



# VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE RED LIGHT AREAS OF KOLKATA, INDIA

A YOUTH-LED STUDY

*Sanlaap*

YOUTH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT SOUTH ASIA  
(YPP-SA)

SUPPORTED BY



### **Youth Survey Team**

This study was conceived and implemented by the following young people involved in the Youth Partnership Project in India, with support from SANLAAP YPP adult team members:

- Sushmita Das
- Rakhi Baroi
- Rina Jadav
- Apurba Bera
- Sunil Singh
- Rajesh Kumar Sah
- Dhiraj Singh
- Sanjay Thakur
- Anjali Bin
- Rahool Goswami
- Somnath Das
- Surojit Mitra
- Rinki Das
- Shanti Das
- Ruby Ahir

### **Supported by:**

Mr. Satyaki Sengupta, Child Protection Officer, YPP India SANLAAP  
Caregivers of SANLAAP

### **Advisors:**

Ms. Indrani Sinha, Executive Director SANLAAP  
Ms. Indrani Chakraborty, Researcher  
Ms. Vimala Crispin, ECPAT International

Mr. Mark Capaldi, ECPAT International  
Mr. Bimol Bhetwal, ECPAT International

### **Report Written by:**

Ms. Ilona Bhattacharya, National Coordinator, India, YPP-SANLAAP, with observations and input from youth researchers.

### **Published by**

SANLAAP  
38 B Mahanirban Road  
Kolkata -700029  
Tel No: 91 33 2464 9596  
[www.sanlaapindia.org](http://www.sanlaapindia.org)

### **Supported by:**

The Youth Partnership Project in South Asia (YPP-SA)  
ECPAT International  
328/1 Phaya Thai Road  
Bangkok 10400, Thailand  
[www.ecpat.net](http://www.ecpat.net)  
[www.yppsa.org](http://www.yppsa.org)

Layout and Design: Manida Naebklang

Information from this report may be freely reproduced, provided that the source is acknowledged.

Responsibility for all opinions expressed in this report rests exclusively with the youth survey team who conducted the study.

July 2010

Copyright © SANLAAP



# **VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE RED LIGHT AREAS OF KOLKATA, INDIA**

**A YOUTH-LED STUDY**

**YOUTH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT  
SOUTH ASIA (YPP-SA)**



## PREFACE

This youth-led study was conducted in an effort to develop a greater understanding of the realities faced by children living and growing up in the four largest red light areas in Kolkata, India: Kalighat, Bowbazar, Tollygunge, and Khidderpur. This unique initiative has been led by youth from the outset; youth surveyors from 16-22 years of age both developed the initial concept for and undertook the practical research involved. Youth members of SANLAAP involved in the Youth Partnership Project in South Asia (YPP-SA) have been actively taking leadership roles in their communities. These roles were further reinforced and strengthened by their involvement in undertaking and completing this study.

The study aimed to delve deeper into the lives of children living in the complex world of Kolkata's red light areas. In trying to understand the vulnerabilities faced by these children, effort was made to explore potential measures for improving the protection of the children living in these areas. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations from this study will provide a stronger platform from which to advocate for greater action and meaningful policy change to ensure better living conditions and essential child protection mechanisms within communities located in red light areas.

This study does not claim to be an exhaustive or comprehensive assessment of the vulnerabilities faced by children in red light areas. It will fall short of the expectations of academic research conducted with a significantly larger sample size and more stringent methodologies and data analysis. The attempt of this study, however, has been to conduct action research led by young people in their own environment and communities. In this way, the young people now hope to address some of the issues that have come to the forefront through the numerous interviews and discussions conducted with children and families, within the scope of available resources and opportunities.

*"This was a different and new experience for us. We decided to conduct this survey because we want the world to know about the lives of children living in red light areas. The idea came from the necessity to engage the most vulnerable children, those not yet within any "protective net" provided by NGOs, schools, etc. As this was our first experience, we have not conducted the survey on an extremely large scale. We are hopeful that adults and people who can make a difference will appreciate the sincerity and hard work that has gone into this survey and excuse any mistakes or shortcomings."*

~ Youth Survey Team

SANLAAP and its youth members would like to acknowledge the support of SANLAAP staff, the YPP India Team, as well as Mark Capaldi, Vimala Crispin and Bimol Bhetwal at ECPAT International. Lastly, thank you to all the children, their mothers and guardians who generously cooperated to make the study a success.

## FOREWORD

India is home to very vulnerable children but is also home to very active, powerful children and youth who with a little push and support can do wonders. At Sanlaap we have always learnt from the young people and the women living in the Red Light Districts of West Bengal. The survivors of violence and trafficking have always told us what to do for them. We did not have to consult any books or university courses to find out ways to help the women and children and also the young adults when they faced problems or when they needed support for their future.

Prostitution in India has always raised lot of questions in this country. Almost all women have been trafficked and those who have joined knowingly have joined due to lack of option in life. The stigma of prostitution has made the children of the locality more vulnerable. School drop outs, child marriage, sexual abuse are some of the everyday realities. Female children have run away to get away and male children have been left with no options and lot of vulnerabilities.

Sanlaap has worked with the children, women and young adults in these areas and today has a very rich experience of dealing with the problems and the progress of these areas. What has not been done by the adults from the outside has been completed by the young leaders of these areas. Several of these young people are now our colleagues and also advise us on the new programmes we take up.

This survey based study once again has taught us how to work in these areas and what is needed by the most vulnerable. The youth are the leaders of tomorrow and they have tried to put us in the right direction through this study. The experiences that we have in this study are not only from the answers of the questions in the survey but live truth of most of the youth who conducted this survey. As organizational leaders, working for change in these areas we need to take action and also share the experience with other organizations and the Government.

Personally I praise the staff in YPP who coordinated the study, ECPAT who constantly supported and helped the young people to complete the study and design the same. Without the help of the young people from YPP this study could not have been complete.

I thank you all and hope all of us would take the study seriously and work towards the change. There is a need to share this study with other organizations working in similar fields.



Indrani Sinha

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acromyns & Abbreviations Used	1
SANLAAP and the Youth Partnership Project	2
Executive Summary	4
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
Rights of Children in India	6
Study Objectives	8
1.1 Approach & Methodology	9
Approach: The Youth-Led Concept	9
Direct Involvement of Youth Strengthens the Research Process	9
Participation in the Research Process: Benefits to Youth	10
1.2 Ensuring Protection of Youth during the Research Process	10
1.3 Involvement of Youth	11
1.4 Operational Definitions	12
1.5 Target Group	13
1.6 Site Selection	13
Bowbazar	13
Kalighat	13
Tollygange	13
Khidderpur	13
1.7 Sampling	14
1.8 Primary Data Collection	15
1.9 Field Testing of the Questionnaire	15
1.10 Secondary Data Collection	15
1.11 Data Analysis	15
<b>CHAPTER II: RAW DATA FROM SURVEY PROCESS</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 Distribution of Families Interviewed by Location	16
2.2 Distribution of Children Aged 12 to 18 Years	16
2.3 Gender Distribution of Children Interviewed	17
2.4 Primary Family Occupation	17
2.5 School Attendance	18
2.6 Comparisons of Boys and Girls not Attending School	19
2.7 Children Engaged in Income Generating Jobs	20
2.8 Types of Work Children are Involved In	21
2.9 Family Perceptions of the Safety of the Red Light Area Environment	23
2.10 HIV/AIDS Awareness	23

2.11 Awareness of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation	24
2.12 Addiction Among Children	24
2.13 Safe Place to Sleep	25
2.14 Physical Abuse: Beating & Slapping	25
2.15 Sexual Abuse	26

### **CHAPTER III FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS 29**

Challenges & Shortcomings	31
Youth Surveyor Findings	31
Recommendations by Young People	32
For Families / Guardians	32
For Community Members	33
For NGO Non-Governmental Organization	33
For Government	34

### **CONCLUSION 35**

ANNEX I: Interview Questions for Children	36
ANNEX II: Interview Questions for Family Members	39
ANNEX III: Focus Group Discussions with Children	42
ANNEX IV: Focus Group Discussions with Family Members	43
ANNEX V: Protection Guidelines for Youth & Adults	44

### **REFERENCES 46**

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
DIC	Drop-In-Centre
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
SSA	The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (Hindi translation: the 'Education for All') movement is a flagship programme of the Government of India for achievement of universalization of elementary education in a time bound manner.



# SANLAAP and the YOUTH PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

## SANLAAP

SANLAAP is developmental organisation that has been working in India for the past twenty years to combat human trafficking, especially trafficking of children for commercial sexual purposes. SANLAAP is a pioneer organisation in the South Asian region leading efforts to holistically address this issue, focusing on a range of strategies, including rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors, preventive mechanisms, as well as advocacy initiatives and research.

SANLAAP works with survivors of trafficking, sexual abuse and violence and at-risk children and young people living in vulnerable situations. Working in the red light districts of Kolkata and the rural source areas of West Bengal, the organization takes a holistic approach to address issues of trafficking, forced prostitution, and sexual abuse including advocacy, sensitization, rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Founded in 1987, Sanlaap has been working against the pervasive gender injustice and violence against women and children in South Asia for nearly 20 years.

SANLAAP's rights-based approach has been the underlying principle which permeates all programmes and activities. It works with children and young people based on the core principles of 'partnership' and 'participation'.

## Youth Partnership Project in South Asia (YPP-SA)

SANLAAP has been implementing the YPP-SA Project since 2005. The YPP is an innovative initiative designed to empower and build the capacity of experiential youth to take the lead in the fight against trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

Large numbers of children are trafficked annually in South Asia, with estimates as high as 350,000 in India, 40,000 in Nepal and 29,000 in Bangladesh. Trained YPP youth involved in the project in India, Bangladesh and Nepal have set up peer support programmes in schools located in high-risk areas to share information and provide individualized support to prevent their peers from becoming trapped into CSEC. YPP youth trained in media and advocacy skills are reaching out to local communities through awareness campaigns in an effort to reduce the numbers of children trafficked to cities and neighbouring countries.

