STUDY ON THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE GAMBIA

December 2003

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Cover Photo: ©UNICEF/GAM000322/GIACOMO PIROZZI This photo portrays a reenactment of a sexual exploitation scene on the beach in the Senegambia Tourist area between a European male adult and a young Gambian girl.
STUDY ON THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE GAMBIA

December 2003
FOREWORD

The Gambia signed and ratified without reservation the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in August 1990 and September 2000 respectively. It also signed and ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182. By these ratifications, The Gambia has committed itself to fulfilling and protecting all the rights of children including the right to protection against sexual abuse and exploitation.

Many families live in abject poverty. Children, especially girls, continue to inherit family poverty. Poverty deprives individuals of their dignity and the opportunity to participate as citizens with a sense of self-respect and a feeling of well-being. The Gambia Government has developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that serves as an operational framework for directing resources to the poorest. Since the Government of The Gambia has made poverty eradication a priority on its national agenda, children’s welfare should be made central to this. The rights of children must be respected and no child should be denied basic health, nutrition, shelter, and education. All children must be protected from abuse and exploitation, including sexual abuse and exploitation.

Although comprehensive research evidence is scanty, anecdotal evidence indicates that sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a large and growing phenomenon in The Gambia. In the Tourism sector, the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) and Terre des Hommes study (2003) indicated that there is sexual exploitation of children in tourism. The Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy Study (2000) concluded that sexual abuse and sexual harassment of children is taking place in schools by teachers and other male students. Over the years, there have been occasional reports, in the local media, of cases of sexual exploitation of children by tourists or the sexual abuse of children by adults in positions of trust and authority. A handful of these cases made it to court and fewer still ended up in successful prosecution.

The influx of refugees due to the instability in the neighbouring countries, the rising levels of poverty and the rural-urban drift, growing tourism and increasing consumerism, all combined to create a conducive atmosphere for sexual abuse and exploitation of children to thrive in The Gambia.

In October 2001, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva at its 28th Session, considered the Initial Report of The Gambia on the implementation of the CRC. In its Concluding Observations on that Report, the Committee expressed concern “about the large and increasing number of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution and pornography, especially those engaged in child labour and street-children. Concern was also expressed at the insufficient programmes for the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children victims of such abuse and exploitation.”

In light of the foregoing, the Committee recommended that The Gambia undertake studies with a view to assessing the scope of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including prostitution and pornography and implementing appropriate preventative and rehabilitative policies and programmes for child victims.

It was in this vein that this particular research was conducted, with the support of UNICEF. The research was meant as an explorative study to determine the nature and scope of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in all spheres of life, look at current interventions in terms of laws, policies and programmes and to provide concrete recommendations for action at all levels.
Fieldwork for the study was conducted between February 2002 and July 2002 at seven sites in The Gambia; Banjul, Barra, Senegambia tourist area, Brikama, Farafenni and Basse. It used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research techniques and study subjects including parents, teachers, schoolchildren, child prostitutes, adult prostitutes, ‘bumsters’, hotel and bar owners, community and religious leaders.

The Report gives some indication of the nature and scope of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in The Gambia, the push and pull factors, the perceptions of the stakeholders on issues related to sexual abuse and exploitation of children and the state of laws, policies and programmes. It has also offered recommendations for action by the different stakeholders at the end of the report. We hope that this report will be useful for policy and legal reform by the Government of The Gambia, for programme design and implementation and the advocacy work of NGOs and other organisations working in this field.

On behalf of the Government of The Gambia, I again take this opportunity to thank UNICEF for their support in promoting and protecting the rights of children as enshrined in the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Similarly, I would like to thank my colleague, the Secretary of State for the Interior and Religious Affairs for the unflinching political support given throughout the study. Protection of children is everyone’s duty and there is no excuse for failing to do it. Global efforts must be consolidated towards this end.

Dr. Yankuba Kassama
Secretary of State for Health and Social Welfare
December 2003.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study into the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in The Gambia was conducted as an exploratory research to determine the nature and scope of the phenomenon and provide concrete recommendations for programming, policy and legal reform and advocacy. From the conceptualisation to the final report, many persons have worked on the study; too many to name individually. However the following individuals and organisations deserve special mention for their untiring effort, support and perseverance, without which the study might never have been completed:

The Government of The Gambia would like to thank UNICEF for the financial and technical support throughout the study; CODESRIA, their Consultant and the team of fieldworkers for overseeing the study, undertaking the fieldwork and producing the initial draft of the report. Members of the national technical committee, co-chaired by the Directors of Central Statistics Department and Department of Social Welfare, for their oversight and technical comments at various stages of the study. UNICEF’s Consultant from the European University Institute for finalising the report in a very short space of time.

Special thanks go to the Permanent Secretary, Department of State for Health and Social Welfare for his support and valuable comments on the report.

We would also like to thank all the research subjects who gave up their valuable time to attend interviews and focus group discussion sessions with the research assistants.

The experience of the study and the consultative meetings left us with an even greater resolve to pursue, without compromise, those measures and investments which will provide children with the care and protection they so badly need, and which will change their lives.

Special thanks go to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Welfare for agreeing to write the Foreword to the Report and for his support throughout the study.

Ms Fanta Sisay
Director of Social Welfare
December 2003.

(Signature)

Mr. Alieu Ndow
Director of Central Statistics Department
Department of State for Finance and Economic Affairs
December 2003.

(Signature)
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


Anecdotal evidence and findings of recent explorative studies indicate that sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children is a growing phenomenon in the country. In the light of this, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, during its 28th session in Geneva, 2001, recommended The Gambia to mandate a study with the primary objective of determining the nature and scope of these cruel and inhuman practices and proffer recommendations for combating them. A corollary objective was to use the empirical findings of this study to put the issue on the national agenda and jog the collective conscience into action to eliminate sexual abuse and exploitation of children in The Gambia.

This study which was funded by UNICEF, began in earnest in mid-February 2002. It took 21 months from conceptualising to report writing and involved hundreds of child and adult prostitutes, schoolchildren, middle persons, security personnel, community and religious leaders, members of civil society, government, non-governmental and tourism officials as well as research coordinator, fieldworkers, consultants and technical experts and focused on three main field sites: Greater Banjul Area, Farafenni-Soma axis and the strategic nodal town of Basse.

Chapter One covers salient as well as subtle causal factors that spawn environments in which children are exposed to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Among these factors is poverty. A common presumption is that children engaged in prostitution come from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. The Gambia is ranked 160 out of 173 countries in the UNDP Human Development Report, 2002 and the 1998 Poverty Study indicated that 69% of the population live below the poverty line.

Another factor is the changing face of youth culture, with a powerful influence of Western life on young people. In The Gambia, as in many African societies, the individual is conceived of as an integral part of the entire community; identity depends on his or her role, status and relations within society. People live in large households as part of an extended family.

However, many families have been uprooted from rural surroundings where the extended family and kinship network had served not only as a system of safety net but also as a system of collective watch and responsibility for children in every respect. Once out of this system, and with negative peer influence, there is a tendency for children to feel less inhibited and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

In The Gambia, basic primary education is guaranteed by the Constitution and is supposed to be free and compulsory. However, there is no corresponding duty placed on either the parent or the State to ensure enrolment and attendance. Continuing education after the primary level is a problem for many categories of children and those affected most are those from extremely poor families, street-children, the disabled and handicapped children, and girls who are often betrothed at this age or withdrawn from school as a result of parents’ concerns regarding teenage pregnancy. The major result of sexual exploitation are dropping out of school, low-level of participation and vulnerability to the lure of money for sex. The chapter also examines sex tourism as it relates to children. The 2001 UNICEF Situation Analysis of Women and Children report stated: “As a poor country that is also a tourist attraction, The Gambia is a vulnerable target.
for not a few unscrupulous visitors such as suspected or convicted paedophiles who enter the country in search of a low profile location to commit their crimes against children silently and with impunity.”

External factors such as the influx of refugees and economic migrants from neighbouring countries were also examined. As a result of civil wars and political instability, large numbers of refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Senegal (Casamance) and recently Cote d’Ivoire came into the country. About 46% of these refugees were children under 18 years of age.

Chapter Two presents the main findings of the research, taking into consideration children's and adults’ perceptions of rights, sexual abuse and exploitation. The chapter also gives an overview focusing primarily on a more common form of sexual exploitation, "cross-generational sex" perpetrated by ‘sugar daddies’, with special reference to the role of sex tourism and how it is evolving in the emergence of child pornography and child trafficking. The findings indicate that for the most part, children engaged in prostitution do not consider themselves ‘children’ and do not understand that they require special protection because of their age.

Although some schoolchildren viewed ‘early marriage’ as a form of sexual abuse, particularly those from Banjul, many more students especially in Basse and Farafenni as well as a few from Banjul gave clear justifications for the cultural practice on moral and pragmatic grounds. On the subject of incest, most children were unusually quiet. It was difficult to discern whether the consistent silence from one focus group to the next was an indication that the topic of incest was too much of a taboo for children to freely talk about or that the practice was not so prevalent in their communities, so not much could be said about it.

However, most children realised that the most prevalent form of sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia is what has recently been coined ‘cross-generational sex’, an inappropriately neutral term describing adolescents (usually female) engaging in covert sexual relationships with adults, usually professional men, in exchange for money, gifts and service. The false ‘glamorisation’ of prostitution – particularly sex tourism exists strongly. For children engaged in prostitution, usually new entrants into prostitution, the prospects of earning vast sums of money and living a seemingly “free” and “modern” lifestyle seemed to override any concerns about poor working conditions or other hazards and risks associated with prostitution.

Most adult focus groups including those with adult prostitutes expressed concern and ambivalence about children’s rights. Adult groups were split on who or what was to blame for sexual abuse and exploitation of children. However, they complained that children’s ideas about Western values and lifestyles as well as increasing clamour over children’s rights were making it difficult for them to have control over their children. Most adults felt that there was already too much Government interference in such matters and that left to traditional methods of dealing with perpetrators of child sexual abuse and exploitation, such practices would be greatly reduced. School officials disagreed and stressed the need for various Government departments to work together to eradicate the scourge of sexual abuse and exploitation, especially within the school system. They believed that the only way to have an impact on abuse of children is to have a zero-tolerance policy, which gives greater weight to the testimonies and complaints of students.

Police and NIA officials interviewed were uncertain about the role of the police in responding to child abuse and exploitation cases. Most adult male and female community leaders were wary about sex education in schools and children’s right to know about and to take responsibility of their sexual and reproductive health. Many believed that this was a Western notion that simply encouraged children to engage in immoral behaviour.
Society’s perceptions of issues and activities that constitute sexual harassment remain controversial. It is difficult and “highly delicate” to arrive at definitive interpretations of sexual harassment in The Gambia. As with focus groups with children, many adults believed that sexual abuse meant forcing another person to have sexual intercourse without consent. An emerging, yet significant, form of sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia is underage prostitution of girls and boys, especially in the tourism sector.

There is nearly universal agreement among varied informants that children engaged in prostitution around the Senegambia Tourist Area near Banjul are predominantly underage, many as young as 12 and that 60% to 70% of tourists come here for the sun, relaxation and cheap sex. But the study found out that there is no overt coercion of children into prostitution. Most prostitutes across all age groups gave clear, articulate and apparently rational explanations for what they do and third persons normally acted as agents rather than as captors or middle men. This stands in stark contrast with the character of sexual exploitation of children from other parts of the world, where extensive prostitution rings or networks exist that are frequently run by underworld gangs, drug dealers and other syndicated criminals.

A factor that may keep children in prostitution is the ease of ‘hiding’ their sources of income and nature of activities. Often, parents are only too eager to receive supplementary income and do not probe their daughters for explanations. On the attendant risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, in focus group discussions, street-children, ‘idlers’ and child bumsters seemed much less aware of types and hazards of STIs, including HIV/AIDS although many reported being sexually active, unlike schoolchildren of both sexes. None of the children engaged in prostitution reported testing for HIV. Most prostitutes of all ages reported consistent condom use, however this information conflicts with reports from other informants particularly users of prostitutes and intermediaries such as bumsters.

Although in recent months there have been a handful of media reports concerning tourists caught with pornographic photos or videos of Gambian children, child pornography or child trafficking do not appear to be major problems in The Gambia although further covert research is necessary to confirm this.

**Chapter Three** focuses on the role and responses of the Government, of institutions and of civil society. The conclusion is a list of recommendations. The Gambia is one of several African countries that are striving to make the battle against sexual exploitation and abuse of children a paramount policy priority.

The Gambia is party to many international instruments and has made public pronouncements acknowledging the problem of child sexual exploitation especially in tourism. Government has pledged to fight the emerging menace with all the means at its disposal. In translating its political commitment and fulfilling its international obligations, the Government has taken a number of steps towards preventing and protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

However, there is no nationally agreed definition of abuse, sexual exploitation and child trafficking and the terms could mean different things to different people. In response to the growing phenomenon of child sex tourism, the Government has enacted new legislation imposing stiff penalties on anyone convicted of the offence.

A new *Children Bill* was drafted in 2003. The Bill gathers all the laws relating to children scattered throughout the laws of The Gambia and seeks to harmonise these with the CRC, the
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant international Conventions. A draft National Policy on Children has also been prepared. The next step for the Government will be the implementation of these new laws.

The Department of Social Welfare supported by UNICEF as well as the newly formed NGO, the Child Protection Alliance has taken the lead in raising awareness on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse of children through research and documentation of its various manifestations, dimensions, causes and probable solutions. However, the study’s findings indicate that there is no experience of NGO programming in The Gambia for victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. At the moment, there are no known programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration for the victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse outside the Government set-up.

There is no simplistic predictor of which children will end up as victims of sexual exploitation. The detailed case studies done for this Report reveal complexities of individual lives and motivations and interconnectedness of a host of personal and environmental factors that research subjects relate in explaining their specific predicaments. Many experience actual or perceived abandonment by parents, care-givers and husbands. Though nearly every child is vulnerable to sexual abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual exploitation at home, in schools and within the community, the majority of children are not engaged in prostitution.

In the Conclusion, this Report makes holistic, general and specific recommendations, stressing awareness creation on the issue, drafting appropriate laws and implementing them effectively, rehabilitation of victims, discouraging sex tourism, provision of life skills and remedial education and coordination of efforts among all parties to stamp out child sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation in The Gambia.
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<td>ACRWC [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child]</td>
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<td>AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]</td>
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<td>BAFROW [Foundation for Research on Women's Health, Productivity and the Environment]</td>
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<td>CCF [Christian Children's Fund]</td>
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<td>CODESRIA [Council on Development and Social Science Research in Africa]</td>
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<td>CPA [Child Protection Alliance]</td>
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<td>CRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child]</td>
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<td>CRD [Central River Division]</td>
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<td>CRS [Catholic Relief Services]</td>
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<td>CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children]</td>
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<td>DAC [Day of the African Child]</td>
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<td>ECD [Early Childhood Development]</td>
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<td>ECPAT [End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism]</td>
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<td>EDF [European Development Fund]</td>
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<td>EU [European Union]</td>
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<td>FASE [Fight Against Social and Economic Exclusion]</td>
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<td>FAWEGAM [Forum for African Women Educationists, Gambia]</td>
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<td>GAMCOTRAP [The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices]</td>
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<td>GDP [Gross Domestic Product]</td>
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<td>GFPA [Gambia Family Planning Association]</td>
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<td>GNP [Gross National Product]</td>
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<td>GTA [Gambia Tourism Authority]</td>
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<td>HARRP [HIV/AIDS Rapid Response Project]</td>
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<td>HIV [Human Immunodeficiency Virus]</td>
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<td>IOM [International Organization for Migration]</td>
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<td>ILO [International Labour Organization]</td>
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<td>IMF [International Monetary Fund]</td>
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<td>IPEC [International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour]</td>
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<td>KMC [Kanifing Municipal Council]</td>
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<td>LRD [Lower River Division]</td>
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<td>NAC [National AIDS Council]</td>
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<td>NAS [National AIDS Secretariat]</td>
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<td>NAYCO [National Association of Youth and Children's Organisations]</td>
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<td>NBD [North Bank Division]</td>
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<td>NGO [Non-Governmental Organization]</td>
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<td>NYC [National Youth Council]</td>
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<td>SITAN [Situation Analysis of Women and Children]</td>
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<td>SPACO [Strategy for Poverty Alleviation Coordinating Office]</td>
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<td>STIs [Sexually Transmitted Infections]</td>
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<td>TANGO [The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations]</td>
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<td>TDA [Tourism Development Area]</td>
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<td>UNDAF [United Nations Development Assistance Framework]</td>
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<td>UNDP [United Nations Development Programme]</td>
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<td>UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>URD</td>
<td>Upper River Division</td>
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<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Service Overseas</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>WD</td>
<td>Western Division</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The Gambia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 3rd August 1990. Article 19 specifically relates to sexual abuse of children while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any person who has the care of the child. Article 34 of the CRC specifically relates to sexual abuse and exploitation. Article 10 of the same Convention concerns the definition of the child, Article 35 deals with the abduction, sale and trafficking of children. The Gambia ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in September 2000.

The Gambia is party to many other international instruments, and is also a signatory to the Agenda for Action adopted at the First World Congress Against Commercial Exploitation of Children in Stockholm, August 1996. In July 1999, The Gambia submitted its Initial Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, under Article 44 of the CRC. The Committee expressed its concern about the large and increasing number of child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including for prostitution and pornography, especially among child labourers and street-children. Concern was also expressed at the insufficient programmes for the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims of such abuse and exploitation. In light of Article 34 and other related articles of the Convention, the Committee recommended that the State party undertake studies with a view to assessing the scope of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including prostitution and pornography, and implementing appropriate preventive and rehabilitative policies and programmes for child victims. The Committee also encourages the State party to pursue its efforts to adopt a National Plan of Action Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, taking into account the recommendations formulated in the Agenda for Action adopted at the 1996 World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

1. Article 19(1). States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Article 19(2). Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

3. Article 34: States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:
   (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
   (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
   (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

4. For the purpose of this Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier.

5. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), entered into force November 29 in 1999, is the first binding regional legal instrument focusing exclusively on the rights of the child. It is rooted in other human rights treaties, but emerges out of the traditional social and cultural values of Africa, including those relating to family, community and society. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child obligates African States Parties to undertake the necessary steps to adopt legislative or other measures to, inter alia, prevent child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

6. The mentioned treaties are all legally binding documents as soon as a State has agreed to be bound by it, by accession or signature followed by ratification.

Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Gambia. 06/11/2001. CRC/C/15/Add.165
Purpose of the research

This exploratory study on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in The Gambia is intended to put the issue on the national agenda and as a first step towards fulfilling the protection of the rights of children in The Gambia. In particular, this study will enable The Gambia to develop appropriate and effective policies and programmes to combat sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.

Research goals

- Examine the nature, causes and extent of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in The Gambia,
- Analyse the legislative framework and assess the extent of current interventions both by the State and NGOs on the question of sexual exploitation of children and their protection.

Research objectives

- Socio-cultural, economic and other factors and circumstances that are associated with sexual exploitation of children.
- Socio-cultural environment of sexual exploitation – norms and values about sexual practices.
- The types of sexual exploitation that exist in The Gambia.
- Demographic characteristics of victims of sexual exploitation.
- Institutional and legal environment of sexual exploitation.
- Mechanisms that perpetuate sexual exploitation of children.
- Current interventions of Government and NGOs.
- Fields for future intervention.

Field sites

The Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children Study focused on three main field sites: Greater Banjul, Farafenni and Basse and several sub-sites.

(I) Greater Banjul (including Brikama)

The Gambia’s busy capital city and surrounding areas were ideal for research on sexual exploitation of children. The main emphasis was on children engaged in prostitution around the seaports of Banjul and Barra as well as around the tourist resorts of Senegambia, Kololi and neighbourhoods such as Fajara/Pipeline, Bakau and Kerr Serign, which are host to numerous European holiday-makers, expatriates and aid workers. Adolescent females and males frequent nightclubs, bars, casinos, restaurants and the beaches in these areas. The bustling markets around Serrekunda are fed by countless underground bars and pubs, motels, guesthouses and grilled meat (Afra) joints and cater more to local or non-Gambian customers, some of whom are involved in the sexual exploitation of children.

Brikama was selected as a sub-site because of its religious and conservative reputation and particularly because of a sudden increase in open prostitution, brothels and motels that cater to local ‘big men’ and young girls. Investigations mainly targeted school children as well as members of the community.
(II) Farafenni and Soma

The busy transport depots in Soma and Farafenni are ostensible sites for large-scale open prostitution. Soma, about 160km from Brikama, is basically a sprawling truck stop with strings of run-down gas stations, cheap restaurants, bars and shops. The prevalence of ‘street-children’ in particular young girls who are vendors, presented an opportunity to study the extent to which they are also engaged in prostitution. As this area is located further upcountry, it provided an interesting opportunity to draw comparisons with the busier and more cosmopolitan areas of Greater Banjul.

(III) Basse

Basse is one of the largest towns in The Gambia and is very near the Senegalese border. It is a popular posting Peace Corps and VSO volunteers and has several bars, hotels and guesthouses. Basse complements the other field sites in several ways. There is a significant movement and concentration of peoples from neighbouring countries such as Senegal, Guinea (Conakry) and Mali. The refugee camp just on the fringes of the town is home to mostly Sierra Leoneans who have fled atrocities of war in their own country. This provided the research team with a unique opportunity to enquire into the situation of refugee children with respect to sexual abuse and exploitation within and outside the refugee camps as well as responses and services available to assist victims.

Definitions

The definitions used in this study are drawn primarily from official definitions in human rights instruments, in particular, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provisions and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Children

For the purposes of the CRC, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, maturity is attained earlier (Article 1)\(^7\). For the purpose of the African Charter, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years (Article 2)\(^8\).

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a form of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

\(^7\) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* - Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990

Sexual exploitation

Child prostitution means the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration (Article 2 (b))\(^9\). Child pornography means any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes (Article 2 (c))\(^10\).

Trafficking

The following definitions are direct quotations from the Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially children and women, supplementing UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime.

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs…”

(c) “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) of this article.”

(d) “Child” shall mean any person less than 18 years of age” (Article 3, Use of Terms)\(^11\).

Sale of Children

Sale of children means any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration (Article 2(a))\(^12\);

Short presentation of the structure of the report

The Final Report constitutes an assessment and analysis of different forms of sexual exploitation of children, particularly those related to sex tourism. Chapter One, while presenting the Country Profile, covers salient as well as subtle causal factors that foster environments in which children are vulnerable or exposed to Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation. The chapter examines the role of economic inducements, experiences of poverty, traditional or cultural beliefs and practices and inadequate access to education. External factors such as political and economic instability in neighbouring countries are also considered.

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10 ibid
11 Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, United Nations, 2000
Chapter Two presents the main findings of the research. Research activities were mainly of a qualitative nature involving: monographs of the selected research sites, non-structured in-depth interviews with main actors (children, prostitutes, health personnel, police, community based organisations that care for victims of abuse, as well as other key informants), collection of life histories, participant’s observations and focus group discussions.

