

# Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and violence by law enforcing personnel and social service providers: Experience from Bangladesh

---

Noman Fatemi

## Introduction

Child sexual abuse has been defined as any sexual contact between child below 18 years of age and an adult where child is used for the sexual pleasure of the adult. Studies have shown that about 3% children are abused sexually. It has a notable long-term effect on the child and his family, as well as society. The child might face problems like depression, low-self esteem and proper mental development.

Like many other countries, Bangladesh is not an exception in this regard. The situation is even worst than some other countries, since big majorities of people are living in a low socio-economic condition. In order to explore the situation of the children, consultation was done with the children engaged in commercial sex and their opinions were documented in two big cities of Bangladesh. The study provides an overview of the Commercial Sexual Experiences of the Children (CSEC) and violation of rights related to the Child Protection Law with various law enforcing personnel and social service providers, knowledge of CRC and effectiveness of existing laws in Bangladesh.



## Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to ensure that the child-friendliness of the legal system and law enforcement that would be described in the final recommendation or legal reform will reflect the point of view and opinions of survivors, children currently engaged in CSEC and children at the risk of CSE. More specifically-

- To gain understanding of the experiences of the children currently engaged in CSEC related to Child Protection Laws with various law enforcers and other social service providers.

- To identify gaps and possible recommendations in CSEC based on experiences of the girls concerned

## Methodology

In mid 2004, 60 girls (10–18 years), either exposed to or at risk to commercial sex, sexual harassment and violence in two major cities of Bangladesh, participated in weeklong consultation with trained interviewers to share experiences through in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), role-play, group work and poster presentation. Documentary films from different countries are also used and children were asked to comment on the film.

## Results

Girls experienced sexual abuse by police (93%), lawyers (69%), and health care professionals (51%). Common assaults and other types of physical violence were being forced sex with police (83%) and health care professionals (29%), beating (93%), hair-pulling or pushing (35%), burn (40%), electric shock (23%), touching private-parts (86%), rude behavior by police (98%), judiciaries (93%), doctors (61%), felt insecurity in custody and court (89%). 91% girls were not aware about legal protection. 90% girls have positive experience about NGOs regarding counseling, healthcare, legal protection and rehabilitation support.

### *Bad experiences*

93% girls have experienced sexual abuse by police and lawyers abused 69% of the girls. Some girls (83%) mentioned that common assaults and other types of physical violence were being forced for having sex with police. Rude behavior by police is a common practice (98%), They became the victims of torture by many different ways like beating (93%), hair-pulling or pushing (35%), burn (40%), electric shock (23%), touching private-parts (86%). While working as maidservant, experienced sex with the master, usually come earlier from the office and forced her to have sex in absence of the wife and it became a regular practice. Many of them fell into sexual abuse and harassment by owner or manager of the factory while working into the garment industries. Since girls had no other earning opportunity, they took it as source of income. Those who born in the brothel consider engaging sex is a good profession, what they have experienced from their very childhood. But working in the brothel also need permission or a sort of license from police, and subsequently abused or raped by police personnel in exchange of giving permission. Police also takes bribe from girls. Moreover in order to become a professional sex worker, police had sex with them in the name of “test” them whether they are fit for sex or not. The girls are quite helpless in this regard, because they have to satisfy police all the time if they want to continue in brothel. Police also demands money in several occasions by blaming them as owner of illegal drugs or connection with underworld cadres. Also torture

them physically if the girls protest or refuse giving money. Some girls said that they were arrested by police, tortured physically and sexually for days and released only after giving bribe.

Children sometimes experience judiciary court and 93% girls have bad experiences about judiciary personnel. Children have to stay at the custody before placing them to court. Usually a dark room is sectioned for several girls and there is no bed for sleep. They also face sexual harassment in the custody, which is the safest place for anyone. The guards of the custody do this. They always feel them unsecured in the custody and court (89%). Moreover they gave bribe to the lawyers and others for arranging bails from the court. There is a negotiation between judges, lawyers, police and other personnel involved in the process. Children also face physical suffering within the confinement. Another sad thing is that none in the court treat them as “human being”, rather always call them in bad name like bad girls, prostitutes etc.

Children met health personnel, doctors in particular in ailment in the government hospital or in the private clinics. Many of them have bad impression about doctors and quality of services as well. A view in general is that doctors never treat them well as other patients. 29% Children mentioned were humiliated by health care professionals. Money is the key factor for good behavior. In some cases, doctors touched the private parts in the name of physical examination, also undressed them in some occasion, although they don't undress girls other coming from other than brothel.