The YPP also works with trained caregivers and local organizations to give them the tools to provide quality psychosocial care for child survivors. With the support of ECPAT International and YPP teams in each country, YPP youth are working to improve the lives of child survivors and persuade adults at the community, national and international levels to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## YPP Project Objectives

- Support and strengthen youth participation in the fight against CSEC in Nepal, Bangladesh and India, as well as within the global structures of the ECPAT International network.
- Develop the skills of young people, with special emphasis on CSEC survivors, to offer peer support to child trafficking survivors.
- Build lobbying and advocacy skills of young people to enable them to influence local and national policy makers for better prevention, protection and rehabilitation services for CSEC survivors.
- Train caregivers in the specialized skills required to counsel young people affected by CSEC.
- Develop and conduct public awareness raising campaigns for the dissemination of information about the dangers of CSEC, HIV/AIDS prevention and the rights of children.
- Provide support to initiatives led by youth groups and networks through a Youth Micro Project Scheme.
- Lobby for the improvement of law enforcement mechanisms related to CSEC.

This Youth-led Study was initiated as part of the YPP South Asia Youth Micro Project Scheme.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India is home to almost 19% of the world's children. More than one third of the country's population, around 440 million, are below 18 years of age and 40% of these children are in need of care and protection. This indicates that a large number of children are vulnerable to a wide range of potentially harmful situations or are living in difficult circumstances.

A National Study on Child Abuse conducted by the government Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2007, the largest of its kind ever undertaken in the world, presented grave results (*Study on Child Abuse: INDIA 2007*). According to the study, two out of every three children are physically abused; 53% of children reported facing one or more forms of sexual abuse. It also emerged that across the different kinds of abuse, young children age 5-12 are most at risk of abuse and exploitation. While the National Study covered children living in families, children living in the street, as well as those in institutional care, the vulnerability of children in red light areas to abuse was not addressed.

4 Across South Asia, prostitution exists in numerous forms, including red light areas and brothel-based prostitution. The region is home to a large number of red light areas in big cities as well as medium-sized towns; in transit business points along travel routes, as well as close to major industrial centres, along highways and the borders. In India, prostitution itself (exchanging sex for money) is not illegal, but related activities (operating brothels, pimping, soliciting sex, etc.) are illegal. In 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development reported the presence of 2.8 million sex workers in India, 35.47 percent of whom entered the trade before the age of 18. The Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, 1956 ("ITPA"), the main statute dealing with sex work in India, does not criminalise prostitution or prostitutes per se, but is designed to punish acts by third parties facilitating prostitution, such as brothel keeping, living off prostitution earnings and procuring, even where sex work is not coerced. (*Pocket Handbook on Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation, SANLAAP*).

Kolkata, one of the largest cities in the world, has a huge population of people living in poor socio-economic conditions. The city is home to several red light areas, where numerous brothels are located and sex trade conducted. It is estimated that over 60,000 brothel-based women and girls are involved in prostitution in Kolkata. The exact number is impossible to quantify, as many women often shift from one area to another. Some women may live in a red light area but go out to work. There are also women who live outside the area, but enter during the day to work. An entire commercial industry exists in these areas comprising of people who benefit financially from the sex-trade: landlords / landladies, pimps, traffickers, shopkeepers, clients, moneylenders, partners of the women or husbands and clubs.

However, a red light area is not only a place where prostitution is carried out or men go to buy sex; it is also a place where generations live and where children are born, play and grow up. Children of women in prostitution who live in red light areas grow up in an environment that is extremely vulnerable and they face greater stigma than in situations where women in prostitution do not live

in brothels or are not restricted to red light areas. Although the Government has initiated measures to improve conditions for these children, their status isolates them from the mainstream world and places them on the very lowest rungs of Indian society.

Little attention has been paid to these children, who are victims of their circumstances from birth, denied the opportunity to be free of their background and deprived of an environment conducive to healthy physical and psychological development. This youth-led study has highlighted some of the leading challenges faced by children living in red light areas.

For these children, for example, access to mainstream education, health and protection services is blocked due to stigma. In their homes, they are often subjected to overt or covert abuse and are ostracised in social spaces outside their community. They witness their mothers being beaten, humiliated and subjugated by clients, pimps, madams, brothel owners, and the police. As the children grow older, adolescent girls are subjected to sexual abuse, harassment and pressure to enter prostitution by madams and pimps. Boys are introduced to alcohol and substance abuse early in their lives and may become involved in coercing and exploiting girls and women of the area. As a result of crowding and congested conditions, there is a lack of space for sleep, rest, study, or to cook and eat healthy food.

Children raised in red light areas, especially girls, are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Due to lack of child-care for single working mothers, many children roam the streets unattended. They often get sick from the unsanitary conditions and are vulnerable to accidents. As they are increasingly vulnerable to abuse around the age of puberty, at this time mothers begin to think of sending their daughters elsewhere, often by arranging for them to be married at a young age. Growing up in a red light area, young girls often learn to relate to others, gain approval and attention, by using their sexuality, which can increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Mothers work late into the night and are often unable to provide a suitable quiet place for their children to do their homework. Many mothers are non-literate or neo-literate and therefore have their own limitations in supporting and understanding the demands of their children's schooling. Some boys become involved in the sex trade, either directly or indirectly as pimps or as trafficking agents, or more indirectly by working for political parties, through local clubs, or by selling drugs or alcohol. Youth from red light areas usually lack the qualifications and contacts necessary for securing formal sector jobs. Many go on to do manual work, for example as mechanics in garages, running tea shops, working in catering services or the current phenomenon of "lotto" (online gambling) shops.

In recent years, a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have started working in red light areas to implement child support services. The aim of these NGOs has been to prevent second generation prostitution and create alternative life and livelihood options, targeting children living in these areas. However, the study has shown that a holistic approach of working with the child along with the family and surrounding social structures (such as schools, peer groups, etc.) can be significantly more effective than working with children in isolation.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Several research initiatives and studies have been conducted on red light areas in India. In recent years, focus has been primarily upon the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among sex-workers in red light areas or the situation of the sex-workers themselves. Several studies have been conducted to identify minors involved in prostitution in red light areas, as well as investigations into the trafficking of minor children. Few studies, however, have focused specifically on children living in these locations who may not have been trafficked or be involved in prostitution directly, but are the children of sex workers or other families living in red light areas. The home environment, neighbourhood and other social structures surrounding a child play a crucial role in their development and well-being. An entire population of children in red light areas are being deeply impacted by the challenging environment in which they live. They are extremely marginalized by society and many are so entrenched in the cycle that they become perpetrators themselves later in life. The risk of sexual exploitation is a reality and serious concern for these children. Many children become engaged in child labour and different forms of work in order to support their families. Other children may seek work in order to support a lifestyle and habits that they become exposed to in this area. This study aims to address the genuine need to better understand the world and of children living in red light areas that has been identified by youth from this community. Without this understanding, planning and implementing effective strategies to strengthen protection and improve their lives is impossible.

### RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN INDIA

The Constitution of India lays down certain fundamental rights that universally apply to all citizens irrespective of race, place of birth, religion, caste, creed, colour, or sex. Whereas the Constitution of India enshrines both in Part III and IV the cause and the best interest of children, other specific articles refer specifically to children, including the following:

- The State can make special provisions for children, (Art 15 (3))
- The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between age six to fourteen years, (Art 21.A)
- No child below the age of 14 shall be employed to work in a factory, mine or any other hazardous employment, (Art. 24)



- The tender age of children is not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength, (Art. 39 e)
- Children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment, (Art. 39 f)
- The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until the age of six, (Art. 45)

The Constitution guarantees the Right Against Exploitation, described in Articles 23 and 24; namely the abolition of trafficking in human beings, begar (forced labour) (The Constitution of India, Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice) and prohibition of employment of children below age 14 in dangerous jobs, such as factories and mines. Child labour is considered to be a gross violation of the spirit and provisions of the Constitution.

The major policies and legislations formulated in the country to ensure child rights and improvement in their status include:

1. National Policy for Children, 1974
2. National Policy on Education, 1986
3. National Policy on Child Labour, 1987
4. National Nutrition Policy, 1993
5. Report of the Committee on Prostitution, Child Prostitutes and Children of Prostitutes and Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children, 1998
6. National Health Policy, 2002
7. National Charter for Children, 2004
8. National Plan of Action for Children, 2005

In 1974, the Government of India adopted a National Policy for Children, declaring the nation's children as 'supremely important assets'. This policy presents recommendations for establishment of a comprehensive health programme, supplementary nutrition for mothers and children, nutrition education for mothers, free and compulsory education for all children up to age 14, informal preschool education, promotion of physical education and recreational activities, special consideration for the children of weaker sections of the population including scheduled castes and tribes, prevention of exploitation of children, and provision of special facilities for children with handicaps. The Department of Women and Child Development was set up within the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985.

India became a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2000 is comprehensive legislation to provide justice and opportunities to the children of India for their growth and development. The Act is based upon the provisions of the Indian Constitution and four broad rights outlined in the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child, including the right to survival, protection, development and participation. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 lays down the primary law for not only the care and protection of children but also for the adjudication and disposition of matters relating to children in conflict with law.

The National Charter for Children, a statement of intent embodying the Government's agenda for development of children, was adopted on 9 February 2004. Underlying the National Charter for Children 2004, is the intent to secure for every child the right to a healthy and happy childhood, to address the root causes that negate the healthy growth and development of children, and to awaken the conscience of the community in the wider social context to protect children from all forms of abuse, while strengthening the family, society and the nation. The Charter also provides specific protection for children in difficult circumstances, children with disabilities, children from marginalized and disadvantaged communities protection from all kinds of abuse. A National Commission for Protection of Child Rights was established in February 2007 to enforce children's rights and support effective implementation of laws and programmes relating to children.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in 13 specific occupations and 57 processes that are hazardous to the children's lives and health. The Ministry of Labour and Employment recently issued a notification prohibiting employment of children below the age of 14 years as domestic servants or in tea shops and dhabas (restaurants along highways) restaurants, hotels, motels, tea shops, resorts, spas or in any other recreational centres, effective from October 10th, 2006.

