

# A Situational Analysis of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Mauritania

by Maye Mint Haidy

(Translated from the French by Luc Ferran)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main object of this study is to gather together all the information available on the subject and get a grasp on the forms CSEC takes and to draw the attention of those in authority: decision-makers, persons in the public eye, elected officials, and village chiefs. It is also an aim of this study to support the actions of partners who are working to help the country in the battle against CSEC.

### 1.1 The Country

Mauritania is situated between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> north parallels and covers an area of 1,030,700 square kilometers. It is bordered on the north by the Western Sahara and Algeria, on the east by Mali, on the south by Mali and Senegal, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean.

#### 1.1.1. *Geographic data*

According to the General Population and Housing Census (Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat – RGPH) of 2000, the country's population totals 2,548,157 inhabitants, of which 95.2% are settled and 4.8% are nomads. The population showed a 2.6% growth rate compared with the 1988 census. The resident population is composed of 48.7% men and 51.3% women.

Urban population was estimated in 1997 to be 55.1%. The 2000 census showed that the country's capital counts 611,883 inhabitants, or 24% of the total population, with an increase of 3.75% per year.

The population is particularly young. The 1988 census showed that inhabitants under the age of 15 years represented more than 44% of the country's total population, while the Demographic Health Survey of 2000-2001 (l'Enquête Démographique de Santé) shows 46% in the same age group, and 50% under the age of 18. Among these children, females number more than males, with a ratio of 100 females to 92 males.

#### 1.1.2. *Socio-economic data*

Mauritania is one of the countries of the Sahel where institutions and structures have evolved very rapidly. Cities such as Nouakchott had only 4,800 inhabitants in 1959, 134,000 in 1977, 393,325 in 1988, or (21% of the country's total population), and 611,883 in 2000, or 24% of the total population, with an annual growth rate of 3.75%.

Within 40 years, the country passed from a poorly developed nomadic subsistence economy to a two-speed economy: on the one hand, a traditional, unofficial subsistence economy sector, important but precarious in an urban environment, and on the other hand, three modern and distinct areas of activity furnishing most of the country's exports – the ultramodern iron mines in the north, fishing, and agriculture.

Mauritania is a low-income country. In spite of a 4% increase in economic growth and a reduction in poverty from 56.6% to 46%, the country remains poor.

The participation of women in the economic life of the country is well noted, particularly women in rural areas and those working in the unofficial sector in urban settings. Women play a vital role in the economic and social life of the country.

### ***1.1.3. Cultural and religious data***

Shifts in family relationships are taking place, which will have an impact on children. Women and young people are increasingly becoming heads of household and families, shifting the traditional patriarchal family structure of husband/wife, parent/child, sibling/sibling, etc. This change is not taking place without resistance. The greatest difficulty is found in the shift in relationships between men and women, more than between parents and children. The unequal status of women reflects social and economic disparities which are based on gender and which are the backbone of patriarchal societies. As the social fabric undergoes rapid change with legal, economic and cultural shifts facilitating such change, the private realm of the family often becomes the refuge for old traditional values.

In the same way, economic hard times call into question the separation of roles within the household. The status of head of household has traditionally been connected to the prestige of being an older man. At present, economic independence resulting from the greater participation of women in the labor force gives them more decision-making power, which can lead to the establishment of new households. On the other hand, economic hardship can seriously hinder the survival of families headed by women. There exists another category of household that includes an entire community of children: these are called collective households, such as the Mahadra (Koranic school).

## 2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Until recently, the existence of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was not recognized in Mauritania. The forced marriage of underage girls is considered an advantage by many in spite of the negative consequences such as early motherhood, dropping out of school. The primary motivating factor for parents, besides any dowry considerations, is the desire to marry their daughters while they are still virgins, since the loss of virginity before marriage is seen as a dishonour for the family.

Many people in the population know little about or are completely unaware of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including decision-makers, people prominent in society, elected officials, village chiefs, and families.

Since the population of Mauritania is 100% practicing Muslim, and since the practice of prostitution is strictly forbidden by the Muslim faith, this phenomenon takes place under cover of secrecy. Thus, the commercial sexual exploitation of children bears a heavy moral taboo.

To provide a better idea of how this problem is manifested and addressed, we will try to analyze existing cases reported in press reviews, court cases, and surveys that have been conducted.

### 2.1 Forms and extent of the commercial sexual exploitation of children

#### 2.1.1. Prostitution

Prostitution is essentially an urban phenomenon in Mauritania (the city being a place where people believe they can find better-paying jobs or receive food or land handouts), found primarily in capitals and large cities, where foreign and local tourists, and expatriates are common.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is both a consequence and a cause of other social ills, among which are extreme poverty (91.9% of those surveyed in this study cited poverty as the main reason they turned to prostitution), divorce, which is very frequent (children are dependent on their mothers for support, with the father contributing nothing), and children who have lost their father (households headed by women total 38%).

According to public opinion, girls from the countryside are brought by their parents or by acquaintances to the city to look for work. Some of them are then drawn to the delinquent urban lifestyle and end up living in houses where prostitution is practiced. There they are well cared for so that they can attract clientele, and a small amount of money is often sent to their parents back in the village. These parents often remain ignorant of their daughters' real situation.

Employers of domestic workers sexually exploit some of these girls who are not in houses of prostitution. The problem is compounded by the fact that a high number end up having children as a result of conditions in their places of employment (survey of children working as domestic servants).

