

Prevention of commercial sexual exploitation

The role of the media

EDITORIAL



The media can contribute to the fight against commercial sexual exploitation by:

- Sensitizing their readers, listeners or TV viewers to awareness of the rights of children and adolescents.
- Making the problem more visible as a crime, to prevent people from viewing it –or ignoring it– as if it were the same old scene; and stressing its illegal nature.
- Deconstructing myths and stereotypes that contribute to perpetuating situations of vulnerability.
- Avoiding the use of images of the victims in reports or the news.
- Analyzing commercial sexual exploitation as a social, cultural, economic and legal problem, and not just as sensationalist news.

Stop the commercial sexual exploitation of children!

The time is now!

The time is now! Stop the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents

Thematic bulletin of the ILO/IPEC Project "Contribution to the prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic"

No. 6

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EDITORIAL

The contents of the information issued by the media are extremely important for society given that they “transmit and uphold the country’s political, economic, social and cultural ideology”. In the specific case of information regarding the problem of commercial sexual exploitation, its influence can be seen in the way society “perceives” this problem. This is much more than semantics and its most immediate consequence can be found, alongside other equally important factors, in the prevailing social tolerance towards a problem that literally puts a stranglehold on any possibility of exercising the right to a positive integral development for persons under 18 years of age. Although the responsibility for this social response to such a serious problem does not lie solely with the media, the extent of the impact of the latter’s actions –as described in this magazine- are, without a doubt, considerable.

In keeping with the new trends in human rights, the comprehensive content of a press article (title, language, image/illustration, together with its placement within a broader informative context) regarding commercial sexual exploitation can consciously be found within a journalistic dilemma that implies: being just another vehicle for revictimization and legitimization of this form of violence towards children and adolescent victims or contributing to defend the victims of this form of exploitation and promoting respect for their rights by means of journalism that is free of myths, prejudice and moralistic attitudes and that is willing to protect boys, girls and adolescents and report situations that create and sustain this criminal activity.

This second option is, undoubtedly, fundamental and even obligatory within the framework of the social responsibility of journalists, social communicators and owners of media agencies.

There is thus an urgent need for changes in the perception of and language used regarding this problem, linked to a change in the approach to the responsibility for exploitation and its criminal dimension. Within this same context, the widespread tendency to use images of the victims to illustrate articles on this issue should, once and for all, be eliminated. This is not just a case of being more careful about publishing images that may directly identify the

children and adolescents, but also of not publishing or making other information known, such as the names of relatives or where they are from, which inevitably leads to their identification and profoundly disrespects rights regarding images and the honour of these boys and girls.

In contrast, references to the exploiters is still minimal. This “omission” –a common occurrence in both the content and illustration of articles on this issue- means any consideration regarding demand is not taken into account. Added to this are the questions: Are the people responsible for putting a stop to the problem mentioned as frequently? Where and when are the institutions and authorities responsible for providing an immediate response to the victims and exploiters mentioned? Are the criminal laws that so severely punish these crimes divulged? All of the above, with the exception of the victims and their families, remain anonymous.

The strategic importance of the media for transmitting values and living standards is unquestionable. In today’s globalized society its role is as fundamental as that of the family, schools or the community and we therefore consider that its role in the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation is also essential.

There is a need for a change of approach regarding information in order to promote the possibilities of the success of prevention policies related to this crime rather than punitive responses, and informing of the successful responses that are being carried out in our countries to combat this problem, such as, for example, successful care programmes for victims, and, finally, for counting on the media as allies of the first order with respect to this problem.

We would, once again, like to thank all those who have contributed to this sixth edition of *The time is now!* and we hope it will provide useful tools and advice for journalists and social communicators, as well as for all those associated with the media, in order to make progress and support the countries’ efforts in the prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

¹ Aguilar, Thais. 2001. Ojos bien cerrados. Manual de tratamiento periodístico para los casos de explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad (Eyes wide shut. Journalists’ manual for dealing with cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). p 33. SEM-UNICEF-FUCDESIDA-OIT/IPEC. San José, Costa Rica.

The role of the media in the prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents

Bente Sorensen.²

The media possess great potential as allies in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents persons since they have the power to place problems that are normally made invisible on the public agenda and analyze them from standpoints that advocate social justice and human rights. They can also play an important role regarding social vigilance in order to achieve the effective application of existing legislation and the implementation of political commitments whilst informing and educating the general public on the prevention of the problem.

1. The media in relation to the analysis of the situation of commercial sexual exploitation

The commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents was not, with respect to the public agenda, considered a social problem or a violation of human rights until the nineties when the First World Congress against the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents was held. It was the NGOs and international agencies who first raised the alarm in relation to this problem, and the media wasted no time in making their criticism and concern known both internationally and in each country. Several media agencies helped to present the problem as a violation of the human rights of children and adolescents, which proved crucial to the way it was subsequently tackled by governments and institutions. The fact that the media took the problem seriously and raised the issue on many occasions in reports and on television and radio programmes led other key sectors for the development of society such as legislators, politicians and decision-makers to also begin to analyzing it.

However, the rights approach still needs to be consolidated by the media given that the victims of commercial sexual exploitation are still presented as “shrewd youngsters” who want to earn easy money, and the exploiters as inexistent or people with “good intentions”, thereby justifying this form of sexual violence and economic exploitation. Furthermore, the media are often incapable or uninterested in carrying out an analysis of the problem of sexual exploitation that includes the socioeconomic, cultural and criminal factors that are the background to the problem. This means the focus is on the victims and their families and on the reasons why they find themselves in this situation.

By providing a critical and comprehensive analysis of the situation of commercial sexual exploitation for society the media can make a very important contribution and can also help to urge and speed up the institutional response to the problem, as well as directly informing and educating the population.

2. The media can speed up the institutional response to commercial sexual exploitation

If the media are well trained in or informed of strategies aimed at the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation that are appropriate and respectful of human rights, it is possible for them to inform the different sectors as to their role and commitment, as well as making that institutional response to the problem more forthcoming and swift. Since decision-makers in public institutions and the private and social sectors are influenced by the media, just as the rest of the population, the media can act as catalysts in favouring a more effective response. The way in which the media present and analyze the problem, as well as the existing challenges in the different sectors and institutions for putting a stop to and preventing the problem, are decisive factors in determining the response that will be provided to the problem.

Some examples of this are mentioned below:

- The media in any given country can report on how many years in prison a paedophile will be sentenced to if he chooses this or that country for committing his criminal acts. They can thus analyze and show if the legislation of that particular country is the same standard as other neighbouring countries and thus call the attention of its legislators.

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- If a given sector, such as the tourist sector for example, claims that it is not its responsibility to have any bearing on a problem such as that of commercial sexual exploitation, the media can run a report on the situation of sex tourism, interviewing tourists, for example, asking them whether they are aware that they are committing a crime if they pay for sex with persons under 18 years of age, even though they may have encountered them within the sex trade. They can also film tourists when they are making contact with the girls, boys and adolescents in tourist areas (without showing the faces of the children and adolescents). Likewise, they can, for example, produce a report based on interviews with hotel receptionists in tourist sectors in order to determine whether they are sometimes contacted by tourists who wish them to help them look for children and adolescents for sexual activities and if the receptionists know that they would be accomplices in a crime as facilitators of commercial sexual exploitation if they agree to provide this “help”. The media may thus contribute to making the different private or public sectors aware of the existence of the problem and of the required response, which, in this case, would be to make the tourist sector aware of its social responsibility within this business.
- The media can also help to create a positive image of the public institutions and private companies that effectively fulfil their duties in favour of the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation. For example, the hotel that guarantees it is an exploitation-free area that respects human rights. This boosts this particular hotel’s prestige and image in the same way as hotels that promote non-polluting environments and protect natural resources.

Since all the countries in the region have ratified international conventions that require them to take immediate measures for putting a stop to sexual exploitation, the media may play a role involving social vigilance and call attention to situations in which international commitments are not being complied with.

The international conventions require, for example, that the nations provide immediate protection for the girls, boys and adolescents involved in situations of sexual exploitation, but they also state that the children and adolescents should be treated as victims of a crime. Therefore, it is not enough for the media to inform of “rehabilitation” options for the girls, boys and adolescents –as if, moreover, it were them who were

the guilty parties who need to be “rehabilitated” rather than the exploiters, who are the ones who need to be punished and require social rehabilitation; the reports must be taken a step further.