Children in red light areas are not identified as a separate category in any of the acts and charters concerning children in India. They are included under 'children in difficult circumstances' or 'children from marginalised and disadvantaged communities', although they have very unique and specific protection concerns. The youth living in the red light areas and involved in the YPP project at SANLAAP therefore felt that it was important to conduct a study to specifically address and better understand the lives of these children as a distinct group.

### Study Objectives:

- To assess the vulnerability of children and youth working and living in red light areas to commercial sexual exploitation and abuse.
- To identify children who are not attending school and are not under the care of a guardian.
- To explore strategies for strengthening the protection of these children and youth through participation in the Youth Partnership Project.

## 1.1 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Children between the ages of 12 to 18 years growing up in red light areas are considered to be especially vulnerable to a range of potential risks and trauma, including emotional, physical and even sexual abuse. As boys and girls near puberty, they often find it especially difficult to cope and adapt to this environment. For this reason, the study is specifically focused upon this age group. Recent studies and experience from the field have shown that boys are also vulnerable to various kinds of abuse and exploitation and therefore the survey has been conducted with boys as well.

### Approach: The Youth-Led Concept

The approach utilized in this study is based upon the guiding principle of meaningful child and youth participation that provides the foundation of the YPP Project. YPP-SA Peer Supporters and Youth Motivators were trained as surveyors and primary data collectors. Of the 13 Youth Surveyors, the majority lived in the red light areas themselves, which facilitated access to the children being interviewed, as well as their guardians.

Engaging young people in studies and evaluation not only generates useful knowledge that can be used to inform and strengthen advocacy and protection initiatives, but also provides valuable opportunities for the development and empowerment of youth participants themselves. From this study, it is clear that the youth survey process is mutually beneficial for the young people and organizations involved, the broader community, as well as the research process itself.

### Direct Involvement of Youth Strengthens the Research Process

- Youth from the red light area community have unique access to children living in vulnerable situations;
- Young people are well placed to evaluate the quality and accuracy of the research findings based on their own experiences and practical knowledge;
- Young people are well placed determine the appropriateness of methodology utilized, particularly from an ethical perspective, when the topic of study directly resonates with their own or their families' and friends' life experiences;
- Young people can establish rapport with their peers (the primary study target group) during the interview process that would be significantly more difficult for an adult or outside researcher to achieve;
- Children are likely to feel more comfortable with young people who there are of a similar age or slightly older and as a result, will speak and share their observations, thoughts and opinions more openly and honestly.

## Participation in the Research Process: Benefits to Youth

- Participation in the survey offered participating youth valuable opportunities to develop their skills in a number of different areas, including conducting interviews, interpersonal skills, coordination, teamwork and problem-solving. These skills were all frequently utilized by youth while conducting the study in the field;
- Building understanding of research methodologies, data collection, data tabulation and analytical skills;
- Gaining a sense of personal accomplishment and pride as important contributors to this study, which generated valuable information about their community;
- Reinforcing their public identity as YPP members within their communities builds confidence as their efforts are appreciated by local community members.

This study has shown the vast and often underestimated potential of young people to initiate and innovate. During the rigorous primary data collection process, the youth demonstrated tremendous leadership, coordination and management skills. For example, small teams of youth were responsible for coordinating the implementation of the survey in each red light area. Each team then broke into pairs to conduct the interviews. Each pair was tasked to interview a certain number of children and guardians. Careful coordination was required to ensure that the team was progressing and to avoid duplication of interviews. Hand-drawn area maps were drafted by the youth at the start of the study in order to clearly indicate the geographical area to be covered. Proper coordination was also ensured through regular weekly youth surveyor meetings.

## 1.2 Ensuring Protection of Youth During the Research Process

While the SANLAAP youth led the study planning and implementation, the organisation staff and adult YPP India team members were responsible for ensuring that the youth were fully supported and safe during every step of the process. The protection of youth conducting the study was paramount and careful planning was required to make certain they faced no harm or risk in the red light areas and while conducting interviews with children and guardians. A detailed set of “Protection Guidelines” were developed and disseminated to all participating youth. Workshops were also held with experts and researchers to equip the youth with the necessary skills required for conducting interviews, as well as to review basic “do’s and don’ts” during the primary data collection process.

### 1.3 Involvement of Youth

- The initial idea of conducting a survey emerged from a YPP Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Meeting held at SANLAAP between youth participating in the project and the adult YPP team members.
- An orientation on the key study concepts was organized with youth by YPP staff. Detailed discussions addressed the following questions:
  - Why should we conduct this study?
  - Who will be surveyed and where?
  - Who will conduct the study and how?
  - What are the possible challenges?
  - How will the study findings be utilized?
- With the support of adult team members, a concept note was developed outlining the youth objectives and ideas. This concept note was shared with SANLAAP management and ECPAT International.
- Workshops with an expert researcher were organized to equip the youth with the necessary research skills and address the following topics:
  - Potential risks and challenges in conducting interviews
  - Interview tips and pointers: what to say and what not to say
  - Emphasis of the point that youth should avoid creating false expectations or making promises to children during the interview
  - Review of study strategies and methodologies with the youth for input and feedback.
- The questionnaire developed for the study was shared with the youth for feedback
- The youth then field-tested the questionnaire and based on their experiences, important changes were made in order to finalize the questionnaire.
- Primary data collection was done by conducting interviews based on the questionnaire. 14 youth (YPP Youth Motivators and Peer Supporters) led the data collection process.
- The data tabulation process was supported by adults, with youth inputting the raw data from the questionnaire into tabulated forms and entering this information into the computer.
- The youth supported the data analysis process and confirmed analysis findings with their own observations.
- The youth reviewed the draft report, providing additional input and recommendations.
- Youth surveyors, with the support of adult team members, conducted follow-up outreach to children and youth surveyed, inviting them to join SANLAAP and YPP activities including the peer support programme, youth club and night shelter.



## 1.4 Operational Definitions

The following terms were defined and discussed with the team conducting the survey to ensure clarity of understanding:

**Vulnerability:** Susceptibility to physical or emotional injury or attack. A state of defencelessness, unprotectedness, liability to further risks and threats or succumbing to temptation or manipulation.

**Child:** Any person under 18 years of age.

**Red Light Area:** Neighbourhood or part of a neighbourhood where businesses connected to the sex industry are located. In some red light areas, prostitution may take place legally, while other red light areas are known for prostitution.

**CSEC:** The commercial sexual exploitation of children consists of criminal practices that demean, degrade and threaten the physical and psychosocial integrity of children. There are three primary and interrelated forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children: prostitution, pornography and trafficking for sexual purposes. Commercial sexual exploitation of children comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or in kind to the child or a third person or persons.

**Micro Projects:** Small scale activities conducted by young people to bring about positive change at the individual and community levels.

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization

**Peer Supporter:** Youth involved in the YPP project and trained in Peer Support techniques for assisting youth at risk and survivors of trafficking and CSEC in local schools and shelters located in areas where there are high rates of trafficking. Peer Supporters work with youth in both one-on-one and group sessions, utilizing interactive and fun techniques to encourage discussion and share information.

**Youth Motivators:** Youth members of the project management team who lead the implementation of YPP activities. YMs are involved in all aspects of the project, from strategic planning and coordination to budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting.

## 1.5 Target Group

The focus of this study was not specifically on women in prostitution in red light areas, but the children and young people who are living in and growing up in red light areas. This includes:

- Children of women in prostitution in red light areas or from families connected to prostitution in the red light area through pimping, renting out rooms and provision of other related services.
- Children who are living with their families who are residents of red light area may or may not be connected with sex trade

This study aims to understand the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children whose mothers / guardians are connected with prostitution. Young girls are often kept hidden and are heavily guarded and forced to stay indoors. Access to the girls for the purpose of conducting interviews was therefore difficult. Given that the surveyors were young people themselves, their protection concerns were also taken into consideration when developing the survey plan.

## 1.6 Site Selection

### BOWBAZAR

“Bowbazar” is commonly said to be a corruption of the name “Bahu Bazar” or “Bride’s Bazar”. The Bowbazar market on Bipin Behari Ganguly Street is known for its jewellery shops besides other shops dealing in wooden furniture, musical instruments, shoes, seasonal fruits, fresh vegetables and other types of food. The narrow lanes of Bowbazar historically contained numerous kothas or baiji-quarters that housed numerous singing and dancing girls, who were coached and trained by renowned dance teachers. As time passed, things have changed and the kothas of Bowbazar are now in decline. Bowbazar now houses a red light area where about 12,000 sex workers live and work. Slum dwellers, truckers and migrant labourers inhabit the surrounding areas.

### KALIGHAT

One of the oldest neighbourhoods in South Kolkata, Kalighat is densely populated and vibrant, with a rich history of cultural intermingling as a result of various foreign incursions into the area over time. Famous for its Kali Temple, Kalighat is also home to a red light area, although smaller than Bowbazar or Sonagachi.

### TOLLYGUNGE

A small red light area comprised of a few houses located near Prince Anwar Shah Road.

### KHIDDERPUR

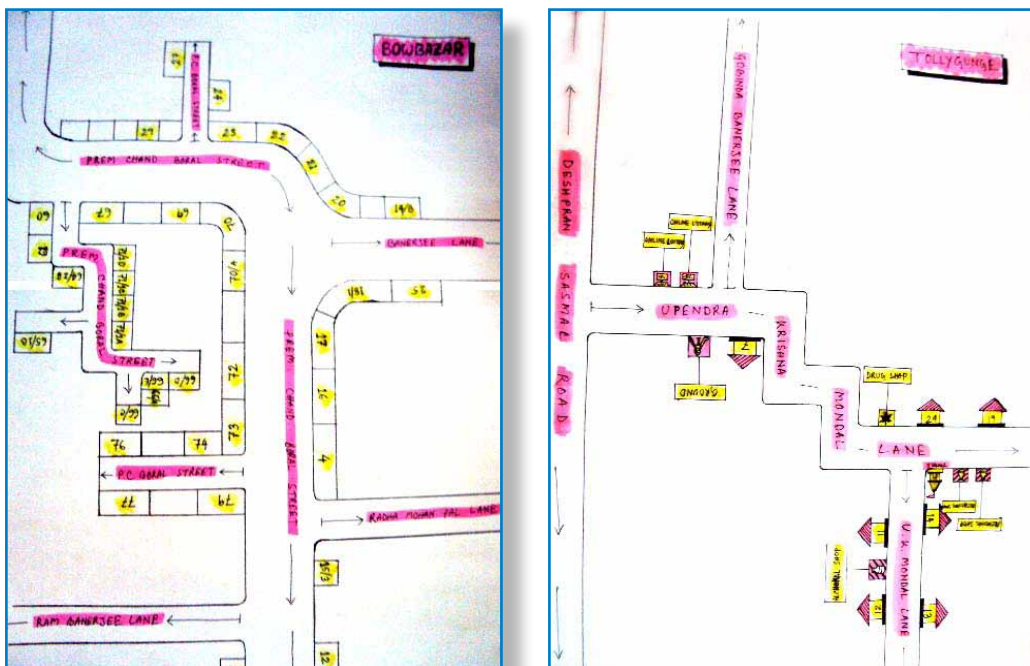
This red light area is situated near the Port, where there is a significant Muslim population.