Part I takes into consideration children's perceptions (in particular schoolchildren, street-children, refugees and underage domestic servants) of children's rights, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, while Part II considers adults’ perceptions.

Part III is an overview of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation focusing primarily on a more common form of sexual exploitation with the "cross-generational" sexual relations. It also examines child prostitution, with special reference to the role of sex tourism and how it is influencing the emergence of child pornography and child trafficking.

Chapter Three focuses on the role and responses of the Government, of institutions and of civil society. The conclusion is a list of recommendations.
PART I: COUNTRY PROFILE AND INTERNAL FACTORS
THAT MAKE CHILDREN SUSCEPTIBLE
TO SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The Gambia is one of the smallest countries in West Africa with a total land area of 10,689 kilometres. The country forms an enclave within Senegal and opens out into the Atlantic Ocean on the west. There are five major ethnic groups: the Mandinka (40%), the Fula (19%), the Wolof (15%), the Jola (11%) and the Serahule (9%). The rest of the population consists of smaller ethnic groups including Serer, Aku, and Manjago.

According to the provisional figures of the 2003 Population census, the population is estimated at 1.4 million with an annual rate of 2.8%. As with many other countries in the sub-region, the population is characterized by a young age structure. According to the 1993 Census, nearly half of the population is less than 18 years of age, whilst only 3% are aged 65 years and over. About one-fifth of the population is between 0-5 years, 21% between 3-8 years and 24% between 6-14 years.

Households are generally headed by senior men, with several generations of family members residing in the same compound. Average national household size is around 8.9 persons (Situation Analysis of Women and Children in The Gambia, UNICEF, 2001). As with many other countries in the sub-region, adolescent females have nearly three times the infection rate of HIV/AIDS adolescent males. In 1999 the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among girls (15 – 24 years) was 1.52 as compared with 0.48 for boys within the same age range (Regional Report: UNICEF 2001).

The economy is predominantly agrarian with a low per capita income of approximately US$330 per annum. Tourism has been an important sector of the economy, contributing about 4.2% to the country’s GDP in 2002 and providing employment to over 10,000 people.
I. Economic background

The Gambia is among the poorest countries in the world. The country has a narrow economic base and is mainly dependent on the export of primary agricultural products, re-export of imported goods, and tourism.

Source: The State of the World's Children 2003

According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2002, The Gambia is ranked 160 out of 173 countries (HD Report 2002). Poverty is endemic and increasing. The 1998 poverty study indicated that 69% of the population lives below the poverty line. A waiter may earn around $25 per month. Teachers and police officers officially earn $60, and senior civil servant’s monthly salary might be $450 (1999 figures). The country has a narrow economic base, which is mainly dependent on the export of primary agricultural products, re-export of imported goods, and tourism. Comparing the prevalence of poverty across divisions, Banjul and Kanifing continue to enjoy the lowest incidence of poverty.

A common presumption about prostitution is that children engaged in prostitution come from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. This is particularly true in Africa where widespread poverty and inadequate provisions and access to social resources have asymmetrical impact on women and children. In The Gambia, several studies have been conducted which highlight the devastating effects of poverty on the lives of children and women. Viewed from a gender perspective, poverty tends to be much more prevalent among women. This may be attributed to a host of factors that disadvantage women. Women in The Gambia have unequal opportunities in education and employment and also have less access to financial and land resources. Most women by virtue of their low levels of educational attainment and skills training are engaged in low-income employment such as crop production and petty trading.

While no systematic attempt was made in this study to measure the levels of poverty of children involved in prostitution, most of them simply said during the interviews that their parents, if they were alive, were ‘poor’ or that they came from large, ‘poor’ families. From fieldworkers’ daily notes describing living conditions of those children engaged in prostitution that invited them back to meet their families, there was no indication that these families are in any way more ‘poorer’ than average households in The Gambia.

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13 This was when the Gambian Dalasi was 11.50 to the US Dollar. Now the Dalasi is about 30 to the US Dollar and senior civil servants are receiving between US$140 to $250.
16 ibid
17 ibid
1.1 Vulnerability to wealthier adults

What then is the significance of poverty to child prostitution in particular? The answer to this question is two-fold. Poverty can be one of the factors that expose children to situations of risk and make them vulnerable to different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. Additionally, it is not just children but their families who are vulnerable to other wealthier adults who are in a position to use varying sums of money or gifts to have sexual access to children. Children from poor families are less likely to have their basic needs met – adequate food, clothing and shelter and access to primary education as well as adequate health care. Such children commonly contribute to household income by working as vendors and apprentices, etc. on the streets, further depriving them of education, rest and leisure or childhood in general. This is also the plight of child migrants who become ‘domestic servants’ and of street-children, refugees, orphans and wards who are sent out to sell produce or are sent to work in homes other than their own.

Adults – tourists or nationals – who are sexually exploiting children take advantage of the poor economic circumstances that exist in The Gambia. Since these men very often approach poor children or/and their parents and offer to assist them with any problems they may have, some parents or care-givers turn a blind eye to the sexual exploitation of their own children or children under their guardianship. Sometimes it is parents or care-givers who actively or passively encourage their daughters or wards to ‘follow big men’. Often, ‘big men’ can afford to buy their way out of any complications when they are discovered – from handing over gift payments to parents to arranging illegal abortions for their child victims.

1.2 Experience of poverty in the face of growing consumerism and global media

The experience of poverty in the face of growing consumerism and the influence of global media with powerful marketing and glorification of all sorts of goods, commodities and services is what deludes some children from poor families to see prostitution as the quickest and best option of breaking out of a cycle of poverty or of acquiring the latest symbols of material wealth and success.

There are other important social and cultural factors that may exacerbate the impact of poverty, desire for material goods and to keep up appearances. Although poverty is widespread in The Gambia certain cultural traditions and ceremonials require expenses far beyond the capacity of most households. A significant amount of money is spent on clothes, materials and jewellery for women to wear on special occasions, naming ceremonies, children’s initiation ceremonies, religious ceremonies, weddings and even funerals. In a single day, a poor family can enter into significant debt after financing a major occasion. Yet these same families struggle to pay school fees, medical expenses and other basic needs and provisions for their children. Many young girls imitate their mothers and other adult women whom they see going to such great lengths to display wealth they do not have on such public occasions.
II. Social and cultural background

Gambian society is arguably patriarchal with households generally male-headed. The man is commonly older than the wife, and sometimes the wife can be half the age of the husband. While most Gambians live in rural areas, in the last couple of decades there has been an increase in rural-urban migration. Another feature is the changing of youth culture, with a powerful influence of American life on the young people.

Source: The State of the World's Children 2003

The Gambia is a very close-knit society, predominantly Muslim, with about 5% of the population Christian. It is a society that is arguably patriarchal with households generally male-headed. However, there has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of female-headed households from 13.3% in 1983 to 15.9% in 1993\(^\text{18}\). In The Gambia, as in many African societies, the individual is conceived of as an integral part of the entire community whose identity depends on his or her role, status and relations within society. Traditional or historical determinants of status are: age, gender, kinship and, in some cases, caste.

The people live in large households as part of an extended family. With an average household size of nearly 9 persons, it is not uncommon to find several generations of relatives living in the same house. The smallest households can be found in Banjul and Kanifing municipal areas with estimated average household sizes of six and seven persons respectively. Average household sizes for the other Local Government Areas range from eight persons in Mansakonko to 14 persons in Basse\(^\text{19}\).

Another socio-cultural feature among most ethnic groups in The Gambia is the phenomenon of early marriage. Girls are generally married young and sometimes as young as 13 years. Culturally there is expected to be a respectable age gap between a man and his wife. The man is commonly older than the wife, and sometimes the wife can be half the age of the husband. In 1993, 15.3% of girls between 12 and 18 years were married in urban areas, and 26.8% in the same age group were married in rural areas. As a result of religious and traditional conceptions and beliefs regarding sexual relations and reproduction, most Gambian ethnic groups prefer to have girls marry as soon as possible after the onset of puberty, at the beginning of their reproductive cycle. What is particularly poignant with regard to early marriage is the impact this has on the education of girls. It is sometimes the case that the girl-child is betrothed while she is still going to school, and thus her education is interrupted when her husband requests her transfer to his own compound.

Another feature is the changing of youth culture. In particular there is a powerful influence of American life on the young people. A lot of them identify themselves with African American pop stars and speak admiringly about ‘American styles’ that they imitate.

\(^{18}\) The Situation of Children and Women in The Gambia November 2001, Gambia Gov’t - UNICEF

\(^{19}\) ibid
II.1 Separation from biological families or from the husband

Most children in The Gambia are brought up with either one or both biological parents\(^{20}\) and reside within extended family systems that provide economic, social and emotional safety nets for individuals. However, certain categories of children, i.e. orphans, street-children, wards and so on may not have access to such safety nets and therefore, as noted in the previous section, are more vulnerable to the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ of casual prostitution. As with poverty, experiences of abandonment alone do not categorically cause individuals to engage in prostitution but combined with other contingencies and individual idiosyncrasies, it is a compelling ‘push’ factor. Of those interviewed who discussed the details of their entry into underage prostitution, a significant figure of 50% reported actual abandonment by husbands, partners, parents or being ostracised or stigmatised for becoming pregnant before marriage.

Paradoxically, not being married when one is past the socially and culturally expected age of marriage can lead to feelings of abandonment by parents or care-givers which can propel young girls towards prostitution. Though numerous girls in Basse lived with their biological parents and other relatives, and had reached or passed the age of marriage, they still had no husbands or imminent prospects. Such a girl is a liability to her parents. In many ways, a 15-year-old girl is believed to have reached a certain level of physical development and she is no longer considered a child but a quasi-adult still living in her father’s compound. There is strong psychological pressure for a girl in such a situation to contribute to her own upkeep as well as to the running of the household. Perhaps out of guilt or shame, or simply wanting to remain unmarried for a while, some of these unwedded girls resort to prostitution to support themselves and their families.

Secondly, for a significant number of children engaged in prostitution, and some adult prostitutes interviewed, the experience of divorce and abandonment by husbands, after an early marriage or/and early pregnancy, became part of the problem that left teenage girls vulnerable to the pull of prostitution. Muminatou was especially bitter:

“I was given to my husband at the age of 13 by my grandmother. After two years he left me. Now I have to feed my grandmother, two small children and myself. I never had a father and my mother abandoned me to go and marry somewhere else.”
(Muminatou, Farafenni, NBD)

Other persons interviewed, in the 18-25 age group, recalled similar experiences of abandonment by husbands in past lives.

“I was 15 years old when I had my first experience. By then I was going to school. I was forced to stop going to school and I got married. My husband was working in an office and I was helping him there. I became pregnant. By the time my child started crawling, he divorced me on no grounds and here I am, sitting.” (Anonymous Female, Farafenni, NBD)

“I was 15 years when I got married. I am an artist, I used to sing and my husband was a dancer and everything I had from my programmes I gave him but he mismanaged everything and left me to suffer. He travelled and left me

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here to suffer. At the end, my mother came for me and I got into another marriage in Touba [Senegal]. There I got twins and there too I suffered at the hands of my mother in-law. Being an artist, I can help myself. The twins I had there later died. I came here to work for myself and a new daughter which I have.” (Anonymous Female, Farafenni, NBD)

With little or no education and virtually no prospects for formal employment these girls opted for the only work they felt they could do in order to survive and improve their standard of living. In some cases, like that of Amie, it was the girl who deserted her husband as a result of boredom or a desire for economic independence and a different lifestyle. Whether initiated by the girl herself or whether she is abandoned by her husband, if she is poor, divorce often leaves the young mother in a desperate situation – having to fend for herself and her small children and perhaps to support her own mother and younger siblings.

Isatou, a 20-year-old Senegalese prostitute came to The Gambia at the age of 16 for prostitution. She said to one of the fieldworkers:

“I separated with my husband after one year of marriage, when I was 15 and went back home. But my father died, so, it was only me and my mother and all the youngsters. I am the eldest. I realised that what my mother was capable of doing before, she was no longer able to do it... One day we will have lunch and the next day no lunch... I felt ashamed of seeing my mother and her hardship and I don't have a husband or a boyfriend to help me, this is why I left home and am sitting here...” (Isatou, 20 year-old female, Soma, LRD)

II.2 A culture of silence

Another feature that makes children vulnerable is that they are expected not to complain or to have a say in decision-making. There are strong cultural norms, which exclude the opinion or voice of children in decisions about their future. There are also many cultural rules, which make sex and reproductive health education in the family a taboo subject. Girls are expected to protect their virginity until marriage. Traditionally, girls will be married at the ages of 13 or 14. Moreover, many children, particularly girls, will be sent to the urban areas for education or to work in the households of relatives.

Additionally, the family rather than the individuals is the most important unit and this clashes at times with the best interests of the child. Hence a child may have to meet expectations or assume roles that are important for family survival.

Finally, a culture of silence prevents children from going to their parents or guardians with certain problems. If a child is abused, there are very few options open for reporting. This has a significant impact with regard to child sexual abuse and exploitation.
III. Educational background

In The Gambia, basic primary education is guaranteed by the Constitution and is supposed to be free and compulsory, but however, there is no corresponding duty placed on either the parent or the State to ensure enrolment and attendance.

UNICEF INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total adult literacy rate 2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school enrolment ratio (Gross) 1995-1999</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school enrolment ratio (Gross) 1995-1999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The State of the World's Children 2003

Adult literacy levels in The Gambia are low. In 2000, the adult literacy rate was 37% for both male and female. For females, only 27% were literate according to the 1993 Census compared to 55% for males. Rural women have the lowest literacy rates, at only 18.3%.

Section 30 of the Constitution has comprehensive provisions dealing with the right to education, and the current Government regards the expansion of and equal access to education as a key aspect of national policy. The education sector receives the largest share of the national budget, after health. But the Government has economic constraints as well as lack of legal mechanisms to enforce such a right especially in rural areas where some parents are still refusing to send their children, particularly their girls, to school

Continuing education after the primary level is a problem for many categories of children. The groups that are predominantly affected are those from extremely poor families, street-children, disabled and handicapped children, and girls who are often betrothed at this age or withdrawn from school as a result of parents’ concerns regarding teenage pregnancy. With regard to non-discrimination, despite the decreasing gaps between the enrolment of boys and girls, education statistics reveal disparities in access to all levels of education, in particular secondary and tertiary enrolment, along gender, regional, ethnic and class lines

Traditionally, in The Gambia, many girls are married at their secondary school level and some that are not married early are sexually active and are thus exposed to the risks of contracting sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. Early marriage is also a significant rights issue since it affects the overall development of the girl-child and prospects for her personal or professional advancement and participation in society.

Access to lower and upper secondary school education is difficult for various categories of adolescents in The Gambia. This is all the more so, considering the limited number of places available, the increased cost of education at higher levels, high dropout rate of girls before reaching this level, as well as other difficulties faced by special needs students in continuing their education after primary level. Only 5% of all male street-children and 7% of females had received any secondary school education. Likewise for adolescents from extremely poor families

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22 ibid
23 Street Children Report, 1995, UNICEF

STUDY ON THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE GAMBIA
particularly in rural areas, Upper River Division as well as some areas in Lower and Central River Divisions, enrolment in secondary schools is extremely low.  

III.1 School dropout and vulnerability

There is no corresponding duty placed on either the parent or the State to ensure enrolment and attendance of children in schools through the required level. In fact, although the first nine years of schooling are gradually being made accessible to all, there is no legal minimum age at which a child is allowed to leave school, thus, no guarantee that children complete the nine years of broad-based education.

There are significant disparities in access to education at all levels along gender, regional, ethnic and class lines. Fula girls in URD, notably Basse, are identified as particularly affected by economic, cultural and regional constraints to enrolment in primary and junior secondary schools. As evidence indicates, most of these girls are withdrawn from school for early marriage or as a result of early pregnancies. Also at risk are many young girls who migrate from neighbouring Senegal to work as ‘maids’ in The Gambia as well as many street vendors in major towns, car parks and beaches in the country.

There are several other options for girls not enrolled in formal school systems which include literacy programmes, ‘madrassa’ education, as well as vocational and skills training for school dropouts. Unfortunately, these alternatives fail to attract many street-children perhaps because they are primary breadwinners in their households or they simply are not aware of how to access these resources. As for children engaged in prostitution, many are dropouts from the formal school system either as a result of early pregnancy or misguided beliefs about the benefits of prostitution or some do not see any value in education and thus view it as a complete waste of time as in the case of Fatou, at Senegambia.

III.2 Low-level of participation for children and vulnerability

In The Gambia, as in many traditional African societies, unconditional respect for elders is a sign of culture and training. These deeply rooted traditional values regarding the relationship between children and adults in society must be negotiated with the right of children to formulate and express their opinions and desires. As such, access to information about children’s rights is an important rights issue for the youths. Respect for the views of the child is also very pertinent given that by the time they reach 12 years, many young persons have developed distinct personalities and hold their own beliefs, opinions and values. Additionally, receiving correct and balanced information about Western countries can help the youths in the process of demystification of the Western society and American way of life.

Finally, given the vulnerability of adolescents to sexual and reproductive health problems, it is important that sex education begins at the primary level and is incorporated in the official school curriculum, and that children complete the nine years of broad-based education.

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25 Ibid
IV. Demographic background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNICEF INDICATORS</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population (2001)</td>
<td>1,337,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population under 18</td>
<td>615,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual number of births (2001)</td>
<td>51,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (2001)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population annual growth rate (1990-2001) %</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The urban population is estimated at 37% and the urban growth rate in 1993 was twice that of the rural one (6.2% versus 3.2%). The population is young with a median age of 18 years. About 45% of the population is under 15.

The country has one of the fastest rates of population growth in the world and is also densely populated (131 persons per square kilometre). The urban population is estimated at 37% and the urban growth rate in 1993 was twice that of the rural one (6.2% versus 3.2%). Given these rates, the overall population is expected to double in about 17 years from the 1993 count of 1.04 million. The population is young with a median age of 18 years. About 45% of the population is under 15. Nearly 50% are aged 0-18 years, and the population under-five constitutes about 15%.

While most Gambians live in rural areas, in the last couple of decades there has been an increase in rural-urban migration, to the extent that, according to the provisional figures of the 2003 Census, 52% of the population lives within Banjul, Kanifing Municipal Council and Western Division, which represents about 25% of the land area. This has uprooted many families from rural surroundings where the extended family and kinship network had served not only as a system of safety net but also as a system of collective watch and responsibility for the children in every respect. Once out of this system, and with peer pressure, there is a tendency to feel less inhibited and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

V. Technological background

An emerging feature in international child sexual abuse and exploitation cases is the use of Internet chat rooms or websites to lure and possibly groom vulnerable children. In The Gambia, use of the Internet is becoming more and more popular and accessible to at least the educated population. However, all except schoolchildren from the most elite families, have very limited access to computers. The very few who said they frequented Internet cafes, stated that they were generally not hassled by attendants. Only one student reported having logged into a sexually explicit website. On the whole, there did not seem to be any indication of a great number of children having access to computers and websites that are targets for vulnerable children by adult perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation. Nonetheless, the expansion of computer literacy and proliferation of Internet cafes throughout the country should be a cause of great concern, and preventive measures or policies need to be put in place to protect otherwise vulnerable children from potential exploitation in cyberspace.
PART II: EXTERNAL FACTORS THAT EXPOSE CHILDREN TO SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

I. The ‘Smiling Coast’: Increase in sex tourism

The Gambia, situated on the west coast of Africa, has a climate divided into a wet season which runs from May until November and a dry season for the remainder of the year. The tourist season corresponds with the dry season when travellers are guaranteed blue skies and hot days, the perfect antidote to the cold wet European winter. What The Gambia lacks in size and resources, its people make up in terms of friendliness and hospitality. In contrast to the rest of the region, it is peaceful and easy-going – hence the much-used term ‘Smiling Coast’.

Flights from Europe take less than six hours and winter package holidays cost less than many European resorts. The beaches in The Gambia are good and the sea is unfailingly warm. The number of tourists coming to The Gambia from Europe (mainly Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands and Germany) peaked in 1988 with more than 110,000. In 2003, it is expected that over 100,000 visitors will arrive and will account for about 5% of the GDP.

Around 10,000 local people are employed directly or indirectly in the tourist industry, mostly in low-earning or insecure jobs, which only last for the six-month tourist season. However, because many wage earners support an extended family, it is estimated that five to ten times this figure (and possibly 10% of the population) is totally dependent on the money tourism provides.

Sex tourism has been a significant phenomenon in The Gambia since the first organised holiday flights from Scandinavia in the 1960s. One has only to go to the main tourist areas at night to see for oneself the scale of the phenomenon 26. As a poor country that is also a tourist attraction, The Gambia is a vulnerable target for not a few unscrupulous visitors such as suspected or convicted paedophiles who enter the country in search of a low profile location to commit their crimes against children silently and with impunity. (UNICEF SITAN 2001) These individuals easily exploit the weakness of poverty-stricken families by offering to adopt or foster young Gambian children. On a drive out in such areas as Kololi, Senegambia, Pipeline or the Tourist Development Area (TDA), very young boys can be seen approaching tourists and offering an underage ‘sister’ as a housemaid, complete with the promise that the latter has never known any man before.

II. Regional dynamics

External factors such as the influx of refugees and economic migrants from neighbouring countries are also important. Situated in West Africa, The Gambia is haven of relative stability in a region marked by civil wars and political instability for the whole of the 1990s. As a result, large numbers of refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Senegal (Casamance) and recently Cote d’Ivoire came into the country. Some of these refugees are children under 18 years of age. According to the 1993 Census data, of the 4.2% annual population growth rate, 1.2% representing 28.5% of the annual growth rate was due to migration.

26 “Gambia...The Smiling Coast!” Child Protection Alliance and Terre des Hommes, January 2003
In 2002, for the UNHCR, The Gambia was host to 12,120 refugees. The refugees are mainly from Sierra Leone (7,630 persons)\(^{27}\) and the Casamance region of Senegal, and 80% reside in urban centres. During 2002, the Gambian Immigration Department (GID) registered 5,000 newly arrived refugees, but 50% of them preferred to return after calm was restored in their country of origin\(^{28}\). In 2002, the population of refugees by location in The Gambia was 1,397 refugees located in two camps (Bambali and Basse) and 10,723 refugees living in urban areas\(^{29}\). About 46% of the refugees were children under 18 years of age\(^{30}\).

In the 1980s, The Gambia enjoyed a respectable degree of economic stability and growth. This attracted a lot of economic migrants mainly from Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Mauritania, Guinea Conakry and Mali. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated for the period 1995-2000 that The Gambia received 55,000 migrants and the projection for 2000-2005 is 25,000 migrants\(^{31}\).

And it happens…

In conclusion and in the absence of any overt coercion, as in cases of abduction and trafficking for sexual purposes in other parts of the world, what are the reasons or causal factors that compel children into sexual exploitation in The Gambia? There is no simplistic predictor of which child will end up a victim of sexual exploitation. The detailed case studies done for this report reveal complexities of individual lives and motivations and interconnectedness of a host of personal and environmental factors that research subjects relate in explaining their specific predicaments. From accounts of adult prostitutes interviewed, their entry into prostitution when they were underage is usually expressed in terms of two contingencies or ‘push’ factors stated above: poverty and abandonment.