The media can question, analyze and show the kind of care that is sometimes provided to the girls, boys and adolescents. There is a need for media agencies to question the appropriateness of “shutting away” the children and adolescents in shelters –even if it is with the intention of protecting them- for long periods, in some cases for years at a time, violating their right to free movement and to live with their families. The media are in a position to encourage societies and institutions to reflect on this situation and provide a more comprehensive and appropriate response that is respectful of human rights.

Reports that blame the victims themselves and their poor families only contribute to reinforcing society’s stereotypes and myths and placing the responsibility on the most vulnerable. There is an urgent need to broaden the framework of analysis to also include the structural factors that influence the existence of the problem, such as poverty, cultures that legitimize buying sex, the uneven distribution of wealth, etc.

In relation to police investigations and the sanctioning of the sexual exploiters, the media can also act as a strategic ally since they can publish photographs of the girls and boys who are missing or who have been kidnapped in order to locate them before they are mistreated or taken abroad by traffickers; or they can help to divulge photographs of the sex offenders who have escaped the legal system.

What constitutes a situation of commercial sexual exploitation?

When one or more people pay or promise any form of payment (money or food, clothing, cell phones, drugs, etc.) to anyone under 18 years of age, or to a third party (a procurer, for example) in order that a girl, boy or adolescent perform sexual activities such as:

- Paid sexual relations or activities.
- Appearing naked in erotic poses, photographs, videos, drawings, texts, etc. The production, sale and possession of this type of material also constitute criminal acts.
- Using them in public or private sex shows.

Source: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP. 2005. *El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad* (The role of the media. Key stakeholders in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama.

Another way in which the media can help in the fight against sexual exploitation is by making slots available and providing guidelines for informative material produced by state authorities and NGOs for educational purposes to prevent exploitation.

3. The media can influence individual behaviour towards sexual exploitation.

The importance of the media's participation in the fight against sexual exploitation also lies in the fact that they reach groups which other authorities have difficulty in accessing, and that they have the power to create values. The media can address the population directly in order to inform them what their individual responses as "ordinary" people should be for putting a stop to exploitation within society.

With respect to **care for the victims**, the media can explain to relatives, neighbours, community leaders, teachers and others who have direct contact with the girls, boys and adolescents, that the latter are not guilty of the exploitation and that they should be treated in the same respectful manner in which victims of other types of sexual violence (victims of incest and sexual abuse) are treated. Due to the stereotypes common in society, it is difficult for the general public to perceive adolescents who appear to be of legal age and who have an active sex life with their partners as victims of sexual exploitation when they are subjected to commercial sexual activities. It is necessary to start deconstructing these stereotypes and the attitudes that place the blame on the victims, despite the fact that this is a long and complicated process.

Commercial sexual exploitation manifests itself in different ways:

- Exploitation by locals (nationals or foreign residents).
- Exploitation by means of sex tourism (where exploiters are foreigners or tourists and this includes the promotion, offer and facilitation of this type of activities).
- Moving children and adolescents from one province to another or from one country to another for sexual exploitation purposes (trafficking).
- Publishing pornography via different means –on the Internet, for example.

Source: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP. 2005.

El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad (The role of the media. Key stakeholders in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama.

The media can also help to disseminate information on the care and protection options the community offers and the right to demand healthcare and education services from institutions in order that this information may reach the beneficiaries as and when they need it. It is naturally necessary to take into account that, given that extreme poverty and illiteracy constitute significant aspects of the victims' situations, it cannot be assumed that they read newspapers or watch educational television programmes; however, radio programmes are perhaps more within their reach or the information could reach them via third parties who have greater access to the media.

In relation to the **sanctioning of the exploiters**, the media can play an important role in providing information on existing legislation in order that the population at large may know what kind of acts constitute a crime. They may also, likewise, inform the public about the places where these crimes are reported, their opening hours and what information should be taken to the authorities, if they may be reported anonymously, etc.

It is, however, in the **prevention of commercial sexual exploitation** that the media are indispensable. It has been discovered that there is a high level of social tolerance towards the use of women and adolescents for commercial sexual activities that is very deeply rooted in the prevailing patriarchal society, thereby favouring commercial sexual exploitation. The biggest challenge in this fight is perhaps that of creating a culture of intolerance of exploitation in society and one in which the media can contribute more with its power to shape values.

The media in this area have an important reporting and educational role. It is necessary to inform the general public of existing legislation and warn potential exploiters, but more important still is the need to educate the public in regard to the issue of sexuality, especially that of male sexuality. As long as adult and young males continue to experience their sexuality in a non-integral, genitalized manner characterized by the use of power, it will be very difficult to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents since society continually requires them to behave in this manner.

3 ILO/IPEC. 2004. *Explotación sexual comercial y masculinidad. Un estudio regional cualitativo con hombres de la población general* (Commercial sexual exploitation and masculinity. A qualitative regional study of males from the general population). Campos, A and Salas, J. M. San José, Costa Rica.

It is necessary to favour sex education that respects human rights and informs both male and female adults of the limit between what is legally permitted and what is considered and what constitutes a crime of abuse or exploitation. The media's support with respect to this is particularly important given that other social institutions (family, education system and the church) normally show little interest in educating the public in relation to issues concerning sexuality.

4. Self-limitation and social responsibility of the media

It is important that the media be aware of their social responsibility in relation to the prevention of sexual exploitation and that they do not have double standards in this respect. Despite its serious physical, psychological and social consequences for the victims, commercial sexual exploitation is a problem that, due to its inherent links with the topic of sexuality, easily attracts the public's morbid curiosity and could, therefore, arouse interest as a "commercial object" for the media since "sex sells". The media should thus limit themselves and focus on reporting on this subject in favour of its elimination. It is problematic and non ethical when reports are made by the media in this respect with the intention of increasing their ratings or selling newspapers.

The media should thus also reflect on whether it is ethical or not to publish advertisements for massage parlours looking for or advertising the fact that their clients will be attended by "young girls", when they know that many of these places are mere facades for luring adolescents and young girls in order to use them for commercial sexual activities.

Likewise, the media should be aware of the fact that, in dealing with this issue, their work could be counterproductive. They should develop institutional guidelines on the use of appropriate terminology to avoid revictimizing the children and adolescents. For example, victims of exploitation should not be referred to as prostitutes but, rather, precisely as victims or simply as boys, girls and adolescents; otherwise what they are doing is, in fact, promoting the exploitation. In the same manner, they should respect the victims' right to their honour, image and good reputation. The media should also take care to ensure that the information provided regarding exploitation does not encourage it

—for example, illustrations or reports should not include photographs of the girls or boys, or child pornography, nor should it divulge where this type of material can be downloaded on the Internet. Reporting on "new" types of abuse and exploitation on, for example, certain kinds of child pornography videos could arouse the interest of certain sectors of the population to view this type of material and, consequently, increases the demand for it.

In the same manner, journalists should make sure their reports and articles do not contain information that could be used by the exploiters. Information on the exact location of brothels where children and adolescents are exploited should not be provided. In other words, care should be taken to avoid facilitating any form of map or "tourist guide" for potential exploiters.

Furthermore, the media should take care to avoid informing the public of cases being investigated by the police. The reason for this is that journalists' reports could destroy evidence or alert the exploiters. Another relevant aspect worth bearing in mind is that they could put the victims' security and integrity at greater risk.

5. Encourage and curb

Journalists' associations may employ a range of strategies for helping their members tackle this problem in an appropriate and responsible manner.

Different initiatives can be developed in order to encourage journalists to deal with the issue in the media, such as supporting a communications prize on child rights in recognition of the journalists who defend the rights of the more vulnerable members of society. Equally, efforts can be made to urge the media to sign letters of commitment to support this struggle. On the other hand, journalists' associations can also make the decision to contact journalists if they find they are tackling the issue in an inappropriate manner. They are in a position to sensitize and inform them of the problem or organize training workshops with the aim of assisting journalists in dealing with the problem more fittingly. If serious errors are made repeatedly they can also decide to apply some form of moral sanction or report cases to the authorities in countries that have legislation regarding the media's responsibilities.

