

# CHILD SEX TOURISM

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With the explosion of tourism in the 70s and 80s, foreigners came in increasing numbers to the tourist paradise for child sex. During this period paedophilia was not necessarily recognized as child abuse, and in Western Countries childhood sexual abuse was considered a major social problem only in the mid-eighties. It was then often considered parallel to homosexuality and attempts were made by these groups to get paedophilia recognized as a 'normal behaviour'. Hence the reason why child sex tourism was openly advertised in these countries at the time. International Gay Guides, produced in the Netherlands and Germany, achieved particular notoriety for promoting certain countries such as Sri Lanka, Philippines and Thailand for homosexual tourism, and highlighting the availability of children. Tour operators (including some airlines) openly promoted child sex tourism in Sri Lanka. Paedophiles flocked these countries in response to these promotions.

'Paedophiles' are not necessarily 'white' or foreigners. A typical 'Sri Lankan paedophile' is described in the 'Kadugannawa Parcel Bomb Case' of 1945 heard in the Kandy Court; even long before the terms 'child abuse' or 'paedophilia' were described. In 1949, a tailor by the name of L.L. Jayawardene was sentenced to death by hanging, by the trial judge of the court of Kandy, Ceylon, for the murder of a 14-year-old schoolboy by an electrically detonated parcel bomb (probably the first on its kind to be used) (Alles, 1962). Jayawardene was a paedophile who lured schoolboys to sex traps in his 'fitting room', using rides on his red 'James' motorcycle to attract the kids. Jayawardene's murder victim was a

child who was caught in Jayawardene's web but later rejected him. During the 40's, 'paedophilia' and child abuse were not recognized terms, and such conduct was comprehended as 'homosexuality'. In this type of situation the child was often considered a participant in the crime rather than a victim.

## The Situation of Sexual Abuse in Sri Lankan Society

We administered an initial anonymous questionnaire to 899, students in the University entrance class and Undergraduates (de Silva 1996). The same questionnaire was also administered to students (818) in the University entrance class after a lecture on child abuse. In the initial study, 85 (18%) of boys admitted having been sexually abused during childhood. 19 (4.5%) of the girls had been abused. However, in the group that was given a prior lecture on child abuse 21% of boys, and a higher percentage of girls (11%) admitted sex abuse. A majority of the boys had been abused either by a relative or neighbour. Other reported abusers included brothers, teachers, and priests. Older women had abused nineteen of the boys. However, a majority of girls did not abuse, suggesting the abuser was an immediate family member. However, in the group that heard the lecture, girls were more likely to divulge the identity of the abuser.

In summary, our data showed widespread sexual abuse in Sri Lanka during childhood, especially in boys and in the lower social group. The actual prevalence is however probably higher, because our study sample was 'selected', i.e. limited to University entrance students and undergraduates. Those who are more likely to have been abused may have been 'weaned out' at an earlier class. Our study also found that subjects were

more likely to divulge abuse when they had been educated about child abuse.

Furthermore the incidence of sex abuse in our study was unusually high for boys. This higher rate was not due to sex tourism as none of the perpetrators in our study were reported to be tourists. Although the media highlights sex tourism as a major cause of abuse in Sri Lanka, our study suggests it plays a relatively small role in terms of numbers, when compared to domestic abuse. When a tourist abuses a child, it would be apparent and many people would know about it, whereas domestic abuse would not be "seen" so easily. Although the numbers are probably smaller in comparison to the domestic abuse, the nature of the commercial exploitation is very harmful to the children. We have also observed that many of the children who become victims to foreign paedophiles have already fallen prey to locals, and are therefore easier to be recruited.