According to the study on CSEC by Father François Lefort, it is apparent that street children are the special targets of unscrupulous adults (often foreigners) who exploit them through work or through prostitution. For these children, the fastest way to earn the greatest amount of money so as not to go hungry is to sell their bodies. In these cases, prostitution often becomes their profession.

Father Lefort reports that in Mauritania, the sexual exploitation of children has taken on frightening proportions. Out of 400 children living without their families in the streets of Nouakchott (capital of the country), almost 10% earn their living through prostitution. Father Lefort attests to having treated 103 children abused by 7 western pedophiles. In 1987, he counted 12 children living in the same area who had fallen victim to homosexual prostitution. For Father Lefort, the cause of child prostitution, especially that of boys, is closely connected to the industrialization of developing countries.

Girls who reach the age where they can bring in a great deal of money through prostitution will engage in it. Often their families close their eyes to this and go along with it. In the event of pregnancy, some fathers bow to social pressure and report their daughters to the authorities, and the Koranic law of sharia is applied. For the parents, this embarrassment is compounded by the fact that their daughters are then no longer marriageable. The girls are sentenced to prison terms. Once they have been excluded in this way, it is extremely difficult for them to find a place again in their families or in society. As they are stigmatized and rejected in their home and communities and with no further support or options, they return to prostitution to survive.

Girls experience this forced withdrawal differently from boys. Often several of them rent rooms together, and it is rare that they live completely on the street. However, they become very well acquainted with the ruthless universe that is theirs. Boys are by turns both clients and mediators when there are problems, and eventually may become procurers as they grow older.

A survey done by Annick Combier shows that certain street boys earn their living by finding prostitutes for rich customers. According to some comments:

Mr. S.I., 17 years old: “Rich people ask me to go find prostitutes for them. They give me from 500 to 2000 ouguiya (about 50FF to 200FF). These are married men, I know five or six of them. Sometimes they ask me for a little girl. There are a lot of girls who do this, and they live with their families who don’t know a thing. I don’t know how they manage not to get pregnant.”

Mr. A., 16 years old, son of a policeman: “I send girl X, who is 12 years old, to some rich men and she gives me money. Other times, I go myself, or we both go together.” It must be pointed out that no detailed study has been made so far of the prostitution of underage girls in Nouakchott.

François Lefort reported that out of 115 persons ranging in age from 8 to 18 years living on the street, 31% were occasionally victims of homosexual prostitution. For these children, the situation can be summarized as follows:

- 34% of parents live in slums (Kebba);
- 70% of the children come from broken families. According to Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Camara, Mauritanian sociologist, 35% of girls’ heads of family are single women;

- 30% of the children have never been to school, 38% of those who had attended school are no longer literate, and the rate of illiteracy is 57%;
- 47% of the children questioned sniff solvent.

Factors that promote prostitution are numerous and often linked with each other. Economic causes seem to be the most flagrant. Destitute populations (national and foreign) continue to conglomerate around Nouakchott, hoping to find work and increasing the growth rate by a spectacular 3.75% per year. Currently, 24% of the country's total population living around Nouakchott and the city is surrounded by slums that create a real ring of destitution and poverty. Peoples du Monde states: "40% of the population of Nouakchott lives in improvised housing, in sheds thrown together with corrugated metal and cardboard, without water or electricity, like Kebba or other tent cities." (Peuples du monde," #270, March 1994, page 12)

### ***2.1.2. Early marriage for girls***

Marriage occurs at a relatively early age for girls (17.1 years on the average, according to the Demographic Health Survey in Mauritania (EDSM 2000-2001).

The practice of "siriya" is prevalent. This is a forced, clandestine marriage generally joining girls from poor families with married men in a more or less official manner, in such a way that the first wife and the family circle are unaware, since polygamy is not often tolerated. Siriya is the privilege of the very rich or of businessmen who are well-off. It sometimes happens that children born of this secret union, tolerated according to the Muslim code, try to force their fathers to recognize them legally. This is a real psychosocial ordeal for these children, caught between legitimacy and illegitimacy. There is no statistical data on this issue.

### ***2.1.3. Children's vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation: the case of the most marginalized***

The surveys conducted among various categories of vulnerable and marginalized children indicate that there is a complex interplay of cultural, social and economic factors and conditions that work together to push and keep these children on the margin of Mauritanian society where they are subject to various types of violations. A particular picture emerges from the data which affirms that there is a close link between children's life on the edge of survival and their sexual victimization.

From among these categories of vulnerable children and youth a smaller sample of respondents were interviewed regarding experiences of sexual exploitation. Results of this survey indicate a high incidence of sexual exploitation among children interviewed. A total of 64.4% of children responded that they were selling sex for survival while 24% said that they could "fend for themselves" and 1.6% "indicated that they receive friends", the latter terms being used as euphemisms to refer to survival sex.

The linkages that emerge between a children's survival on the street, or their integration to forms of apprenticeship, education or work where they have little protection, and victimization through sexual or other exploitation, make it imperative to consider the specific nature of the contexts. It is within them, where children find struggle for survive, that they are further exploited.

#### **2.1.4. Street children**

Children and young people living on the street were surveyed in three large cities (Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and Rosso). A total sample of 800 children was taken, distributed among the three cities according to overall population size. Thus the city of Nouakchott had 500 children answering the survey, and Nouadhibou and Rosso had 200 and 100 respectively. Results showed that 92.1% of those questioned were male. This high percentage of male children can be explained by sociological and socio-cultural factors that make the presence of girls on the street less likely, even where the problem of sexual exploitation is common to both sexes. This alerts us to the fact that the social context of exploitation will differ for boys and girls, impacting on its specific nature and manifestations and reflecting larger societal gender based boundaries.

