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Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children in the Coastal Region of Sao Paulo State, Brazil

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Introduction

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) refers to a broad range of illegal activities that involve “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier,” as stipulated by Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).¹ Sexually exploitive activities directed against children include child pornography, juvenile prostitution, sex tourism, and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes both within and across international borders.

In 1996, the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (held in Stockholm, Sweden) defined CSEC as “sexual abuse (of children) by adult(s) and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated both as a sexual object and as a commercial object.”²

Later, the additional forms of CSEC including child sex tourism, child pornography, child marriages, forced marriages and the outright sale of children for sexual purposes, firstly discussed at the Second World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (held in Yokohama, Japan) were published in a document from ECPAT International (End Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes).³

What distinguishes the commercial child sexual exploitation from other forms of sexual violence is the matter of the monetary benefit that takes place as a result of the sexual “favors” that are exchanged between the child and an adult. Such exchanges may take the form of money itself or tangible goods of value to the child, e.g., food, temporary shelter, clothing, street drugs, and so on.⁴ Although juvenile prostitution and its occurrence in Brazil is a major focus of this article, when appropriate reference also is made to other forms of CSEC, the majority of which often are associated with prostitution. For the purposes of this article, a “child” is defined as a person younger than the age of 18 years old.

According to the U.S.-based National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART-1),⁵ teenagers constitute the group of children most likely to run away from home and engage in illegal behavior, including consuming illicit drugs, becoming victims of physical violence, and very often, becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Of considerable interest to the authors of this study, in 1999, NISMAART-2⁶ reported that some 1,682,900 children and adolescents in the United States go missing every year (mostly due to running away from home) but that only 21% of these people had been officially reported to the police authorities as missing persons. Histories of

physical or sexual violence (21%), drug use (19%), and crime involvement (11%) figured prominently in the experiences of many of these runaway and throwaway children.⁶

In an extensive study of the nature, extent, and frequency of CSEC in the United States, Mexico and Canada, 5 categories of children were identified as being at special risk of CSEC:^{7,8} a) those who do not live with the family of origin because they have run away either from their homes or from youth-serving institutions; b) those who are sexually exploited while living with their families—by either other family members or strangers; c) girls who belong to gangs that demand sexual “favors” as a condition of membership; d) girls who live with groups of transsexuals and other sexual minority groups and who, themselves, self-identify as being either a transsexual or a member of a sexual minority group; and, e) young people who live in close proximity to foreign cities where transnational sexual exploitation is tolerated. The authors of these studies also suggested that street children, who tend to be very numerous in most developing countries, are at especially high risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation in all its forms.

Different life circumstances contribute to child sexual exploitation, including for Brazilian children, the major focus of this article. A rapidly “emerging economy” with a population of nearly 200 million people, Brazil has large numbers of children who are believed to be victims of CSEC. The factors that contribute to CSEC among these children include income poverty,^{9,10,11} family dysfunction,^{11,12} prior history of child physical or sexual abuse,^{11,12,13} and the use of “survival sex” by street children to meet their basic social and material needs.^{4,7,8} The Global Report on Trafficking Persons¹⁴ provides evidence that the sex trafficking of Brazilian women and girls occurs in all 26 Brazilian states and Brasilia (the Federal District) estimates that upwards of 250,000 children are involved in prostitution---an estimate not much different from that observed by the authors of the North American study.^{7,8} Child sex tourism remains a serious problem throughout the country, but especially in Brazil’s many resort and coastal areas in its northeast states where child sex tourists typically arrive from Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States.¹⁵ In 2011, the national hotline for reporting suspected incidents of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation received approximately 12,000 calls on sexual exploitation of children, including 38 cases of children who were moved for the purpose of prostitution.¹⁵

“Runaway” children are one of the largest categories of street children in Brazil and, as such, are at the highest risk of sexual victimization for commercial purposes.^{5,6,11,16,17,18} These unprotected

young people also are at risk of being trafficked both within countries, due to the continent's very large geography and cultural mix, as well as across international borders to countries that border Brazil.^{7,10,13,19} Sexually exploited children make up the bulk of the statistical data reported by official human service, juvenile justice, and central governmental authorities, albeit the reports are rarely followed by integrated programs of action.^{3,9,13} The majority of these children have fled their homes for reasons associated with domestic violence between parents, violence toward the children themselves (especially toward boys), sexual abuse (especially toward girls), and a wide range of other types of family conflicts and dysfunction.^{12,17,18,20,21,22,23}