Why is boys' abuse more common in Sri Lanka? Several social factors may explain this fact. A girls' virginity is considered important at the time of marriage in traditional Sri Lankan society and thus girls are more protected than boys. In traditional society, it is customary to show a blood stained bed sheet to the groom's mother to prove her virginity at the homecoming ceremony (However, this practice is slowly disappearing from society, and is nowadays often considered an insult to the bride). For the same reason pre marital sex is unusual in traditional society. As a result, the hormonally primed young adult males may have access only to boys or pre-pubertal girls who are less protected. Commercial sexual exploitation of boys (often referred to as 'boy prostitution') was known to the sexually transmitted diseases control programme in 1965, before the explosion of tourism. The exploitation catered to only a few local people (Arulanantham, 1992)

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For the Westerners, access to children in their own countries is limited and when available is expensive. However, children in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Philippines are sold for pens, tee shirts or caps, so much so a British Tour operator offered children in the Philippines for 'the price of a hamburger'. Poverty is a leading cause for this effect, because many, from parents, hotel staff to guides and trishaw drivers earn from this activity, apart from the big money earned by the paedophile ring operators and tour operators. The children hardly get any money. There are others who 'justify', even now, sexual exploitation of boys by saying "boys do not get pregnant" or "ships don't leave tracks on water" **without realizing** (or not wanting to realize) **its long-term emotional consequences**. Consequences of childhood sex abuse often manifest in adult life, and would include, Neurosis, Psychosis, Promiscuity, Prostitution, Homosexuality & Sexual Molestation of children. It is known that adult rapists – give an increased incidence of maternal or female childhood sex abuse. These effects can be very damaging to the individual and society. There is often a vicious cycle of abuse with the children, who were abused in childhood becoming a part of abusers in later life, although not all abused children become abusers. Our studies showed that about 70% of abusers had been abused as children. Studies have revealed that those who are classified as pedophiles who habitually abuse children have often been victims of childhood sexual abuse. We have also described a high incidence of (40%) childhood sexual abuse in female commercial sex workers.

The children are also considered a part of the crime by society, especially when they are labeled as 'child prostitutes' when there is some onus on the part of the child. The reason why children do not have a responsibility as a partner in the crime is based on the definition of child abuse, "the involvement of children or adolescents in sexual activities they do not comprehend nor could given

informed consent." Therefore these children are referred to as "sexually exploited" and is now classified by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as a hazardous form of child labor.

Non-governmental organizations or sociologists initially prepared documentation of sexual exploitation in Sri Lanka. These reports were often presented at professional meetings, but were not well documented. In addition there were no reports in the medical literature. Tim Bond (Bond, 1980) published a well-documented report, which identified Sri Lanka as second only to the Philippines as a source for 'cheap child sex'. This report highlighted the demand for boys, starting as young as 8 years, while citing poverty, orphans, and broken homes as factors contributing to the exploitation. Bond estimated the number of commercially exploited boys in Sri Lanka in 1980 to be around 2000.

The officials at the time considered 'child prostitution' (as it was referred to then), to be a sensitive issue which may 'harm tourism' (Seneviratne, 1997). However due to pressure by many NGOs such as UNICEF, PFACE, Sarvodaya and individuals, the government presented an act titled "The young persons (Safeguarding from exploitation for immoral purposes) draft act of 1987. The act was approved by the cabinet, but was not presented to parliament in detail, as the minister in charge at the time (State and Tourism) thought the act was 'not relevant to present times'. He justified this decision by citing the decline in tourism due to insurgencies in the country. In response many NGOs cited sometimes-conflicting numbers of children commercially exploited for sex with ranging figures quoted as high as 30,000. Ratnapala (1999) in sociological studies done in the early nineties found 926 child sex workers under 16 years, and 533 less than 18 years of age in the tourist areas of the country.

Paedophiles (foreign or local) should not always be viewed as 'ugly' men with long unkempt hair, long teeth, bloodshot eyes and unshaved. They may be

pleasant looking, and are often extremely 'helpful'. The paedophiles often may seek employment in jobs with access to children. Teachers, orphanage or children's hostel employees, school van or bus drivers, etc. Again it must be emphasized that a vast majority of people in these jobs are not paedophiles, but only a very small proportion of them would be involved in paedophilia.

