

The Elimination of the Sexual Exploitation of Children

Two Policy Briefings

Commissioned by Oak Foundation from Knowing Children,
Malaysia, September 2011.

Executive Summary (Extracts)

Disclaimer: *The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Oak Foundation.*

Knowing Children

Consultancy Team

Tatek Abebe, Maria Antonia Di Maio, Abdoul Karim Gueye
Antonella Invernizzi, Elsbeth Robson, Timothy Williams
Managed by Judith Ennew
judith.ennew@knowingchildren.org
mobile +60166476045

Contents

1. Background (page 3)
2. Strategic planning and the human rights of children (page 3)
3. Briefing on primary prevention: Reducing societal tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children (page 4)
4. Briefing on secondary prevention: Preventing children's entry to all forms of sexual exploitation (page 5)
5. Recommendations (page 15)
 - 5.1. Strategic planning (page 15)
 - 5.2. Reducing social tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children (page 15)
 - 5.3. Preventing children's entry into all forms of sexual exploitation (page 16)
 - 5.4. Overall recommendations (page 17)

1 Background

The Oak Foundation child-abuse programme has funded and supported a range of civil-society actors over the course of the last ten years, with the aim of reducing the incidence of the sexual exploitation of children, focusing primarily on work in East Africa, Eastern and Central Europe, Brazil and India. The Foundation is committed to expanding this work, focusing 50 percent of resources over the next five years, within two priority areas:

- The elimination of the sexual exploitation of children;
- The positive engagement of men and boys in the fight against the sexual abuse of children.

Under the first of these priorities Oak Foundation requested Knowing Children to produce two documents to guide a strategic-planning meeting of the child-abuse team in mid-October 2011:

- Reducing societal tolerance of sexual exploitation of children;
- Preventing children's entry into all forms of sexual exploitation.

2 Strategic planning and the human rights of children

Objective: To consider Oak Foundation overall strategy on sexual exploitation and comment on the relevance of the objectives, highlighting any major gaps.

What is required is an integrated vision, rather than a diverse set of vistas.

Children's rights and children's agency

Currently the strategic statements and clusters of grants in the Oak Foundation vision and strategy lack an integrated vision. They are related through the idea of eliminating the sexual exploitation of children, but not within an overall framework such as children's rights. The strategy is tied to projects rather than children, to welfare concerns rather than to the empowerment of children to act on their own behalf to protect themselves and other children from violation of their human rights.

Childhood-studies methodology since the 1980s, although not based in children's rights, recognizes children as social agents rather than as 'human becomings' and helpless victims. Such an approach is rarely adopted by most policies and programmes aiming to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children.

Find a niche

Oak Foundation is a significant donor on the world stage for combating the sexual exploitation of children, but perhaps recognized only as a medium-level player in terms of strategy and policy. To have greater influence in, and impact on, the elimination of the sexual exploitation of children Oak Foundation needs to define its niche within this field and take a leadership role that is appropriate to its experience, knowledge, and financial, technical and human resources.

Paradigm confusions and conceptual blurring

Conceptual clarity in the field of sexual exploitation of children is as scarce as scientific research and unbiased analysis. Terms vary and are poorly understood; paradigm confusions are endemic. Without being necessarily clear about existing concepts and terms, organizations create ever new definitions in order to try to solve apparent contradictions. New definitions risk adding to the existing confusion.

Stronger conceptual clarity should be achieved and applied to programme interventions at all levels. The Oak Foundation could play an active role in promoting standards of data collection, as well as shared learning and understanding on key-concepts and terms applied to the problem that it aims to address.

An immediate requirement should be that funding proposals submitted to Oak Foundation includes an acceptable glossary of terms used (and conceptual frameworks applied) to the intended interventions. While achieving greater clarity within its portfolio, the Oak Foundation and its partners would be able to promote conceptual clarity, including externally among other actors working on sexual exploitation and related issues.

3. Briefing on primary-prevention: Reducing societal tolerance of sexual exploitation of children

Objectives: To provide the child-abuse programme with recommendations about how the Foundation can deliver results to reduce societal tolerance of sexual exploitation of children by exploring the following:

- Current thinking, policy and practice about reducing societal tolerance of sexual exploitation of children;
- Lessons that might be learned about reducing societal tolerance from other sectors (for example, HIV/AIDS prevention and promotion of gender equality) including children's involvement in successful initiatives;
- Assessment of barriers to achieving such societal change and the ways such obstacles might be overcome;
- Comment on Oak Foundation strategic statements and clusters of grants, indicating opportunities for future funding, gaps and critical junctures, within current geographical focus areas, as well as possible new partnerships beyond customary NGO circles and new sectors of activity should be explored for future grant-making;
- Suggested baseline data and indicators of outcome in this area.

