

## Causes of child sex tourism

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### Abstract

**Background:** The tourism industry beyond all reasonable doubt is not only one of the most rapidly growing industries in the globe but one of the largest employers generating an annual revenue of billions of dollars. However, in spite of that, the industry according to nascent studies has some profound negative socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental impacts on communities. For instance, the act of involving children in sexual activities by tourists has affected the children physically, mentally, emotionally, economically, socially and psychologically. Some have even died. Even though the precise number of victims of child sex tourism casualties and their circumstances is not scientifically well researched and documented, it is an indisputable fact that they are in millions. This lack of scholarly documentation, beyond reasoning has posed a great challenge to all concerned authorities. Thus, this research aims at addressing this gap.

**Purpose:** The fundamental rationale for a systematic literature review is to examine the present scale and degree of the causes of child sex tourism, share knowledge to spark and inspire processes that will usher in rapid growth from all directions in the fight against the menace. **Methodology:** A systematic review of the literature using information collected from different sources was actuated. Google Search Engine was used to search these articles. During the search, numerous combinations of words and phrases were used to ensure that articles reflect the most recent knowledge and scholarly works. In essence, only peer-reviewed articles published after 2008 were selected except extract perceived to be of fundamental mileage to the study. However, articles published by dedicated international organizations working for the protection of children for years and have produced indefatigable knowledge in commercial sexual exploitation of the children were stealthily appraised. **Results:** Poverty, which is commonly cited, is not the sole justification for the commercial sexual exploitation of children, even though it contributes to an environment that may be a sequel to such exploitation. In sum, a range of other complex contributing factors includes consumerism, culture, economic disparities, social, political instability, environment, corruption, lack of reporting crimes, lack of and/or inadequate laws, poor enforcement, lack of interest, debt burden, structural adjustment programmes, practice of projecting women as subservient to men, discriminatory policies, poverty, natural calamities, lack of training, demand and supply, power imbalances, sex trade, family encouragement, philanthropic organizations, Internet access, crime and violence, transient workers, freedom of movement, domestic tourists, population expansion, child trafficking, individual, loss of communal farmlands; and porous borders.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the causes of child sex tourism can be simply pooled and catalogued into social, economic, political, natural, technological, individual and legal causes.

**Keywords:** Child, child sex tourism, perpetrators, survivors, tourist, tourism.

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## **1. Introduction**

Numerous African societies are divided on who or what to be blamed for the commercial sexual exploitation of children with males often harped on changing traditions, westernization and failure of modern institutions to address moral issues and indecent behaviors the way their forefathers have done. Traditional leaders blamed women or mothers who they accused of colluding with their daughters and encouraging them to have boyfriends. They also faulted weak men who are supposed to be heads of households but instead allowed their homes to be controlled by their wives. Women leaders on their part blamed men for financial irresponsibility and lack of sexual control. Other mothers insisted that some daughters are plain, stubborn and will not listen to what elders say. Some complained that children's ideas or perceptions about western values and lifestyles as well as increasing clamor over children's rights were making it difficult for them to have control over their children. In all fairness, male elders blamed men for failing to control their carnal urges and transgressing religious and customary laws.

The findings of Johansson (2017) indicate that there are numerous factors responsible for the continuous persistence of child sex tourism including culture, economy, social, political, environment, corruption, debt burden, structural adjustment programmes, the practice of projecting women as subservient to men, rampant poverty and unpredictable, devastating natural calamities. McCrann (2017) stated that child sex tourism like all other social problems transcend all layers of being economic, social cultural, religious and racial factors.

## **2. Aims and methodology**

### **2.1. AIMS**

The fundamental rationale for the literature review is to examine the present scale and degree of the causes of child sex tourism, share knowledge to spark and inspire a process that will usher in rapid growth from all directions in the fight against the menace.