Another observation in Sri Lanka is foreign paedophiles often get legally married to Sri Lankan widows or divorced Sri Lankan Women, to be socially viewed as a 'respectable' person, and access to children becomes easier. These women are often paid a salary for the position of 'wife'. However, it must be emphasized that every foreigner married to a Sri Lankan should NOT be looked at in the same way.

Foreign paedophiles are also generally very 'helpful'. They often generate income to a large number of people in the area, as well as to professionals and officials; and as a result, they would be reluctant to inform authorities/take action, for loss of short-term gain. These paedophiles are also very helpful to the children, buying meals, clothes or other 'goodies' for these children, who otherwise would not have had access to. They often help out the parents with money or goods. They may build or renovate houses. Foreign trips for the children are arranged, and some are taken in the pretext of 'adoption'. Some paedophiles have been involved in social service activities, using 'fronts' such as NGO, orphanages and medical projects. **However, there are many foreigners who are genuine philanthropists who help poor Sri Lankan families.** These foreign paedophiles are also involved in income generation 'projects' to support their own activity. They may be involved in paedophile 'rings' supplying children to casual paedophile visitors to Sri Lanka. They may also be involved in child and or adult pornography production. Pornography produced for a few rupees in Sri Lanka may be sold for hundreds or thousands of dol-

lars in the paedophile rings. A lot of the pornographic material is probably smuggled out through the internet, and many of them are likely to be computer experts.

Recently there is a sharp rise in the reports and prosecutions of foreigners for Child Abuse in Sri Lanka. Two foreign paedophiles (a Swiss, German) were successfully prosecuted in Sri Lanka and they served 18-month sentences (under the old law) in Sri Lankan Jails. Under the new Penal Code amendment of 95 now the minimum sentence would be 10 years. Recently, a Norwegian was convicted for 14 years in Sri Lanka. Successful Prosecution of 2 other Paedophiles in Switzerland (One received a 4 ½ year sentence and the other 6 years) and I from the Netherlands for crimes committed in Sri Lanka indicated the importance of co-operation between countries in the war against commercial sexual exploitation of children. These prosecutions would not have been possible without the co-operation of the Sri Lankan Government and NGO. Charges have been requested for the trial of a Belgian who escaped while on bail. A Swiss who was convicted but escaped while on bail is believed to be in Switzerland, and The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) has requested the

Swiss government through the foreign ministry to make him serve the sentence in Switzerland. This has probably led to caution by the international paedophile 'rings', which is reflected by in the *Spartacus Magazine*, the 'International Gay Guide

95/96 (24<sup>th</sup> Edition, ED. Bruno Gmunder Verlag), which mentions: "Homosexual acts between men regardless of age, are prohibited by Section 365 & 365a of the Penal Code. The penalty is up to ten years of imprisonment. The laws, until recently were rarely enforced, are now more frequently applied and the number of convictions has increased sharply. This was caused by aggressive sex-oriented tourism from Western Gays and heterosexuals. It must be stressed that although homosexuality is an offence in Sri Lanka, no foreigner has yet been prosecuted for sex with a consenting adult. Therefore, this magazine has to be referring to paedophile prosecutions, but have not specified it for obvious reasons. The latest copy the Interna-



tional Gay guide does not have a section on Sri Lanka, indicating the reduction in the demand by that category of tourist to visit Sri Lanka, probably due to the deterrent effect of prosecutions.

Although child sex tourism has been a major problem in Sri Lanka, scar-ing our image of tourism, there appears to be reduction in its incidence recently, probably because of aggressive prosecutions both in Sri Lanka and co-operative Western Countries. Previous avoidance of discussion and action by authorities for fear of 'damaging' tourism has paradoxically caused more damage, by stigmatizing Sri Lanka's image. It is important for authorities to help in the surveillance and to apprehend not only the perpetrators but also the 'ring operators'. It is also important to address the problem of domestic sexual abuse of children, and prevent poor children in tourist areas from becoming prey by improving their education and provision of vocational training for school dropouts.

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