The average age of the children in the survey was 14 years. It is to be noted that the phenomenon of street children is linked to the rural exodus and the urbanization of the population, since 46.8% were city-born and 53.2% were newly arrived. In this survey, 27.6% were the eldest in their families, 59.4% of the respondents were the younger brothers and sisters in their families and 12.9% were the youngest in their families.

The number of children who had been to school was very high; only 24.3% declared that they had never been to school. However, not many had remained in school. Among the reasons for leaving school, 28.4% indicated that they had been expelled and 25.1% said they didn't like going to school.

The data from the survey show that street life is transitory, with time spent waiting to find a job or to go back to the family, or to find other place of shelter.

#### **2.1.5. Children of the Taliban**

This survey was taken in Nouakchott, Kaedi, Boghe, and Rosso, and in the rural surroundings of these three cities. It included 120 children all under the age of 16, as well as 70 parents and 25 teachers, arranged in order of the demographic importance of their (Taliban children) representation.

The findings of the survey showed that Taliban children who are in a beggar status are primarily of the ethnic Popular group, representing 90.4% of those surveyed. This group of children were followed by children of the Wolofs with 6.1% representation in the survey, the Soninkes who made up 1.7% of the total, Arabs with 0.9%, and all others making up 0.9% from the ranks of groups that traditionally practice begging on a more or less permanent basis.

Taliban children can be recognized by their tattered clothes, bare feet; and by the begging bowl that they often carry to collect money for charity, which is typically made from a 2-kg can that once held stewed tomatoes. In rural and semi-urban areas, these children collect mostly food items while in the cities they also collect money, which they are required to give to their teachers. The majority, or 63.5% of the children surveyed in this category (beggars) were Mauritians while Senegalese made up 33.9% and 2.6% were of unknown origin (no response provided in survey).



The data highlighted many related and relevant elements, which need to be considered:

- The cultural dimension of the phenomena of placing children under the auspices of teachers, such as that which is practiced for Taliban children, is rooted in the desire of families to provide education for their children, in the absence of any formal education or as a complement of it. The advancement of their highly valued religious function within traditional society encourages parents to send their children to teachers known for their competence and integrity, even parents for whom it is outside the domain of their religion. This shows us the extent to which the phenomenon is well anchored within the cultural dimension of certain levels of society.
- There are also social dimensions which intermix with cultural elements but which can often dominate. These operate on two levels. The first is relative to the function that the phenomenon plays as a tool for socialization. The second has to do with its function as a means for the acquisition of social status.
- The economic dimension of the phenomenon is preponderant at both the level of parents and teachers. For the parents, the possibility of placing one of their numerous children with a teacher offsets their financial burden. In this way, all of the sons of a family can be work from a young age, offering economic relief to the family. As for the teachers, even if the children are placed with them primarily for education and without regard for any material advantages they might hope to receive from well-off parents, the teachers exploit the children in different types of work. Labour in the fields constitutes the most striking example of exploitation of this child work force. It can be concluded that in the absence of sufficient economic resources to support these children, begging takes on great proportions and becomes the primary instrument of survival for the teacher and even can lead to his enrichment. In certain cases, begging can dominate all the other activities for which the child was placed with the teacher.

The phenomenon of begging by children of the Taliban in the traditional context was acceptable in local society. The risks were limited and the money they collected answered a real need in the community and took place in the child's social milieu. However, with the urbanization of underdeveloped regions and the increased mobility of the teachers, this phenomenon has undergone profound changes. Begging has widened its role beyond providing for the survival of the children involved (in rural areas children must help their teacher in his work to guarantee their own meals and in the cities the children are required to beg for part of the day), to include a lucrative aspect for the teachers, and in certain cases, for the parents as well.

Paradoxically, some teachers from ethnic backgrounds not previously involved in the phenomenon of begging have become fascinated by its money-making aspect and many in urban areas and are starting to insist that their own students adopt the practice, and even set a daily intake requirement.

The results of this survey showed that the children divide what they collect between the demands of their masters (95.7%) and their own personal needs (4.3%). Of those surveyed 87% reported that they were required to hand over a daily amount decided by

their master. The average amount was 30 ouguiyas per day. As a result of the demands and pressure for large sums of money on the part of some of the masters, a number of children have left the status of Taliban and become simple street children (some masters have beaten children to death when they have not brought in the required amount).

This unbearable situation drives some children into seeking shelter in the street where they spend several hours a day. Children who do this gradually lose contact not only with their masters (from the fear of being beaten to death), but with their parents as well (it is not permissible for a mistreated child to return home). And in the street they become exposed to many different forms of exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation and delinquency.

#### **2.1.6. *Girls as domestic workers***

Although the civil authorities abolished slavery in all its forms in 1980 and ratified all the international conventions having to do with the phenomenon, daily reality and the weight of long-standing social customs have combined to continue exploitative practices of the old social system with its seamier sides.

Mauritanian society is composed of several ethnic groups who have lived side by side since the Almoravides and who share the Muslim religion. Within these groups, there are some well-established differences having to do with position in various social strata and hierarchies, although this is not the case with children.

