

STREET CHILDREN IN THE **PHILIPPINES**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document has been produced to provide factual information on the plight of Street Children in the Philippines, including sexual exploitation. It aims to put the issue in context by examining the underlying causes of the problem and present statistical evidence.

Measurement of phenomena such as this is not without its problems. Jubilee would like to state that there are a variety of figures in circulation for some of the variables mentioned and holds no responsibility for the accuracy of the figures that are reproduced in this report.

2.0 UNDERLYING CAUSES

The Philippines covers a region of 300 000km², an area slightly smaller than Italy but has a population significantly larger of almost 73 million people. Around 45% of the population are under 18 years age, with over 8% under 5. Over half of the people who live in urban areas are categorised as living below the absolute poverty level. In rural areas, this figure rises to 64%. 27% of the population live on less than 1 US dollar a day

Filipino economic reality reflects the pyramidal structure, with the top 2% effectively controlling and dominating the rest. The top 20% of income earning households receives almost half the total national household income, compared to 40% of the lowest income households who received only 17%.

The sexual exploitation of children has its roots in the poverty, social injustice and crowded slum conditions that conspire to create explosive family environments, parental abuse and neglect. Children are seen as extra wage earners for struggling families. These factors propel children into the squalid adult environment of the streets, where the quickest and highest wages available are for those who become the merchandise of the child sex industry, sustained by local people, foreign tourists and paedophiles.

There are around 1.5 million Street Children in Philippines and 100 000 of them are estimated to be prostituted . If the home environment is seriously abusive, children that begin by just working on the streets often end up living on them.

3.0 CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

The violence of poverty in the Philippines has profoundly affected the infrastructure of the family amongst the urban poor. An estimated 75 000 and 80 000 children live on the streets of Manila alone. Many do have families but poverty compels them to beg for money on the city's streets where often they face arrest. There are probably at least 5 000 to 7 000 "full-time" Street Children with no family. The only prosperity in some areas comes from it sex industry and the capital of foreign and local paedophiles.

3.1 Housing Conditions

Slum and shanty town areas exist around the majority of the Philippines' major cities and urban areas. In the slums and squatter colonies the inhabitants live in a state of uncertainty in regard to their 'homes'. Insecurity of tenure, fear of eviction and relocation and the fear of fire, plague the

shanty town life. 90% of these citizens are "illegal", squatting on government or privately owned land. Only 16-28% of these 'homes' have piped water and up to two-thirds have no sanitation, leaving only a 'wrap and throw' method of disposal. In the UK, all households have access to piped water and sanitation. Only one-third of the slum houses benefit from the government garbage trucks. The homes themselves are small. The average size is one room inhabited by a family of six. The Filipino population is growing on average at 2.3% a year compared to 0.2% in the UK.

3.2 Children's Health

With the housing conditions described above, it is not surprising that the health of children and infants is poor. Infant mortality is reported to be 32 per 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality is high, at 170 per 100,000 live births compared to 39 in Malaysia. Pneumonia, diarrhoea, tuberculosis and measles are common. Malnutrition has caused over 30% of the Philippines' under 5s to suffer severe or moderate stunting.

Street Children, because of the scavenging-type and street-based occupations and prostitution, suffer from many illnesses, including sexually-transmitted infections, and are in danger from vehicle accidents and violence against them. Child rag pickers spend their day searching the streets for old pieces of cloth, plastic, paper and any other recyclable materials that they can sell. Children who do this work suffer from health problems such as tuberculosis and scabies as well as injuries caused by scrambling over rubbish tips and skips. The children are out in all weathers and have to carry heavy loads which stunts their growth. Eating discarded food can cause sickness.

3.3 Education

Primary school education is free and compulsory but "free" is a relative term. With uniforms, strong shoes, bus fare, stationary, textbooks, a lunchtime snack, levies for "extra-curricular activities", the expenses may run up to a significant portion of the family's monthly income. Pressure to participate in these school budget-boosting "extra-curricular activities" means children who cannot afford them are ostracised. Many children from families among the urban poor consequently drop-out. Out of 100 school age children enrolled in Grade 1, only 56 will finish to Grade 6, 23 will finish High School and only 14 will finish college

Three quarters of Street Children go to school for some period of their school age years but around one half are absent from school at any time. 40% of Street Girls never go to school at all.

