

**Educational Challenges faced by Children who engage  
in Child Sex Tourism  
(A study based on Hikkaduwa, Negombo, and Weligama Coastal Belts)**

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**Abstract**

Child sex tourism refers to particular kind of tourism organized to satisfy the need among certain customers segments for establishing commercial sexual relationships with the children. It is an obscure industry where the tourist's primary purpose is to engage in sexual experience with a child. Mostly coastal areas can be identified as hubs of children engage in sex tourism in Sri Lanka. Exclusion from the education and school dropouts has become a major obstacle to develop their life skills. This qualitative study examined the 'Educational Challenges Faced by Children who Engage in Sex Tourism' as well as the associated push and pull factors, while Person in Environment theory was giving an insight in theoretical frame work. Data was collected through purposive sampling method where the in-depth interviews from 06 male children (age 12- 18) from Hikkaduwa, Negombo and Weligama coastal areas.

Additional data were gathered from key informant interviews and focus group discussion. Findings of the study revealed that the motivation from the living background and socio-economic condition have directly affected children to find financial assistance mainly by engaging in sex tourism avoiding school attendance. Furthermore, parents' neglect, family separation, acceptance and the recognition received for the body image in the tourism trade, being a male child and devious assumption on education divert them from schools. Therefore, it is recommended to establish child protection committees in identified hotspot areas, turn a sex tourist into an ex-tourist and promote social work practice in controlling adverse effects of child sex tourism in all micro, mezzo and macro levels by endowing the professionals in child protection.

**Key Words:** Child, Child Sex, Educational Challenges, Tourism, Push Factor

**Introduction**

Child sex tourism (CST) is a subtle industry where the tourist's primary purpose is to engage in sexual experience with a child. Under international legislation, tourism with the intent of having sexual relations with a minor (children) is in violation of the United Nation's Convention of the Rights of the Child. The intent and act is a crime and in violation of human rights. Moreover, the child sex tourism in the Sri Lanka is one of the major destination countries for the purposes of child prostitution. The purpose is to bring attention to the guise of tourism. It offers a definition of the crisis, a description of the victims and perpetrators, and a discussion of the social and cultural factors that perpetuate the problem. The study of "Educational challenges faced by the children who engage in child sex tourism in Hikkaduwa, Negombo, and Weligama" is focus on the educational barriers faced by children who engaging sex tourism. Though there are several factors that need to focus on

child sex tourism such as; their economy, lives style, psycho-social factors, this research is focused on significance of explore the barriers which made them to acquire education, also to distinguish how it affects their future and for the development of lives skills.

The history of CST, Since the 1980s sexual exploitation of children by tourists in developing countries has grown exponentially. During this time, in Southeast Asia, CST and child pornography was exposed and received widespread mediaattention around the world. “The authorities investigated 22 foreign male tourists suspected of the production of child pornography, drug abuse, and the sexual abuse of children” Protection Project, 2007. Throughout the 1990s the Philippines, in addition to other international interests, were concerned with the extent that European, North American, Australian, Japanese, and Korean men were traveling to the country (and other developing nations) to engage in sex with children.

This has been spread all over the world and it has highly violated the child rights and protection. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 1.8 million children were forced into prostitution and pornography in the year 2000. Other estimations add up to 10 million prostituted children worldwide. It is estimated that more than US\$5 billion are obtained through child prostitution every year. CST , which is defined by the United Nations as “the exploitation of children for sexual purposes by people who travel locally or internationally to engage in sexual activities with children”, accounts for a part of these earnings. In South-East Asia, Central America and Brazil can be identified as designated countries with a long history of CST, mostly seen in the developed countries.

Furthermore, CST is linked to the field of human trafficking and child prostitution. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) states that at least 1.2 million children are trafficked worldwide annually, primarily for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In addition to that 27.2 per cent of ever-partnered Sri Lankan men aged 18-49 reported having experience some form of sexual abuse as a child (Fonseka, Minnis, & Gomez, 2015). According to Police data there were 10,593 cases of rape between 2010 and 2015, of which three-quarters were statutory rape cases. 1,161 out of 9,210 rape suspects were children below 18 years of age (Save the Children, 2017).This statistics reveals that the children who below the age of 18 are more susceptible for sexual abuse. Although the tourism industry has brought great benefits for developing countries, there are various impacts can be identified. Apart from environmental destruction, tourism has also brought some unhealthy issues to the community members, especially to children (Ferran, 2008). Most of the tourists travel to other countries to seek sex, and this has led to the formation of sex tourism (Cullen, 2010).