The mass media as allies in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation

Rosa Cheng Lo ⁴

An analysis of the presence of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation in the mass media in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic

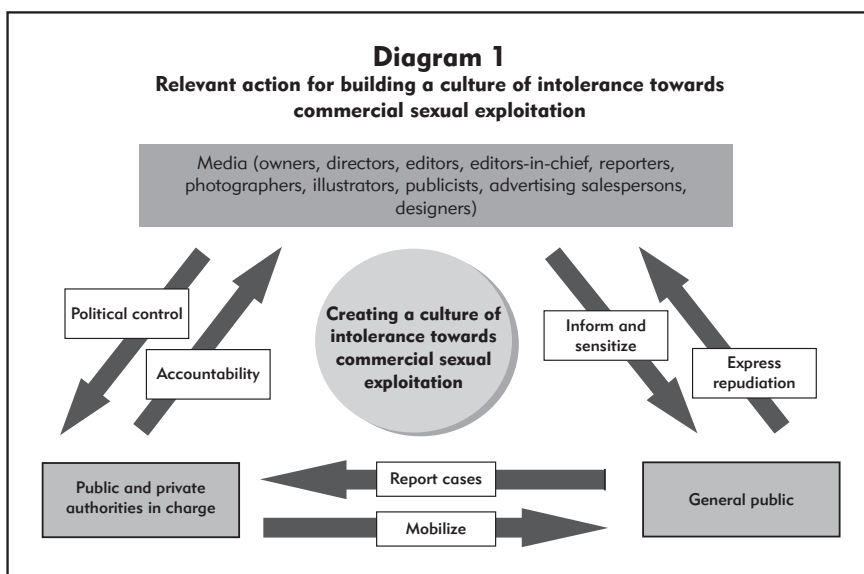
1. The role of the media

In order to achieve the effective prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents it is essential to build a culture of intolerance towards this serious violation of the rights of girls, boys and adolescents. It is of fundamental importance in this task that the different social stakeholders acknowledge the problem and actively take on their corresponding role in this struggle.

The mass media are one of the crucial stakeholders for combating commercial sexual exploitation since, on the one hand, they can inform and sensitize the general public and, on the other hand, they are in a position in which they can exercise a role of political and civil control of the public and private authorities responsible for preventing, dealing with and sanctioning the problem.

This ability to influence the media can be summed up in the following actions:

- Calling attention to the problem
- Informing of its existence and complexity
- Improving understanding of the issue
- Encourage a change in attitude and action on the part of the different sectors of society
- However, the “goodwill” of communicators will not suffice with regard to the fulfilment of these tasks since, if they are carried out in an inappropriate manner this could generate risks which, far from helping the victims to overcome their situation, could reinforce their vulnerability. For example:



- If attention is called to the existence of the problem, but the reality of the victims' situation is not analyzed in depth, this could lead to the revictimization of the children and adolescents (blaming them for situations in which they are the victims and not the people responsible).
- If information on commercial sexual exploitation is presented but the stance taken is no different to the traditional approach (that views commercial sexual exploitation as normal and natural in society), myths and stereotypes regarding the victims, the exploiters and possible responses to the problem may be reinforced.
- If in-depth understanding of the problem is presented, but solutions are not forthcoming, powerlessness and indifference may be experienced by the population and the sectors responsible.

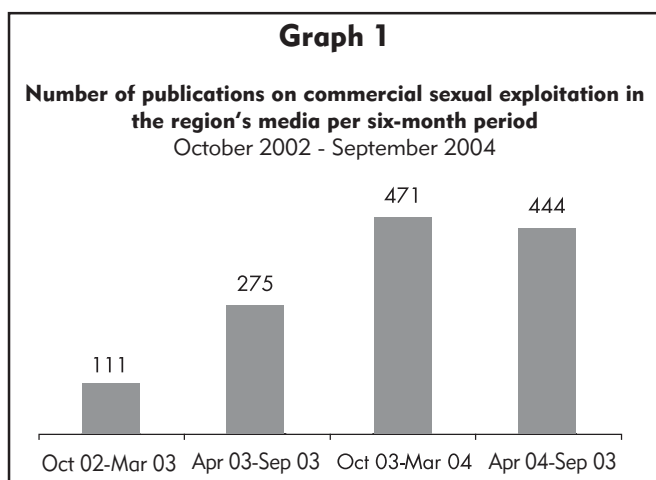
This is why any strategy for raising the awareness of and providing training for the media should begin by revealing the ways in which the media themselves are reflecting the reality of commercial sexual exploitation. Only thus will it be possible to comprehend the

⁴ Social communicator and assessor of development projects and programmes. External consultant in communications for the CSE Sub-Regional ILO/IPEC Project (October 2004 – December 2005).

mechanisms that must be “dismantled” in order to consolidate a different approach to the problem –one that respects the human rights of the children and adolescents and that is more relevant to the fight against this social scourge.

2. Media presence of the commercial sexual exploitation issue

An analysis on the presence of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation in the media in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic carried out at the end of 2004⁵ showed an increase in the number of times the issue was mentioned in the press, indicating that the determination of different social stakeholders to place the problem on the public agenda had a considerable effect on this sector⁶.

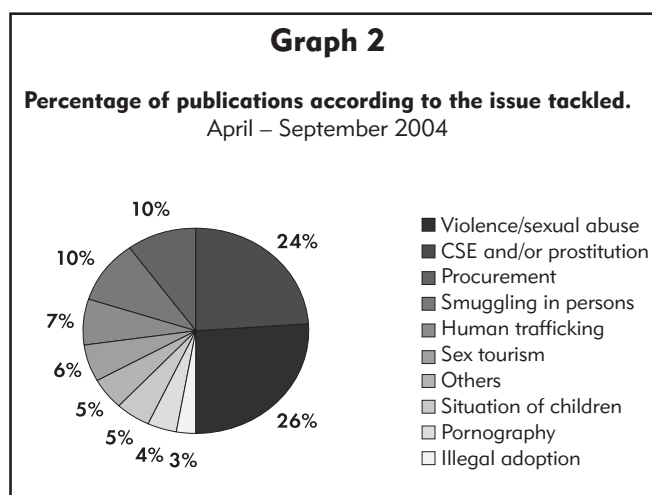


However, this greater presence of the issue did not imply a positive situation per se, since the analysis of the contents of the information published revealed the following aspects:

- a) A large concentration of the number of times the issue was mentioned in a limited number of media agencies, since 72% of the publications appeared in 10 press agencies (out of 49 media agencies). This leads to the assumption that the issue has not been afforded the same level of attention by different agencies and that it responds, rather, to an editorial policy that favours certain issues.

⁵ The media's analysis was undertaken based on the press archives of the ILO/IPEC Project “Contributing to the prevention and elimination of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Central America, Belize, Panama and the Dominican Republic”.

⁶ It is important to point out that the press archives on which this analysis was based do not reflect all the existing media in the region, since they only include 49 media agencies. Nor was the compilation methodology the same for all the countries, and the results of the analysis should thus be considered a press survey rather than a statistical study. Seventy seven percent of the information analyzed came from Costa Rica and Honduras.



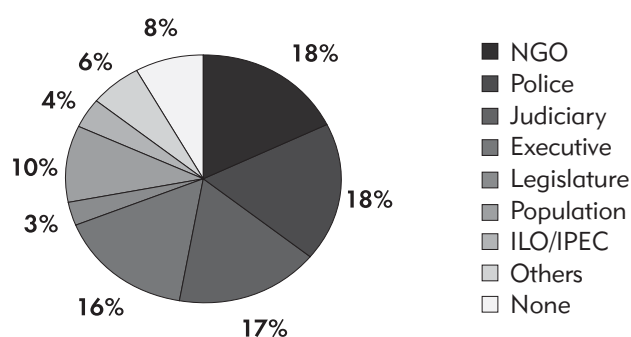
- b) The predominance of press articles as the preferred format for presenting the problem of commercial sexual exploitation (approximately 80%) to the detriment of other formats that allow for a more in-depth study of the issue, such as reports, letters of opinion or editorials.
- c) The issue of commercial sexual exploitation is closely linked to cases of abuse and sexual violence towards children and adolescents. Although the two issues are clearly related –they are both forms of sexual violence towards children and adolescents– it is important to point out that commercial sexual exploitation has particular characteristics that need to be made known and tackled from their specific perspective such as the trade that this form of sexual abuse entails. This distinction was not always clear to journalists.
- d) Approximately half of the publications appeared in the Accident and Crime Reports section and were related to the administration of justice in specific cases of sexual abuse or commercial sexual exploitation (reports, detentions, police investigations or interventions, court cases, sentences, etc.). This indicates that emphasis was placed on a reporting perspective based on repression as the State's institutional response to the problem, with a lack of information on preventive or educational measures or proposals in terms of solutions to the situations of commercial sexual exploitation presented. Furthermore, few publications referred to the existing national or international legal framework allowing for action in cases of commercial sexual exploitation; and, with few exceptions, in-depth analysis of the causes and consequences of commercial sexual exploitation was undertaken.
- e) With regard to the publication on the administration of justice in cases of commercial sexual exploitation,

more attention is placed on these cases being reported than on convictions, thereby creating a feeling of ineffectiveness of the justice system. Equally, the amount of information on actions for strengthening institutions (legal reform, staff training, public policy proposals, prevention campaigns, community response, national plans on commercial sexual exploitation) was similar to the amount that revealed shortcomings in the institutional response to the problem, thus sending a message that is unlikely to prompt the mobilization of the different stakeholders who have the capacity to act against commercial sexual exploitation.