The Brazilian Effort to Identify Missing and Sexually Exploited Children

The first formal study of the incidence of sexually exploited children in Brazil was *Night Girls: The Prostitution of Girls Enslaved in Brazil* (Portuguese title: *Meninas da noite: a prostituição de meninas escravas no Brasil*),²⁴ which was published in 1992. The author of this volume denounced the presence of large networks of child trafficking in Brazil's northern region. Among other responses to the report, in 1993 the first Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry (CPI) was established in Brazil to examine the nature, extent, and severity of child prostitution throughout all regions of the country.²⁵ The CPI had a profound impact on sensitizing service providers, lawmakers, and the general community to the seriousness of this problem, which, until that time, had largely been ignored.

Today, most studies that focus on the complexities of missing and exploited children have been conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or by academic research units. After the World Congress on CSEC held in Stockholm (1996), for example, the "National Plan to Combat Children Sexual Violence" was launched in Brazil, and as a result, Brazil became one of the 122 countries committed to the Agenda of Action proposed at the Stockholm world meeting.^{13,25} The Third CSEC World Congress on Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents was held in 2008 in Rio de Janeiro,²⁶ where countries put forward a new set of goals and procedures aimed at preventing the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents all over the world.

In Brazil, a runaway child is considered "missing" when the family files an "official" missing person's report in the police office. Formally, a child is not considered as missing until such time as an official report has been filed. Once reported, such a person, including a child of any age, is

officially considered as a “missing person” and, thereby, becomes the subject of official searches that may well extend beyond the person’s geographic area of original domicile to the country as a whole. Only in cases of kidnapping, specifically kidnapping of a minor by a family member or stranger, are considered crimes of abduction (Article 249 of the Brazilian Penal Code ²⁷).

The official data from the Public Security Secretary indicate that approximately 9,000 reports of missing children are filed each year in just São Paulo state—the country’s largest and wealthiest state. Approximately 40,000 reports of missing children are filed annually for the country as a whole.²⁸ Regardless of the high number of cases of abduction and CSEC suggested by these numbers, the major reasons for this problem have not been well identified. In developing countries such as Brazil, despite the rapid pace of its economic growth, detailed data concerning missing people, including missing children, remain scarce.

One of the first Brazilian studies about missing people,²⁹ although successful in trying to identify the different categories of missing people for the country as a whole, did not include missing children. In response to this void in critical information, since September 2004 a multidisciplinary project called “Caminho de Volta”²⁸ housed in the Forensics Department of Legal Medicine, Medical School, São Paulo University (Departamento de Medicina Legal da Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil), has been working with families who filed official missing persons reports with police authorities. The purpose of this assistance has been both to aid in the identification of the motives of the children going missing and also to help establish an approach to child identification through the collection of biological samples from family members for DNA profile comparisons.

Considering all the cases, approximately 700 families who met the study’s filing requirements between 2004 and 2010 revealed that domestic violence was the primary factor (50%) that accounted for the child’s disappearance.³⁰ Excessive alcohol use (42%) and illicit drug dependency or addictive behaviors by the parents (35%) were reported by the families. Drug trafficking (11%), criminal offenses (18%), and CSEC (5%) were also reported by families. In terms of the last group of children (those who were the victims of CSEC), 14 were girls, and 8 were boys.³⁰

The project also identified that 73% of all missing children in São Paulo state go missing after running away from their primary homes (often from the complex of slums—referred to as “favelas” in the literature—that exist in the communities that surround Greater São Paulo).^{28,30} Among a wide range of reasons, these runaway children leave home in search of

better economic lives for themselves outside of the slum, but an unknown number of them end up becoming the victims of pornography, prostitution, and child trafficking to other states in Brazil and to other countries in the Latin America.

Obviously, the link that exists between runaways and commercial sexual exploitation requires fuller, more careful investigation in Brazil. The sheer number of these child victims requires such follow up, and of course, specialized service and other types of programs must be developed to meet their profound social, psychological, educational, housing, and other needs. The objective of the present investigation was to evaluate the possible link between the runaway children and those identified as CSEC in 3 different cities in the coastal region of São Paulo state.

