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International Programme on the Elimination
of Child Labour (IPEC)**



VIET NAM

**CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION
IN HANOI, HAI PHONG, HO CHI MINH CITY AND CAN THO:
A RAPID ASSESSMENT**

**By
Dr. Le Bach Duong**

July 2002

For ILO Mekong sub-regional project to combat trafficking in children and women

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2nd Floor, UN Service building
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue, PO Box 2-349
Bangkok 10200 Thailand

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FOREWORD

Unacceptable forms of exploitation of children at work exist and persist, but they are particularly difficult to research due to their hidden, sometimes illegal or even criminal nature. Slavery, debt bondage, trafficking, sexual exploitation, the use of children in the drug trade and in armed conflict, as well as hazardous work, are all defined as Worst Forms of Child Labour. Promoting the Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, is a high priority for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Recommendation (No. 190, Paragraph 5) accompanying the Convention states that “detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms, as a matter of urgency.” Although there is a body of knowledge, data, and documentation on child labour, there are also still considerable gaps in understanding the variety of forms and conditions in which children work. This is especially true of the worst forms of child labour, which by their very nature are often hidden from public view and scrutiny.

Against this background the ILO, through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), has carried out a series of rapid assessment investigations of the worst forms of child labour. These have explored very sensitive areas including illegal, criminal or immoral activities. The forms of child labour and research locations were carefully chosen by IPEC staff in consultation with IPEC partners. The rapid assessment investigations focused on the following categories of worst forms of child labour: children in bondage; child domestic workers; child soldiers; child trafficking; drug trafficking; hazardous work in commercial agriculture, fishing, garbage dumps, mining and the urban environment; sexual exploitation; and working street children. Funding for these reports was provided by the United States Department of Labor and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom.

To the partners and IPEC colleagues who contributed, through their individual and collective efforts, to the realization of this report, I should like to express our gratitude. The responsibility for opinions expressed in this publication rests solely with the authors and does not imply endorsement by the ILO.

I am sure that the wealth of information contained in this series of reports on the situation of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour around the world will contribute to a deeper understanding and allow us to more clearly focus on the challenges that lie ahead. Most importantly, we hope that the studies will guide policy makers, community leaders, and practitioners in tackling the problem on the ground.



Frans Röselaers
Director
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
International Labour Office
Geneva, 2001

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¹ Explanation of the *Doi dong dang nu* is given in Section II. As requested by the members, all their names are confidential.

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ACRONYMS

IEC	information, education and communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs
NGO	non-government organization
SCF-UK	Save the Children Foundation-United Kingdom
SIMPOC	Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour
Sub-DSEP	Sub-Department for Social Evils Prevention
US	United States
VND	Viet Nam Dong

MAP OF VIET NAM



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Rapid Assessment provides some limited insight into the situation of young people involved in prostitution in Viet Nam. The bulk of the information is based on interviews with 122 children, with brothel owners and with pimps (the latter two actors rarely, if at all, ever studied) in four locations in the North and South sides of the country.

Although it is a Rapid Assessment and the numbers presented here are only estimates¹ or relatively representative only for the four geographical areas covered, the report provides some in-depth understanding of the issues of children in prostitution.

The studies for this report were conducted separately; an assessment was carried out in the North in 1999 and a complementing one in the South was done the following year. The research began with a review of existing literature to determine what has been previously known about young people engaged in prostitution.

This report presents the findings of one of 38 rapid assessments undertaken in the context of the IPEC/SIMPOC (Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) project to investigate the worst forms of child labour through rapid assessments covering 19 countries and one border area, as well as through two national reports. It is also part of IPEC's Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women, which has undertaken similar studies in four countries. The findings of the studies will be used to determine strategic objectives for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in each country or region and guide policy makers, community leaders and practitioners to tackle the persisting existence of these unacceptable forms of child exploitation on the ground. It is also hoped that these reports will raise awareness and promote the urgency of preventing more children from entering the worst forms of child labour.

Promoting Convention No. 182

The International Labour Organization's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) commits governments to determined action in combating the worst forms of child labour. Promoting ratification of Convention No. 182 is a high priority for the ILO, and several countries in south-east Asia have already expressed their commitment to follow up accordingly.

The first immediate constraint is that, while it is generally known that these forms of child labour occur in south-east Asia, current information is limited at best. To enable relevant policy-making and appropriate measures with regard to eradicating the worst forms of child labour immediately, it is both essential and urgent to expand the knowledge of the situation.

Overview of Child Prostitution in Viet Nam

Due to the covert nature of children engaged in prostitution, it is impossible to determine through the literature the actual numbers of young people and other actors involved. The incidence of children in prostitution is believed to be steadily increasing: 2.5 percent in 1989, 11 percent in 1994 and 11.42 percent in 1995. In fact, the figures may vary between 5 percent and 20 percent, depending on geographical area, and the problem is said to be more evident in the South than in the North (Centre of Sociology, 1996). The lack of solid information – even reliable estimates – is due both to the nature of the phenomenon and also to the fact that few systematic studies have been conducted on the subject (IPEC, 1998; MOLISA, 1999; SCF-UK, 1999).

One interesting observation, though it is only based on informal information from the four assessed locations, is that nowhere in the northern areas has the sex industry developed as intensively as it has in the southern areas. Sex services in some places in the South were very visible and uninhibited. In the opinions of the key informants, which were confirmed by the investigators' observations, almost all the service businesses in these areas – hotels, restaurants, massage parlours, saunas, pharmacies, taxis, hair salons, tailors, beauty shops, phone services, etc. – derived

¹ It is emphasized that real figures could be quite different.

benefits from the sex trade. Thus, and unlike in other areas, sex workers operate openly. They do not feel reserved about their jobs, since the community, the population of which works mainly in the service sectors, consider them as necessary to the local economy. Even some families with members working in the local police department operate sexual services. The sex sector in one area, for instance, is almost entirely tolerated by the local authorities.

Historic Profile

During the French colonial period, prostitution appeared in some urban centres in the form of licensed brothels and singer salons (*hat co dau*). Prostitution developed both extensively and intensively during the Viet Nam War, particularly in the South, to provide entertainment for soldiers and government officials. By contrast, in the North, with socialist development emphasizing a new proletarian culture, prostitution was outlawed by the Government and effectively eliminated by the state apparatus. New social values established a solid foundation for widespread resistance to prostitution. In addition, tight social organization minimized the space for these activities with strict household registration, labour deployed by the state and collective sectors and children kept in school or participating in communist youth groups. The population was poor but relatively homogenous and social stratification was minimal. Under such conditions, prostitution, particularly child prostitution, had little chance to flourish. After the war, the same practice was implemented in the South, though with much lower success, and prostitution in the region was drastically reduced.

However, it never ceased to exist, albeit run underground. With the new economic reforms and the city's booming economy, along with a decrease of government control over the population, prostitution has regained momentum and has expanded massively ever since.

Current Developments

By the mid-1980s, the country had embarked on a new development path, transforming its centrally planned economy into a market-oriented one. While the new economic order has created new opportunities for economic growth, other challenges have arisen in the social realm, the most destabilizing of these being the widening gap between the rich and the poor. As the labour market becomes increasingly stratified, certain groups are being marginalized, with little or no access to economic assets, education and social services.

New disparities are also appearing between rural and urban areas, uplands and lowlands and North and South. Meanwhile, despite government efforts, poverty alleviation programmes have achieved only limited success. At the same time, rising expectations create both real and perceived needs among a growing segment of the population. These find their way into family and individual economic decisions aimed at either simple survival or upward social mobility. This assessment has shown that not all of the children participated in the sex trade to help their family escape poverty; a considerable number did this with the sole purpose of achieving personal material goals.²

Rapid changes in values and the expansion of the market for children in prostitution and the networking of actors involved in the sex trade have enabled the proliferation of the situation of children's involvement in prostitution. In addition, the idea of law as the foundation of state and society is quite new in Viet Nam. Historically, laws have not been well understood in Viet Nam. As a result, people can easily violate laws without realizing that their conduct is illegal. Furthermore, an effective system of state and local bodies to implement laws in a consistent manner does not exist.

Community economic conditions, such as poor infrastructure, low living standards, social differentiation and an undeveloped local labour market and structure have become factors pushing people to urban centres to seek jobs, mainly in the informal sectors. The assessment provides ample evidence of family poverty as root cause of the children's decision to accept involvement in prostitution.

² Children's "choice" of engaging in prostitution is regarded as not an informed choice; even if no person is forcing them to engage in commercial sex, they are considered to be forced by circumstance – lack of options, etc.

Legal and Institutional Framework in Viet Nam to Combat Child Prostitution

The Government has declared the prevention and elimination of prostitution in general and sexual exploitation of children in particular to be among its major concerns. A series of policies and decrees have in recent years created a legal framework for state and local action aimed at preventing and eliminating prostitution (and other “social evils”³).

The Government has established a comprehensive programme for combating prostitution, including child prostitution. Major components include:

- education and propaganda campaigns
- investigating the situation and building databases
- police actions
- vocational training, employment creation and poverty alleviation aimed at sex workers
- rehabilitation and reintegration of former sex workers into the community
- institutional capacity building at both central and local levels
- building social evils-free communities
- international cooperation for combating prostitution

Responsible state bodies have limited reliable information regarding prostitution. At the same time, vertical and horizontal cooperation among these organizations is too weak to enable effective action. Within a structure of top-down decision making, there is little room for bottom-up information sharing and decision making, despite the fact that prostitution must be approached at the grassroots level. Information, education and communication programmes, for example, are merely initiatives of state authorities without serious consideration of how they might be adapted to local conditions in changing community behaviour.

Organizations do not understand or, in some cases, do not show concern for the issue of prostitution, other than as evidence that the poverty alleviation and universal education programmes are essential and that *doi moi* has brought with it very negative consequences (Kelly and Le, 1999). Ideally, community and state would act in concert through grassroots organizations. Currently, this does not appear to happen with regard to dealing with the issue of prostitution.

Aims of the Rapid Assessment

Research on children in prostitution in Viet Nam often lacks methodological rigor and produces unreliable data. Studies conducted on the basis of careless assumptions are common. The market economy is, for instance, often blamed for current social disorders. Or researchers adopt presuppositions informed not by scientific observation or research but rather by media or other campaigns merely aiming to mobilize public opinion against the sexual exploitation of children. These studies are often highly emotional, overwhelmed with poorly grounded assertions of “right” and “wrong” and employ rhetoric describing traditional values as always “good” without real investigation of the relevant issues (Kelly and Le, 1999).

This assessment was designed to collect new information provided directly by children currently involved in prostitution. While there is existing research based on information collected from children in prostitution, it refers to those who operate in the streets under the control of pimps or street gangs and therefore casts light on the activity of only those located in the bottom sectors of the sex industry. The current assessment is unique in the sense that it has gained access to different segments of the sex sector.

³ Social evils and diseases is an official term used in Viet Nam regarding any socially harmful activities, notably prostitution, drug addiction and gambling.

Selection of Geographical Locations for the Assessment

The selection of four geographical provinces for the assessment was informed by the review of available published and unpublished information on the topic. All four areas⁴ have enjoyed most of the advantages brought about by ongoing economic reforms. They have also been the major destinations for rural-to-urban migration and are centres of economic activity. Social stratification is most pronounced in these areas as well, with the widest gap between the rich and the poor and, reportedly, extensive prostitution and sexual exploitation of children.

In summary, two rapid assessments were carried out in four provinces and covered 74 establishments and 13 locations where children were found engaged in prostitution. Overall, 122 children (23 in Hanoi, 19 in Hai Phong, 41 in Ho Chi Minh City and 39 in Can Tho) involved in prostitution were interviewed, accounting for more than one-fourth of the total 441 children available at these places.

What Has Been Learned About Children in Prostitution in Viet Nam

The two rapid assessments that inform this report were designed to give deeper insights into the sexual exploitation of young people in Viet Nam. However, research findings cannot be generalized to children in prostitution in the country as a whole as it was impossible to draw a representative sample,⁵ given the nature of the problem. *Here we can only repeat that the assessment provides some in-depth understanding of the issues in the selected geographical areas and that the results are relatively representative solely for these areas.*

What we know so far from the literature compared with what was observed or learned from the rapid assessment can be summarized as follows:

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics

Age. In the literature, children in prostitution are described as those aged between 13 and 18 years. Nevertheless, almost nothing is known of the age distribution within that range.

Children in the assessment in the North were between 15 and 17 years old and in the South they were between 13 and 17 years, though the majority were from age 15 to 17. Younger children were less likely to be involved in prostitution because they were not physically mature enough to perform the activity.

Gender. The literature on child prostitution deals primarily with girls, although there is unsystematic evidence of boys' involvement in this service. Very often the word "children" is used without gender segregation.

In the assessment, only girls were found in the study of the North and a few boys were found in the South; boys in prostitution appear to be rare.

Ethnicity. Although there is no breakdown of children in prostitution by ethnicity in the literature, there are sources suggesting its dimension (IPEC, 1998). It is believed that ethnic minorities in mountainous communities are more easily lured into prostitution, as they are much poorer and less educated.

In the assessment, the young people in the study were mainly Vietnamese; there were two out of a total of 42 children in the North who were from ethnic minorities and four out of a total of 80 children coming from ethnic minorities (Khmer) in the South. No evidence was found that young ethnic minority people were more easily tricked into prostitution. There is some opinion that the stronger traditional cultures among ethnic groups may serve to make them less likely to engage in sex activities.

⁴ Like Hanoi, administratively Ho Chi Minh City is ranked as a province.

⁵ The whole population of children in prostitution is unknown.

Education. Generally, according to the literature, children in prostitution have achieved lower educational standards than other Vietnamese children. Many have not even finished primary school. No information is available on the different levels of education these children have received. Their relative lack of “living experience” and “social skills” (life skills) is also mentioned (MOLISA, 1999). The same studies refer to levels of “cultural capital” among children in prostitution, which clearly would be low.

There were distinct differences between the two sides of the country among those who were interviewed for this assessment. Nearly 70 percent of those included in the study in the North received lower secondary education, though some had completed only primary education. Very few had higher educational levels. In the South, education levels were much lower than in the North with one-fourth of those interviewed illiterate; very few had higher educational levels. This suggested to the researchers that there are weaker values put upon education among the poor parents in the South compared to those in the North.

Every young person interviewed had dropped out of school because of economic difficulties (48.5 percent of total cases) and poor performance (8.7 percent) either because of poor learning ability or family economic difficulties, or both. In the North, negative social environment among peers and less care from schools for students’ learning and socialization seemed the major cause of young people dropping out, though some left because this is a common practice among peasant families (12 percent) and some left because of family trauma. In the South in addition to economic difficulties and poor performance, there was also no interest in school. Some dropped out because of family trauma; few left because of negative social problems in school.

Nevertheless, 41 percent of the children in the sample accepted the fact that without education they could not pursue most ambitions. They believe that a better future, particularly one including a stable, honest job, could only be achieved with the help of education.

Education of parents. In the literature, parents often have little education, with children exposed to limited family education, or cultural capital, at home (MOLISA, 1999; Centre of Sociology, 1996).

The educational level of parents of children in the assessments was also low, with a much lower level found among parents in the South than in the North. Fathers had higher education than mothers on both sides of the country, which reflects an emphasis by society on the importance of education for men rather than for women. In the South, this may directly link to more responsibilities on girls to help the family, including engaging in prostitution.

Geographical origin. The majority of children in prostitution referred to in the literature originate from rural areas (SCF-UK, 1999a), although the extent varies according to location.

Again, there were contrasting findings between the North and the South assessments among those people interviewed. In the North, children were mainly from rural areas adjacent to provinces where they engaged in sex activities. Few of their family members migrated due to the fact that they were largely peasants lacking non-agricultural skills; this low mobility was one indicator of their poverty. Some families did, however, live in poor city neighbourhoods.

In the South, children with urban origin accounted for almost a half of the sample. Their families lived exclusively in urban slums and there was a higher percentage of migrated families due to traditionally stronger migration trends in the South.

Family size. The literature describes large families and many young people in prostitution as having families where trauma was prevalent: parents were divorced or separated or one or both parents were dead.

All those in the studies did indeed come from large families with a high number of dependants. The size of the family and the number of dependants were part of the variables for family economic difficulty. About one-fourth of the people in the North came from families with trauma while about half experienced similar family trauma in the South.

Family economic activity. “Poverty” in most of the literature refers to family economic status, with the majority of child prostitutes having parents who are poor peasants or workers.

Among those interviewed in the North, their families were mainly engaged in agricultural work; some were involved in private services and small trade but worked at the bottom of the occupational structure with low income. In the South, the parents of the children were mainly involved in private service and small trade and similar to those in the North, worked at the bottom of the urban occupational structure with low income.

Family income/debt. In the literature, this element is described as generally low.

In the studies, it was very low. In the North, family income was about half the national average income and in the South was less than one-third the national average.

In the North, some families lacked rice for four to six months of the year; only half the families were able to satisfy their basic needs. And nearly one-third had debt. In the South, slightly more than half of the families were able to satisfy their basic needs but nearly two-thirds had debt.

There was also considerable variation in the per capita income between the two areas of each side of the country. In the North, the families interviewed in Hanoi earned around VND 172,000 a month (or US \$147 a year), while in Hai Phong they earned only VND 73,000 (US \$60 a year); in the South, it was VND 125,000 (US \$107 a year) among families interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City and VND 88,000 (US \$75 a year) among those interviewed in Can Tho.

Family poverty and indebtedness are reconfirmed to be the major causes that provoked many children to engage in prostitution, either voluntarily or by being forced, sometimes even by their family members.

Reasons for children engaging in prostitution in Viet Nam

Absolute poverty alone does not explain why children enter the trade. Other issues that need to be taken into account include the family situation as well as interrelated factors, notably poverty and social exclusion, low education, dysfunctional families and external influences, such as consumer values and peer pressure and cultural values, such as filial piety.

Children interviewed in the studies provided echoing reasons (with that found in the literature) for their presence in prostitution. Those reasons were largely similar for both sides of the country: Children wanted to help their families out of economic difficulties and sought legitimate work and were tricked into prostitution, or they sought it out because of the money involved. Some parents encouraged, forced or even deceived their children to engage in prostitution as a “duty” to help the family. (Usually the first act is to sell their daughters’ virginity, which is highly paid in the sex market – sometimes as much as US \$1,000, though more often from US \$300 to \$500, or even lower.)

Other situations were found to increase the vulnerability to prostitution of young people; these included lack of parental care, family trauma, such as the death of one or both parents and the need to seek survival, family problems, negative influences from friends, a desire to make quick money with an “easy” activity and drug addiction, which has become an alarming issue in Viet Nam.

Lifestyle conditions and impact on children

Period of time engaged in prostitution. In the northern assessment, only 7 percent had been involved in sex activities for more than a year; the children in the South started in sex service much earlier and kept being in it much longer. At the time of the interviews, the majority of children in the South (87.8 percent) had been engaged in prostitution for more than a year. A high proportion had been in the sex sector from two to three years, 32.4 percent and 29.7 percent respectively. Only 7 percent had been engaged in prostitution for the past four years. And 12.2 percent had been involved for less than a year.

Conditions and impact. Most research generally talks of exploitation and addresses the issue of the sex activity hazards to which children in prostitution are exposed. Also serious are the long-lasting impacts on physical and psychological development that, together with factors like labelling and stigmatizing, prevent the reintegration of former prostituted children into the community and thus increase the possibility of their permanent marginalization.

Sex activity hours, conditions and impacts described in the interviews were similar in both the North and South. Children were engaged in sex services seven days a week and throughout the year; they started taking customers around noon and continued until midnight or later. They endured rude treatment from customers and beatings from employers and pimps. They feared HIV/AIDS, other STDs, pregnancy, arrest, rejection by customers, being discovered by families or villagers. They felt sad and anxious about the future.

Young people in the South also expressed enduring exploitation from street gangs.

Many young people interviewed in both the North and South also talked of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, of an unhealthy environment with exposure to substances, temperatures and noise levels or unreasonable confinement to premises by the employers.

Observations and information from the children interviewed as well as other key informants showed that children involved in brothels located far from the city centre were generally more exploited.

Brothel owners, pimps and their network

Very little literature information is available on brothel owners, pimps, procurers and their networks. What is known is that employers are mainly female and procurers are mainly people from the same villages the children come from.

In the assessment findings, brothel owners, pimps and procurers were the main actors. The interviews in both the North and South indicated that procurers could be from the same village or community but certain key figures were recruiting on a permanent basis. In the South, parents (particularly mothers), family members, relatives and friends were found to also be among the involved actors.

In total, eight employers from disguised brothels⁶ (two in each area) and nine pimps were interviewed during both assessments. Most the employers were female; two were male. They ranged in age from 29 to 55.

The recruitment processes. Methods of recruiting children mentioned in the literature often include deception and the promise of good work but sometimes involve force and kidnapping.

Five different “systems” of recruiting children were described during the assessment interviews (and were similar for both the North and the South). In the first system, children in most cases were persuaded by friends or other people from their home areas – usually people who are sex workers themselves – to follow them to the city for legitimate service jobs, such as tailoring or hairstyling. Though these people work for commissions, they also think what they are doing is good for these children since it helps them to escape poverty and hard work in the fields while making big money for themselves and their families.

Only after arriving at their destination did the children discover the truth. In most cases, the children agreed to do the sex activity mainly because of the money. The first payment in exchange for their virginity typically brought them VND 2 million to VND 3 million (US \$140 to \$210) and sometimes as much as VND 5 million to VND 6 million (US \$350 to \$420).

⁶ These establishments have a license granted by local authorities for doing legal business, in these cases selling drinks and foods. However, they use that legal coverage to run prostitution. There are also many non-licensed establishments too. This assessment therefore covers only part of the “universe” in the selected geographical locations.

In the second system, children were deceived by their friends or fellow villagers. And commonly they were forced by employers and their pimps to provide sexual services to customers. The families received cash advances, typically VND 1 million (US \$70). The families tended to trust the facilitators, who were from the same village, and let their daughters go. They did not realize how their children were destined to be employed. Sometimes even their relatives, including parents, deceived or forced them.

Children in the third system volunteered to work in prostitution. In these cases, no force was involved. In the fourth and fifth systems, children with family or personal problems sought activities in prostitution.

There was no discussion found in the literature about young people's decision-making process. However, nearly 50 percent of those interviewed in the North said they had decided themselves to engage in prostitution while around 33 percent were there because they had been persuaded though they made their own decision. Some 22 percent said they had been deceived or forced into the sex activity. In the South, about 84 percent said they had decided for themselves; few claimed to be in prostitution because they had been deceived or forced.

Earnings

Children's earnings. The money made by the children interviewed varied across the geographic areas and locations covered by both rapid assessments. Similar to the findings in the North, incomes of the children interviewed in the South varied across geographic areas and locations. In Ho Chi Minh City, children in the inner-city establishments earned from VND 6 million to VND 16 million (US \$428 to \$1,143) a month, mainly from tips. The figures were essentially the same as those earned by children interviewed in the centre of Hanoi.

Meanwhile, the children in the city outskirts and frontier made much less. Children in the Hanoi frontier, except those in the special place of Thanh Tuoc, earned just VND 2 million to VND 3 million a month (US \$140 to \$210). In Ho Chi Minh's outskirts, the earnings ranged from only VND 1 million to VND 5 million (US \$70 to \$357). These earnings were also what the children soliciting in downtown streets received while earnings of the children interviewed in luxury establishments of the city outskirts also matched that of those located in the inner-city establishments.

Apart from daily expenses, children saved their earnings mainly to send it home as remittances, except those who had no parents or were ignored by parents. Some saved their money so they could change to a job later.

Earnings of employers. Prostitution in general and child prostitution in particular is an extremely lucrative business. Information collected by the rapid assessment in the North shows that employers can make up to VND 60 million a month, with net earnings of at least half that amount, or VND 30 million. This net earning is equivalent to more than US \$2,000 a month (US \$24,000 a year) or even much more. It should be noted again that the average per capita GDP in Viet Nam is just over US \$300 a year. Such returns explain why this industry has developed so quickly during the past decade, even though the recent economic slow-down in Viet Nam has had a disastrous impact on other revenues.