- f) The main source of information of over 50% of the publications were government entities, mainly the police and judicial authorities, which explains the “accidents and crime reports” and repressive nature of the information presented. The efforts of NGOs to shed light on and tackle the problem are evident, since they were cited as the second main source of information. However, the relatively weak presence of the Executive and Legislature as news sources for commercial sexual exploitation indicates that the problem has still not been dealt with in relation to the formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of public policies regarding children and adolescents. Social communicators have, likewise, not made sufficient efforts to consult the opinions of sectors such as private enterprise, local governments and the general public. It appears that the issue continues to be viewed as a problem related to the private lives of the victims and their families, rather

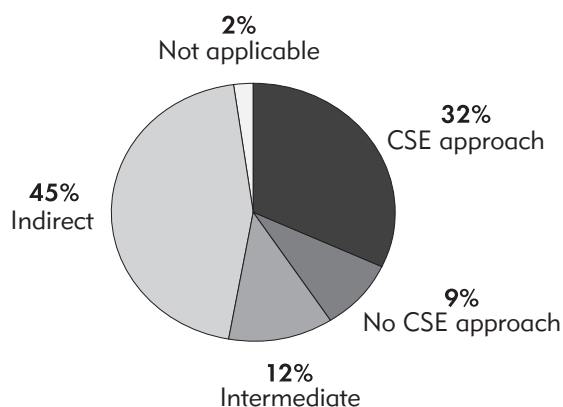
Graph 3

Percentage of publications according to source of information.
April – September 2004



Graph 4

Percentage of publications according to source of information.
April – September 2004



than from the perspective of its complex political, economic, social and cultural dimension.

- g) Of all the publications analyzed, 32% present a human rights approach, which means they have used the terminology recommended by experts in the field (commercial sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, victims of commercial sexual exploitation); they do not present photographs of the victims; their main source of information is NGOs and national authorities dealing with children and adolescents. On the other hand, 21% of the publications that did not use this approach (9% lack a human rights approach and 12% use an intermediate approach) were characterized by one or several of the following:
- Use of terms such as “child prostitution”
 - They refer to commercial sexual exploitation as “work”, to the victims as “prostitutes” and to the exploiters as “clients”
 - They focus the information on the victims, providing details of the events and circumstances of their lives
 - They do not analyze the “demand”, and when they do they link it to foreign tourists and conceal local demand
 - They do not analyze in depth the network of intermediaries that benefit from commercial sexual exploitation
 - On presenting victims’ declarations, they focus on aspects such as the amount of money they “earn” or their marginalized background, even presenting commercial sexual exploitation as an activity related to a luxury lifestyle

- vii. They insinuate that it was the victims' decision to embark on "this kind of life" and that they do not wish to abandon the exploitation
- viii. They present sensationalist headlines that do not necessarily correspond to the contents of the article
- ix. They illustrate the article with images of the victims and do not take due care to protect their identity
- x. They use images that reproduce gender stereotypes (women in low-cut clothes and sexually provocative poses), and in some cases they even act as vehicles for child pornography by issuing images of this nature with a view to illustrating the issue, or they become sources of information for paedophile or commercial sexual exploitation networks by providing addresses of places where exploitation is carried out.

3. Strategies for making allies of the media

With respect to the reality being presented by the media regarding the problem of commercial sexual exploitation, the ILO/IPEC Project "*Contribution to the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Central America, Belize, Panama and the Dominican Republic*" developed some strategies for counteracting the negative effects that the media were facing in revealing and raising awareness of the problem, with the intention of winning them over as allies in this fight. Some of the general strategies employed were:

- a) Sensitizing people in the media to the appropriate way of reporting on the issue. The basic principles being promoted are the following:
 - i. The girls, boys and adolescents should not find themselves in a worse condition following the intervention of the media
 - ii. Morbid fascination and sensationalism should be avoided by using an appropriate focus in

terms of approach, terminology and images that do not revictimize

- iii. Interventions that hinder legal processes or investigations should be avoided
- iv. The need to be continually informed and trained as to the most appropriate way they can contribute
- b) Regularly monitor the media in order to "gauge" the issue and be able to provide some form of feedback for the media covering the problem, or that could do so in the future.
- c) Introduce balanced topics and approaches when motivating and supporting journalists or generators of public opinion in order that they may publish articles or reports related to the problem from different angles that were not previously presented by the media. In this sense, the facilitation of material and technical orientation were crucial for achieving this motivation.
- d) Sensitizing other key stakeholders responsible for preventing, tackling or sanctioning commercial sexual exploitation in order that they may benefit from the media as a fundamental ally in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation. Diversifying sources of information on the problem is, therefore, vital for achieving a better positioning of those responsible with respect to the general public.

There is no doubt that the media are essential for achieving effective elimination of commercial sexual exploitation, and this is why "winning them over as allies" is a day-to-day and long-term task in which a continuous appeal is made to their sensibility, conscience and individual and collective social responsibility. The message against this criminal activity is gradually beginning to permeate the media; however, the task of dignifying the image of the girls, boys and adolescents in the region and restoring part of their human rights that are being violated is only in the very early stages.



Commercial sexual exploitation can be carried out different ways:

- Exploitation by local individuals (nationals or foreign residents).
- Exploitation as sexual tourism (when abusers are foreigners or tourists; this includes promotion, solicitation and facilitation of this kind of activities as well).
- Moving children and adolescents from one province to another or from one country to another for sexual exploitation (trafficking).
- Dissemination of pornography by different means, such as the Internet.

Source: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP. 2005. *El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad. Panamá* (The role of the media. Key stakeholders in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama

Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and the media: the challenge accomplished

Thaís Aguilar Z.⁷

With the objective of raising the public's awareness regarding the severe violation of rights that children and adolescents are subjected to in our countries, the awareness-raising campaigns promoted by different international, national and non-government organizations have focused on revealing the responsibility for exploitation as that of the "client-exploiters", procurers, intermediaries and facilitators of the sex trade, and on decriminalizing the victims, who are the weakest link in a long chain of abuse and violence.

In this context work has been carried out by different authorities in order to highlight the fact that these types of rights' violations severely affect the overall development of the children and adolescents and, therefore, compel society to take events that have been considered "normal" or acceptable out of the private realm.

With particular reference to the media, in 1998 the first instance of awareness-raising and training for Costa Rican journalists took place with a view to searching for a way of handling this problem in the news, since it was being rubbed into the nose of Costa Rican society on the main streets of its capital, San Jose, as well as in other communities around the country, especially in ports and border areas.

1. Analysis of the characteristics of the coverage of the commercial sexual exploitation issue by the media

Due to the systematic and sustained work undertaken by international and national organizations in the region's countries, the approach to information on CSE has improved substantially in quality and focus over recent years. We thus identified the following positive characteristics that demonstrate the progress made in the way this issue is covered:

- a) It is no longer common to find photographs of the victims of sexual exploitation and information regarding their identity. The handling of the photographs has improved as has the way the news approaches information on the abusing clients.
- b) There are practically no descriptions of the situations of exploitation and interviews with the victims of sexual exploitation. This favours non-revictimization of the persons being sexually exploited.
- c) The information no longer focuses on ascertaining the number of victims of sexual exploitation. The

focus is more on smuggling and trafficking, and the vulnerability of the victims is reflected, as is their relation to poverty and desperation.

However, some challenges still remain with regard to portrayals that are more in keeping with a human rights approach. It is thus important to identify and correct the following characteristics found in informative reports related to CSE:

- a) The placing of the information in the news agenda is still determined by the interests of the sources (the majority of which are official) working on this issue, rather than by the critical and vigilant attitude of the journalists. Moreover, the tendency to base information on only one news source or one study persists.
- b) The news continues to present information that is not very objective and interviews with civil society or non-government entities are few and far between.
- c) Despite the fact that some news makes the connection between problems of poverty, marginality and situations of commercial sexual exploitation, it is necessary to highlight it as a problem that is the result of a specific demand for sex with people who are vulnerable and have less power.
- d) There is little or no follow-up to the reports, studies or news that shed light on the places sexual exploitation centres around and the meeting places of abusers and the abused, etc.