Methods

São Paulo state is located in southeastern Brazil. The state-wide population numbers approximately 42 million people, of which 27% are 14 years old and younger. Per capita income in Brazil averages \$10,200, but the country is characterized by wide disparities in wealth and a rigid class structure. Nearly a third (31%) of the population lives below nationally established poverty levels; the country's GINI Coefficient, which measures the level of national income disparity, is 56.7 and, as such, reveals Brazil to be one of the least equitable countries in the world.³¹

The research reported in this article was performed through analysis of the registries of the names of missing persons reported by families to local police authorities in the cities of Santos, São Vicente, and Guarujá and, separately, analysis of reports made to major youth-serving NGOs located in São Vicente. All 3 cities are located along the southeast sea coast of São Paulo state (Figures 1 and 2). They are very close to each other, and share similar socioeconomic conditions, including the number of inhabitants (419,400 in Santos, 332,445 in São Vicente, and 290,752 in Guarujá).³²

This region was selected for this study due to the proximity to the São Paulo state capital (~100 km) and due to the high migration of people, including runaway children, to and from the Santos port region. These are also choice resort communities for children to run to, given their very temperate climate, ready availability of food (including via fishing), and for some children, "adventure." This pattern is similar to the one noted by Estes and Weiner⁷ in the large number of American children who ran away from home to such resort communities as Las Vegas, South Miami Beach, and Cancun, among others.

The research for this article was conducted in 2 phases, each of which used a different set of methodologies. First, a comparative analysis was conducted between the data collected from the police and the NGO records to identify the number and frequency of coincidences. Second, qualitative methods were used to interview the professionals from the NGO.

Figure 1. Geographical Map of Brazil Showing the Coastal Region of São Paulo State



Figure 2. Geographical Map of São Paulo State Coast Showing the Relative Distance between the city of São Paulo and the 3 Studied Cities (São Vicente, Santos, and Guarujá).



Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis

Data collected from police reports: Multiple data concerning missing people, including children, were selected from the records of 3 police districts for the period of 1995 until 2009. Among other demographic data, these reports included only the child's full name (as provided by the child's parents or caregivers), sex, and age. Because of their physical nature, data were obtained from these reports using manual methods; subsequently, these data were converted into electronic data files. Once converted into electronic form, the data could be easily searched and cross-referenced with other regional data sets, including those maintained by the community-based NGO that helps sexually abused children and youth.

Data collected from the NGO: The NGO data collection phase of the project included a major child-serving NGO that, since 1997, has had an established history in the city of São Vicente. The NGO is well respected by children, their families, and local police authorities for their innovative work in dealing with the specialized needs of children at risk. For the present research, only the full names of children and adolescents who had received services from psychologists associated with the NGO were collected for the 12-year period of 1997 to 2009. These names were used in comparing the NGO's records with those of official police registries to which members of the research team also had access. Only members of the research team had access to both lists, thereby ensuring a high degree of confidentiality for the children and families served by the project.

Comparing names from police reports and NGO: After converting the police and NGO data into electronic spreadsheets, the names of the children and other demographic data were listed for purposes of comparisons and inclusivity. The comparison was possible because the 2 data sets included not only the child's name but also the names of the child's mother and/or father, the address of their last domicile, and the sexes and ages of children who appeared on both sets of registries. Only reports with at least these 3 critical data—e.g., name, age at time of registration, and sex—were considered for final comparison, excluding duplicate names.

Phase 2: Qualitative Analysis

Interviews with the NGO professionals: In addition to comparing names and other identifying data contained in the paper and electronic files, personal interviews were conducted with leading members of the NGO staff. During these interviews, the research team asked the lead NGO staff members to detail the stories of the children who came into their care as a result of running away from home or by virtue of having become victims of some form of commercial sexual exploitation, or both. Although these interviews included different approaches, for this research the focus was to attempt to identify: a) the entrance and exit processes used by these children vis-à-vis CSEC; b) the family's knowledge about CSEC; c) reasons for the child wanting to remain in situations that involved their sexual exploitation; d) the child's feelings about being sexually exploited; and e) how CSEC was or was not associated with running away from home. Because of our desire to protect the privacy of the children and not to erode the quality of their relationships with the NGO staff members, the children themselves were excluded from direct interviewing by members of the research staff.