For the South, the investigators could not find reliable information from employers. The common answer is that the business fluctuates: sometimes it brings good money, sometimes not. However, based on incomes of the children working in these establishments, which were very close to that of the children in the North, it can be safe to say that incomes of employers in the South are similar to those of their northern counterparts.

Customers

Information provided by the children, employers and pimps interviewed show that customers' profiles are quite diverse. Overall, their ages range from 14 to 65, though the major groups are those ranging in age from 30 to 60.

Customers were divided into five groups. The first consists of state officials and state enterprise employees. Providing sex workers can be part of business deals, and sometimes people feel they must participate even if they do not like it. The second group is comprised of people working in the private sector. These customers must use company money, and in most cases, except for those doing business illegally, thus cannot be very extravagant. The third group consists of young people from affluent families who, according to the prostituted children interviewed, are good tippers but also troublemakers, as they want children to perform unusual sex acts that they learn from imported pornographic movies. Military men and policemen form the fourth group. The fifth group is filled with foreigners, mainly Asian businessmen from China, Japan, the Republic of South Korea and other south-east Asian countries. These are considered “golden” customers, since they pay higher prices and are good tippers. Many have a preference for “deflowering” young girls.

Conclusion

Judging by the literature as well as information collected from the assessment, children of some family types are more at risk of being exposed to prostitution than others. Among the family types at highest risk are the poor, those lacking formal or family education, those with negative gender roles, those suffering from value disorientation, those ridden by problems such as divorce, separation, alcoholism, drug abuse, immorality or criminal behaviour. Essentially, these are families that have been excluded and marginalized in the process of economic reform and who are not reached by government economic and social programmes.

The rapid assessment confirms a number of points highlighted by previous investigations presented in the literature. It has also led to a significant improvement in our understanding of child prostitution in Viet Nam with the fresh and reliable information directly from the field. As opposed to the conventional view of prostitution as the result of poverty, lack of education and “social evils” brought about by economic reforms, the assessment shows that the situation is much more complex than that, bringing many institutions into the analysis. Actions for combating child prostitution should therefore be undertaken at three levels: the macro (national), the meso (provincial) and the micro (community/family/individual).

The issue of child prostitution, while not invisible, remains unsolvable within the current legal and institutional framework. The Government recognizes the issue but so far has been more concerned with other urgent issues. Few effective measures have been taken beyond some police actions and achievements in poverty alleviation, the real impact of which is questionable in reducing prostitution.

Sexually exploited children is a social product. It can only be eliminated with comprehensive programmes that address their social root causes. Such a solution takes time and requires many resources presently not in the hands of the Government and local actors. But as one of the worst forms of child labour, ethically it must be stopped through strong state actions and strict enforcement on both supply and demand sides, particularly at the local level, together with strong provision of livelihood alternatives.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Referring to analysis of secondary data, field observations and in-depth interviews of working children, their employers and key informants, this report presents major findings of a rapid assessment on the issue of children in prostitution in Viet Nam. The assessment was carried out in two separate studies; the first took place in North Viet Nam in late 1999 and the study of the situation in South Viet Nam was conducted in 2000. An independent editor combined the papers into this single report. The report presents the findings of one of 38 rapid assessments undertaken in the context of the IPEC/SIMPOC (Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour) project to investigate the worst forms of child labour through rapid assessments covering 19 countries and one border area, as well as through two national reports. It is also a part of IPEC's Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women, which has undertaken similar studies in four countries. The findings of the studies will be used to determine strategic objectives for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in each country or region and guide policy makers, community leaders and practitioners to tackle the persisting existence of these unacceptable forms of child exploitation on the ground. It is also hoped that these reports will raise awareness and promote the urgency of preventing more children from entering the worst forms of child labour.

1.1 Context of the Rapid Assessment

The new ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) commits governments to determined action in combating the worst forms of child labour:

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procurement or offering of a child for prostitution, production of pornography or pornographic performances;
- the use, procurement or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs; and
- work, which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Promoting ratification of Convention No. 182 is a high priority for the ILO, and several countries in south-east Asia have already expressed their commitment to follow up accordingly.

The first immediate constraint is that, while it is generally known that these forms of child labour occur in south-east Asia, current information is limited at best. To enable relevant policy-making and appropriate measures with regard to eradicating the worst forms of child labour immediately, it is both essential and urgent to expand the knowledge of the situation.

The first measure to be taken with regard to the new Convention is to conduct a situation analysis. Recommendation No. 190 accompanying the Convention states that "detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour should be compiled and kept up to date to serve as a basis for determining priorities for national action for the abolition of child labour, in particular for the prohibition and elimination of its worst forms as a matter of urgency" (Article 5).

To enable countries to do this, substantial technical and financial assistance will be needed at different levels and will be forthcoming from ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC), which is engaged in the development of new research methodologies and the creation of databases to allow for systematic recording of the extent and the nature of the worst forms of child labour and for keeping track of progress made in eradicating them.

While the above measures are indispensable, it will be some time before such comprehensive programmes of assistance are effectively underway. Meanwhile, it is important to maintain momentum in terms of commitment to the Convention and to collect information on some of the worst forms for early interventions.

For Viet Nam, prostitution as one of the worst forms of child labour was selected as the research topic and the results are documented in this report.

1.2 What is Known About the Issue of Child Prostitution in Viet Nam – the Literature Review

What we really know about children in prostitution in Viet Nam is very limited. The available literature, published and unpublished, tells us something about certain causes and mechanisms pushing children into prostitution and about lifestyle conditions among children engaged in prostitution. Research to date also provides some information on employers, their aides and customers of children in prostitution. Difficulties that former young prostituted children experienced when reintegrating into the community are also highlighted. In general, however, research to date on the topic lacks the depth required to elucidate the real situation. What we know according to the literature can be summarized as follows:

1.2.1 Magnitude of the problem

Due to the covert nature of child prostitution, it is impossible to determine through the literature the actual numbers of children and other actors involved. But what we do currently know about the issue suggests that it is a substantial and increasing problem resulting mainly from poverty and lack of education among children and their parents, although there is no agreement on the numbers involved. The incidence of sexually exploited children is believed to be steadily increasing: 2.5 percent in 1989, 11 percent in 1994 and 11.42 percent in 1995. In fact, the figures may vary between 5 percent and 20 percent, depending on geographical area, and the problem is said to be more evident in the South than in the North (Centre of Sociology, 1996). The lack of solid information – even reliable estimates – is due both to the nature of the phenomenon and also to the fact that few systematic studies have been conducted on the subject (IPEC, 1998; MOLISA, 1999; SCF-UK, 1999).

1.2.2 Demographic and socio-economic characteristics

Age. In the literature, children in prostitution are described as those between 13 and 18 years old. Nevertheless, almost nothing is known of the age distribution within that range.

Gender. The literature on child prostitution deals primarily with girls, although there is unsystematic evidence of boys' involvement in this service. Very often the word "children" is used without gender segregation.

Ethnicity. Although there is no breakdown of children in prostitution by ethnicity, there are sources suggesting its dimension (IPEC, 1998). It is believed that ethnic minorities in mountainous communities are more easily lured into prostitution, as they are much poorer and less educated.

Education. Generally, children in prostitution have achieved lower educational standards than other Vietnamese children. Many have not even finished primary school. No information is available on the different levels of education these children have received. Their relative lack of "living experience" and "social skills" (life skills) is also mentioned (MOLISA, 1999). The same studies refer to levels of "cultural capital" among children in prostitution, which clearly would be low.

1.2.3 Family situation

The majority of children in prostitution originate from rural areas (SCF-UK, 1999a), although the extent varies according to location. For example, figures collected in 1996 at the Thu Duc Rehabilitation Centre in Ho Chi Minh City revealed that of 187 sexually exploited children younger than 17 years, 87 (46.5 percent) came from the city and 100 (53.5 percent) came from the provinces. In Hanoi, reports from the officials at Loc Ha Screening Camp state that most of the apprehended girls came from rural areas of the provinces of Vinh Phu, Ha Tay, Thanh Hoa, Hai Phong and Bac Ninh (Bond and Hayter, 1998). Many came from large families. "Poverty" in most of the literature refers to family economic status, with the majority of sexually exploited children having parents who are poor peasants or workers. Parents often have little education and their children are exposed to limited family education, or cultural capital, at home (MOLISA, 1999; Centre of Sociology, 1996).

However, absolute poverty alone does not explain why children enter the trade. Other issues that need to be taken into account include children living in single-parent families, children who suffer abuse in the home, those who lack family and social support and protection, those with uncertain legal status and those whose family is involved in the sex trade (SCF-UK, 1999; MOLISA, 1999).

1.2.4 Reasons for children engaging in prostitution in Viet Nam

Several interrelated factors recur in the literature, notably poverty and social exclusion, low education, dysfunctional families and external influences, such as consumer values and peer pressure.

Market reforms, aside from producing economic growth, have also widened the gap between rich and poor. In finding ways to escape poverty, prostitution becomes the only "choice"¹ for an increasing number of people who, because of their lack of land and capital, large family size and low level of educational attainments and skills, become increasingly marginalized in the market place.

Cultural values operating at the societal and family levels – for example, filial piety among children toward parents and beliefs concerning appropriate treatment for boys and girls, with the latter expected to support their family from a very young age – are also mentioned as causes that induce children to enter the sex trade as a way to repay moral debts to their parents.

On the other hand, families with members involved in illegal activities or those with problems such as family violence, divorce and drug addiction are more likely to have members, including children, involved in prostitution, either as a way to escape home life or as a "normal" way to earn money.

Finally, some children enter the service merely because they are attracted by the promise of high earnings and "easy" activities or simply because of socialization problems, such as that of growing up in an environment where acquaintance with prostitutes is common (Mac V. Trang, 1996; Do An, 1996; IPEC, 1998; MOLISA, 1999 and 1997; Nhom PV CT-XH, 1996; CPCR and FFC, 1995; Centre of Sociology, 1996; NLD, 1998).

The transition to a market economy and the subsequent expanding trade, tourism, urban growth, influx of "poisonous" materials,² negative Western influences, etc. all pose challenges to Vietnamese society. Many long-held cultural values of a traditionally egalitarian and Confucian society have eroded while new ones, such as a focus on money, consumerism and pragmatism, have evolved. Meanwhile, the role of the State in social control has been increasingly weakened. In addition, traditional beliefs, such as the high status of men against that of women, worsen the situation (Lan Anh, 1996; Centre of Sociology, 1996).

¹ Children's "choice" of engaging in prostitution is regarded as not an informed choice; even if no person is forcing them to engage in commercial sex, they are considered to be forced by circumstance – lack of options, etc.

² Pornographic materials, such as videos, compact disks, magazines, etc.

1.2.5 Working conditions and impact on children

Most research addresses the issue of the work hazards to which children in prostitution are exposed. These include harmful working environments, severe exploitation by employers, pimps and customers, risk of HIV infection and other STDs and unwanted pregnancies. Also serious are the long-lasting impacts on physical and psychological development that, together with factors like labelling and stigmatizing, prevent the reintegration of former prostituted children into the community and thus increase the possibility of their permanent marginalization.

1.2.6 Brothel owners, pimps and their network

Very little information on brothel owners, pimps, procurers and their network is available. What is known is that employers are mainly female and procurers are mainly people from the same villages that the children come from. Methods of recruiting children often include deception and the promise of good work but sometimes involve force and kidnapping.

1.2.7 Customers

Generally, customers range in age from 25 to 45 years old and come from a variety of backgrounds. Customers also include foreigners who come to Viet Nam for business or for sex tours.

1.3 Aims of the Rapid Assessment

Previous research has been based primarily on the existing literature and official statistics or on information collected through interviews of children being assisted at some social protection and care centres – mainly those arrested and in rehabilitation programmes. Thus, information from them may well be distorted, as will be discussed in the section on methodology. This assessment was designed to collect new information provided directly by children currently involved in prostitution. While there is existing research based on information collected from sexually exploited children, it refers to those operating in the streets under the control of pimps or street gangs and therefore casts light on the activity of only those located in the bottom sectors of the sex industry. The current assessment is unique in the sense that it has gained access to different segments of the sex sector. The research methods adopted guaranteed that in all cases the children would not fear later consequences, either from the authorities or their employers.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview

Research on children in prostitution in Viet Nam often lacks methodological rigor and produces unreliable data. Studies conducted on the basis of careless assumptions are common. The market economy is, for instance, often blamed for current social disorders. Or researchers adopt presuppositions informed not by scientific observation or research but rather by media or other campaigns merely aiming to mobilize public opinion against the sexual exploitation of children. These studies are often highly emotional, overwhelmed with poorly grounded assertions of “right” and “wrong” and employ rhetoric describing traditional values as always “good” without real investigation of the relevant issues (Kelly and Le, 1999).

Also, researchers tend to rely on a single method of inquiry. Far too often, the only social science method employed is the questionnaire survey, which is a poor tool to use with children, particularly where sensitive subjects, such as sexuality and abuse, are concerned (Ennew, et al., 1996).

Furthermore, data used in research are likely to be biased when data collectors gain access to interviewees mainly by means of formal institutions, projects and programmes. Information may therefore reflect what interviewees believe interviewers would like them to say, their fear of repercussions (particularly among children) from institutional staff or exaggeration in order to attract greater project advantages. Even worse, some rely only on myths and the reproduction of myths or on anecdotes passed off as case studies (Ennew, et al., 1996).

The lack of rigorous methodology and the use of unsubstantiated data lead to weak analysis. For example, the literature contains an overwhelming amount of claims that poverty and poor education are the root causes of prostitution. By themselves, however, these factors cannot explain why prostitution becomes the actual choice for some children but not for others who suffer similar or even worse situations.

2.2 Methods Adopted

The rapid assessment on children in prostitution in Viet Nam, similar to those conducted in other countries, adopted the following research methods: (a) a review of available published and unpublished information on the topic and (b) interviews with children in prostitution, their parents, employers and key local informants and organizations responsible for combating these forms of child exploitation at specific locations in four selected provinces where sexual exploitation of children was known to take place. This approach allowed direct observation and in-depth information collection from children currently involved in prostitution. The analysis adopted in the assessment was contextually oriented so that causal relationships could plausibly be identified at community, family and individual levels.

2.2.1 Review of available published and unpublished information

Before undertaking field research, an extensive review of literature, including research reports, articles and both published and unpublished documents was made, focusing particularly on analysis of the data collection and the methodologies used by the researchers, their areas of research and their conclusions. This helped to identify what was still unknown because it was never researched or because poor research was undertaken, thus enabling the consultant to design, focus and organize the rapid assessment. In later stages, data collected from observations and interviews were analysed in the context of what was already known based on the literature, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue in Viet Nam.

2.2.2 Selection of geographical locations for the assessment

The selection of four geographical provinces¹ for the assessment was informed by the review of available published and unpublished information on the topic. Hanoi, the capital, and Hai Phong, the major port province, were chosen as the focus in the North. Ho Chi Minh City, the largest metropolitan city in Viet Nam, and the province of Can Tho, one of the richest provinces with a large city (Can Tho City), were picked for the rapid assessment in the South. All four areas have enjoyed most of the advantages brought about by ongoing economic reforms. They have also been the major destinations for rural-to-urban migration and are centres of economic activity. Social stratification is most pronounced in these areas as well, with the widest gap between the rich and the poor and, reportedly, extensive prostitution and sexual exploitation of children. However, according to informal sources, there is a sharp difference in the forms of prostitution practiced in Hanoi and Hai Phong, with children in the latter being more exploited and the recruitment network there more widespread and less under government control.

The study in the North was carried out a year before the one in the South. The southern study consequently was designed to be a comparable sample to the one done in the North. As proven in the assessment, many aspects of child prostitution in the North and the South are very similar. At the same time, sharp differences also emerge, particularly the societal attitudes and the corresponding behaviours and practices toward prostitution. These differences reflect distinctive processes taking place in each region resulting from the long history of separation and development patterns. Detailed analysis of socio-economic conditions of all four areas that are conducive to the growth of prostitution will be presented in Section 4.1.

2.2.3 Micro-level sampling of specific locations

North Viet Nam

Hanoi. Three areas were selected for micro-level sampling of specific locations: the inner city area, its immediate outskirts and its frontier boundary (usually with a mixture of population involved in urban sectors as well as agricultural activities). The selection of these three areas was recommended primarily by knowledgeable key informants. It was also suggested that forms of sexual exploitation may differ between these areas – children found in the inner city area were reportedly under less control from employers and took in the highest earnings, while those in the frontier area might face closer control and receive much lower earnings.

Three streets – Truong Chinh, Tay Son and Thai Ha – were selected for the inner-city area. The three locations selected for the city outskirts were Dich Vong, Thang Long and Giap Bat. The two locations selected for the city frontier were Thanh Tuoc and Nhu Quynh.

In each area, a number of establishments (disguised brothels) were covered: 9 in the inner-city area, 9 in the city outskirts and 5 in the frontier area, making a total of 23 establishments visited at 8 locations. Detailed information of these locations and establishments are presented in Section 4.1.

Hai Phong. Since there was no establishment available in the inner city areas (because of frequent police raids), only those located in the city's immediate outskirts (Kien An district) and frontier boundary (Do Son resort centre) were selected. The number of establishments visited were 4 in Kien An and 8 in Do Son, for a total number of 12 places visited at 8 locations (4 locations for Kien An and 4 locations for Do Son).

¹ Like Hanoi, administratively Ho Chi Minh City is ranked as a province.

South Viet Nam

Ho Chi Minh City. The sampling strategy taken in Ho Chi Minh City followed that in Hanoi with three areas that were selected for micro-level sampling of specific locations: the inner city area, its immediate outskirts and its frontier boundary (usually with a mixture of population involved in urban sectors as well as agricultural activities). Detailed characteristics of these areas will also be described in Section 4.1. The selection of these areas was again informed primarily by the key informants. It was also said that forms of sexual exploitation might differ between these areas, with children in the inner-city area experiencing better working conditions with higher earnings.

For the inner-city area, the districts 1, 3 and 5 were selected. For the city's outskirts, 6 locations selected were the districts 4, 6, 7, 10, Tan Binh and Binh Thanh. For the city frontier, it was the Binh Chanh district, situated west of the city.

In each area, a number of licensed establishments (disguised brothels) in the forms of karaoke bars and restaurants were covered²: 6 in the inner-city area, 6 in the city outskirts and 3 in the frontier area, making a total of 15 establishments visited. In addition, streets, parks and gardens where sexually exploited children solicited were also visited: 8 in the inner city and 2 in the outskirts. Detailed information of these establishments and locations are presented in Section 4.1.

Can Tho. Since Can Tho is much smaller compared to Ho Chi Minh City (similar to Hai Phong in comparison with Hanoi), we selected the city of Can Tho and three other rural districts of Chau Thanh, O Mon and Thot Not for micro-sampling. These rural districts are also well known for the rapid growth of prostitution. The number of establishments visited were 13 in the city, 1 in Chau Thanh, 5 in O Mon and 5 in Thot Not, for a total of 24. Similar to the situation in Ho Chi Minh City, streets and public places where street-based sexually exploited children operated were also approached: 1 in the city, 1 in Chau Thanh and 1 in Thot Not.

In summary, 2 rapid assessments were carried out in 4 provinces and covered 74 establishments and 13 locations where children were found involved in prostitution. Overall, 122 children (23 in Hanoi, 19 in Hai Phong, 41 in Ho Chi Minh City and 39 in Can Tho) engaged in prostitution were interviewed, accounting for more than one-fourth of the total 441 children available at these places.

² These establishments have a license granted by local authorities for doing legal business, in these cases selling drinks and foods. However, they use that legal coverage to run prostitution. There are also many non-licensed establishments too. This assessment therefore covers only part of the "universe" in the selected geographical locations.

Table 1: Number of Visited Establishments, Sex Workers and Sexually Exploited Children in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho

	Visited places*		No. of sex workers (including children)	No. of children	%	No. of children interviewed	% of children interviewed
	Establishments	Street					
Hanoi							
Inner city	9	-	77	24	31%	9	38%
Outskirts	9	-	103	36	35%	9	25%
Frontier	5	-	39	17	44%	5	29%
Total	23	-	219	77	35%	23	30%
Hai Phong							
Kien An	4	-	49	17	35%	6	35%
Do Son	8	-	71	27	38%	13	48%
Total	12	-	120	44	37%	19	43%
Total for the North	35	-	339	121	36%	42	35%
Ho Chi Minh City							
Inner city	6	-	81	43	53%	9	21%
	-	8	185	75	40.5%	13	17.3%
Outskirts	6	-	67	24	36%	8	33.3%
	-	2	50	7	14%	3	43%
Frontier	3	-	50	16	32%	8	50%
Total	15	10	433	165	38%	41	25%
Can Tho							
City	13	-	128	57	44%	15	26.3%
	-	1	120	40	33.3%	7	17.5%
Chau Thanh	1	-	12	4	33.3%	1	25%
	-	1	50	15	30%	1	7%
O Mon	5	-	36	10	28%	5	50%
Thot Not	5	-	41	17	41.5%	5	29.4%
	-	1	30	12	40%	5	41.7%
Total	24	3	417	155	37%	39	25%
Total for the South	39	13	850	320	37.6%	80	25%
TOTAL	74	13	1,189	441	37.1%	122	27.7%

* Numbers of licensed establishments and streets/locations for street sex workers

2.2.4 Information collection in selected locations

Training of investigative teams. In the North, there were two teams consisting of two investigators and one supervisor, and in the South there was one team consisting of four investigators. All were selected and recruited for the assessment (see the Acknowledgments for their names). Among them, two were senior sociologists from the Institute of Sociology, Viet Nam National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, and five were collaborators of the Market and Development Research Center, a Vietnamese NGO belonging to the Viet Nam Union of Sciences and Technology Association.

The other two interviewers who joined the southern assessment were recruited from NGOs in Ho Chi Minh City. Both teams operated under the direct leadership of a national consultant who was assisted by an advisor, a senior member of the Institute of Sociology.

The national consultant trained the investigators using the adjusted version of the interview lists provided by ILO/IPEC South-East Asia (see Appendix). The investigators were also instructed in techniques of direct observation in the selected locations as well as methods for approaching the subjects.

Direct observation of selected locations and establishments. Direct observations of selected locations and establishments were made before and during the interviews of children, using standard guidelines provided by ILO/IPEC South-East Asia. Observations included the following:

- location of premises
- working environment
- work performed³
- conditions of work
- organization of protection
- remuneration
- working relations

Detailed information collected has been incorporated into Section 4.1 as well as throughout the analysis.

Approaching the target groups. Since prostitution, particularly child prostitution, is illegal in Viet Nam and is severely punished, many establishments offering such services are invisible to outsiders. Thus, an extensive search was made through the social networks of the research team for clients who knew the establishments and, more importantly, were familiar to the employers. Although this task was time consuming, it was very crucial because only through them could the interviewers contact the employers and seek their consent to conduct interviews with employees.⁴ This was not always successful, however, and the interviewers also had to rely on the assistance of the resource persons in meeting the children outside their workplace, in gaining their trust and in making them feel like friends through social activities, such as picnics and movies. Only when such trust was established and agreement from the children was obtained could the actual interviews be conducted. Also, with the support of the Viet Nam Women's Union in Ho Chi Minh City, the team contacted members of *Doi dong dang nu*, a group consisting of former sex workers who volunteer to do social work, to seek their help in approaching sexually exploited children for the interviews. Both clients and members of *Doi dong dang nu* are named here as resource persons.

Interviews with children involved in prostitution. Where the employers permitted, interviews were conducted in the establishments themselves, and tape recorders were used if the children felt comfortable with them. If they did not, then oral life history techniques were employed, and the interviewers recorded the main results on standard interview forms (see Appendix) after the interview was completed. Where the interview was made with the consent of the child and without the employer's knowledge, the meeting often took place in a quiet place to assure the privacy and comfort of the child – usually in apartments rented by the children, street cafes or quiet public places. Only a few of the children refused to have their conversation tape recorded, and, in such circumstances, oral

³ Their activities in soliciting, including occasionally their sexual acts with customers in public places like parks and dark street corners.