Moreover, sex tourism is allied with the child prostitution. It is not a crime in some countries that having sex with adult prostitutes, having sex with children is a crime against their rights in any circumstances under international legislation (Tepelus, 2008. United Nation Children's Fund, 2011). Additionally, large numbers of children around the world are being trapped in the sex industry (ECPAT International, 2009. Tepelus, 2008).UNICEF & ILO Joint Statement on recent reports of children involved in commercial Sexual Exploitation March 14, 2014, Colombo, Sri Lanka: revealed that, there are over 40,000 child prostitutes in Sri Lanka. In addition to that The National Child Protection Authority (2010) revealed shocking statistics, quoting that, Sri Lanka has nearly 40,000 child prostitutes in the country while 5,000 to 30,000 Sri Lankan boys are used by Western paedophiles sex tourists, as the world celebrates day against child labour today. In addition to that nearly 10,000 to 12,000 children from rural areas are trafficked and prostituted to paedophiles by organized crime groups.

In Sri Lanka CST is growing faster, most of children who live in coastal belt are more vulnerable than the children who live in inside the country. Most of children have been found as child sex labors,

nearly all the victims are boys, aged between 10 and 18. It has proven that the boys are victimizing to this condition other than the girls. "Some German men were in a hotel room with three Sri Lankan village boys, aged seven, 11 and 14, having sex and filming it. They would sell the pornographic video back in Europe. The men had rented the room for a month" (Independent, 1994). The above article cited out that the most of boys are engaged in the CST field and they are more vulnerable in the field of tourism. "First she pleaded with the manager of the guest-house, a clean and proper-looking establishment shaded in the coconut groves behind Negombo beach. It was known through paedophiles circles in Britain, Sweden and Germany, and while other hotels in this popular resort suffered many vacancies, this guest-house was always full" (Independent, 1994). The areas which are located in the coastal belt can be identified as the hubs of CST. "More than 250 million copies of videos on child pornography are circulating world-wide, and most were filmed in the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. One raid, on a home in a Stockholm suburb in July 1992, yielded stacks of letters between paedophiles sharing descriptions of children's bodies and sex organs. Found in the haul were 300 hours of child pornography videos, mostly filmed in Sri Lanka with titles such as Boy Love in Negombo and Hikkaduwa - the Child Sex Paradise" (Independent, 1994). Most of boutique hotels are designations for western paedophilic tourists.

In Europe, such behavior would have brought them stiff prison sentences if caught. But in Sri Lanka, foreigners are never jailed for sex offences against children. "The pay-off for each boy was a carrier bag with a box of cereal, milk powder, chocolates, a T-shirt and dollars 25. The Germans gave one boy a bicycle. He kept riding the bicycle round and round the garden, but the look in the boy's eyes was like something out of the Omen - intense and angry" (Independent, 1994). Most of the CST happens because of the poverty and the lack of financial support to live. Children have caught to this situation when they feel that they need money more than education. "Confronted the German video cameraman as he came out of the room. 'How can you do this?' she sputtered angrily. The German rubbed his fingers together. 'Money, money, money,' he replied" (Independent, 1994).

Further some research reveals that the "Sri Lankan boys are easy prey, A boy can earn as much felling a tourist - 200 rupees (pounds 2.25) - as carrying bricks for 12 hours. Relations between boys and girls are discouraged until marriage, and until then many Sri Lankans take a discreet and casual attitude towards homosexuality. Some boys are lured into organized gangs who often run secluded villas co-financed by foreign paedophiles, while others have casual trysts on the beach with foreigners" it is clear that the money matters when it comes to the CST. As long period of time engaged in CST leads them to become homosexual though they are heterosexual. The pathetic situation is that the most of the parent influence for motivate children for CST in Sri Lanka to find financial and material assistance. Even in some incident that the parent rented their own house for the tourist to spend time with the child. All this have made the tourist to visit to Sri Lanka with the intent of having sex with child.