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- e) Coverage of progress made and lessons learned in relation to the prevention and elimination of CSE continue to be outside the scope of the journalism agenda.
- f) There is still an adult-centric view of the way news regarding children and adolescents is handled.

Language is the first instrument of meaning. It allows us to develop and construct our identity and is, therefore, fundamental to redefining values, concepts and ideas. The following characteristics can be mentioned in relation to this aspect in the analysis of the media:

- a) The use of sexist and exclusive language against the children and adolescents affected by sexual exploitation is common.
- b) The terms “child prostitution” or “adolescent prostitution” are hardly ever used any more. Terms such as “exploitation”, “the abused”, “victims of trafficking”, etc., are more frequent.
- c) The “client” is another term that still needs to be redefined in order to demonstrate the social tolerance towards these victims. A client is a person who acquires a product or service in exchange for money or barter. Referring to the exploiters as “clients” implies tolerance and acceptance of the exploitation, slavery and abuse.
- d) There is a notable increase in news that denounces trafficking and CSE as a mafia “business” run by organized crime networks, etc., which is an approach that should be reinforced.

Another common term, used as a synonym for “adolescent” by journalists is that of “minor”, which reveals an “adult-centric” outlook and denies the children and adolescents their status of persons with rights. This term should NOT be overused.

Conclusions

The review of news items from a rights and gender perspective is uncommon and even novel for professionals in communication; however, it is precisely this void that urgently demands the production of news that takes into account the rights of children and adolescents.

Analyzing news production from these perspectives reveals a metaphor concealed behind information terminology in general –that of portraying children and adolescents as “adult girls, boys and adolescents”. This

approach considers this sector of the population as small adults –an outlook that arises from adulthood. Their smallness –due to their size- “affects” their human condition and, since they are not fully human, they are seen as incapable of demanding and exercising their rights. They are thus not considered news subjects with full rights.

This stance denies children and adolescents their own statute –of special protection by the State and society- and prevents them from constructing their identity based on their own perceptions and categories. The adult-centric view, therefore, does not accept the existence of a child and adolescent culture, nor is the latter recognized as such: a culture that organizes its own time, space, relations and fantasy. As a culture in its own right, it has every right to its own development, and to being understood, respected and protected.

Boys, girls and adolescents are thus treated by the mass media as passive subjects or recipients of certain services or “favours” provided by adults, which contrasts with the wishes and rights of the former who demand greater involvement in matters that concern them.

Despite the progress made regarding coverage, improvements still need to be made to the rights approach in order that the children and adolescents have a greater say and their condition as citizens with special rights is respected.

Recommendations for improving the way the issue is handled by the media

Mention the problem more often: The silence, indifference and general ignorance surrounding commercial sexual exploitation contributes to maintaining and consolidating this problem. It is the duty of the media to speak of the problem more, with courage and insistence. It must be acknowledged that CSE is a national and international problem of enormous proportions.

Training: Although journalists often do not have the time to study all the aspects that should be analyzed, this factor should not turn into an excuse for a lack of interest. It is necessary to be sensitive, honest and prepared when faced with new phenomena such as human trafficking, for example. Many government employees and NGO staff are willing to provide help and guidance in this respect.

Sources: there is a tendency to use only official sources when, in fact, it is best to find more balanced information and support from other institutions such as government and non-government coalitions, NGOs, foundations, universities and specialists.

Observation: Professionals in communication should not forget the supervisory and social anthropological role of observation of the environment with an open mind. The CSE of children and adolescents occurs before our very eyes and we “do not see it” because we often blame the victims and excuse the exploiters.

Checking data: on analyzing news over a given period, some figures vary from one media agency to another despite the fact that the journalists have been carrying out the same activity, and this is why it is important to check data rather than relying on rumours.

Placing of the news: Issues related to the CSE of children and adolescents tend to be placed only in the accidents and crime reports section, when it is a scourge with structural roots in society and one which, furthermore, transcends frontiers and involves a form of organized crime. Therefore, it is important to view it in a broader sense –a problem of major proportions that deserves to be strategically placed on other pages or in more “hard news” sections.

Follow-up: the news on the CSE of children and adolescents tends to be considered as isolated incidents and rarely receives the follow-up and explanation it deserves.

Morbid curiosity and sensationalism: due to the vulnerability of the victims of CSE and the abominable nature of their experience, there is a tendency to make these stories the main news story, using detailed and exaggerated descriptions. The rights of these children and adolescents such as, for example, the right to the protection of their identity are thus often violated. This is an example of a violation of international conventions and local legislation. Although the story is important from a newsworthy point of view, it is not necessary to exaggerate descriptions, and the dignity of these people should be taken into consideration.

Service information: due to the country's social and cultural conditions, it is important to warn the national community of the existence of CSE mafias, human trafficking and smuggling in persons, in order to prevent them from falling victim to deceit. It is thus important to provide readers, listeners and television viewers with the names and telephone numbers of legal aid, psychological and social institutions for victims, as well as places and institutions where these situations can be reported.

Writing that does not revictimize



Commercial sexual exploitation: use of girls, boys and adolescents in paid sexual activities.

Different forms of commercial sexual exploitation: paid sexual activities, child and adolescent pornography, sex shows, trafficking of children and adolescents for commercial sexual exploitation purposes.

Girl, boy and adolescent victims of commercial sexual exploitation: children and adolescents whose rights are violated by adults.

Exploiters or “client”-exploiters: those directly responsible for the crime of commercial sexual exploitation.

Trafficking of children and adolescents for commercial sexual exploitation purposes: moving girls, boys or adolescents within or outside the country, in order to use them in the sex trade.



Child prostitution/prostituted girls, boys, adolescents/young prostitutes or minor prostitutes: “prostitution” refers to the buying and selling of “sex services” between adults. It should not be applied to children and adolescents since it reinforces the erroneous myth that the girls, boys and adolescents are “selling a service”, when in reality they are being exploited and are victims of a criminal act committed by the adult.

Client: a person who pays for a service. Sexual exploitation is not a service, it is a CRIME.

Smuggling of persons: this is a crime that is different from trafficking since it implies facilitating illegal border crossings.

National Journalists' Council of Panama: the role of the media

Fernán Molinos D.⁸

Child rights –regardless of gender- are, without doubt, some of the most consecrated fundamental rights in the world and the most deep-rooted among the international community. However, they are also the most violated. Crimes concerning commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents are, likewise, frequent in a panorama that turns the victims into the most vulnerable members of the so-called “contemporary civilization”.

The role of the media is particularly important in the development of policies aimed at combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children. And the fact is that many of the factors that influence this problem are based on information circulated by the media.

As in other fields, the media tend to be urged to consider their responsibility through the development of “prevention and sensitization programmes”. This task is, in many cases, limited, and, fortunately not in all cases, reduced to the mere issuing of messages in collective headings or tiny spaces, mostly relegated to the least important sections and times in the press or audiovisual media. Nonetheless, communication companies have been called upon to make a more significant contribution than this poor collaboration.

In this sense, tackling the problem and all its complexities demands new approaches “so as to not adversely affect still further” –as an orienting publication on the issue points out- “the rights of the girls, boys and adolescents” who are victims of this scourge.

This approach should serve to deconstruct myths that conceal the magnitude of a social problem with unforeseeable effects and scope. These myths include: the problem is widely recognized and limited to a few cases; the majority of the offenders are tourists; this “work” is appealing to children and adolescents because it provides them with money and helps them to overcome their circumstances fraught with poverty; the victims are only small girls and boys.

The abovementioned approach should, equally, review the way the problem is handled, for example, in the use of terms and concepts such as “child prostitution” which implies that the children and adolescents are “selling themselves”, when they are, in actual fact, being exploited.

One way of dealing appropriately with news of this nature is to inform journalists of tools for ensuring the protection of children and adolescents from these practices, and which constitute international and local legislation for punishing CSE. These are, mostly, to be found –on the national level- in the constitutions themselves, and are developed by specific laws and articulated in related codes, whilst –on the international level- they are included in declarations, conventions and protocols that are binding for the nations that have signed them.