⁴ The fact that the clients are close acquaintances of the employers maximized – though by no means totally ruled out – the chance that there won't be any repercussions on the interviewees. Also, in seeking their consent to conduct the interviews, the research team tried their best to assure that all information would be totally confidential and would not lead to any charge against them from the authorities.

history techniques were again applied. It should be noted that real names are not reported in this assessment, so the young people's livelihood and safety will not be affected. In some cases, children had to be interviewed twice to cover the ground.

Interviews with employers and pimps. In total, eight employers from disguised brothels (two in each area) and nine pimps (one each in Hanoi and Hai Phong, five in Ho Chi Minh City and two in Can Tho) were interviewed during the assessments. Contacts were made and interviews arranged with help from the resource persons. Information provided by employers and pimps is provided in Section 4.6 of this report. As with the children, the real names of the employers and pimps are not presented in this report.

Interviews with parents/guardians of children involved in prostitution. Although ILO/IPEC South-East Asia recommends interviews with the parents or guardians of working children, this proved to be impossible. Almost without exception, the children did not give the interviewers their family addresses, at least nothing beyond their provinces of residence. Also, a large number of them have families living in a variety of provinces and the researchers would have had to expend an unrealistic amount of time and resources to reach them. More importantly, almost without exception, the children had not informed their parents of their actual activity, telling them instead that they were working as domestic servants, tailors, hair stylists, waitresses at restaurants, etc. Information concerning their families' socio-economic circumstances was therefore collected through the children by means of the adjusted interview questions.

Interviews with key informants. In order to highlight the issue from various perspectives, interviews were conducted at the last stage of the assessment with a number of key informants.

In Hanoi/Hai Phong:

- doctors working in a Nguyen Khuyen hospital where many children engaged in prostitution go for STD treatment
- two senior researchers with long experience of studying children in prostitution in Hanoi
- three researchers working on the same issue in Ho Chi Minh City
- the Head of the Department of Propaganda and Education, Viet Nam Women's Union
- the Vice Director, Department for Social Evils Prevention
- the Head of the Planning Office, Department for Social Evils Prevention
- the Director of the Centre for Social Communication and Mobilization, Viet Nam Committee for Protection and Care of Children

In Ho Chi Minh City:

- the Vice Director, Department for Social Evils Prevention
- the Head of the Department for Women Support and one expert of the city's Viet Nam Women's Union
- the Director of the Children Support Association
- the Director of the Little Rose Home
- one educator of the Green Bamboo Home
- one doctor and an official of the Community Consultancy Centre of District I (Hope Cafe)
- two experts of the Community Consultancy Centre of District IV
- one reporter of the Ho Chi Minh City Women magazine
- one official of the Cau Han Community Development Project in Nha Be

In Can Tho:

- the Vice Director and one expert of the Provincial Department for Social Evils Prevention
- the Vice Director, Provincial Committee for Protection and Care of Children
- the Vice Director, Provincial Centre for Employment Introduction
- the Vice Director, Provincial Preventive Health Care Centre

- two experts of the Provincial Sub-Department for AIDS Prevention and Elimination
- three doctors at the Provincial General Dermato-Venerotology Centre
- two officials of Hung Phu district
- one policemen in Vinh Trinh commune, Thot Not district

A standard list of questions for these interviews was provided by ILO/IPEC South-East Asia.

2.3 Assessment of the Methods

The main advantage of the methods adopted was that it allowed interviewers to approach such a difficult target group as children in prostitution without jeopardizing the children's safety and well-being. The sampling strategy allowed the assessment to cut across three distinctive geographical areas in each province where different forms of sexual exploitation of children are occurring. The selection of different locations within each area allowed confidence that possible variations among them were accounted for. The assessment is expected to give deeper insights into the sexual exploitation of children in Viet Nam. However, research findings cannot be generalized to children in prostitution in the country as a whole as it was impossible to draw a representative sample,⁵ given the nature of the problem. Here we can only say that the assessment provides some in-depth understanding of the issues in the selected geographical areas and that the results are relatively representative solely for these areas.

2.4 Information Processing and Report Writing

Validation and interpretation of the assessment results were conducted by the national consultant in close consultation with all members of the research teams and the adviser. All of the team members participated in workshops, and one-on-one meetings were conducted between the consultant and each investigator. The report was written by the consultant, and he is solely responsible for the conclusions herein presented.

⁵ The whole population of children in prostitution is unknown.

CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

3.1 Historical Profile

Prostitution in Viet Nam, as it is anywhere in the world, is as old as human history. One of the best known stories in Vietnamese literature is the sixteenth-century *Tales of Kieu* in which a young woman has to sell herself to save her family. *Tales of Kieu* conveys the filial piety Vietnamese society expects of children – the idea that they have to do anything to repay a moral debt to their parents. Although it may be sometimes manifested differently today, this tradition remains strong.

It is therefore not surprising to see that many of the children covered by the assessment had become involved in prostitution with the sole purpose of helping their families out of poverty. Except for a few rare cases, however, prostitution has long been severely condemned by society.

During the French colonial period, prostitution appeared in some urban centres in the form of licensed brothels and singer salons (*hat co dau*). Prostitution developed both extensively and intensively during the Viet Nam War, particularly in the South, to provide entertainment for soldiers and government officials. By contrast, in the North, with socialist development emphasizing a new proletarian culture, prostitution was outlawed by the Government and effectively eliminated by the state apparatus. New social values established a solid foundation for widespread resistance to prostitution. In addition, tight social organization minimized the space for these activities with strict household registration, labour deployed by the State and collective sectors and children kept in school or participating in communist youth groups. The population was poor but relatively homogenous and social stratification was minimal. Under such conditions, prostitution, particularly child prostitution, had little chance to flourish. After the war, the same practice was implemented in the South, though with much lower success, and prostitution in the region was drastically reduced.

3.2 Current Developments

3.2.1 Structural level

Social stratification and marginalization, regional differentiation and poverty. By the mid-1980s, the country had embarked on a new development path, transforming its centrally planned economy into a market-oriented one. While the new economic order has created new opportunities for economic growth, other challenges have arisen in the social realm, the most destabilizing of these being the widening gap between the rich and the poor. As the labour market becomes increasingly stratified, certain groups are being marginalized, with little or no access to economic assets, education and social services. Horizontal inequalities, and therefore insecurities, between social groups are becoming more and more widespread.

New disparities are also appearing between rural and urban areas, uplands and lowlands and North and South. Meanwhile, despite government efforts, poverty alleviation programmes have achieved only limited success. At the same time, rising expectations create both real and perceived needs among a growing segment of the population. These find their way into family and individual economic decisions aimed at either simple survival or upward social mobility. The assessment has shown that not all of the children participated in the sex trade to help their family escape poverty; a considerable number did this with the sole purpose of achieving personal material goals.

Rapid changes in values, consequent disorientation and demoralization. Even more detrimental are rapid changes in family and individual values. The present dilemma is that many long-held beliefs and traditions (some of which have been very positive for the cohesion of family and society) eroded before and during the *doi moi* reforms.¹ Meanwhile, new, many imported, values are not always positive in nature. Lacking viable values as a foundation for views of the community and their own roles in society, many people become disoriented, even demoralized. The expanding market for prostitution in general and child prostitution in particular in both supply and demand is a clear indication of such new demoralization enhanced by increasing social inequalities.

Poor understanding and implementation of law. Against this backdrop, the idea of law as the foundation of state and society is quite new in Viet Nam. Historically, laws have not been well understood in Viet Nam. As a result, people can easily violate laws without realizing that their conduct is illegal. They may take the laws lightly or have no legally sanctioned responses when their rights and interests are violated or threatened. Furthermore, an effective system of state and local bodies to implement laws in a consistent manner does not exist. The old adage “the King’s rule stops at the village gate” still prevails in rural areas. As such, laws may be well designed but in many cases they are poorly executed.

Expansion of the market for children in prostitution and networking of actors involved in the sex trade. The structural factors described above have together created conditions conducive for the emergence and expansion of the market for sexually exploited children as well as the organization of brothels (disguised as they are) and the networking of criminals involved in running the sex services sector. There is also evidence of cross-border networking, for example in the trafficking of women and children from Viet Nam to China, Japan and some south-east Asian countries and in the operation of sex tours and in job introduction agencies involved in trafficking.

3.2.2 Community level

Material and social conditions in communities of origin. Some of the same problems at the societal level are reproduced at the local community level, with even stronger effects on families and individuals. Community economic conditions, such as poor infrastructure, low living standards, social differentiation and an undeveloped local labour market and structure may become factors pushing people to urban centres to seek jobs, mainly in the informal sectors. The assessment provided ample evidence of family poverty as a root cause of the children’s decision to work.

While the community’s material conditions significantly define the social welfare of families and their members and provide the material causes of their economic decisions, the social conditions of the community are equally important. The latter defines the social space in which families and individuals live. As such, social composition (degree of homogeneity/heterogeneity), social organization and social cohesiveness all become important factors defining the types of socialization received by family and children.

Tradition, values, beliefs, customs. Similarly, beliefs, traditions, values and customs are also crucial for community cohesion, either for good or bad, and contribute to the socialization of family and individuals. Traditional values can work in favour of prostitution as easily as they can work against it. For example, the persistent belief in traditional gender roles sees women as being of less value than men. And more than one child in the sample decided to work in prostitution because of her assumed greater responsibility than male siblings toward the family’s welfare.

Social conditions, traditions, values, norms and beliefs in Viet Nam have all been transformed in history. For example, before economic reforms were initiated, collectivization from the 1950s till the mid-1980s altered many values (though by no means eliminating them), changing attitudes to some extent from

¹ Transition to a market economy with a socialist orientation.

family- and community-oriented to state-oriented. This proved to be very powerful in mobilizing people during the war. After national unification, as national devotion ceased to be first priority, people turned back toward their families and communities. But many positive values are gone, and it will not be easy to regain them.

Meanwhile, people are assaulted by new values which, without strong protection of traditional core values – and taken together with pressing material needs in the context of limited poverty alleviation programmes – help to drive some people into painful economic decisions, including that of entering prostitution.

3.2.3 Organizational level

Organizational weaknesses prevent effective government intervention. The major problems include lack of reliable information, ineffective information, education and communication (IEC) programmes, loose vertical and horizontal cooperation among state organizations at both central and local levels and poor response and cooperation from the community.

Responsible state bodies have limited reliable information regarding prostitution. At the same time, vertical and horizontal cooperation among these organizations is too weak to enable effective action. Within a structure of top-down decision making, there is little room for bottom-up information sharing and decision making, despite the fact that prostitution must be approached at the grassroots level. Information, education and communication (IEC) programmes, for example, are merely initiatives of state authorities without serious consideration of how they might be adapted to local conditions in changing community behaviour. Organizations do not understand or, in some cases, do not show concern for the issue of prostitution, other than as evidence that the poverty alleviation and universal education programmes are essential and that *doi moi* has brought with it very negative consequences (Kelly and Le, 1999). It is not uncommon that the interests of any state run against community interests. In the battle against prostitution, the interests of both state and community usually coincide. However, where badly executed, state programmes can alienate the community. Ideally, community and state would act in concert through grassroots organizations. Currently, this does not appear to happen with regard to dealing with the issue of prostitution.

3.2.4 Family level

Material welfare and social capital. The family is the child's immediate social space. In the context of changes at community and national levels, as described above, this most important institution has also undergone critical changes. Many problems at the community and societal level are now manifested at the family level. Family welfare and social capital can be seen as comprehended in the larger structures, but families still reserve a degree of independence from outside institutions and behave according to their own available resources and opportunities and to what they think is right. These resources, opportunities and "sense of right" may be actual or perceived. Families in Viet Nam still reserve a certain degree of independence from outside (legal and political) institutions and behave according to their knowledge, values, available resources and the opportunities presented.

Judging by the literature as well as information collected from the assessment, children of some family types are more at risk of being exposed to prostitution than others. Among the family types at highest risk are the poor, those lacking formal or family education, those with negative gender roles, those suffering from value disorientation, those ridden by problems such as divorce, separation, alcoholism, drug abuse, immorality or criminal behaviour. Essentially, these are families that have been excluded and marginalized in the process of economic reform and who are not reached by government economic and social programmes.

3.2.5 Individual level

The assessment shows that the following individual factors (in addition to the structural, community, family and organizational ones) are important in making children vulnerable to prostitution:

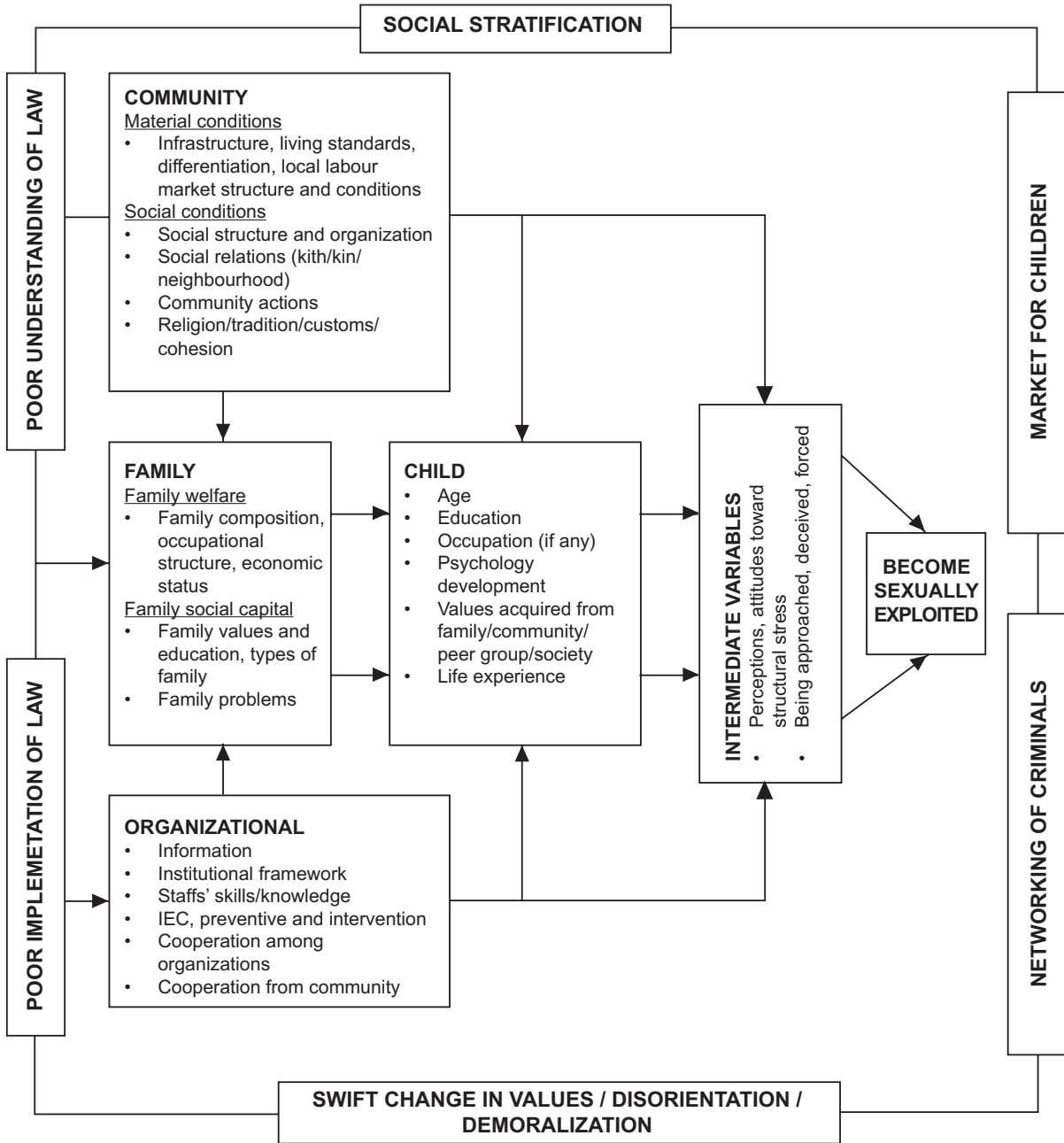
- age (children younger than 14 are unlikely to become sexually exploited)
- physical condition and attractiveness (employers, procurers, pimps are unlikely to take children who are not “qualified” for the activity)
- education (in general, the better educated, the less likely that the children will become involved in prostitution)²
- psychology and mental development (this is very much shaped by social upbringing)
- values acquired from families, community, peer groups (social association)
- life experience

3.2.6 Intermediate factors

All of the variables (structural, community, family, organizational and individual) help to shape children’s perception of the pressures that they face. Taken together with the relative likelihood of being approached, deceived or even coerced by agents, these factors can predispose children toward becoming sexually exploited.

² While better education is likely to be a strong preventive factor, it in fact depends on other variables, such as the availability of accessible jobs outside the low-income agricultural sector.

Diagram 1: The Inter-Relationship Between Contextual and Individual Factors Leading Children Into Prostitution



CHAPTER 4: BASELINE INFORMATION PRODUCTS

4.1 The Where: Magnitude of the Problem of Children in Prostitution in Researched Areas

While the actual magnitude of children in prostitution is by no means clear, based on what the research teams observed as well as information collected from brothel owners, sexually exploited children and key local informants, the results provide some insights to the problem, though at selected locations already outlined – Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho.

4.1.1 Hanoi

Inner city area. Three geographical locations were researched in Hanoi: the strip that includes Ton Duc Thang, Tay Son, Thai Ha, Nga Tu So and Truong Chinh streets; Hai Ba Trung Street; and Bui. Luxury establishments – mainly in the form of karaoke bars and mini-hotels where customers can buy food, drink and karaoke services – are clustered at these three locations. It is widely understood that customers can pay waitresses for sexual services at these bars.

Children here could be described as physically more “beautiful” than those engaged in prostitution in the city outskirts or the city frontier, since usually only young, attractive girls can remain employed in a market drawn mainly from affluent social groups. Of course, the cost of sexual services is also higher, as are the earnings of both employers and employees, including the children. The monthly earnings of the children working in these establishments can be VND 5 or 6 million up to VND 15 million (US \$400 to \$1,000), which is as much as 10 times higher than that of some of those located in Hai Phong. (The current average per capita GDP in Viet Nam is just over US \$300 a year, or about US \$25 a month. In many rural areas, the annual per capita income is even less than US \$100). As reported by the children, many came to Hanoi from such low-income families. This huge income gap was an important factor in their decision to engage in the expanding lucrative sex sector.

Interview information indicated that most of the sex workers were between 15 and 22 years of age, although no breakdown by age was provided. Even those actors involved could not tell exactly how many sexually exploited children were located in the neighbourhood, although some knew the number of establishments where children were available. According to some owners interviewed, a total of about 51 disguised brothels were found in these three locations of the inner-city area. Each establishment employed from 3 to 15 sex workers, about 10 on average, with around one-third of them children. This information suggests that there were about 500 sex workers at these locations, among whom more than 150 were children.

City outskirts. Sexual services in the city outskirts were also widely available. The assessment covered just three areas: Dich Vong, Tu Liem and Thang Long bridge; Thanh Xuan/Ha Dong; and Giap Bat. According to the key informants, hundreds of establishments in the form of garden cafes, karaoke bars, restaurants and mini-hotels employ thousands of workers, many of them disguised sex workers. No actual figures were provided, however. Compared to the inner-city locations, children involved in prostitution here were more diverse and their earnings were lower – VND 3 million or less. Many, in fact, were sex workers who could not make a go of it in the inner city and who had to move here. Indeed, the majority were recruited directly from the countryside, usually through social networks among the sex workers themselves (see Sections 4.4 and 4.6).

City frontier. Two small towns were selected for the assessment: Thanh Tuoc and Nhu Quynh, both of them satellites of Hanoi. Thanh Tuoc is a special place where affluent customers from Hanoi and some foreigners go for sex services. Outsiders cannot buy services here, since only familiar customers are

admitted, and only through them may newcomers be introduced to the employers.

Customers come here mainly for services that are hard to find in downtown Hanoi. In their own language, here they can have *huong dong gio noi*, or “the scent of rice field”. Essentially, this refers to the sex services of young country girls. Unlike other places where sexually exploited children account for only a proportion of the total employees, here the majority of employees are children, wearing simple clothes and no cosmetics. Key informants told the research team that there were about such 20 establishments, each employing 2 to 4 children, for a total of about 50 children in the area. The average earnings of children located here was about VND 7 million (US \$450) a month.

Unlike Thanh Tuoc, Nhu Quynh is a typical small town where the majority of people work in the rural sector, and very few families are involved in the sex industry. In total, about 15 establishments employ about 10 sex workers each, about one-third of them children of 17 years or younger. Thus, it is estimated that there are about 50 children involved in prostitution in the area.

4.1.2 Hai Phong

Kien An. Kien An, formerly a small town, was recently integrated into the city of Hai Phong. Located about 10 kilometres from the city’s downtown, it is close enough to attract customers but distant enough to avoid being “disturbed” by the city authorities. Sex services here are very visible and uninhibited, in much the same way they are in Do Son (described below). There are five major establishments in town, each with its own mode of operation and each attracting a different type of customer. These major establishments also provide sex workers to a number of smaller establishments. Estimates indicate there are 100 sex workers or more in the area. The number of children in prostitution is uncertain, but there is probably one-fourth to one-third of the total, or 30 to 40.

During the investigators’ visit to one hotel, the best-organized place of them all, the owner received and made many calls regarding sexual services for different establishments. He was assisted by a team of four pimps. The hotel had a number of luxurious rooms from which customers could order sex workers. All the sexually exploited children were physically attractive, nicely dressed and appeared very professional. One-third of them owned expensive imported motorcycles. On average, their earnings were VND 5 million (US \$320) a month or more, which is very high compared to that of the more sexually exploited children of Do Son.

At another hotel, all employees must wear the Vietnamese *ao dai*, reputed to enhance a girl’s femininity. The employer told the investigators that her customers were all gentlemen who preferred sex workers who looked courteous.

Do Son. Do Son is a famous tourist centre located on the coast only 18 kilometres from the city of Hai Phong. Informal information suggests that nowhere in the North has the sex industry developed as intensively as it has here. The runner-up is probably Quang Ninh, also a tourist area. The sex sector in Do Son, as in Kien An, is also very visible. In the opinions of the key informants, which were confirmed by the investigators’ observations, almost all the service businesses in these areas – hotels, restaurants, massage parlours, saunas, pharmacies, taxis, hair salons, tailors, beauty shops, phone services, etc. – derived benefits from the sex trade. Thus, and unlike in other areas, sex workers operate openly. They do not feel reserved about their activity, since the community, the population of which works mainly in the service sectors, consider them as necessary to the local economy. Even some families with members working in the local police department operate sexual services. The sex sector in Do Son is almost entirely tolerated by the local authorities.

No one, even among those in the sexual service network in Do Son, could provide reliable figures regarding the magnitude of local prostitution in general and child prostitution in particular. Estimates of several hundred establishments with thousands of sex workers were common.

4.1.3 Ho Chi Minh City

Prostitution has been a problem in Ho Chi Minh City, the largest metropolitan city of Viet Nam, for decades. Extensively developed during the Viet Nam War when the city became the so-called “Gem Stone” of the East – a place for entertainment of foreign troops, prostitution went down to its minimum during the late 1970s and early 1980s under severe police raids. However, it never ceased to exist, albeit run underground. With the new economic reforms and the city’s booming economy, along with a decrease of government control over the population, prostitution has regained momentum and has expanded massively ever since.

The official figures provided by the Sub-Department for Social Evils Prevention (Sub-DSEP) in Ho Chi Minh City show that currently there are about 10,000 to 15,000 sex workers in Ho Chi Minh City; of them, 1,000 to 1,500 (10 percent) were children younger than 18. However, authorities also admitted that the exact number was impossible to determine due to the underground nature of prostitution as well as the very high mobility of sex workers (moving from area to area and from province to province). But the Sub-DSEP rejects the figures in newspapers that the number of sex workers in Ho Chi Minh City is about 50,000.