The objective of reducing social tolerance of sexual exploitation of children brings with it the assumption that 'zero tolerance' would be primary prevention. Yet current thinking on reducing social tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children tends to be based on general preconceptions. Similarly, current practice tends to use concepts that work in the Global North but cannot reliably be patterned on to societies in the Global South, where not only culture but also social expectations, economic realities and ideas about sexuality vary considerably.

Social tolerance

The greatest barrier to reducing or eliminating social tolerance is that so little is known about what it is and how it functions. On this basis programmes that aim to change attitudes and practices are bound to have limited success or influence, or even fail altogether. The entrenched forms taken by the sexual exploitation of children are not always discrete categories, even within a single child's lifetime. Children have complex childhood 'careers',¹ hidden by a literature that separates them into categories and studies them in snapshot time capsules, partly as a result of the dominance of Northern framings of vulnerability, risk and crisis..

Political will

Lack of government commitment is one of the major challenges of addressing the sexual exploitation of children, even in the face of strong and insistent awareness raising and lobbying. Some means have to be found to make the eradication of sexual exploitation of children a compelling necessity for governments, despite the disadvantage that children are denied franchise and are thus only of rhetorical interest to politicians.

Unwritten rules

Patriarchy is the underlying framework of all societies, taking different forms within and between societies and in varied historical and structural contexts. Because patriarchy consists in the dominance of older over younger and male over female it provides the rationale for both the sexual exploitation of children and social tolerance of its manifestations in gender, seniority and the dynamics of communities and families, as well as in political systems.

Written rules

Law is the expression of state power and ideology and thus not only a means of underwriting social attitudes, but also of shaping them. It can be the result of public pressure, or can run ahead of public opinion because it is the outcome of specific lobbying group activities, as is the case with some national capital punishment legislation. Law is as effective as the way it is implemented, which applies equally to national law, international, regional and cross-border (extra-territorial) legislation.²

International human-rights law provides a set of standards for the elimination of the sexual exploitation of children that, on paper at least, are close to universally accepted. Yet, across the populations of Sub-Saharan Africa, and throughout Asia, despite universal ratification of or accession to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), there is no widespread acceptance of a 'universal' notion of children's rights. Given prevailing traditional notions of children as submissive to adults, public resistance is encountered globally to notions of children's rights. This is by no means confined to the Global South.

Those who argue that the UNCRC is a cultural imposition from Northern countries come dangerously close to appearing to condoning the sexual abuse and exploitation of children,

¹ Evans, R. 2002 'Poverty, HIV, and barriers to education: street children's experiences in Tanzania', *Gender and Development*, 10, 3, pp 51-62; Evans, R. 2006 'Negotiating social identities: The influence of gender, age and ethnicity on young people's 'street careers' in Tanzania', *Children's Geographies*, vol 4, no. 1, pp109-128.

² International Bureau of Children's Rights, 2002, *Global report: International; dimensions of the sexual exploitation of children*. Quebec: BIDE.

while ignoring cultural opposition to the human rights of children in Northern countries, in some of which it is widespread.

Debates about cultural relativity are among the factors that underwrite social tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children. Adults may argue that human rights are not relevant in their culture, but abused and children of the same culture might disagree – if adults permitted them the knowledge that such rights exist.

Communication for change

Once the background of attitudes to social tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children is known and understood (which is far from being the case at the moment), reducing such tolerance entails the development of effective, coordinated communications strategies., building on the successful experience of social marketing in communicating health messages. The five-year strategic plan should be rolled out within a comprehensive communication strategy, including public education (social marketing) using lessons learned from success in other fields – particularly health – encompassing a wide range of locally-relevant media.

Lessons learned in both combating sexual exploitation of children and the HIV prevention field demonstrate that creating stand-alone ‘sexual exploitation prevention programmes’ is impractical, given that, in many local contexts, the issue is little understood, and remains highly stigmatised. Addressing societal tolerance needs to be understood locally in terms of:

- A holistic approach to the human rights of children (and adults), rather than focusing on a single form of violation;
- Development of a public discourse that breaks the silence on sexuality as a whole;
- Awareness of sexual exploitation and its consequences;
- Practical information about sexual exploitation: what it is, how to recognize warning signs, how to develop local responses, where children can go for help;
- Quality services to provide help, based on, or compatible with, local traditions and practices of community support, leadership, reintegration and healing.