Although Sri Lanka has extended concern and developed legislation targeting CST, it's the effort of advocacy groups around the globe who have brought attention to this disparaging subject. Moreover it's the responsibility of government, non-government and international Organizations like ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children) and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) bring attention to those hidden areas of violations of child rights and shrinking space for child well-being. Although these organizations have made efforts to extend CST research and interventions, CST is increasing drastically. The awareness of the problem remains abstruse. Focusing on the educational challenges of children who are related to tourism filed and inclusion for the development, generally receives causal mention and little in-depth analysis. Most of areas like; Hikkaduwa, Weligama and Negombo are highly exposed for

tourist activities. Those areas identify as red-light areas of children engage in child sex. The pathetic situation is that, many children are engage in child sex tourism in those areas and has been excluded from education. Most of children are becoming school drop outs (age 12-18). This have become a huge problem when it comes to develop their lives skill and to fulfill their school life. There are lack of expertise dialogue related to this issue and have no enough information to reveal this situation. The important of to ascertain the loop holes in the law implementation and to find their perception on education is becoming researchable where it reveal that, in the future more children will be uneducated as there will be enormous violation of child right and sexual exploitation of children, who lives in the coastal belt of Sri Lanka. It is significant to identify the educational challenges faced by children who engage in child sex tourism and to explore proper social work intervention in abating these challenges.

**Methodology**

The study locations of this study are; Hikkaduwa, Weligama and Negombo. Where has been reporting high percentage of child sex tourism in Sri Lanka. These areas have been identified by local and international organization in to their consideration of children engage in sex tourism.

The researcher adopted the qualitative research design. Where the qualitative method use for revealing the complex phenomena like life style, life experience of CST. Meanwhile to gain an understanding of CST related to the big picture of hidden life causes. In-depth interview, Key informant interviews, Focused group discussion (FGC), observation and case studies were used as methods of the study. In addition to that study focused on to collect data from purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study, where it helps researcher to find respondent by expertise since the respondents are invisible in the field of CST.

The sample population was selected as male children who engage in sex tourism. Age 12-18.06 respondents were interview and collected information. Many of them were identified with the assistance provide by the former field officer of rehabilitation center. High priority was given to guarantee their right to privacy while having the interview and the interviews were conducted by receiving their permission. Throughout this method, it systematic to get reliable data from the respondents it's highly concern not to harm self-image and identity. The data analysis considered more logical and thematic process, utilizing the thematic analysis.

**Results**

Findings presents through the thematic analysis based on the Themes.

Case Study	Name	Area	Age (years)	Gender	Duration of Experience CST	Economic Background	Educational Attainment
01	Chutte	Weligama	12	Male	Nine months	No any earns	Educated up to grade 5
02	Sandy	Weligama	13	Male	One year	Earns Rs.300-600 per day	Educated up to grade 7
03	Suddha	Negombo	15	Male	Two years	Earns Rs.500-700 per day	Educated up to grade 6

04	Gray	Hikkaduwa	16	Male	Two years	Earns Rs.1000-2000 per day	Never gone to school
05	Buda	Negombo	18	Male	Six months	Earns 500-1000 per day	School going
06	Podda	Hikkaduwa	16	Male	Ten months	No any earnings	School going

**Table 0.1 Respondents Demographic Profile**

Above Table displays the demographic data collected of the 06 respondents. As demonstrated by the table, all the respondents are male children, between 12 – 18 ages. All the respondents are living near the coastal belts. They are belongs to low income families and almost all the respondents are engage in occupation related to tourism and earns Rs.300-2000 per day.

Its reveal that there are push and pull factors for children to engage in sex tourism. Push factors stand for the factors that make a push for these children to have the sexual contact with tourist and pull factors stand for the reasons that have pushed on children seeking for sexual contact with tourist. Mainly the findings were gathered through the in-depth interviews with respondents and the key informant interviews.