3.4 Child Labour

Global estimates vary on the total number of child workers. The International Labour Organisation estimates that there are 250 million working children world-wide aged between five and fourteen. 61% of child labourers are working in Asia (excluding Japan). It is estimated that there are 3.7 million child labourers in the Philippines, with 2.2 million of them being exposed to hazardous work environments. Hundreds of children, for example, are employed in dangerous reef-fishing called pa-aling. For eight hours a day, child divers are forced to dive down 50ft to scare fish out of the coral reefs by using lead weighted hoses which belch out compressed air. Many are whipped if they make mistakes and they face the continual danger of decompression sickness and ruptured eardrums.

In January 1998, thousands of children marched through Manila to protest against the exploitative use of child labour, as part of the Global March on this issue.

3.5 Prostitution and Children

Olongapo City is known as "the world's largest brothel". Fr Shay Cullen of the Preda Foundation insists that sex tourism is the ultimate in exploitation. *"People of other nations have exploited the raw materials of poorer countries for centuries. Now they exploit the bodies of our children."*

Prostitution is widespread in the Philippines and a large number of those working are children, some as young as four years of age. It is estimated that at least 20,000 and up to 60 000 children are engaged in prostitution. Child prostitutes are used by both foreign sex tourists and paedophiles as well as local people. Many Street Children are lured into prostitution as a means of surviving, others work in order to earn money for their families. A variety of different factors contribute to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Philippines, only some of which, for example like poverty, are outlined in this document.

In Olongapo City, there are believed to be 15,000 prostitutes, almost 8% of the total population. Prostitution is essentially the only industry in the town, with 6,500-7,000 hospitality girls registered in the city. Many of Olongapo's prostitutes are children, originally recruited very young by club owners to work as go-go dancers, their prelude to the slide into prostitution.

In the past, parents in Olongapo had encouraged their children 'to go with an American' which referred to the US Navy personnel attached to the Subic Bay Naval Base. With the closure of the Base in 1992, thousands of women who were employed as prostitutes were left unemployed. Although the Base no longer exists there continues to be a demand for child prostitutes in the Philippines. It is feared with the ratification in May 1999 of the Visiting Forces Agreement which allows military exercises on Filipino soil with the United States that there may be an increase in prostitution, particularly child prostitution.

In Pagsanjan in Laguna, south of Manila, children have also been used as sexual currency by their parents. They welcome foreigners who give TV sets, video recorders and motor bikes to the family in exchange for the children who go to live with them in a cottage or apartment. Some paedophiles have built new houses for the family and live on the top floor with the child. A common scenario is for the paedophiles to pick the child up on the street, bring them to an eatery for food, then buy clothes for the child, especially underwear, go to a hotel on the pretext of getting the child to shower and dress in the new clothes and then the abuse follows. Most paedophiles are arrested in these circumstances, when a hotel employee knows the routine and tips off the police. This description would fit approximately 65% of the cases.

3.6 Pregnancy and Abortion

As well as the inappreciable depths of emotional damage, there are more measurable indicators of the cost. Studies show that half of the female children that are involved with the sex trade become pregnant. In Olongapo City, the number is higher, at almost 70%. Nationally, 48% of the girls said that they had become pregnant, 33% twice, 15% three times and 5% four times. Nationally 32% of these minors have had at least one abortion. In Olongapo this number is almost 50%.

3.7 HIV/AIDS and STIs

The World Health Organisation/UNAIDS estimate that 1.3 million children are living with HIV/AIDS world-wide. In the Philippines there are approximately 28 000 living with HIV, including around 1 300 children. The number of adults with HIV doubles each year, according to the Philippines National AIDS Centre, although there have been few registrations of AIDS cases in comparison to the estimated figure. There is no HIV testing for children in the Philippines but 18% of the Street Children contract sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). Many children in the sex industry are presumably infected.

3.8 Children in Prison

Street Children as young as 10 years old are often imprisoned under the Vagrancy Act, ending up in the same cells as adult prisoners, including young girls with male adults. They are often sexually and physically abused by prisoners and guards and are forced to clean out the toilets and cells. They are prone to catch TB from sleeping on damp floors and being in close confinement with sick adults. They often do not have their own imprisonment recorded.

Children are also found in prison living with their mother or father in prison whilst their parent is serving their sentence. This is allowed because in some cases, there is nowhere else for the child to go.

3.9 The US Navel Base in Subic Bay, Olongapo

Along with Clark Field, the huge US Air Force Base in Angeles City which was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991 and subsequently abandoned, Olongapo City had a long and blemished history of dependency on the Subic Naval Base for economic survival. There were also five other minor US bases in the Philippines all closed now.