Findings

Statistical Trends

A total of 4,340 police reports of "missing people" were collected during the study period, i.e., 2,069 (48%) from the Santos police registries, 1,756 (40%) from the São Vicente police registries, and 515 (12%) from the Guarujá police registries. Considering only the names, it was possible to identify a total of 2,041 girls and young women (47%) and 2,293 (53%) boys and young men listed on all 3 registries. For 6 reports, it was not possible to determine the sex by the registered name alone.

Out of a total of 4,340 reports, only 858 cases (20%) were children and adolescents who ranged in age from as young as 1 month to as old as 18 years. Among these identified cases of children and youth, 648 (75%) were between the ages of 13 and 17 years old, of which 226 (26%) had more than 1 missing record report. Thus, only a comparative minority of the official reports of missing people involved children, even though all previous studies suggested that we should expect the number to be considerably higher.

Data from the NGO selected for analysis revealed that during the period from 1997 to 2009, the professionals succeeded in providing services to only 456 young people aged 18 years old and younger. Of this number, 362 (79%) were girls or young women, and 94 were boys or young men (21%). Among these 456 cases, 352 (77%) were between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. In all cases, the majority of these children were from the city of São Vicente (91%), where the NGO is located, and the others from Santos, Guarujá, and São Paulo.

The first comparison between the names included in the police registries of children under 18 years old (858) and the names recorded from the NGO registries (456) revealed that only 38 children (36 girls or young women and 2 boys) were common to both lists, indicating that only 8% of the NGO's participants had at some point been declared as officially missing persons. All of these individuals were all from São Vicente, and 3 girls had more than 1 police report. Thus, neither the police registries nor the NGO data bases contained even a close approximation of the number of children we had identified through other means to be runaways, some of them victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Besides the comparison between names contained in both sets of the separately constructed files, the other comparison drawn had to do with staff knowledge concerning the actual involvement of individual children in sexually exploitative activities, running away behavior, or both—a total of 64 (14%) individuals (61 girls and 3 boys) (Table 1). Only 18 (37%) of these cases were included in the police registries report. Thus, and once again, only 18 out of 64 children whom we readily identified in our work with the NGO and other professional staff led to the immediate identification of missing persons, and they were legally registered as such children (Table 2). The gap between our lists of “discovered” missing children versus the official registry maintained by police authorities was dramatic.

Of this list of 64 names, 40 (62%) of them had histories of running away and of sexual exploitation (only 2 of these were boys), 10 (16%) had histories of just running away from home, and 14 (22%) had histories of

commercial sexual exploitation (including 1 boy). As reported in Table 1, 62% of these children and youth were between ages 13 and 16 years old.

To visualize better the number of official reports of missing children vis-à-vis those identified as such by the youth serving NGO, information concerning the frequencies are reported in Table 2. These data, for example, confirmed that only 30% of established runaway and sexual exploitation cases had been officially reported to the police as cases involving running away; 70% of all runaway children, including those who became victims of CSEC, were not listed on any official governmental reports and could only be identified through direct field work with community-based youth-serving organizations (Table 2). This pattern is further illustrated in that, of 14 cases of identified sexual exploitation, only 4 (29%) appeared on official policies registries (Table 2).

It is important for the reader to keep in mind that the present investigation into the nature and dynamics of running away and child sexual exploitation is the first study of its type in Brazil and, as such, represents “first generation” research into the phenomenon. At this early stage of empirical investigation into the incidence and prevalence of CSEC throughout Brazil, the present study could not provide definitive answers to the many questions related to the incidence and prevalence of the disappearance of all children nor of the extent of CSEC in the entire country. This was well beyond the scope and resources of the present study. Instead, the investigators sought only to begin to put some preliminary estimates, and faces, on that large number of São Paulo children and youth who, each year, go missing as a result of running away from home. The data also suggest that sexual orientation, drug use, peer pressure, and other factors contribute to this phenomenon. As of today, we think we have arrived at a reasonable picture of what the general trends look like when viewed from a macro-perspective and of the underlying forces that contribute to child sexual exploitation in Brazil, especially among its large populations that live in slums.