**Push and Pull factors**

*Push factors*

*Family separation and Single parent fami*

*Mother’s passive neglect*

*Loneliness and attention seeking*

*Female headed families*

*Low family income*

*Peer influence*

*Gender*

**Pull Factors**

*Peer influence*

*Loneliness and attention seeking Physical appearance*

*Money worth than education Unattainable goal Gender*

**Theme: 01 Love and affection**

**Sub theme 1 .1: Family separation and Single parent families**

The family is playing a major role in the society as a social institution, where the children shape up their personality through the support of family. Findings revealed most of children, who engage in child sex tourism, are children who come from broken families and who have been grown up with single parent.

Some highlight points from the findings can be seen as; parent has other extramarital affairs, where mother lives separately from the family with another man and father have left the family. Most of the children’s father and mother separated from the family and some are living with grandparents. Further, these children don’treceive any support from the parent since the parents were separated. As findings revealed most of the children with single parent are vulnerable to CST, where the parent does not have time to look after their children, while engage in other (occupational) activities.

*“Most of the cases that I have been experienced are the children, who come from the broken families. Some children even don’t have parents and some are separated from the family. Whole the day these children are staying alone in the home. They do whatever they want and no one will there for to secure them at even in the day time”.*

**Key Informant interview 04** - (Probation Officer)

According to the discussion with probation officer, why children fall victim to child sex tourism? Among the reasons which were given by the probation office, these children don’t receive parental protection, care and attention. This occurs especially in the broken families, parent separation and leaves the children with the father or any other relation such as grandmother, grandfather, aunt or uncle. In addition, children are not provided protection.

### **Sub Theme 1.2: Mother’s passive neglect**

The above finding seen as, push factor, Most of children who engaged in child sex tourism because of mother’s less attention, where the mother don’t have time to look after the child or intentionally neglecting the child.

*Case Study 01* “Chutte” is 12 years old child who lives in Weligama beach side. He is the youngest child with two brothers. His brothers married and separated from the family. They don’t have any contact with the family, when they got to know that the Chutte’s mother has another relationship with a man. Father separated from the family when Chutte was 5 years old. Mother works in the fish market and all the time her away from the Chutte. She doesn’t have time to look after Chutte and she doesn’t pay any attention to what chutte is doing at home. Since he is alone at the home he always used to spend time in nearby the surfing school at the beach with some of his close friends who support him always. He educated up to grade five because of the lack of money to afford for books and other stationeries. His mother was unable to send him again to the school, since she doesn’t have financial assistance and due to fewer facilities. He is very sensitive and seeking the attention from others.

*“Sir, I really miss my father, sometimes I feel that, if he is with me I might be encouraged to studies and my mother will love me more than this”.*

*“She always working in the beach and she have no time to stay with me at home”.* (Chutte, 12 old)

### **Sub Theme: 02. Poverty**

#### **Sub Theme 2.1: Female headed families**

Female-headed families with children are living with poverty. It more obvious in the coastal belt, mother can’t afford for the children’s education with small amount of money. In most of female headed families earn Rs.15, 000 per month by selling fish and engaging other related occupations. It is more difficult for women to gain big amount of money in the field of fishery. Furthermore it is difficult them to provide meals for all the children, if they have large number of family members, this led them to suffering from hunger and they can’t find meal for themselves. This situation has made some women to engage in illegal activities like prostitution, drug dealing and moonshine selling. Within the system, it made the women in to a vulnerable situation to find them in the position of independency. As findings reveal it is more common that the women headed family children are more vulnerable to engage in child sex tourism.



### Sub Theme 2.2: Low family income

Low family income is another push factor with courses for poverty. Most of the children who recognize as children who engage child sex tourism are coming from low income families. The income of these families around Rs.15, 000 for a month. This amount is not enough to look after all the children within the family. If father is the breadwinner of the family, there are no any other options. He has to provide all the facilities for the family. In addition, most of people have been adopted for the daily wage they don't receive monthly payment as the government officers. This daily wage is insufficient to survival where, only it enough for their daily consume. They only focus on to consume and not for any savings. Furthermore, this situation leads to generational poverty, where these children also live below the poverty line.

*Case study 06* "Podda" is 16 years old child lives in Hikkaduwa area. His parents engages infishery activates and they earn small amount of money. Podda don't have any siblings. He is schooling, but no enough money to purchase important items which need for his school. Although his parents are engage in occupation. They are unable to full fill his needs. He always gets support from his friends whenever he needs. He believes that if he engages in CST he could have earned more money other than his parents.