However, most children in The Gambia are poor. Many experience actual or perceived abandonment by parents, care-givers and husbands. Though nearly every girl is vulnerable to sexual abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual exploitation at home, in schools and within the community, the greater majority of children are not engaged in prostitution. How is it then that some particular female and male adolescents become drawn into sexual exploitation? From the interviews, the persons engaged in the practice perceived the benefits as far outweighing the risks, at least initially, “and it happens…”

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\(^{27}\) Sierra Leonean refugees in West and Central Africa, statistics as at April 2002, Africa Fact Sheet – June 2002, UNHCR

\(^{28}\) UNHCR Global Report 2002

\(^{29}\) UNHCR Population Statistics 2002


\(^{31}\) World Population Projects, UN DESA Population Division, the 2000 Revision; and The Link Between Migration and Development in the Least Developed Countries, IOM, 2001
This part focuses on children's perceptions of children's rights, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, some of which are directly affected by sexual exploitation. The relevant groups of children interviewed were:

- (1) schoolchildren
- (2) street-children including idlers, ‘bumsters’\(^{32}\) and other youths,
- (3) children engaged in prostitution,
- (4) refugee children and,
- (5) underage domestic servants.

This chapter examines experiences, views and attitudes of these children. The structure of this chapter is based on topics contained in interview schedules for focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews.\(^{33}\) First, the research participants gave their views on attitudes towards child rights and protection. Second, study participants defined and discussed views on various forms of sexual abuse – paedophilia, incest, early marriage, sexual harassment – involving adults and minors. Finally, different categories of children discussed what is believed to be the most significant form of sexual exploitation in The Gambia – ‘cross generational’, and sex tourism. Participants did not consider that other forms of sexual exploitation, such as pornography, child trafficking and access to certain Internet websites are particularly prevalent in The Gambia.

I. Awareness and attitudes towards definition of children and awareness of rights

I.1 Awareness and attitudes towards definition of a child

There were wide variations in responses concerning definition of the child within a category of children and between different categories. Schoolchildren, in particular those at higher level junior secondary and senior secondary schools gave most correct responses – that a child is anyone under the age of 18. Most other children cited physiological, emotional and intellectual states as being important to determination of childhood versus adulthood. Many children engaged in prostitution reported that a child is someone who does not ‘know’ anything. By saying this they were indirectly referring to sexual or carnal knowledge implying that they, as sexually experienced persons, could not be considered children. Most children agreed that girls mature faster than boys and therefore could get married earlier and become full-fledged adults.

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\(^{32}\) A ‘bumster’ is a young person who will follow tourists and offer to be a guide or a friend.

\(^{33}\) See appendix for samples.
I.2 Awareness and attitudes towards knowledge of rights

I.2.1 Right to protection

There was no indication, even amongst schoolchildren that the age limit of 18 meant that a child has a right to protection until he or she reaches that age.

For the most part, children engaged in prostitution do not consider themselves ‘children’ and do not understand that they require special protection because of their age. Some expressed that they have an onus to contribute to or fend for themselves or their poor families. Others insist that the fast ‘modern’ or ‘Western’ life is their preference and only through prostitution can they satisfy their ‘tastes’. Only one single mother expressed utter helplessness and resentment at her plight – Muminatou in Farafenni. The remaining underage single mothers conveyed that prostitution offered them a means to take care of themselves and an escape from the drudgery of poverty and parenting.

Even older prostitutes expressed victimisation only in terms of betrayal by former husbands or boyfriends and their own illusions about the glamour of the sex industry, as well as the indignity of extreme poverty. No one represented herself or her entry into prostitution as a betrayal of parents, care-givers, communities or Governments that are responsible for protecting their rights and welfare as children.

I.2.2 Right to education and protection against economic exploitation

None reported the view of education as a right, or protection against economic exploitation as a right. In a culture where children are expected to work and contribute their share to subsistence or household income, the idea of economic exploitation seems alien. Thus, in circumstances where there is no father and the mother is sick or old, children are forced to work. In those cases, children do not view the prospects of earning lots of money through their bodies as sexual exploitation but welcome the ‘opportunities’ they are presented with to lift themselves from poverty and even to travel to Europe one day.

I.2.3 Knowledge of international instruments

Most categories of children on the whole were not generally conversant with international instruments that guarantee the ‘rights of the child’ or with existing national legislation that protect them against sexual abuse and exploitation. Although several have heard of the CRC, they only mentioned provisions regarding the rights of the child to basic social services: namely adequate food, shelter and education. A few students were categorically opposed to other areas of child rights, such as the right to voice their opinions and to be listened to and respected, saying that this would undermine parental authority and control. The following are extracts of what some of them had to say about children’s rights:

“A child should not have his or her own right because he is under his parent. If a child should have his own right he may do something which you know is not good for him.”
(14-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, WD)

“The right of the child is that a child should be educated, and also have food and good shelter. [Parents] should protect the child as well, but that does not mean that a child
should speak in society or say something in public.” (15-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School)

“But when we say right, every right has a corresponding duty. Then it means that when we say it is our right for our parents to send us to school then it is our responsibility to do what is expected of us.” (16-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, WD)

“My opinion is that it is not good at all, they should not introduce it at all. There are some children who have never been to school who would not understand the meaning of the ‘right of the child’. But if they want us to understand the meaning they have to go to the media and the television and sensitise us. Right now, if you tell us about the ‘rights of the child’ we will think that in the USA, how children are living that is how we are also going to live. And which we don’t want, because if that happens, we will be killing each other…” (17-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, WD)

“Although a child should have rights it should be based on whether the parents are rich or not. If the parents are not rich then the child should not compare himself to the rich because you know you are from a poor family. You should be in a way where your mother and father can feed you and take good care of you.” (16-year-old, Brikama Upper Basic School, WD)

II. Awareness and attitudes towards age and sexual relations

Although some schoolchildren viewed ‘early marriage’ as a form of sexual abuse, particularly those from Banjul, many more students especially in Basse and Farafenni as well as a few from Banjul gave clear justifications for the cultural practice on moral and pragmatic grounds. Interestingly, many children engaged in prostitution professed that marriage of girls under the age of 18 is ideal so long as the husband is cooperative and understanding:

“It is better to go to school at the same time getting married if only your husband can allow you or understand you. Then it is okay for you to continue your education and this will benefit you and your husband.” (15-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

“One of the advantages of early marriage is that boys cannot impregnate you or spoil you. Because the moment you are married that’s the time the boys all run away from you or leave you alone.” (14-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

“There are some advantages [of early marriage]. For example, if you are a schoolgirl and your parents are poor, if you see somebody who can marry you and pay your school fees, you can get married to that person. And the person can be able to pay your school fees and you continue your schooling.” (16-year-old female, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, NBD)

“If you are a girl and you are very useless to yourself, any boy talk to you, you say ‘yes’, if your parents observe you like that, they will say we don’t want shame, they will just give you away to a man without doing anything for you.” (17-year-old female, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, NBD)
“The word ‘abuse’ implies that it is against somebody’s will but sometimes I see in these rural areas girls marrying at 13, 14 and 15 but it is done at their will, they like it and they want it.” (16-year-old male, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, NBD)

For most schoolgirls, especially those living upcountry in Basse and Farafenni, marriage below the age of 15 is commonplace and expected:

“In our school, 30% of girls are married and they are still attending school.” (17-year-old female, Essau Senior Secondary School, Barra, NBD)

“In our school, there are many girls who are married... from here we are going to a classmate’s naming ceremony.” (17-year-old female, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, NBD)

“For girls in this same school, [parents] will take them to be married. The girls will refuse but the parents will force them, ‘go and marry – your brain is not fast in school, you are spoiling our money, go and marry!’ It is common here in URD, to marry very early is common.” (15-year-old female, St George’s Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

“Some girls are married at an early age because the parents don’t want the girl to be pregnant while not having any husband. So when the girl has just developed breasts, they will say it is okay to let her go and get married. Yes, we the Fulas do this thing all the time.” (16-year-old female, Nasir Senior Secondary School, Basse, URD)

Many children, particularly males and refugee children (mostly of Sierra Leonean origin), believe that a girl should not marry before the age of 18 and some agreed that such underage marriage constitutes a form of child sexual abuse. They cited mainly health risks in pregnancy and delivery as the main problem, as well as the higher risk of dropping out of school:

“It is a form of sexual abuse. When a girl is 13 or 14, she is not physically, mentally or physiologically mature enough to be married. It can make her lose her life in birth and also she will not be able to satisfy the man in sexual relations.” (14-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

“It is better to wait until after your education [to get married]. This is so that you can concentrate well on your education because sometimes your husband may not want that.” (15-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

Nearly all children who responded to this topic believed that males should wait until they are at least 18 before marriage. The general consensus was that age 25 was ideal for men to get married. The idea of sexual abuse of children under 12 years of age was not as prevalent, and there were few examples cited by students in focus groups.

III. Awareness and attitudes towards sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

All participants in focus groups were invited to define the term ‘sexual abuse’ and fieldworkers were permitted to suggest various ages of child sexuality in order to record responses and reactions. Initially, most children, including children engaged in prostitution, were unable to make any clear distinction between sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. This led to discussions
led by interlocutors or interviewers on differences between the two categories and where they overlap.

III.1 Awareness and attitudes towards sexual abuse

Most children across all categories defined sexual abuse as ‘misuse of sex’. Many stated that sexual abuse meant forcing another person to have sexual intercourse without his or her consent – that is, rape.

III.1.1 A misuse of sex

Participants in focus groups suggested that sexual abuse did not just include sexual intercourse and gave the following examples as other modes of sexual abuse against children: touching or fondling breasts and genitals, kissing, exposing one’s genitals, masturbating, ‘fingering’, sodomy (oral and anal sex), making sexual comments and any attempts to sexually arouse a child or receive sexual gratification from a child such as showing the child pornographic pictures or films. Some children responded that they had heard individual cases of adult men molesting very young girls or boys.

“This one old man used to tell the younger kids to sit on him so that he will be feeling their body.” (14-year-old female, Brikama Junior Secondary School, WD)

“There was one man in our area, the man is a doctor. The girl was nine years old and living in our compound and she was sick. [The doctor came] and asked her if she was sick and she said, ‘yes’. He told her, when I come from work I will give you medicine. The girl said that when she went there he gave her some medicine and touched her breast. After, we told our grandmother and now the man is not coming to our compound again.” (13-year-old female, Brikama Junior Secondary School, WD)

“In our street in Perseverance, there is a man who used to follow these small, small, tiny girls like nine or ten years old and give them money to have contact with them.” (14-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

But, many cited relations between adult men (sugar daddies) and young girls as a form of sexual abuse or ‘misuse of sex’. After the interlocutor spelled out the actual differences between sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, most children agreed that the widespread ‘sugar daddy’ phenomenon constituted sexual exploitation rather than sexual abuse of children.

III.1.2 Incest

On the subject of incest, most children were unusually quiet. It was difficult to discern whether the consistent silence from one focus group to the next was an indication that the topic of incest was too much of a taboo for children to feel free to talk about or that the practice was not so prevalent in their communities, so, not much could be said about it. Given children’s eagerness to discuss equally sensitive topics either in reference to themselves or the experience of others, it is doubtful that the subject of incest would have caused them so much anxiety as to warrant self-censorship. It is more probable that sexual relations among close blood relations are rare occurrences in most communities in The Gambia. In any case, of those few who did talk about incest, most agreed that it signified forbidden sexual relations between close relatives. The examples most cited were that of father and daughter:
“Around Faraba there was one man who had sexual intercourse with his child whenever they go to their farm. He will tell his daughter that if you don’t lie with me I will kill you.” (16-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, WD)

“Right in this place there is a man, even his wife is afraid to leave her seven month daughter with him alone. The man had a daughter with another wife before but he abandoned the child and the mother. The child was staying with relatives until one day she started to ask about her father. She went to find him and stay with him. By that time he was having another wife. The father was interested in the daughter but he did not tell her ‘I love you’, it was just in his actions. There was a day the girl was sleeping and he came and lie down beside her and kiss her. She said, ‘why are you doing this, you are my daddy?’ The girl wanted to shout but the father said, ‘if you shout here you will disgrace me and they will say it is Miss X’s father.’ So the girl just ‘bear’ that and went on sleeping with her father. The girl too was having feelings. They kept on like this until she became pregnant and the stepmother knew what was going on. The stepmother reported the case to the alkalo (village headsman) and the like and the news spread to everybody to talk to the father seriously. The problem got back to the girl’s natural mother and the natural mother came to collect her daughter. Now the problem is gone but the wife the man is having now will take her daughter wherever she used to go.” (Anonymous Speaker during one of the Focus Group Discussions which formed part of the fieldwork for the Study)

“In our area, a father raped his daughter. The mother of the daughter was a businesswoman. When she goes for business trips, the father will be at home with the daughter and sometimes he will buy things like ‘bodice’ and tell the girl to wear it. One day the father forced her to have sex and they continued like that. The daughter became five months pregnant before the mother knew about it. She told her mother that it was her father that [im]pregnated her. They did not go to the police because they said it was a family matter.” (17-year-old female Essau Senior Secondary School Barra, NBD)

“I have heard of ‘incest’. It is my uncle who had been doing it to my younger sister at our compound. She has 12 years. My uncle was sent out.” (16-year-old female, St George’s Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

Several children also mentioned what seemed like mythical tales of mother and son incest and spiking of attaya tea with drugs.35

“Some boys, for example when they love their mothers, they will brew some attaya and put some drugs there, and give it to their mother. When their mother falls asleep then they have contact with her and the mother will not know until she sees herself

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34 To withstand.
35 In many cases, girls are warned against drinking attaya with boys because the latter are likely to use certain unidentified and untraceable drugs to knock them out, making the girls vulnerable to rape and other sexual abuse.
36 A local brew of Chinese herbal tea.
pregnant.”37 (18-year-old female, Bottrop Senior Secondary Technical School Brikama, WD)

Cases of incest involving non-blood relations, such as between stepfather and step-daughter were also mentioned by the few who spoke up on the topic:

“I know one girl her step-father is always having sex with her because the wife is not around. When the wife goes to work, he forces his daughter to have sex with him. She has 15 years.” (17-year-old female, St George’s Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

“This one is the step-father to my friend. The mother used to travel and leave the stepfather with the girl. Every night the stepfather will take the girl to sleep with him. When the mother came, she realised the girl was not well and asked the stepfather if he knew who impregnated the child. The man said I don’t know because I always go to work. The mother asked, ‘how can this girl be preggnated here without your knowledge and you are the only [one] I left here with the maid?’ The man told the woman that maybe her daughter goes out with other men. The woman took him to the police where he finally admitted that he was the one. He said it was because he wanted sex and his wife is never around.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Junior Secondary School, Brikama, WD)

III.1.3 Awareness and attitudes towards reporting the crime

All forms of sexual abuse were believed to be serious taboos. In fact, in most anecdotes, consequences were almost always the same – pregnancy and shame for victimised girl or mother38 and death, banishment or ostracisation and shame for the perpetrators. Interestingly, many children believed that it was inappropriate for victims or anyone else to report matters of incest to the police or other authorities and felt instead that the family through the mediation of religious and traditional elders should resolve the matter:

“It [should] not be reported to the police because it should be reported to the religious leaders who should come and talk to the father or the mother to leave that.” (16-year-old male, Jamisa Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“It is a taboo, it is not a matter of police discussion.” (15-year-old male, Jamisa Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“Yes, she should report the matter to the elders in the family to discuss the matter.” (16-year-old male, Jamisa Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“No need to tell teachers [about incest] but you should contact your relatives to avoid spreading it and let them help you.” (17-year-old male, Essau Senior Secondary School, Essau, NDB)

The children quoted above believed that the best interest of the child could only be served if the situation was handled privately in a way that would protect his or her identity and preserve as

37 This particular anecdote has the force of folktale. It was told to us in various focus groups across the country.
38 In the examples cited, it was the mother who was portrayed as the victim of unscrupulous sons.
much as possible the family cohesion. However, a few children supported the idea of reporting such sexual abuse to the appropriate authorities:

“It should be taken to court for such an act because you cannot use your own daughter or son to sex with them.” (14 year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“Yes, the whole country should know what the man has done” (17-year-old male, Kinderdorf Bottrop Senior Secondary School, Brikama, WD)

Children generally agreed that they are not advised on what to do in the event that they should experience incest and expressed uncertainty about whether they could trust adults to assist them. One student insisted that it is important to report such matters at school because of guidance and counselling that exists in the schools. However, there is little evidence that such guidance and counselling exists in most schools countrywide or that they are accessible to children who are victimised. Incest is a form of sexual abuse that particularly causes the victimised child to be withdrawn and ashamed of his or her experience to confide in anyone until it is too late. And most of the examples cited above indicate that it is when a girl-child becomes pregnant, and when the pregnancy becomes obvious, that people become aware of the nature of the problem for the first time.

III.2 Awareness and attitudes towards sexual exploitation

Finally, most children interviewed agreed that the most prevalent form of sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia is what has recently been coined ‘cross-generational sex’, an inappropriately neutral term describing adolescents (usually female) engaging in covert sexual relationships with adults, usually professional men, such as civil servants, businessmen, politicians, school officials, aid workers and so on, in exchange for money, gifts and service. In fact, such practices are extremely commonplace in The Gambia and much of the subcontinent, perhaps one of the greatest ‘open secrets’ of everyday life in areas of dire poverty.

Many students spoke as if there was no difference between students having affairs with ‘sugar daddies’ and students engaged in prostitution. The following are some grizzly anecdotes:

“There are these two sisters, one is in our school and the other one is not in school. Their mother and father have died so they are in their compound. At night there will be many cars in their compound, all these Mafeeyaas. If one gets in there, you will see two rooms inside. One will go the older sister and the other will go the younger sister. When another comes in then another will go. If you tell the elder girl in school that she is a prostitute she will say, ‘yes, it’s our idea we are prostitutes… from prostitution we used to feed ourselves and it’s from prostitution we used to feed our brothers and sisters and it’s from prostitution I pay my school fees.’” (17-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“I have seen two girls but I don’t know their ages. Every two weeks they will come back from that work [prostitution] and give the money directly to their parents. The girls go to Serrekunda parts, and the two contribute and give money to their parents. They stay at Brikama here and they are underage. You know they began first with some of these

39 Mandinka reference to slang, ‘Mafia Pas’.
‘sugar daddies’ in our community.” (14-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“There is a prostitute house here and they call it ‘Cashpower’. It has many underage girls who go there with ‘sugar daddies’. If you are a [male] student you can pay money so that you can do it there. There is an area in Durumacolong (a notorious seedy district and domicile for petty thieves) around Sanneh Kunda side…” (16-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“Yes, my friend of the same age is involved in prostitution and she was influenced by money. She got a ‘sugar daddy’ when she was just 13 years. Every time you see her she is always wearing expensive clothes and shoes. She is always at CNN Bar.” (15-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

Several schoolchildren spoke candidly about the experiences of classmates and their views on the motivation of schoolgirls in engaging in relations with wealthier, older men. Most schoolgirls expressed sympathy and understanding for the plight of their ‘fallen’ female classmates who they suggest are motivated by reasons of abject poverty or sheer materialism.

“There is a girl, she is in our school and she wanted to buy a book and school materials but her parents are poor. She told her parents about the problem she was having at school but they said they have no money. So, there is a man around them and the man is very rich. She went to the man and explained her problem. The man took out more than 1,000 Dalasis and told her that if you have sex with me, I will give you all this money and you will be the owner of this money and everything I have… Then the girl had to think of her life and said, ‘if I don’t do this they will throw me out of school’. So, she decided to have sex with the man and the man gave her the money and at the end she became pregnant and then the man told her that ‘I am not the one who pregnated you… I told you if you have sex with me I will give you the money and you will not mention my name anywhere.’ So the girl was thrown away from school and the money did not benefit her.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“This girl is a student… when she is going to school [her parents] are so poor they don’t give her lunch [money]. So, there was one man who always gave her lunch [money] in the morning. One day she was ready to go to school and the man told her, I always give you lunch [money] go and accompany me to the hotel. So the girl wanted to satisfy the man and go with him. The girl then had sex with the man. But the man was later arrested and taken to the police.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“Sometimes if you see your friends in expensive clothes and you want to be like them and you don’t know how she gets money, what you will do is follow her and do what she is doing to have it too. Sometimes you will both have ‘sugar daddies’ who will be giving you more money than the young boys.” (16-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

40 Fieldworkers followed up on girls and confirmed that they are children engaged in prostitution who are school drop-outs (both are included in sub-group 1, children engaged in prostitution, and one in sub-group 2 or case-studies).
41 Most students used the term pregnated as an abbreviation of the word impregnated.
“You know some girls want to have things that their friends put on and they don’t have it so they used to go to men so that they can give them money to buy it. You know when their friends put on other things that they don’t have, they used to get jealous and go to the men.” (14-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD).

IV. The ‘glamorisation’ of prostitution

IV.1 The Toubab\(^{42}\) myth

The false ‘glamorisation’ of prostitution, particularly sex tourism exists strongly. Many children engaged in prostitution spoke of their envy of girls involved in prostitution – their clothes, style and hanging out at nightclubs. For some, having a ‘white’ boyfriend is fashionable and these girls become the envy of their peers – especially the few that are successful in travelling abroad. Staying fashionable and ‘cool’ especially given the global media – with music videos of ‘glamorous’ African-American girls dancing, singing, laughing seductively with black men in an aura of sexual freedom and independence – means having access to a lot of cash to buy jeans, shoes, to go to beauty salons for hair and nail care, to show off at beach parties and nightclubs.

In a detailed focus group discussion with children in a dance troupe who perform at night in hotels and restaurants, parents, children and the organisers stated over and over again that the opportunity for children to meet a toubab and travel to Europe is worth the sacrifices. The fact that underage girls from poor families are deliberately selected and displayed before tourists is not considered exploitation but ‘opportunity’. In one case, the troupe was barred from performing at one of the large hotels because guests complained that the children were too young to be dancing and performing at midnight when their counterparts in Europe are getting a good sound sleep in preparation for attending school the following morning. The troupe leader could not understand this sentiment. “In Senegal where I am from, we don’t have these kinds of problems. The children are allowed to perform wherever and whatever time – after all, it is their luck if one is seen by one of the tourists and is taken abroad. She will be able to turn around later and assist the rest of us…”

IV.2 A ‘free’ and ‘modern’ lifestyle

For children engaged in prostitution, usually new entrants, the prospects of earning vast sums of money and living a seemingly “free” and “modern” lifestyle seemed to override any concerns about the hazards and risks associated with prostitution.

