Violence against Children in Southeast Asia: the case of child sex tourism in Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia

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Violence against Women in Southeast Asia

Violence against Children is prevalent in all countries
Violence against Women in Southeast Asia

- A Regional Review and Synthesis of Findings on VAC (UNICEF 2014)
- Preliminary result on child sex tourism in Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR (TU, Thai Police Force and Fight Against Child Exploitation (FACE), (2016)

Violence against Children is more prevalent in lower income countries

17 – 35% Prevalence in Lower – Middle Income Countries

1 - 13% Prevalence in Upper Middle - High Income Countries

Violence against Women in Southeast Asia

Violence against Women in Southeast Asia

17 – 35% Prevalence in Lower – Middle Income Countries

1 - 13% Prevalence in Upper Middle - High Income Countries
Institutionalize policies on elimination of violence against children among ASEAN member states

Promote the establishment of prevention and protection services supported by national legal framework and institutional mechanisms

ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on the Elimination of Violence against Children

Review and Communication
Prevention
Protection, Responses and Support Services
UN-Model Strategies on VAC
Legal Framework, Prosecution and Justice System
Partnership and Collaboration
Management, Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation
Research and Data Collection
Capacity Building
ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on the Elimination of Violence against Children

Key Challenges

- Lack of specific plan or designated agency to tackle sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism
- Lack of specially trained personnel to facilitate implementation
- Newly developed soft law, not fully implemented by countries
- Each country has its own “context and reservations”
- No systematic financial support and staffing
- Difficulties in solving trans-national issues
- No monitoring mechanisms

Child Sexual Abuse

“Child sexual abuse occurs when someone involves a child in a sexual activity by using their power over them or taking advantage of their trust. Child sexual abuse includes all forms of unwanted sexual behaviour. This can involve touching or even no contact at all.”

(World Vision 2014)
Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse in travel and tourism denotes *child sexual abuse by tourists, travelers or foreign residents who commit child sexual abuse in the country or countries in which they are visiting or living*

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Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is more prevalent for girls than boys in most areas *(UNICEF 2014)*

11 – 22%  3 – 16.5%
Child Sexual Abuse

For low income countries, child sexual abuse is slightly more prevalent for boys (UNICEF 2014)

13% 16.5%

Needs more study to learn why the prevalence and outcomes may be different for boys and address high prevalence of violence against girls in the region.

Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Overview

In 2014, fastest growth in sexual exploitation of children by foreigners
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Overview

Traditional Destinations:
Thailand and The Philippines

Emerging Destinations:
Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Overview

Male from another Southeast Asian country or East Asian countries (Japan, China, South Korea)

Stateless children, refugees, indigenous children, ethnic minority groups, children working close to tourists

Offenders

Children at Risk

Emerging Pattern:
Cheap Travel costs and new technology allow for expedient information sharing

- A record of 96.6 million international visitors in 2014

- A rise of webcam-based child sex tourism due to the advancement of information technologies
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Causes

- Offenders’ preference for sexual activities with children
- Take advantage of the demands and seek out children to create supply
- Victims’ need for financial security contributes in a small part

Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Impacts and Consequences

- Victims traumatized imposing negative impact on both physical and mental health
- Many survivors have substance abuse problems as means to cope with their pain
- Survivors have increased suicidal thoughts and tendencies
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Common Points of Access

**Establishment-based prostitution:** Bars, Karaoke Venues, Beer Gardens, Massage Parlors that operate as brothels

**Direct/facilitated solicitation of vulnerable children:** Living/working in public places popular among tourists such as beaches and marketplaces.

Access may even be facilitated by those in child-contact roles such as schools and orphanages who target children from broken homes.

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Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Thailand

- Infamously known as the “center of child sex tourism”
- High risk areas are Chiang Mai and Pattaya
- Travel agencies and hotel operators are the main facilitators
- Children are bought from their parents and forced into sex trade
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Thailand

- State justice systems often inaccessible & inhospitable to child victims of sexual violence
- Corruption in certain factions of the police leads to the tipping off of owners of brothels and sex clubs in exchange for bribes
- State judicial systems often fail to monitor and restrict the movements of accused exploiters in the pre-trial period
- More common to confine the child victims who are often confined for a long period of time following their rescue in highly restrictive and inadequate shelters for the duration of the criminal investigation and prosecution
- Inconsistent implementation of child-friendly procedures
- Prolonged and delayed prosecution of cases – leading to further distrust in the justice system

Flawed Justice Processes for Victims

Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Cambodia

- Emerging as a growing target destination for child sex tourism
- Weak laws against prostitution and child sex tourism
- High risk areas are Siem Reap and Mondulkiri

Cambodia
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Cambodia

Child Sex Tourism in Cambodia

Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Cambodia
Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Lao PDR

- Rapid growth in child pornography and emerging target for child sex tourism due to the development of information technology infrastructures
- Child prostitution activities commonly found in beer shops, where owners pay regular fees to the government, therefore reducing incentives for local officials to inspect or close down beer bars.

Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia – Recommendations

1. Prevention interventions should take an all-inclusive approach
   - Prevention interventions should not only focus on child sexual abuse by travelers/tourists in tourist hubs, but also by locals and foreigners in remote and indigenous areas.

2. Attitudes and practices must be observed from a holistic and dynamic perspective to fully address the risks and vulnerabilities of children to sexual abuse
   - More attention should be paid to the sexual abuse of boys.
Children should be targeted in prevention interventions and provided education to help them recognise signs of abuse and encourage them to disclose information to a trusted adult if they are being abused.

Prevention interventions should reach out to both school-going and disadvantaged children.

Prevention information and messaging should be conveyed to children via their favourite communications platforms.

Parents should be targeted in preventative interventions and provided with the information and skills to protect and communicate effectively with their children.

Parents and duty bearers must be updated on children’s tools and communication channels.

Prevention interventions should reach out to both school-going and disadvantaged children.

Interventions at community level should work in cooperation with, and in support of, existing local child protection mechanisms.

Besides providing information and education, interventions should also include advocacy with relevant high-level jurisdictional entities to amend and enforce criminal justice responses to child sex offending.
### Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia - Recommendations

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<td>13</td>
<td>Implementation of international and regional instruments and strengthening of cooperation</td>
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<td>Developing database and evidence based research to inform policy and enhance understanding of patterns and evolutions of child sex tourism in the region</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Improving and strengthening legal frameworks and law enforcement to combat child sex tourism through the adoption, revision and implementation of relevant legislation</td>
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### Child Sex Tourism in Southeast Asia

“It is much easier to place blame firmly on a sexually perverse foreign man abusing innocent children than it is to look at a situation where the sexual abuse of children is endemic and has become normalized, and indeed, institutionalised”
Child Sex Tourism
Catching the Predators

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