As he revealed,

*"I engage in this to get some money, I have fed-up with receiving money from my parents. Whatever amount they earn, they don't have money to afford for me"* (Podda, 16 y)

According to his statement it reveals that they are suffering from the poverty. They don't have any savings. Although they earns, it will not remain to afford for the Podda's needs. There can be seen a vicious cycle of poverty. "Social and economic deprivation during childhood and adolescence can have a lasting effect on individuals, making it difficult for children who grow up in low-income families to escape poverty when they become adults. Because the negative effects of deprivation on human development tend to cumulate, individuals with greater exposure to poverty during childhood are likely to have more difficulty escaping poverty as adults" (Wagmiller,R. and Adelman,R ,2009). This statement shows how the environment of low income of family directly affect the child education and his development. Referring to Podda's statement it is proved that if individual grow up in low income family, where the parents cannot full fill his/her basic needs, which will negatively affect child later life.

Low Income → Low Saving → Low Investment → Low Production → Low Income

"Adults who were poor during childhood are much more likely to be poor in early and middle adulthood than are those who were never poor. Few adults who did not experience poverty during childhood are poor in early and middle adulthood. At ages 20, 25, and 30, only four to five percent of those adults who were never poor during their childhood live in poverty. At age 35, less than one percent are poor" (Wagmiller,R and Adelman,R .2009). Also the intergenerational poverty highly affect the child development and for his education, where he try to escape from the education.

**Theme: 03 Negative perception on education**

**Sub Theme 3.1: Money worth than education**

Most of the children who live in coastal belt are used to earn money from their small age. This is one factor with related with their income and the family background. Increasing number of family members and lack of money to afford for the education can identify as a causes for this children to engage in occupation in their small age. Average of ages 12-15 they have engage in different activities associated with the tourism. Meanwhile child sex tourism is an easy way to earn money without any struggling in the tourist designations. This availability has tended them to engage in child sex tourism and to get some amount of money.

**Key informant interview 01**

*“People who live in this area are always prefer to do occupations connected to coastal belt, though there are several opportunities.”*

*“These children are so matured than we think when it comes to this field. They know how to deal with foreigners.”*

Surfing community leader (Weligama coastal area)

As the surfing community leader sited out, that these children are so matured in the field of CST. They have more life experience which we expected from a normal child. Money has played a big role and to develop a gap between educations which direct them away from school life.

*“These children even don’t know the word education; they know only money and fun.”*

(Field officer– Negombo area)

These children are addicted to money, where they can easily find in the field of CST. As the field officer shared his experience working with children associate with sex tourism, most of the parents don’t worry about how these children received money. When the child takes money to home offered by a tourist for whatever reason, no questions were asked. Parents are detached from their children and some are aware that their child is engage in CST but they tend to ignore it since the benefits gain from the tourist.

As the researcher observed when referring to those case studies, that the most of tourist are situational abusers. They do not usually have a sexual preference for children, but take advantage of a situation in which a child is made available to them.

**Conclusion**

Most of arears in coastal bets are identified as CST red light hubs of children engage in child sex tourism. This has influence the result socio-economic background of the people and their life style. The major issue is most of the children have engage in CST and they are excluded from the education as researcher found, some are school drop outs and some children engages CST as part time while going to the school. This have negatively impact to develop their educational and life skills. As it is a violation of the UN Convention of CRC, the right to education. Further it is the violation of the Educational policy in Sri Lanka which have legalized the compulsory education up to the age 16. In addition to that most of the children have working in other actives to gain money. This condition has increasing in the costal belt and there are lack of expertise dialogue related to this area where there are



no enough information to reveal this situation. Although legal the legal mechanisms (regional and international) are available to protect child from sexual exploitation and right violations, still this are remaining in concealed. The important of to ascertain the loop holes in the law implementation and to find their perception on education is becoming researchable where it proved that in the future more children will be uneducated as there will be enormous violation of child right and sexual exploitation of children, who lives based on coastal belt of Sri Lanka.