While no better information is available, based on the assessment findings, it is safe to say that the number of sex workers is much higher than the official estimates. As shown in the Section 2.2.3, at only 15 licensed establishments and 10 streets visited, the estimated number of sex workers were already about 433 – of them 165, or 38 percent, were children aged up to 17 years old. For the whole of selected neighbourhoods, the numbers were much higher (see description below). This suggests the much larger magnitude of the problem in the city.

Inner-city area. Three geographical locations were covered in the inner city: (i) the streets and parks at the heart of the city surrounding the Unification Palace (Independence Palace during the Viet Nam War) and the city zoo. These areas are busy public places where street sex workers frequent to get customers; (ii) the streets along and around the Saigon River – the Chuong Duong Harbour – a place of cheap establishments with poor services; and (iii) streets of Districts I and V where luxury establishments disguised as mini hotels, restaurants and karaoke bars are situated.

Like in Hanoi, observation showed that the sexually exploited children in the licensed establishments at the city centre could be described as physically more beautiful than those located in the city outskirts or the city frontier for the same reason, and only young, attractive girls could remain competitive for much higher pay (between VND 6 million up to VND 16 million, or US \$400 to more than \$1,000 a month).

Even those actors involved could not tell exactly how many sexually exploited children were located in the neighbourhood, although some knew the number of establishments where children were available. According to key informants interviewed, a total of about 67 disguised brothels were found in these three locations of the inner-city area. Each establishment employed from 5 to 15 sex workers, about 10 on average, with around one-third of them children. This information suggests that there were 600 to 700 sex workers at these locations and that more than 200 were children.

In addition, there are a thousand sex workers soliciting in streets and parks in the city centre; of them, 25 to 30 percent are children under 18. Their earnings were much lower with few that can make up to VND 5 million a month (US \$357). The majority earned between VND 2 million to VND 3 million (US \$140 to US \$214) or even lower, just VND 1 million VND (US \$71).

City outskirts. Sexual services in the city outskirts were also widely available. The assessment covered six districts: (i) District IV: Xom Chieu, the area of street gangs; Nguyen Tat Thanh street of affluent residents; (ii) District VI: the Phu Lam park, a “hot” place for prostitution; (iii) District VII, area of the urban poor and Xom Cay Diep, another area of street gangs; the districts of (iv) Tan Binh, (v) Binh

Thanh and (vi) Phu Nhuan – the places with highly mobile population and housing expansion.

According to the key informants, there are more than a hundred establishments in the form of cheap karaoke bars, restaurants and mini-hotels employing more than a thousand workers. No actual figures were provided, however. Compared to the inner-city locations, children engaged in prostitution here were more diverse and their earnings were lower – from VND 3 million (US \$214). Many, in fact, were sex workers who could not make a go of it in the inner city and who had to move here. Indeed, many were recruited directly from the countryside, either through social networks among the sex workers or they came to the city for the activity (see section 4.4).

Operations and earnings of street sex workers (estimated to number more than a thousand) on the city outskirts were similar to those on streets in the city centre.

City frontier. The research team covered three busy areas around the famous West Bus Station situated in the sub-rural district of Binh Chanh. The neighbourhood is estimated to have a hundred licensed establishments recruiting thousands of employees; of them, one-fifth to one-fourth were children. There is no sharp difference between licensed establishments in the city frontier and those of the city outskirts in terms of operation and earnings of the employees and employers.

4.1.4 Can Tho

The city. Can Tho is a rich province located in the heart of the fertile Mekong River Delta. It used to be proudly named the *Central City of the West*, or *Can Tho of White Rice and Crystal Water*. Located on the intersection of the National Highway One and one of the two largest branches of the Mekong River, the Hau River, the city is actually the centre for economic transaction, services, transportation and tourism.

A few years ago, Ninh Kieu riverside was a place well known for prostitution. However, recent police efforts have cleared the area, but unfortunately not the problem, as sex workers simply moved to another area – the Bai Cat (Cai Khe district) on the city's edge. This is a large area under construction at the time of the assessment, with a highly mobile population and booming services.

Sex workers operate in three ways in Bai Cat. A few hundred of them simply stay along streets, lanes and around the stadium to solicit customers. The others stay in small huts hidden in gardens and pimps obtain the customers. Estimates indicate that there are about 200 to 300 sex workers; about 20 percent of them, or some 40 to 60, were children. The better-looking, younger and of course more expensive prostitutes, like those in Ho Chi Minh City, served in licensed establishments.

Cai Rang town, Chau Thanh district. Located just 12 kilometres south of the city, Cai Rang town resembles the situation of Kien An in the northern Hai Phong. The town is growing economically and so is the sex sector. There has been an emergence of many karaoke bars, restaurants and mini hotels with the fresh supply of women directly from the district as well as other rural districts of the province. There are about six establishments in the researched area, each having recruited about 10 employees; of them, one-third were children.

As with other towns in the Mekong River Delta, outside of Cai Rang there are many large orchards for relaxation and cheap fruits for sale. These places have become ideal for the expanding operations of the prostitution business. Sex workers operate independently (relatively, as they still work with pimps). Each owns a small hut as a place to serve customers. Similar to the situation in Thanh Tuoc of the North, customers here are those who knew the place from the introduction by others. There are about 100 sex workers working here; of them, 10 to 15 percent were children.

O Mon and Thot Not districts. O Mon together with the Thot Not district are located northwest of the city. These two districts have emerged recently as “hot” places for prostitution. In O Mon district, along the Highway 91 and close to the district centre, there are a few dozen restaurants, cafes and karaoke bars. According to local key informants, the area had about 100 sex workers, with 10 to 15 percent of them estimated to be children.

Compared to Chau Thanh and O Mon, the sex sector in Thot Not is much more widespread and visible, particularly in Vinh Trinh commune, as reported by newspapers. An area of poor population, sex service is the only economic activity that can bring about decent earnings. A substantial segment of the population openly runs sex operations in front of the police who have proven to be very ineffective. There were at least 100 sex workers in the commune; about one-third to nearly a half of them were children. It was reported to the investigators (by resource people) that it was not uncommon for parents to operate as guards and pimps for their daughters.

No one, even among those in the sexual service network in Thot Not, could provide reliable figures regarding the magnitude of local prostitution in general and child prostitution in particular. Estimates of several hundreds of establishments with thousands of sex workers were common.

Table 2: *Estimated Numbers of Establishments, Sex Workers and Sexually Exploited Children in Selected Geographical Locations*

	Estimated number of establishments	Estimated number of streets/places*	Estimated number of sex workers	% children	Estimated number of children
Hanoi					
Inner-city	51	-	500	30%	150
Outskirts	Hundreds	-	Thousands	-	Hundreds
Frontier	35	-	200 or more	-	About 100
Hai Phong					
Kien An	-	-	100 or more	30%	30 to 40
Do Son	Hundreds	-	Thousands	-	Hundreds
Ho Chi Minh City					
Inner-city	67	-	690	30-35%	200-240
Outskirts	-	8	1,000	25-30%	hundreds
	110	-	1,390	30-35%	420-480
Frontier	-	12	Thousands	20-25%	hundreds
	100	-	Hundreds	20-25%	hundreds
Can Tho					
Can Tho	20-30	-	200-300	20-25%	40-80
	-	3	200-300	20%	40-60
Cai rang	6	-	60	30%	15-20
	-	1	100	10-15%	10-15
O Mon	30	-	100	15-20%	15-20
Thot Not	56	-	280	30%	88
	-	2	45	50%	20-25

*Streets/places where street sex workers solicit

The above table presents estimates of the magnitude of children in prostitution at the selected locations targeted in the rapid assessment. *They are only estimates, it must be emphasized, and the real figures could be quite different.* Nevertheless, they are useful since they indicate how extensive the issue is, albeit only in relative terms.

4.2 The Who: Baseline Information of the Interviewed Children

4.2.1 Demographic characteristics

Age. The age range of all the 122 children interviewed from both assessments was between 13 and 17. However, in the North, the youngest of them was 15. (Of the 42 children interviewed there, 26 of them, or 62 percent, were 17 years old, 11, or 26 percent, were 16 years old, and only 5 children, or 12 percent, were 15 years old.)

In contrast to the findings in the North where the majority (88 percent) were 16 or 17 years old, the age distribution of the children interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho was relatively wide: slightly more than half of them (56.3 percent) were aged 16 and 17, and the rest (43.7 percent) were between 13 and 15 years old. This suggests the more widespread participation in the sex sector of children of different ages in the South. Keep in mind also, these figures hide the fact that most of the children started their activity much earlier, as the majority of them (87.8 percent) began at least one year before being interviewed (see Section 4.3).

Table 3: Age of Children Interviewed

Province	Age					Total
	13	14	15	16	17	
Hanoi	-	-	2	8	13	23
Hai Phong	-	-	3	3	13	19
HCM City	3	5	11	11	11	41
Can Tho	1	4	11	12	11	39
Total	4 (3.3%)	9 (7.4%)	27 (22.1%)	34 (27.9%)	48 (39.3%)	122 (100%)

Sex. One of the priorities of this assessment was to study boy prostitutes. Such an attempt failed in the North because, so far, no case of boy prostitution has been reported in this region, although there is informal information on male prostitution (performed by adults of whom many are college students) in Hanoi. In the South, male prostitution is known to exist particularly in Bason, the ship dock area close to the centre of Ho Chi Minh City. The media has reported a few cases of boys in prostitution found on the street of Pham Ngu Lao in Ho Chi Minh City. This is a busy tourist area where, according to local informants, many gays (among the foreign tourists) frequent. This information guided the search, and the team found five boys (one is of Khmer ethnicity) in that area. Section 4.4 provides information on their ways of becoming sexually exploited and their practices. The rest of the interviewed children (75) in the selected areas were girls.

Ethnicity. In the North, two children from the Tay and Muong ethnic minorities were interviewed in Hanoi. Sex workers from various ethnic minorities in North Viet Nam have been found and reported. Since they are much poorer and less educated than many of their mainstream counterparts, in some opinion they are probably more easily tricked into prostitution. Other observers disagree. One group of researchers that the consultant talked with believed that ethnic minorities, in their experience, were the least likely to become involved in prostitution because they clung more tightly to traditional cultures and were less influenced by new changes than were mainstream Vietnamese.

In the South, four children from the Khmer ethnic minority were approached and interviewed in the assessment: two of them worked in restaurants in Can Tho and the other two (one girl and one boy) operated from the street in Ho Chi Minh City. No one from other ethnic minorities was found.

4.2.2 Origins of the children interviewed

The stories told by the interviewed children provided certain clues of the combination of factors that ultimately resulted in their involvement in the sex sector. Family poverty, low family education and particularly delinquent family values were among the prime causes. A number of family characteristics of the children support this argument.

Family place of residence and migration status. The majority of the children engaged in prostitution (33, or 79 percent) came from rural areas in the assessment in the North, while in the South almost a half of the sample (42.5 percent) had urban origins, particularly those in Ho Chi Minh City (53.7 percent). Like in many large metropolitan cities of the developing world, these young people are from the slums that resorted to street life at very early ages. The city also attracted children coming from other provinces, 48.8 percent, compared to 30.8 percent in Can Tho.

The provinces adjacent to Hanoi and Hai Phong, many of them located on the Red River Delta, are the major sending areas – a total of 24 children came from Ha Tay, Ha Nam, Bac Ninh, Hai Hung, Hai Duong, Hai Phong (rural districts), Vinh Phuc, Hoa Binh, Ninh Binh, Thai Nguyen and Thai Binh. Traditionally, these provinces have been places of origin for migration to the cities, the northern uplands area and the South. Being densely populated (more than 1,000 people per square kilometre), these provinces often face food shortages together with widespread unemployment and underemployment. These factors, together with convenient transportation facilities, encourage children to move to Hanoi and Hai Phong to seek jobs. There were also five children from the upland provinces of Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Bac Giang and Tuyen Quang. Another nine children were from the poverty-stricken provinces of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa in the northern central region. The remaining four children came from families in the poor neighbourhoods of Gia Lam, Trai Nhan, Phuc Tan and Think Hao in Hanoi.

Of the total sample in the North, there were only two children whose families had migrated: one moved to Hanoi from Lam Dong in the Central Highland and one migrated to Hai Phong from the mountainous province of Lao Cai. Families of the other 40 children interviewed had never moved. Being peasants and lacking skills suited to non-agricultural jobs, as we will see later in this report, they have been tied to assigned plots of land with very low crop yields and thus remain in a poverty trap.

In the study of the South, the provinces of the south-east and the Mekong River Delta adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho were the major sending areas. There were 19 children who came to Ho Chi Minh City from Binh Duong, Long An, Tay Ninh, Tien Giang, An Giang, Kien Giang, Can Tho, Vinh Long, Soc Trang and Ca Mau provinces. There was only one child who migrated to the city from Phan Thiet (Binh Thuan province) on the Central Coast. For Can Tho, 12 children came from Ho Chi Minh City, An Giang, Kien Giang, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Minh Hai and Ca Mau. Traditionally, these have been provinces from where migrants originated, particularly during the period of highly artificial urbanization during the Viet Nam War and the period after the economic reforms in the mid-1980s.

Table 4: Place of Residence and Migration Status of Family of Interviewed Children

Current family residence	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Urban	7	30.4	2	10.5	22	53.7	12	30.8	43	35.2
Rural	16	59.6	17	89.5	19	46.3	27	69.2	79	64.8
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100
Same province	4	17.4	5	26.3	21	51.2	27	69.2	57	46.7
Other province	19	82.6	14	73.7	20	48.8	12	30.8	65	53.3
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100
Family migration status										
Migration	1	4.3	1	5.3	15	36.6	6	15.4	23	18.9
Non-migration	22	95.7	18	94.7	26	63.4	33	84.6	99	81.1
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

There were 21 children, accounting for 26.3 percent of the total southern sample, whose families had migrated. Children interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City who came from migrated families accounted for a much higher rate (36.6 percent) than those found in Can Tho (15.4 percent). Economic difficulties accounted for the move of the families of a majority of the children, 92 percent in Ho Chi Minh City and 85 percent in Can Tho. Upon arrival at the cities, many ended up working in the informal sector, often at the bottom tier.

Size and type of family. It is not a coincidence that many children came from families with many members, as large family size has been a strong explanatory variable for poverty in the developing world: the average family size among the respondents was about 5.5 people. Closer examination shows that more than one-third of the children (37.7 percent) came from families with more than five family members, and some 18 percent of the total children were from families of more than seven people (Table 5).

But more serious was family trauma, which nearly half (40 percent) of the children underwent when they were very young. Table 5 also provides the proportions of children who have experienced parental divorce (18 percent) or the death of a mother (4.1 percent) or father (9 percent) or both (5.7 percent). Another 3.4 percent were abandoned by their parents. As a consequence, many had to live with relatives without adequate upbringing. Some were even left to live on the streets, as in the cases of three children interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City and one in Can Tho. Incidents that occurred outside the Vietnamese territory may also be relevant, as one child (of Khmer origin) had had a father killed by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s and was ignored by his mother who remarried. Being left alone, he migrated to Viet Nam, worked on the street in Ho Chi Minh City as a shoeshine boy, was abused sexually and finally ended up in prostitution. Almost all the provocations that led children into prostitution can ultimately be traced to processes at the family level.

Table 5: Size and Type of Family

Family size	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
3 members or less	2	8.7	5	26.3	9	22	9	23.1	25	20.4
4-5 members	9	39.1	2	10.5	12	29.3	6	15.4	29	23.8
6-7 members	9	39.1	9	47.4	12	29.3	16	41	46	37.7
Over 7 members	3	13.1	3	15.8	8	19.5	8	20.5	22	18.1
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100
Average family size	5.8		5.3		5.4		5.6		5.5	
Family type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Family with parents	20	87	12	63.1	25	61	16	41	73	59.8
Family with divorced parents	3	13	4	21	8	19.5	7	17.9	22	18
Family with mother deceased	-	-	1	5.3	-	-	4	10.3	5	4.1
Family with father deceased	-	-	1	5.3	3	7.3	7	17.9	11	9
Orphans	-	-	1	5.3	2	4.9	4	10.2	7	5.7
Children abandoned	-	-	-	-	3	7.3	1	2.6	4	3.4
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

Educational level of parents. Parents of the interviewed children had very low formal educational attainment. For the North, more than a half of the parents (62 percent) had only primary education (Grades 1 to 4, as categorized in the old education system).¹ About 29 percent had a lower secondary education and only 7 percent had completed upper secondary education. Another 3 percent were illiterate. For the South, the situation was even worse: 75 percent of parents had primary education, 13 percent had lower secondary education, 2 percent had upper secondary education and 11 percent were illiterate.

There was a significant difference in the educational attainments of fathers and mothers in the North. Mothers often acquired poorer education than fathers, although there were significant differences between the North and the South. Education for women in Viet Nam has traditionally been considered less important than for men. This perception and practice continues to have a negative impact on women in general and the children in our sample, particularly as many of them had families giving highest priority in schooling to their sons while their daughters were expected to focus more on helping economically. Among the mothers in the North, only 23 percent had completed a lower secondary education, while not a single one had completed upper secondary school (the respective figures for fathers were 34 percent and 14 percent). For the South, only 7 percent of the mothers had completed a lower secondary education, while not a single one had ever gone to upper secondary school (the respective figures for fathers were 22 percent and 5 percent).

¹ The formal educational system in Viet Nam used to consist of 10 grades. The primary education level was comprised of Grades 1 through 4; the lower secondary education level consisted of Grades 5 through 8; and Grades 8 through 10 comprised the upper secondary education level. In the new educational system, the primary level consists of Grades 1 through 5; lower secondary consists of Grades 6 through 9; and upper secondary education level consists of Grades 10 through 12.

Major economic activities in the family. Since the majority of children had families living in the countryside, 47.9 percent came from families where agricultural production accounted for their family's economic activities. The parents of another 27.4 children found livelihood in petty trade and private services, although in-depth information collected during the assessment revealed that those family members were working at the bottom end of the occupational structure. The list of their jobs includes street bicycle repair, cyclo driving, vegetable/fruit selling, carpentering, cloth washing, etc.; 9.4 percent of the young people's parents were hired to do manual work. A further 5.1 percent of the children came from families with parents who were already retired or simply doing unpaid housework. Finally, there were 9.4 percent of the parents who were completely unemployed; many actually lived by support of their children engaged in prostitution. There was only one child in Hanoi who had parents working in the state sector.

Diagram 2: Educational Attainment of Parents

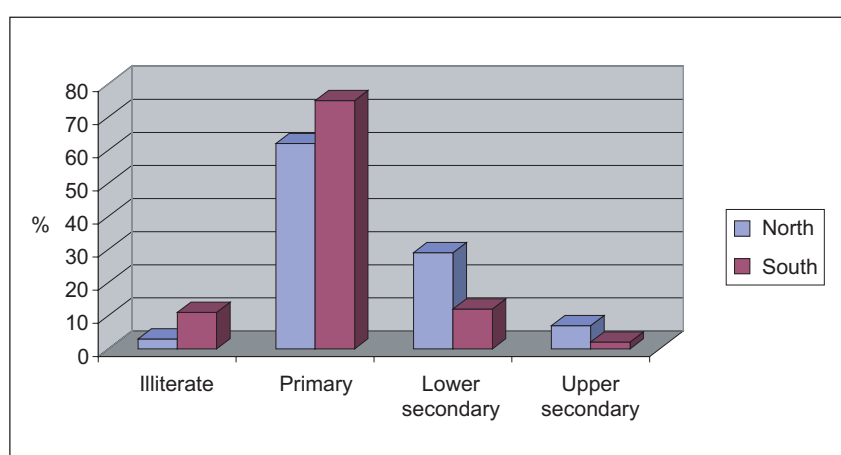


Table 6: Major Economic Activities of Family Members

Reason	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
State employee	1	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.8
Agriculture	15	65.2	17	94.4	12	30.8	12	32.4	56	47.9
Hired manual work	-	-	-	-	5	12.8	6	16.2	11	9.4
Petty trade/service	5	21.7	-	-	17	43.6	10	27	32	27.4
Retired/housework	2	8.6	1	5.6	-	-	3	8.1	6	5.1
Unemployed	-	-	-	-	5	12.8	6	16.2	11	9.4
Total*	23	100	18	100	39	100	37	100	117	100

* Since there were 5 children who were orphans, the figures in the bottom row (Total) are not 19, 41, 39 and 122.

Family's income and indebtedness. The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the families of the interviewed children partly explained the severe economic difficulties that their families were facing. On average, a family's per capita income in the North was about VND 139,000 a month (or about US \$120 per year), which is about half the national average per capita GDP of US \$320. In the South, the monthly income was much lower, about VND 113,000 (or about US \$97 per year),² which was less than a third of the national average per capita GDP.

² The exchange rate at the time of the assessment was more than VND 14,000 per US \$1.

There was also considerable variation in the per capita income between the two areas of each side of the country. In the North, the families interviewed in Hanoi earned around VND 172,000 a month (or US \$147 a year), while in Hai Phong they earned only VND 73,000 (US \$60 a year); in the South, it was VND 125,000 (US \$107 a year) among families interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City and VND 88,000 (US \$75 a year) among those interviewed in Can Tho.

Family poverty and indebtedness are reconfirmed to be the major causes that provoked many children to engage in prostitution, either voluntarily or being forced, sometimes even by their family members.

In the North, only 52 percent of the children's families were able to make enough to satisfy their basic needs, while roughly 7 percent had some disposable income. Nearly a third of the children's families had debts, with more families of children working in Hai Phong (44 percent) being in debt than those of children working in Hanoi (18 percent). Causes of indebtedness reported by the children included medical costs for parents, schooling costs for the children and their siblings, investment in production and trading and even basic subsistence, given that some families lacked rice to eat from four to six months of the year.

The situation was somewhat worse in the South: While only 58.7 percent of the children's families were able to make enough to satisfy their basic needs and only one family (of the total southern sample) in Ho Chi Minh had some disposable income (from their cafe shop), up to 71.2 percent of all the children's families had debts. The causes of indebtedness reported by the children included medical costs for parents/grandparents, schooling costs for the children and their siblings, family ceremonies (such as worshipping ancestors) and events (such as wedding of other siblings), house repair, investment in production and trading as well as basic subsistence or debt services over a number of years.

4.2.3 Educational experience

Educational attainment of the children. The educational attainment of the interviewed children was also low: 15.6 percent of them were illiterate; 37.7 percent had received only primary education; 40.1 percent had lower secondary education; and only 6.6 percent had managed to reach upper secondary education level.

Diagram 3: Educational Attainment of Children

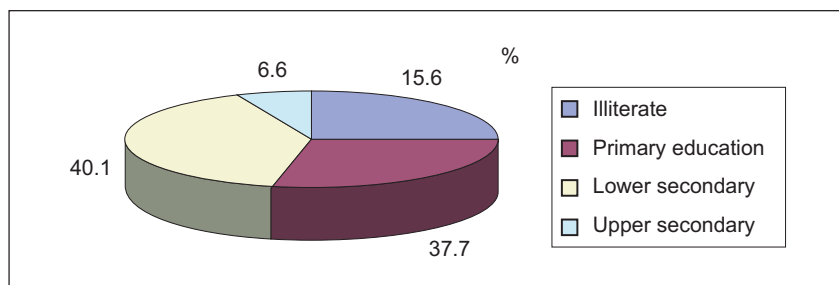


Table 7 displays further the breakdown of educational attainment of the children by grades. Compared to that of their northern counterparts, the educational attainments of the children interviewed in the South were much lower. Nearly half, 47.6 percent, received only primary education, 23.8 percent had lower secondary education, 3.8 percent had upper secondary education, and up to 23.8 percent were illiterate (the respective figures for the North are 19 percent having primary education, 69 percent with lower secondary education, up to 12 percent having upper secondary education and none were illiterate). This, together with information on family type (presented above) suggests a higher degree of ignorance among parents in the North than among the parents of the interviewed children in the South.