Children engaged in prostitution did not dispute this at all. Most of them simply maintained that circumstances could lead children to engage in sexual relations with adults. Thus, as the evidence seems to suggest, at least in roughly half of the cases of children engaged in prostitution, “selling sex” is perceived as an easy and convenient way of earning extra income to purchase ‘trendy’ goods i.e. clothing, hairstyles, accessories, etc. and for those living on their own, to finance independent living, such as Binta, Solomon and to some extent, Fanta. For the second half who are single mothers or face more pressing survival needs, such as Muminatou who has never attended school and Fanta who dropped out at age 14, beginning life as a prostitute meant having access to fine clothes, jewellery, and a fast lifestyle, which is seen as a better option than living

\(^{42}\) Name used to refer to white people or people from Europe or America or anyone believed to be a well-to-do foreigner.
as a single teenage mother within tight-knit communities. Also, it means freedom from having to depend on her former custodian and memories of his sexual abuse.

For Solomon, young and displaced from his country of origin and having no family, prostitution was the “best” option for survival.

“I go with the Old Pa and he gives me roof on my head and money in my pocket. But I can come to the bar and meet some women, some sugar mamas and I go with them too and get money. I can go both ways – with men or with women – as long as you have money I can satisfy you, no problem there [laughs]!” (Solomon, a Refugee from a West African Country, Basse, URD)

Older prostitutes who entered prostitution as young teenagers also expressed desire for material things, an escape from the drudgery of single parenthood as well as a view of their work as a convenient and an immediate means for survival and assisting their households.

“For my own part, I was desiring luxurious things and money. Once, when I was 14, a man faced me and gave me money from which I can even furnish a big house. I was very surprised because I was very poor.” (Anonymous Female, Farafenni, NBD)

“I get into this through a friend who was doing it. I was staying in my family compound but my friend was living a more expensive life than me. One day she advised me to follow her to the nightclubs so that I can also have something from the tourists or the ‘big bosses’ [sugar daddies]. I was lucky, on my first day I met a white man who gave me D2,800. From there, I went to the market to buy clothes. From there I also became a sex-worker.” (Anonymous Female, Farafenni, NBD)

As a conclusion, all things being equal, what seems to set children engaged in prostitution apart from other vulnerable children who are not engaged in prostitution, keeping in mind the virtual absence of overt coercion, is their desperation to escape victimisation of poverty, abandonment and sexual abuse or harassment at home where they feel powerless.

Prostitution gives these children a sense of power, control and victory over circumstances out of their control. However, prostitution promises more than it delivers; it provides very little room for escape and ultimately, negates the very sense of power and control it appears to give to vulnerable children. Many young girls enter the prostitution with great expectations about the short-term material gains and illusions about finding the ‘right’ husband or toubab who will take them to Europe. The focus groups discussions with older prostitutes belie these myths and expose the harsh reality that once a young girl goes in, it is very difficult for her to break out. Initial enthusiasm and optimism lead to frustration and low self-esteem, which feed into continued economic reliance on prostitution, and this further reduces self-esteem and increases a sense of helplessness, hence feelings of being ‘trapped’.

For children who are new entrants in prostitution, there is a lot of money to be gained, and conditions are considered less risky. They are envied by some of their peers and can easily ‘disguise’ their line of work. Yet, as with the older prostitutes, prostitution is what defines their individual self worth and at the same time degrades them in the eyes of the community. The older the prostitutes get and the longer they spend in prostitution, the more degradation they experience and less affirmation of their youthful sexuality. It seems it is this affirmation that they continue to search for and place a price tag on. The higher the price tag, the greater the self-esteem, the lower the price, the lower the sense of self-worth.
PART II: COMMUNITY’S PERCEPTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

This part discusses interviews and focus groups with adult members of the community as well as adult prostitutes. The various groups consist of the following categories:

- Parents,
- Community leaders,
- Religious leaders,
- Teachers and other school officials,
- Police officers,
- National Intelligence Agency (NIA) officers,
- Adult prostitutes.

I. Awareness and attitudes towards definition of child and children’s rights

1.1 Definition of ‘child’

Most of the adults interviewed gave various age limits to define a child ranging from 14 to 40 mostly corresponding with suitable ages for marriage of females and males respectively. One male elder insisted that a child does not become a full-fledged adult until the age of 40. Teachers and other authorities with a significant level of education generally agreed that the age limit for children is 18.

1.2 Knowledge of rights

1.2.1 Awareness and attitudes of rights of the child

Most adult focus groups including those with adult prostitutes expressed concern and ambivalence about children’s rights. Many strongly believed that children needed certain ‘things’ in order to develop effectively. However, these ‘things’ were not expressed as rights. Some said that they could only do and give what they could and what they have and that children should be made to understand the limitations of poverty. Again, not many adult community leaders stressed any significant role for Government or NGOs in protection of children and in provision of basic needs. Essentially, as with focus groups with children, most categories of adults agreed that there was not much governmental authorities could do to curb sexual exploitation of children and that it was essentially up to individual families and children.

1.2.2 Awareness and attitudes towards protection against child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

Adults groups were split on who or what was to blame for sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Male elders often harped on changing traditions, Westernisation, and the failure of modern institutions to address moral issues and indecent behaviour the way their forefathers were able to. Male elders and traditional leaders also blamed women or mothers who they accused of colluding with their daughters and encouraging them to have boyfriends. They also faulted weak men who are supposed to be heads of households but instead allow their homes to be controlled.
by their wives. In all fairness, male elders blamed men first and foremost, for being the perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation, for failing to control their carnal urges and transgressing religious and customary laws. Some gave impassioned examples of how their own families have been affected by child sexual exploitation.

For their own part, women leaders blamed men, their husbands, for financial irresponsibility and lack of sexual self-control. Most women also blamed other women for not exercising enough control over their daughters and instilling in them proper moral values. Those who had personal experiences defended themselves and other mothers insisting that some daughters are just plain stubborn and will not listen to what elders say. They blamed their husbands, the fathers of their daughters, for interfering when they want to enforce discipline. School officials interviewed blamed the school system and individual teachers that pervert their roles and responsibilities to their students.

Most adult community leaders agreed that they were the ones ultimately responsible for protecting their children against sexual abuse and exploitation. However, they complained that children’s ideas about Western values and lifestyles as well as increasing clamour over children’s rights were making it difficult for them to have control over their children. Many expressed fear of being taken to the police for ‘beating’ their children, which used to be the accepted traditional means for keeping them in line. As with children’s groups, adult community leaders did not stress the responsibility of the State in protecting their children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Most adults felt that there was already too much Government interference in such matters and that left to traditional methods of dealing with perpetrators of child sexual abuse and exploitation, such practices would be greatly reduced.

School officials disagreed and stressed the need for various Government Departments to work together to eradicate the scourge of sexual abuse and exploitation, especially within the school system. They did not support current policies within certain schools of simply transferring known abusers from one school to the next. They believed that the only way to have an impact on sexual abuse of children is to have a zero-tolerance policy, which gives greater weight to the testimonies and complaints of students affected.

Police and NIA officials interviewed were uncertain about the role of the police in responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation cases. They noted that corruption was rampant, and most cases are squashed through payoffs from wealthy alleged culprits. Also, one NIA officer noted that his own investigation has shown that corrections officers sometimes take part in abuse of children, particularly children engaged in prostitution who are rounded up in raids. Fellow officers rarely report these criminal acts. Further, some officers stated that reporting sexual abuse such as incest to the authorities rarely serves the interest of children. They believed, as with many children and other adults, that such ‘private’ matters are best left to traditional mechanisms of law enforcement.

In some instances, adults did say that children must play a role in their own protection – primarily by listening to and following the advice of their parents and other elders. As some of the children’s groups observed, many adults agreed that parents can only do so much to protect their children. Even if their needs are taken care of, they can still engage in behaviour that is detrimental to their well-being, such as sexual relations with ‘sugar daddies’. Most children engaged in prostitution did in fact say that their parents had no idea of what they did for a living and they could easily ‘hide’ their income from them. Thus, the prevailing idea that parents collude with and support their children’s exploitation could be a partial exaggeration, perhaps a convenient form of denial that one’s own children could become a victim. Adult prostitutes
generally blamed themselves and the men who exploited them for their predicament. The idea that, as children, parents and authorities should have protected them seemed naïve to most of them and a denial of their own agency and ability to make rational decisions.

I.2.3 Children’s rights to education concerning sexually transmitted diseases and health seeking behaviours

Most adult male and female community leaders were wary about sex education in schools and children’s right to know about and to take responsibility of their sexual and reproductive health. Many believed that this was a Western attitude that simply encouraged children to engage in immoral behaviour. Also most of them said that they would be against their children having access to medical treatment and advice concerning their sexual and reproductive health without the parents’ consent.

Most adult prostitutes had not attended school but stated that sex education could empower young girls to say “no” to sexual exploitation and abuse as well as to protect them against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Many believed that if they had had access to primary and secondary school education and were given control over their sexuality (particularly for those who were married at early ages) they would not have ended up being prostitutes.

II. Awareness and attitudes towards age and sexual relations

Nearly all adult male and female community leaders felt that there were certain instances in which early marriage was not only suitable but the only option for certain girls, especially those who are deemed dull in school yet precocious in sexual matters. Generally, male and female community leaders believed that education should be a priority for both male and female children. However, they added that early marriage does not necessarily interfere with a girl’s education, if the girl in question is serious about her studies and her husband is supportive. None of the adults cited medical risks of early pregnancies, suggesting perhaps that schoolchildren were made aware of these risks primarily through education in schools. As with children’s groups, the general consensus among adult male and female community members and prostitutes regarding the appropriate age for male marriage was around 25 years.

III. Awareness and attitudes towards sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

III. 1 Attitudes towards sexual harassment and sexual abuse

III.1.1 Attitudes towards sexual harassment

As aptly stated in the 2000 Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy Report, “society’s perceptions of issues and activities that constitute sexual harassment remain controversial”. Some actions that are perpetrated by one sex in relation to the opposite sex could be classified locally as jocular and acceptable. However, in Western societies, such actions would be “rigidly classified as improper sexual behaviour thus constituting sexual harassment”. Also, beliefs about sexual harassment may vary from community to community and from one ethnic group to another as well as one class of individuals to another. Thus, it is difficult and “highly delicate” to arrive at definitive interpretations of sexual harassment in The Gambia. Nonetheless, the Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy Report defines sexual harassment according to the degree of consent in the relationship: “Those acts and activities perpetrated by one sex over another that call attention
to sexuality without consent of the individual in an embarrassing, indecent, or discourteous manner.” Implicit (although it should be stated explicitly) in this definition, is an asymmetrical power relationship between the perpetrator and victim, irrespective of gender.

III.1.2 Attitudes towards sexual abuse

III.1.2.1 A misuse of sex

As with focus groups with children, many adults believed that sexual abuse meant forcing another person to have sexual intercourse without his or her consent. Many adult groups also indicated that sexual relations between adult men (sugar daddies) and young girls represented the most common form of ‘misuse of sex’.

As with schoolchildren, adult members of the community generally expressed extreme distaste at the idea of sexual relations between adults and children. They were also less willing to cite poverty as a reasonable excuse for sexual exploitation of children.

III.1.2.2 Incest

Most adult male and female community elders as well as adult prostitutes expressed knowledge of incest and could cite known examples within their own communities. In line with responses given by children’s groups, adults professed that all forms of incest were serious cultural taboos that evoke the worst sanctions. As with anecdotes given by children, the consequences were invariably pregnancy and shame for girl victims and death, banishment or ostracisation and shame for the perpetrators.

III.1.2.3 Reporting the crime

As with most groups of children, adult male and female community leaders believed that it was not beneficial for matters of incest to be reported to the police or other authorities. Like many children, adults believed that the mediation of religious and traditional elders was deemed the most efficacious path to resolving the problem.

III.3 Attitudes towards sexual exploitation

III.3.1 Definition of prostitution

Most adults defined prostitution as the exchange of sex for money. Many adult prostitutes asserted that the real prostitutes were divorced women or married women who date other men in exchange for money. Adult prostitutes also referred to their customers as ‘prostitutes’ themselves and swore, “they would equally suffer the same fate on the Day of Judgment”.

III.3.2 Sex tourism

As with most categories of children, adult male and female community elders maintained that tourists do more harm than good in the society. Most espoused the belief that The Gambia is widely becoming a known destination for tourists seeking sex with local girls and women. Adult

prostitutes in Farafenni also had mixed feelings about the benefits of sex tourism and supposed benefits of *toubabs* over local customers. NIA officials interviewed in and around the TDA maintained that sex tourism is rampant and most male as well as female tourists come to The Gambia with the expressed determination to make sexual contacts with locals. They said that it is difficult to make any arrests against suspected paedophiles without the cooperation of the children themselves and their families.

One officer stated that because of poverty, most parents turn a blind eye on the abuse of their children and accept payments and gifts from the offenders. He also mentioned that many of these parents are illiterate and do not even imagine that benevolent *toubabs* could have any ill intentions against their children. The same officer noted that a case was reported to his office, which he personally investigated. A young girl of 10 or 11 years was working as a ‘maid’ in a certain guesthouse frequented by middle-aged male holidaymakers from Germany. The girl’s ‘mother’ insisted that her ‘daughter’ was merely collecting clothes to bring back to her compound to be washed by other adult women. The girl would then take the clean clothes back to the clients at the guesthouse. When interviewed, the girl confirmed the story and denied any contact with any of the customers. The NIA officer had no other option but to simply demand that the ‘mother’ discontinue using her ‘daughter’ as a delivery person.

### III.3.3 Definition of pornography

All categories of adults had heard of ‘blue films’ or pornographic films, and like children’s groups, most agreed that they are readily available and accessible by children in all parts of The Gambia.

### III.4 Awareness and attitudes towards child trafficking

Adult prostitutes denied the existence of any organised trafficking of children or adult prostitutes for that matter either within The Gambia or across borders. Most foreign prostitutes said that they came on their own initiative to the country sometimes with the help of relatives or friends. In Farafenni, one popular brothel owner said that she sometimes travelled to Senegal to look for young, fresh recruits for her establishment. Two prostitutes did in fact say that someone went to speak to their families in villages across the border to gain permission to bring their daughters to work as ‘barmaids’ or ‘domestics’ in her ‘hotel’ in The Gambia. It was when they arrived in The Gambia that they discovered what the line of work entailed. Nonetheless they were given the choice to work in Farafenni or to be returned to their families across the border in Senegal. They chose to stay and said they had no regrets, that there were no other opportunities for them in Senegal.
PART III: OVERVIEW OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The findings in this Part III indicate that ‘cross-generational sex’ is by far the most common form of sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia as perhaps in most African countries.

I. Main concerns: Sexual abuse and prostitution

I.1 Sexual abuse

I.1.1 Sexual abuses while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s)

Firstly, in The Gambia, the most visible form of sexual abuse of children is not regarded as such – that is, early marriage. As prostitutes have indicated in this study, in particular the majority of whom are of Fula origin, marriage by the age of 13 or 14 is a cultural norm. Another form of sexual abuse includes incest. Incest between biological or blood relations was rarely reported. However, several prostitutes stated that they had been raped or otherwise molested by stepfathers, brothers-in-law or other male custodians. Again, focus groups with other categories of children also indicate a significant prevalence of various forms of sexual abuse affecting the general population of children.

Secondly, exposure to early sexual abuse in the home or community is disproportionately high among child prostitutes in The Gambia. As the case studies indicate, nearly all children engaged in prostitution reported experiences of sexual abuse or harassment within their compounds, schools or local communities. Each of the case studies depicts series of victimisations at the hands of male adults who were charged with the care of research subjects at one point or another. In each of the case studies the adult male perpetrators were not blood relatives to their victims but they were all in positions of authority and trust. In the case of Mumintatou, her abuser became her husband, further blurring any conceptual differences between the two relations.

I.1.2 Sexual harassment and sexual abuse while in the care of other care-givers

One of the most talked about problems is sexual harassment within schools and the educational system. In focus groups with schoolchildren, the topic of sexual harassment of schoolgirls especially by male teachers (but also by male students) dominated discussions. The impression was that sexual harassment is commonplace and affects the majority of schoolgirls. Abuses range from unwanted comments with sexual overtones to actual physical touching or molestation and in some cases to full-blown sexual relations or even rape. In fact, most students equate sexual harassment with rape – and maintain that this behaviour is common in schools.

Many students described the techniques of sexual harassment of schoolgirls by teachers:

“Number one, teachers in our school harass students by inviting the girl inside their office. Two, by trying to make study classes or private classes. Three, by giving them high marks so that the students will try to love them.” (17-year-old female Essau Senior Secondary School, Essau, NBD)

44 In the larger sample, which included data from 18 to 25-year-olds and ages 26 and above, the incidence of early childhood sexual abuse and harassment is very high, if not universal.
“For example, I have an experience. A teacher said, ‘I wrote something for you, after school you can come and collect it in my home. I want to give you something to take it’. So, when I went there [the teacher] did not raise that topic but instead busied himself touching papers, doing all sorts of things. If I ask him what do you want to give me, that’s the time he will sit down and start to express himself like, ‘I have seen you and love you’ something like that.” (17-year-old female, Kinderdorf Bottrop Senior Secondary Technical School, Brikama, WD)

“Even in our school here, it exists because it happens to me not once, twice... when I am going [the teacher] usually calls me and says, you can come to our compound and I will give you books and pencils. So one day, I go there. I was sitting in the parlour and he went inside the room and asked me to come inside and collect the things. I was also afraid. After he came out and tell me what I wanted to give you I have postponed it because you refused to come and collect it. What I want to advise my fellow students is that whenever they call you to collect anything, just tell them to give you here [in school].” (16-year-old female, Kinderdorf Bottrop Senior Secondary Technical School Brikama, WD)

“I also remember one of my teachers, he was teaching a class and there was one girl in that class which he loves. He followed that girl for a long time but the girl refused to accept him. Now what he used to do is mark in her books, ‘I love you’ and I think that is sexual harassment.” (16-year-old male, Muslim Senior Secondary School, Banjul)

“Girls have problems when they go in for these ‘campfires’. In one school, a girl was definitely raped by a teacher at a campfire. It led to a very difficult situation because she was a virgin and there was a lot of blood and she had to be rushed to the hospital. They have to avoid these camps by scouts and other societies. Usually, girls are harassed around these areas when they are without parents or somebody who is going to advise them.” (17-year-old male, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, Farafenni, NBD)

“Sexual harassment is mostly done by teachers. Some teachers when they see their students they will start telling them that ‘your buttocks is very big’ and other sweet words like, ‘today you can bring my books for me, you can come to my place...’ and when you go there they will have sex with you.” (15-year-old female, St George’s Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

“Sometimes school girls do follow their teachers home to beg for money. For some [teachers] they cannot give money without having sexual intercourse with them. The girls allow them.” (17-year-old male, Farafenni Senior Secondary School, Farafenni, NBD)

Senior school officials, such as principals or headmasters were also identified in well-known sexual harassment cases. In a few instances, the police authorities were involved, however, most schoolgirls stated that they handled matters themselves with the intervention of parents or other school officials.

“At [another school] we know that the principal is having sex with these small girls.” (16-year-old male, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)
“It is a headmaster and the headmaster was poor and a very old man. He used to call the girl when everyone was in the classroom to come and take out white hairs in his hair…The girl went and called her parents and the parents took the matter to the police. The police came and asked the girl, ‘do you have any evidence of what this man always tells you or that he calls you into his office?’ The girl said, ‘yes’ and she went and called her class teacher. The class teacher said, ‘yes, whenever the class is going on our headmaster will call this girl in his office. The headmaster was sacked from his job and they say he will not have another job in this country for five years.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

I.2 Prostitution

An emerging, yet significant form of sexual exploitation of children in The Gambia is underage prostitution of girls and boys, especially in the tourism sector. The main objective of this section is to describe the dynamics of prostitution, providing a profile of victims and an understanding of life as a prostitute.

I.2.1 Dynamics of prostitution

I.2.1.1 Children engaged in prostitution

The six case studies, annexed, were selected from the total sample of prostitutes interviewed and together represent a diversity of individual experiences. Of the total sample of interviewed persons engaged in prostitution, 14 or 23.3% are under 18, 28 or 46.6% are between ages 18 to 25. As this was not a random sample, the numbers are not necessarily representative of prostitutes on a national scale. Of the six individual case studies, four persons reported being under 17 and two identified themselves as 19. All prostitutes are female with the exception of one male, aged 19. Children engaged in prostitution are most visible in the Senegambia tourist resort area near Banjul as well as at underground bars in Basse.

At least 50% of prostitutes reported beginning prostitution under 18 whilst 35% admitted to beginning between ages 18 to 25. Most prostitutes have been engaged in prostitution between one and five years (65%), and a significant proportion (mostly children engaged in prostitution) have been working for less than one year (10%). Most under 18 reported working in the sex industry for under one year (71%), and the remaining stated that they have been in the business between one and five years. All six case studies entered prostitution under age of 17 with two having been in the business for only under one year, another two for about one year and one young lady has been working as a prostitute for nearly all her teenage life – over four years.

Nationality

Of non-Gambians, Ibo females from Nigeria and ‘Afro-Lebanese’ from Sierra Leone comprised significant numbers of prostitutes in the total. Senegalese females comprised the largest proportion of the total sample size at 36.6% and followed by Sierra Leoneans at 10%. Of the total number of non-Gambians (numbering 39) only 11 had legal residential permits whilst the remaining 28 had no legal documentation. Many of these prostitutes were subject to countrywide
raids and those with no documentation were deported out of the country. In the under-18 category, a total of 11 reported themselves as Gambians, one as a Guinean, one as a Senegalese and one claimed to be a Liberian. None of the three ‘foreign’ children engaged in prostitution were in possession of documentation.

Level of education

In the under-18 category, only two persons engaged in prostitution had never received formal education whilst the great majority or 64.2% were either currently enrolled in Junior Secondary School or had reached that level of education but then dropped out of school for one or more reasons. In sub-group B, four of the interviewees received up to Junior Secondary School level education. One reported having some primary school education.

Marital status

Although a little over half the total sample (53%) reported never being married, a vast proportion said they were either separated or divorced (43%). Only one prostitute reported being married, living with her husband, and working as a prostitute. In the under-18 category, 11 children engaged in prostitution reported never having married, and the remaining are separated.

Mother/Offspring Status

Most prostitutes sampled had at least one child (61%) reportedly being cared for by the child’s maternal grandmother (45% of mothers) or the child’s father and his relations (30% of mothers). Nearly half or 46% of girls engaged in prostitution in the under-18 category have at least one child. The child/children are either residing alone with their mother or with their father or his relations. One child engaged in prostitution reported that the father took her baby abroad to Europe.

Place of residence

Many prostitutes reside in a motel or brothel where they work (33%), and a surprising 23%, mainly children engaged in prostitution, reported residing at home with other family members. A majority of children engaged in prostitution are residing at their family compounds (64.2%), and a significant number reported living with a ‘boyfriend’ or ‘sugar daddy’ (28%). Only one was living on her own as a single mother.