In an even more specific sense, the role of the media should, at all times, take into account the observance of ethical criteria in relation to both editorial content and the images or photographs that illustrate it. This is, after all, the most fundamental aspect of their task in the major undertaking of protecting the rights of children and adolescents.

The National Journalists' Council of Panama, as an association that draws together all the media –radio



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stations, writers, television, tourist and university press, as well as communication companies- is an essential link in the fight to prevent and put a stop to the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in this country.

Thus, once the media's responsibility had been established in this field (Law 16 of 31 March, 2004⁹) and given the appeal made by the Attorney and President of the National Commission for the Prevention of the crimes of Sexual Exploitation (CONAPREDES), the Council decided to support the actions developed to combat this phenomenon.

Links have, therefore, been established between both organizations as a result of the above and the signing of a letter of commitment, and, with the help of the ILO, training for journalists on this issue was initiated; a document aimed at social communicators in order that they may tackle the issue appropriately was validated, and they took part in a major awareness-raising campaign via the mass media (members of the

Council) with a view to informing the public of the fact that sexual exploitation against any underage person is a crime punishable by Panamanian law.

There are many actions that need to be developed. In this sense, the task embarked upon accurately reflects the willingness of the organizations that are members of the Council to honour the commitment made in defence of child and adolescent rights in Panama.



The media can contribute to the fight against commercial sexual exploitation in many ways:

What should be done:

Promote a code of conduct and supervision of publicity and programmes that demonstrates the social commitment and responsibility of communication companies and their employees to the defence of the rights of children and adolescents, who constitute the weakest link in this chain of exploitation.

Promote mass media campaigns that sensitize the public –especially opinion-shapers and decision-makers- to this problem.

Have bearing on making the problem be considered in its true dimension as a social, cultural, economic and legal problem, and that it not be presented only in accidents and crime reports sections, and in women's' magazines or programmes. In this sense it is fundamental that commercial sexual exploitation be dealt with as a crime, which, in many cases, involves organized crime networks that reap huge profits from illegal activities.

Offer journalists more opportunities and time to present information and opinions that help to prevent, deal with and sanction commercial sexual exploitation.

Support the specialization of journalists in the issue of child rights and ensure they are properly oriented to tackle the issue of commercial sexual exploitation appropriately. In this sense it is necessary to encourage debate in editorial departments on how to handle, promote and provide information on the issue in an appropriate manner.

What should be avoided:

Avoid disseminating or promoting violence, particularly that of a sexual nature, and promote the formation of a healthy sexuality that respects human rights.

Ban the use of photographs or images of the children and adolescents exploited.
Avoid sensationalism when presenting news.

Prevent news related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents from being covered only in tabloid sections.

Avoid the publication or broadcasting of vague information, the sources of which have not been duly consulted.

On broadcasting or publishing news, avoid becoming sources of information for organized networks that abuse children and adolescents.

Source: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP. 2005. *El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad* (The role of the media. Key stakeholders in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama.

9 ILO/IPEC. 2004. *Ministry for Youth, Women and the Family, Ombudsman. Law N° 16 (31 March 2004). Panama.*

From the university lecture room: contributions to the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in the classroom

Alely Pinto Bautista¹⁰

The significance of the media in our societies is widely recognized, and it continues to be one of the most important tools for contributing to resolving the problems they are afflicted with. The media and journalists play an important role in recreating society, which is, after all, what journalists do: "This is the job of the journalist: to publicly represent the ups and downs and tensions within society; portray its protagonists, starting with the most invisible; perceive rifts that signal even more commotion regarding human relations or social coexistence"¹¹.

In their task of portraying and combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, the media have the potential to contribute in different ways, for example: a) making the problem visible. Helping people to stop seeing it –or ignoring it– as the same old story, and highlighting the social nature of the problem; b) sensitizing readers, radio listeners or television viewers, accompanying them in their awareness of the rights of children and adolescents, c) influencing trends in public opinion generated within society, and, most importantly, constructing new social concepts of children and adolescents, in particular children and adolescents who are economically exploited. By the latter I mean the ability of the media and journalists to deconstruct myths and stereotypes that threaten the rights of children and adolescents and contribute to perpetuating situations of vulnerability, as is the case with commercial sexual exploitation.

The recreation of society by the media oscillates –in the case of commercial sexual exploitation– like a pendulum between approaches and the handling of information that contributes to the elimination of the problem and those which, in contrast, perpetuate it. Among those

who promote the fight against this scourge, the latter is disturbing and causes concern for seeking ways to influence journalistic practices. This has led to efforts being made to sensitize journalists through manuals, training workshops and other resources.

Nevertheless, when we speak of or show concern for the way information is handled, we cannot lose sight of the business facet of the media and its ideological background –aspects that, as they demand other resources outside the influence of the classroom, will not be discussed in this article. What we must bear in mind when facing this challenge is that, before embarking on their professional careers as editors and reporters, the latter had to undergo a process that took place within university lecture halls, which, after all, is where the seeds of professional Journalism are sown, and it is this aspect that will be discussed here.

1. Working in the breeding ground

Added to the concern for influencing the agenda and work routines of journalists and the imagery of practicing communications professionals, is the need to work on the roots of communicators' training, on the breeding ground –the origin and beginning– from where good or bad practices began to be propagated in regard to writing. I am referring to working with students of Journalism (and, in turn, with those studying other subjects who currently find themselves in the schools of communication studies, i.e. public relations, advertising and audiovisual production).

Why university lecture halls?

Diacritic

Well, because, as those of us who, at some time or other in our lives attended the school of Journalism or Communications as students, know, very often our first encounter with social issues took place in those

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¹¹ Germán, Rey. 2004. Demandas éticas y sociales. Que le demanda el público a los medios y periodistas. En: La búsqueda de la calidad periodística y la transformación del periodismo profesional. Memorias del seminario 30-31 agosto, 2004 (Ethical and social demands. What the public demands of the media and journalists. In: The search for quality journalism and the transformation of professional journalism. Report on the seminar held from 30-31 August, 2004). Monterrey, Nuevo León. México.

very schools. Alongside learning the techniques of the inverted pyramid”, how to edit a “lead”, the formats of short news items, reports and columns, we also learnt that you had to fill those formats with content and that required observation of one’s surroundings, “gauge” current affairs and research an issue, perhaps for the first time, in depth.

Many of us for several years treasured, among our most precious memories, that first report that sent us out onto the streets to investigate an issue (about which most of the time we knew very little), later returning, with our view of the world disrupted, to piece together the four or five pages required by the Editing or Journalist Genres course.

From the other role that exists in the classroom, those of us who have had the responsibility of teaching young people Journalism are all too familiar with the range of possibilities this teaching opens up. We have seen young students take their first steps not only in applying journalistic techniques but also in the task of revealing the environment and extracting from it the issues that they are most interested in tackling. That is the moment when future journalists begin to propose thematic agendas, which they may later continue to develop in their professional careers.

Responsibility in the university

Universities –whether public or private- and their authorities, as well as their teaching staff, have the responsibility of perfecting the process of teaching Journalism in order that future reporters and editors, once they are working in editorial departments, may forge the recreation of society in the media from a broader and more committed viewpoint.

The inclusion of approaches to issues such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is obligatory in the study plans, academic goals, teaching profiles and research and extension projects of other spheres of university life.

And the fact is that journalism today requires professionals who not only master the trade, but who also possess the ability to develop their professional practice with in-depth knowledge of reality and with the sensitivity and awareness that favour approaches focusing on the rights of children in situations of vulnerability.

How does one influence the handling of issues such as commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents from the classroom?

This influence on students can take place on different levels and from different angles. It is naturally not an action that arises from a teacher’s “order” to research this or that topic. It is a question of motivating (or, better still, instigating) students to take an interest in social issues and problems. In this case the teachers’ task is to motivate them to look into as many windows on the issue as possible in order that, by building a bridge between academia and society, and from whatever option they prefer, they may recreate this reality on a level of a greater understanding of the problem and sensitivity to its dimensions.

On this occasion reference is made to three possible –not exclusive, but, rather, complementary- levels of influence in training students of Journalism to have a better handling of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

2. The first level of influence: ***promoting transversalization***

On defining what new ways could be found in the classroom to combat commercial sexual exploitation, I am not going to propose including this issue, or its institutionalization, as a course or subject on the university curriculum since it is a well-known fact that, besides this one, there are many other relevant issues that also deserve to be included. Knowing how the curricula in schools of Journalism are structured, what is needed is to point out the importance of the presence of these social issues over the course of the degree’s different subject matter. Commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents could easily be discussed in the context of the contents and placements of courses as diverse, but also complementary, as Editing, Research Journalism, Photography, Television Production, Current Affairs, and Communications Research, among others.