Table 7: Breakdown of Educational Attainment of the Children Interviewed

Grade	Primary school					Lower secondary school				Upper secondary school			Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Hanoi	-	-	1	1	1	6	3	2	5	1	1	2	23
Hai Phong	1	-	-	2	2	4	4	2	3	1	-	-	19
HCM City	7	2	6	5	3	6	2	2	1	1	1	1	37
Can Tho	2	4	2	5	2	3	4	1	1	-	-	-	24
Total	10	6	9	13	8	19	13	7	10	3	2	3	103

Distance to school. For the children covered by the sample, access to schools in terms of distance was easy since schools were located close to the children's homes, usually within range by bicycle. The most distant school was just four kilometres away. Many were within walking distance. The reason for the children dropping out of school, as indicated below, was purely economic and social.

Quality of available education. Nearly one-fifth of the children believed the formal education they received was good. What concerned them was not so much the teaching quality or knowledge acquired, but a school social environment in which teachers sincerely cared for their students and lent enthusiastic help, not only in studies but also in personal matters. However, this was not always the case – 29.1 percent of the children interviewed considered the quality of available education only medium, while 6.8 percent considered it bad. About half of those children interviewed (44.7 percent) were unable to evaluate the quality of their education.

Difficulties in school. The majority of the interviewed children (66 percent) mentioned educational costs – tuition fees, school fees (for construction, health insurance, hygiene, security, etc.), textbooks and other learning materials and other contributions, including money spent on private tutoring offered by teachers (more or less compulsory) – which can easily surmount their family capability. The figures given by the children ranged from VND 100,000 to VND 200,000 a month (depending on the level of education), which was essentially equal to their family's average per capita income of VND 113,000 (US \$8) a month. Poor performance in classes was mentioned by a half of the children as the reason that discouraged them. This sometimes also reflected economic difficulties that prevented them from focusing on their studies. Nearly one-fifth of the children (18 percent) felt no interest at all in school due to their social upbringing, which did not put high value on education. Finally, 3 percent mentioned bad relationship (with friends and teachers) as a real difficulty they had in their school years (Table 8).

Table 8: Educational Quality, Difficulties at School and Perceptions of Children Regarding Education

Quality of available education	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Good	2	8.7	3	15.8	10	27	5	20.8	20	19.4
Medium	15	65.2	10	52.6	5	13.5	-	-	30	29.1
Bad	1	4.3	2	10.5	4	10.8	-	-	7	6.8
Do not know	5	21.8	4	10.5	18	48.7	19	79.2	46	44.7
Total*	23	100	19	100	37	100	24	100	103	100
Difficulties at school**										
High cost for family	17/23(74%)		13/19(68%)		20/37(54%)		18/24(75%)		68/103(66%)	
Poor performance	11/23(48%)		12/19(63%)		17/37(46%)		14/24(58%)		54/103(52%)	
No interest in school	3/23(13%)		2/19(11%)		10/37(27%)		4/24(17%)		19/103(18%)	
Bad relationship	2/23(8.7%)		1/19(5%)		-		-		3/103(3%)	
Relevance of education to future										
Good for future	10	43.5	4	21	21	51	15	38.5	50	41
No relevance for future	11	47.8	12	63.2	13	32	20	51.3	56	46
Do not know	2	8.7	3	16.7	7	17	4	10.2	16	13
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

* These are total numbers of children who went to school and do not include those who were illiterate.

** Some children selected more than one reason.

Relevance of education to children's future. A combination of factors, both objective and subjective, caused a significant number (46 percent) of the interviewed children to perceive negatively the relevance of education to their future. Their opinions varied widely, however. Some saw a college diploma both as unattainable for them and as essential if people were to improve their circumstances. Others expressed the view that upward mobility for children of poor, marginalized families was hopeless and that education had no relevance for them beyond the need to avoid illiteracy. A few respondents said they just wanted to be free, to be different and saw no need for education. Some just assessed education in financial terms and believed other ways (such as prostitution) were a more certain path to better income.

Nevertheless, 41 percent of the children in the sample accepted the fact that, without education, they could not go any further. They believed that a better future, particularly one including a stable, honest job, could only be achieved with the help of education. Because of their circumstances, however, they had had to leave school.

All the children in the sample covered by the assessment had dropped out of school. Some had left school years earlier, some left just recently. The major reason given, again, was family economic difficulties, which accounted for 48.5 of the total cases. Poor performance at school explained another 8.7 percent of the school dropouts. A considerable proportion of the children left school because they had no interest simply because they thought there was no hope anyway for them and that they should leave to work for their family. Family trauma, such as divorce or the death of a father or mother, also affected schooling, as did social problems in the school. In the North, around 12 percent of students said they left school because it was what other children of their age did in their home village. One child told the interviewer that in her village children simply quit school after certain grades, usually when they were in lower secondary school, because families could not bear the cost of upper secondary schooling or simply because they thought there was no hope anyway for children of peasant families and that they should leave to work with the family farming.

Table 9: Reasons for Dropping Out of School

Reasons for dropping out	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Economic difficulties	9	39.1	9	47.4	18	48.6	14	58.3	50	48.5
Poor performance in school	4	17.4	2	10.5	-	-	3	12.5	9	8.7
No interest in school	-	-	-	-	16	43.2	3	12.5	19	18.4
Family trauma	2	8.7	4	21	2	5.4	4	16.7	12	11.7
Social problems in school	-	-	-	-	1	2.7	-	-	1	.9
Peer common practice	3	13	2	10.5	-	-	-	-	5	5
Personal problems	4	17.4	2	10.5	-	-	-	-	6	5.8
Others	1	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.9
Total*	23	100	19	100	37	100	24	100	103	100

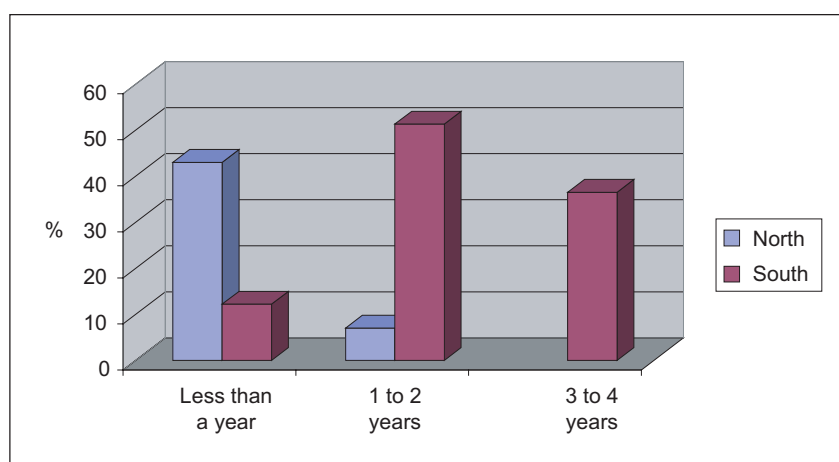
* These are total numbers of children who went to school and do not include those who were illiterate.

4.2.4 The road to prostitution

Period of time engaged in prostitution. If we take into consideration their age structure (see Section 4.2.1), we can see that compared to those in the North where the majority of children (88 percent) were between 16 and 17 years of age and only 7 percent had been engaged in prostitution for more than a year, the children in the South started to be in sex service much earlier and kept being in it much longer. The explanation of it is partly described in Sections 3.2 and 4.1.

At the time of the interviews, the majority of children in the South (87.8 percent) had been working in prostitution for more than a year. A high proportion had been in the sex sector from two to three years, 32.4 percent and 29.7 percent respectively. Only 7 percent had been working in prostitution for the previous four years. And 12.2 percent had been working for less than a year.

Whereas in the North at the time of the interviews, 24 percent of the children had been working in prostitution for only a month and 50 percent had worked for the previous three months. Only 15 percent of the total children had been in prostitution for more than 6 months (2 years was maximum). The explanation for these relatively short terms, according to one employer interviewed in Do Son, was simply that they were too young: most sexually exploited children started work at the age of 16 or 17. Thus, when the interviews took place, they were just beginning.

Diagram 4: Years Involved in Prostitution

Paths to becoming a sexually exploited child. The children interviewed became involved in prostitution for reasons presented in the following table.

Table 10: Reasons for Engaging in Prostitution

Reason	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Help family. No deception/force	6	26	8	42.1	16	39	23	59	53	43.4
Help family. With deception/force	7	30.4	5	26.3	5	12.2	3	7.7	20	16.4
Self-help ³	-	-	-	-	5	12.2	3	7.7	8	6.6
Make quick money	6	26	4	21.1	14	34.1	4	10.3	28	23
Family problems	1	4.3	1	5.3	-	-	5	12.8	7	5.7
Personal problems	2	9	1	5.3	1	2.4	1	2.6	5	4.1
Others	1	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.8
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

4.3 The Why: Reflections of Young People Involved in Prostitution⁴

The dominant view reflected in many previous research, mass media and campaigns is that children enter prostitution because of poverty. This assessment of North and South Viet Nam also evidenced this connection. However, the way children first came to prostitution varies. The following selected anecdotes are relatively typical of the children interviewed, though by no means exhaustive and are used here to highlight and categorize the factors that led children into prostitution.

(i) Children wanted to help their family out of economic difficulties; they themselves looked for work in prostitution.

The major attraction was the promise of much higher earnings than found in the other jobs available, given young peoples' limited skills and educational attainments.

My parents have to work very hard but we never have enough rice to eat. And my brother is going to school next year, but we don't have money to pay for his schooling. I do this activity because I can help my parents and get my brother to school. He's the son and my parents expect much of him. I looked for the activity myself since I knew the earnings were good.
Thu Van, 17 years old. Interviewed in Hanoi on 12 November 1999.

Thuy Ngan was 17 years old, second daughter of a large family of 12 members in a poor neighbourhood of the southern Can Tho City. Sheer poverty was the prime reason that pushed her into street-based sex activity in the well-known area of Bai Cat in Can Tho City. Like many northern children who sacrificed themselves for the family's well-being, she volunteered to work without family consent:

³ Those who received no support from families.

⁴ All names of the interviewees have been changed.

We are so poor, my family. We used to have a small plot of land but could not live on it. So five years ago my parents had to sell it and they have worked as tenants since then. But jobs are not always available. In the off seasons, sometimes we do not have enough rice to eat. ... My mother borrowed money from moneylenders against a throat-cutting rate (20 to 30 percent). Then the interests just kept accumulating and we were trapped. I decided to help my family out of debt. ... It is very simple since I live close to Bai Cat. I know how people make money here and just simply joined them. ... I lied to my parents and said I worked for a cafe and that's why I often returned home very late at night.

Thuy Ngan, 17 years old. Interviewed in Bai Cat, Can Tho City, on 14 May 2000.

(ii) Children wanted to help their family in economic difficulties. Their parents knew and allowed, even encouraged, them to engage in prostitution.

An astonishingly high number of cases was found in the South, 27 out of 80, or 34 percent (no similar case was found in the North) of children whose parents allowed, even encouraged, them to engage in prostitution to help the family economically. It is a common thinking among parents and other family members of those children that nothing is shameful, degrading or even dangerous in letting their daughters engage in sex activities. For them, it is the "duty" of children to help the family economically. Usually the first act is to sell their daughters' virginity, which is highly paid in the sex market, sometimes as much as US \$1,000 (but more often from US \$300 to \$500, or even lower). Children of this category knew what they were going to do and were obedient to their parents' will. Usually family members or relatives of the children arranged the work for them.

My mother was in serious debt. ... She told me it was my duty to help the family, as I am the oldest sister. ... With the help of an aunt, I was brought to Hanoi to sell my virginity for VND 15 million (more than US \$1,000) ... at a karaoke bar. My aunt knows the bar owner... I was forced to drink until I got drunk and then the customer "did" me. ... He was a businessman. Now I work in Can Tho City.

Diem Huong, 15 years old. Interviewed in Can Tho City on 13 May 2000.

Similarly, another child, Ngoc Anh, in Ho Chi Minh City was taken by her sister to one establishment, this time in the neighbouring Cambodia to sell her virginity:

My second sister Loan left for Cambodia two years ago [with friends who did the same activity]. She found a job at a massage parlour in Phnom Penh. A few months later she took me with her there.... I sold my virginity to an 80-year-old Cambodian man for US \$800. ... We are poor and I had to do it.

Ngoc Anh, 16 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on 24 May 2000.

(iii) Children laboured to help their family in economic difficulties. They were deceived and/or forced by their own parents.

In the South, there were five cases where the children were forced by their parents to engage in sex activities, sometimes for the family's survival, as with the case of Nhu Trang:

My parents forced me. ... I wanted to help them and my sisters and my brothers. ... But I am sad since they did not care much about what I feel and went through. ... Once I wanted to have a few days off because I was so sick, they did not allow me. They yelled at me as if I was a lazy girl so that I had to go and work on the street again.

Nhu Trang, 15 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on 20 May 2000.

But sometimes they were used to acquire money to cover their parents' own extravagant spending, like the case of Thu Thuy in Can Tho whose virginity was sold by her mother to someone in Cambodia. Despite being exploited by her mother, her attitude toward her parent is that of an obedient, "responsible" daughter:

My mother is a member of a *hui* (a credit group). She needs money to contribute to the group. She forces me to make money this way. I work everyday and she takes all the money. ... Two years ago she took me to Nam Vang in Cambodia. ... She said I would work as a dish cleaner. ... I do not know how far it was from here but we left in the early morning and arrived in the evening. We came to a restaurant and there I was told that I should sell my virginity for good money for my family. I did not understand what "virginity" means so my mother explained it to me. She said sooner or later I would lose it, but better to lose it this time since I could make money. If not, I will lose it to some "bastard" friends and it will be wasteful to do so. ... The customer was a middle-aged Chinese who bought my virginity with US \$300. My mother took money from him in advance and did not give any money to me. After that night, I stayed for about a month, making money by sleeping with all kinds of customers, including the Vietnamese. Then I travelled back and have worked in this neighbourhood ever since. ... It is better here since it is close to home. ... She just gives me two clothes a year and pays for my breakfast only. ... I did not get angry with her. She is my mother and my duty is to help her.

Thu Thuy, 16 years old. Interviewed in O Mon, Can Tho province on 16 May 2000.

(iv) *Children wanted to help their family in economic difficulties. They were deceived and/or forced by employers or pimps.*

Some children, while looking for jobs outside their communities (mainly in the urban places) fell into hands of recruiters/employers/pimps who deceived, or even forced, them to work as prostitutes.

My family is very poor. My older sister had to leave for Hanoi to work in order to help our parents. She left and then didn't write to us for a long time. So I decided to go to Hanoi looking for her. Some bad guys in Hanoi said they knew where my sister worked. When I came to this cafe, they kept me here and raped me. I've been forced to work here ever since.

Hue, 16 years old. Interviewed in Tu Liem, Hanoi on 11 November 1999.

I found a waiter job in a cafe. ... I know what other people [employees who provide sex service] do in this place but I thought it was voluntary. But one night, when everybody was out, the owner raped me. ... I did not want to tell his wife since he will deny his conduct anyway, and I had no evidence. ... I had nothing to lose afterwards and accepted to serve customers ever since.

Thu Hang, 17 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on 22 May 2000.

A man who knew one of my villagers met me and said that he could find me a servant job in Ho Chi Minh City with an income of VND 500,000, not including accommodation and food. For me it sounds like a very good opportunity since I can help my family. ... Once in the establishment, the female boss forced me to sleep with an old man. ... I do not know how much she got from selling my virginity, but I just remember that she gave me very little afterwards.

Be Bay, 14 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on 28 May 2000.

(v) Children wanted to help their family out of economic difficulties; they were first deceived but accepted to work in prostitution (no force involved).

Nguyet Huong was first deceived but could not refuse because the promised earnings were too important to her:

Initially, I just wanted to come to Hanoi and work as a domestic servant so that I could send money home to help my family. A woman from my village told me that she could find me a place where I could sell beer, earning a salary of VND 1 million a month. I agreed, since that money would be very important to us. So I came to this place. For the first two weeks the employer lady just let me rest and provided me with good food and nice clothes. Then one day she told me to sell my virginity for VND 3 million. At first I wouldn't agree, but she kept after me until I did, convinced that the money was too much to refuse.

Nguyet Huong, 17 years old. Interviewed in Hanoi on 19 November 1999.

(vi) Children wanted to help their families in economic difficulties. They fell into unexpected and unprotected situations and ended up in prostitution.

For many children from rural areas, going to a large city is an unnerving experience. Without protection in an unfamiliar environment, they are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by bad segments of the local population.

When I was a waitress in a restaurant, a 30-year-old customer raped me. Afterwards I moved to this place. When the first customer wanted me I accepted because I had nothing to lose.

Ngan Ha, 16 years old. Interviewed in Thang Long, Hanoi on 10 November 1999.

Like other villagers, I came to Hanoi to seek work during the off-season. My family often faces rice shortages, sometimes for up to four months, since we have seven people in the family (my parents, brothers, sisters and myself). I took a bus and arrived at Gia Lam. For several days I couldn't find a job. I got sick. A motor-for-hire driver gave me food and some medicine. Later, he asked me if I wanted to sell my virginity for VND 5 million. I had to accept, since I was too weak. Then he took me to this place and I've been working here ever since.

Thanh Lan, 17 years old. Interviewed in Nhu Quynh, Hanoi on 11 November 1999.

(vii) *Children who lack parental care can also be vulnerable to prostitution.*

While the prime motivation is still economic, those children who were lacking parental care and (sometimes) financial support, dropped out of school. Being unemployed, they were persuaded by friends who, often for mixed motives evincing both good and bad will, introduced them to sex industry employers. Typically, after initial hesitation the new recruits accepted the work because the promised earnings were so high.

I dropped out of school in Grade 4. My parents did not care about my schooling anyway. A friend of mine in the same village returned home one day and asked if I wanted to work as a tailor in Hanoi. She said she cared about me because my family was very poor. She promised me that the job would bring me good money. We travelled together to the city. When we arrived, she told me about her actual activity, which is what I'm doing now. I hesitated at first, but then agreed. She took me to this karaoke bar and I was received. But when the first customer wanted to sleep with me, I refused because I was afraid. Then the pimp beat me up severely. Anyway, I make good money pretty easily. It's better than farming, which is very hard. And no one at my village knows what I'm doing, except the girlfriend who introduced me.

Nguyet, 16 years old. Interviewed in Co Nhue, Hanoi on 12 November 1999.

(viii) *Children who have experienced family trauma and had to work for their own survival.*

Divorce or separation of the parents leads to mental traumas in some children. They felt left alone and uncared for and this was the first step on the path to becoming a sexually exploited child.

I had to leave school in Grade 6 because my parents had divorced and no one cared about me anymore even though I still lived with one of them. My friend then persuaded me to go to Hai Phong to find a job. But when we arrived she told me that I should do this activity. In fact, I did not do it for money but because I felt disappointed with my family situation and wanted to be free from them. I cannot do other jobs because I have little education. So this activity is the only one possible. But I feel fine with it. I am free to do what I want.

Tuyet Hoa, 17 years old. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 24 November 1999.

My parents divorced when I was very young. I lived with my father. He worked as a motorbike-for-hire driver. ... He only came home very late at night. ... I left school because he did not want to pay for the costs. ... Rarely he gives me money to buy food or clothes. ... Friends persuaded me to take this activity because it can bring me good earnings and makes me independent.

Tuyet Huong, 17 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on 25 May 2000.

The situation is similar when the divorced father or mother re-marries someone who bears hostility toward the child.

My father got married with a woman just one year after leaving my mother. She treated me so badly that I decided to leave their house and make my living here.

Thu Hong, 15 years old. Interviewed in Can Tho City on 12 May 2000.

In a few cases, parents totally ignored their children. Being too young to find a job, they were left to survive on their own.

My parents left me to stay with my uncle so that they can move to Ho Chi Minh City to work. ... I do not know what jobs they are doing. They have not returned any way. ... Well, my uncle and his wife also do not want me to stay in their house. They did not always give me food. ... Through friends I know I can make money here.

Thanh Ha, 16 years old. Interviewed in Can Tho City on 14 May 2000.

(ix) Problems with love affairs leading children to volunteer for work in prostitution.

Being young and naive, children may be abused by men who take advantage of their trust. Disappointed with the failure of their first love affair, children often do not know how to handle their emotions and wind up choosing self-destructive courses of action.

My family has seven members. We only have a small plot of land and often lack rice and money. But the major reason that led to this work was that my boyfriend lied to me. I wanted to take revenge on him by doing this kind of work. I myself looked for this activity.

Xuan, 17 years old. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 24 November 1999.

When I was in school, I fell in love with my teacher. He was already married. But he lied to me, saying that he did not want to live with his wife, since their family was not happy. He said he wanted to marry me. One night he deflowered me behind the school. Later on, I discovered he just wanted my body. I could not tell anybody because they would not believe me, since people thought that he was a good and dedicated teacher. Since then I see him, and men in general, as bastards because even a teacher can behave that way. So I can be bad too, and this activity gives me good money.

Le Anh, 17 years old. Interviewed in Thanh Tuoc, Hanoi on 9 November 1999. Le Anh also has become addicted to cocaine.

(x) Problems with their own family affairs leading children to work in prostitution.

It is relatively common in the South (in the rural areas or urban poor communities) that young girls stay as a wife with men in the same community without getting married (they are not allowed to legally marry until reaching 18 years of age). Being young and naive, children are often unable to handle their own "family" affairs and can easily be abused by their "husband" or his parents. Many were actually left by their "husbands" without a means to survive. As a consequence, they ended up choosing prostitution activities.

My parents left for the US [her father used to be ex-officer of the Southern regime during the Viet Nam War]. They could not bring me with them since I already got married. ... We did not have a marriage certificate, however. Actually we did not have a wedding either. We just stayed together. ... He left me when I was pregnant. I had no money to raise my son so I came to work in this park. ... I have a sister but I can never ask her for anything. Sometimes, feeling so hungry I went to ask her for a bowl of rice. She shouted at me and did not allow me to enter her house. Maybe she is afraid that I will steal something (crying).

Thu Ha, 16 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 19, 2000.

Sometimes, they keep living with their “unlicensed” husbands but have to support them.

He is unemployed. ... He also has girlfriends, one after the other. ... I had to make money for my children [two]. ... I give money to him, too.

Ngoc Tram, 17 years old. Interviewed in Thot Not, Can Tho province on May 10, 2000.

(xi) Acquainted with negative influences, leading to voluntary work in prostitution.

The children’s social environment is very important in shaping their personality and behaviour. Once exposed to negative influences, they become more and more deeply involved with deviant behaviour, which may lead to the decision to adopt illegal activities, in this case as a sexually exploited child.

My family lived in the district town. I have friends who used to rent porno movies, and we spent time together watching. At some point we became excited and had to have sex. Then we decided to go to Do Son resort area to make money. The first customer I had was a 55-year-old man.

Diep, 17 years old. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 24 November 1999.

(xii) Drug addiction leading to voluntary involvement in prostitution.

Drug addiction has become an alarming problem in Viet Nam, particularly among the youth. Bad social association exposes the children to drugs, including cocaine. Since they must make money to keep buying drugs, prostitution is an apparent solution.

I’ve been addicted to drugs since I was in eighth grade. The teachers knew about it, and I wasn’t allowed to go to class. I needed money to buy drugs but couldn’t ask my parents. They hated me, too. I found a job as a waitress in a student restaurant. There I made friends with young people who did not care much about life and just wanted to have fun and enjoy. I followed them and was introduced to this karaoke bar.

Tram, 15 years old. Interviewed in Mai Dinh, Hanoi on 15 November 1999.

I tried cocaine when I left school. ... My friends introduced me to it... Now it is impossible not to use it. ... It’s very costly you know. Everyday I have to spend VND 75,000 to buy cocaine [she makes about VND 100,000 a day as a sex worker]. I could not live without it. I may not eat, but I need cocaine.

Thanh Tuyen, 17 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 28, 2000.

(xiii) Desire to make quick money with an “easy” activity.