The situation of children in all the ethnic groups is similar. They take up different types of work at a very young age, depending on the social group they belong to. All children bear certain responsibilities within traditional society independent of what group they may be part. For example, boys in every community work outside the home and girls take up different types of domestic work.

The results of this survey showed that there is a large pool of labour to draw from that provides the workforce for domestic work, which is largely female. At the time the survey was done, it was not possible to study the extent to which girls took up domestic work as seasonal employment. For example, the pool of girls that goes to the city as soon as work in the fields is over and stays there until they receive confirmation of a new and good rainy season.

However, the phenomenon of seasonal labour is only a part of a larger phenomenon whereby outlying districts (generally poor) provide a permanent supply of girl children for domestic service for the richer areas. It is to be noted that poor families can be found living in richer areas, providing security for buildings under construction or working as camel breeders. Daughters from these families find work as servants in these richer households.

The results of this survey show that 56.1% of girls working at domestic jobs speak Arabic as their native language, 28% speak Poular, 10% speak Wolof, and 5.5% speak Soninke. The girls range in age between 8 and 15 years. It is noteworthy that for the most part it is the youngest girls who are sought after for domestic service. In cities such as Nouakchott, 52% of those surveyed were 12 years of age or younger, and in Nouadhibou, the economic capital of the country, 62% were under age 12.

The survey also revealed that 45% of girls doing domestic service jobs came from families affected by separation (divorce or death). Separation therefore cannot be considered the only contributing factor to families sending out very young girls to do domestic service jobs.

As mentioned above on the subject of the parents' housing situation, the majority live in either very temporary precarious housing such as tents, huts, and sheds with 60% living in makeshift dwellings made of zinc or other materials. Data related to parents' employment status indicates that 27% of fathers are out of work, 38% do manual labour or have low-level jobs and 81% of mothers are housewives or are unemployed. A closer study of the employment status of both parents highlights some extreme cases: 30% of girls have both father and mother out of work, staying at home or deceased. This state of poverty was confirmed by observations, which revealed severe shortages of food, deficiencies in hygiene and a striking scarcity of the most elementary means of survival. What emerged from this survey is the finding that the majority (58%) of girls working in domestic jobs come from highly disadvantaged social groups.

The findings of these surveys underscore the difficult and precarious situation of particular groups of disadvantaged children. This situation is compounded as they are forced to find a means of survival in the streets or with little adult support and protection. The findings of the survey conducted among a smaller sample of children of the above categories on broad elements of their daily lives, highlight with great clarity the undeniable link that exists between social marginalization, economic exclusion and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## 2.2 Analysis of results

Out of 62 persons interviewed, we met 5 males and 57 females: 82.3% are of Mauritanian nationality, 16.1% are Senegalese (bordering the country) and 1.6% are Nigerian. The majority of these people speak Hassanya (64.5%), Wolof (16.1%), Pulaar (9.7%), Soninke (6.5%) and 3.2% are of a Creole mixture (from Senegal or Gambia).

It can be noted that 50% are under the age of 18 (the target group), and 67.7% are younger than 19 years of age.

The problem of the commercial sexual exploitation of children can be approached from five angles, according to the results of our survey:

- **Prostitution:** the results of the survey show that 69.4% of those interviewed declare openly that they prostitute themselves, 24.2% fend for themselves, and 1.6% receive friends; it is understood that these last two categories indicate concealed prostitution.
- **Pornography involving children:** the survey revealed that 58.1% of those interviewed have been invited to watch films of children naked on the beach, in bedrooms and engaged in sexual activities.

- **Child trafficking for sexual purposes** (the displacement of children for commercial exploitation, forced marriage of girls): 16.1% are still living with the persons who transported them, 54.8% are no longer with those persons and 29% are afraid to answer the question. To earn their living, the respondents resort to stealing (3.2%) and 96.8% prostitute themselves as follows: regular prostitution (61.3%), occasional prostitution (9.7%), fending for themselves (8.1%), helped out by friends (3.2%) and supported by someone else (14.5%).
- **The tourist sex trade:** 64.5% of those interviewed are involved in the tourist sex trade.
- **CSEC on the Internet:** 58.1% of those surveyed state that they have heard of pornography on the Internet, but only 3.2% know of sites to visit. 45.2% have heard about pornographic pictures, real or virtual. It was found that 66.1% do not know how to use the Internet and 33.9% did not answer the question. However, 25.5% of the respondents continue to visit pornography sites on the Internet because they find pleasure in it and 6.5% say that it is their favorite pastime.

### 2.3 How the country copes with the phenomenon of commercial sexual exploitation of children

The existence of CSEC remains largely an unmentionable subject and remains both touchy at the official level and taboo in the eyes of the general public. It is an off-limits subject, forbidden by the national religion.

We may then say that there is no official recognition of the existence of CSEC. However, recent awareness-raising efforts concerning the sexual exploitation of children have been made within the context of Children’s Rights and the Women’s Rights.

During this past year, the government has signed optional protocols and appointed a magistrate in charge of penal legislation that covers all aspects of this phenomenon and, except for the case of forced marriage, a strong and active vice squad has been created.

#### 2.3.1. *Laws adopted*

The government signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography in 2002 and has enacted the “**Law on the penal protection of the child**”, which includes the following provisions:

**Chapter II:** Any offense against the physical or psychic integrity of the child.

#### **Section III:**

**Paragraph 1, Article 24:** Rape committed on a child is punishable by the “had” set out in articles 309 and 310 of the penal code. When all conditions required by the penal code are not present, it is punishable by five to ten years of imprisonment.