Media

Media reports that try to shock, and thereby increase circulation or audience, in fact reduce the ability of readers or audience to react appropriately. A further risk is that this tendency will increase the demand for sex with children, particularly for holiday makers in ‘exotic’ destinations such as the Caribbean, West Africa and South-East Asia, who may have read, or seen reports of, the sexual exploitation of children in such places and under the impression that this is ‘OK in the local culture’ decide to experiment while under the influence of holiday dis-inhibition.

Nevertheless, it has been shown that media can be sensitized through ongoing training in children’s rights, although the message about not violating children’s rights to dignity and respect needs to be regularly reinforced.³

Feature films and documentaries are part of the stock in trade of communications about sexual exploitation of children – particularly if they focus on street children and/or brothels. A recent article discusses their contribution to a ‘discourse of compassion that is globally throbbing with funds, protectionist laws and images’, contending that:

³ See for example UNICEF Malaysia media training http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/11979_crc20-child-rights-reporters-workshop.html

Representations [like this] churn out highly aesthetic images of acute vulnerability and suffering – but ones that propose a straightjacket response to save these children: raid, rescue, rehabilitate.⁴

The result is that children are robbed of their agency and right to take decisions about their own lives by the very agencies that aim to help them, while ‘the commercial appropriation of images of suffering’⁵ is ‘taken up into processes of global marketing and business competition’⁶

Cybersex

New and evolving communication and information technologies provide innovative avenues for accessing sexual services, including with children, in more anonymous and uncontrolled ways. ‘Cybersex’ refers to a range of sexual activities using mobile phones or networked computers, including abuse and exploitation through commonly used social media/networks such as Skype, Facebook as well as chat rooms and more hard-core online adult sites and sex-games. Given the current trends in increasing availability and use of phone and computer technology among relatively wealthy, urban, children and young people, these are areas for concern as yet almost completely unresearched, although recognized as bearing risks for children through grooming for meetings and sexual encounters by adults (often posing as children) as well as the use of webcams for producing and using pornographic images and videos.

Concerns raised in Northern countries, where social media are becoming ubiquitous, have led to privacy and child-protection policies on responsible web sites, such as Facebook, as well as a number of programmes accessible to parents whereby children’s use of social media can be monitored. But none of this is foolproof or water-tight; internet cafes, for example, tend not to be monitored.

There is little cooperation between North and South on cyber safety. Fostering such cooperation could be a task Oak Foundation might be able to assume within its secondary-prevention activities. Children themselves could be strong partners in such a campaign and sometimes show their concern about Cyber-risks.

Sex education and schools

If children are to develop the life skills necessary to protect themselves against sexual exploitation, they also need information about sex and sexual norms, about risks and dangers and the mechanisms within their own families and communities that exist to help them and can be trusted. Children need information about what is and is not acceptable adult behaviour. Unfortunately there is even more widespread intergenerational silence about sex – often supported by governments and religious opinion leaders. Breaking this silence is a formidable task if societal tolerance of sexual exploitation of children is to be significantly reduced.

⁴ Sircar, O., and Dutta, D r, 2011, Beyond compassion: Children of sex workers in Kolkata’s Sonagachi. *Childhood* 18 (3): 333-349. P 334

⁵ *Ibid* .336.

⁶ Kleinman, A. and Kleinman, J. 1997. The appeal of experience; The dismay of images: Cultural appropriations of suffering in our times. In Kleinman, A., Das, V., and Lock, M., (eds.) *Social suffering*. Berkley: University of California Press. 1-23.

Education about sex in schools is forbidden in many countries (usually for religious reasons) or watered down either into superficial 'family life education' or into one-off biology-based, single-sex lessons around the age of puberty. HIV prevention has shown that sex education should be taught within overall life skills (including saying 'No' and negotiating condom use) and family life. Information about the sexual exploitation of children should be an integral part of overall curriculum provision on life skills that includes information about sex, gender and sexuality. In practice, in a real world, this almost never occurs. Yet to be empowered to make good choices in life, children require good knowledge and information (UNCRC article 17).