### **2.2. Methodology**

A systematic review of the literature using information collected from different sources was actuated. Google Search Engine was used to search these articles. During the search numerous combinations of words and phrases were used to ensure articles reflect the most recent knowledge and scholarly works. The systematic searches beget varied and voluminous articles which had to be sieved not only to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria but to ensure the fundamental objectives of the study are wrangled.

Therefore, only peer-reviewed scholarly publications published after 2008 were selected except extracts perceived to be of fundamental mileage to the study. However, articles published by staunch international organizations known to have been working in the protection of children for years and has produced indefatigable knowledge in commercial sexual exploitation of the children were stealthily appraised.

### **2.3. Inclusion and exclusion procedures**

The underneath procedures were followed in articles inclusion. That is, only:

1. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles.
2. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles on child sex tourism.
3. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles published from 2008 to 2019.
4. Articles on international or regional perspectives on child sex tourism.
5. Articles on child sex tourism published by international organizations with years of meritorious experiences in child protection.

To exclude some articles from the review, the below captioned criteria were applied. That is:

1. Non-peer reviewed articles.
2. Articles published before 2008 unless critical and impactful.
3. Media-generated articles including newspapers.

In spite of the fact that both qualitative and quantitative articles were trawled, a majority of the literature reviewed were 17 (seventeen) which is largely due to a dearth of data.

In essence, only peer-reviewed articles and publications by international organizations are considered to be trustworthy because they occasioned standard, ethical and robust studies.

### **3. Discussions**

The literature review has divulged a wide range of causes that lead to child sex tourism.

### **4. Social causes of child sex tourism**

All human beings are circumambient by different social environments which together influence who they are. These social institutions include the microsystem (i.e., the family, school, and neighborhood), mesosystem (i.e., interactions between the microsystems themselves), ecosystem (i.e., those social institutions that we are not directly interacting with but do affect us because they affect someone critical in our life, e.g., the interactions between parents and their workplaces) and the macrosystem—the outermost layer which encompasses the laws, policies, cultural values, rules, customs, etc. Therefore, it is obvious that our social environment does not only wobble our physical, social, cognitive and psychological development but equally our social behaviors and expectations as it significantly influences what is to be regarded acceptable and unacceptable. In a society, where there is ferocious competition for limited resources the moral barometer is not only subjected to oscillation but putrefaction endangering other people’s lives especially the vulnerable group. Thus, in spite of the paucity of data some empirical evidences pertinaciously linked child sex tourism with the unswerving moral putrescent at worst genocide. This assertion concurred with the findings of many scholarly publications as captured underneath.

Hawke and Raphael (2016), half the world population domiciled in South Asia where tourism is a principal source of revenue for most nations and communities with the booming of the domestic tourism and the social norms condoning boys engagement in street based-sexual exploitation and girls victimization in brothels and other venues, child sex tourism is on the increase. Similarly, Montgomery (2008) divulged child sex tourism does not happen in a vacuum and as such cannot be abrogated from the cultural and socioeconomic situations of the country but hardly considered and fought against. Hodgson (n.d.) as quoted in Fredette (2009) impacted, child sex tourism though driven by economic

gains, consumerism, logging projects destroying forestlands, rural poverty exacerbated by population spike and rapid urbanization are critical factors to reckon with. Furthermore, Zafft and Tidball (2010) revealed the causes of child sex tourism are diverse, multifaceted and deeply rooted in socio-economic, cultural, government structures, educational, military occupation, poverty, cultural norms, easy travel, demand and supply, government offering women hostesses to influential visitors, unregulated industries, nations' dependency on the sex industry.

Cotter (2009), in a study conducted in the northern province of Thailand unveiled, two-thirds of the families who sold their daughters preferred to purchase color television and video gadgets though they are capable of keeping their girls in the alternate. McCrann (2017) reported, contextual factors exacerbating the problem of child sexual abuse include patriarchal nature of society, the transactional nature of sexual relations, the low status of children, and the assumption that children are free from HIV virus. Also the patriarchal nature of society has made women and children vulnerable. Johansson (2017) points, the causes of child prostitution are a product of country's history and culture (M'jid & Najat Maalla, 2014) a former UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.