Table 1. Information about 64 Individuals Who Participated in the NGO, Regarding Age, Missing Person Status, and Sexual Exploitation History

Age (years old)	Runaway and sexual exploitation (%)	Runaway (%)	Sexual exploitation (%)	Total (%)
9	1 (2,5)	-	-	1 (1)
10	2 (5,0)	-	-	2 (3)
11	2 (5,0)	-	-	2 (3)
12	3 (7,5)	-	1 (7)	4 (6)
13	6 (15)	3 (30)	2 (14)	11 (17)

14	7 (17,5)	1 (10)	-	8 (12)
15	5 (12,5)	2 (20)	4 (28)	11 (17)
16	7 (17,5)	2 (20)	1 (7)	10 (15)
17	2 (5,0)	2 (20)	1 (7)	5 (8)
18	1 (2,5)	-	-	1 (1)
No data	4 (10)	-	5 (36)	9 (14)
Total	40 (62,5)	10 (16)	14 (22)	64

Table 2. Comparison Between Names That Were Included in Both the Police Reports and the NGO Files (Representing the Same Persons)

Cases	NGO Number	Number of police missing reports for the same person
<u>NGO Staff Interviews (64)</u>		
Sexual Exploitation	14	4 (29%)
Runaway + Sexual Exploitation	40	12 (30%)
Runaway	10	2 (20%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>18 (28%)</i>
<u>NGO Registries (392)</u>	392	20 (5%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>456</i>	<i>38 (8%)</i>

Thanks to a high level of cooperation with police authorities, a major youth-serving NGO, and individual professionals working at the university and in the field, we think we can begin to trace some of the dimensions of the missing child/sexual exploitation problem in São Paulo state, especially in the relationship that exists between the City of São Paulo and its many nearby coastal communities. In all cases, we believe that official numbers reported to and by policing authorities significantly underestimate the number of missing and displaced children in the region and, likely, for the country as a whole. Some of the reasons for this situation might be: a) national customs (i.e., children are not as highly valued as older family members); b) the poverty that exists for many households (31% of the Brazilian population live below the country's official poverty line); and c) the many opportunities for economic advancement that exist in and around the São Paulo community—the country's largest and richest city and region.^{28, 30}

Prior history of runaway is a solid predictor of future runaways and subsequently possible child sexual exploitation. Sexual minority

orientation, family conflicts, poverty, and sometimes curiosity could also contribute substantially to children running away from their families of origin and could increase the risk of these children eventually becoming victims of CSEC.

Official Records for Missing People

Official records, such as those kept by the police and other public agencies (e.g., children protection and other social welfare entities), are woefully inadequate for understanding the true scope of the missing children and sexual exploitation issues. Public trust in police authorities to resolve such dilemmas also is very low and, in some cases, may actually subject the family (and subsequently the child) to unwanted scrutiny. Police officers betray the trust of these people when they tell families that they have to wait 24 or 48 hours before filing a missing persons report. According to Brazilian law, the report has to be opened immediately; unfortunately, this misinformation to families of child victims is still a reality in many police stations of the city of São Paulo and the rest of the country.

Official records offer us the possibility to work with numbers of cases filed but do not provide an adequate explanation of the reasons that lead to so many missing reports for so many child victims and their families. For this matter, we quote again previous research conducted with families with missing children and/or the children themselves, after they were returned home.²⁸ Some of the reasons for running away are: a) oppressive adult-child relationships in many families; b) violence as a frequent adjunct to familial oppression; and c) in some cases, the outright rejection of children because of their homosexual orientation. In such cases, many of the children chose to runaway from home rather than to endure the prolonged stresses associated with family oppression and rejection.²⁸

Indeed, from the present investigation, it was possible to conclude that official police reports were not filed for the vast majority of children with a history of running away from home. According to Table 2 above, even completed police reports represented only 30% of 40 children and adolescents with prior histories of runaway and sexual exploitation and for only 20% of 10 runaway cases registered in the same youth-serving NGO located in the same coastal community. Even considering 9,000 child missing cases officially reported by year in São Paulo State, this number is likely to be a grossly under-reported estimate of the true situation as it exists in the community.