Schools have a dual role with respect to the sexual exploitation of children:

- I. A role often played: As locations of exploitation by teachers, in practices tolerated by pupils, families, communities and ministries of education;
- II. A role seldom played: As potential locations of education to combat sexual exploitation through adequate health, sex and life-skills curricula delivered by properly-trained, non-abusive teachers.

Peer education

Peer education has been demonstrated to be an effective means of communicating health messages and changing both attitudes and behaviours, most recently and effectively in HIV/AIDS work.⁷ The approach has developed some local organizations of children, particularly child clubs and organizations of child workers.⁸ In addition to disseminating information, these activities can be empowering for children, developing the confidence and self-esteem needed for self-protection.

Tolerance of demand

Almost all programme work and research on the sexual exploitation of children focuses on the children rather than the adults involved – be they clients, Sugar Daddies/Mummies, brokers, pimps or brothel owners, although some profiles of sex tourists and paedophiles can be found in news reports. There are scholarly exceptions, but these too seem to focus largely on sex tourism.⁹ One reason for this gap in knowledge is that there are many markets where many different kinds of sex are bought and sold, and most transactions are hidden. But surely the main reason is that men, in particular, buying sexual services is condoned, tolerated and in many cases expected.

- *Imaging (male) sexuality*

Tolerance of adult males buying sex is based on the myth that men have sexual needs that must be met because they cannot be controlled. Men living or working away from their wives, or unmarried men, or men whose wives provide insufficient quantity of sexual services are widely believed to be in danger of health problems, or a danger to society because they cannot control their physical; desires.¹⁰ Attitudes about masculinity and traditional perceptions of gender roles and gender norms, are difficult to address, but

⁷ www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_01.pdf

⁸ See for example <http://www.cwc.org>

⁹ O'Connell Davidson, J. and Sanchez Taylor, J. (1999) 'Fantasy Islands, Exploring the Demand for Sex Tourism', in Kempadoo, K. (ed.) *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers; Hart, A., 1993 *Purchasing power; An ethnographic study of men who buy sex in Alicante, Spain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Stevens Evelyn P.; 1973. :*Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America*; in: Pescatelo Ann; *Female and Male in Latin America*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.

work with men and boys which aims to address these attitudes and norms can be effective in promoting gender equality and reducing sexual exploitation.¹¹

- *Imaging sexualised children*

Sexualized images of children are not new but, like all other pornographic images, have been made more potent since photography facilitated reproduction of images, and given an additional boost with the progressive development of moving images. More recently the ability to download images directly from cameras onto computers, mobile phones and the internet has made dissemination far easier and more widespread.

One of the general challenges of reducing tolerance of child pornography is that, like sex itself and other forms of sexual exploitation, pornography tends not to be openly discussed. The general public and government officials are not really aware of the extent of the negative impact on children. Any public debates are likely to be skewed by the fact that the people in the debate may be users of pornographic products who do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Another issue, which may well feed social tolerance of pornography, is that children (usually boys) may be exposed to it, alongside adults (usually male).

The internet is a huge source of pornographic images of children, given the increase in accessibility to the internet in all regions. Similarly mobile phones, which are becoming increasingly widespread even among the very poor, and can be used to take, post, share, send and receive pornographic images of children. Cyber cafes are unregulated and can be accessed by young people in many towns and even villages, while parents tend to be unaware of children's online activities. Child pornography is not specifically illegal in all countries, and even where it is very few prosecutions take place.

¹¹ See parallel briefing paper for Oak Foundation on engaging men and boys in combating the sexual exploitation of children.

4. Briefing on secondary-prevention Preventing children's entry into all forms of sexual exploitation

Objectives: To consider the Oak Foundation strategic statement and proposed clusters of work related to prevention of entry to sexual exploitation, to assess the extent to which they reflect:

- Current thinking, practice and policies intended to prevent children from entering sexually exploitative work, including a review of work funded by Oak Foundation;
- The impact of this work, including how impact is measured;
- Gaps in knowledge, policy and/or practice.

Current knowledge

Current knowledge on the entry of children into sexual exploitation is patchy, based to a large extent on poorly-constructed research that fails to take children's own perceptions, opinions and experiences into account. Ethical strategies and scientific methods of data collection and analysis are too frequently either inadequate or absent altogether.¹² While there is a growing body of academic research on this issue, it seems only rarely to influence project and programme planning.