As mentioned earlier, the prevailing view in Viet Nam is that prostitution results mainly from rural poverty, which forces young women to engage in prostitution in urban centres. Media and government reports also alarm the public with accounts of trafficking networks that deceive or even kidnap women and sell them to brothel owners. This rapid assessment, while showing that family economic difficulties do remain an important cause of child prostitution, also shows that a desire to make quick money with an “easy” activity also explained the decision to enter prostitution on the part of about 24 percent of the children interviewed in the North. In the South, it is 22.5 percent. This is particularly true among

children working in the Ho Chi Minh City. Good looks and association with delinquent friends can soon lead young people to acquire a pragmatic view of life, one in which making quick money to satisfy personal needs is the focal point. These children often deliberately looked for activities in the sex trade.

After completing lower secondary school, I followed friends to Hanoi, hoping to find something to do to make money, since staying in my home village and farming was hard for me. It is also hopeless to be a peasant. Here I knew more people, and they suggested I do this activity. It gives me big money.
My, 16 years old. Interviewed in Hanoi on 12 November 1999.

I did not want to leave this activity. It is easy to make money here and we do not have to work hard. Everybody does the same thing. ... You know most of the girls in the community do it.
Thuy Nga, 16 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 28, 2000.

This pragmatic attitude to life can sometimes encourage children to enter prostitution for specific objectives. Once these objectives are achieved, they may or may not leave the activity.

After failing the upper secondary school entry exam, I found a job in a Taiwanese company. My job was to go to a bank and get money to pay the workers. One day I lost the bag in which I kept the money. I was laid off, and my parents had to borrow money to pay the company back. I thought I had to find a job, to get money and pay back my parents. This was the only activity that enabled me to make quick money. But I will leave it soon, once I make enough money to pay back my parents.
Ngoc Anh, 17 years old. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 23 November 1999.

Last month, I lost a bicycle that I had borrowed from a friend. I must make VND 2 million to buy another one to replace it. So I do this activity. After a month, I will leave it.
Hong Hoa, 17 years old. Interviewed in Kien An, Hai Phong on 24 November 1999.

The case of Thanh Trung, a 17-year-old boy, is very typical to boy sex workers working in the street of Pham Ngu Lao, a tourist area of Ho Chi Minh City:

I was left alone at a very young age. ... I lived in a slum in Tan Binh district. ... I went to this street since many tourists are here and we can make good income [shoe shining]. ... One night a guy [foreign] came to talk to me. I did not understand so he left and came back with an interpreter [Vietnamese]. He [the tourist] explained that he wanted me to let him have sex. ... I told him he should pay me VND 400,000 (about US \$30) [Trung knew the price from his acquaintances]... He took me to a hotel nearby and I had to serve him there... I had to do whatever he asked me to.
Thanh Trung, 17 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 27, 2000.

The Vietnamese interpreter in this case told the foreign tourist that Trung charged him VND 800,000 (US \$60). He also took VND 150,000 for "commission" from Trung. Trung noticed it but considered it was normal to do so.

All five boys who were interviewed expressed their fear of being sexually abused by foreign tourists who forced them to perform embarrassing and physically hard sexual intercourse (without condom).

You know, making money this way is not easy.
Quoc, 16 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 28, 2000.

Pham Ngu Lao is not only the street where boys engaged in prostitution are found. In fact, in Ho Chi Minh City, boy and male prostitution are available in many other areas, particularly Ba Son, the ship dock, also close to the city downtown. Here, there are female customers together with male customers.

[The women] are in the late 40s and mid-50 years of age... You know, they are “spring-returning” women [a Vietnamese expression of middle-aged women who have strong sexual needs]. ... They are very rich. ... A woman took me to her villa in her black car. No one was around in the villa. It’s harder to serve women. I prefer to have male customers.
Thanh Trung, 17 years old. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City on May 27, 2000.

4.4 The How: Recruitment Processes⁵

Table 11 shows different systems of recruiting children that are similar for both the North and the South.

System 1: In most cases, children were persuaded by friends or other people from their home areas. These facilitators are usually people who are sex workers themselves. But they may also be doing other jobs, participating in the network in some way through complex social relations in the cities. They become facilitators or procurers for (disguised) brothel owners, not only because of financial gain in the form of commissions, but also because they think what they are doing is good for these children since it helps them to escape poverty and hard work in the fields while making big money for themselves and their families.

Tactically, the facilitators first persuaded the children to follow them to the city for legitimate service jobs, such as tailoring, shop keeping or hairstyling. Only after arriving at their destination did the children discover the truth. In most cases, the children agreed to do the activity mainly because of the money. Initially, however, most did not fully realize how hard the lifestyle was till they were forced to serve their first customer. Some were beaten by pimps, locked for days in a room, and sometimes threatened with worse. Later, they acquired obedient attitudes and simply followed employers’ orders. What they perceived as easy money compensated for their uneasiness and even made some feel content with their jobs. The first payment in exchange for their virginity typically brought them VND 2 million to VND 3 million (US \$140 to \$210) and sometimes as much as VND 5 million to VND 6 million (US \$350 to \$420).

Question to disguised-brothel owner: When you went to the village to recruit new children, did you tell them that they were being hired for this kind of activity?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Usually I have to look for those who are in a special situation, such as those from poor families or those having divorced parents. I tell them that they should come with me to do things like dishwashing or housecleaning. They all start with that kind of job. Gradually, I persuade them to go with customers. If they agree, it’s okay. If not, I won’t force them. But in most cases they agree. This activity is easy, with very good earnings. They’re used to living in the countryside, in dire poverty. Now they come to the city with me, and there they do nothing but have everything. So no one wants to leave me.

Dung, 29 years old. Disguised-brothel owner. Interviewed in Kien An, Hai Phong on 28 November 1999.

⁵ All names of the interviewees have been changed.

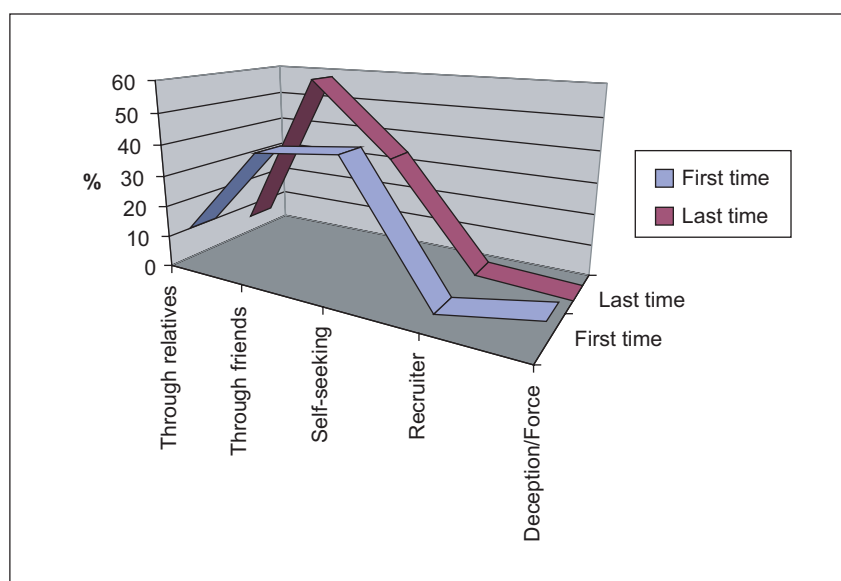
System 2: In the assessment, there were also cases of children who were deceived by their friends or fellow villagers, and commonly they were forced by employers and their pimps to provide sexual services to customers. Children were approached by friends, villagers or strangers who promised high income for legal work that turned out to be prostitution. Sometimes the families of the children were approached by facilitators/recruiters promising they would provide the children with service jobs in the city. The families received cash advances, typically VND 1 million (US \$70). The families tended to trust the facilitators, who were from the same village, and let their daughters go. They did not realize for what their children were destined. In a few cases, to reassure the parents, procurers even allowed them to accompany their daughters to the establishments, meeting the employers and staying overnight, if they wished, to see that the situation was legitimate. (Of course, in those cases everything had to be rehearsed). Sometimes even their relatives, including parents, deceived or forced them.

System 3: Children volunteered to work in prostitution. In these cases, no force was involved.

Systems 4 and 5: Children with family or personal problems sought work in prostitution.

Usually, the facilitators/recruiters (who may also be pimps) received commissions for each child (or adult sex worker) recruited.

Diagram 5: Recruitment in the South



But it is most common that children themselves searched for an activity in sex service deliberately with or without help of friends or relatives. The diagram above shows what was found in the South. At the beginning (the first time children looked for the activity in prostitution), 42 percent of the interviewed children found the activity by themselves, 10.1 percent with help from relatives and 39.1 percent with help from friends. In total, 91.4 percent of the children fall into this category. One of the 80 children was approached and recruited by a recruiter (see case of Be Bay in Ho Chi Minh City described above) and only 6 children (7.2 percent) were deceived and/or forced. Once the children were in the sex sector, it was also common that they moved from one establishment to another and from place to place. Information regarding their last move showed that 58.3 percent found the new place through their network of friends, 34.7 self-seeking, 5.6 percent with help of relatives and only one case through a recruiter.

Table 11: Recruitment Processes

Steps	Actors Involved				
	Family	Child	Facilitator Recruiter	Brothel Owner	Guards Pimps
SYSTEM 1 Economic difficulties; recruited without force					
1.1 Children looked for activity deliberately (most common in the South)					
• Child (with or without help from friends/family members/relatives) approached pimps/employers	x	x	x	x	x
• Agreement made; if with relatives, an advanced payment is made	x	x	x	x	x
• Transportation to “place”	x	x	x	x	x
• Received at “place”	x	x	x	x	x
• Set to work		x		x	x
1.2 Arrangement made by outside people					
• Child (sometimes also family) approached by a villager or outsider(s) (facilitator/procurer)	x	x	x	x	x
• Told of potential job (legal) and salary	x	x	x	x	x
• Agreement made; if with family, a payment is made; if with child, costs of transportation and meals are paid	x	x	x	x	x
• Payment to facilitator/recruiter			x	x	x
• Transportation to “place”	x	x	x		x
• Received at “place”		x	x	x	x
• Set to work		x		x	x
NB:					
* It should be noted that facilitator, recruiter and pimp might be the same person. Most common is that the facilitator/recruiter is the child’s friend or fellow villager. If the recruiter is an outsider, contact with the child and/or family must be arranged by a villager.					
* The child, usually a girl, may be approached in her home village or in the city where she goes to seek a job.					

Steps	Actors Involved				
	Family	Child	Facilitator Recruiter	Brothel Owner	Guards Pimps
SYSTEM 2 Economic difficulties; recruited with force					
• Child (sometimes with family) approached by a villager or outsider(s) (facilitator/procurer)	x	x	x	x	x
• Told of potential job (legal) and salary	x	x	x	x	x
• Agreement made; costs of transportation and meals are paid		x	x	x	x
• Transportation to “place”		x	x		x
• Payment to facilitator/recruiter			x	x	x
• Received at “place”		x	x	x	x
• Forced to work		x		x	x
NB:					
* It should be noted that facilitator, recruiter and pimp might be the same person.					
* The child, usually a girl, may be approached in her home village or in the city where she goes to seek a job.					

Steps	Actor involved				
SYSTEM 3 Desire to make quick money	Family	Child	Facilitator Recruiter	Brothel Owner	Guards Pimps
• Child seeks a “place” through social network		x	x		x
• Transportation to place		x	x		x
• Received at “place”		x	x	x	x
• Set to work		x	x	x	x
NB:					
* It should be noted that facilitator, recruiter and pimp may be the same person.					
* The child may find a “place” by herself or with the help of a recruiter.					

Steps	Actor involved				
SYSTEM 4 Family problems	Family	Child	Facilitator Recruiter	Brothel Owner	Guards Pimps
• Child is neglected or otherwise traumatized by parents and wants to leave the family • The system is the same as for systems 1 or 2	x	x			

Steps	Actor involved				
SYSTEM 5 Personal problems	Family	Child	Facilitator Recruiter	Brothel Owner	Guards Pimps
• Personal problems may result from failure in love affairs or other social associations • The system can be the same as for systems 1, 2 or 3		x			

Decision-making. The previous anecdotes, as well as the information collected from the whole sample, suggest that about 70.5 percent of the children decided themselves to engage in prostitution. Here we should also note that the voluntary decision to take up prostitution did not always mean they knew what it was they were really getting into. Another 15.6 percent were persuaded by friends (or facilitators/ procurers) or by the professional tactics of the employers (brothel owners). The remaining 13.9 percent performed the required services under duress. There were also sharp differences between children interviewed in the South and their counterparts in the North, reflecting the much higher degree of voluntary decision made by those in the South.

Diagram 6: Decision-making



4.5 The Conditions⁶

Hours. Almost without exception, the children engaged in prostitution seven days a week and throughout the month. For those involved in licensed establishments, usually they started late in the morning, between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m., and usually finished by midnight, sometimes later. However, many often stayed in the establishments and were engaged only when there were customers. Their busiest time was around noon – since this was the time state employees (the largest group of customers) were able to leave their offices for a short break – and in the evenings.

Details on sexually exploited young people in the South indicate that about 17 percent of them were engaged in prostitution from 3 to about 6 hours; 20 percent from 6 to about 9 hours; 18.8 percent were kept busy from 9 to about 12 hours; and up to one-fifth of the children were engaged 12 hours or more. There is only one case in Can Tho where the young person spent less than 3 hours in prostitution activities. The rest, 21.3 percent, of the children were engaged whenever there was a customer.

Damaging physical and psychological conditions in the workplace. As many as 67 percent of the children interviewed in the North and about half of those in the South experienced one or more of the damaging physical and psychological conditions in their places of work. They suffered especially from a variety of psychological pressures. It should be noted, however, that many were often too naive to realize fully what their activity entailed. And because many of these children were in fact the brothels' most attractive commodities, they were often "nurtured" by employers and thus had not undergone as many bitter experiences as had their more senior counterparts.

⁶ All names of the interviewees have been changed.

Table 12: Damaging Physical and Psychological Conditions

Damaging conditions	Hanoi	Hai Phong	HCM City	Can Tho	Total
Physical conditions					
Hard activity serving customers	6/23 (26%)	5/19 (26.3%)	14/41 (34.1%)	12/39 (30.8%)	37/122 (30.3%)
Rude treatment by customers	3/23 (13%)	5/19 (26.3%)	9/41 (22%)	5/39 (12.8%)	22/122 (18%)
Beatings by employers/ street gangs	5/23 (22%)	4/19 (21%)	4/41 (10%)	2/39 (5.1%)	15/122 (12.3%)
Psychological conditions					
Fear of infection by HIV/ AIDS and other STDs	4/23 (17.4%)	9/19 (47.4%)	6/41 (14.6%)	3/39 (7.7%)	23/122 (18.9%)
Fear of arrest by police	-	5/19 (26.3%)	-	2/39 (5.1%)	7/122 (5.7%)
Fear of pregnancy	3/23(13%) (13%)	2/19 (10.5%)	2/41 (5%)	-	7/122 (5.7%)
Fear of rejection by customers	1/23 (4.3%)	-	3/31 (7.3%)	1/39 (2.6%)	5/122 (4.1%)
Fear of being found out by family and villagers	2/23 (8.6%)	2/19 (10.5%)	-	-	4/122 (3.3%)
Sadness and anxiety about the future	5/23 (22%)	8/19 (42%)	5/41 (12.2%)	3/39 (7.7%)	21/122 (17.2%)
Conflicts in social environment (over customers, lovers)	2/23 (8.6%)	-	4/41 (10%)	1/39 (2.6%)	7/122 (5.7%)
Strict control from employers and pimps	2/23 (8.6%)	4/19 (21%)	8/41 (20%)	3/39 (7.7%)	17/122 (13.9%)
Exploited by street gangs	-	-	3/41 (7.3%)	1/39 (2.6%)	4/122 (3.3%)

Sex activity hazards. Table 13 lists the number of children who themselves recognized the sex activity hazards to which they were exposed. (The conditions correspond with the International Labour Organization Recommendation No. 190, Article 2.)

Table 13: Percentage of Children Recognizing Sex Activity Hazards to Which They Were Exposed

Sex activity hazards	Hanoi	Hai Phong	HCM City	Can Tho	Total
Physical, psychological and sexual abuse	15/23 (65.2%)	13/19 (26.3%)	16/41 (39%)	12/39 (30.1%)	56/122 (45.9%)
Illegal environment damaging psychological development	8/23 (34.8%)	6/19 (31.6%)	4/41 (9.8%)	7/39 (18%)	25/122 (20.5%)
Unhealthy environment exposing children to hazardous substances, processes, temperatures and noise levels	8/23 (34.8%)	13/19 (68.4%)	10/41 (14.4%)	8/39 (20.5%)	39/122 (32%)
Long hours of sex activity, often during the night	5/23 (21.7%)	12/19 (63.2%)	21/41 (36.6%)	9/39 (23%)	47/122 (38.5%)
Unreasonably confined to premises of the employer	11/23 (47.8%)	14/19 (73.7%)	15/41 (36.6%)	2/39 (5%)	42/122 (34.4%)

The children interviewed reported the following physical, psychological and sexual pressures and abuses:

- having to serve strong customers
- psychological crisis, especially when remembering cruel customers
- missing home but could not make a visit
- having to serve many customers a day (one child interviewed in Hanoi said that once she had to serve 14 customers in a day)
- even worse, having to serve several customers at one time
- being forced to perform embarrassing sexual acts
- being tortured, beaten up by customers (particularly by street gang members or drunks)
- being hurt by customers' sexual tools
- painful intercourse, particularly among girls whose sexual organs had not yet matured
- customers not paying after receiving sexual service
- being exposed to STDs, including HIV/AIDS and other diseases
- fear of employer and pimps
- being beaten up by employers/pimps for disobedience
- being forced to borrow money from street gangs with extremely high interests and consequential debt bondage
- repeat abortion (reportedly having an abortion in the morning and receiving a customer in the afternoon)
- being oppressed by older employees
- being robbed by other employees

The children reported the following psychological pressures related to the illegal working environment:

- fear of police arrest
- fear of being recognized by villagers from home
- shame
- experience of a generally bad social environment

They reported exposure to the following hazardous substances:

- having to drink alcohol (sometimes until drunk)
- having to smoke
- being exposed to the threat of cocaine addiction

They saw the damage to health caused by:

- long hours of hard work
- late hours
- having unsafe sex
- exposed to wind/rain (for street sex workers)

They reported unreasonable confinement to the premises of the employer:

- money kept by employer as one way to tie them to the premises
- having to ask permission from employer to go out
- being beaten up or threatened with exposure as sex workers to family and home villagers if they run away
- debt bondage

Protection against sex activity hazards and access to medical service. Very few children interviewed (9 out of 122, or 7.4 percent) said that when they were pregnant or suffered from health problems, such as STDs, their employers bought medicines or took them to hospitals for treatment, including abortion, but they were required to pay for the service. The rest had to find their own medical services. In order to defend their privacy, they often sought private health care, avoiding state services. Most of the children reported they were not protected against work hazards, except for five children who received condoms free of charge from employers. The others had to buy them themselves – if they wanted to use them.

Probably the only protection that some children received against the work hazards was that employers' typically refused to allow a number of customers, particularly street gangs, to order a single child. "When the customers were too rude," said one child in a Can Tho karaoke bar, "she [employer] assigned me to other rooms with better-behaved customers." But that was not always the case since some others in the sample described problems they had when serving more than one customer. To please the customers, it was not uncommon for employers to turn a blind eye. Some of the children reported being beaten up for their refusal to serve customers.

Relationship with employers. Most of the children (81 percent) considered their relationship with employers as being, in their own words, "fine" or "normal". For the South, this rate was much higher than the North (92.2 percent versus 60 percent) and thus reflects (i) wider acceptance of this type of work and the corresponding social relationship to employers among the southern children, but also (ii) occasional kinder treatment from some employers toward their employees. Some (19 percent in the North, 35.3 percent in the South) even thought that their relationship with their employers was good. "She treats me even better than my aunt," explained one child in Ho Chi Minh City. "She even bought me a golden chain," said another respondent. The term "good" could have different interpretations. "She even shows me how to do a good job with men," explained one child in Hanoi. "She's nice to me; she lent me money," said another girl in the North. Later, the investigators discovered that the child was tied to her employer in a relationship of debt bondage. And in most cases, "fine" or "normal" meant a variety of things:

"Everything is fine if I do not run away."

"Everything's fine if I obey."

"It's fair, because both gain benefits."

"She's nice, but she can also be very tough."

"Things are pretty good, but I'm afraid of her."

"She is angry with me sometimes if I am not obedient."

"Good. She gives me a meal a day but said she is not responsible if I am arrested."

"They are nice but if there is no customer, they will put their anger on us."

"No problem unless going to work late or leave early."

In all areas, the children generally underestimated the exploitative relationship because of their naive understanding of the situation and because brothel owners often employed cunning to tie the children to them. One employer in Hai Phong, for example, told investigators:

I have to be flexible with [the employees] – sometimes hard, sometimes soft. You know, I have to be nice to the good-looking ones so that they won't leave.

Nam, 30 years old. Karaoke bar owner. Interviewed in Hanoi 10 November 1999.

Sometimes, their treatment of employees also reflected a seemingly caring consideration, although it was more likely to be self-serving.

If they get pregnant or catch a disease, we take them to hospital for sure. If they want to leave the activity, we must take them home and give them back to their parents. We cannot simply let them go. Sometimes their parents know where they work. If they disappear, we will be in trouble with their families.

Tuan, 26 years old. Pimp. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 25 November 1999.

Whenever I want, I can get dozens of girls. They all trust me. They think of me as their big brother... I'm never rude to them, except in special cases. Better to be nice to them, talk to them in a convincing way. I can be rude, but that isn't wise. They are human beings after all, so they can make mistakes. And who knows what will happen? Maybe, later on, employers become employees of their ex-employees.

Hai, 29 years old. Pimp. Worked for his relatives. Started this business in 1994.

While the opinions of the children may not accurately reflect the real nature of the relationship, some, particularly those in Hai Phong, do have a darker view. In Hai Phong, 7 out of 19 young people told the investigators that their relationship was "bad", "exploitative" or "rude", compared to only 2 out of 23 in Hanoi.

The employer keeps all the money I make. I don't even receive tips, since she asks the customers to give all the money to her. This is how she keeps me working here. I have to serve from four to six customers every day and, for the last four months I haven't received the salary that the employer should pay me.

Trang, 17 years old. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 23 November 1999.

Observations and information from children interviewed as well as from key informants show that children located in brothels located far from the city centre are generally more exploited. For example, sexually exploited children in Hanoi mainly rent places outside the brothels to live and maintain a certain degree of freedom from the employers, while, for example, children in Hai Phong are paid less, kept under strict control and even beaten severely when disobedient.

Earnings. The money made by the children interviewed varied across the geographic areas and locations covered by both rapid assessments. Similar to the findings in the North, earnings of the children interviewed in the South varied across geographic areas and locations. In Ho Chi Minh City, children in the inner-city establishments earned from VND 6 million to VND 16 million (US \$428 to \$1,143) a month, mainly from tips. The figures were essentially the same as those earned by children interviewed in the centre of Hanoi.

Meanwhile, the children in the city outskirts and frontier made much less. Children in the Hanoi frontier, except those in the special place of Thanh Tuoc, earned just VND 2 million to VND 3 million a month (US \$140 to \$210). In Ho Chi Minh's outskirts, the earnings ranged from only VND 1 million to VND 5 million (US \$70 to \$357). This amount of money was also what the children soliciting in downtown streets received while earnings of the children interviewed in luxury establishments of the city outskirts also matched that of those working in the inner-city establishments.

With Hai Phong, there was less differentiation between the two geographic locations, with children in Kien An making from VND 2 million to VND 4 million (US \$140 to \$280) a month and those in Do Son earning from as little as VND 1 million (US \$70) to as much as VND 4 million (US \$280) a month. Children in Do Son were severely exploited by their employers, and their fees were much lower because of harsh competition from a large pool of children working in the sex sector, as well as

concerted action by the employers/pimps network to organize this seaside resort.