1.2.1.2 Vulnerable children

Street-children are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation, albeit the incidence of such abuse is probably underreported. The fact that these children have limited or no basic education places them more at risk than their counterparts within the school system in terms of contracting sexually transmitted infections. Almost 10% of street-children reported having had sex with someone. Shoe-shiners, labourers and male street vendors were the most sexually experienced, while female street vendors were reportedly the least experienced. A significant 78% of street-children who were sexually active reported not having had any family planning advice, and 75% of them did not use any form of protection when they had sex49. The 1995 Street Children Report suggested that some girls agree to have sex with older men in exchange for food, money, clothes and other necessities.

49 Street Children Report, 1995, UNICEF
But what was missing from the 1995 Street Children Report was an indication of the prevalence or incidence of child prostitution, particularly in the case of refugee girls who are desperate to survive, often having to fend for themselves if they have no immediate relatives with them in the country. When asked, girls did mention that they knew of other street-children that slept with adults in return for money, food and other items. The importance of pursuing this line of inquiry in a more systematic way cannot be understated. Because of the vulnerability of refugee populations in general and women and girls in particular, it would be useful to know if there is any significant incidence or prevalence of rape or sexual exploitation within refugee camps.

1.2.1.3 Customers

National customers and cross-generational sex

Engaging in prostitution is easy. The demand for sex with underage children and willingness of mainly adult men to pay for it provides a convenient ‘solution’ to the problems vulnerable children face in everyday life. Many prostitutes refer to ‘sugar daddies’ and ‘mafia pas’ as their first introduction to prostitution. They reported that very often older men in nice cars would approach them or vice versa, and give them their business cards or mobile numbers – offering to assist them with any ‘problems’ they may have.

Many of these targets are schoolgirls and with peer pressure they relent and enter into sexual relations with older men in exchange for luxury goods and sometimes, basic services, such as assistance with school fees, feeding costs at home, hospital costs etc. Some girls report that their ‘sugar daddies’ would send bags of rice to their compounds thus making it easier for parents or care-givers to turn a blind eye. Some girls said that they realised later that they could get more from toubabs; especially the possibility of obtaining a visa to travel to Europe and this is what ultimately lures them into ‘open’ prostitution.

“In most cases the [man’s wife] is pregnant and he can no longer keep himself, so he has to go in for those young girls. I think that is the reason for most men going out for those young ladies. Their wives cannot go out with them in towns and nightclubs because they have babies and so on. Therefore, the man will look for the young girls who are free to move with them anywhere and girls whom they can move and enjoy with. Because if you have three wives you can’t choose one and go with her to the nightclub, of course you will look for a girl whom you can go with, who is younger than your wife and more enjoyable than your wife.” (19-year-old male, Muslim Senior Secondary School, Banjul)

The most cited example of ‘cross-generational sex’ is intimate relationships between ‘sugar daddies’ and schoolgirls. Other local names for ‘sugar daddies’ are ‘Mafia Pas’ or ‘Big Bosses’. The vast majority of culprits are married, ‘responsible’ men with one or more wives and several children at their home(s). Usually, they are men who have reached 35 years or above and are considered to be of high status. Female victims range from age 12 to 25 years although the age of preference seems to be for adolescent girls age 14 to 19 years, or girls in junior and senior secondary schools.

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Unlike the lone voice of the young man quoted at the beginning of this section, the majority of male schoolchildren were not at all supportive of the behaviour and motivations of adult men involved in illicit relations with young girls:

“Some of those people are our fathers and our elder brothers who follow these underage girls to exploit them.” (15-year-old male, Jamisa Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“These ‘big bosses’ who have money when they pregnancy these young girls, they give them large amounts of money so that the girls will not name them. And they will point at small boys and tell the girl to name that individual, which is a sin to God.” (14-year-old male, Jamisa Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

“[Sugar daddies] are rampant in our society. There are married men who just want to play in the street and at night when you go out in the street you will see these ‘sugar daddies’ with their private cars following these school girls, fooling them because they have nice cars – this thing is so rampant in the society.” (18-year-old male, Muslim Senior Secondary School, Banjul)

“These ‘sugar daddies’, they will fool the girls, telling them that I have a lot of money and I will not spoil you. I will use condom... I have money, I will marry you, I will do something for you, I will not pregnancy you... and at the end of the day they will pregnancy you.” (18-year-old female, Kinderdorf Bottrop Senior Secondary School, Brikama, WD)

Finally, for the most part, schoolteachers in The Gambia are under 35 years, are not high earners and are not generally considered as ‘sugar daddies’ or ‘Mafia Pas’. Although some schoolgirls may acquiesce to relations with teachers for limited financial or material gain, most reportedly do so for the luxury of having school fees paid for or for the benefit of receiving high examination marks.

**Non-nationals and sex tourism**

During their six weeks stay at a major hotel in the Tourism Development Area (TDA), fieldworkers interviewed several informants. There was nearly universal agreement among varied informants that Gambian children engaged in prostitution in the Senegambia Tourist area are predominantly underage, many as young as 12. In a lengthy interview, a proprietor of a large and popular tourist resort hotel stated that in his nearly two decades of experience in the tourism industry in The Gambia, he would not hesitate to say that 60% to 70% of tourists come here for sun, relaxation and cheap sex. This is the case, he said, for both male and female tourists. A proprietor of a large hotel noted that first time male travellers will tend to use prostitutes they meet in the open in or around the Senegambia tourist area and Kairaba Avenue, but the returnees learn how to find the ‘good’ ones and normally maintain long-term relations with their ‘girlfriends’ in The Gambia. Female tourists, he said, who come mainly for sex are generally middle-aged and above but they tend to go for local boys who are between the ages of twenty and thirty.

“Countless tourists do come and involve themselves specifically with very young children – between six and ten years old. They meet these children, some are street boys but most are these little girls who are fruit sellers. In fact, I know of one village where many of these tiny girls are coming from – selling fruits on my beach and...
'chasing' my guests. Yes, 'chasing' tourists. Sometimes you see them running behind the tourists and telling them openly what they can do. It is terrible and very sad to see this in my own country; even around my hotel staff will gossip about what some of the visitors are up to. But what can you do? There is the bad side of it – and there is the business side of it...” (Hotel Proprietor, Kotu/Kololi)

Children engaged in prostitution in the Senegambia tourist area who were interviewed individually and informally acknowledged that they are in great demand by tourists and expatriates – mainly white Europeans but also African male professionals living and working in The Gambia. “This is why we come here,” said Fatou as she sat with her younger sister and cousin at a bar and restaurant near Senegambia tourist area:

“I was told about this place from my friends at school. One of them encouraged me to go out with her and her toubab boyfriend. I went with her to meet him at his hotel and he was there with another white man – that one was for me. It was my first time to even talk to a white man. They took us to Chinese restaurant. And then my own friend, his name is 'Mike', gave me 50 Pounds (Sterling) and said that I should call him. I was already used to Lebanese, so why not a toubab. That is where I had my first taste of toubab! Before Mike left, he gave me over 300 Pounds. He said he would phone me when he is coming next. Since that time, we are coming here almost every weekend. And I bring my own sisters and I tell my friends so they can know this life is better than school. Any night we can make sometimes 2,000 Dalasis!” (Fatou, Senegambia Tourist area)

More important, a proprietor of a large hotel emphasised that, knowledge of tourists’ attraction to ‘small’ girls compels some older teenagers to lie about their ages to customers as well as about their ‘virginity’.

“Some of the [bumsters] will come to us and say ‘so and so likes you – but I told him you are twelve and that you are a good girl – that your parents do no allow you to go out’. When the boys say that then you know what to say and how you are going to pretend to the toubab. Even if [the toubab] meets you in a nightclub if you start crying and tell him you are a virgin, he will believe you.” (17-year-old, At a classic Nightclub, Senegambia Tourist area)

“One security guard said specifically that prostitution has always existed in The Gambia, but it was ‘hidden’ and the few adult women who were involved stayed at their homes. As a result of the influx of refugees and economic migrants as well as increase in tourism, ‘open’ prostitution is now believed to be spreading among the younger generations especially teenagers in The Gambia.

I.2.1.4 Third persons and intermediaries

Perhaps the overriding element in all these cases is the lack of any overt coercion of children into prostitution. Most prostitutes across all age groups gave clear, articulate and apparently rational explanations for what they do. Third persons normally act as agents or middle persons.
This is in stark contrast with the character of sexual exploitation of children from other parts of the world, particularly in Asia and Eastern Europe where extensive prostitution rings or networks exist that are run by underworld gangs, drug dealers and other criminal syndicates. In The Gambia as perhaps in most West African countries with the possible exception of Nigeria, most child victims of sexual exploitation work alone or in small numbers with very few, if any, intermediaries. Nonetheless, the impact of sexual abuse and exploitation in The Gambia is equally destructive to children and should give even greater cause for alarm because of its banality or commonplace character in every day life.

Agents and middle persons

According to Neneh, a 19-year-old from Casamance who began going to nightclubs in Senegambia at age 15, it takes a few months to understand the ‘system’.

“You have to go with someone who has been going to the clubs for some time and they can protect you from the wild girls and show you how to keep away from trouble or quarrelling and fighting. In Senegambia [tourist area], the Sierra Leoneans, the Nigerians and these Liberian girls are very aggressive – especially when they see younger and fresher girls, they will try and fight you for stealing their customers. They even will take you to police and pay them to arrest you.” (Neneh, 19-year-old female, from Casamance, Senegal)

Understanding the ‘system’ means first and foremost exploiting the right contacts and connections, setting up or infiltrating an existing albeit loosely tied network. According to Neneh:

“Everyone knows when the flights are coming and which tourists from which country are staying in which of the hotels and which hotel is easier to enter than the others. So, you know, you have to have your connections at the airport, with taxi drivers, at the hotels, with security people and people working behind the bars at the nightclubs and restaurants – everywhere. If you have two or three good contacts who are helping you, you will always have regular customers. Me, I don’t even go to the clubs like I used to. I sit in my apartment, which is being rented for me and I have boys who call me many times a week, when they have someone for me. Because I am a Jola, they can call me to go as a maid for at toubab for two or three weeks. I even stayed with someone working for an NGO for six months – doing sex and cleaning for him.” (Neneh, 19-year-old female, from Casamance, Senegal)

Young girls reportedly pay some of these ‘intermediaries’ to secure customers for them. One such well-known intermediary is also a bumster called ‘Bigga’. Bigga claims to have achieved tremendous financial success as an intermediary and has built a compound for his family in Talinding with the income he receives as a middleman between young girls and middle-age tourists. Girls know him very well and normally approach him for his well-established contacts with many wealthy toubabs. Bigga boasts that all his girls are ‘tested’ first, that is he will have sex with them first, before he refers the ‘good’ ones to any of his European clients. He charges both the prostitutes and the toubabs separately. Bigga claims that many girls trust him and prefer his services because, on their own, the girls can be easily fooled by seasoned tourists and ‘semesters’ who disappear back to Europe without coming through on payments or gifts to them. Some individuals are notoriously involved in procuring young street boys for paedophile

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51 Slang name use for Gambian young men who travel to and are living in Europe – particularly Germany and Scandinavian countries where they are known for drug dealing and petty crime.
tourists. A certain long-term ‘Arab’ middle age female resident in one major hotel is the link between young boys and girls and elderly European and Lebanese clients. Another long-term resident, “Daddy Cool” at the same hotel is well known for bringing boys under 12 years old to his room late at night.

The ones that do not ask: parents, security guards, and proprietors of hotels, restaurants

A factor that may keep children into prostitution is the ease of ‘hiding’ their sources of income and the nature of their activities. Often parents are only too eager to receive supplementary income and do not probe their children for explanations. Also many parents particularly upcountry, are illiterate, and do not question their children when the latter claim that they have to go for extra studies. And, as was indicated in interviews in areas around tourist centres girls simply tell their parents that they are ‘employed’ in restaurants or hotels.

At nightclubs in the Senegambia Tourist area known for underage prostitution, security guards interviewed said they never request for identity documents to verify the ages of ravers. At one particular haunt, children engaged in prostitution are allowed an entire row at the top of the club. The doormen stated that many of these girls tell their parents that they are ‘working’ in a hotel or restaurant in Senegambia Tourist area, whilst they are prostituting themselves at nightclubs and then bring home their ‘salaries’ at the end of the month. The parents do not ask where the money is coming from or question how it is that their daughters are able to earn salaries in the thousands of Dalasis as waitresses in tourist areas when Government Ministers do not earn half the amount. According to these informants, after one or two months, the girls are able to rent their own rooms in Kololi, Kerr-Serign, Manjai, Serrekunda and Dippakunda.

One security officer said that he has known several of these children engaged in prostitution who started off by coming to the beaches in their school uniforms ‘collecting’ money from tourist for their ‘school fees’ which, invariably they claim, their parents are unable to pay because they are poor. Fieldworkers did in fact encounter schoolchildren on the beach, ‘begging’ for ‘school fees’ and interviewed several of them on the spot. All of them maintained that what they were doing was okay because their parents were poor. They were convinced that they would never be susceptible to sexual exploitation because they “know themselves” and know how to behave themselves. According to them, it is the ‘other’ girls that go out of control.

Some middle-age female proprietors of underground bars revealed that they were prostitutes in their youthful days either in The Gambia, Senegal or often abroad in Europe. One woman in particular, Georgina, told us about her entry into prostitution in the tourism industry at age 14, which eventually led her to Sweden where she worked on the streets, hustling and as a ‘call girl’. She began using hard drugs, especially crack cocaine. She gave birth to a mixed race boy who was later taken away from her by the Department of Social Welfare. After years of hustling with bouts of imprisonment and drug rehabilitation, she was deported back to The Gambia, leaving her son behind. Through the assistance of friends she was able to clean up her drug habit and open up a bar/restaurant. The bar she owns is frequented by ‘Mafia Pas’ she knew in her earlier life in The Gambia and in Sweden. They go to the bar with underage girls; new entrants from Senegal, some Gambian schoolgirls, much the same way she began:

“This is the only life I know. Here in The Gambia – this is the way many girls can keep themselves and their families, and their independence. If they get lucky, they will meet someone who is serious, who will marry them. But most of these girls are not interested in marriage. They want to go to Europe. And most of them will end up like me, and will be doing this until they are too old.” (Georgina, Senegambia Tourist area)
I.2.2 Life as a prostitute

I.2.2.1 Double lives

In fact, many children engaged in prostitution are leading double lives: living at home in their extended family compounds and ‘working’ the nightclubs and bars at night.

“Here in Basse, many of us are going with men for money. Who has time for school? And who wants to marry an Old Pa? In a bar you can meet regular customers and you rent a room and earn your money and you go home and give what you can for the one who is taking care of you.” (17 year-old, Basse, URD)

“Hardship is in the life... I cannot get to sleep. I sit up and start crying and people start asking me, but I know what I am crying for. I think of what I am doing, I don’t even want my people to know where I am, which God and His Prophet don’t want – yes, that is the hardship...” (Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

For those who are not the sole or primary breadwinners in their families the extra income affords them a more “expensive” and “luxurious” lifestyle, often making them the envy of their peers and classmates. Many children engaged in prostitution spoke of the money as a primary motivating factor:

“Sometimes you can get a toubab who will give you 150 to 200 Pounds (sterling) for one or two nights. Even for one week, you know how much money this is in Gambia!” (17-year-old, Senegambia Tourist area)

“It is the local Gambians, these local, local girls who bring down our rates. We, Freetowners get much more money because we are ‘high class’ and have better sense than these illiterate girls here. Me, I can make up to 500 pounds in one week, when it is peak season. You better believe...” (18-year-old, Afro-Lebanese, Senegambia Tourist area)

“Sometimes [toubabs] take us to classy hotels to have time with us. I only go with someone I like, not just anyone, no, I am not desperate. Don’t you see me? Just look at me [pointing at her figure].” (16-year-old, Senegambia Tourist area)

I.2.2.2 A future trapped in a cycle of prostitution and poverty

However, the illusion of a carefree, lucrative easy life as a prostitute belies the experiences of older prostitutes, particularly those working in transit zones upcountry. The latter’s testimonies below reveal that false inducements early in life invariably lead to a future trapped in a cycle of prostitution and poverty.

“Any one you see on the street doing certain abnormalities, know there is something forcing her to do it because if she has everything she will sit at home praying to God and doing all the things that God asks her to do.” (Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)
“Some white men come here just to fool us. I saw a girl in Senegambia who got married to a white man but she ended up being a prostitute for that man – by giving her a number and people will be coming for sex with her while her husband receives the money. The man has taken many girls to Germany. But I heard that he later died.”
(Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

“For my part, I have a white boyfriend but he fooled me by promising to marry me. He took my Identity Card but never returned. He used to give me money, and even send me money from Europe and a big tape [cassette player]. Now you meet me here.”
(Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

“What I wanted to contribute is that really, it’s not nice... we don’t have anything from it – being a woman and having contact with a man for 15 Dalasis or 10 Dalasis. From this you are supposed to eat, drink, clothe yourself, put on your shoes, pay 10 Dalasis for sleeping in the room – that is painful! With that 10 or 15 Dalasis you are supposed to save to go back home, help your mother, and feed yourself – then it must be many 10 Dalasis! And one man is a problem for a woman – much more 5, 6 or 10 men, it pains me. If it was my wish, I will quit it. You can get sick and have no way to cure yourself. Because if today you make 50 Dalasis, you pay the room 10 Dalasis, dinner 10 Dalasis, lunch 10 Dalasis, breakfast 10 Dalasis – It’s finished. So, if you get sick you cannot cure yourself.”
(Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

“The work has difficulties. We sit here without quarrelling, [security forces] round us up like sheep and we are only human beings who survive ‘from our sweetness’. We spend the whole day and night there – but because of (name) they do not beat us. She will go there and beg them until we are released... it is very shameful.”
(Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

“Those who are ashamed [when rounded up by the police] it’s because here in Farafenni is ‘Trans-Gambia’ [open highway] – you will sit at the police station and your relatives pass by. You don’t have anywhere to go. You see your relatives and you are ashamed.”
(Anonymous Woman, Farafenni, NBD)

“There is nothing painful than when you pass little children who may be companion to your children or who your children are older than, throwing stones, calling you ‘chaga! chaga!’ (prostitute) You are insulted and you don’t have your [financial] problems solved. You don’t have any enjoyment. And you feel ashamed to go to the police and report that someone is calling you ‘chaga!’”
(Farafenni, NBD)

These narratives of older prostitutes who started the ‘life’ with basic misconceptions are starkly revealing. It is clear that attitudes regarding conditions of work vary according to the age of prostitutes, their duration in prostitution and to a large extent, their location. In general, children engaged in prostitution in the Senegambia tourist areas are much better paid, require fewer ‘dates’ and have long-term relationships with toubabs abroad. This is unlike their older counterparts in peripheral areas upcountry, many of whom are foreigners with several children and depend on many ‘dates’, many ‘10 Dalasis’. With their greater responsibilities and fewer physical attributes, these older prostitutes can barely survive in prostitution after they passed their early teenage prime.
A very high exposure to HIV and STIs

Another negative consequence of child sexual exploitation is heightening prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. The 1998 Adolescent Fertility and Reproductive Health Survey revealed that 50% of single males and 30% of females in the age group of 14–24 are sexually active. Some of the risks associated with adolescent sexuality and fertility include sexually transmitted infections (STIs), maternal mortality due to early pregnancy as well as problems associated with illegal abortions of unwanted pregnancies52. Female adolescents and young adults are nearly seven times more likely to contract HIV infection than their male counterparts. Although it is a commonly believed stereotype that HIV/AIDS is only prevalent among prostitutes, this study indicates that only 196 of the 2,352 patients, or 8% were professed prostitutes.

A significant proportion of respondents (86%) in the 1998 Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey reported that they had heard of HIV/AIDS mainly through radio (22%), friends (about 39%) and television (20%). Approximately, 18% of those who had heard about AIDS did not believe in its existence. Of the majority who did believe in the existence of the disease, 71% responded that it could be transmitted through sexual intercourse; about 12% said through blood transfusion; and, 8% also mentioned transmission from mother to child53.

In focus group discussions, street-children, ‘idlers’ and child bumsters seemed much less aware of types and hazards of STIs, including HIV/AIDS although many reported being sexually active, unlike schoolchildren of both sexes. On the whole, most schoolchildren where quite knowledgeable about common STIs, especially HIV/AIDS and were able to recite various ways of prevention and treatment. This is because children are taught HIV/AIDS and other STIs as part of the Population and Family Life Education, which is taught in all upper primary, junior and senior secondary schools as part of school curriculum. Moreover, in the past two years, there have been increased public sensitisation and awareness campaigns about HIV/AIDS and dangers to sexually active children. None of the children engaged in prostitution reported testing for HIV. Notwithstanding, one of the interviewees died of HIV/AIDS complications in July 2002 before the completion of this study.54

Amie’s case study is a stark example of the perils of teenage prostitution in Senegal and The Gambia. In the early months of her bouts with illness, her friends and companions used to come and visit her. When it became apparent that she was suffering from AIDS related conditions, these girls, one by one, simply stopped coming. In the end Amie had only her mother and one female cousin looking after her full time. In the same way that Amie denied to her grave that she was suffering from AIDS, her friends continue to frequent the nightclubs and underground bars, dating tourists and ‘semesters’, refusing to see the possibility of their own imminent demise.

Conflicting information on condom use

Most prostitutes of all ages reported consistent condom use, but this information conflicts with reports from other informants particularly users of prostitutes and intermediaries such as ‘bumsters’.55 According to Bigga, he never used condoms with girls he ‘tested’ and as he was recommending them to ‘trusted’ clients, he didn’t imagine that the clients use condoms either. In

53 ibid
54 Another child engaged in prostitution/informant died of ‘pneumonia’ in December 2002.
55 No one interviewed admitted to personally paying for use of prostitutes in The Gambia but were eager to discuss other ‘known’ cases or their ‘friends’ s transgressions etc.
fact, he said when girls complained to him about clients who refused to use condoms, he warned them not to make too much of fuss, because there are many more girls who would be willing to compromise. He advised them instead to charge more for ‘flesh-to-flesh’ or ‘naked’ sex. Bigga maintained that most of the very young girls under-15 do not understand anything about condoms and they don’t believe they can get AIDS.

‘Sugar daddies’ interviewed covertly said they do not use condoms because they don’t need to. According to them, they only have one or two long-term girlfriends and they choose ‘good’ girls. They said they couldn’t have any ‘feeling’ with condoms so they pressurise their girlfriends to go for ‘family planning’ only, as they don’t believe they are at risk of contracting STIs.

In Basse, children engaged in prostitution said that they ‘know’ most of their clients but that they use condoms with anyone they don’t know. Older prostitutes professed nearly universal condom use, saying that their lives were more important than a quick 10 Dalasis or 15 Dalasis. However, given the desperate conditions under which they survive, according to their own accounts, and their reported sense of frustration, it is doubtful whether, at the right price, these prostitutes would not forgo condom use during sex if this is what their customers demand. Prostitutes in Farafenni, Soma and Barra said that the Medical Research Council (MRC) through a special programme distributes most of their condoms.

1.2.2.4 Unwanted pregnancies

Although some students professed that most teen pregnancies are caused by boys of the same age as the girls involved, they expressed particular concern about adult male culprits – ‘sugar daddies’, teachers, other school officials and other adult males from the community.