### *Good experiences*

On a number of occasions, children have good experiences about people like police, doctors and other service providers. They helped them, treated well, supported them and protect the girls in many cases. Although their number is much lower, may be 12-15% according to children, but remained as good reminiscence on their mind. One of the girl mentioned that doctor rescued her from police, when she was tortured for two days in a fake case of theft. The doctor then gave her treatment, free medicine and send her to a renowned lawyer in the city for protection. In another occasion, one girl was rescued from hotel room, where hooligans kept her there and had forced sex for three days. The police officer helped her for treatment, informed her mother and put the hooligans into jail. The police officer gave confession in the court against the hooligans. Very few mentioned that they received good behaviors by health personnel in the hospital, none raised question about their identity.

Many NGOs are working with these children to improve their socioeconomic status, health awareness, providing legal protection and rehabilitation support. 90% girls have positive experience about NGOs regarding their support. Some NGOs also run micro-credit program in brothel. Though none of the girls are

involved with micro-credit, but they know that it a good savings program, as heard from mother or other people. NGO people are always good regarding behavior; better treatment and providing other services. They are always ready to serve without any discrimination. Children find a big difference between NGOs and other service providers, and NGOs have an influence on them because their services are very comprehensive and without any discrimination. Children pointed out another interesting thing although NGO people are always good with them, at the same time they always try to convince the children that their services are better than others.

### *Awareness about the rights and legal protection*

Children have a perceived conception that they are “bad” girls or prostitute they have no rights to live like other people in the society. They are accustomed to hear calling them in bad names by others. They are neglected by people, nobody listen them, even not treat as human being. Though they feel upset when people treat them badly. However, they have accepted it. Majority of them have no idea about rights or legal protection (91%). They only know that they are safe from everyone if they can give money, otherwise not. They were never informed about their rights by police, lawyers or other service providers, also not informed about persons or places where they could get help or support. One participant mentioned that she heard “something about child rights” from an NGO No question about knowing UN or CRC.. What children have experienced from police, and other low enforcing personnel, lawyers or any other service provider is discrimination or humiliation. They are getting ill behavior and attitude than the other children of the society; children think this not fair at all. They can’t go to school, as they are not acceptable in the society. But they want their future generation to be in a good environment, should get out of this inhumane life. They don’t want to return to the brothel whenever they get any opportunity to go outside, but they are undone as many of them are bonded with pimps, as wll they have earn for their survival. Children themselves wish to come ut of this environment, want to live in a family environment like many other, requested the interviewers if they can be of any help to them.

A good percentage of girls are smoker, some have tested drugs like heroin, other sedatives, and alcohol etc. Some girls also worked for carrying or selling drugs. As children said, police is well informed about this, but they overlook it for some reason.

### *Profile of some participants*

# 1

Name:	A
Age:	16 years
Age at becoming Sex Worker:	14 years

Feelings towards sex profession:	She doesn't like it, as she has been experiencing violence, humiliation every time
Thinking about her future:	She is being engaged in the profession with an intension to collect the money to provide dowry in her marriage and she wishes to go home as early as possible
Remarks	Her sister brought her into the brothel by giving assurance of arranging marriage. She has a permanent client.

# 2

Name:	B
Age:	13 years
Age at becoming Sex Worker:	12 years and 10 months
Feelings towards sex profession:	Society does not accept them, hate them but a good number of people from the same society come to them too. Many girls from that society works as prostitutes in big hotels and other places but nobody talks about them.
Thinking about her future:	She is being engaged in the profession with an intension to collect the money to provide dowry in her marriage and wishes to return to normal life
Remarks	Her sister brought her into the brothel by giving assurance of arranging marriage. She has a permanent client.

# 3

Name:	C
Age:	14 years
Age at becoming Sex Worker:	12 years
Feelings towards sex profession:	This profession is too bad but she can't manage going to a different place to earn
Thinking about her future:	She will buy some land, build house and wishes to live with her family, wants to be accepted in the society. She wish that no one would be brought to this profession and she also wants to see that the house owners and pimps of the brothel would be punished
Remarks	Her mother is also a sex worker who forced her become a sex worker. She has a permanent client

# 4

Name:	D
Age:	15 years

Age at becoming Sex Worker:	11 years
Feelings towards sex profession:	This profession is too bad but now she doesn't like it anymore because she believes that the outside world is very beautiful.
Thinking about her future:	She wishes to leave this profession if she can manage some earning source, acting in cinema or becoming dancer
Remarks	She has born and brought up in the brothel with her mother. Mother didn't have many clients, so she decided to become a sex worker to ever come the financial problems

# 5

Name:	E
Age:	18 years
Age at becoming Sex Worker:	14 years
Feelings towards sex profession:	This is a bad profession but no other alternative, as she has to earn for food. She believes that those engaged in this profession are spoiled.
Thinking about her future:	She wishes to leave this profession if she can manage some earning source.
Remarks	Her sister and aunt are also engaged in sex business, which misguided her to come in this profession. She has permanent client who wishes to marry her, terminated pregnancy with 3 months during the consultation.