Additionally, Hawke and Raphael (2016) vouchsafed though Australia and New Zealand have efficient child protection mechanisms but as an emerging destination where the awareness of the phenomenon and inadequate laws coexist with strong indigenous norms that fuel the risk, for example, child marriage, forbearance for violence and commercial sex, sexual taboos; and low regards for children, children are increasing becoming vulnerable. Bad social norms, for example, male superiority, females being regarded as passive of male sexual desire, victims being regarded as complicit in sexual exploitation, families and communities rejection and ejection of homosexuals all contribute to the increased vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation (Hawke & Raphael, 2016). Chinese erroneous belief that having sex with children can be rejuvenating or can bring good luck to business travel and the fact that it is the most populous country, the second biggest economy in the world and tourism is on the increase in the country, empirical evidences strongly indicate that child sex tourism will be on the increase if not muzzled (Hawke & Raphael 2016). Prodigious growth of unregulated orphanages by foreigners and parents voluntarily giving their children created fertile ground for child sex as most proprietors allowed in all types of visitors as long as they have paid the visiting levy. McCrann (2017) states that the avoidance of HIV has equally contributed to child sexual abuse as perpetrators believed children are virgins (Hawke & Raphael 2016).

Fredette (2009) reports that in addition to the economic and political factors, child sex tourism is caused by deeply rooted cultural beliefs and stereotypes, child sex being approved pegged on male dominance beliefs, false believed that children are less likely to be HIV positive; and the strong conviction that children should support their aging parents by all means. Frederick (2010), in a closely related study, divulged that the culture of freedom of movement in South Asian societies often result in boys being prostituted in the streets, beaches, parks, entertainment districts and transits hostelry clubs while girls in establishments like brothels, bars and even Five-Star hotel added (Hawke & Raphael 2016).

## **5. Economic causes of child sex tourism**

Studies have emphasized the significance of economic factors that often inveigled people into criminal activities including child sex tourism. With the industry estimated to yield \$2.8 billion yearly in the USA alone (Bouche & Crotty, 2017), it is axiomatic that there are elephantine economic returns for notorious cartels including perpetrators, intermediaries, clubs, bars, hotels, brothels, managers,

families and amoral security and judiciary personnel. With the anomalous level of unemployment, underemployment, widening economic gaps, debt burden, market demand, conspicuous adult sex trade, transient workers, population detonation, and farmlands banishment. The economic impulses to engage children in commercial sexual exploitation including child sex tourism is stalwart.

Fredette (2009) asserted, the widening economic gaps between developing and developed nations compel impoverished destinations to welcome sex tourists with large disposable income. Similarly, Hawke and Raphael (2016), numerous nations heavily depend on travel and tourism to bolster their national developments and so too are some households relying on jobs created by the industry thus, escalating the possibilities of not reporting child sex tourism plus the lack of enforcement of legislations meant to regulate the industry. Often, the tourism industry creates opportunities to facilitate the exploitation of children for instance, with disruption of local economies, perpetrators avail themselves of the tourism infrastructures to reach children Fredette (2009).

Russell (2004) as cited in Fredette (2009) laments that because financial gains from illegal trade surpass legitimate wages impoverished families forced to pay loans with exorbitant interest sometimes; families nimbly succumbed to child sex tourism. In Cotter's (2009), in Thailand it is not unheard of for parents to sell their daughters into sex tourism to resolve family financial crisis, for example, to settle debts to continue farming on rice fields to avoid destitution or just to acquire new goods due to modernization, for instance, a new television set. McCrann (2017), poverty was the primary explanation for child sexual abuse as victims and families condoned it because they desperately needed financial support for survival.