Sonagachi, the biggest red light area in Kolkata and one of the biggest in Asia, was left out of the scope of this study, as it was determined to be overly challenging for the youth to conduct research inside this location and this would have also entailed significantly more human resources than were available.

A multi-stage sampling process was followed. A list of maximum number of children to be interviewed was first compiled through door-to-door visits and reviewing NGO attendance registers. From the list, 50% of the girl children, 25% of boy children and 40% of the families (having children between the ages of 12-18) were selected for the survey sample.

Similarly, a list of families with children aged 12 to 18 years was created. Respondents were then chosen from every 10th number (as described in the sampling frame prepared by the youth surveyors) following the simple random sampling method.

In order to compile the door-to-door list of children and families, the young people conducting the survey made maps of the area and then divided the houses amongst themselves.



## Sample Size

	FAMILIES	GIRL CHILDREN	BOY CHILDREN
Tollygunge	7	6	3
Kalighat	35	22	20
Khidderpur	23	18	16
Bowbazar	36	67	55
Total	101	113	94

## 1.8 Primary Data Collection

### Individual Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Case Studies

Individual interviews formed the basis of primary data collection through a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted with boys and girls between the ages of 12 to 18.

## 1.9 Field Testing of the Questionnaire

Each youth surveyor conducted three to five interviews based on the draft questionnaire. They provided specific suggestions and feedback, based upon which the questionnaire was subsequently reviewed and changed.

## 1.10 Secondary Data Collection

Newspaper articles, research reports and academic journals formed the basis for the secondary data collection process.

## 1.11 Data Analysis

The Youth Surveyors used a simple manual tabulation system to convert the responses from the questionnaire to data. Additional analysis was conducted of the notes taken during focus group discussions, case studies, as well as observations made by the youth in the field.

## CHAPTER II

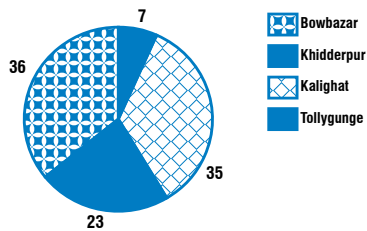
### Raw Data from Survey Process

Locations: Tollygunge, Kalighat, Khidderpur, Bowbazar Red Light Areas

Total Number of Families Interviewed: 101

#### 2.1 Distribution of Families Interviewed by Location

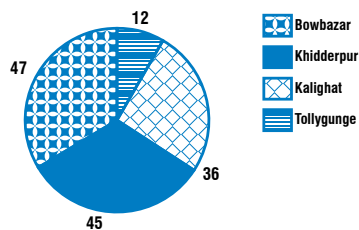
Number of Families Interviewed



Total number of children between 12-18 years of age among the families interviewed: 140

#### 2.2 Distribution of Children Aged 12 to 18 Years by Location

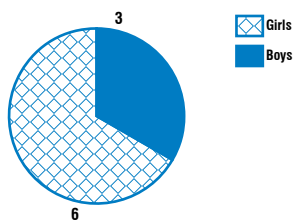
Number of Families Interviewed From Different Areas



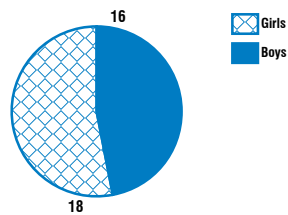


2.3 Gender Distribution of Children Interviewed by Location

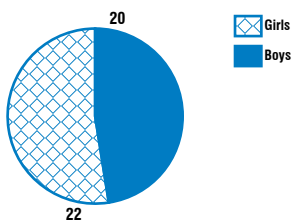
Tollygunge



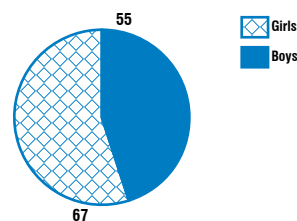
Khidderpur



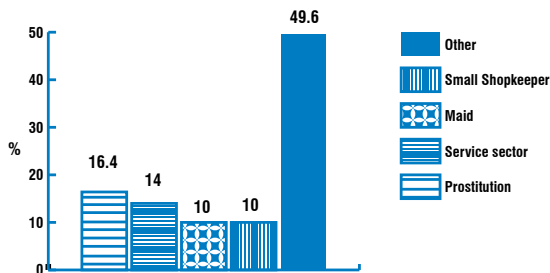
Kailghat



Bowbazar



2.4 Primary Family Occupation



A total of 207 responses were collected on the occupation of the families of the children interviewed for the study. Income from prostitution or the sex trade was reported as the highest, in cases where the mothers or women of the family were engaged in sex work.

Of the 10% of responses reporting that their occupation involved running small shops, 1% of these owned or managed alcohol shops selling local liquor. Although no responses specifically confirmed this information, the Youth Surveyors shared that the alcohol shops also often sell “ganja” or cannabis.

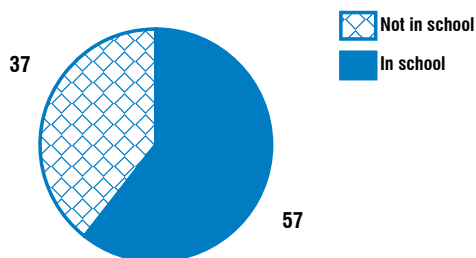
**“No one can understand the humiliation and emotional trauma a child goes through when he is asked to fetch cigarette for his mother’s babu (client)”**

– quote from a young boy in the Bowbazar red light area

## 2.5 School Attendance

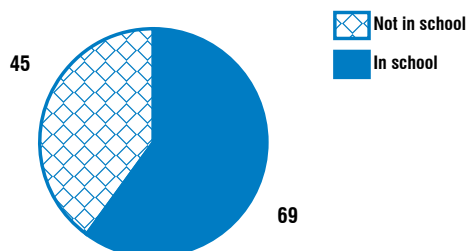
	Tollygunge Children		Kalighat Children		Khidderpur Children		Bowbazar Children		Total	
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl
Yes	Nil	4	13	16	13	11	31	37	57	68
No	3	2	7	6	3	7	24	30	37	45
Total	3	6	20	22	16	18	55	67	94	113

### School Education for Boys



Of the 94 boys interviewed, 60.6% were currently attending school, while 39.3% were out of school. This significant drop-out rate highlights the unfortunate reality that low school attendance is one of the most common problems for children living in red light areas. As can be seen from the graph below, drop-out rates for girls are similarly high.

### School Education for Girls



High drop-out rates of children living in red-light areas can be attributed to the following factors reported by children and families interviewed:

- **Economic Constraints:** many single mothers cannot support the rising costs of education in higher classes. The subsidized education system in India (Sarbashiksha) minimizes school fees but does nothing to prevent the ‘hidden’ costs in the form of books, computer fees, etc.

- Many children assist their mothers who work as domestic maids in affluent households in the neighbourhood, leaving little time for school.

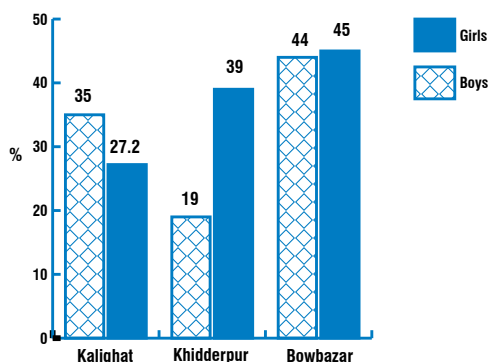
- Apathy towards Education: children often do not have a supportive environment at home to help them do well in school. Education may be seen as 'useless', especially for girls.
- Girls are often married very early or put to work if their mothers/guardians hope for them to have a life outside of the red-light area. Unfortunately, some are coerced into prostitution to bring the family income. In either case, education is not seen as necessary.
- Failure to pass in exams results in lack of motivation and causes children to become unwilling to go back.
- Fear of studying English was cited by children interviewed as one of the reasons for not going to school.
- Boys are under pressure to start earning early and do odd jobs, including running errands, sitting in shops, catering or managing 'playwin' kiosks which often ultimately leads to discontinuing their education.
- Children typically leave school in Class V, VI & VII when the pressure mounts and academic subjects become more difficult to grasp without guidance and support.

The present education system is not sufficiently child-friendly to address issues outside of academics. Overburdened school teachers seldom have time to provide the additional attention required by these children. Sadly, they are sometimes teased by their peers if their identity or the location of their home is revealed. Teachers have also been known to be disrespectful and neglect children that belong 'come from such places'. Other challenges faced by children from red light areas include

- Addictions to alcohol, substance abuse, gambling etc. hinder educational pursuits.
- Lack of space to study: most of the children live with their mothers in a one-room space. They cannot enter the room when their mother is entertaining clients and therefore they spend most of their time on terraces, verandas or in the streets and parks.
- Frequent migration also emerged as a primary reason for high rates of attrition.