Academic work tends to refute the comfortable assertions of adultist thinking about the sexual exploitation of children, which may be one reason why the conclusions of well-implemented research are discarded or ignored by project workers. However, another reason must be that academics do not generally disseminate their results other than through academic journals, and certainly rarely report back to the subjects of research in ways that can be easily understood.

Whether scientifically acceptable or not, research on the sexual exploitation of children has tended to obscure reality by carrying out one-time studies that provide snapshots of children's activities and tend to lead to categorizations into types of prostitution and single points of entry. Longitudinal studies are not carried out, and would be difficult to construct in any case, because of the mobile nature of the populations involved. But childhood is the life stage most notable for change. The idea of a single 'point of entry' ignores the variety of children's life journeys and careers as they move through the transitions to adulthood. A more useful approach would be to look at entry in terms of journeys towards and through various levels of children's involvements in sexual exploitation.

Current practice

Most information about current practice in the field of the sexual exploitation of children relates to the 3-Rs (rescue; rehabilitation; and reintegration), in other words the emphasis in practice is not on either primary or secondary prevention. Where prevention practices do exist they appear to take the form of small-scale, poorly-evaluated civil society activities, with no overall strategic approach.

¹² See the discussion of research on children involved in prostitution in. ECPAT International, 2008, *Exploitation of children in prostitution: Thematic Paper*. World Congress III Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, November 2008
http://www.ecpat.net/WorldCongressIII/PDF/Publications/Prostitution_of_Children/Thematic_Paper_Prostitution_ENG.pdf

Partnerships

Non-traditional partners, which often identify themselves as ‘networks, ‘working groups’ consortia; and coalitions, tend to dispense with the formalities of legal incorporation and agreements. The focus is a particular issue or problem, and the aim is combine resources and expertise to ‘get the job done’. Sometimes these groups are short-lived and single-issue or event oriented. Other examples may persist for years, or become institutionalized. Similar inter-agency groups operate in other parts of the world, and show the benefits of a new and more open collaboration between organizations, which also benefits traditional ‘local partners’ and can prevent competition on the ground..

Impact and how it is measured

A focus on monitoring impact and results, instead of process and activities, represents ongoing learning for programmes and partners and a major and overdue shift in perspective. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to monitor *all* aspects and stages of a project cycle, including the process of the cycle itself.

Probably the main lesson learned from the attempt to focus on results is that impact and outcomes can be measured only if clear objectives have been set. This points to the importance of designing an impact-monitoring system at the outset of a programme and not waiting until after it has already started, or when it is completed.¹³ Despite the increasing focus on results and impact, a review of programmes and projects supported by Oak Foundation highlights considerable gaps in clarity among objectives and activities.

Children’s participation in the project cycle

Organizations and projects tend to consult with children (if they consult at all) at the outset of their planning and in the evaluation phase, but there is limited (if any) ongoing consultation throughout the implementation of projects and programmes. Organizations remain reluctant to involve children and other beneficiaries on an ongoing basis because of the implications for resources of time, money and effort. Moreover they are not necessarily clear about how to ‘do’ participation.¹⁴

The participation of children, as well as their families and communities, should be a routine approach to programmes and projects.¹⁵ Children’s participation is particularly important for impact monitoring as Oak Foundation has demonstrated in some advocacy, child helpline and shelter programmes it has funded. But this is not yet a necessary condition of Oak Foundation funding, and would require training of staff at all levels in ethical, participatory research and programming.¹⁶ Oak Foundation staff recognize the limited capacities and capabilities of partners/grantees in relation to consulting and involving children. Many of the staff members of partner organisations are aware of the principles related to the participation of children but very often they do not have the time, resources and space they need to undertake children’s participation.¹⁷ The skills, methods, confidence and ethical procedures necessary for participatory work with children need to be learned and practiced with humility.

¹³ Child Trafficking Response Programme, Phase II, External Evaluation Report, Page 31-32, and interview with Mads Sorenson, Save the Children Albania.

¹⁴ Phone conversation with Jonathan Blagbrough.

¹⁵ Conversation with Mads Sorensen, CTRP Manager, Save the Children in Albania (1 September 2011).