In addition, Hawke and Raphael (2016) unearthed the presence of adult sex or entertainment trade embolden child sex tourism as the situations present opportunities for situational offenders and child sex recruiters under the disguise of legal businesses like domestic help recruitment agencies. Canada and USA are known to be a long time source for perpetrators; however, there are evidences that their children are becoming victims at a much younger age due to a combination of factors including sex for survival, increase demand by business travelers attending conferences, transient workers and easy access to the Internet and other communication technologies by children (Hawke & Raphael 2016). In East Asia, domestic travellers far outnumber foreign ones, and the fact that business travel is increasingly accompanied by the rise of a corporate culture entailing participation in after-hours 'meeting' characterizing by alcohol consumption and sex is supported by the evidences pointing out the domestic tourists as a cause for concern. There is no single cause for child sex tourism but what is certain is that it operates on demand and supply principles (Fredette 2009; Hawke & Raphael 2016).

Similarly, Cotter (2009) revealed that though modernization and globalization have resulted in the increase of wealth especially among the elites it has caused impoverishment in the majority due to the dismantling of traditional families, subsistence farming, loss of communal land, shifting from subsistence farming to cash-crop farming and new government policies in favour of mechanized agriculture sending poor farmers away from their lands into slavery. Also, the population expansion has resulted in massive poverty thus, creating a fertile ground for the supply of children whom the traffickers can easily mastermind and exploit Cotter (2009).

## **6. Political causes of child sex tourism**

Political stability ever since is a fundamental requirement for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. With political stability peace and process are assured to all citizenry as communities can reap the benefits of their natural and human endowments. However, when stability aquaplane, either

through accidents or calculated bashes, not only developmental achievements are lost but equally lives and means of survival. When peace and conventional means of survival cannot be assured, desperation rein. With desperation, vulnerability to all menaces is heightened including sex for survival.

Walters and Davis (2011) commented that the fundamental causation of child sex tourism in Latin American nations include poverty, political and economic instability, literacy, limited employment opportunities, broken home, families selling their children, easy access to the Internet; and bleak financial circumstances for families. Cotter (2009), sex tourism thrives in southeast Asia due to five main factors, namely devastating poverty, armed conflicts, rapid industrialization, an exploding population growth; and radical transition, the brunt of which is borne by impoverished families.

Similarly, OHCHR, (Johansson, 2017) reported that the wellbeing of many children is in catastrophic situations largely due to their national social policies and structures which discriminate against children based on both gender, social and economic status. Fredette (2009) mapped out, lack of interest in child protection due to inadequate policies and laws, rampant corruption, tolerant of child sex tourism as non-serious offense, granting a license to perpetrators to continue victimizing children with impunity and soft hands, patrons acting with no ion of fear of any punishment safe deportation, tantamount to unreserved approval of child sexual abuse. Like some Chinese officials who argued that prostitution is inevitable in any emerging economy, the states that enact policies that indirectly encourage rapid development of prostitution such as the provision of sexual services to a foreign military on overseas deployment indirectly sting the growth of the trade despite the anticipated financial returns and support by the World Bank Fredette (2009).

Comparably, Hawke and Raphael (2016) delineated, when crimes are not investigated and perpetrators prosecuted a culture of impunity rein in, paving the way for organized crime and continuous abuse; and under such circumstances, victims and families have reasonable grounds not to trust authorities to blazon child abuse.

## **7. Legal causes of child sex tourism**

The progress of any society cannot be severed from the effective and efficient justice delivery system. For the state to deliver justice, it must promulgate laws and enforce them without fear or favour. Therefore, in the absence of any accountable, independent and corruption immune judiciary, order and moral consciousness become scarce commodity paving ways for all genres of social villainies including commercial sexual exploitation of the minors.