## 2.6 Boys and Girls not Attending School

Surveys conducted in Kalighat evidenced the interesting trend of larger numbers of boys dropping out of school than girls. This could be attributed to the fact that there are a large number of NGOs and organisations working in the area. Although Kalighat is a small red light area, it is estimated that



over 20 organisations are working to provide services and carry out protection programmes for children. Girls are the main focus of protection programmes to break the cycle of second generation prostitution and protect them from sexual exploitation.

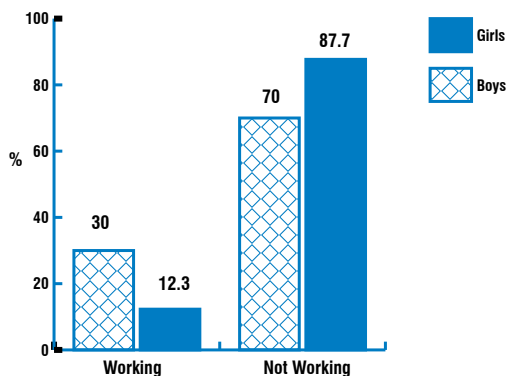
The number of children who have never been admitted to school is negligible. This indicates that almost all children, even those living in red light areas, get admitted to schools, which are

predominantly municipal and government funded. This can be attributed to the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Programme) implemented by the Government of India for children between the ages of 0 to 6. The ICDS Scheme includes, among other services, free pre-school education for children and their enrolment into schools. Admission to primary levels is also free and therefore poses little difficulty for the families. However the challenges described earlier arise for children who remain in school until Class X - XII.

## 2.7 Children Engaged in Jobs Earning Income

	Tollygunge (Boys: 3 / Girls: 6)		Kalighat (Boys: 20 / Girls: 22)		Khidderpur (Boys: 16 / Girls: 18)		Bowbazar (Boys: 55 / Girls: 67)		Total	
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl
Yes	2	1	5	5	3		18	8	28	14
No	1	5	15	17	13	18	37	59	66	99
Total	3	6	20	22	16	18	55	67	94	113

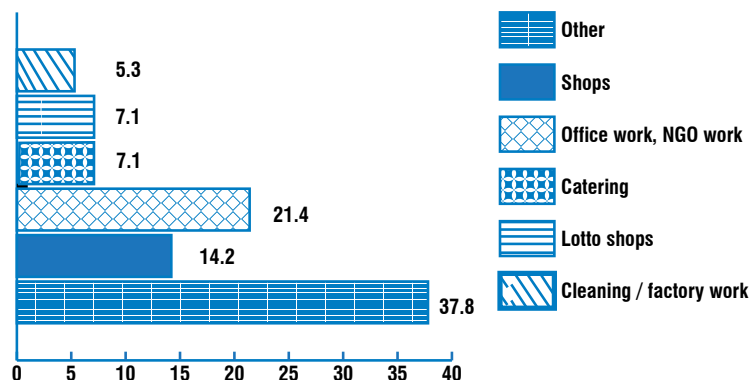
**Total number of boys and girls working for income**



Types of work children are engaged in include:

1. Managing and working in tea and alcohol shops
2. Providing catering services in weddings and functions
3. Working in factories
4. Painting posters and billboards
5. Managing lottery shops
6. Working as maids / domestic help
7. Working in gold and stone setting (jewellery) shops

## 2.8 Types of Work Children are Involved In



14.2% of children said that they worked in shops, including alcohol shops. Four respondents said they were involved in 'business', however the specific nature of the business was not revealed. Some jobs, such as catering services, are seasonal in nature and are available specifically during the wedding season. Other jobs, including painting, are irregular and compensation is on per-job basis.

Three children said they worked as maids or domestic help in households. The kinds of chores they were responsible for included washing utensils, washing clothes, and cleaning.

One youth respondent was involved in prostitution. She worked six to nine hours each day and reported that she could earn up to Rs. 1,000 per day.

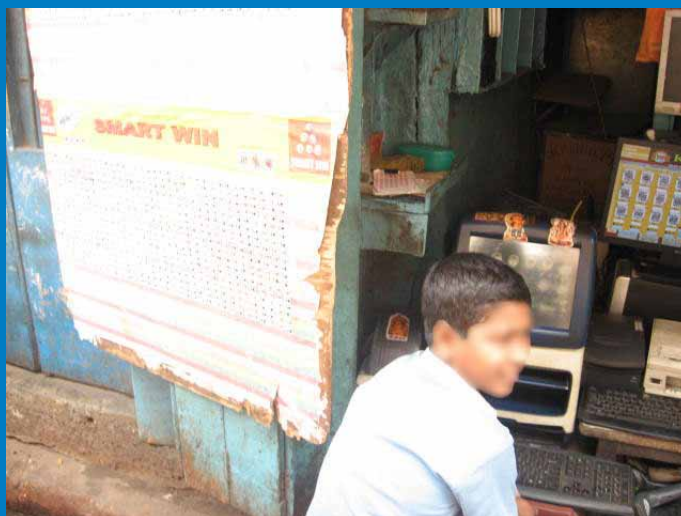
Hours of Work per Day	
Shops	1 to 4 hours
Catering	4 to 5 hours
Office work, NGO work	6 to 8 hours
Lotto Shops, Factory work	More than 8 hours

## Dangers Faced by Working Children

Managing lottery shops, which is predominantly done by boys, exposes children to a wide range of risks. The study did not encounter any girls working in lottery shops. Men from the area, including pimps, customers and others, frequent the numerous online lottery shops in the red light areas. They are often intoxicated and may become abusive when they lose money. Children running the lotto shops are frequently verbally abused and may even be subjected to physical abuse as passive

subjects upon which these men vent their anger and frustration when losing money. While managing the lotto shops, some children fall prey to playing and betting themselves. Being a source of quick money for the children, the children are tempted to drop out from school and work in these shops. With the funds they acquire, boys are able to buy cigarettes, gutka (chewing tobacco) or even visit the sex-workers in the area.

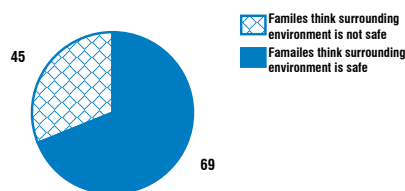
Income from online lottery shops	Rs. 100 (USD \$2) per day or Rs. 800 (USD \$17) to 1000 (USD \$22) per month, depending upon sales and profits
Hours of work	1.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. (9 hours per day)



One youth respondent shared that he became addicted to playing lotto when he was employed to manage a small kiosk with one computer in the Tollygunge red light area. He started borrowing from a moneylender and ended up borrowing hundreds of rupees from him. He is now in debt and has to work double to earn and repay his debts to the moneylender. The moneylender has come to his house and has threatened him to pay his debts quickly.

## 2.9 Family Perceptions of the Safety of the Red Light Area Environment

### Safety Perception



Of the 101 families interviewed, 69% thought that the environment of the red light area was not conducive to the well-being of their children and to positive development. The threat perceptions identified related primarily to girls.

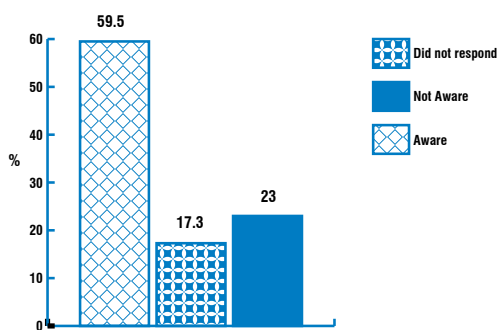
Focus group discussions with mothers revealed that they felt helpless when a client touched, molested or teased their daughters verbally. Some felt pressure from their families to enter their daughter into prostitution. Of the 69% of families

who stated that they felt that the red light environment was not conducive to the well-being of their children, 40% were willing to consider ways to get their children out of the area.

However, not all possible options are in the best interest of the child, such as early marriage. Marriage is seen as a convenient way of removing a girl child from the red light area and protecting her from prostitution and therefore mothers are willing to arrange for their daughters to be married at an early age. For boys, a common strategy is to work and save enough money to get a room in 'proper residential location' away from the red light area for their mothers and families.

## 2.10 HIV/AIDS Awareness

### Awareness about HIV/AIDS



Protection depends not only upon external factors but also on individual knowledge and availability of information about threat perceptions and imminent risks. Children who are unaware about the risks that exist are more vulnerable to fall prey to them. This study in made an effort to ask children about their awareness of issues including HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, etc.

Of the total number of children interviewed, 49.7% reported they knew about HIV/AIDS. The parameter used for 'awareness' was having minimum knowledge on the routes of transmission

and ways of prevention. 17.3% of children said that they were not aware of HIV/AIDS at all or had just heard of the name, but did not know anything more. 32.8% did not respond to the question.

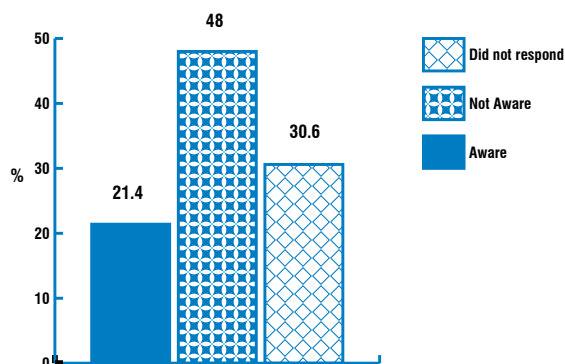
The level of awareness about HIV/AIDS can be attributed to the efforts of a number of organisations currently working on the issue in the red light areas and awareness campaigns that have been conducted. Some children attributed their knowledge to the popular "bula di" campaign led by the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society (WBSPACS). Capitalizing on the commonly



accepted authority of a didi (“elder sister” in Bengali), Bula-di educates the public in West Bengal about HIV transmission and prevention. A non-threatening, sari-clad puppet with large, round eyes, Bula-di appears on billboards, advertisements, television and radio commercials, as well as posters throughout the city.