For Can Tho there was also a differentiation among the three geographic locations, with children in the city establishments making from VND 3 million to VND 6 million (US \$214 to \$428) a month and those in O Mon or Thot Not earning from as little as VND 1 million (US \$70) to as much as VND 4 million (US \$280) a month. The situation, like in the North, reflects different modes of operation, control, exploitation and different sources of children drawn upon by the employers, as well as different types of customers.

Children aged 17 and younger generally earned more than sex workers from older groups (59 out of 103 children), except in Hai Phong, for reasons mentioned, where it was the same.

Apart from daily expenses, children saved their money mainly to send it home as remittances, except those who had no parents or were ignored by parents. (Some saved their money so they could change jobs later.) Table 14 indicates the number of children who sent money home, the average amount of remittances and the impact of these remittances on the family economic situation. It is worth noting that on average, remittances in the South (VND 1.65 million per month in average) were much higher than those of their northern counterparts (VND 284,000 per month) since many children in the North did not dare to send as much money as they really could because they did not want to make their parents suspicious of the actual source of their earnings. In the South, more often children felt it is quite normal to do this kind of activity to help their family, and they were sometimes even encouraged by their family to do so.

Table 14: Remittances Sent Home by Children (in VND)

	Send remittances	Average amount	Considerable help
Hanoi	17/23(73.9%)	400,000/month	10/17(58.8%)
Hai Phong	12/19(63.2%)	120,000/month	11/12(91.7%)
Ho Chi Minh City	30/41(73.2%)	1,730,000/month	22/30(73.3%)
Can Tho	29/39(60%)	1,565,000/month	24/29(82.8%)
Total	80/122(72.1%)	953,750 month	57/88 (64.8%)

The children's perception of sex activity. Table 15 presents the children's perceptions of their sex activity. A large percentage in both the North and South (55.7 percent) considered the activity to be "bad" or "shameful". Many said that they fell into prostitution because there was no choice open to them. However, roughly a third of the others (34.4 percent) viewed it as acceptable, mainly in the sense that at least they had good earnings or, more importantly, it greatly helped their parents. One 16-year-old in Hanoi even said, "Everything has its price. If I want to make money, I have to accept the activity." Finally, 12 children (3 in Hanoi, 1 in Hai Phong, 4 in Ho Chi Minh City and 4 in Can Tho) considered their activity to be "good" purely in monetary terms – as one child in Ho Chi Minh City put it, "No job can make such a good money as this one."

Many were even surprised to be asked about their judgment of the activity since for them, "nothing is bad if they sincerely want to help their family."

Table 15: Children's Perception of Their Sex Activity

Reason	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Good	3	13	1	5.3	4	9.8	4	10.3	12	9.8
Acceptable	7	30.4	5	26.3	13	31.7	17	43.6	42	34.4
Bad	13	56.6	13	68.4	24	58.5	18	46.1	68	55.7
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

Perceived remedies to sex activity-related problems. More children in the North than in the South – nearly one-third (North) compared to nearly one-fifth (South) – felt trapped in their situations and could not offer remedies to help improve or overcome the sex activity-related problems they faced. Others, more concerned about these problems, gave the investigators ideas about what they thought might help. About 51.6 percent of children believed making more money (more tips from customers) might help them to feel better, compensating for what they otherwise had to undergo. Comparatively, only 21 percent of those interviewed in the North thought more money would help the situation while for the South, it was 67.5 percent.

About 12 children said they wished they were less controlled and exploited by employers and 15 others said it would be much better if the customers stopped being abusive. Two children in Hanoi thought that legalization of prostitution might help, since it would help to protect employees and make them feel better about their activity. Also in Hanoi, two children held very negative views, saying that nothing could help once they took up work in this sector. But two other children in Ho Chi Minh City said they were absolutely happy with their current activity and no remedy was needed.

Table 16: Perceived Remedies to Sex Activity-Related Problems

Reason	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
More money	6	26.1	3	15.8	24	58.5	30	76.9	63	51.6
Less control from employer	3	13	6	31.6	3	7.3	-	-	12	9.8
Better behaviour from customers	5	21.7	3	15.8	4	9.8	3	7.8	15	12.3
Legalize prostitution	2	8.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.6
No need to change	-	-	-	-	2	4.9	-	-	2	1.6
No way to improve	2	8.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.6
Do not know	5	21.7	7	36.8	8	19.6	6	15.3	26	21.3
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

Children's aspirations. Table 17 indicates what the children wished they would achieve in the short term. The majority (43.4 percent – 83 percent in the North, 35 percent in the South) hoped that their sacrifice would earn them enough money to switch to legitimate work, mainly in service sectors, such as tailoring, hairstyling, waitressing or in petty trade. Some wanted to help their family out of current economic difficulties; some wanted their family to receive them back (these were children forced by their parents to work in prostitution). Several in the South wished to return to school to learn enough so that their life will be better; six of them wanted to get married or get their own family, once they left the sex activity. Seventeen children in the South and three in the North only talked of remaining in prostitution and making as much money as possible as sex workers (since this is the “easiest” way). Three children just wished to free themselves of their cocaine habit. And another four children did not

despair but did not know what to aspire to. Many more children in the South (15) than in the North (2) claimed to have no aspiration, feeling that life is hopeless.

Table 17: Children's Aspirations

Reason	Hanoi		Hai Phong		HCM City		Can Tho		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Make more money and have a new job	15	65.2	10	52.6	12	29.3	16	41	53	43.4
Just to solve family difficulties	-	-	4	21	-	-	5	12.8	9	7.4
Go back to family	-	-	-	-	3	7.3	-	-	3	2.5
Go back to school	-	-	-	-	7	17.1	-	-	7	5.7
Get married	2	8.7	1	5.3	3	7.3	-	-	6	5
Get rid of cocaine	2	8.7	-	-	1	2.4	-	-	3	2.5
Just work in prostitution	3	13	-	-	7	17.1	10	25.6	20	16.4
No aspiration	-	-	2	10.6	7	17.1	8	20.5	17	14
Do not know	1	4.3	2	10.6	1	2.4	-	-	4	3.2
Total	23	100	19	100	41	100	39	100	122	100

4.6 Baseline Information on Employers, Pimps and Their Operations⁷

4.6.1 Profile of employers, pimps and size of establishment

In total, 8 employers from disguised brothels (2 in each area) and 9 pimps were interviewed during both assessments. The contacts were made and the interviews were arranged with help from the resource persons or clients.

Most of the employers were female; 2 were male. They ranged in age from 29 to 55.

Establishment sizes in the North ranged from 6 to 16 sex workers, of whom 2 to 5 were children aged up to 17 years of age. In the South, they ranged from 9 to 12 sex workers, of whom 2 to 6 were children aged up to 17 years of age.

Table 18 : Profile of Employers and Size of Establishments

	Age	Gender	Location	No. of sex workers	No. of children
Hanoi					
Employer 1	32	Female	Inner city	6	3
Employer 2	30	Male	Outskirts	9	4
Hai Phong					
Employer 3	34	Female	Kien an	16	5
Employer 4	29	Female	Do Son	7	2
Ho Chi Minh City					
Employer 5	55	Female	Inner city	8	4
Employer 6	34	Female	Outskirts	12	5
Can Tho					
Employer 7	34	Male	O mon	10	6
Employer 8	29	Female	Thot Not	9	2

⁷ All names of the interviewees have been changed.

Both pimps interviewed in the North were males, aged 26 and 29, and serving at karaoke bars, one in Hanoi and one in Do Son. The bar in Hanoi had 3 child workers. The one in Do Son had 7 workers of whom 2 were children.

Of the 5 pimps interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City, 1 was male (and also a motorbike-for-rent driver) and the others female. Their ages ranged from 32 to 44. Three pimps in Ho Chi Minh City worked for licensed establishments (restaurants and karaoke bars) and 2 provided for street sex workers. Establishment sizes ranged from 5 to 10 sex workers, of whom 1 to 4 were children aged up to 17. The other 2 pimps worked on the sidewalk where sex workers frequented. One supervised 12 street sex workers, of whom 3 were children. The other pimp handled 10 workers, including 2 children.

In Can Tho, the 2 pimps interviewed were male and aged 25. They both worked for licensed establishments with sizes ranging from 9 to 12 sex workers of whom 2 (each) were children aged up to 17.

Table 19: Profile of Pimps and Size of Establishments or Workplace

	Age	Sex	Location	No. of sex workers	No. of children
Hanoi					
Pimp 1	29	Male	One karaoke bar	3	3
Hai Phong					
Pimp 2	26	Male	One karaoke bar in Do Son	7	2
Ho Chi Minh City					
Pimp 3	38	Male	Three inner-city restaurants	17	4
Pimp 4	32	Female	One inner-city karaoke bar	10	4
Pimp 5	35	Female	Sidewalk by the park	12	3
Pimp 6	44	Female	Street in the outskirts	10	2
Pimp 7	39	Female	One restaurant in the outskirts	5	1
Can Tho					
Pimp 8	25	Male	One inner-city karaoke bar	12	2
Pimp 9	25	Male	Two inner-city karaoke bars	9	2

4.6.2 Modes of operation and networking

Secrecy and networking are two characteristic features of local prostitution. In most cases, brothels are disguised as licensed service establishments, such as restaurants, mini-hotels, hairdressing salons, massage parlours and karaoke bars (most common). It is not obvious from outside that these places offer sexual services.

In places where secrecy is a priority – usually establishments where the owners are very “professional”, employees are expensive. Earnings of both employers and employees are high – a network of trusted customers develops, expanding as older customers introduce new ones to the employers. Outsiders are not admitted to this circle without an introduction from an established customer. Then a variety of security measures are typically in place: door locks, security bells, secret escape routes, etc. In some establishments, rooms with no beds and prepared meals are maintained together with security measures to slow the progress of unexpected police raids, presenting official intruders with nothing but a couple having a meal together, which is of course entirely legal. Some employers even require customers to have sex with employees somewhere outside their establishments, leaving themselves virtually immune from legal charges.

Networking is also crucial to the successful operation of brothels, particularly when employers had relationship with some officials from local officials authorities. Some establishments have thus been able to operate so openly that the whole community knows what services they are offering.

The modes of operation and networking are described in the following comments taken from interviews with employers and pimps.

You know this is common all over the place. If you want to do business, you need relationship. You cannot keep all for yourself since sooner or later they will touch you. ... You need to make good ties first.

My Linh, 55 years old. Female. Karaoke owner. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh city on 28 May 2000.

And it is not always difficult to develop such a relationship.

People often think that having a good relationship with the local officials is difficult, but in fact it is not. Sometimes you don't even have to pay. If you do things right, there's no need to spread money for them. Everyone has his weakness. For example, some are hungry for girls; some are hungry for money. But they are all afraid of their wives or that their behaviour will become known to the public.

Hai, 29 years old. Pimp. Worked for his relatives. Started business in 1994.

Hai had started business five years earlier. A university graduate, he was unemployed until he got paid as procurer for a relative who owned the establishment where he was working. Smart and decisive, he ran the whole operation while his relative just sat there and received money. Carefully cultivating his network of contacts with some local officials, he was reasonably sure that no one would bother him. "I told you, the authorities would not touch me. I have friends everywhere in the city," he said during the assessment in Hanoi.

It is not always the case that employers are as powerful as Mrs. My Linh who owned a luxurious establishment in Ho Chi Minh City's downtown or as cunning as Hai. Very often the owners, particularly in rural areas of both Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho, just do it because it is common to do so (in the surrounding community) and they therefore are willing to take the risk, sometimes out of the sheer need to survive and to stay in business afterwards.

Question: When did you start doing this work?

Just for a couple of years. Previously I worked as a hired labourer. But there were so many people unemployed. I could not find a job.

Question: Is it dangerous to do this job?

Yes, if arrested, one can be jailed 9 or 10 years.

Question: You know the sentence, why you keep doing it?

If I don't, how can I live? Working as a hired labourer I can make only VND 10,000 a day. Even so there is no job available. ... If I do not have girls working, then there will be no customer.

Question: Are you afraid?

Yes. If no customer comes, no money. But if they come, I am afraid like in hell.

Tran Thanh, 34 years old. Male. Disguised-brothel owner. Interviewed in That Not district, Can Tho province on 13 May 2000.

Mr. Thanh had no connection with the police and the local authorities. He realized the illegality of his business but just "closed his eyes". He played the role of both employer and guard. If being found employing sex workers, he paid off the police.

Question: How can you alarm the children if the police come?

From here I can see everything [his establishment was located in the middle of a garden]. I am always in attention. But if they send under-cover policemen disguised as customers, then I will be caught.

Question: Have you ever been caught?

Yes.

Question: Then how did you do?

I bargained with them.

Tu My, 29 years old. Female. Disguised-brothel owner. Interviewed in O Mon district, Can Tho province on 16 May 2000.

Similar to Mr. Thanh, Mrs. Tu My, a boss lady interviewed in O Mon district, opened a sex business because many people in the community were doing the same. This was the only business that could bring quick and easy money while opportunities for other jobs are so poor and unstable.

Question: Do people in the community say anything about your business?

Here? Nobody. Many other people also do the same like me. Everyone minds his or her own business. But if you get wealthy, then someone can call the police... because they are envious.
Tu My, 29 years old. Female. Disguised-brothel owner. Interviewed in O Mon district, Can Tho province on 16 May 2000.

Professional employers also maintained an extensive employee recruitment and exchange network.

Recruiting girls from the countryside requires good connections with local people. If you go there by yourself, village boys can throw you in the river.
Hai, 29 years old. Pimp. Worked for his relatives. Started business in the North in 1994.

Over the past couple of years both in the North and South, the recruiting network has greatly expanded while becoming more professional at the same time. Some villagers are now working full-time as recruiters. These recruiters are often people in the village service sector, such as photographers, cafe or restaurant owners, motorcycle-for-hire drivers and shop-owners. Pimps from the cities know these local recruiters well and incorporate them into the network. Upon receiving orders from the city, the recruiters search for women and children, usually approaching those in “special” situations.

The price employers pay for each child varies depending on how “good” she is. They range from VND 1 million to VND 9 million (for beautiful young virgins). The money paid by employers is shared among city pimps and local recruiters. For the employer, doing this brings massive benefits, since customers have to pay from VND 3 million to VND 6 million, sometimes even VND 8 million to VND 9 million or higher (particularly when the customers are foreigners), to have sex with a virgin.

Nevertheless, in the South, as shown in the assessment, it is much more common that the children or their relatives, including parents, approach the employers/pimps themselves to offer. As we can see in previous section, up to 83.8 percent of the children interviewed decided themselves to work in prostitution. This rate is much higher than in the North where only 45 percent of the children did so. Only 10 percent of the total children fell into the sex sector because of some forms of force or deception. So doing prostitution in the South is more voluntary in nature.

The girls themselves came and asked me, “Do you need a waitress?” Then I just need to select those I see fit... Basically they have to be good looking and able to sing or to drink.
My Linh, 55 years old. Female. Karaoke owner. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh city on 28 May 2000.

But sometimes the employers asked their sex worker employees to return to their home community and recruit others.

The girls all came from the countryside. Some came here by themselves asking for a job. If we feel they are good for the activity, then they get it. If not, they must go... Or we can ask girls who work here to return home and recruit others. Basically, this is it. The former introduced the latter.
Tuan, 26 years old. Pimp. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 25 November 1999.

It is also possible among establishments in the same neighbourhood for employers and pimps to “borrow” employees from each other. Sometimes they exchange even whole groups of employees, so that customers may feel they are enjoying “fresh” provisions. With some of the more attractive employees, however, employers keep them, even nurturing them, since these employees attract repeat customers. “If they leave, so do the customers,” one pimp in Hai Phong admitted.

As we can see, employers may or may not rely on pimps to recruit children and other older employees. While the mass media have provided cases of pimps who acted as both recruiters and guards, very often being portrayed as cruel actors, information from the assessment shows another side of the situation. There were pimps who were not under the control of, and were paid by, employers (though they usually maintained a good relationship with them). They may enter the business occasionally. They may not be cruel to sex workers but more often have good will and sympathy toward sex workers and actually help them in a variety of things, which are not necessarily related to finding customers. In return, they are also treated fairly by the sex workers, for example, in giving them tips. In short, this is a more human picture where both sides help each other and it is not rare that trust is made between them.

I know that they are from a poor family. I introduce customers to them so that they can make money and send it home for their parents. ... But of course there are also those who do this just to make quick money...

Huyen, 32 years old. Female. Pimp. Interviewed in Ho Chi Minh city on 22 May 2000.

Huyen used to be a sex worker herself. She was left by her husband and had to work in prostitution to make money for her sick mother and other unemployed siblings. Upon leaving the sex sector, she opened a street-side stall where she sold cigarettes and beers. She also introduced customers to the sex workers, including the children, for the nearby karaoke bar. She received tips from both customers and the sex workers. She also helped the children in buying things, sometimes even advised them how to behave with customers, based on her own experiences. She was sometimes approached by newly arrived children asking her to introduce them to employers. Even some mothers came and asked her to help them sell their daughter’s virginity. She did not always take money from the children or their families if they were really in a difficult situation.

Then there is the story of Tuan, a pimp who was also a motorbike-for-hire driver. His major activity was to carry prostituted children to customers at their request. He was also active in finding customers for these children. Like Huyen, he received tips from both sides and operated like a service man for these children. According to him, there were five other pimps (volunteering to work for sex workers for the same restaurant). Each served specific sex workers and there was no competition among them.

The investigators in the North asked one pimp in Do Son about the relationship among establishments in his neighbourhood and was told it was supportive and friendly.

Question: Do establishments here “steal” employees or customers from each other?

Never. We must rely on one another. Interdependence, you know. For mutual benefit.

Tuan, 26 years old. Pimp. Interviewed in Do Son, Hai Phong on 25 November 1999.

4.6.3 Money generated through sexual exploitation of the children

Prostitution in general and child prostitution in particular is an extremely lucrative business. Information collected by the rapid assessment in the North show that employers can make up to VND 60 million a month, with a net income of at least half that amount, or VND 30 million. This net income is equivalent to more than US \$2,000 a month (US \$24,000 a year). It should be noted again that the average per capita GDP in Viet Nam is just over US \$300 a year. Such returns explain why this industry has developed so quickly during the past decade, even though the recent economic slow-down in Viet Nam has had a disastrous impact on revenues.

For the South, the investigators could not find reliable information from employers. The common answer is that the business fluctuates: sometimes it brings good money, sometimes not. However, based on the earnings of the children working in these establishments, which were very close to that of the children in the North, it can be safe to say that earnings of employers in the South are similar to those of their northern counterparts.

Two years ago, I made VND 180 million a month. Now, some days I only get up to 3 million, sometimes 2 million, sometimes even a few hundred thousand.
Thu, 32 years old. Disguised-brothel owner in Hanoi. Interviewed 25 November 1999.

4.6.4 Customer portraits

Information provided by the children, employers and pimps interviewed show that customers' profiles are quite diverse. Overall, their ages range from 14 to 65 or even older (one child in the assessment had to serve an 80-year-old man). The major groups are those ranging in age from 30 to 60.

For the customers of the disguised establishments, essentially we can identify certain major groups as follows (not in size order):

The first group consists of state officials and state enterprise employees. It is not uncommon for them, when travelling to other provinces, to visit disguised brothels to have fun by themselves or with local hosts who want to treat them nicely. Providing sex workers can be part of business deals, and sometimes people feel they must participate even if they do not like it. It is not uncommon that money spent in these brothels comes from expenses claimed for ostensibly legitimate purposes, such as "treatment of official guests", "meetings" and "marketing". Customers commonly range between 30 and 55 years of age.

Just a few are young men. But my employees do not want young guys even if they are good tippers. Young guys often do messy things, not being "sentimental", like the old guys. Old guys come here for sweet talk, not to mess around.
Trang, 34 years old. Disguised-brothel owner. Interviewed in Hai Phong on 28 November 1999.

Middle-aged men prefer employees who already have children since they know how to make them excited. They in fact always have customers. The younger ones cannot compete with them. ... But men over 50 years old want very young girls.
Hai, 29 years old. Pimp. Worked for his relatives. Started business in 1994.

The second group entails people working in the private sector. These customers must use company money, and in most cases, except for those doing business illegally, thus cannot be very extravagant.

The rich businessmen want to buy virginity, since they think deflowering a girl brings good luck in business. And the virgins must be 15 or 16 years old. Older girls, even in the countryside, already have boyfriends or are even married.

Thu, 32 years old. Disguised brothel owner. Interviewed in Hanoi on 25 November 1999.

The third group consists of young people from affluent families who, according to the sex workers interviewed, are good tippers but also troublemakers, as they want children to perform unusual sex acts that they learn from imported pornographic movies.

Military men and policemen form the fourth group. The interviews with children and employers indicated that some of these customers frequent establishments in their own assigned area, since they may not have to pay for services.

The fifth group are foreigners, mainly Asian businessmen from China, Japan, the Republic of South Korea and other south-east Asian countries. These are considered "golden" customers, since they pay higher prices and are good tippers. Many have a preference for "deflowering" young girls.

These five groups mainly frequent the licensed establishments. They often come in groups of three to four people. However, there are also people of low-income groups, such as motorbike-for-hire drivers, bus/truck drivers, small traders, hired unskilled labourers, peasants, etc. Sometimes even those from criminal society, such as street gangs, come to establishments, order sex services and often terrify sex workers. The respondents gave the investigators stories that they themselves or their friends were beaten up or forced to perform sexual acts to entertain those criminals. But in fact it rarely happens, however, since brothel owners and pimps usually protect their employees, particularly the good ones (by simply not allowing a group to order one). Generally, those customers look for cheaper sex workers soliciting on streets.

CHAPTER 5: LEGAL AND POLITICO-INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK TO COMBAT THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

5.1 Legal Framework

The Government has declared the prevention and elimination of prostitution in general and sexual exploitation of children in particular to be among its major concerns. A series of policies and decrees have in recent years created a legal framework for state and local action aiming at preventing and eliminating prostitution (and other “social evils”¹).

From the Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party:

- Directive 33/CT-TW, dated 1 March 1994, on “Heightening leadership against social evils”.
- Directive 64/CT-TW, 25 December 1995, on “Enhancing leadership and management, restoring orders in cultural activities and cultural services and eliminating social evils”.
- 7th Party Congress document on “Eliminating social evils: Simultaneous implementation of education, economic, administrative and legal methods to effectively combat social evils”.

From the National Assembly:

- Vietnamese Constitution, 1992, which specifies state enforcement against drug addiction and social diseases.
- Administrative orders against sex workers.

From the Vietnamese Government:

- Decree 374/HDBT of the Council of Ministers, issued 14 November 1991, stipulating in detail the implementation of the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children.
- Decree 338/HDBT of the Council of Ministers, issued 26 October 1991, on the implementation of the Law on Universal Primary Education.
- Decree 87/CP, dated 12 December 1995, on enhancing the elimination of social evils.
- Decree 88/CP of the Government, issued 14 December 1995, on legal charges against negative culture, services and social evils.
- Decree 53/CP of the Government, 26 June 1994, detailing administrative measures against state employees involved in prostitution, drug addiction, gambling, etc.
- Decision 05/CP of the Government, issued 29 January 1993, on the prevention and elimination of prostitution.
- Directive 814/TTg of the Prime Minister, issued 12 December 1995, on increasing control and maintaining social order in cultural and service activities and eliminating social evils.
- Directive 776/TTg of the Prime Minister, issued 17 September 1997, on assigning detailed responsibilities to related state bodies to prevent trafficking of women and children abroad.

¹ Social evils and diseases is an official term used in Viet Nam regarding any socially harmful activities, notably prostitution, drug addiction and gambling.