Hawke and Raphael (2016) adumbrated, over the years, that the Western European countries have been the sources of child sex offenders, however, the trend is changing not only because they are the number one tourist destination welcoming more than half the global tourists leaving their children vulnerable but also the Central and Eastern European countries, which often lack proper legislations to protect children, are rapidly emerging as the source. Crime and violence often fuel child sex tourism as it results in massive poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, violent gangs; and children running away from homes and living in the streets aggravating child sex tourism. Many countries and households rely on income from tourism and travel industry for their survival which has not only increased vulnerability but sparged reporting crimes and the enforcement of child protection critical laws (Hawke & Raphael 2016). The rate of child sex tourism offenses in comparison to the limited conviction undoubtedly manifest crummy enforcement of legislations (Fredette 2009). Similarly, under security and judiciary training, officials do not only permit the continuity of the outdated practices in which children are adversarially questioned but treated as culprits resulting in incomplete information

gathering, intimidation and lack of cooperation from children who subsequently compromises the whole proceedings; however, allowing children to testify via video links can be viable and an affordable option.

## **8. Natural causes of child sex tourism**

Natural calamities are common phenomena the aftermath of which can be cataclysmic both to human kind and infrastructural developments. In some instances, communities are completely wash off their hard-earned properties and even family members. Under such defoliated or doomed circumstances and safety and survival becomes the cardinal priority. In the search for safety and survival some are cajoled into criminal activities and others rendered victims.

Cotter (2009) chronicled that disasters and porous borders are also known to have made children more vulnerable for sex trafficking as was the case during 2005 tsunami in which a lot of Indonesian children were trafficked despite the government criminalizing it.

## **9. Technological causes of child sex tourism**

Today, access to technology is a requisite for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development due to its transformative potentialities. Thus, to transform communities socio-economically and even politically, technology must not only be diverse, progressive but equally available, accessible, affordable; and user-friendly to all. With these fundamental requisites, technology, more especially with the Internet, the world is at the fingertips of many people to both create and clutch opportunities and at worse making the commissioning of crime easy, quick and hard to discern rendering several people vulnerable.

Terre des Hommes (2014) as quoted in Hawke and Raphael (2016) heralded that the proliferation of the Internet and associated technologies have exponentially altered the methods of solicitation and exploitation of children by making it easier, faster and cheaper for online grooming, cybersex, webcam, etc. resulting in tens of thousands of children in Philippines alone be engaged in webcam child sex tourism in which children perform a sexual act in front of a camera controlled by the abuser through a local intermediary. Similarly, Hawke and Raphael (2016) unearthed the fact that with the unprecedented easy access to mobile technology and expansion in the travel and tourism infrastructures couple with inadequate legislations to punish perpetrator to instill fear along with poor social services to victims, children are becoming most susceptible to child sex tourism in South Asia.

## **10. Limitations**

The fundamental limitations of the study include being conducted within a very short period of time, there was no financial support from any institution or individual and above all, the articles reviewed were not without limitations.

1. It was not an exhaustive review of the literature on the menace.
2. The review was not on all facets of the menace since the causes can be inextricably linked to many other critical strands.
3. The cut-off year for the commencement of the reviewed has debarred some expository studies.
4. Reviewing articles that are easily accessible disbars hermeneutic and probably more up to date ones.

## 11. Summary and conclusions

Poverty, which is commonly cited, cannot be the sole justification for the commercial sexual exploitation of children, even though it contributes to an environment that may sequel to such exploitation. In sum, a range of other complex contributing factors include consumerism, culture, economic disparities, social, political instability, environment, corruption, lack of reporting crimes, lack of and/or inadequate laws, poor enforcement, state lack of interest, debt burden, structural adjustment programmes, the practice of projecting women as subservient to men, discriminatory policies, poverty, natural calamities, lack of training, demand and supply, power imbalances, sex trade, family encouragement, philanthropic organizations, Internet access, crime and violence, transient workers, freedom of movement, domestic tourists, population expansion, child trafficking, loss of communal farmlands; and porous borders which can be simply pooled and catalogued into social, economic, political, natural, technological; and legal causes.

### 11.1. Declaration of conflict of interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the study, authorship and/or publication of the manuscript.

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## 12. Ethics approval

Ethics approval was not necessary for a systematic literature review study.

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