## 2.11 Awareness of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

### Awareness of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

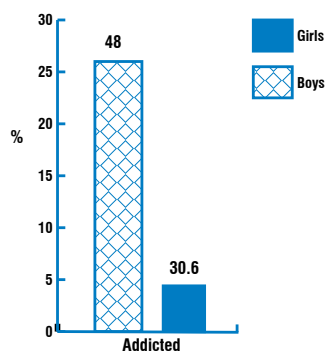


21.4% of child respondents had some awareness of sexual abuse and exploitation. The parameter for understanding their level of awareness was basic knowledge about sexual abuse, including what constitutes sexual abuse and that children can be vulnerable to such abuse. The level of awareness can be attributed primarily to the witnessing of cases of abuse within the area. Children who are involved in NGO programmes in the area were also more aware of these issues. There was no correlation between school attendance and awareness and school children were

not necessarily more aware than non-school going children about such risks.

## 2.12 Addiction Among Children

### Number of Boys and Girls Using Addictive Substances



Of the 94 boys interviewed, 26% said that they consumed addictive substances. Substances mentioned included cigarettes, gutka (chewing tobacco) and alcohol. 4.4% girls reported that they consumed addictive substances.

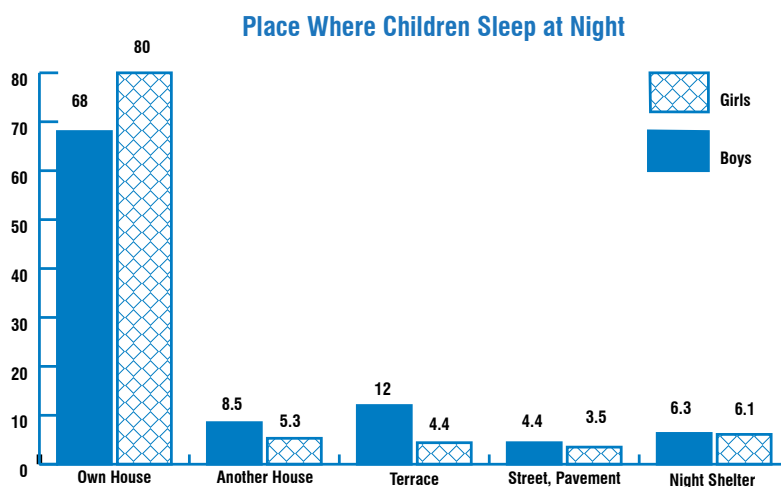
Alcohol consumption was highest in Tollygunge, as this area has many local liquor shops. Apart from the shops, many households also produce local liquor and children of the house often participate in the alcohol making process. Many people come to the area to buy and procure alcohol. Police frequently raid in these local unlicensed shops and houses for the illegal sale and consumption of alcohol. A boy interviewed shared that subsequent to one such police raid, he had to flee with his elder cousin to the house of a relative for two months.

Habitual use of addictive substances is behaviour that children learn from their mothers, fathers and

family members. Consumption and procurement of 'ganja' (marijuana, cannabis) is commonplace in the red light area, although none of the children said that they consume 'ganja'.

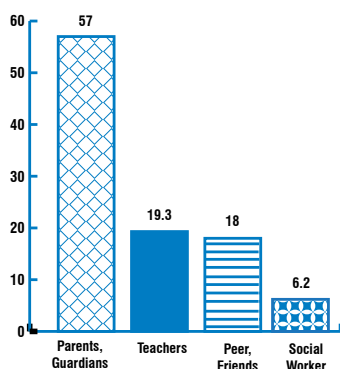
## 2.13 Where Children Sleep at Night

Though many children stated that they sleep in their own room at night, a considerable number of children in the red light area do not have the safety of their own house during at night. Children often sleep in the rooms of older women who are paid by their mothers to take care of the children while they are with clients. Sleeping on cramped terraces is very common in these places. Makeshift sleeping places are created with plastic sheets overhead. The terraces are surrounded by rooms where there is regular movement of men who are coming to purchase prostitution services. The children sleep in the middle where there is clear space. Adults and older men also sleep in these terraces. One boy interviewed said that he was bitten by a rat at night and had to undergo treatment and medication for two months.



## 2.14 Physical Abuse: Beating & Slapping

### Incidents of Beating and Slapping



This indicator has to be considered within the Indian cultural context, where beating and slapping children is seen as a normal aspect of discipline, rather than an exception. The youth interviewers faced difficulties in helping respondents understand the importance of this indicator with respect to exploitation of children. Youth surveyors observed that the level of physical violence is especially high in the red light areas, particularly domestic violence at home, violence against women perpetrated by clients, or violence on the streets caused by drunken brawls and consumption of various substances. These types of violence are regularly witnessed

by children who also experience 'violent behaviour' in their daily lives. During interactions with children outside the purview of the survey, youth surveyors observed that the children in the red light area exhibit unnecessarily violent behaviour, even while they playing with peers and frequently employ physical violence to solve minor conflicts amongst themselves. The children also use violent behaviour to vent their frustrations and deal with feelings of anger.

I once saw a boy, about 14 years old, smash his friend's head against a wall because he did not like a comment that was made about the colour of his shirt. Thankfully the boy was not seriously hurt.

There is a lot of aggression and anger in these children, which is evident in the way they break into serious physical fights over minor reasons.

An interesting piece of information emerged around discussions of this indicator, related to the behaviour of social workers in a particular red light area where a large number of NGOs are working. The children reported instances of slapping and beating of children by social workers in these centres and shelters run by the NGOs. The beatings and slapping have not resulted in any serious injury to a child, according to the respondents.

### 2.15 Sexual Abuse

Have You Heard of Cases of Sexual Abuse?		
Area	Yes	No
Kalighat	42	
Tollygange	9	
Khidderpur	34	
Bowbazar	122	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>207</b>	

Children from families directly engaged in sex work were more vulnerable to abuse of all forms – physical abuse to neglect and sexual abuse. 100% of the children interviewed answered that they had heard of cases of sexual abuse that have occurred with their friends, siblings, and other children living in their neighbourhood. Cases of sexual abuse varied from molestation and touching

private parts, kissing on the mouth, being asked to perform a sexual act on an adult to rape or forceful penetration.

## Persons Perceived as Likely to Abuse Children

Area	Family Members	Men from Community (Known)	Men from Community (unknown), clients	Peers and Friends	Did not respond	Total
Kalighat	5	7	15	12	3	42
Bowbazar	12	60	14	27	9	122
Khidderpur	6	2	14	12		34
Tollygunge	2		3	4		9
Total	25	69	46	55	12	207

From the table above, it appears that men from the community are seen by children as the leading perpetrators of abuse of children. These men include relatives, neighbours, political party members and local club members. All these men live in the red light area and are known to the children. They often wield some power and authority in the area and in the lives of the children. Children in red light areas are easy prey to child abusers, as they are they are frequently unsupervised. The lack of a father in their lives makes them gravitate towards men who show them attention and affection. Young girls are particularly vulnerable around the age of puberty. Because of their early exposure to sex, children often learn to relate to others, to gain approval and attention by using their own sexuality, which increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Children often imitate the actions of their mothers with their friends and peers. This starts from 11 to 12 years of age amongst both girls and boys.

## Political Parties

Red light areas are spaces for various illegal activities and political parties are eager to gain power in these areas. The red light areas are a fertile ground for the political parties to recruit cadres (so called volunteers) amongst unemployed boys who are unskilled and semi-literate. These boys are enlisted in the party and then used for different kinds of party work.

Boys may be lured with money and also sometimes with addictive substances. The youth receive immediate cash and embrace negative habits and unhealthy lifestyle choices. They often spend the money they receive to buy alcohol or cigarettes.

Addiction is a serious problem in a red light area and many adolescent and teenage boys become addicted to tobacco chewing, cigarettes or “ganja” (cannabis). Political party workers take advantage this, coupled with the poverty and poor economic conditions of their families.

Boys are used during the time of voting to give ‘proxy’ or false votes for their respective political parties, despite the fact that they are still minors. They made be asked to make crude bombs to be

used during inter-party clashes. In conflicts and clashes, it is the young boys who are sent out first to face the opposing party and they often become injured and hurt.

During inter-party clashes, youth may be arrested and taken into police custody. On the behest of the party leader the youth are then released. This obligates them to continue serving the party. By being arrested, their names are registered with the police station and they can then be arrested by the police on suspicion or during politically tense times. The youth therefore feel they have no option but to remain under the 'protection' of the party. Leaving the party becomes difficult with the progression of time and they become increasingly entrenched. Another reason youth cannot leave the party is fear of wrath and revenge from opposing parties, as they frequently target each other in order to cause harm.

## CHAPTER II

### Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were undertaken in an effort to collect more qualitative information from children regarding their perceived vulnerabilities. A total of eight FGDs were conducted to discuss and better understand the perceptions, opinions and beliefs of the children involved in the survey.

Several key stakeholders connected with the children of the red light areas in different ways were also interviewed. Three interviews were conducted: one with a police officer (Assistant Officer-In-Charge of Watgunge Police Station, with jurisdiction over the Khidderpor red light area) and two with principals of government-aided schools (one for boys and one for girls) where children from two red light areas study.

90% of the children participating in FGDs answered that they do not feel safe in the red light area where they live. This percentage was higher for girl respondents. Some children said that they do not like going outside during late evening hours when the area becomes very crowded. Threats mentioned by children include illness or sickness and political disturbances in which children can be caught in the middle. Beatings from parents and teachers were also cited as a threat to their safety. The use of children to support political agendas and illegal activities was also mentioned.

Children feel that they are often not in a position to protest against adults and that they are often not fully aware of the consequences of their actions. Boys are frequently used for politically motivated activities, including hurling handmade bombs, rigging during votes, and transporting bombs from one adult to another since police will not suspect the children. All of the child respondents stated that they wanted to get out of the area. In a group discussion conducted with nine boys, all of the boys unanimously stated that if they had an opportunity to change one thing in their life, they would want to leave this “bad” place and take their mothers away too. The desire to get their mothers out of the red light area places pressure on boys to start earning early in order to save funds to rent a place in another location.

Corporal punishment, including beating, slapping and other forms of punishment appear to continue in most schools that the children attend. A girl narrated a story where she was asked to stand in the sun holding her ears for one hour. She felt very sick and eventually fainted. The school authorities did not inform her family but some of her friends did and she was then taken to a doctor.