Among many reasons for so few reports, one could point out the misunderstanding on the part of the general public concerning the need to

report such cases to police authorities. Added to this difficulty is the confusion that exists in both the public's mind and the law concerning the definition of what is meant by a missing child and, more importantly, a child who is at special risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Based on previous investigations with professionals working in São Paulo at the Child Protection Council (data not shown), it was possible to verify that the public and professional views of both phenomena differ dramatically from one another. For some families, the repetitive behavior of a teenager who leaves the home without permission for 1 to 3 days is not classified as a missing person even though the whereabouts of the child is unknown. And the necessity for a family to file a missing persons report in such situations is really not fully appreciated, especially if the family is poor and the assumption is that the child has run away for economic rather than sexual abuse reasons.

Qualitative Data on Missing Children and CSEC

The interviews with senior NGO staff were useful not only in identifying the 64 cases which otherwise would have gone undetected but also in gathering considerable information about these children. In almost all the cases, these girls and boys were not coerced into prostitution; from their point of view, it was a free choice. Among the NGO cases, there were no reports of children or adolescents who were driven from their homes or who were kidnapped by an adult.

Regarding the 10 cases of running away from home, it seems that those children did it alone and were repeated "runners." Nevertheless, they always returned home or to protective NGO-sponsors. Homosexuality was present in 4 of the 10 cases of runaways, all pertaining to girls. In 3 of these cases, the running behavior was clearly related to the lack of acceptance of the homosexuality by the child's family.

Regarding the 14 reported cases of sexual exploitation, only 1 was a boy who self-identified as being homosexual. For this boy, "turning a trick" was something much more attached to his choices and sexual identity than to sexual exploitation. There were also stories of girls who got involved in sexual exploitation at 10 or 11 years of age. In one case, a girl reported that for her sexual exploitation was a job, viewed from her perspective as the only possible alternative of life. Of these 14 adolescents, 6 of them broke away from sexual exploitation. One of the girls broke away when she was in a shelter, the others when they were in the NGO, including one instance that occurred in response to parental intervention. For 3 teenagers, the break occurred when they started heterosexual dating.

In the largest group that included prior history of runaway and sexual exploitation, only 2 of the 40 were boys. A common desire among these children was to get away from living with their family of origin; however, they did not understand that "to turn a trick" was a form of commercial sexual exploitation. The motivations and justifications for the exchange of sex and money (or goods) varied widely: a) to search for a boyfriend for romantic relationship, b) to be invited to parties and dances, c) to use drugs, and d) to escape family problems. Also, for many of these young people, the breaking away happened when they were in shelters or under NGO support.

In Brazil, Article 244-A of Child and Adolescent Statute³³ defines it as a crime "to submit a child or adolescent to prostitution or sexual exploitation." Note that the legislation uses the term "submission," which deserves some reflection. First, if the child or adolescent is being submitted, it means that it is done under forced conditions or that there is at least one adult who is exercising power or coercion. Second, we understand that a child or adolescent is being submitted because he has no psychological and emotional wherewithal to be fully responsible for his or her actions. Under either interpretation, the responsibility lies with the adult who is paying for sexual favors. But beyond that statement, Brazilian law does not define what is effectively "to be subject to sexual exploitation."

Sexual exploitation is a complex concept that allows for many interpretations. To meet the definition of sexual exploitation, it might be understood that it is necessary to have the figure of a pimp or a manager. Also, it is not clear if sporadically "turning a trick" should be considered sexual exploitation or not.

As presented by different authors, to discuss and evaluate CSEC it is necessary to take into consideration changes in perspectives on childhood and prostitution, treating them as subjects of investigation rather than objects of concern. As a result, concepts of "childhood" and "prostitutes" are now being reviewed, creating new challenges.³⁴

In the present study, it was possible to identify some forms of involvement in sexual exploitation of children and adolescents studied as part of the NGO interviews: a) girls engage in sexually exploitive behavior when they want to get money for clothes, to receive gifts, or to go to parties; b) girls engage in sexually exploitive behavior to increase personal and family income; c) boys engage in sexually exploitive behavior both to confirm and explore their homosexuality and as a way of not being discriminated against; d) girls engage in sexually exploitive behavior in situations in which they feel "in love" with their pimps or others

involved in the exploitative process; e) girls engage in sexually exploitative behavior with the primary goal of stealing from the client; and, finally, f) girls engage in sexually exploitative behavior when searching for a loving relationship.

It is interesting that, for many adolescents, to “turn a trick” as part of survival sex seems natural and sometimes is mixed with feelings of having a serious relationship status. For others, it was observed that the situation of sexual exploitation can also be experienced as an adventure in which they are going to places they have wanted to go and never imagined they would actually have the possibility to go. It is also a way to obtain money to purchase a pizza, to go to a nightclub, or to buy illicit drugs.