In other words, rather than dealing with the issue in specific courses, the idea is to propose these dynamic coordinates –overlapping courses- in which work is carried out based on a common theme in the case of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Thus, teachers and students research,

analyze and develop communication products related to the topic based on a process, and from the point of view of different subject matter. This, however, implies sensitivity, willingness and a serious commitment on the part of the university teaching staff to the fight to eliminate this problem affecting children and adolescents.

Likewise, attempts can be made to favour the inclusion of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents as research subjects for seminars and graduation and social extension projects in these degree courses. The idea is that the students become more familiarized with the issue not only through the typical questionnaire in a journalistic interview –a form of contact that is, in any event, ephemeral- but from an involvement and systematic (and hopefully interdisciplinary) handling of the problem, by researching its roots and social representation, as well as through contact with the social stakeholders involved not only in the problem but also in the fight to eliminate it.

3. The second level of influence: *reflection*

Another aspect of influence consists in the opportune sighting and confronting –“being on the safe side” one could say- of shortcomings observed in relation to practising professionals, for which it is important to bear in mind bad practices that have been observed in the media and reflect in light of these, without losing sight of the fact that, naturally, in the media other professionals and deciding factors (already mentioned above) intervene besides the decisions made by journalists.

Sensationalist or tabloid treatment, the absence of a range of consulted sources, decontextualization, presence of myths, revictimization, disrespect of the copyright of images of the boys, girls and adolescents, approaches based on patriarchal ideology, lack of in-depth analysis, etc., are just some of the problems pointed out time and again in journalistic products that cause the concern mentioned in the first paragraphs of this article. The handling of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents –without failing to recognize that the media and journalists have gradually been making improvements in quality- is still seen to be removed from the human rights approach for boy, girl and adolescent victims.

It is, therefore, important to confront these future journalists with these approaches, and, by means of a problematizing methodology –in which journalistic approaches are observed, analyzed and deconstructed- propose other alternative ones with a rights approach to the victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Naturally, this exercise undertaken based on current journalistic practices and the only aim of which is to reveal and put into practice appropriate terminology (in the media) will always remain incomplete if it is not applied beyond mere theory and is not accompanied by that mentioned in the first level of influence and with what is set out below.

4. A third level of influence: *breaking with the reference framework and approach*

One of the most serious problems facing the handling of information related to commercial sexual exploitation is the emphasis placed on the victims and the reinforcement of standards for sexuality based on patriarchal and sexist ideals. Therefore, one of the challenges within universities is to break with the belief that this is the only and correct outlook.

And this is where we witness a fundamental challenge that arises from the university lecture halls –that of deconstructing attitudes and ways of viewing sexuality- especially male sexuality. I mention this because most students arrive at university with ideologies that allow them to view certain social practices as “natural” and certain cultural constructs as “logical”, which favours tolerance towards paid sexual intercourse with children and adolescents and other types of commercial sexual exploitation. The classroom thus constitutes a place where we are able to challenge students in order to attempt to recreate their thought processes and strengthen them so that, when they turn professional, they can tackle the problem from other angles.

Once we have overcome this challenge we will be able to work towards the visibilization and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents using an approach that respects the human rights of boys, girls and adolescents, that focuses on those responsible for the problem (procurers, client-

exploiters and intermediaries) and that contributes to building a more healthy sexuality, among other fundamental approaches. This naturally also implies upsetting the tendency to view university Journalism lecture halls as the places where students are taught that the most appropriate course of action is to imitate journalists and news products (without questioning the quality of these). I am referring to the concept that limits journalism in practice by encouraging students to develop imitation and reiteration skills, and that focuses on “doing”, which is often devoid of thought processes (a situation that is, to a certain extent, determined by academia/the labour market).

Within a different approach to journalism in universities, it is worthwhile to develop exercises in questioning what has already been done and making different proposals for presenting reality. This is in keeping with the -always current- discourse of the educator Paulo Freire, who states that our mission should, among other things, be to question and problematize prior knowledge in order that a new understanding of the same topic may be reached and, in this particular case, to train professionals capable of rethinking the way the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is dealt with and covered in the news.

Some of the myths that should be eliminated from the media regarding social issues:

| Myths | Realities |
|--|---|
| The commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is widely known and few cases exist | The magnitude of this problem is unknown since it is a crime and is therefore committed in secret, goes unreported and, in many cases, is not even considered a crime. It is only until recently that the issue has been dealt with publicly as a social, economic and cultural problem as tolerance towards the problem has been and continues to be widespread. |
| The majority of the client-exploiters are tourists | According to studies undertaken, the majority of the exploiters are local men, nationals or resident foreigners from different social backgrounds, and with different levels of education or purchasing power. |
| The boys, girls and adolescents enjoy this work because they get money for it | The boys, girls and adolescents cannot consent to being exploited. They are victims and require protection. The demand for sex services by an adult does not constitute a job; it is an abusive relationship on the part of the exploiter. Commercial sexual exploitation is a crime. |
| The children and adolescents involved in commercial sexual exploitation live a glamorous lifestyle full of parties and entertainment | The children and adolescents of commercial sexual exploitation have been lured into the sex trade or networks run by procurers, and not because they like it. Those who benefit the most are the procurers and the intermediaries, who are the ones who facilitate the trade and make a profit from it. The children and adolescents often run up debts with the exploiters for their maintenance and they suffer much physical, psychological and social damage because of this. |
| The victims of commercial sexual exploitation are small boys or girls | The sexual exploitation can occur with anyone over the age of 18. the victims are mostly adolescent women; however, studies have shown the existence of adolescent males who are also victims of this crime. |
| Adult men can offer money or objects to an adolescent in exchange for sexual intercourse since they are thus contributing to alleviating their situation of poverty. | Any adult who takes advantage of the inequity of the relationship by offering money or other objects to a boy, girl or adolescent in exchange for sexual activities is committing a crime. Under no circumstances can an adult justify paying someone under 18 years of age for sexual activities because this exploitation produces indelible consequences for the victims. |

Sources: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP 2005. El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad (The role of the media. Key actors in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama, ILO/IPEC. 2005. Con enfoque periodístico: Recomendaciones para comprender mejor la Explotación Sexual Comercial de Personas Menores de Edad (The journalistic approach: Recommendations for a better understanding of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and adolescents). Guatemala

Influence of the media on penal reform in Honduras

Félix Molina¹²

The ILO/IPEC regional communications strategy “Project for the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents” served, in this particular case, and within the framework of a broad national process, to achieve a key influence objective: the approval of penal reform against commercial sexual exploitation in Honduras.

At the same time, it served as a training and education opportunity for journalists from large urban media with national coverage and departmental communicators from sensitive regions of the country.

The range of coverage proved decisive in keeping the issue on the national agenda and producing an increasingly strong attitude towards reporting this crime to the authorities, as well as sufficient political will to legislate against it.

From the second half of 2004 to January 2005, five television stations with national coverage (channels 5, 9, 13, 30 and 48) issued three spots for free on the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation aimed at the adult population at large.

During that same period, five radio stations (STC Radio, Radio Reloj, Radio América, HRN and Radio Católica) included five slots aimed at decision-makers for reforming the Penal Code and including crimes of commercial sexual exploitation that did not exist in penal legislation.

Even a cinema company -Multicines América de Tegucigalpa- included the spots in 8mm over the course of one month as part of the extras shown before the films listed.

The Canal Católico Internacional EWTN, which produces the talkshow “Hablando Claro con el Padre Alberto” in Tegucigalpa that has a nationwide audience, broadcast three programmes on commercial sexual exploitation in Honduras that were repeated all over America and Europe for several weeks running. In addition, from its studios at Canal 57 in Tegucigalpa,

the Canal Evangélico Internacional Enlace, issued a satellite broadcast of a “Critical Conscience” programme on commercial sexual exploitation, in which key representatives from the regional project participated.

In order to convince these communication companies to broadcast these audiovisual products, it was necessary to approach their programmers, producers and executives individually, and highlight the importance of contributing to building up social intolerance towards this problem.

In the second half of 2005, approximately 100 journalists from the capital were informed, through debates, of the process of penal reform and sensitized to the transnational nature of commercial sexual exploitation.

The meetings were carried out at the sources identified as crucial for promoting the penal reform against sexual exploiters: the State Prosecutor, the Security Secretariat and the National Congress, which are precisely the places where journalists undertake their reporting and research tasks.