**Paragraph 2, Article 25:** Harassment of a child by the use of orders, threats, or pressure, with the intention of obtaining sexual favors, by a person in authority abusing the power of

his position, is punishable by two to eight months of imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to 140,000 ouguiyas, or \$467 USD.

**Line 2:** Sexual harassment and/or exploitation of a child legally holding a domestic service job, placed in a home or in the care of a family is punishable by four months to two years of imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 to 300,000 ouguiyas, or \$667 to \$1000 USD.

**Paragraph 3, Article 26:** Sexual offenses other than rape committed against a child are punishable by two to four years of imprisonment and a fine of 120,000 to 160,000 ouguiyas, or \$400 to \$533 USD.

**Line 2:** Any act of sexual touching committed against a child is to be considered a pedophile act and is punishable by 5 years of imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 ouguiyas, or \$667 USD.

**Article 27:** The infraction noted on line 1 of Article 25 is punishable by 5 to 7 years of imprisonment and a fine of 140,000 to 180,000 ouguiyas, or \$467 to \$600 USD when committed upon a child by an older relative or any person holding authority over the child.

Generally speaking, there are few legal provisions in West or Central Africa for protecting children from CSEC, even though a country such as Chad has made revisions to laws in 1991.

Child pornography is not generally the object of specific regulations in the law at the present time, whether having to do with its consumption, distribution, or production. Existing regulations apply only to the protection of morality and public morals. As yet, there are no specific regulations to repress the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. However, the offenses are reprehensible.

### **2.3.2. *Other governmental measures taken***

- Ratification of the convention of the Children's Rights since 1991;
- Adoption of a plan for the advancement of child welfare within the framework of survival and development;
- Organization of campaigns to sensitize national opinion and the general public and draw attention to the problems and special needs of children;
- Creation of the office of Secretary of State for the formulation and organization of national policy on the promotion of child and family welfare;
- Creation of national institutions responsible for child welfare:
  - the National Council on Children;
  - a parliamentary group responsible for the welfare of children;
  - the association of mayors for the defense of Children's Rights.
- Revision of labor laws to afford greater protection to children;
- Eradication of the worst forms of child exploitation and establishment of a minimum working age;
- Promulgation of the law of persons (family law);
- Strategic framework for the fight against poverty;
- Betterment of living conditions for mothers and children;
- Strategy for fostering the welfare of women;
- A program for fostering the legal status of education;

- Commitment on the part of the Prime Minister at the world summit in New York on Women's and Children's Rights to work towards building solidarity and cooperation to guarantee a better future for the generations of tomorrow;
- Commission on Human Rights: Program for the Fight Against Poverty and Rehabilitation of beggars and street children in Nouakchott (in partnership with certain NGOs);
- Signing of the Optional Protocols to the CRC by the Prime Minister in New York during the world summit on Women's and Children's Rights;
- Expulsion of foreigners who deal in CSEC;
- Freedom and independence of the press.

### **2.3.3. Socioeconomic and educational measures**

- Economic growth of 4%, contributing to the reduction of macro-economic poverty.
- A policy of war against poverty, reducing the poverty rate from 56% to 46%.
- Support for the legal status of formal education, which for the first time in the country's history and in the history of the entire region has become a legal requirement for every child. Highest rate of school enrollment in the region (85%).
- A policy of promoting books and establishing the practice of reading in every basic family unit.
- The development of various means of communication and basic infrastructures.

In spite of the significance of the contribution of these actions and measures, nowhere is the practice of sexual commerce or CSEC mentioned in any official document.

In addition, there has recently been an increase in the tourist trade, calling for accompanying measures and adequate surveillance.

### **2.3.4. Protection and prevention**

A group of NGOs active in the fight against CSEC (ANAIF-PIE, AMPFE, ADP, SWAA, TILIMSIN and Rijal Alghaithe) has just been established. The NGO ANAIF-PIE has opened centers where child victims or homeless children can come for refuge.

A great number of existing projects are now taking into account the fight against CSEC. These include groups originally begun with the intention of meeting the needs of children who find themselves in particularly vulnerable positions, such as children living and/or working in the street or working at domestic jobs.

## 3. SURVEY

### 3.1 Methodology

This is a survey done in the field in order to get a grasp on the phenomenon of CSEC in certain target groups.

#### **Where the interviews take place:**

- For prostitutes known to vice squad police: they are questioned in the presence of their protectors or at home under the orders of their protectors.
- For street children, juvenile delinquents, beggar children, and those living on the beach: we identified the following places: nightclubs, hotels, beaches, various stopping places (red lights, mosques, marketplaces, and movie houses).
- For children in jail: within the jail itself.

**Interview style** is direct and individual.

**Who the interviewers are:** people in the NGO invested with the responsibility for finding child victims or children at risk, notably:

- A former police officer from the vice squad who knows the environment well;
- One of the NGO's members who has worked with adolescents and who knows some of the prostitutes' protectors.