“One girl in our school was in love with a teacher until he happened to impregnate her. Now they are staying together as husband and wife. But the girl is a Gambian and the teacher is a Sierra Leonean.” (16-year-old female, Garba-Jahumpa Junior Secondary School, Banjul)

“I know one girl who is pregnant by her teacher the time they went for excursion in Dakar.” (16-year-old male, Banjul Muslim Senior Secondary School)

“Our former P.E. teacher pregnant some of the grade seven students.” (14 year-old female, St George’s Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

“Since I enter St Georges, any year at least two or three of them will get pregnant.” (15 year-old female, St Georges Upper Basic School, Basse, URD)

All categories of children recognised teenage pregnancy as a potential threat to the health of young, underdeveloped girls as well as to the continuation of their schooling and hence, their overall future development. In Brikama, one notorious ‘abortion doctor’ was cited as performing illegal abortions on teenage girls who come to him from various parts of the country, in many cases causing their deaths. One schoolgirl in Barra stated:

“In my school a schoolgirl was impregnated by a school teacher. She went in for an abortion. Instead of taking the number of tablets she was given for the pain she drank everything and later kept vomiting until she died.” (16-year-old female, Barra, NBD)
In many cases, early pregnancy was the main factor that propelled unmarried girls to drop out of school:

“I have seen one former classmate; she is from our village, who is a female ‘bumster’ around Senegambia tourist area. She got pregnant by one teacher during her school days and was thrown out from school. She was at Foster’s Senior Secondary School [Brikama]. After the incident, the girl went to the beach. She is now mingling with the boys, smoking cannabis, drinking alcohol with these Rasta boys, moving with one white man…” (17-year-old male, Kinderdorf Bottrop Senior Secondary Technical School, Brikama, WD)

“I know one girl she was in our primary school. Now she has left because she was pregnant. But the baby died and now she is roaming the streets.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

Most children engaged in prostitution minimised the significance and possibility of becoming pregnant saying that they ‘always’ use condoms to protect themselves. Other informants, however, noted that some girls have children by unknown fathers and simply continue with prostitution after delivery. This was the case of at least one of the Sierra Leonean prostitutes interviewed.

I.3 Unreported crimes

In the first place, “keeping a lid” on a serious crime committed against the girl-child can reinforce any guilt that she may feel as a result of the incident. Also, if the perpetrator is a family member, a neighbour or even a prominent individual within the community, then there is the actual or perceived risk of recurrence and thus, the girl-child will live in constant psychological fear and emotional distress. Although isolated cases of incest or rape of girls under eight years old are not unheard of, such incidents go largely unreported and thus, undocumented.56

Cases of abuse and neglect are rarely reported to the responsible authorities such as the police or Department of Social Welfare and certainly, never by the victims themselves (MDPR, 1999).57 Evidently, children within this age group have limited if any awareness of their fundamental rights or procedures for seeking redress for physical, psychological, mental and emotional abuse. Moreover, with no clear-cut definition of “child-abuse”, it is difficult for victims to accept, much less to report, their experiences of violation.

According to the Department of Social Welfare, the handful of cases of sexual abuse of younger children, all of them girls, that have come to the attention of the Department were stifled by families concerned who preferred settlement among themselves (MDPR, 1999). Although, such settlement is intended for the sake of communal harmony and peace, it is doubtful whether the best interest of the child is maintained at all costs.

In 1998/99 out of the six educational regions of The Gambia, only five cases of sexual harassment were reported altogether – four from Pakalinding Junior Secondary School [Pakalinding, LRD] and the other from Nassir Senior Secondary School [Basse, URD]. At Pakalinding, two of the perpetrators were teachers whilst the other two were pupils. The only case reported at Nassir was against a teacher. With the identification of teachers as culprits, it is of

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little wonder that cases of sexual harassment are rarely reported to school authorities, which makes it difficult to know the full extent of this problem in the educational system. Part of the problem is society’s perception of the level to which girls are complicit in sexual harassment. Many people believe that young girls invite sexual advances from older men in the community or from male schoolteachers, in order to receive monetary favours or academic leniency.\(^{58}\)

II. Secondary concerns: pornography and trafficking

II.1 Pornography

II.1.1 Production of pornographic materials

Another well-established form of sexual exploitation is child pornography. A main concern regarding pornography and child abuse is the use of children in sexual poses, partly dressed or nude, for sexual gratification of the viewer of pornographic material – either through print or video media. Also, of concern are older persons – juvenile or adult – deliberately exposing children to pornographic material in order to sexually arouse them or to induce them to engage in sexual activity. Although in recent months there has been a handful of media reports of tourists caught with pornographic photos or videos of Gambian children, child pornography does not appear to be a major problem in The Gambia although further covert research is necessary to confirm this. There have been some occasional reports of some concern, for example, a child bumster boasting about how he was asked by a tourist ‘couple’ and agreed to participate in a pornographic video recording. Only one child in this study narrated a story about a suspected case of child pornography involving someone she knew:

“I have seen a card, one boy, a touba is sponsoring him, he just take a picture without any clothes and put it in a present and parcel it for him.” (15-year-old female, Brikama Upper Basic School, Brikama, WD)

On the other hand, nearly all categories of children had heard of ‘blue films’ (local term for pornographic films) and most agreed that they are readily available and accessible by children in all parts of The Gambia. It was mainly male children who admitted to watching these films either at the video clubs when they are shown late at night or at the homes of friends and other venues.

“Most of the schoolchildren rent these cassettes and watch them. And most of them are having pornography books in town.” (17-year-old male, Nasir Senior Secondary School, Basse, URD)

Some reported disgust and others laughed embarrassingly, saying that they enjoyed the films or that it stirred up ‘feelings’. Most of the male interviewees said that they experienced uncontrollable ‘feelings’ when they watched ‘blue films’:

“Me, my friends and my class teacher watched these films. We were definitely all attracted but we control ourselves and we didn't do anything, make any noise, just sitting gently and enjoying the film.” (16-year-old male, Nasir Senior Secondary School, Basse, URD)

\(^{58}\) The Situation of Children and Women in The Gambia November 2001, Gambia Gov’t - UNICEF
Other boys who reported having sexual ‘feelings’ when watching pornographic films said that it would be difficult to contain themselves if girls were around and that merely viewing such films could possibly lead them to rape at one extreme and sexual harassment of schoolgirls or street-girls at the very least.

II.1.2 Exploitative use of children in pornographic performances

This involves the use of children under 18 years of age to perform in obscene exhibitions or indecent shows for pornographic purposes. There is no evidence of children being involved in pornographic performances in The Gambia. However there are several dance and cultural troupes that perform in hotels for tourists. A number of these dance and cultural troupes include children of both sexes.

In those cases, children do not view the prospects of earning lots of money through their bodies as exploitation but welcome the ‘opportunities’ they are presented with to rise from poverty and even to travel to Europe one day.

In a detailed focus group discussion with children in a dance troupe who perform at night in hotels and restaurants, parents, children and the organisers stated over and over again that the opportunity for children to meet a toubab and travel to Europe is worth the sacrifices. The fact that underage girls from poor families are deliberately selected and displayed before tourists is not considered exploitation but ‘opportunity’.

II.2 Trafficking

A third form of sexual exploitation of children worldwide is child trafficking. Children in almost all categories said they have never heard of child trafficking in The Gambia or the trafficking of Gambian children abroad for sexual purposes.

Prostitutes denied the existence of any organised trafficking of children or prostitutes for that matter either within The Gambia or across borders. Most foreign prostitutes said that they came on their own initiative to the country sometimes with the help of relatives or friends. In Farafenni, one popular brothel owner said that she sometimes travelled to Senegal to look for young, fresh recruits for her establishment. Two prostitutes did in fact say that someone went to speak to their families in villages across the border to gain permission to bring their daughters to work as ‘barmaids’ or ‘domestics’ in her ‘hotel’ in The Gambia. It was when they arrived in The Gambia that they discovered what the line of work entailed. Nonetheless, they were given the choice to work in Farafenni or to be returned to their families across the border in Senegal. They choose to stay and said they had no regrets, that there were no other opportunities for them in Senegal.

Two other children engaged in prostitution from Sierra Leone and Benin reported to being ‘tricked’ into coming to work in The Gambia have been interviewed, and in both cases, there was no real evidence of an established network. In the case of the prostitute from Benin, fieldworkers could not independently confirm details of her story. More research is needed into child trafficking to and from The Gambia and the possibility that The Gambia may be used as a transit point for trafficking children to European destinations.
CHAPTER III: CURRENT INTERVENTIONS

The Gambia is one of several African countries, which are striving to make the battle against sexual exploitation and abuse of children a paramount policy priority. Many stakeholders have come to the realisation that although little has been said on this topic in the past, sexual exploitation and abuse of children is a reality, and thousands of children are vulnerable as a result of chronic levels of poverty, economic migration, political instability in neighbouring countries, harmful traditional practices, beliefs and attitudes as well as perturbing levels of consumerism and negative pitfalls of ‘globalisation’. To tackle the ‘scourge’ of sexual exploitation and abuse of children, all stakeholders in Government, civil society including NGOs, private sector, community based organisations and representatives of international organisations must work together under a common, far-reaching agenda that maximises the unique contributions of each sector.

PART I: GOVERNMENT

Actors and institutions at the community, national and international levels either support or constrain the efforts of the family to ensure the fundamental rights of the child are met. As part of this study, questionnaires were distributed to relevant Government Departments, international organisations, NGOs and Diplomatic Missions. Their responses provided invaluable information on knowledge gaps, financial and other resource constraints as well as possible areas of intervention that are useful in consideration of a wider, coordinated national plan of action to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse of children in The Gambia.

I. International obligations and political commitment

I.1 International obligations


59 The mentioned treaties are all legally binding documents as soon as a State has agreed to be bound by them, by accession or signature followed by ratification.
60 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), entered into force on 29 November in 1999, is the first binding regional instrument focusing exclusively on the rights of the child. It is rooted in other human rights treaties, but emerges out of the traditional social and cultural values of Africa, including those relating to family, community and society. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child obligates African States Parties to undertake the necessary steps to adopt legislative or other measures to, inter alia, prevent child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking.
61 The ILO Convention 182 provides children with the right to protection from the worst forms of child labour, which include the sale and trafficking of children, the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performances, and any work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the child (Article 3)
62 This Optional Protocol to the CRC provides clear definitions of different forms of sexual exploitation. It elaborates significantly on the obligations of State Parties towards law enforcement and child-centred proceedings.

All these Conventions, which are part of international law, place binding obligations on the Government through all necessary legislative, administrative, and judicial actions to prevent and protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Signature and ratification of these and other conventions is demonstration of Gambia Government’s political commitment to promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of children including the right to protection from sexual abuse and exploitation.

I.2 International political commitment

In addition, The Gambia has participated in many international and regional meetings and conferences. At the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm (1996), The Gambia with other governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and members of civil society from around the world, committed themselves to a global partnership against the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Gambia has subscribed to both the Declaration and Agenda for Action.

The Gambia was represented at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama (2001) by a high-powered delegation. In his statement to the Yokohama Congress, the Permanent Secretary, Department of State for Health and Social Welfare, deputising for the Secretary of State for Health and Social Welfare, reiterated Government’s commitment to the fight against sexual exploitation. He went further to acknowledge the existence of the problem of child sexual abuse and exploitation in The Gambia, albeit an under-reported problem. He stated that although research evidence does not exist, there is anecdotal evidence, which indicates that young children are being sexually exploited. The Government of The Gambia, he said, is committed to undertake the harmonisation of the domestic laws with the CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant international conventions; to undertake a study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children; to ensure greater involvement of civil society, tourism and private sectors in child rights programming; to increase the collaboration among the law enforcement bodies with regional and international agencies to facilitate sharing of information and joint investigation; and to design programmes for the prevention of commercial sexual exploitation of children, the recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Gambia also participated in a regional meeting on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Dakar in 2000. That meeting served as follow-up to the Stockholm Congress in 1996 and as a preparation for the Yokohama Congress held in 2001. As a follow-up to the Dakar meeting, the Child Protection Alliance was formed in The Gambia in 2001 and since then it has been raising awareness on child abuse and exploitation issues in general and child sexual abuse.

The Agenda for Action aimed to highlight international commitments, to identify priorities for action and to assist in the implementation of relevant international instruments, to highlight the commitment to adopt national agendas for action.

The Second World Congress provided an opportunity to strengthen worldwide partnerships, old and new, since the First World Congress and to reinforce the global commitment to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.
and exploitation in particular. The Gambia is a signatory to the World Tourism Organisation code of conduct on sexual exploitation of children in tourism.

Finally, The Gambia participated in the UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children (2002). The delegation, which was headed by the His Excellency, the President of the Republic, included Secretaries of State for Education, Justice and Foreign Affairs, the Director of Policy Analysis Unit at the Office of the President, the Director of Social Welfare and the three child delegates. One of the children from The Gambia was chosen to represent the children of the world at the Parliamentary Forum, and the other served as a Moderator of the Inter-Generational Dialogue with Heads of State and Government.

As part of the preparations for The Gambia’s participation in the UN Special Session on Children, the National Association of Youth and Children’s Organisations in collaboration with the Government and UNICEF, organised a National Forum on Children March 2002, the first of its kind in The Gambia. It facilitated dialogue between adults and children on issues affecting children. A tangible outcome of the national forum was the “Creating A Child-Friendly Gambia” document which was taken to the UN Special Session by the President. The issues discussed during the National Forum were the protection of children against abuse and violence, implementation of CRC in The Gambia, the duties and responsibilities of the child, good quality basic education for all children, breaking down the traditional barriers to child rights, investing in children, creating opportunities for meaningful participation of children and ensuring the best possible start for all children.

I.3 Monitoring processes

Some of the above instruments established monitoring committees to assess the fulfillment of children’s rights by States Parties. The Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors States Parties’ obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. States Parties are required to report within two years of becoming a party on measures they have adopted to give effect to the CRC and thereafter every five years.

In its Initial Report, The Gambia stated: “The prevalence of child prostitution and teenage pregnancies may have been aggravated by inadequate access to youth-friendly family planning and psychosocial counselling services. There is an urgent need to fulfill the rights of sexually active adolescents between 14 and 18 years to family planning facilities, with or without parental consent. Many parents who would ordinarily detest such access would prefer them to having their daughters drop out of school due to unwanted pregnancy. Such a law should not be seen to be promoting promiscuous behaviour.”

65 In the Plan of Action that was adopted at the UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children eight paragraphs are specifically addressed to the elimination of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

66 Article 44
1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights:
(a) Within two years of the entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned;
(b) Thereafter every five years.

During the meeting with the Committee, The Gambia was asked why there was no national Plan of Action in accordance with the recommendations of the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. In reply The Gambia stated that although no cross-border consultations had previously taken place on issues related to children, the Department of Social Welfare had convened a meeting of representatives of neighbouring States to discuss the need for child protection and the monitoring of cross-border transfers of children. The Department of Social Welfare had developed a draft Plan of Action for child protection, in accordance with the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the Stockholm World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. A workshop to discuss the Plan of Action was conducted in 2001 to raise awareness among policy-makers and members of civil society.\footnote{Summary record of the 740th meeting: Gambia. 11 October 2001, CRC/C/SR.740, Committee on the Rights of the Child.}

According to Article 43 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child State Parties are obliged to report, within two years of entry into the Charter of the State, to the African Committee of Experts on how it is implementing the provisions of the Charter. The Gambia ratified the Charter in 2000 and its Initial Report was due in 2002. However, the report is yet to be submitted to the African Committee of Experts.

II. Governmental action

II.1 Governmental structures and policies

The Government has made public pronouncements acknowledging the problem of child sexual exploitation especially in tourism and has pledged to fight the emerging menace with all the means at its disposal. In translating its political commitment and fulfilling its international obligations, the Government has taken a number of steps towards preventing and protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

II.1.1 Inter-Sectoral Child Protection Committee and Plan of Action

An Inter-Sectoral Child Protection Committee has been set up under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare. The mandate of the Committee is to facilitate inter-agency collaboration and co-ordination on sexual exploitation of children and to prepare a National Plan of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). A draft Plan of Action Against CSEC has already been prepared and it is to be finalised soon. A Tourism Code of Conduct, which is under preparation, will be integrated into the CSEC Plan of Action. The Committee is composed of 20 members from UNICEF, the Department of State for Health, hospitals, Social Welfare Department, Departments of State for Education, Justice, the Interior, Child Welfare Unit of the Police, tourism authorities, National Youth Council (NYC), the National Association of Youth and Children’s Organisations (NAYCO), Christian Children’s Fund, SOS Children’s Village and Child Protection Alliance.

II.1.2 Multi-Agency Task Force on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Tourism

A multi-agency National Taskforce on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Tourism was set up in March 2003 under the aegis of the Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA). The membership of the Taskforce comprises UNICEF, Government Departments, NGOs, tour operators and hotel and
restaurant owners. It has since been working on the preparation of a Tourism Code of Conduct for travel agents, tour operators and hotel/restaurants and bar owners.

II.1.3 Policy on sexual abuse and harassment in schools

The Government is using resources generated in the context of international co-operations, especially with UNICEF (2002-2006 Programme of Co-operation) to address emerging child protection concerns including sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Already it has committed resources from the UNICEF-Government of the Gambia country programme of Co-operation to this end. Furthermore a Policy on Sexual Abuse/Harassment in Schools has been prepared. The Policy will soon be presented to Cabinet and National Assembly for their endorsement. A Guidance and Counselling Unit has been set up at the Department of State for Education Headquarters in Banjul and some schools are provided Teacher Guidance Counsellors to address issues of sexual abuse/harassment and schoolgirls’ pregnancy.

II.1.4 The Police Child Welfare Unit

A Child Welfare Unit has been setup at Police Headquarters in Banjul and all Police Stations in the country have Child Welfare Officers. The Unit has been in existence for about ten years and its primary function is to deal with minors who are in conflict or contact with the law in ways which protect their rights. The Police Child Welfare officers have received basic orientation on the CRC and ACRWC, the Beijing Rules, the Riyadh Guidelines. These are international standards for the administration of juvenile justice and prevention of juvenile delinquency developed by the United Nations. With UNICEF support, the Department of State for the Interior developed guidelines on action to be taken in the event of an arrest of a minor which were published and distributed to all police stations.

While some basic orientation has been given, a more systematic and structured training on child rights and child protection, including juvenile justice, is required for the entire Police, Immigration, the Army and the Customs and Excise officers. In this regard, the Department of State for the Interior, with support from UNICEF, is making preparations to introduce a Child Protection Module (which will include juvenile justice) into the Curriculum of Police Training School.

II.1.5 National HIV/AIDS Council (NAC)

In the framework of the HARRP

69 programme, a National HIV/AIDS Council (NAC) has been established under the Office of the President. The President is the Chairman of the Council. Council members are representatives of civil society and the Government in equal numbers. The composition includes Secretaries of State, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, representatives of religious, women and youth groups, as well as people living with HIV/AIDS.

II.1.6 Girls’ Education Programme

The Girls’ Education Unit is responsible for implementation of the Girls’ Education Programme which sets targets and strategies to increase girls’ enrolment and retention as well as to improve the physical, intellectual and emotional environment in schools in ways that are sensitive to the needs of the girl-child.

69 HARRP is an expanded multi-sectoral response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
In the education sector, the President, in October 2002, announced a tuition-free scheme for Girls’ education. This is an initiative from the President’s Foundation, The Jammeh Foundation for Peace and Development. Under this scheme, secondary school education is tuition-free for all girls in the Greater Banjul Area. The scheme will gradually be extended to all parts of the country. Among other things, a Trust Fund for Girls’ Education has been set up by Government to support girls who are in need.

II.2 Legislation and its implementation

II.2.1 Current laws

II.2.1.1 Definition of ‘child’

The CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child clearly define the ‘child’ as someone under the age of 18 years of age. In The Gambia, as in many countries, there is no overarching definition of ‘child’. Various legislation, policies and customary practices (personal law) define varying ages or stages of ‘maturity’ depending on which issues are being considered, for example, voting rights, consent to marriage, sexual relations, adoption, maintenance of children in case of divorce as well as protection against criminal offences, among others. However, with the coming into force of the 1997 Constitution, the age of majority for the purpose of voting in national elections has been lowered to 18 years.

II.2.1.2 Sexual abuse and exploitation

There is no nationally agreed definition of abuse binding on public and law enforcement agencies, nor have categories of abuse and neglect been agreed, so the words “abuse” and “neglect” could mean different things to different people.

Although both the Constitution and the Criminal Code prohibit child abuse and neglect, the enforcement of these laws is inhibited by social norms and practices, as already mentioned. Section 29 (1) of the Constitution specifically provides that: “Subject to legislation enacted in the best interest of the child to know and be cared for by their parents”. Sections 18, 19, 210, 211 and 218 of the Criminal Code have created offences relating to child abuse and neglect. These vary from failure by the duty-bearer to take care of a child of tender age and failure to provide for the necessities of life, to assault, ill treatment, neglect, abandoning of a child below the age of 14 years, etc. This responsibility is only bestowed on persons above the age of 16 years. The duty to preserve the life and health of a child is a legal one and it could be argued that children in The Gambia are already accorded that protection.

Currently, several provisions of the Criminal Code make it an offence to have sex with an under age girl or boy. However, the age of sexual consent for girls is set at 16 and for boys at 14. Section 127(1) and section 131 of the Criminal Code make it an offence to ‘defile’ a girl under 16 years and for a head of household to offer girls in his care below the age of 13 years for such an offence. Each offence carries a maximum sentence of 14 and five years respectively.

70 Initial Report of The Gambia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/3/add.61, 26 September 2000
Rape of a woman and indecent assault against a woman or a boy under 14 years are prohibited, under Section 121.72 Girls below 21 years old are protected from being procured in unlawful sexual activities. Rape and indecent assault against a boy of between 14 and 18 years is not prohibited. But if a boy under 18 years is raped by a man, the boys are themselves punishable under the prohibition of homosexual activities (Sections 146 and 148). Sections 129 to Section 137, of the Criminal Code prohibit procurement of persons for sex and allowing one’s premises to be used for prostitution.

**II.2.1.3 Sexual harassment**

Section 126(3) of the Criminal Code states that “Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or object shall be seen by such a woman, or intrudes on the privacy of such a woman is guilty of a misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for a term of one year.”73

Despite the existence of this law, sexual harassment prevails in schools and is often perpetrated by teachers. Most schoolgirls do not have knowledge of their legal rights and thus, cases of sexual harassment are not reported to authorities.

Currently the National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women is the only official policy that makes reference to eliminating sexual harassment against women and girls. Two other Polices under development also make reference to the elimination sexual abuse and exploitation. The National Policy on Sexual Harassment in Schools aims to eliminate sexual harassment in schools and the draft National Policy on Children aims to eliminate sexual exploitation of children.