This exercise in a collective approach on the part of media employees produced not only news articles, interviews, and additional reports and visibility in the media, but also concluded with the signing of a Letter of Commitment by the participants.

The letter, the contents of which were based on a model used by the National Journalists' Council of Panama, under the auspices of the ILO/IPEC, includes technical indications for the use of expressions, concepts and images for coverage of this problem, but it also contains ethical advice for approaching sources and the victims.

As a result of this process of informing, training and sensitizing in the workplaces of journalists, the idea arose to extend it to the regional level by means of an association that has branches in the main regions of interest for the project against commercial sexual exploitation: the Honduran Press Association (APH in Spanish).

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Between September and October 2005, approximately 150 communicators from three inland regions of the country participated in the sensitization sessions held by the ILO/IPEC and the APH, which were attended by this association's head office and regional directors.

The results of these sessions were soon revealed in changes in the language used by the media. This began to become evident as revictimizing expressions ("child prostitution", "exploitation of minors", "girls of the good life", "white slave trade", etc.) gradually disappeared from headlines and the content of articles, giving way to the concept of the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents.

Competition arose between newspapers in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula to attract readers' attention with series from Guatemala and Mexico, where it is impossible to hide the problem. Although the handling of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation did not always employ the desired approach in these reports, the topic remained visible on the public agenda, building a favourable bridge towards efforts to influence legislation.

In over 600 articles published during the implementation of the project in Honduras, the outcome is favourable to an approach that attracts social interest, increases the reporting of these cases to the authorities –confirmed by the Special Prosecutor for Children's Issues in its latest report- and sets the scene for introducing changes to legislation.

It was possible to generate the political will for reforming the Penal Code against sexual exploiters at the end of August 2005, before the members of congress launched into their search for votes in the election campaign in the run-up to the general elections in November of that year.

With hindsight, based on the newspaper and periodicals archives on commercial sexual exploitation in Honduras, three concluding statements may be made that are valid for explaining the positive development of the intervention against the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, boys and adolescents:

- a) The sensitivity, commitment and coordination of over 50 entities involved in prevention, sanctioning and care for victims were decisive in generating the favourable political will for penal reform.
- b) The press and audiovisual media adopted the issue in their agendas as an opportunity to attract the attention of both consumers in human interest stories, and of politicians in urgent need of increasing the legitimacy of the policy.

- c) The quality of the penal reform approved by the members of congress on 30th August for increasing sanctions against commercial sexual exploitation is very much in keeping with international legislation on this issue. There is no doubt as to its scope.

The second statement is crucial because, to a large extent, the reporters, news directors and editors took advantage of a media niche that was already profitable under the old approach of "white slave trade" or "child prostitution", but that now has an approach that respects the human rights of children and adolescents.

There is no doubt about the fact that the issue of sex crimes has a business appeal that is reflected in the newspapers on a day-to-day basis. The introduction of reforms to increase sanctions for those involved with children and adolescents complements this existing agenda.

The work carried out by the ILO/IPEC naturally aimed to provide a new conceptual approach to the issue and insist on new terminology, which adequately expresses the hidden dimension of this form of modern slavery.

The ILO/IPEC considers commercial sexual exploitation to be a serious violation of the human rights of children and adolescents and a form of economic exploitation similar to slavery and forced labour, and that it constitutes a crime committed by those who use and entice girls, boys and adolescents into the sex trade.

The file with clippings of stories told by victims, news articles on cases investigated over the past few months and reports on institutional efforts to punish these crimes more severely, made an impact on legislators.

The file containing work carried out by the press was chosen in order to produce a knock-on effect in the consciences of the leaders of groups within parties that had been delaying the approval of the reform since May 2004.

I didn't know there was so much information on this issue! exclaimed the President of the National Congress, the then presidential candidate for the National Party, Porfirio Lobo, who was accustomed to receiving the monitoring of political information every morning. *"This is tremendous"*, he said over and over again whilst glancing through the file opened by his colleagues from other parties, in the hall of group leaders at the Legislature.

The surprise shown by these members of congress revealed that there was no reason to delay the legislative debate on an issue filling newspaper headlines and prominent pages of the dailies *País*, *Nacionales*, *Al Frente* and *Primer Plano*. The issue was no longer discussed in the tabloids and was now being placed alongside issues

on the national agenda, in spaces politicians compete for on a daily basis.

It was not easy to reach this point. It required additional forums, press conferences, live appearances on radio and television programmes, issuing posters and videos on the problem, in coordination with a wide range of institutions from the public and non-government sectors.

The documentary “*La sombra en la región*” (The shadow in the region) was the regional production that best served the purpose of providing journalists, communicators and decision-makers a transnational view of the problem of sexual exploitation linked to the organized crime networks operating in the country.

Placing the issue within the sphere of shared responsibility was not an easy task, given that stereotypes present for decades referred the issue to women’s organizations working with children as an issue of child prostitution or as cases of sexual abuse or rape.

Individual experience of masculinity or femininity makes a direct approach to the problem difficult, and, as the WEM Institute of Costa Rica pointed out in its study “*Explotación Sexual y Masculinidad*” (“Sexual Exploitation and Masculinity”), this is not an issue that can be modified overnight.

Placing and keeping the issue on the pages of national newspapers and occupying prime time viewing and listening on radio and television is a task that should not be abandoned.

The personal contacts made with the more sensitive journalists and communicators and the institutional agreements made with the associations should always be consolidated with new information, and with all the products possible, leaving no doubt as to the fact that the issue is not a project that ends at its conclusion.

This year saw the beginning of a new phase in which the media are the protagonists because the challenge is to increase the reporting of cases to the authorities and the exemplifying sentences against those responsible; in this new phase communicators and journalists will also be allies to the victims through the dissemination of the penal reform and by making the exploiters known.

In short, the media strategy regarding prevention, coupled with training and sensitization actions, focused on a strategic objective: the approval of the penal reform in keeping with international standards.

It, concomitantly, developed capacities for media employees to cover this issue using an approach centring on the rights of the victims, and far removed from the prejudice and phrases that conceal the problem.

Always present at the heart of the discourse was the certainty that the openness of the news regarding this issue represents profitable gains for the media, both in terms of more news consumers and as a clear projection of their social responsibility.

Transmitting a different approach: communicators can contribute to justice in the penalization of exploiters, for which it is important to...

- promote the reporting of client-exploiters and persons who form part of the chain of exploitation. In order to do so it is necessary to inform the public of existing legislation and the legal implications of participating in these criminal activities.
- inform the legal investigation organisms before carrying out or issuing a journalistic product on the issue in order to avoid hindering an investigation underway or alerting the exploiters to inquiries they are being subjected to.
- support the national authorities responsible for criminal investigations by providing useful information or reporting these types of crimes to the relevant authorities and following up on the reporting process.
- publicly reporting public and private officials abusing their authority and promoting the exploitation.
- assessing the alternatives for protection for the victims, analyzing if they exist, reflecting on their approach or effectiveness, disseminating the initiatives taking place in other countries.
- the use of sensationalist language and terminology, as well as images and headlines of this nature, exerts a strong influence on society, which is why expressions that reinforce myths and stereotypes that contribute to the cycle of abuse should be avoided.
- not blame or make the victims responsible for the situation. Always remember that commercial sexual exploitation is a crime and that the children and adolescents are the victims.
- employ an appropriate approach to the information, revealing the sexual exploitation business and networks, as well as those responsible for the exploitation. Avoid including images of the victims, since this violates the rights of the children and adolescents. The publication of photographs of the victims adversely affects their image rights, is the cause of severe revictimization and puts the person’s personal safety and even life at risk.
- excess descriptions of cases of commercial sexual exploitation tend to generate an unnecessary morbid fascination and sensationalism regarding the problem. It is necessary to visibilize all the aspects of the problem: the responsibilities of the sexual exploiters (clients, intermediaries and procurers) on violating the rights of the victims, the actions that must be taken by the authorities or public officials, the task of supervising and controlling all citizens within the community, as well as the vulnerable situation in which the victims and their families find themselves.

Source: ILO/IPEC, CONAPREDES and CNP, 2005. El papel de los medios de comunicación. Actores clave en la lucha contra la explotación sexual comercial de personas menores de edad (The role of the media. Key stakeholders in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents). Panama.



Journalism against commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents

International Programme for the
Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

Project "Contribution to the prevention and elimination
of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents
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