**The software used** for data entry is CSPro.

#### **Target groups are:**

- street children
- juvenile delinquents
- beggar children
- children wandering or living on the beaches
- prostitutes

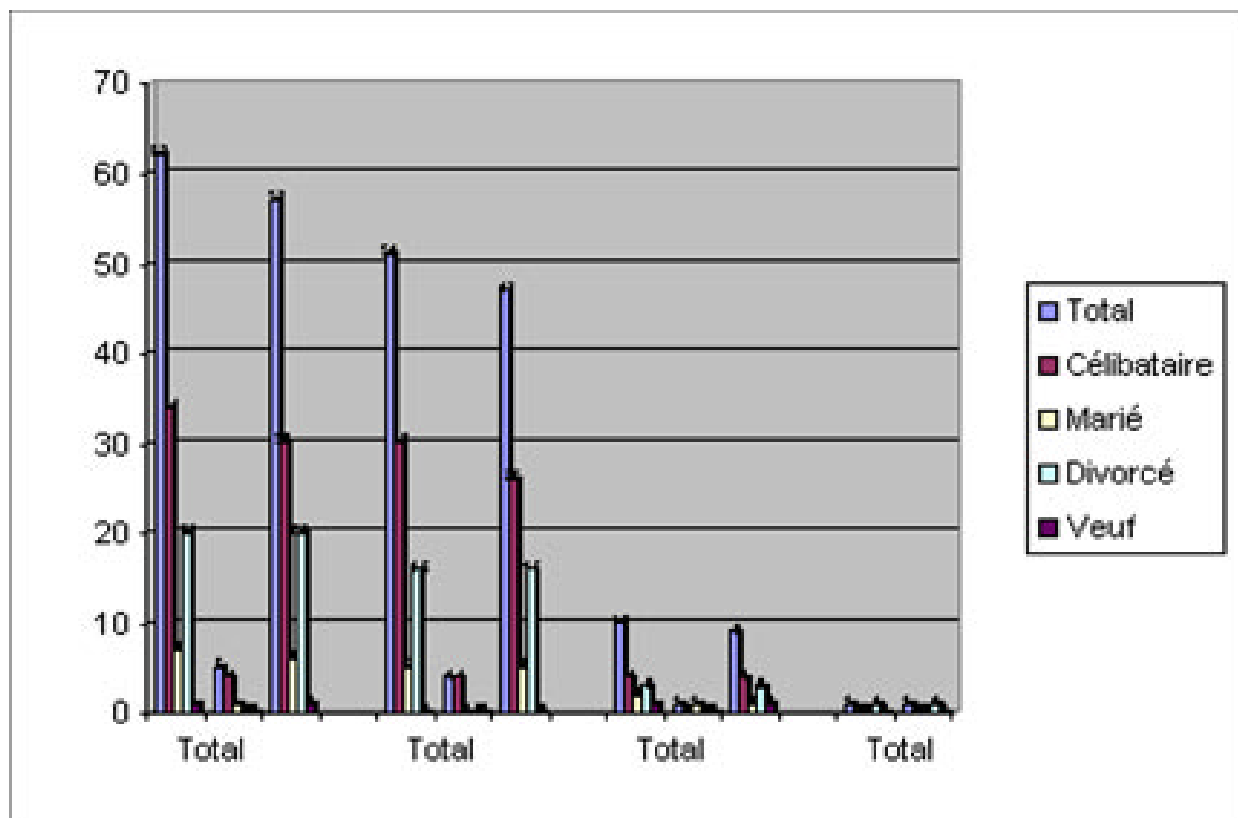
**Questionnaire:** We are including charts and graphs followed by an interpretation and comments that shed light on the results of the survey.

### 3.2 Analysis of Results

i) **Chart 1:** Population distribution according to matrimonial status, nationality, and gender.

	Total	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed
<b>Total</b>	62	34	7	20	1
<b>Male</b>	5	4	1	-	-
<b>Female</b>	57	30	6	20	1
<b>Mauritanian</b>					
<b>Total</b>	51	30	5	16	-
<b>Male</b>	4	4	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	47	26	5	16	-
<b>Senegalese</b>					
<b>Total</b>	10	4	2	3	1
<b>Male</b>	1	-	1	-	-
<b>Female</b>	9	4	1	3	1
<b>Nigerian</b>					
<b>Total</b>	1	-	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	1	-	-	1	-

Chart #1 shows that out of 62 persons interviewed, 34 are single (4 men and 30 women); there are 20 divorced persons (all women); 7 are married (1 man and 6 women); and there is one widow. 51 people are Mauritanian (4 men and 47 women); 10 persons are Senegalese (1 man and 9 women); and 1 person is Nigerian.