¹⁶ Beers, H.V. and Trimmer, C., [reference not cited]

¹⁷ Key informant interview by email with Blain Teketel and Fassil Mariam 9 September. 2011

However there is now a global body of experience and a variety of learning materials available.¹⁸

Some new ideas

Capacity-building

Working groups and coalitions tend to identify learning and sharing knowledge (particularly on management skills) as a priority, without developing structures within which these could operate successfully. One barrier is that staff of both small and large NGOs, as well as government departments, are usually overstretched and do not have the time to devote to long-term learning, or even to spend at the many workshops on specific skills that are regularly offered by international organizations.

Much could be learned through systematic dialogue and connections, encouraging mutual learning between partners rather than attendance at training packages from the Global North. Distance learning, especially through the internet, is now a well-organized and accredited form of education.

Other modes of sharing and learning are structured third-party training of colleagues after workshop attendance, mentoring, exchange visits, online courses, mutual-exchange study days and webinars.

Partnerships with the private sector

Partnerships with the private sector can be powerful both for securing additional funding and for in-kind support. Nevertheless, even the social-responsibility sectors of commercial enterprises need to be sure that their company will gain prestige and improve image by partnering with an NGO. Unfortunately the topic of the sexual exploitation of children might well be regarded as too unsavoury to be linked with a brand name. When seeking commercial sponsorship, a children's-rights framework might be the best way to begin the dialogue.

Industry-wide international organizations and trades unions can be encouraged to raise awareness (and work towards zero tolerance) of the sexual exploitation of children in places where unaccompanied men are gathered – such as mining enclaves, and certain tourist areas. Two examples of partnerships with the private sector are the World Tourist Organization involvement in campaigns to discourage sex tourism, and in the field of combating child labour, joint activities with commercial producers and organizations.

International programmes related to the sexual exploitation of children

Responses to sexual exploitation of children by humanitarian/aid workers have resulted in codes of conduct, child protection policies and zero tolerance of sexual exploitation for all staff, volunteers, children and their communities.¹⁹

A great deal of work on trafficking has been carried out by the health and public health community. While some have focused on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS amongst trafficked

¹⁸ See for example, RWGCL publication *Learning to work together: A handbook for managers*; and *Adults first*, both downloadable from Save the Children Sweden publications website; and the UNICEF EAPRO publication *Resources for children's participation*, available from UNICEF EAPRO website.

¹⁹ Hyder, T and Mac Veigh, J (2007) 'Gender-based violence against children in emergencies: Save the Children UK's response', *Gender and Development*, 15, 1, pp81 – 93.

girls, others have focused on looking at how health and social welfare systems could be better integrated into an effective trafficking response.²⁰

Community-based programmes for protecting children

NGOs and CBOs have been enhancing child-protection efforts by communities focusing on family counselling, dialogue meetings at village, parish and sub county level, strengthening capacity of social-protection structures and systems such as Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) committees, traditional leaders, child-protection committees, parents groups, youth and children groups.²¹

Child protection by and for children

A growing body of information demonstrates that children can be involved in their own protection against a variety of violations of their rights, through being involved in community and local government and/or through children's groups and clubs in which they not only learn about children's rights and children's participation, but also about risks and dangers of violation and how to protect themselves and other people. These activities have been quite well documented for all regions of the Global South.

Lacunae in policy, practice and knowledge

A wide range of gaps was identified by consultants, but two major areas stand out:

- An apparent lack of challenge to the 'Rescue, rehabilitation, reinsertion ('3-Rs') response model;
- Gaps in scientific, robust information in a field dominated by unscientific research and analysis.

Available research

Research on sexual exploitation tends to be repetitive, poorly integrated and archived, and decontextualized. Few studies analyze the familial, generational and social forces/contexts that fuel children's entry into and exploitation in sex work, especially the roots in rural areas of predominantly rural countries. Research in these areas usually presumes a crude 'push' (poverty) 'pull' (bright lights) dichotomy. More nuance and a great deal more children-centred, quantifiable work is required as the basis for effective policies and programmes.

Two aspects of the way research is conducted and disseminated; information from scientific research more often than not remains within academic circles. Yet sharing research findings with communities – especially children – can result in further useful information for research and programming, as well as encouraging and empowering community members to act collectively to find solutions.²²

A further problem is poor management of the interface between IGOs and NGOs and the researchers commissioned to carry out the research. Essentially this is not managed at all, apart from the development of a research TOR by the organization. The interface should ideally include an ongoing dialogue on objectives, conceptual clarity, and proper

²⁰ Williams et al 2009 Sex trafficking and health care in Metro Manila: Identifying social determinants to inform an effective health system response. *Journal of Health and Human Rights*, 12(2)

²¹ Key informant email interview, Anthony Kerwegi, 9th Sept. 2011.