5.2 Institutional Framework

The Government has established a comprehensive programme for combating prostitution, including child prostitution. Major components include:

- education and propaganda campaigns
- investigating the situation and building databases
- police actions
- vocational training, employment creation and poverty alleviation aimed at sex workers
- rehabilitation and reintegration of former sex workers into the community
- institutional capacity building at both central and local levels
- building social evils-free communities
- international cooperation for combating prostitution

Eight major state actors are responsible for combating the sexual exploitation of children:

Police Ministry

- playing the leading role in combating prostitution
- inspecting, identifying and eliminating brothels and networks of prostitution
- putting sex workers into hospitals and rehabilitation camps
- supervising released sex workers at commune/ward levels
- coordinating with border guards to stop the trafficking of women and children
- integrating the prostitution elimination programme into the overall anti-crime programme
- working together with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and other related state bodies to establish laws, policies and regulations as well as plans for combating prostitution

Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs

- directing the education, rehabilitation, vocational training and reintegration of former sex workers
- building integrated programmes, including prostitution elimination, poverty alleviation, vocational training, HIV/AIDS prevention and other social activities
- together with related state bodies, creating annual plans for fighting prostitution
- managing resources allocated to combating prostitution
- seeking international and regional cooperation in combating prostitution

Ministry of Justice

- together with relating state bodies, improving the present legal framework for combating prostitution

Ministry of Culture and Information

- providing leadership in education and propaganda to improve public knowledge of the problem and mobilizing public opinion against prostitution
- reinforcing cultural values among individuals, families and communities
- inspecting cultural activities and halting the fabrication and dissemination of undesirable cultural products

Ministry of Health

- coordinating with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs to provide medical treatment for sex workers
- controlling and supervising the provision of licenses for services, such as massage and sauna parlours

Ministry of Education and Training

- building gender education programmes at schools to prevent prostitution among students
- together with related state bodies, creating and publishing guidelines for staff responsible for combating prostitution

Ministry of Trade and Tourism

- controlling and supervising the provision of licenses for service establishments
- together with the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Tourism, establishing regulations for coordination between these state ministries and local authorities for inspecting and controlling service establishments

Ministry of Planning and Investment

- together with the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, introducing an annual budget for the Programme of Prostitution Elimination
- mobilizing domestic and international resources for anti-prostitution programmes

Ministry of Finance

- assuming responsibility for the budget allocation for anti-prostitution programmes
- mobilizing domestic and international resources for these programmes

People's Committees (at all levels)

- responsibility for all activities combating prostitution in areas under their authority
- based on local conditions and government orders, making and implementing plans for combating prostitution
- mobilizing resources for anti-prostitution activities in areas under their authority

The People's Supreme Court and the People's Supreme Inspecting Institute

- directing the system of courts at all levels to combat prostitution
- together with the Police Ministry, Border Guards and other related state bodies, prosecuting criminals involved in prostitution

The Viet Nam Women's Union; Viet Nam Father Front; Viet Nam Federation of Labour Unions; War Veterans Association; Vietnamese Peasants Association; Vietnamese Youth Union

- coordinating efforts at all levels to build communities free of social evils
- mobilizing public action in combating prostitution

Resources. Financial resources for these state bodies and mass organizations are drawn from government and community budgets, as well as international support funds.

For the past six years (1994-1999), the government budget has allocated to programmes of anti-prostitution a total of VND 143.2 billion (approximately US \$10 million). The amount of funds in the last two of those six years has declined (VND 22 billion in 1998 and VND 16.2 billion in 1999). These budgets have proved insufficient.

Meanwhile, financial resources mobilized at the local community levels as well as from international sources are very limited. Furthermore, there is no clear mechanism for mobilizing resources. Many local authorities are therefore dependent almost exclusively on budget allocations. In addition, due to factors such as poverty and limited acknowledgment of the issues among the public, contributions from communities and families amount to very little. International support is negligible.

Achievements. The following tables show official statistics on state actions in combating prostitution (including child prostitution).²

Table 20: Arrests Made Against Prostitution

Years	Total number of persons arrested	Categories		
		Sex workers	Brothel owners/ procurers	Customers
1994	7,769	3,750	2,633	1,386
1995	7,451	4,448	1,317	1,686
1996	7,631	4,489	1,710	1,432
1997	7,793	5,556	1,341	869
1998	5,403	2,785	1,494	1,124
First 9 months of 1999	3,934	1,905	1,275	754
Total	39,981	22,933	9,770	7,278

Source: *Du thao chuong trinh hanh dong cua chinh phu phong chong te nan mai dam giai doan 2000-2005* (Draft of government action plan for combating prostitution in the period 2000-2005)

Table 21: Number of Sex Workers, Including Sexually Exploited Children, Received Into Rehabilitation Programmes

Year	Received medical treatment & education	Received vocational training & jobs	Total
1994	6,198	2,057	8,255
1995	5,705	3,401	9,106
1996	6,609	3,229	9,838
1997	4,429	1,951	6,380
1998	4,548	1,590	6,138
First 9 months of 1999	2,188	1,010	3,198
Total	29,677	13,238	42,915

Source: *Du thao chuong trinh hanh dong cua chinh phu phong chong te nan mai dam giai doan 2000-2005* (Draft of government action plan for combating prostitution in the period 2000-2005)

So far, however, efforts are confined primarily at occasional police actions whose targets are brothel owners, pimps and sex workers. While a comprehensive framework and mechanism have already been in place to deal with many factors giving rise to prostitution, the lack of resources together with poor coordination, unclear responsibilities and accountability among state and local bodies working on the problem have severely limited their success.

² There are no figures provided for children among the sex workers in the government statistics.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The rapid assessment confirms a number of points highlighted by previous investigations presented in the literature. The following table summarizes the comparison of what we know from the literature with what was learned in the assessment study in four locations in North and South Viet Nam.

This assessment has led to a significant improvement in our understanding of children in prostitution in Viet Nam since the methods of inquiry adopted have provided fresh and reliable information directly from the field. As opposed to the conventional view of prostitution as the result of poverty, lack of education and “social evils” brought about by economic reforms, the assessment shows that the situation is much more complex than that, bringing many institutions into the analysis, as outlined in the diagram in Section 3.2. Actions for combating child prostitution, as outlined in Section 3.2, should therefore be undertaken at three levels: the macro (national), the meso (provincial) and the micro (community/family/individual).

The issue of child prostitution in Viet Nam is no longer invisible. It remains unsolvable, however, within the current legal and institutional framework. The Government recognizes the issue but so far has been more concerned with other urgent issues. Few effective measures have been taken beyond some police actions and achievements in poverty alleviation, the real impact of which is questionable in reducing prostitution.

Sexually exploited children is a social product. It can only be eliminated with comprehensive programmes that address their social root causes. Such a solution takes time and requires many resources presently not in the hands of the Government and local actors. But as being one of the worst forms of child labour, ethically it must be stopped through strong state actions and strict enforcement on both supply and demand sides, particularly at the local level, together with strong provision of livelihood alternatives.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Demographic characteristics			
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children can be as young as 13. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children were between 15 and 17 years old. Younger children were less likely to be sex workers, since they were not physically mature enough to perform the work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children were between 13 and 17 years old, but the majority were from 15 to 17. Younger children were less likely to be sex workers, since they were not physically mature enough to perform the work.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both boys and girls; the latter are predominant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only girls were found in the assessment. Boy prostitution exists, but it is rare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few boys were found. Boy prostitution is relatively rare.
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly Vietnamese. But there are also ethnic dimensions; children of ethnic minorities are poorer and less educated, thus more easily tricked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were 2 (out of total 42 children) coming from ethnic minorities. No evidence was found that they were more easily tricked into prostitution. Some opinion had it that, with stronger ties to traditional cultures, they were in fact less likely to work as sex workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were 4 (out of total 80 children) coming from ethnic minorities (Khmer). No evidence was found that they were more easily tricked into prostitution.
Origins of children			
Place of family residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly in rural areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly from rural areas adjacent to provinces where they work. Few family members migrated due to the fact that they were mainly peasants lacking non-agricultural skills. Their low mobility was one indicator explaining their poverty. Some families lived in poor city neighbourhoods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children with urban origin accounted for almost a half of the sample. Their families, however, lived exclusively in urban slums. Higher percentage of migrated families due to traditionally stronger migration trends in the South.
Size and type of family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large family size. Many come from families with trauma (divorced, separated, father or mother or both dead). Low level of educational attainment of parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large family size. Mainly nuclear family, because of general demographic tendency. High number of dependents in families. Size of family and number of dependents were among the explanatory variables for family economic difficulties. About one-fourth came from families with trauma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large family size. Mainly nuclear family because of general demographic tendency. High number of dependents in families. Size of family and number of dependents were among the explanatory variables for family economic difficulties. About half came from families with trauma.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Education of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low level of educational attainment of parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low level of educational attainment of parents. Fathers had higher education than mothers, reflecting an emphasis by society on the importance of education for men rather than for women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much lower level of educational attainment of parents compared to the northern counterparts. Fathers had higher education than mothers, reflecting an emphasis by society on the importance of education for men rather than for women. This may directly link to more responsibilities on girls to help family, including doing prostitution.
Family economic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly agricultural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly agricultural. Some were involved in private services and small trade but worked at the bottom of the occupational structure with low income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly in private services and small trade but at the bottom of the urban occupational structure with low income.
Family income/ debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very low income, about half the national average income. Some lacked rice for 4 to 6 months of the year. Only half the families were able to satisfy their basic needs. Nearly one third had debt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very low income, less than one-third of the national average income. Slightly over a half the families were able to satisfy their basic needs. Nearly two-thirds had debt.
Education experience of children			
Educational attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low educational attainment. Lack of living experiences and social skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 70 percent received lower secondary education (complete and incomplete); some completed only primary education; very few have higher educational levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much lower than children in the North with one-fourth illiterate; very few have higher educational levels. This suggests weaker values put upon education among the poor parents in the South compared to those in the North as well as higher degree of ignorance of the former.
Difficulties in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor performance. Family economic difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic difficulties, poor performance (either because of poor learning ability or family economic difficulties or both) and negative social environment among peers and less care from schools for students' learning and socialization are major causes of their dropping out. Some dropped out because this was a common practice among peasant families; some because of family trauma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic difficulties, poor performance (either because of poor learning ability or family economic difficulties or both), no interest in school are major causes of their dropping out. Some dropped out because of family trauma, a few because of negative social problems in school.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Relevance of education to future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than half had negative views of the relevance of education for their future; yet one-third thought that without education they could not achieve a better life. • Some viewed education as beyond hope for peasant children; some saw that education does not help without a college diploma; some saw only the need to be literate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant numbers (about 40 percent) had negative views of the relevance of education for their future; yet nearly half thought that without education they could not achieve a better life. • Some viewed education as beyond hope for peasant/poor children; some saw that education does not help without a college diploma; some saw only the need to be literate.
Road to prostitution			
Road to prostitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's experience in prostitution was limited, with 90 percent having worked as sex workers for less than a year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's experience in prostitution was rich with nearly 90 percent having worked as sex workers for more than a year; about 60 percent from two to three years. This also meant children in the South started to work in prostitution much earlier and kept in it much longer compared to their northern counterparts.
Reasons for becoming engaged in prostitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help family in poverty. • Deception/force. • Family problems. • Desire to make quick money. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly to help family in poverty. • Deception/force. • Family problems. • Desire to make quick money. • Personal problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly to help family in poverty. • To survive because of parent's ignorance. • Deception/force. • Family problems. • Desire to make quick money. • Personal problems.
Actors involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brothel owners, pimps and procurers. • Procurers are mainly from same villages and may include relatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brothel owners, pimps, procurers. • Procurers could be from same village but certain key figures in the village were recruiting on a permanent basis. • Steps in recruitment were summarized in the path analysis presented in Section 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brothel owners, pimps, procurers. • Procurers could be from same village but certain key figures in the village were recruiting on a permanent basis. • Parents (particularly mother), family members, relatives, friends. • Steps in recruitment were summarized in the path analysis presented in Section 5.
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly 50 percent decided by themselves; around 33 percent because of persuasion or their own decision; 22 percent because of deception or force. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 84 percent decided by themselves; few because of deception or force.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General claims of being exploited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide service 7 days a week and throughout the year; starting around noon but continuing until midnight or later. Working mainly at lunchtime and in the evening. Hard work serving customers. Rude treatment by customers. Beatings by employers and pimps. Fear of being affected by HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Fear of arrest. Fear of rejection by customers. Fear of pregnancy. Fear of being discovered by families and home. Also by villagers. Feeling sad, anxious about the future. Emotional conflicts involving customers and lovers. Strict control from employers and pimps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide service 7 days a week and throughout the year; starting around noon but continuing until midnight or later. Working mainly at lunchtime and in the evening. Hard work serving customers. Rude treatment by customers. Beatings by employers and pimps. Fear of being affected by HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Fear of arrest. Fear of pregnancy. Feeling sad, anxious about the future. Emotional conflicts involving customers. Strict control from employers and pimps. Exploited by street gangs.
Sex activity hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General claims of hazards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Illegal working environment damaging, psychological development. Unhealthy working environment, with exposure to substances, processes, temperatures and noise levels hazardous to health. Unreasonable confinement to premises by employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Illegal working environment damaging, psychological development. Unhealthy working environment, with exposure to substances, processes, temperatures, and noise levels hazardous to health. Unreasonable confinement to premises by employers.
Protection against sex activity hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No protection against work hazards except occasional provision of condoms (rare) or refusal from employers to allow many customers to order one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No protection against work hazards except occasional provision of condoms (rare) or refusal from employers to allow many customers to order one child.
Relationship with employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploitation by employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children did not always or fully realize the exploitative relationship with employers. Employers used professional tactics to make children feel like they cared about them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children did not always or fully realize the exploitative relationship with employers. Employers used professional tactics to make children feel like they cared about them. Occasional kinder treatment from some employers toward employees.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only a few figures provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earnings varied, as children in Hanoi made more money than did those in Hai Phong; in Hanoi, children in the inner city earned the highest income, while those in the outskirts and far from the city earned less and were more exploited and controlled. Generally, children in prostitution had very high incomes and that explained why many saw the sex trade as a reasonable option to solve family and personal economic problems. In Hanoi, the income of children was generally higher than that of adult sex workers; in Hai Phong, however, the income was basically the same due to a large local pool of child labour and joint actions among employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earnings varied, as children in licensed establishments made more money than those in outskirts, frontier or rural areas. Those in inner-city establishments in Ho Chi Minh City made the highest. Generally, children in prostitution had very high earnings and that explained why many saw the sex trade as a reasonable option to solve family and personal economic problems. The earnings of children were generally higher than that of adult sex workers.
Use of earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help family and to satisfy personal needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist family, but did not dare to send too much, since they were afraid that the family would be suspicious of their actual activity. Still, their remittances contributed considerably to the family income, and this often explained the children's continuing work in prostitution. For personal expenditures (including luxury needs). Saving to change jobs later. Among addicts, to buy drugs. For "tactical" purposes. To support lovers, who often took advantage of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to assist family. Many children were encouraged, even forced by parents to do this activity. Most of the children sent almost all their earnings back to their parents. Their remittances contributed considerably to the family income and this often explained the children's continuing work in prostitution. For personal expenditures (including luxury needs). Saving to change jobs later. Among addicts, to buy drugs. To support "unmarried" husband, who often took advantage of them.
Children's perceptions of their sex activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bad, shameful, guilty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority considered it bad and shameful. Some took a pragmatic view: everything has a price. Some considered it the best way to make good earnings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority considered it bad and shameful. Significant number (nearly 40 percent) considered it as acceptable because they were helping their family. Some considered it the best way to make good earnings.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Remedies to overcome sex activity-related problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many were trapped and did not know which remedy could help. • Better tipping and behaviour among customers. • Less control by employers/pimps. • Legalize prostitution. • Some see no hope to improve at all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many were trapped and did not know which remedy could help. • Better tipping and behaviour among customers. • Less control by employers/pimps. • Some saw no need to improve at all as they were content with their activity.
Aspirations regarding life and work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority considered their current activity to be temporary and wanted to make money to change jobs later. • Wanted to get married later. • Desire to help family as much as possible. • To make money to satisfy luxury material needs. • To rid themselves of a cocaine habit. • Some had no aspirations; thought of life as hopeless. • Did not know what they should expect. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many considered their current activity to be temporary and wanted to make money to change jobs later. • One-fifth just wanted to stay in prostitution because of easy earnings. • Desire to help family as much as possible. • Wanted to go back to school. • Wanted to go back to family. • Wanted to get married later. • To rid themselves of a cocaine habit. • Some had no aspirations. • Did not know what they should expect.
Employers / pimps / operations / customers			
Age and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer: Mainly women in their 30s and 40s. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers: Mainly women in their 30s and 40s. • Pimps: Young males in their 20s and 30s. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers: Mainly women in their 30s to 50s. • Pimps: Mainly women in their 30s and 40s; some men in their 20s.
Mode of operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking for recruiting sex workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrecy. • Networking with local authorities for protection. • Networking among themselves for business purposes. • Networking with local villagers to recruit employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More children self-seeking with or without help from friends, relatives and family members. • Secrecy. • Networking with local authorities for protection. • Networking among themselves for business purposes. • Networking with local villagers to recruit employees. • Some did it without connection and had to take risks.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Money generated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely high; can be as much as VND 180 million, but mainly around VND 30 million to VND 60 million, a month, of which about a half is net income. • This explained why the networks were persisting/ expanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely high; can be as much as VND 180 million, but mainly around VND 30 million to VND 60 million, a month, of which about a half is net income. • This explained why the networks were persisting/ expanding.
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of varied background. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of varied background, including state employees; those in the private sector; young people from affluent families; military men and policemen; foreigners (mainly Asian businessmen); and those from criminal society. • Aged mainly between 35 and 55 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of varied background, including state employees; those in the private sector; young people from affluent families; military men and policemen; foreigners (mainly Asian businessmen); peasants, low-paid labourers, and those from criminal society. • Aged mainly between 30 and 60 years.
Historical, cultural and socio-economic context of sexual exploitation of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty; social exclusion. • Low education. • Dysfunctional families. • External influences. • Cultural values operating against the interests of girls. • Individual material desires. • Negative impact of reforms. • Crisis in values. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Context of sexual exploitation of children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the diagram (Section 3). • Social stratification, poverty, marginalization. • Poor understanding and implementation of laws. • Rapid changes in values/disorientation/demoralization. • Existence of market for child prostitution (both domestic and international). • Networking of criminals. • Material and social conditions of community. • Community traditions, values, beliefs, customs. • Family material welfare and social capital. • Organizational factors. • Individual factors: age, physical condition, attractiveness, education, mental development, life experience. • Intermediate variables: perceptions; being approached by procurers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the diagram (Section 3). • Social stratification, poverty, marginalization. • Poor understanding and implementation of laws. • Rapid changes in values/disorientation/demoralization. • Existence of market for child prostitution (both domestic and international). • Networking of criminals. • Material and social conditions of community. • Community traditions, values, beliefs, customs. • Family material welfare and social capital. • Organizational factors. • Individual factors: age, physical condition, attractiveness, education, mental development, values acquired, life experience. • Intermediate variables: perceptions; being approached by procurers.

	FROM THE LITERATURE	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN NORTH VIET NAM	FINDINGS OF ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH VIET NAM
Legal and institutional framework to combat child prostitution			
Legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrees and directives from Politburo and Vietnamese Communist Party. • Constitution. • Decrees and directives from the National Assembly. • Decrees and directives from the Vietnamese Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrees and directives from Politburo and Vietnamese Communist Party. • Constitution. • Decrees and directives from the National Assembly. • Decrees and directives from the Vietnamese Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrees and directives from Politburo and Vietnamese Communist Party. • Constitution. • Decrees and directives from the National Assembly. • Decrees and directives from the Vietnamese Government.
Institutional framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police ministry. • MOLISA. • Ministry of Justice. • Ministry of Culture and Information. • Ministry of Health. • Ministry of Education and Training. • Ministry of Trade and Tourism. • Ministry of Planning and Investment. • Ministry of Finance. • People's Committees. • People's Supreme Court and Inspecting Institute. • Mass organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police ministry. • MOLISA. • Ministry of Justice. • Ministry of Culture and Information. • Ministry of Health. • Ministry of Education and Training. • Ministry of Trade and Tourism. • Ministry of Planning and Investment. • Ministry of Finance. • People's Committees. • People's Supreme Court and Inspecting Institute. • Mass organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police ministry. • MOLISA. • Ministry of Justice. • Ministry of Culture and Information. • Ministry of Health. • Ministry of Education and Training. • Ministry of Trade and Tourism. • Ministry of Planning and Investment. • Ministry of Finance. • People's Committees. • People's Supreme Court and Inspecting Institute. • Mass organizations.

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APPENDIX

List of questions for interviews with sexually exploited children in Viet Nam

Name of interviewer:

Place of interview:

Date of interview:

Time start:

Time end:

Name of the interviewee:

Demographic characteristics

1. Age of interviewed children:

- below 13;
- 13 and 14;
- 15 to 17 inclusive

2. Sex:

- Male
- Female

3. Ethnicity (if relevant):

Family demographic characteristics

4. Family size

Father - yes no

Mother - yes no

Guardian - yes no

Number of brothers: sisters: .

5. What is the family's ethnicity (if relevant)?

Family housing and migration:

6. Current place of residence of your family?

7. Since when have they lived there?

8. Where do you come from originally?

9. Describe the migration pattern (if any)?

10. Why did they move to their current place of residence?

Family socio-economic characteristics

11. What is the educational level of parents?

12. Income?

- What income-generating activities are parents and other family members involved in?
- What is the family income, and is this sufficient to meet basic needs?
- Is this sufficient to meet luxury needs?

13. Does your family have any debts, and if so, as a result of what (e.g. illness, death, recruitment process)?

14. Is your family involved in any community work and/or groups (specify)?

Education and recreation

15. Do you attend school?

No

If not, at which grade did you drop out of school?

Why?

Yes

If yes, hours per day: per week: per month:

Type of school:

16. What do you think of school? Possible topics:

- ✓ Relevance of education (in general) for their future?
- ✓ Quality of available education?
- ✓ Difficulties in school?
- ✓ Distance to school?
- ✓ Costs involved (e.g. uniforms, teacher fees, travel costs, opportunity costs of work)?

17. What recreational activities do you engage in?

- How frequently?
- What other interests/hobbies do you have?

18. What are your aspirations in life and in work?

Recruitment, work and work conditions

19. Recruitment:

- Since when have you worked with this employer?
- When did you enter this profession?
- How?
- Why?
- Explain the recruitment process and whether you freely decided to work here or not (was there peer or family pressure)?

20. What are your perceptions of the work (good, bad, acceptable) for the future, and what are the alternatives?

21. How many hours do you work per day, week and month; and when do you work (day/night)?

22. What are the conditions under which you work, both physical and psychological?

23. Have you been involved in any work-related accidents or illnesses. Do you know of fellow workers involved?

24. What are the work hazards?

- work that exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse
- work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces
- work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads
- work in an unhealthy environment that may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health
- work under particularly difficult conditions, such as long work hours, night work or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer

25. Do you receive any protection against work hazards? Do you have access to medical services?

26. Are you provided with educational facilities or training?

27. What is your relationship with your employer?

28. Earnings:

- How much do you earn per month (specify base salary, piece rate, bonuses, tips)?
- How much is deducted by the employer for costs incurred (e.g. housing, recruitment, transportation, provision of loans, work equipment)?
- How does this compare to adult wages for the same type of work?
- Who collects the salary (you or your parents/guardians)?
- What do you do with the money earned (e.g. buy things, save, give it to the family)?
- If you give money to your family, how much is it?
- Does it represent significant help for your family?

29. Do you think your work prevents you from going to school?

30. What remedies do you suggest to overcome work-related problems?

31. If you could choose another job, what would it be?

32. Do you have the qualifications and ability to do that job?

33. Do your family know what you are doing now?

Draft list of questions for interviews with key informants on sexually exploited children in Viet Nam

1. Size of the place where children work in terms of employees, including the number of children.
2. Information on money generated through sexual exploitation at the work-site.
3. Do the employers belong to or are they linked to any group, association or network?
4. Who are the clients?
5. Why do employers recruit children for work?
6. What remedies do key informants propose to overcome sexual exploitation of children?
7. Please add any other questions that are deemed necessary to cover the assignment as specified in the terms of reference.