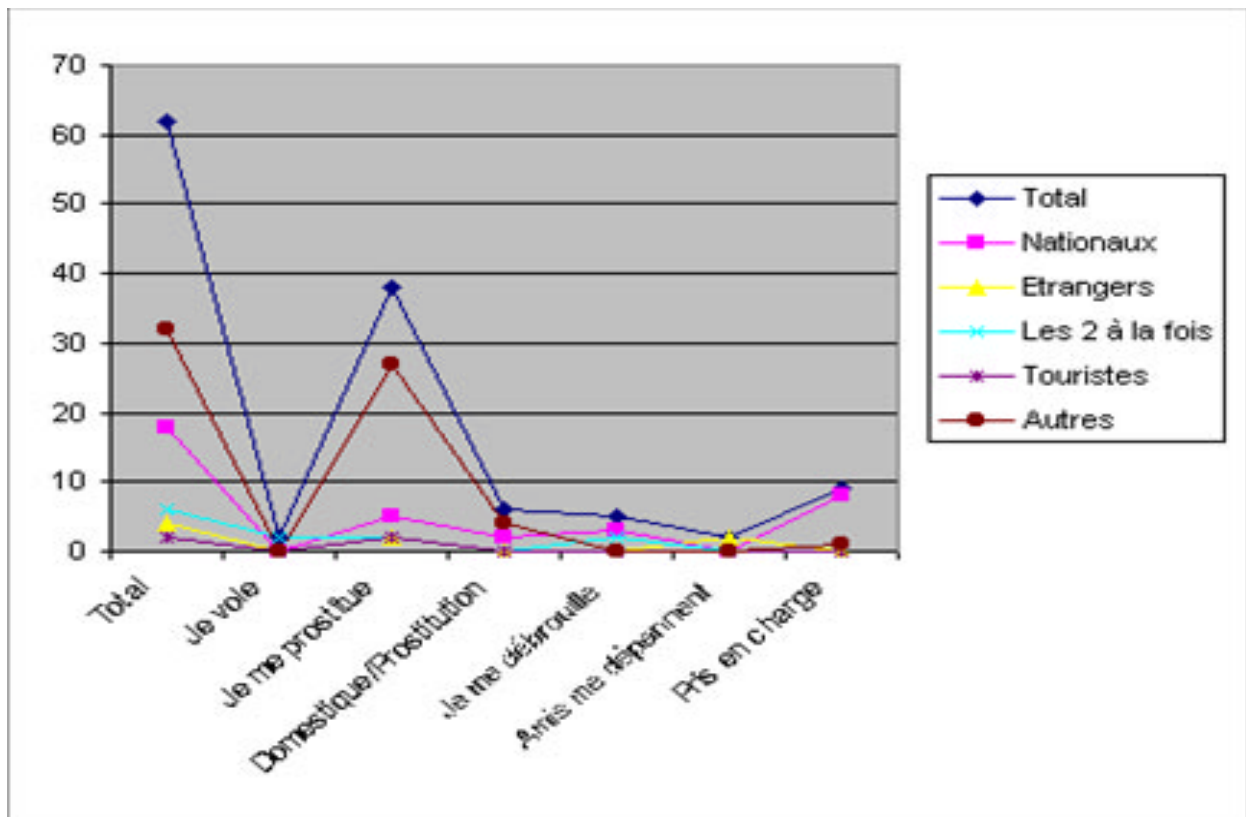




ii) **Chart 2:** Population distribution according to language and how the interviewee earns a living

	Total	Native	Foreign	Both	Tourists	Others
<b>Total</b>	62	18	4	6	2	32
<b>I steal</b>	2	-	-	2	-	-
<b>I prostitute myself</b>	38	5	2	2	2	27
<b>Domestic work/prostitution</b>	6	2	-	-	-	4
<b>I fend for myself</b>	5	3	-	2	-	-
<b>Friends help me</b>	2	-	2	-	-	-
<b>Someone supports me</b>	9	8	-	-	-	1

Chart #2 shows how the people interviewed earn their living. There are 6 ways listed, of which 5 are open or concealed prostitution. 38 persons state openly that they earn their living through prostitution, and 6 others prostitute themselves and do domestic work at the same time because domestic work alone does not offer enough money to live on. 5 persons fend for themselves (the interviewers say that they prostitute themselves but do not wish to admit it openly); it is the same case with those who have someone supporting them and 2 persons who say that friends help them out. The 2 persons left earn their living by thievery.



iii) **Chart 3:** Population distribution according to ethnic origin, age, and gender

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>Pulaar</b>	<b>Sooninke</b>	<b>Wolof</b>	<b>Creole</b>
<b>Total</b>	62	40	6	4	10	2
<b>Male</b>	5	2	2	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	57	38	4	4	9	2
<b>14 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	2	2	-	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	2	2	-	-	-	-
<b>15 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	7	5	1	-	1	-
<b>Male</b>	2	1	1	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	5	4	-	-	1	-
<b>16 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	7	7	-	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	7	7	-	-	-	-
<b>17 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	15	12	-	-	3	-
<b>Male</b>	1	-	-	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	14	12	-	-	2	-
<b>18 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	11	4	2	3	2	-
<b>Female</b>	11	4	2	3	2	-
<b>19 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	1	-	1	-	-	-
<b>Male</b>	1	-	1	-	-	-
<b>20 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	3	1	-	1	1	-
<b>Female</b>	3	1	-	1	1	-
<b>21 - 24 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	9	6	2	-	1	-
<b>Male</b>	1	1	-	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	8	5	2	-	1	-
<b>25 - 29 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	3	2	-	-	-	1
<b>Female</b>	3	2	-	-	-	1
<b>35 - 39 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	1	1	-	-	-	-
<b>Female</b>	1	1	-	-	-	-
<b>50 - 54 years old</b>						
<b>Total</b>	3	-	-	-	2	1
<b>Female</b>	3	-	-	-	2	1

According to chart #3, breakdown of interviewees according to ethnic origin is as follows: 40 Arabs, 10 Wolofs, 6 Pulaar, 4 Soninke (all 4 from Mauritania), and 2 Creoles (foreign ethnic background). 31 respondents were under the age of 18, and 42 persons were 18 years of age or younger.