# 6

Name:	F
Age:	17 years
Age at becoming Sex Worker:	12 years
Feelings towards sex profession:	She believes on fate, which forced her to become a sex worker, none can change it
Thinking about her future:	She thinks she has to live in the brothel till the last, as she can't manage by herself. But definitely she will leave the place if she gets an opportunity
Remarks	She can't remember her identity, someone brought her here in her early childhood. She has a permanent client.

### Gaps and Recommendations

Gap: Children don't know how to read or write

*Recommendation:* NGOs working in the brothel should take initiatives to provide educational services

*Gap:* Children are not aware about their rights

*Recommendation:* The relevant authority NGOs should let the children know about their rights

*Gap:* Children are maltreated, rather treated as prostitutes, not as normal people in the society

*Recommendations:*

- Opportunity should be created for the children to get rid of this profession and they should get the chance to become a dignified member of the society
- The NGOs should take necessary steps
- Low-enforcing personnel should take care of the girls

*Gap:* Children are not informed about their rights or about the people or places where they can get help and support

*Recommendations:*

- Both government and NGOs should come forward
- The government should make strict laws for that

*Gap:* Children pass long time in the custody before she proved guilty by the court

*Recommendations:*

- Quick investigation should be done
- Children should be in bail before proving guilty or in punishment
- Children should not be in the jail

*Gap:* Lawmakers never talk to the children before making laws for children

*Recommendations:*

- The lawmakers should listen to children, their experiences before making a law
- Every child should get the opportunity to express his/her opinion

*Gap:* Children don't get the scope to talk or protest with anyone or anywhere

*Recommendation:*

- There should be laws in this regard and person should be there to observe whether the law is implementing properly
- The NGOs should play a role at this point
- There should be honest people who will stay beside the children always

*Gap:* Children living in brothel or engaged in sex works are not treated as other children of the society

*Recommendation:*

- People should be informed about the rights of the children
- Every child should get the same opportunity and rights from their childhood

*Gap:* There is little scope of rehabilitation for children engaged in sex work or children living in the brothel

*Recommendation:*

- Government and NGOs should take measures for rehabilitating the children through skill trainings like sewing, handicrafts, and stitches.

:

*Gap:* The police don't treat them as children or human being

*Recommendation:* Trainings on child rights should be organized for the police

*Gap:* Children are coming in the brothel through trafficking regularly

*Recommendations:*

- The traffickers should be arrested and face exemplary punishment
- Those who buy children in brothel should be convinced not to buy any children from traffickers and they can also inform the police about the trafficking

*Gap:* Police take bribe from children

*Recommendations:*

- Police department should be more cooperative in this regard
- There should be someone to supervise and taking necessary steps, punishment or suspension against concerned police

*Gap:* Police make the first sex with the girl to prove her as "mature enough" for sex business or 18 years of age

*Recommendation:*

- Police should rather protect every child from sex business
- Police should be punished In case of false registration of age

*Gap:* Children engaged in commercial sex don't get proper justice

*Recommendation:*

Personnel of judiciary and other concerned people should learn about the child rights during the training period

*Gap:* Children couldn't visit anyone without giving money to the gatekeepers in the jail

*Recommendations:*

- There should be penalty system in which if anyone of the gatekeepers takes an amount of money, the penalty should be double or more than that and a strict person to follow that

*Gap:* There is no female doctor



*Recommendation:* There should be provision of female doctors for the girls or females

*Gap:* doctors abuse Children sexually during check up

*Recommendations:*

- There should be punishments for that kind of behavior so that he or the others would be afraid of doing this again

## **Conclusion**

Sexual abuse of the children is very common in police, judiciary and doctors, which sometimes turned into violence due to ignorance of Child Rights and Child Protection Law and defenselessness. Children who are experiencing violence, sexual abuse, harassment, violations of human rights have identified the problems or gaps by themselves. Recommendations might help or lead to appropriate interventions and support, and ultimately trim down violence and other harassments and its detrimental consequences on these children. Also to prevent this inhuman practice and promote the safety of this vulnerable group and raising awareness, immediate programs should be taken by authority concerned. However children believe that these consultation and recommendation could get in touch with appropriate authority and may be some change will come by next couple of years.

## **Noman Fatemi**

Head of Bengali Service, Radio Base Popolare Network

Via G. Felisati 167/6, 30171 Mestre, Venice, Italy.

Ph + 39 041 2602123, Fax + 39 041 2602119,

Cell + 39 3291869219,

Email: bengali@radiobase.net

&

President

Organization For Immigrant Journalist

Venice, Italy

[www.radiobase.net/bengali](http://www.radiobase.net/bengali)