²² Derived from email interview with Mike Wessells 31 Aug. 2011.

management of ethical issues related to all aspects of the research process, from the development of the TOR to the dissemination of results.

Better research practices

- Research evaluations, including children at all stages; Impact evaluation – require projects to have proper (scientifically rigorous) evaluation plans from the proposal stage, ensure they are fully funded and implemented.
- Research with ethical strategies built in to the protocol to ensure child protection throughout the research process, and support of ethical committee development among NGOs and INGOs carrying out or sponsoring research with sexually-exploited children.
- Participatory approaches - involve children in research²³ learning from/researching with young people involved in exploitative sex to identify the drivers of the problem and identify strategies for prevention.
- Ensure that feedback of research results to stakeholders – especially children – is provided using non-technical language and, to the extent necessary, non-written forms of communication.

²³ Porter, G; Hampshire, K; Bourdillon, M; Robson, E; Munthali, A; Abane, M; and Mashiri, M. 2010 'Children as research collaborators: issues and reflections from a mobility study in sub-Saharan Africa' American Journal of Community Psychology vol. 46, no. 1, pp215-227. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/fwm6341q7t0m913v/> Robson, E; Porter, G; Hampshire, K; and Bourdillon, M. 2009 'Doing it right?': working with young researchers in Malawi to investigate children, transport and mobility Children's Geographies vol. 7, no. 4, pp467-480.

5. Recommendations

Oak Foundation has taken up a massive and complex primary-protection challenge in seeking to reduce societal tolerance of the sexual exploitation of children. The obstacles to success lie in deeply-rooted socio-historical facts as well as in the frequently-cited current factors of ‘cultural traditions’ and the present structures of capitalism and consumerism. It may seem like hubris to try to demolish this potent combination of brick walls. Not to make the attempt, however, would reduce work to protect children from risks of humiliation, emotional and physical damage. To turn away from the possibility of primary prevention will continue the environment in which children enter sexual exploitation. This would mean that secondary prevention work with girls and boys who are sexually exploited would be reduced to small projects of prevention, rescue and rehabilitation, together with minor legal changes as the result of advocacy and lobbying. Thus the challenge of tearing-down social frameworks that, in themselves put children at risk must be met. However, alternative frameworks must be available; the argument of this briefing paper is that the human rights of children – indeed of all human beings – provide a viable alternative to the power structures of patriarchy.

Traditional attitudes are usually referred to as if they are fixed in stone, and cannot or should not be changed. This idea is part of the problem. The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a timeless feature of human societies. Yet, the fact that culture changes between generations, partly because of the unrecognized social agency of children and their ability to construct meanings and values, makes children the most potent partners for bringing about change.

The participation of children in decisions made about their own lives has been identified as one of the most potent means of child protection, but requires changes of law, local and national political and administrative structures as well as social attitudes throughout societies.

5.1. Recommendations for planning

- Zero base on a children’s-rights framework
- Develop and support a children’s-participation agenda
- Promote clear paradigms and terminology

5.2. Recommendations for reducing social tolerance

Reducing societal tolerance to sexual exploitation of children can be seen as a strategy for prevention in general. Some suggested components in strategic planning are:

- Adopting and implementing a children’s-rights framework;
- Facilitating and supporting children to be actors in their own lives;
- Providing accessible information about sexual exploitation to children and parents, including access to information about alternatives and decision-making skills;
- Finding ways of breaking the intergenerational silence about sex, including opportunities for informed discussion;
- Designing programmes on evidence: supporting research on positive cases, in which ‘poverty’ and marginalization *do not* lead to sexual exploitation, and learning from the

- ‘magic ingredients’ what preventative programme elements will work and be locally relevant;
- Addressing both negative and positive sexual-exploitation functions of schooling.

5.3. Suggestions for preventing entry to sexual exploitation

Rethink ‘poverty’

One key suggestion is to consider that ‘poverty’ that can lead to sexual exploitation is less a matter of economic deprivation – important that this may be – and more related to marginalization and lack of access to power.