vi) **Chart 4:** Population distribution according to activity, age, and gender

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Domestic</b>	<b>I fend for myself</b>	<b>Prostitution</b>	<b>Friends come and see me</b>
<b>Total</b>	62	3	15	43	1
<b>Male</b>	5	-	2	3	-
<b>Female</b>	57	3	13	40	1
<b>14 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	2	-	-	2	-
<b>Female</b>	2	-	-	2	-
<b>15 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	7	-	1	6	-
<b>Male</b>	2	-	1	1	-
<b>Female</b>	5	-	-	5	-
<b>16 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	7	-	1	6	-
<b>Female</b>	7	-	1	6	-
<b>17 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	15	-	2	12	1
<b>Male</b>	1	-	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	14	-	2	11	1
<b>18 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	11	2	1	8	-
<b>Female</b>	11	2	1	8	-
<b>19 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	1	-	1	-	-
<b>Male</b>	1	-	1	-	-
<b>20 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	3	1	1	1	-
<b>Female</b>	3	1	1	1	-
<b>21 - 24 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	9	-	6	3	-
<b>Male</b>	1	-	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	8	-	6	2	-
<b>25 - 29 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	3	-	2	1	-
<b>Female</b>	3	-	2	1	-
<b>35 - 39 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	1	-	-	1	-
<b>Female</b>	1	-	-	1	-
<b>50 - 54 years old</b>					
<b>Total</b>	3	-	-	3	-
<b>Female</b>	3	-	-	3	-

Chart #4 shows that 43 persons stating that they prostitute themselves are 18 years of age and younger.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We have understood from our investigation that there is a general need for change in the approach and attitude towards this practice, to protect our country from the poverty that is at the root of all our problems. It is therefore necessary to develop and implement regional, effective, and long-lasting strategies against this phenomenon and to form regional networks that have adequate means of communication.

This is a gamble we must take, but to win, considering globalization in today's world, it is necessary to develop these strategies with the participation of all the active elements of society in every country, using networks of local and regional migration. The populations directly concerned must become involved, as well as the justice system and the police forces. Strategies need to be based on an understanding of the determining factors and the interrelations that exist between the different government powers.

- **The first action to take is to begin creating networks** that will raise public awareness of the existence of the phenomenon in the country, targeting all those involved in the economic activities of the country -- political decision-makers, NGOs, families, spiritual leaders, and members of religious communities.
- **We must develop a strategy of adequate consciousness-raising** involving all possible means and lines of communication.
- **To formulate a more effective and long-lasting strategy**, it is necessary to understand the nature and the determining factors of CSEC and how they relate to poverty, as well as who is or should be active in this effort. It would be fitting, then, to set out medium-range and long-term objectives, including key results and short-term assessments in order to be sure that the programs are well thought-out, set up effectively, and carefully followed.

The fight against poverty must begin with the children who are the most exposed to its dangers and uncertainties, so that the continuation of this problem can be avoided, for both women and children.

We must attack all forms of poverty:

- Poverty in individual households, by ensuring good living conditions and an increase in household revenues.
- Cultural and intellectual poverty, by guaranteeing full school enrollment, which will involve concerted action to combat the school dropout rate.
- Social poverty, by creating a harmonious climate in the surroundings where people live, promoting understanding and affection, particularly in blended families (stepmothers and stepfathers, etc.).
- Ethical poverty, by the administration of civic and moral education in school programs and educational sessions aimed at households (rural radio and television programs, the written press, discussion meetings, etc.).
- Physical, moral, and intellectual poverty.

In order to prepare a workable program that would offer lasting solutions, it is necessary and important to understand the nature and the determining factors of CSEC.

To attain this objective, a survey must be undertaken with a more representative sampling on the subject of CSEC in Mauritania, not only to show its existence, but also to seek out its causes in all social milieux (urban and rural), and propose solutions adapted to each.

In conclusion, it is obvious that it is because of poverty that millions of children in the world are going hungry and find themselves exploited not only economically but also sexually. Children are exposed to danger by having to work at certain jobs not in accordance with their status as children. It is through children that poverty is transmitted from generation to generation. This vicious circle will continue as long as children are not helped first.

We therefore support Mr. James P. Grant, former Director of UNICEF, who said, “Women and children can be the Trojan horse that attacks the citadel of poverty.” UNICEF approaches the fight against poverty from the angle of Human Rights, taking in all aspects of human destitution.

Participation is at the center of this approach: the poor are considered the main actors in going forward, rather than passive subjects. In this case, we no longer talk about “target groups” but partners who play an essential role in the battle to have their rights respected.

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## **APPENDIX 1: LISTING OF NGOs**

### **ANAIF-PIE:**

The National Association for Support of the Feminine Initiative for the Protection of Children and the Environment, though struggling from lack of funds, continues its campaign of public awareness to fight against CSEC in our country (early marriage, excision).

In addition to the establishment of schools, this association has opened centers where children can come to discuss their problems and has set up groups whose job it is to seek out child victims. Within this framework there exists a receiving center for child victims of CSEC and those at risk in a district known for its extreme poverty (this NGO has taken in women repatriated from Senegal and a number of street children).

### **CARITAS:**

This is an NGO whose objective is to care for “Children without families living in the streets”: 30 children have been placed in four family-type homes situated in slums with access to sanitary and educational services. The goal is to allow the child to return to his or her family of origin or to find him a substitute family if the real parents are no longer around.

### **AUX CAPTIFS DE LA LIBERATION:**

In the spirit of solidarity between Paris and Nouakchott, the young couple Jean-Jacques and Annick Combier, working on the street team “Aux Captifs de la Libération” [“The Prisoners of Liberation”] of the Forum of the Halles/Beaubourg, founded by a Paris priest named Patrick Giros, have started a program for street children.