In 1983, the child care agency the Preda Foundation discovered that a group of eighteen Olongapo Street Girls aged 9-14 years were infected with venereal disease. The children told of being sold to foreign customers for sex by local pimps, being paid between US\$10 and US\$20. One of the girls, a nine year old called Jennifer was left bleeding. To stop the bleeding she used a T-shirt belonging to the navy officer and later his name was found on the laundry tag. He was US Navy officer Daniel J Dougherty. He was subsequently convicted on thirteen counts of child abuse and ordered to undergo psychiatric treatment for one year.

The US Base helped to spawn a culture of prostitution in Olongapo. At least 108 cases of sexual abuse have been filed against American servicemen in the Olongapo's Prosecutor's Office in the past fifteen years. Many were quashed before they were even filed and many more incidents were unreported, as the police were often the abusers. Those cases that did get to court were either resolved in favour of the servicemen or settled out of court. Local officials were reluctant to prosecute US citizens for fear of upsetting the US authorities. When a confidential report by a US Navy Investigation Bureau undercover operation revealed that children as young as six had been sold for sex with US sailors, and that eight suspects had been identified as pimps, the Mayor Richard Gordon quashed the report, and none were brought to trial.

The last US servicemen left in 1992, leaving behind an estimated 5,000 AmerAsians - of mixed parentage - all under twenty years of age and many abandoned by both parents. It is estimated that there are 50,000 AmerAsians in the Philippines as a whole. AmerAsians in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand are granted immediate US citizenship but those born in the Philippines live as outcasts and are given no special consideration from Washington.

4.0 JUBILEE RESPONSE

Jubilee supports the work of Fr Shay Cullen and the Preda Foundation in the Philippines.

The Preda Foundation, a child care agency in Olongapo, took a stand against the sexual exploitation of children by overseas personnel. They experienced as a result a profound backlash from the wealthy owners of nightclubs and bars, where much of the sex industry exists, when they began taking action on behalf of the children.

The Foundation provides protection, shelter and rehabilitation for children who have been abused or exploited. It believes that when children are shown love and respect, they can begin to become absorbed again in childhood things, normal activities they were denied whilst in the power of the abusers.

Jubilee has been supporting Fr Shay and PREDA since 1992. The protective and therapeutic house provides a safe environment for up to 60 children. It also has an outreach programme for another 60 and reintegrates the children into a family home and supports their schooling through the PREDA after care initiative.

Using therapy and education both in the community and in schools, it aims to rehabilitate the children and encourage them to bring their abusers to justice. The Foundation has been prominent in campaigns to end child prostitution and expose local syndicates of trafficking women and children. It is active in tracking paedophile websites that traffic children for sexual exploitation.

Case Study

Jenny, 13, was abused by her step-father and raped by her cousins. When she was rescued by the staff at Preda and arrived at the Foundation, she did not talk or smile and rejected everyone. In the following weeks, she began to express her pain, fear and anger. Two months later, she is laughing, playing with the other children and learning to cook.

5.0 LEGISLATION

Britain and the Philippines agreed new measures in 1997 to address child abuse. They include the prosecution in Britain of paedophiles who have committed crimes abroad and also a co-operation agreement with the Filipino police for the sharing of information and intelligence on paedophiles. About 40 Filipino policemen have undergone training from their British counterparts on dealing with crimes committed against children.

Many other countries such as Ireland and Australia have brought in legislation as well to prosecute paedophiles for offences committed overseas.

6.0 ALL PARTY-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR STREET CHILDREN

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Street Children was launched on March 3rd 1992. It was formed because MPs were receiving a lot of correspondence from their constituents concerning Street Children. It was felt that a group was necessary to effectively air public feeling about the children's plight.

The All Party Group represents the three major political parties in Britain. MPs who are part of the group include, Ian Bruce (Conservative Dorset South), Llin Golding (Labour Newcastle-under-Lyme), Nigel Jones (Liberal Democrat Cheltenham) The group has been actively involved in the plight of Street Children in Guatemala and Brazil and has over seventy members.

7.0 JUBILEE ACTION AND JUBILEE CAMPAIGN

Jubilee Action is a registered charity (No. 1013587) and works to protect children's rights worldwide by supporting aid and awareness programmes like the one run by Fr Shay Cullen in the Philippines. Jubilee Action developed from Jubilee Campaign in 1992.

Jubilee Campaign is a Christian human rights pressure group. It has foregone charitable status in order to lobby without restriction. Jubilee regularly briefs Foreign Office officials, lobbies ambassadors, governments, the European Parliament, the United Nations and co-ordinates political action amongst MPs. Jubilee Campaign has been supported by over 100 Members of Parliament from all the major political parties as it works to protect children's rights.

If you would like further information about Jubilee Action please e-mail
info@jubileeaction.co.uk

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