Children’s participation

- Conceptualise children as social agents and subjects of human rights, rather than victims.
- Consult sexually exploited children on their needs, give them power to make decisions and shape intervention activities. Involve children and their communities as active participants in finding solutions to these problems rather than using ‘top down’ approaches. This takes a good deal of capacity building, time, money, and relationship development and needs to be done sensitively and ethically.²⁴
- Ask some hard questions about programmes (and research studies) that fail to make the participation of children a core feature.
- Establish a framework to ensure children’s participation in the project cycle of all Oak-Foundation funded work.
- Work with both children and adults - Programmes empowering children to have a say in policy making and in the design of programmes that impact on them should be encouraged. However, preventative work should not focus solely on children, thus inadvertently making them responsible for avoiding situations of sexual exploitation. Work with adults, especially including men, needs to be strengthened but clearly needs to be based on the experiences and input of young people.²⁵

Child protection

- Establish / strengthen child protection systems and the development of child-protection policies and practices in all institutions working with children including communities, schools, churches, hospitals, orphanages, remand homes.
- Resist targeting categories of children
- Contextualize the sexual exploitation of children.
- Do not label and categorize children, especially by using misconceived categories such as ‘street children’ or labelling them with acronyms such as OVC and CSEC.

²⁴ Key informant email interviews with Prof McKay and Prof Wessells, 31 Aug. 2011.

²⁵ Email interview, Helen Alexander, 9 Sept 2011.

This risks stigmatization, community jealousies and excluding some children in need of help.

Gender issues

Recognize that sexually exploited children may be boys as well as girls, and differently gendered as well as heterosexual.

Best practice

Clarify, disseminate, promote and maintain the criteria for 'best practice' including especially with children as partners.

5.4. Overall recommendations

In addition to the specific suggestions in the sections on strategic planning, reduction of societal tolerance and prevention of entry into sexual exploitation of children, the following general recommendations are made, affecting all three areas.

Three pillars

The key recommendation from both briefing reports is that the strategy plan should be based on the framework of the human rights of children.

- *Framework of the human rights of children*

Using a framework of children's rights entails that sexual exploitation is not picked out separately, but seen as a zero-tolerance violation embedded in the complex task of combating all violations of the human rights of children, thereby acknowledging the complexities and vulnerabilities that lead to sexual exploitation.

- *Recognition of children's social agency*

Children are the primary partners and stakeholders; their social agency, knowledge and opinions must be acknowledged.

- *Emphasize primary prevention*

Recognize that primary prevention is the first consideration, but a long-term goal within the progressive achievement of children's rights, while secondary prevention can be tied to shorter-term activities and objectives, working with children now to prevent immediate violations of their rights.

Act on the basis of reliable knowledge

- Promote reliable knowledge of the sexual exploitation of children, filling gaps with replicable, verifiable, comparative and ethical research. Use academic research results creatively. Accentuate the positive: what factors keep children *out* of sexual exploitation?

Take a leading role through appropriate, consistent niche activity

Seek and find the Oak-Foundation niche, and take a leadership role that zero bases on the human rights of children:

- Plan and implement a holistic, integrated strategy;
- Avoid using patchwork clusters, avoid 'projectitis'; think big to achieve a big vision. Small-scale funding for scattered small-scale projects is an inefficient use of funds and cannot match up to a big vision.
- Coordinate work through strategic coalitions (many of which already exist) with civil society and government, as well as other sectors such as health, law and child protection;
- Devise an integrated strategy, with related activities, that recognises schools as both exploitative and preventative:
 - As locations of sexual abuse and exploitation
 - As potential places where information about power and sex can affect societal tolerance of sexual exploitation.
- Develop and roll out a strategic plan for sustainable, innovative training and capacity building, including using internet as a solution as well as a problem.

5.5. Think again

Three conventional assumptions need some out-of-the-box thinking.

'Poverty' reduction

Poverty (however defined) is not the key problem – otherwise more children would be sexually exploited.

In any case, poverty reduction is the business of states and inter-governmental institutions. Poverty is structural and NGOs cannot either reach the structures to change them (even with effective advocacy) or do more than provide occasional band-aid projects.

Trafficking

Most of the activities implemented thus far seem to have focused on trafficking as key-form of entry into sexual exploitation. Evidence now seems to show that this may not be the case, and that other entry points in childhood careers require greater attention.

Risk factors

Some 'risk factors' detected in children's lives represent gross violations of fundamental human rights, even if sexual exploitation does not follow. The perspective on prevention of entry needs to be broader and focus more on addressing prior violations of children's rights.