**II.2.1.4 Sex tourism**

In response to the growing phenomenon of child sex tourism, the Government has enacted new legislation entitled the Tourism Offences Act 2003. The Act makes sexual exploitation of children an offence and imposes stiff penalties on anyone convicted of the offence.74

**II.2.1.5 Pornography**

Child pornography is punishable, like all pornography. The selling, making, distributing, circulating, importing or exporting, exhibiting, producing, or possessing of any obscene book, photograph, pamphlet, paper, drawing, painting, representation, figure or object is punishable, as well as taking part in or receiving profit from any business dealing in obscene publications and materials. The advertising or making known any of the above-mentioned obscene materials or persons engaged or ready to engage in the above is also prohibited.

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72 Section 121, rape and 124 on abduction are typical gender-biased provisions in the law, and the legislators seem to have only envisaged the possibility of a girl or woman becoming a victim of rape and abduction.


74 See Annex VIII for the whole document.
II.2.1.6 Economic exploitation

Section 29(2) of The Gambian Constitution seeks to protect children from economic exploitation and work that is detrimental to their health and mental well-being:

“Children under the age of 16 are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”.

No legal framework is in place to enforce the above provision. The Department of Labour was in the process of formulating policies to guide and regulate the sector in general, and in particular, to conform with its commitment to protect children under ILO Conventions 182 and 138, both of which The Gambia has ratified. With respect to the issue of domestic workers, the National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women calls for the registration of domestic workers in existing labour unions and is advocating for an amendment to the 1990 Labour Act to include domestic labour. An age limit for domestic servants needs to be set in place to protect very young girls who leave their homes to work as ‘maids’.

II.2.1.7 Early and forced marriages

Section 27(1) of the Constitution states that “Men and women of full age and capacity shall have the right to marry and found a family”.

Section 27(2) of the Constitution states that “Marriages shall be based on the free and full consent of the intended parties”.

There are three forms of marriages that are recognised in The Gambia – civil, religious and customary. For civil marriages, the parties must be at least 21 years. If either party is below this age, he or she must obtain the written consent of a parent or guardian. Canon Law, which governs most Roman Catholics, sets the minimum age at 16 years for males and 14 years for females, but permission from parents is normally required for young persons within this age group. In practice, for other Christian denominations, males must be 21 years and females 18 years in order to contract a marriage. Islamic Law does not specify the ages at which a male and a female can contract a marriage, relying instead on the physical maturity of the parties to determine readiness. Customary marriages are also recognised by Gambian Law and are governed by customary laws and traditions of both parties so long as these are not “repugnant to justice and morality or inconsistent with the provision of any Act or other Law in force” as per section 11 of the District Tribunal Act of 1933.

In short, the age of contracting marriages under both Sharia and Customary Law (which, together are applicable to well over 90 per cent of the population) is not clearly defined, and it is not unheard of that girls as young as 11 and 12 are married away, incapable of giving informed consent. However, the law is being reviewed and revised to harmonise it with the Convention on Children’s Rights and other international child rights instruments. (See section II.2.2.1 below)

Currently, efforts are under way in the form of education campaigns to change prevailing attitudes and preferences that encourage early marriage. At least three NGOs have made campaigning against early marriage a central focus of their activities. Also, one of the goals of the
National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women is to contribute to the reduction and elimination of early marriage, mainly through communication initiatives.

II.2.2 Laws and policies under preparation

Gaps and inconsistency amongst the laws has been mentioned as a problem in protecting children against sexual abuse and exploitation. In terms of legislation reform of public law and public policies a National Policy on Children has been prepared and a Children Bill has been drafted which when passed into law will become a comprehensive code on children.

II.2.2.1 Children Bill, 2003

A Children Bill has been drafted. It gathers all the laws relating to children scattered throughout the Laws of The Gambia and it also harmonises these laws with the UN CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other relevant international Conventions. The Bill harmonises the definition of a child and includes many other innovative provisions relating to minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls, as well as age of criminal responsibility and harmful traditional practices affecting children. Section 24 states that “No child shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage and accordingly, a marriage so contracted shall be null and void and of no effect whatsoever”. Section 25(1)(c) further states that “No parent, guardian or any other person shall give out a child in marriage”.

II.2.2.2 Draft National Policy on Children, 2003

A draft National Policy on Children has been prepared. This provides a co-coordinated policy framework for child rights and child protection interventions, including sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The policy will soon to go to Cabinet and National Assembly for their endorsement.

II.2.3 Implementation

Abuse and neglect of children can only be redressed if they are reported. Many cases of abuse and neglect go unpunished simply because the victims are unable to take such steps, or they may be ignorant of the existence of such institutional facilities. Parental authority and traditional practices that condone child abuse in the thin guise of discipline are readily accepted as a natural right of a parent. This in turn engenders fear in victims of abuse who often suffer in silence. The end result, according to some Social Welfare reports, are mood disorders, emotionally traumatized children and other personality disorders, which may affect the victim well into adolescence.

In The Gambia, one European consulate reported that they had knowledge of five of their nationals who were reported to the police in the last two years for abusing children. In all five instances, the cases never made it to court. The speculation was that the accused abusers paid substantial money to families and witnesses to withdraw the charges leaving the abuser unpunished and the children involved unprotected. The Gambian Police informed the researchers that they currently have four cases of reported child sexual abuse and exploitation by European men under investigation.

75 Initial Report of The Gambia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/3/add.61, 26 September 2000
76 “Gambia…the Smiling Coast!” Child Protection Alliance and Terre des Hommes, January 2003
While the Tourism Offences Act 2003 and the Children Bill under preparation are important legislative reforms, it is only when these laws are fully and effectively implemented that they will accord children the protection that was intended. All efforts must be made to ensure that this Act and the Children Bill when it becomes law are effectively and completely implemented.

III. Social Programmes

III.1 Prevention programmes

When asked the question what actions could be taken to stop child sex tourism, almost all interviewees said awareness of the issue should be raised. The Department of Social Welfare backed by UNICEF as well as the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) has taken the lead in raising awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse of children through research and documentation of its various manifestations, dimensions, causes and probable solutions. The CPA is an umbrella body for organizations working or interested in child rights issues.

While there are some initiatives like the Girls’ Education Programme, which may have the ultimate effect of preventing the sexual exploitation of children, few programmes exist specifically for the prevention of sexual exploitation of children. The CPA has an awareness-raising programme on child abuse and child exploitation in general, including sexual exploitation. It also has an information campaign aimed at breaking the silence surrounding child sexual abuse and exploitation. Working mainly with young children it is using awareness raising as a prevention strategy. It also organises some training on child abuse and exploitation for its member organisations. There has been strong and sustained advocacy by UNICEF and other partners aimed at galvanising the Government and other stakeholders into action, which will prevent and protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation.

With regard to sexually transmitted infections, the State has taken the lead in the battle against HIV/AIDS. In recent months, Government made official pledges to commit resources to the fight against AIDS mainly through IEC that target the youth population. Since then, many national and international NGOs, youth groups and the National Youth Council have joined in IEC efforts against HIV/AIDS. The major activities have been concerts by popular local bands as well as youth workshops and sensitisation sessions in rural communities. There is also a Peer Health Education programme for in school which includes HIV/AIDS prevention and some aspects of life skills education.

III.2 Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

There is a problem with the range of alternatives that are available to children who are sexually abused and exploited. The lack of a place to report was also mentioned many times as a problem in the CPA/Terre des Hommes study and the Department of Social Welfare in The Gambia is mindful of these limitations. The department has set up a Child Care Unit with a remit to institute child protection policies and procedures. Some of these processes are already in place with respect to the monitoring of child abuse cases. Currently, the Department has developed monitoring procedures with the police and at least two children/women based NGOs have undertaken joint child protection visits.
There is not a long tradition of NGO programming for victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation in The Gambia. At the moment there are no known programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration for the victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse outside the Government set-up. The Department of Social Welfare has a Child Care Unit, which intervenes in few reported cases and offers counselling and reintegration services to victims. It has no systematic outreach programme specifically aimed at identifying, recovering and rehabilitating victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. There is an urgent need to build capacity, encourage and facilitate NGO involvement in the general area of child protection programming especially in prevention, recovery and rehabilitation. In partnership with Standard Chartered Bank, a Child Drop-In Centre has been established for at-risk children.

PART II: INSTITUTIONS

I. International institutions

The UN agencies and other international organisations, are supporting the Government to provide basic health and education services to children and women through the provision of financial and technical assistance as well as through tailored projects and activities that promote their well-being. As part of the UN Reform, the programme cycles of UNICEF, UNDP, and UNFPA are now harmonized, which makes co-funding of activities much easier. In addition to addressing fundamental rights to education and health, 2002-2006 UNICEF-Government of The Gambia Country Programme of Co-operation contains a programme specially geared towards protecting the rights of children in need of special protection.

I.1 UNHCR

UNHCR office in Banjul covers programmes in The Gambia, with small caseloads of urban and camp-based refugees.80 In 2002, UNHCR assisted 1,443 refugees in The Gambia (out of a total of 12,120 persons) with medical activities and they also benefited from protection81. Allegations of sexual exploitation of refugee children in West Africa have received widespread media attention in 2001. Protection of the alleged child victims, remedial and preventive activities were prioritised and action initiated that year82.

I.2 UNAIDS/WHO and World Bank

Global surveillance of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)83 mapped in 2002 the geographical distribution of HIV in The Gambia through HIV sentinel sites for different population groups, in relation to population density, major urban areas and communication routes84.

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80 Africa Fact Sheet – June 2002, UNHCR
81 Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children, An independent evaluation of the impact of UNHCR’s activities, May 2002
82 Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme – Standing Committee 24th meeting, EC/52/SC/CRP.12, 30 May 2002
83 Global Surveillance of HIV/AIDS and STIs is a joint effort of WHO and UNAIDS. The UNAIDS/WHO Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance, initiated in November 1996, guides respective activities. The primary objective of the Working Group is to strengthen national, regional and global structures and networks for improved monitoring and surveillance of HIV/AIDS and STIs.
84 Epidemiological Fact Sheet, UNAIDS/WHO, 2002 Update
In 2001, The Gambia signed a US$15 million Credit Agreement with the International Development Association (IDA/World Bank) to implement the HIV/AIDS Rapid Response Project (HARRP) over four years\(^8\). Under this project, the Government is addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS through its line Departments of State, civil society organisations, and communities. HARRP is an expanded multi-sectoral response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic\(^\text{86}\). Component I is developing institutional capacity to develop and implement an HIV/AIDS campaign based on a national strategy and action plan, and its monitoring and evaluation and Component IV is supporting community-based initiatives by Civil society organisations and other groups for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support to people living with HIV/AIDS. Target beneficiaries are notably people who have no or limited knowledge about HIV and AIDS, and who are in danger of being exposed to the disease because they are unaware of the problem and how to prevent infection; and people who are in “high-risk” category of being exposed to the disease, including prostitutes and their clients, truck drivers or long-distance transport personnel, migrants workers, etc.

\textbf{I.3 UNFPA}

UNFPA is not directly intervening in this area. However, it has a programme that deals with Adolescent Reproductive Health, which can contribute, in reducing sexual exploitation of children. In 2001, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)\(^8\) proposed to support a comprehensive population programme over a five-year period, starting in January 2002, to assist the Government of The Gambia in achieving its population and development objectives\(^8\).

The programme is consistent with the Government’s overall objectives on population and development as stated in the programme for sustained development. The overall goal of the Government as stated in the national population policy is to improve the quality of life and raise the standard of living for all Gambians, by, among other things: achieving universal access to quality education with particular priority given to primary and technical education and on-the-job training, eliminating gender disparities in access to, and retention in, school and eliminating all forms of discrimination against girls and women.

\textbf{I.4 UNDP}

Its mission is to support The Government of The Gambia's initiatives in building partnerships to fight poverty. UNDP is mainly concerned with: Poverty Alleviation, Good Governance, Economic Management and Capacity Building, through the Capacity 2015 Programme. Capacity 2015 is a global partnership mechanism assisting countries to develop the capacity of their professionals, institutions, and systems to formulate and implement strategies for sustainable

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\(^8\) World Bank – Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Programme for the Africa Region (MAP)
\(^8\) The Gambia HIV/AIDS Rapid Response Project (HARRP), project launched by the President of The Gambia, April 2001.
\(^8\) UNFPA's mandate is to build the knowledge and the capacity to respond to needs in population and family planning, to promote awareness of population problems in both developed and developing countries and possible strategies to deal with these problems, to assist developing countries, at their request, in dealing with their population problems, in the forms and means best suited to the individual country's needs and to play a leading role in the United Nations System in promoting population programmes, and to coordinate projects supported by the Fund.
\(^8\) United Nations Population Fund proposed projects and programmes, Second regular session 2001, DP/FPA/GMB/5, 10-14 September, New York
development to achieve local, national and international development goals. Two of the Programme Components are of interest for the fight against Sexual Exploitation: nurturing young local leaders (important given the impact of HIV/AIDS), and creating and nurturing leadership among women and other marginalized groups. The initiative will promote investment in social capital development that enhances the engagement, participation, and understanding of people and their ability to influence their circumstances. Finally, UNDP approved a $2.1 million project mitigating against economic and social exclusion over the period 2000-200389.

I.5 ILO and IPEC

During its nearly ten years of existence, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has gained extensive experience in mobilizing global action to combat child labour. In all IPEC participating countries, policies and programmes are implemented to prevent child labour and withdraw children from work including commercial sex. IPEC activities in Africa have expanded rapidly in recent years. The key issue being addressed in the region is elimination of the worst forms of child labour, particularly in commercial agriculture or the informal sector where children are often exposed to dangerous and hazardous conditions. The action programmes in all these countries include policy and legal reform, formal and non-formal education, vocational training, social and legal protection and the improvement of working and living conditions90. Unfortunately, The Gambia has not yet signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding), nor is it a country associated with IPEC91.

The Fight Against Social and Economic Exclusion (FASE) is a three-year programme funded by UNDP and executed by the ILO, with Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment as the national counterpart. The Strategy for Poverty Alleviation Coordinating Office (SPACO) is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the programme. FASE targets traditional women’s groups and individual micro and small entrepreneurs, including unemployed youth. Its aim is to strengthen community response to poverty, promoting full participation of the poor in the life of the nation and the development of national policies favorable to the poor. Its specific objectives include the empowerment of women and youths as well as micro-entrepreneurs to develop capabilities and sustainable income generating activities as well as support specific social protection schemes. FASE’s expected result is that poor women, youth and micro/small entrepreneurs will be able to carry on sustainable livelihoods and develop collective responses to break the social and economic barriers that keep poor persons from moving out of poverty.

I.6 UNESCO

The main mission of the Dakar Office (Cluster Office to The Gambia, in the Central and Western Africa and Regional Bureau for Education in Africa) is to promote and develop, at the regional level, UNESCO’s actions, notably in the field of education, through the organization of periodic ministerial conferences and other forms of regular consultations with Governments, NGOs, institutions and the intellectual community of African Member States. In The Gambia, UNESCO Headquarters towards the end of 2002 approved the micro-project of Gambia National Commission for UNESCO “Assistance to Street-children”. This project which was implemented

89 United Nations Population Fund proposed projects and programmes, Second regular session 2001, DP/FPA/GMB/5, 10-14 September, New York
91 ibid
by the Department of Social Welfare with support from UNESCO/BREDAR, produced a Video Documentary on the updated situation of Street Children in The Gambia.

I.7 The World Bank

Using its financial and human resources, the World Bank, has been and continues to support the Government of The Gambia in its development objectives. Under the 1998 Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), the Bank adopted a combination of lending and advisory services that focused on economic management and capacity building, private sector development, rural development and social development.


The Education Sector project supports the Government’s Policy 1998-2005, which places emphasis on increasing access to education for all including girls and improving the quality and relevance of basic education. The Participatory Health, Population and Nutrition Project (PHPNP) aims to improve the quality of and access to family health services, including reproductive, infant and child health services, nutrition services. The Poverty Alleviation and Capacity Building Project seek to improve the living conditions of the poor, mainly in urban areas.

I.8 UN reform and inter-agency collaboration

1.7.1 HIV/AIDS Thematic Group

Formed in 1996, the Theme Group on HIV/AIDS was co-sponsored by UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, UNFPA, and the World Bank. In 2000, membership was extended to FAO, WFP, EU, and DfID. The Department of State for Health is a member. In 2002, a survey was conducted on the socio-cultural context of HIV/AIDS with the coordination of the UN System. In July 2002, a landmark report jointly produced by UNICEF, UNAIDS, and WHO entitled “Young People and HIV/AIDS: Opportunity in Crisis” was jointly launched.

1.7.2 Education Thematic Group

A Theme Group on Education started late 2002, and was launched by the Secretary of State for Education. UNICEF holds the chair for this Theme Group. There are three representatives from government, i.e. from the Department of State for Education (DoSE). Other member agencies are UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, WFP and FAO. The UNESCO national representation was present during the launching.

UNGEI (UN Girls’ Education Initiative) is a pressure group whose mission is to ensure that the goals on gender equality in education are met through collaborative efforts among UN agencies, civil society, governments and donor agencies.
II. Regional institutions

II.1 ECOWAS

ECOWAS was established in May 1975 to promote trade, co-operation and self-reliance in West Africa. It has the following members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ECOWAS sub-region adopted in Dakar (Senegal) on 17th December 2001, a Political Declaration and an Action Plan against trafficking in human beings in the West Africa region (UNIS, 20th December 2001).

The Plan of Action commits ECOWAS countries to:

- Urgently take action against trafficking in persons in 2002-2003;
- Set achievable goal and objectives;
- Ratify and fully implement crucial international instruments of ECOWAS and the United Nations that:
  1. Strengthen laws against human trafficking and;
  2. Protect victims of trafficking, especially women and children.

The Action Plan calls for:

- New special police units to combat trafficking of persons;
- Training for:
  1. Police
  2. Customs and Immigration officials
  3. Prosecutors and Judges
- Training that focuses on methods used in:
  1. Preventing such trafficking;
  2. Prosecuting the traffickers;
  3. Protecting the rights of victims;
  4. Protecting the victims from the traffickers
- ECOWAS countries to:
  1. Set up direct communication between their border control agencies; and
  2. Expand effort to gather data on human trafficking.

II.2 European Union

European Union is co-financing with NGOs and complements the main financial instruments for development co-operation, particularly the European Development Funds for the developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). In June 2003, using the resources of the 7th, 8th and 9th European Development Fund, the Commission allocated 120,000,000 Euro for the process of deconcentration – Zone ACP (2003-2006).

Decentralised Cooperation constitutes an approach to development that places the agents at the centre of the implementation of the project, with the dual objective of adapting operations to needs while rendering them viable. This approach was underlined most particularly in the Lomé
IV Convention between the ACP and the EC and in Council Regulation (EEC) n° 443/92 of 25 February 1992, in relation to financial and technical aid and economic co-operation with the developing countries in Latin America and Asia. The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000, underlines the importance, which the EU attaches to the principle of a partnership which encompasses all those involved.

The Community will support sustainable development activities and initiatives undertaken by Community decentralized co-operation agents and developing countries, with a view to promoting in particular:

- More participation in development, in response to initiatives from the peoples needs in developing countries;
- A contribution to the diversification and strengthening of civil societies and to the democratization of the grassroots in such societies;
- The mobilisation of community decentralized cooperation agents and mobilize support for these objectives within the framework of structured programmes.

**PART III: CIVIL SOCIETY**

**I. Non-Governmental Organisations - Children’s rights and education**

NGOs are significant partners in the provision of basic needs and services to which all children are entitled. These independent national and international organisations provide much needed financial, technical, research and basic services to children and women92.

Currently, substantial efforts are under way in the form of reproductive health and youth education campaigns to change the prevailing cultural attitudes and preferences that encourage early marriage and motherhood. The three main women’s NGOs – BAFROW, GAMCOTRAP and APGWA have made campaigning against early marriage and female circumcision a central focus of their activities.

Several NGOs are involved in the support of the education sector and the Forum for African Women Educationalists, The Gambia Chapter (FAWEGAM), in particular is devoted to encouraging increased enrolment and retention of the girl-child and to improving the quality and relevance of educational experiences for girls. In rural communities, several private religious organisations have been responsible for the establishment of secondary schools in particular, filling an enormous and critical gap in some locations. UN agencies, especially UNICEF in collaboration with the Government, are also involved in providing technical and financial support to the education sector93.

The NGOs such as Action Aid The Gambia, Gambia Family Planning Association, Worldview International Foundation, Association for the Development of Women and Children (ADWAC) and the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) focus on the general promotion of children’s welfare94. VSO Gambia supports the Government's vision for poverty reduction and works to benefit target

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93 *ibid*
groups who suffer most from being disadvantaged: women and girls, young people, the unemployed, non-literate people, people who are old and infirm, disabled people, poor people in both urban and isolated rural areas.

ActionAid The Gambia is a Non-Governmental Organizations that began operating in The Gambia in 1979, and now works with 200,000 people. It supports the basic rights and needs of poor people, working at a practical level to improve their access to services and lobbying government and other decision-makers to change policies and practices that affect their lives.

There are other NGOs and programmes like the Social Development Fund (SDF), which provide vocational skills and/or micro-finance credits for adolescents who drop out of school or did not go to school at all. Through vocational skills and sometimes start-up capital, these adolescents and young people are being given an alternative to prostitution as a way of getting money to satisfy their basic needs.

Finally, TANGO (The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations) coordinated the preparation of the alternative Report to The Gambia Government’s Initial Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This institution is the umbrella organisation for NGOs in The Gambia, consisting of 59 members including both national and international NGOs.

Schools, children’s rights NGOs such as Defence for Children International, Soroptimist International, SOS Children’s Village, and other community-based groups are among the institutions, which could serve as a means of addressing the problem of abused and neglected children.95

II. Non-Governmental Organisations - Sexual Exploitation of children

1.2.1 Child Protection Alliance

The Child Protection Alliance is an umbrella association of organisations working or interested in the prevention of child abuse and exploitation or the protection of children from abuse and exploitation. It was formed at the behest of UNICEF after the participation of The Gambia in the 1996 Stockholm Congress on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the follow-up meeting on the Stockholm Declaration in Dakar in 2000. Since its formation in 2001, the CPA has developed very rapidly, attracting funding both locally and internationally. It is now an affiliated ECPAT organisation and attended the 2002 ECPAT Congress.

The twin objectives of the CPA are to raise awareness on child abuse and exploitation thereby breaking the culture of silence surrounding it; and to build national/institutional capacity in the prevention of child abuse and exploitation and protection of victims. In its first year of operations it was able to carry out a number of sensitisation and capacity building activities for children as well as professionals on such issues as child abandonment, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and exploitation of children, corporal punishment and teenage pregnancy. The CPA also acts as a link between child victims of abuse and providers of services such as counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration. They encourage children to report

95 Initial report of The Gambia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/3/add.61, 26 September 2000

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incidents of abuse to them, which are investigated and appropriate advice and support given to the service provider and the child victim.

With support from UNICEF, they have also trained journalists on how to report cases of child abuse and exploitation in the news. Through its special relationship with children’s organisations, the CPA is sensitising and building the capacity of children on child abuse and exploitation issues and encouraging children to monitor and report child abuse and exploitation cases in the community. As a result of this effort, child victims of abuse, concerned adults and children are beginning to report cases of child abuse and exploitation. The children themselves are the ‘foot soldiers’ in the fight against child abuse and exploitation and breaking the silence surrounding it.