Unwelcome touches to the body by men in the area were also reported by the children. These men were primarily clients and customers who frequent the red light areas. Often the touches may not be direct but subtle brushing of the body or hand could also be the case. Children who are working mentioned beatings from their employers if there were any lapses in their work.

Most children go to their mothers when they are in danger. Most children do not have fathers in their lives and hence their mother is the only person they have to go to. Many cited their grandmothers or old women who take care of them. This is especially true when the mothers are mobile and roam from one place to another leaving their children in care of grandmothers or old women who survive by looking after other women's children as income in old age diminishes. Some children go to their friends or peers when they are in danger. However it is apparent that for children living in red light area forming stable relationships is difficult. Their relations with their mothers are often strained and they therefore turn to their peers when they are in trouble. Many also form very close bonds with other adults including social workers and teachers.

Financial hardship was identified as the key reason for dropping out of school. Peer pressure was noted as another reason, where children (mostly boys) become reluctant when their friends in the same school stop attending. Many of the children are the first generation of learners in their family and their parents who are illiterate are unable to guide them in their academics. This can become an additional hindrance in continuing their studies.

The children and mothers participating in the discussions appreciated the concept of the YPP Project and expressed interest in being involved in this initiative. Several were acquainted with the Peer Supporters and YPP youth in their communities and the work they were doing. Apart from the peer support programme, boys and girls expressed their desire to be involved in some kind of training which will help them to earn a livelihood in the future.

The primary causes identified for early marriage that emerged from the focus group discussions included:

- Parents want to move their daughters out of the RLA, and marriage is seen as a way out.
- Overexposure and early exposure to sex in the RLA leads to children engaging in sexual activities. When parents discover this, they feel that the only way to maintain the family dignity is to arrange marriage.
- Children fall in love and often elope with their friends. Girls are particularly vulnerable to this, as it is easier for boys to take advantage of their low self-esteem and over eagerness to move out of the area.

One girl said that she ran away with her boyfriend who promised to marry her. However after living together for some months, the boy abandoned her. She had no choice but to come back to the red light area. She had discontinued her studies while she was away and did not return to school.



## CHALLENGES AND SHORTCOMINGS

The objective of this study was not to be comprehensive but to represent a pilot study with a small sample size. For example, one of the largest red light areas in India, Sonagachi, was omitted from the scope of the study.

Difficulties shared by the Youth Survey team during review sessions included:

- The youth had to select a time for the interviews that was convenient for the interviewees. This sometimes created complications for the youth surveyors in terms of their own daily schedules.
- The children were often initially hesitant to talk to the youth and several meetings and rapport building sessions were required in order to conduct the interviews.
- Due to unfulfilled promises made by NGOs in the past, people hold negative perceptions regarding NGOs and see no value in participating in activities like the survey. NGOs at various points may have conducted different studies and surveys in the red light areas, building up the expectation within community that they would receive something (training, job, etc.) in return. Unfulfilled expectations have resulted a negative perception regarding any kind of survey or interview. Community members shared that they felt such surveys did nothing to benefit their condition or that of their children.
- The presence of men drinking alcohol inside a house while the youth were conducting interviews posed threats. In such situations, the youth conducting the interviews said that they would come back or requested support from an adult caregiver. In extreme situations, the house was eliminated from the interview list and replaced with another.
- Some of the children initially identified were not found when the youth went back later to conduct the interview. Reasons for their absence included: either the child was married and moved to a different place or was residing in an institution or shelter home. This posed a problem, as the sample size then had to be adjusted or new children had to be identified.
- It was initially difficult for the youth to conduct the interviews. They felt ill equipped to approach a child or a mother and share the purpose of the study. However, as time progressed, the Survey team become more confident and at ease in conducting the interviews.
- Some of the interviewees were uncomfortable with the idea of a youth filling out a written questionnaire during the course of the interview. The Youth Surveyors would have to note down the responses in a notebook and later put them into the questionnaire format.

## YOUTH SURVEYOR KEY FINDINGS

- The rate of literacy seems to be increasing. However this increase appears greater for boys than girls, many of whom are getting married early.
- Many girls who are continuing their studies are residing in homes run by NGOs.
- Women and girls are aware about the future of their children. They are concerned about child protection issues, particularly sexual abuse and exploitation.

- Some men (clients / babus / fathers) are also sensitive to the needs of their children.
- The girls interviewed appear to be more eager to study than boys
- Many of the boys are both working and studying.
- Many mothers shared their perception that the red light area is not the ideal place for children to live and grow up in. They want their daughters to leave the area as soon as possible once they reach puberty, as is the time that many girls are sexually abused and molested within their own homes and environment.
- Some girls seemed to be aware about family planning and safe sex practices.
- Though there are drop-out children, a remarkable number of boys and girls are fighting to continue their studies.
- There is a need to work with the school authorities on various adolescence issues. There still exists attitudinal problem, prejudices and rigidity towards the children of red light areas.
- The children in the area are not sufficiently aware of basic health, cleanliness and hygiene issues. This is reflected in the skin diseases and infections that they suffer.
- Many children and adolescents who are not going to school are involved in substance abuse.
- The levels at highest risk of drop-out are class VI-VII. Reasons for this include apathy towards education and its benefit, economic constraints and marriage.
- The primary earning options for young boys and girls are catering services in weddings and occasions. Many smaller boys are involved in operating online gambling (lotto) machines.
- 68% percent of the respondents have left school (while being involved with NGOs).
- Older boys (youth) become engaged in political activities during elections and are used by the political parties.
- The boys appreciated the formation of the YPP Youth Club in their area.
- There were some cases reported of girls sent to dance in Bihar, a neighbouring state of West Bengal.
- Girls who are not in school typically remain at home and do household chores. The boys roam the streets.

## RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY YOUNG PEOPLE

### For Families / Guardians

1. Be more aware of the well-being of children and try to engage the interest of the child when dealing with children.
2. Look after the health needs of children
3. Recognize the importance of education and continuing studies in school.
4. Refrain from physical violence, including beating and slapping at the slightest reason
5. Do not use derogatory language (slang) in front of children.
6. Do not force a child to leave school and getting married
7. Do not ask a child to run chores and errands which can be tempt them to try cigarettes, alcohol, etc.

8. Enroll children in the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), a Government child welfare scheme for 0-6 children and pregnant mothers for nutrition, pre-school education, and immunizations. This will ensure that the child will have a higher chance to getting enrolled into school and have their birth registered. Mothers in this programme can also learn about issues of child development.
9. Families should make sure that the child has the necessary citizenship documents.

### For Community Members

1. Refrain from teasing and humiliating children.
2. Do not discriminate between children of red light areas and children living in 'residential' neighbourhoods.
3. Local clubs in the community should be more socially conscious. Local club members or community leaders should share information with the women in their house on child development and protection issues and encourage their own children to remain in school.
4. Community leaders and members should ensure that children are not gambling on the streets or using drugs.
5. Meetings should be organized within the community to discuss child protection issues, including the sexual exploitation of children.
6. Ensure that all births and marriages are registered.
7. Strengthen communities to build care and protection 'safety nets' in order to receive trafficked children when reintegrated and protect them from traffickers, who are often from the same community.
8. "Community Watchdog Committees" should be established to ensure quality of services offered by NGOs. Meeting should be held between the committees and the NGOs to address issues such as the abuse of children in NGO care.

### For NGO Non-Governmental Organization

1. Do not give false promises or raise the expectations of children. Do not use these tactics to ensure enrolment of children.
2. In some communities, many NGOs work within the same geographical area, creating competition for enrolment and quality of services. Children may be negatively affected by this.
3. NGOs should coordinate activities and not duplicate programmes within the same area. This will prevent repetition of services and ensure that a diverse variety of services are provided. For example, many NGOs in red light areas work on education, but few on HIV/AIDS issues among children and young people or on livelihood issues.
4. NGOs should work with families and guardians, particularly with mothers, if possible, to inform them about child protection issues.
5. NGOs should increase community awareness programmes and participatory activities involving children.

6. Greater focus on vocational training and livelihood issues for youth living in the community is required. Dropouts can be brought together and taught functional literacy classes through the YPP Micro Projects.
7. Work towards motivating community members to open saving accounts and work with banks to ensure this. This will encourage a habit of savings for the future, especially among mothers.
8. Work in partnership with the police to ensure protection of children in the red light areas.
9. Open Night Shelters for children sleeping in terraces or on the pavement.
10. Youth Groups can work with the local administration to facilitate safe migration of young people, especially girls, into and out of the red light area.

### For Government

1. The government should prioritize child protection issues.
2. Initiate special programmes and government schemes targeting children and youth in red light areas. These could be in the form of Government Youth Centres, where young people can enrol for skills and job training, as well as placement for government jobs.
3. The government should take note of and make a list of children under 18 years working in alcohol shops, operating online gambling shops, and other such places where they are at a high risk of being exploited. Government representatives in the area should make follow-up visits to these places as a deterrent to employers from harming the children in any way.
4. Combat addiction amongst children to sniffing glue, chewing tobacco, etc. through awareness campaigns and posters.
5. Free health camps should be organised in the red light areas.
6. Political leaders should ensure that no children are involved in party activities. If they find out that children are being recruited, they should stop this immediately.
7. Local political parties should include child protection issues in their mandate.
8. Attention to be given and follow-up provided to children who are not attending school.
9. Ensure that the laws for children are implemented properly.
10. Create forums where children can access government representatives and talk to them.
11. Information on government welfare programmes for adolescents and youth should be easily accessible and access should be easy and simple. The government should do more to publicise these amongst the community and the youth.
12. Open a Night Shelter for boys and girls who have no safe place to sleep at night.
13. To reduce the dropout rate, greater educational support should be provided to the children by the government or NGOs.
14. The government has established the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) programme and developed the infrastructure of schools, but unfortunately these efforts have not reached drop-out children or children not enrolled into schools. Joint initiatives should be undertaken by NGOs and the government to reach out to these children and bring them to school.
15. Provide the 'Green Card' scheme for children who are unable to continue their study due to economic constraints under the SSA scheme.

16. The right to education campaign should be conducted in red light areas through awareness programs organized jointly by NGOs, school authorities and the government.

