

*Стецька К., магістр ННІ № 1  
Національної академії внутрішніх  
справ*

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## **TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Poverty, gender-based discrimination and a history of sexual and physical violence are all factors that can make women and children vulnerable to traffickers. Some are abducted and sold, some are deceived into consenting by the promise of a better life or a better job, and some feel that entrusting themselves to traffickers is the only

economically viable option. Once trapped, they are held and exploited in slavery-like conditions.

Regardless of the route of entry, most women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation suffer extreme violations of their human rights, including the right to liberty, the right to dignity and security of person, the right not to be held in slavery or involuntary servitude, the right to be free from cruel and inhumane treatment, the right to be free from violence, and the right to health.

In many parts of the world, human trafficking is a high-profit and low-risk endeavor for the traffickers. Traffickers use several means to prevent victims from escaping. These may range from physical restraint in the form of locks and guards, physical or psychological violence, drugging or by instilling a fear of the police, making the victims believe that they are the offenders.

The trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation, also results in a negative impact on the health and well being of victims, which could be long term and ultimately life-threatening.

Further, human trafficking prevents victims from attaining physical, mental and social well-being. During the process of being trafficked itself, there are several difficult situations, which pose health hazards like drowning, freezing or suffocating. Victims' health is further endangered in situations of sexual exploitation. Available data suggest several areas of concern:

**Violence:** The consequences of psychological, physical and sexual violence associated with trafficking and sexual exploitation include depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and physical injuries such as bruises, broken bones, head wounds, stab wounds, mouth and teeth injuries, and even death.

**Reproductive Health:** Involvement in the sex industry is associated with an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Pregnancy and forced or unsafe abortions are primary health concerns, exacerbated by lack of access to health care.

**Access to Health Care:** Fear of detection and deportation can leave undocumented women reluctant to access social services. In situations of debt bondage, women may not be able to pay for care. Those forcibly kept in brothels may not be allowed to leave to seek health care. Because their access to care is so restricted, trafficking

victims are at high risk of complications arising from undiagnosed and untreated infections, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, chronic pelvic pain, pregnancy and sterility.

**Substance Abuse:** Many women and children in the sex industry use drugs and/or alcohol as a coping mechanism. Both voluntary and forced use commonly leads to addiction and its attendant health consequences.

The last 25 years have witnessed a momentous rise in the knowledge and awareness about child victims of sale and sexual exploitation. Yet, significant changes have not taken place to better protect children. Existing initiatives remain at the legislative or policy level without any effective implementation. Every year, between 500 million and 1.5 billion children around the world experience violence, abuse, and exploitation.

This year will mark the twentieth anniversary of the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996. This ground-breaking event was followed by 2 more congresses in Yokohama in 2001 and in Rio de Janeiro in 2008. Unfortunately, the numerous political commitments made by participating states have remained mostly unfulfilled. There is an urgent need for a common strong political will to move forward towards implementation through effective and sustained allocation of the necessary resources.

Plan International has been working with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. We have produced a number of tools, including this report and child-friendly resources to inform children and adolescents on how they can use the Special Rapporteur to report exploitation and conduct advocacy on the issue.