This study explores the 'Education Challenges faced by Children who Engage in Child Sex Tourism' and the push and pull factors to engage in sex. Meanwhile considering the educational opportunities they have and social work intervention abating the challenges. It is a challenge to obtaining accurate data, since the child sex tourism is an illegal activity, it is mostly hidden or involves organized in tourism industry and it is a topic that is still regarded as a taboo subject in many parts of the world. The research purposively used community members for the focus group discussion and through that researcher able to find 06 respondents. The in-depth interview tool used to interview the respondents and to acquire relevant data. Further, key informant interview used to get some relevant data from the key figures in the area. Accordingly gathered data was analysis through the thematic analysis.

The findings of the study reveal; that the children environment have affect for the child to engage in CST. Family separation, single parent families , mother's passive neglect, female headed families, low family income, physical appearance and gender affect as push and pull factors that motivate the child to engage in CST, such as love and affection, poverty, peer influence, seeking acceptance and recognition. Further, certain negative perceptions like; money worth than education, unattainable goal and remodeling deviate the children from education.

More over the person in environment theory and the conceptual frame work of trafficking tangle provides insight to understand the above findings. According to all this findings it evidence that, through there are legal mechanisms to protect child from the sexual exploitation, there are loop whole issues in implementation. Specially in defining the age of child and sexual concern of child are complicated in legal documents. In addition to that there are some issues the implication of education policy in Sri Lanka. Although we have ratified the CRC it makes reservation that whether the rights of the child are grantees in the context of Sri Lanka.

It is recommended to establish child protection committees in village level to identify the children who engage in CST, especially in Hikkaduwa, Negombo and Weligama. The committee should form with the support of the Grama Niladari, Child right promote officer, School teachers, Religious leaders and the participation of community member. The committee should have the authority to report CST cases and they need to have the knowledge in working with the children. They need to have action plan includes; identification of children who engage in CST, refer to rehabilitation and community awareness.

Based on the information given by the field officer in Negombo area, there was an informal rehabilitation center, which was actively functioned for rehabilitate the children who engage in CST. Due to the monitoring and evaluation issues it was closed. It is recommended to re-function the rehabilitation center with the participation of well experienced field officers and the participation of religious leaders. It needs to be registered in the divisional secretariat office to acquire the legal assistance with appropriate evaluation, monitoring and follow-up system.

Furthermore, most of the children were pushed and pulled to the CST and excluded from the education because of the lack of love attention receive from the parent. Further parent separation and single parent families have influence on child education. Therefore, recommended to conduct

awareness programme for the parents, neighbors and guardians in the coastal belts in order to understand them about who is child, needs of child and rights of the child (Right to education). Further make them understand what happens around child, specially in the tourist industry. It need to provide the knowledge on role and responsibilities of the parent, how to look after child and the legal back ground to protect children from CST.

The tourists who travel for the CST have the knowledge about CST and they learn about the places through internet, forum chat or word of mouth. They also have specialized websites where they could post on the updates of information, advices and experiences of different destinations. In the websites they have chat room where they can discuss and suggest each other. Once they are in the destination, they could get more information through taxis drivers, advertisements, hotels or bars to gain the access to CST. In this kind of situation it need to focus on the tourist also, where they can aware in the airport and make understanding about polices enacted for CST. Further conduct awareness programme in the tourist designations (beach, hotels, and parks) which they can sensitize in matters of children.

It is recommended to provide training on child rights and child protection for members of surfing community and fisheries community in order to understand the child rights and violations of child rights, where they can report to the relevant authorities.

When there is a demand there will be supply. As Pavena Hongsakula, a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office in 1999 wrote to The Bangkok" (Sex Tourism And Child Sex Tourism In Bangkok Sociology Essay,2015).To stop the supply, it need to address the demand. Therefore, it recommended to have qualitative and quantitative research that would address the Micro, Messo and Macro levels understandings of CST and its impact for the child development. Additionally, innovative research questions need to be expanded .As the researcher finds out following topics are proposed for future research studies: examine the regional law implementation, How to rehabilitate the children who engaged in CST, Identify, compare and contrast legislative and enforcement issues across nations; in addition to right violation in the CST, identify and explore the role of religious and community leaders in combating CST.

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