### Recommendations by Young People for Young People: What We Can Do

- Implementing projects like the Youth Partnership Project (YPP) can be beneficial to children and youth. Through the YPP, young people can establish peer-to-peer interaction with children who are in need of emotional support and who are facing problems.
- Youth should encourage their peers who are in vulnerable conditions to contact NGOs in their area for assistance. SANLAAP, for example, runs temporary shelters and drop-in-centres in the red light areas of Kolkata.
- Small scale Micro Projects can be supported amongst children who are not going to school. Micro Projects can be adapted to enhance functional literacy skills, basic geography can be taught through map puzzles and basic calculations and mathematics presented through child friendly and innovative teaching-learning methods.
- Literate youth in the community can take responsibility for teaching drop-out-children as part of their YPP peer-to-peer support programme.
- Initiate activities and create safe spaces like child and youth clubs in the community, where young people can access information that is necessary for their protection and discuss issues which they cannot share elsewhere.
- Youth clubs can initiate art and handicrafts activities for positive engagement with children and youth.
- Children and youth, especially boys, can be engaged through sports activities.
- Youth groups can organize community awareness programmes on issues including child sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour, HIV, etc.

### CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, red light areas are not going to disappear and it is likely that the sex trade will continue to thrive for many years to come. However, as noted at the beginning of this report, red light areas are not only places where the sex trade and various related illegal criminal activities take place, but also places where children are born, grow and live. These children are one way or another negatively affected by their environment. They are more likely to be physically, emotionally and sexually abused and exploited than children who do not live in such areas. Other children living in extremely difficult situations, such as street, platform and abandoned children also face numerous challenges, similar to those of children residing in red light areas. Our study is a small step towards identifying and highlighting these issues to people who can join us to extend a helpful hand.

YPP India Youth Surveyors

## Annex I:

### Interview Questions for Children Age 12-18

1. Name of respondent:
2. Main occupation of the family:
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. Are you currently in school?
5. If yes, in which class?
6. If you have dropped out, from which class and when?
7. List the reasons for dropping out below:

Reasons
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

8. If not admitted to school, why?

Reasons
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

9. Please describe your typical daily activities from morning to night.
10. Are you engaged in any money-earning job?
11. If yes, mention the kind of work, hours, place of work and wages received.

Kinds of work	Hours/ Days	Place of work	Salary

12. How do you spend your earnings?
13. Are you interested in resuming your studies?
14. If not, why?
15. a) Did you ever visit any NGO run centre? If yes, where? Do you go regularly?  
b) What services are you receiving?  
c) If discontinued, why?
16. What types of services would you like for an NGO run centre/school to provide?  
*[It is important here for the interviewer to be clear that the YPP will not necessarily be able to provide these services, in order to avoid unfairly raising expectations]*

Services
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

17. Are you addicted to pan /gutka / bidi / cigarette /alcohol / any other substance?
18. What is your future plan?
19. What do you need to fulfil your future plan?
20. Do you have any health problems and if so, have you received treatment for these?



21. Where do you sleep at night?
- a) on a terrace
  - b) in someone's room (not your own)
  - c) on the street / pavement / patio
  - d) NGO night shelter / centre
22. Have you heard of cases of sexual abuse?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
23. Who is most likely to abuse children in the area?
- a) relatives and family members
  - b) men from the community who are known to the children
  - c) unknown men coming to the area as clients
  - d) peers, friends
  - e) social workers
24. Have you been ever beaten and slapped?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
25. Who beats you the most?
- a) parents/ guardians
  - b) teachers in school
  - c) Social workers
  - d) Peers, friends

## Annex II

### Interview Questions for Family Members (with children between 12-18 years old)

Area Name and Address: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name of respondent:
2. Main occupation of the family:
3. How many children do you have?
  - i) 1
  - ii) 2
  - iii) 3
  - iv) 4
  - v) 5
4. How many of your children are aged between 12-18 years?
5. Please specify the number of boy and girl children, with names & ages:  
Boy children:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.  
Girl children:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

6. In which class do they study? (List separately)

Boy children:	Girl children
i)	
ii)	
iii)	
iv)	

7. If they have dropped out of school, from which class? When?

Boy children:	Girl children
i)	
ii)	
iii)	
iv)	

8. Reasons of dropping out (list separately for boy and girl children):

Boy children:	Girl children
i)	i)
ii)	ii)
iii)	iii)
iv)	iv)
v)	v)

9. If not admitted to school, why?

10. Marital status of your girl children (if married mention the name):

11. If married below 18 years, where do your daughters live?

12. In case of daughters living in the red light area, what is their occupation?

13. Are your children engaged in any job? Yes/ No?

If yes, Please specify the name, mention the kind of work, hours of work and their earning.

14. Are you interested in sending your son/daughter to school? Yes/No

15. If no, please list the reasons below:

Reasons
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

16. Have you ever sent your son daughter to an NGO run school? If yes where? How frequently do they go?
17. If discontinued, why?
18. What kind of services would you like for an NGO-run school to provide? List specifically.  
[It is important here for the interviewer to be clear that the YPP will not necessarily be able to provide these services, in order to avoid unfairly raising expectations]
19. Do you feel that your immediate environment is safe for your children? Why or why not? What concerns do you have for your boy children? What concerns do you have for your girl children?
20. What is your hope for your children's future?
21. Do you or your children have any health problems and if so, have you received treatment for these?
22. What do your children like to do in their free time?

## ANNEX III

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH CHILDREN

1. Do you feel safe in your surrounding area? If not, what do you feel are the biggest threats to your personal safety?
2. Whom do you turn to for assistance when a) you feel you are in danger, 2) when you feel sick, 3) when you are in need of food or money?
3. Do you attend any NGO-run centre? If not why? If attended earlier, why did you stop? What are your expectations from an NGO-run centre?
4. What are the key challenges to continuing education? What are the primary reasons for dropping-out? How can these problems be addressed?
5. If you could change one thing about your life today, what would it be?
6. What is your favourite thing to do in your free time?
7. Do you know about the YPP project? Would you like to attend an upcoming YPP Peer Support session in your community?

## ANNEX IV

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

1. What do you do to protect your children from potential dangers?
2. What are the main problems to continue education for your children?
3. Do you feel that the health services in your community are adequate? How could they be improved?
4. Do you know about HIV/AIDS and where people in your community can go for treatment and assistance?
5. Whom do you turn to for assistance when a) your children are sick, b) when you are in need of food or money?
6. What do you expect from NGOs working in your area?
7. Do you know about the YPP project? Would you like to for your children to be involved in the YPP Peer Support Programme.

## ANNEX V

### PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS

1. The surveyors will be youth who are locally well known in the respective area and also involved as peer supporters in the community under the Youth Partnership Project (YPP).
2. Experienced Caregivers working in the respective areas for a long time will provide support to the Surveyors for to ensure their safety and protection during the study.
3. Before starting the study, an orientation meeting will be organized with the survey team, including the caregivers, to discuss the study objectives and process in detail.
4. The youth are to be well informed about and prepared for any possible protection concerns that may arise while conducting the study by the YPP Child Protection Officers.
5. The study team will be divided into smaller groups from each area, with one or two Caregivers assigned for per location.
6. Meetings will be organised with local authorities and influential community leaders before the study is conducted to gain their support for the study. Their commitment will be important in the event any problems arise.
7. The planning of the study team, ie. where they will conduct the interviews and time and dates for the interviews, will be shared with the YPP Child Protection Officers and National Coordinator, to ensure everyone is aware of the whereabouts of the youth at all times.
8. The youth conducting the survey will carry SANLAAP identity cards, YPP identity cards, as well as phone numbers of the YPP Child Protection Officers, local police stations and numbers of the Caregivers assigned for their area of study.
9. At no time will any youth go alone to conduct an interview. They will always work in pairs.
10. Consent of the children giving the interview will be asked, as well as from their guardians, if present.



11. Interviews will be conducted during daytime. Do not conduct surveys in the evening or night in red light area. In the rare instance that an interview is scheduled late in the day, an adult must accompany the youth surveyors.
12. Youth will be instructed to immediately vacate any place or residence if they feel in any way threatened or uncomfortable while conducting an interview.
13. Youth should not start an interview in any place or residence where they do not feel comfortable.
14. Do not disclose information discussed during the interview with others, particularly case studies or specific experiences shared by children.
15. Do not give any commitment before, during or after the survey to the children and their guardians which one cannot fulfil.
16. Regular monitoring to be conducted by YPP adult staff to assess the survey progress and immediately address any protection concerns through regular follow-up meetings with the youth surveyors.
17. The YPP Child Protection Officer will be in regular contact with the youth surveyors at all times and will have primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of the youth conducting the study.

## REFERENCES

"A mandate to legalise prostitution". The Times of India, August 25, 2003.

"Around 2.8 million prostitutes in India". Indian Express, May 8, 2007.

The Constitution of India, (modified December 1st 2007), Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice. Accessed from [www.lawmin.nic.in](http://www.lawmin.nic.in) in December 2009.

The Constitution of India, Part III, Article 23 & 24 on Fundamental Rights. <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/jev.htm>, accessed on 8th December 2009.

"Engaging Youth in Participatory Research and Evaluation". Jane L. Powers and Jennifer S. Tiffany. Journal of Public Health Management & Practice, November 2006, Volume 12.

Guilty Without Trial - Women in the Sex-Trade in Calcutta. Carolyn Sleightholme and Indrani Sinha. January 2002. Published by STREE.

Mothers for Sale. Indrani Sinha and Shamita Das Dasgupta, published 2009.

National Report on "A World Fit for Children: Towards New Dawn", Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007.

Study on Child Abuse: INDIA 2007. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. Accessed from [www.wcd.nic.in/childabuse](http://www.wcd.nic.in/childabuse) in December 2009.



**ECPAT International**

328/1 Phayathai Road, Ratchathewi, Bangkok 10400

Tel: +66 2 215 3388, +66 2 611 0972 Fax: +66 2 215 8272 Email: [info@ecpat.net](mailto:info@ecpat.net) Website: [www.ecpat.net](http://www.ecpat.net)