The diversity of situations described above shows us that girls and boys have desires, hopes, fears, and feelings that, to the adult mind, seem to be highly irrational. More than that, it can be said that their moral values are often different from the moral values of the researcher, and these differences end up being ignored in sexual exploitation studies. Also, there is a range of meanings attributed by adolescents themselves, who experience both the sexual exploitation and missing person status.

Another issue that stands out in these data is the ease with which sexual exploitation is accepted by many girls. For many of them, sex is directly related to love—not necessarily sex within marriage but in relationships where there is physical attraction or desire to initiate or sustain a loving relationship. For many girls whose cases were reported in this survey, sex was used as a way to acquire something of value to them—whether cash, gifts, or favors. Even if it is natural for them to exchange sex for money or favors, this situation can often be mixed with emotional needs that are not so clear at the beginning. Sometimes, the girls perceive sexual exploitation in the opposite way that it is usually understood: they are the ones who are exploiting the men, the ones who are charging or even stealing from the customers. The romantic sex that many associate with their exploitation is something very precious to them, sometimes even more than the money, gifts, and other material benefits that may derive from the exploitative experience. In such situations, girls simply do not feel exploited; rather, they perceive themselves as receiving acceptance, love, and caring. The sex they experience is only a side benefit of such encounters.³⁵

Typically, the desire to leave home was related to experiences that were perceived by the child at least as violent or repressive. According to the NGO staff interviewed as part of this phase of the study, these girls (and boys) felt that their families did not care if they stayed at home or not, and they tried to find outside the home a place more welcoming than their

own homes. Homosexuality was presented in 4 of the 10 cases of runaways, all pertaining to girls. In 3 of these cases, the running behavior was clearly related to the lack of acceptance of the homosexuality by the child's family.

The observed results could be in part related to the "macho" environment that still exists in Brazil, where boys may find it difficult to self-identify as homosexual to others. Even when engaging in homosexual acts for hire, the boys still identify themselves as heterosexual and perform the male-male sexual acts as part of the "survival sex." This phenomenon has been well observed in other regions of the world as well.⁸

Regarding the breaking away with sexual exploitation, it was observed that the fear or the perception of danger was the main point. But for some of these young people, the opportunity of finding love, the establishment of more lasting relationships, and the possibility of having babies and their own family was the turning point that made them detach from sexual exploitation.

Conclusions

The material reported in this survey indicates that although it was not possible to establish the real depth of the connection that exists between CSEC and missing children and adolescents, the fact that only 38 (8%) of the names on both sets of registers (police and NGOs) were common is a strong indicator of the deep-seated institutional and organizational problems that exist in Brazilian law enforcement and human service communities. Further, considering that only 28% of the NGO cases of runaways had been registered with the police officially as missing people suggests that the number of missing youth in São Paulo state is many times larger than the number officially reported. Considering the number of cases with police missing reports that were not identified by the professionals working in the NGO (50%) it is possible to infer that this problem is not often perceived as being sufficiently important as to warrant active coordination of the activities of the 2 sectors that impact most directly on the lives of missing and highly vulnerable children. Increased public attention to reporting (and to taking action) is a major challenge confronting both sectors that work so directly with society's most vulnerable children and youth.

The results reported in this study are important for several reasons. First, they are intended to sensitize police and human service communities to the existence of child sexual exploitation in the community. Second, the study established a strong probable link between recurrent runaways from

home with the risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Third, the study draws attention to the absence of a nationwide system for reporting potential cases of child abduction, kidnapping, and sexual exploitation as well as the lack of a network communication between the institutions. And fourth, the study offers initial insights into the nature, extent, and severity of the commercial sexual exploitation problem that exists among runaway and homeless youth residing in São Paulo and its coastal cities. The data reported in this article should serve as a foundation for strengthening existing programs that support runaway and sexually exploited children and youth as well as for establishing new services. Increasing efforts regarding preventive programs against CSEC in Brazil should be encouraged. Also, the association between missing children and CSEC should be studied further, and the interagency mechanisms of the federal, state, and local governments and the NGOs involved in specialized assistance should be enhanced.

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