“Voice of The Young”, which is a children’s organisation affiliated to the CPA, is the vanguard in this crusade. The other innovative dimension of the CPA and its approach to child abuse and exploitation is that through the involvement of children in its work, it is facilitating the participatory rights of children, while at the same time raising awareness and building capacity on child protection issues. It has used child-friendly approaches like drawings, essays and debates to raise the awareness of children on abuse and exploitation and to encourage them to report cases.

In collaboration with Terre des Hommes of Netherlands, the CPA conducted a study on child sex tourism in The Gambia and the Involvement of Dutch Tourists. The CPA/Terre des Hommes study complements this current UNICEF supported study.

I.2.2 SOS Children’s Village

SOS Children's Villages is a private, non-political and non-denominational welfare international organisation. SOS offers orphaned and destitute children regardless of race, nationality or creed, a new and permanent home and prepares them for an independent life. SOS International exists in 132 countries worldwide and operates in more than 1,500 projects including kindergartens, youth facilities, Hermann Gmeiner schools, vocational training and production centres, medical centres and SOS Emergency Relief Programmes. SOS Kinderdorf International is the umbrella organisation to which all national SOS Children's Village Associations are affiliated. In The Gambia, SOS provides care and a home for orphans and children living in difficult circumstances. SOS has not organised any activities related to sexual exploitation of children, but it is taking charge of vulnerable children exposed to sexual exploitation.
CONCLUSION

Although the original scope of this study included both sexual exploitation and abuse of children, there were considerable methodological constraints concerning collection of data on various forms of sexual abuse. As mentioned above, there are few official reported cases of child sexual abuse. Also, the subject of child sexual abuse, particularly incest, is taboo and victims as well as perpetrators are stigmatised. Therefore, vulnerable children who were interviewed were reluctant to discuss their own personal experiences, if any. In only one instance did a young schoolgirl admit to a case of incest within her family. Time constraints and the need to cover a wide geographic area militated against following up on anecdotal reports on individual sexual abuse cases. Until a high level of national awareness of child sexual abuse is reached it will be difficult for researchers to determine or estimate the prevalence of child sexual abuse and assess varying impacts on victims. However, the Study clearly established that sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children are prevalent and becoming growing phenomena in The Gambia. It also established that while tourists are involved, it is not just tourists who are exploiting children sexually. Nationals are involved as well as some members of the expatriate community residing in The Gambia. It also established that there is growing acknowledgement of the problem of sexual exploitation of children by tourists and other adults. While there are some responses to it, they are inadequate and piecemeal. Few, if any, NGOS are involved in the area of recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. There is some legislation to address the problem, but there are gaps and implementation has not been always effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the Study, the following recommendations are made:

Prevention

✓ Sensitisation and awareness creation on issues of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children directed at the following:

  o The parents and communities in selected vulnerable areas;
  o Children themselves in and around tourist areas and in schools.

✓ Information campaign targeted at tourists on child sexual exploitation based on the new Tourism Offences Act 2003 and the future Children Bill.

✓ Sensitisation and training of law enforcement officers on issues of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse and exploitation cases.

✓ Enhanced protection of children against exploitation by training professionals working with children on child exploitation issues.

✓ Intervention strategies recognising the need to include public sensitisation and awareness about the deep psychological effects of sexual abuse and exploitation on children and links with child and later adult prostitution.
To increase awareness of youth/adolescent on HIV/AIDS and STIs prevention nationwide.

Ensuring that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health.

More generally, to raise awareness on the CRC in the country and to foster a culture of respect for the rights of children by training of law professionals, law-makers and policy makers on the CRC and other International Child Rights Instruments.

Contributing to the empowerment of adolescents and youth and their active and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels and in the development process.

There should be life skills training for adolescents and young people both in and out of school, particularly those at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Youth friendly centres providing services in all the administrative divisions. These should be staffed by well trained and youth friendly staff.

Strengthen partnerships among Government, UN Agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders to address the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Strengthen DoSE Counselling Unit finalise the Sexual Harassment Policy and implemented this in all schools. This involves working with education officials, school authorities, Gambia Teachers’ Union and Parent Teachers Associations.

Legislation and its implementation

Clarification of definition of ‘Child’ and age of consent to sexual relations. The age of consent to sexual relations with an adult, including someone in authority or position of trust over the child, and to marriage needs to be the same and needs to apply equally to females and males to be in line with Article 2 of the CRC. The current age of 16 for girls should be maintained and also applied to boys and rigidly enforced.

Legislation needs to clearly define and distinguish between various criminal offences of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment against female and male children, carrying stringent, maximum penalties for each offence.

Specific legislation needs to be enacted against perpetrators and intermediaries within the tourism industry, carrying stringent and maximum penalties against sexual abuse or exploitation of both female and male children.

Education policy needs to include strategies to eliminate sexual harassment and discourage teenage pregnancies within schools. The draft Policy on Sexual Harassment in schools should be finalised quickly and implemented in all schools. There needs to be very strict legal and administrative measures against sexual abusers of children including listing them in a register.

Legislation to guarantee the girl’s right to continue education during and after pregnancy.
Optimal use of traditional legal structures alongside national institutions, to assist in investigation and adjudication of sexual abuse and exploitation cases within communities. Provide necessary training and sensitisation to traditional courts as well as established women’s groups and leaders.

Children need to have access to effective complaints procedures. Children often do not report sexual abuse because they feel that they may not be taken seriously or that they will be further punished for their disclosures.

Legislation must be considered to limit access of children to nightclubs. An administrative measure must be put in place to implement this.

Strict controls need to be put in place to limit unaccompanied children’s access to hotels, bars and restaurants in the TDA.

Strict enforcement of defilement legislation against teachers, “sugar daddies” and other adult men, including tourists, who engage in illegal sex with underage girls.

The law on pornography needs to be amended to avoid the penalisation of child victims of pornography.

Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of victims

Specific programmes should be considered that target children engaged in prostitution for rehabilitation and reintegration as well as other victims of sexual exploitation within schools and the greater community.

Within the private sector, the tourist industry, Internet service providers and video club owners have an important role to play in the prevention of child sexual exploitation. Codes of conduct are very suitable constructions to give guidance to the measures the tourism industry could take, both by foreign tour operators as well as local tourist service providers, like hotels, restaurants, etc.

Whilst separate efforts taken up by exemplary Government departments and interventions already in place under the auspices of a few NGOs and religious organisations need to be commended, it is important that a coordinated approach be established to consolidate and maximise gains at all levels.

NGOs, both local and international, should be encouraged to go into recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for victims as well and prevention programmes.

Provide support to protect children at highest risk, particularly adolescents and children in conflict with the law, and children affected by sexual exploitation and abuse in the study area.

Provide livelihood skills training, remedial education and micro-finance support for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

There should be a toll free telephone hotline staffed by trained Social Workers around-the-clock for reporting of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation.
✓ There should be community-based child protection committees for the monitoring and reporting of sexual abuse and exploitation cases.

✓ Psychosocial counselling and free health care service should be provided for victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

✓ The Government of The Gambia, as a matter of urgency, should ratify the Optional Protocols to the CRC and implement their provisions.

✓ The birth registration system needs to be strengthened and made accessible and affordable. Acquisition of birth certificate will facilitate the determination of age so that children can be effective and comprehensively prevented from having access to Tourist Areas or secure successful prosecution of perpetrators on court.

✓ The National Plan of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children needs to be finalised soon and adequate financial and human resources allocated for its implementation and monitoring.

✓ The Police and the Department of Social Welfare should establish a database on child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. They should link and share information on child sexual abuse and exploitation with Interpol.

**Coordination**

✓ There needs to be a central co-ordinating mechanism for child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation matters. To prevent the formation of too many committees, commissions or taskforces, the multi-sectoral Committee on Child Protection that is working on the elaboration of National Plan of Action Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children should be broadened and maintained. The National Taskforce on Sex Tourism should be the sub-committee of the multi-sectoral Committee on Child Protection. There could be other sub-committees as and when necessary. There should be a Focal Point at the Department of Social Welfare responsible for child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation matters. Among other things, the focal point should be responsible for the monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and preparing annual reports for submission to the proposed National Commission on Children through the multi-sectoral Committee on Child Protection.


Africa Fact Sheet – *June 2002, UNHCR*


Child Protection Alliance and Terre des Hommes, “Gambia...The Smiling Coast!”, January 2003


Department of Social Welfare Draft Social Welfare Policy


ECPAT Newsletter (October 2002)


Epidemiological Fact Sheet, *UNAIDS/WHO, 2002 Update*

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s programme – *Standing Committee 24th meeting, EC/52/SC/CRP.12, 30 May 2002*

The Gambia HIV/AIDS Rapid Response Project (HARRP), *project launch by the President of The Gambia, April 2001*


Initial Report of The Gambia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, *CRC/C/3/add.61, 26 September 2000*


Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children, *An independent evaluation of the impact of UNHCR’s activities, May 2002*

National Disability Survey (1998)

National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women (1999-2009)


UNDP/UN System/The Gambia Government, 2002


Second World Congress Against Commercial Exploitation of Children (The Yokohoma Congress), Yokohoma, Japan, December, 2001

United Nations Population Fund proposed projects and programmes, *Second regular session 2001, DP/FPA/GMB/5, 10-14 September, New York*

UNHCR and Save the Children-UK, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, 2001*


STUDY ON THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE GAMBIA


World Bank – Multi-Country HIV/AIDS programme for the Africa Region (MAP), 2002
LITERATURE REVIEW

Various international and national documents as well as other relevant writings were extensively reviewed as part of the first phase of the sexual exploitation study.

A UNICEF report titled ‘Regional Report on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in West and Central Africa’ was particularly useful for understanding various types of sexual exploitation of children in Africa as well as the particular vulnerabilities of African children, particularly child victims of armed conflicts, child refugees, child domestics and children working in the streets as well as children involved in voluntary migrations to neighbouring countries. The UNICEF regional report detailed significant advances in the awareness of child sexual exploitation internationally and provided overviews of status of national legislations in countries within the sub-region.

Several reports published by the International Campaign to End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) were also reviewed, namely its Mission Report on West Africa (2000) which provided an overview of the situation in several African countries as well as efforts being made by Governments, NGOs and other actors to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children. The ECPAT report, ‘A Step Forward’, provided information on the status of implementation of the Agenda for Action adopted at the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and most important, an model Plan of Action that can be used as a basis to formulate a National Plan of Action for The Gambia. Another significant report published by UNHCR and Save the Children-UK entitled ‘Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone (2002)’ provided interesting findings on the scope and nature of sexual exploitation of vulnerable refugee children as well as the consequences of sexual violence for these children.


These reports highlight children in especially vulnerable circumstances who, as this study demonstrates, are most susceptible to sexual exploitation and abuse, such as: street-children, refugee children, children with disabilities, orphans or wards, child domestics, schoolgirls in primary and junior secondary level education. Several of them provide comprehensive guides on compliance of national laws and social policies with the CRC with entire sections or chapters to child sexual abuse and exploitation. These reports cover legislation and policies concerning related areas of rights issues, such as child labour, sexual harassment, and early or forced marriages.
Other important studies were consulted which provided information on theoretical and human rights dimensions of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in other countries (See bibliography).
ANNEX I: METHODOLOGY

The Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children Study is structured along a three-dimensional conceptual framework: (I) Assessment, (II) Analysis, (III) Recommendations.

(I) Assessment

The first stage of research consisted of a thorough assessment of the manifestations and problems of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in The Gambia. Four months of fieldwork were devoted to data collection. Various research techniques were used to elicit information on socio-demographic profiles of victims, namely, age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and so on. Fieldworkers also focused attention on eliciting information on knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, motivations and practices of various actors, including victims and vulnerable children, perpetrators, intermediaries, families, community members and traditional leaders as well as Government officials in relevant sectors. Data collection also included a review of existing national laws, social policies and other interventions for treatment and reintegration of child victims. Field workers also distributed questionnaires that examine the role of international organisations and NGOs in protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse.

(II) Analysis

This report constitutes a thorough analysis of all the data gathered and focuses on salient as well as subtle causal factors at individual, family, community and national levels that foster environments in which children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. The analysis takes into consideration the voices of children engaged in prostitution and schoolchildren. A more limited amount of data from other groups particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation, such as street-children, refugees and underage domestic servants are also analysed closely in this report. The analysis includes an examination of deeper issues, such as traditional or cultural beliefs and practices, experiences of poverty, economic inducements, inadequate access to education as well as legislative and policy frameworks and institutional constraints. External factors such as political and economic instability in neighbouring countries are also considered. The analysis also takes into consideration adults’ perceptions of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

(III) Subject Samples

The importance of obtaining rich qualitative data meant that research subjects were pre-selected based on their level of knowledge, experience, articulation and willingness to participate in a study of such sensitive nature. Many prostitutes and intermediaries were naturally wary of compromising their identity and security and therefore were reluctant to participate. Several focus groups and individual interviews were held in order to compare information across age groups, gender, ethnicity and other variables particularly areas of consistency or incongruity in what sex workers and other subjects had to say. Thus, the study is limited in terms of its representativeness of the overall population and in its ability to generalise about the situation of child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in The Gambia. For the most part the study excludes those children who are kept at home and do not attend school and are not street-children, children under 9 years of age and disabled children. What this study does provide is a thorough assessment and analysis of the experiences, attitudes, challenges and constraints of certain victims and their families, their
communities and institutions entrusted with child protection. Below is a breakdown of characteristics of subject samples for each chapter.

The findings and discussions are based on a total sample of 12 focus groups of sex workers comprising 59 females and 1 male ranging from ages to 15 to 56. This total sample is sub-divided into subgroup A consisting of those sex workers under-18 (or 17 and under); and, subgroup B consisting of six underage sex workers (case-studies) of which four cases are age 17 years and under and two cases are in the 18 to 25 category. The under-18 group was deliberately over sampled, as this was the main target group for the study.

The names of places and individuals used here have been altered to protect the identity of informants and interviewee for the study. Thus names used here do not knowingly relate to any real person dead or alive.

(III) Recommendations

The section on recommendations includes a review of lessons learnt and proposes a method to proceed in combating the menace of sexual exploitation of abuse of children in the country.
ANNEX II: FIELD TEAM

The field team consisted of the consultant who was responsible for overall supervision and monitoring of fieldwork, one full-time field supervisor, two full-time field workers and several local fieldworkers who assisted as organisers and interlocutors in some focus group discussions with prostitutes. A full-time translator/transcriber and an accounts clerk/administrative assistant assisted in data management and organisation and conducted fieldwork as required. The field team worked together, one site at a time, with fieldworkers responsible for collecting data according to assigned domains.
ANNEX III: RESEARCH TOOLS

(I) Case studies - The six case studies selected for inclusion in this study all concern the life histories and experiences of individual underage victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The main research methods and tools used were open-ended interviews with subjects as well as some weeks of observation of participants in their daily lives.

(II) Primary data collection was achieved through focus group discussions with adult prostitutes and child victims of sexual exploitation. Informal group discussions were conducted among intermediaries who act as intermediaries in procurement of underage girls for sex, as well as individual semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable informants, such as taxi-drivers, night watchmen, security guards, employees in the tourism sector etc. (See Appendix for listing of subjects interviewed and methods). Also, participant and non-participant observation was conducted for several weeks around the TDA. Focus groups with schoolchildren were conducted using standard question guidelines although questions and topics were tailored to reflect the unique experiences and attitudes of their categories. Street-children were mainly interviewed individually or in groups of two or three since it was more difficult to organise them into formal focus groups. Less formal group interviews were conducted among maids, a dance troupe and some other youths.

(III) Extensive interview schedules or question guidelines covered important forms of sexual exploitation involving ‘responsible’ members of the community as well as teachers and other individuals who are in positions of trust and authority over children. Standardised question guidelines also covered areas such as domestic sexual abuse – incest and sexual relations with wards or underage ‘domestic servants’. Emphasis was on the extent to which children expressed awareness of these various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse and on their attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, experiences and so on of these offences. The focus was less on individual experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse, which are difficult to elicit in group discussions, and more on gaining an understanding of what children themselves thought were their vulnerabilities and their attitudes regarding causes of and solutions to sexual crimes adults commit against them.

Informal interviews and participant observations were conducted in local communities to document cultural and religious attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding child sexuality including local meanings and understandings of child sexual exploitation. Interviews were conducted with individual police officers, health workers as well as older street youths or idlers.

(IV) A questionnaire was designed to elicit information on existence or knowledge of existence of protection measures and procedures available for prevention, recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as perceived roles of international organisations, Government, NGOs and civil society organisations, in elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Questionnaires were supplemented by key person interviews with officials in critical Government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders.
## ANNEX IV: RESEARCH TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Research tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children engaged in prostitution</td>
<td>The six case-studies selected for inclusion in this Study concern the life histories and experiences of individual underage victims of prostitution. Open-ended interviews with subject, some weeks of participant observation in their daily lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediaries in procurement, <em>bumsters</em></td>
<td>Informal group discussions. Participant and non-participant observations around tourism areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible members of the community, teachers, other individuals in positions of trust and authority over children</td>
<td>Extensive interview schedules or question guidelines. Standardised questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable informants, such as taxi-drivers, night watchmen, security guards, employees in tourism sector</td>
<td>Individual semi-structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>Informal interviews and participant observation in local communities to document cultural and religious attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding child sexuality including local meanings and understandings of child sexual exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International organisations, Government, NGOs and civil society</td>
<td>Questionnaire designed to elicit information on existence or knowledge of existence of protective measures and procedures available for prevention, recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims. Key person interviews with officials in critical Government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders.</td>
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### ANNEX V : TIMETABLE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>TEAM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>1. Desk review of secondary data on international, national and local structures.</td>
<td>Research coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th February 2002</td>
<td>2. Research design:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First design (February 2002) during the methodological seminar in Dakar;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Second design (Mid-May 2002).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First meeting of the technical committee overseeing the sexual exploitation study in The Gambia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid May 2002</td>
<td><strong>Phase Two</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fieldwork or primary data collection:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Participants observations at tourist resorts, bars, nightclubs;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Informal and casual interviews with informants, mainly bumsters;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Tape or video recorded semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions among adults and children involved in prostitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Views, attitudes and personal experiences of ordinary members of the community:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Focus groups among school children;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Semi-structured interviews with individual schools officials, policemen, market traders, taxi-drivers, local leaders, traditional and religious authorities;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Focus groups among other vulnerable groups of children such as maids, street-children, bumsters, child performers.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Specific case-studies:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a. In-depth interviews and documented life histories of victims of sexual exploitation;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Participants observations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Structures (national and international institutions) that are responsible for child protection:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Questionnaires sent out to several Government departments, NGOs, international organisations, diplomatic missions and other relevant bodies;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Key person interviews with officials in critical Government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2002</td>
<td><strong>Phase Three</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisation and analysis of primary data</td>
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<td>1. Translating and transcribing audiotapes and videocassettes of interviews and focus group discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Analysis of the socio-demographic data.</td>
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<td>3. Analysis of the interviews, focus group and field notes from fieldworkers.</td>
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<td>September 2002</td>
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<td>Full-time field supervision</td>
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<td>Several local field workers</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Phase Four</td>
<td>Writing of the report</td>
<td>Research coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October 2002</td>
<td>1. Submission of a zero draft to the technical committee in The Gambia.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Integration of editorial comments and suggestions for improvement of style and content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2003</td>
<td>3. A first draft was submitted to the scientific committee at CODESRIA for further comments on methodology and presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Submission of this draft to committees in both The Gambia and Senegal for final approval.</td>
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<td>Phase Five</td>
<td>Writing of the final draft</td>
<td>External consultancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2003</td>
<td>1. Revision of the Table of Contents.</td>
<td>UNICEF Gambia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Complementary Consultation with Governmental representative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>3. Collect of additional information (profile background, official documents, legal documents and information from international institutions).</td>
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<td>Phase Six</td>
<td>Validation by the Technical Committee</td>
<td>Technical Committee</td>
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### ANNEX VI: STUDY SAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Total sample (60 persons engaged in prostitution)</th>
<th>Sub-Group A: (14 children engaged in prostitution)</th>
<th>Sub-Group B: (6 case studies)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Total sample (60 persons engaged in prostitution)</td>
<td>Sub-Group A: (14 children engaged in prostitution)</td>
<td>Sub-Group B: (6 case studies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
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<td>26 and above</td>
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<td><strong>Duration in prostitution</strong></td>
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<td>1 to 5 years</td>
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<td>6 to 10 years</td>
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<td>Above 10 years</td>
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Case One: Binta (Manjai Kunda)

Binta is an expressive 19-year old prostitute who not only agreed to cooperate as an important case study but also became an invaluable informant to the research team and participated in organising focus group discussions with other sex-workers in the Manjai area. She has been a professional sex-worker for three years, beginning at the age of 16. Binta’s story is not atypical of that of other young sex-workers working in restaurants and bars around the Manjai/Kotu area for both local and foreign clientele. Binta recounted for us that she was 11 years old when she encountered an older Nigerian lady with a toubab sitting in a local bar. She had gone to the local shop to buy something for her mother when the couple saw her and called her over. She said the Nigerian lady, called Princess, asked her where she lived and said that she and her ‘husband’ were interested in having her work for them as a maid.

Binta then took the couple to her parents’ compound around the corner from the bar and introduced them to her mother. Princess did most of the talking and Binta was able to translate what she was saying to her mother. Her mother explained that the family was very poor, her husband was not employed and that Binta was still in school. Princess promised that she and her toubab would pay for Binta’s school fees and would provide her money each month, which she could contribute to her father’s household. Binta’s mother told the couple to come back later in the evening to meet with her husband, Binta’s stepfather. Princess returned that evening with her toubab and they obtained permission to take Binta. Within the first few weeks, Binta said the toubab, David, would give her extra money and told her to keep it a secret from Princess. After one month, the toubab began coming to her room when Princess was away at the market and began fondling with her. Binta said she allowed the toubab to ‘play’ with her because he would give her plenty of money and clothes and he never allowed Princess to punish her. Also, Binta said that her mother encouraged her to try and be the toubab’s second ‘wife’ so that he could take her (Binta) to ‘Angleterre’.

Binta said that David often travelled to ‘Angleterre’ and when he did, an older Nigerian man, known simply as ‘Uncle’, would come and stay at the house in Princess’ room. Princess had warned her not to say anything to anyone about ‘Uncle’. When Princess was away, ‘uncle’ would approach Binta in private, as David had done, offering her money to fondle her. It was to ‘Uncle’ that she lost her virginity. She did not tell her mother about ‘Uncle’ for fear that it may upset her because he was a Nigerian. According to Binta, it was from her care-giver Princess and her lovers that she became acquainted with prostitution and saw it as a normal practice for young women. She would often watch Princess bring other toubabs to the apartment and introduce them to ‘Uncle’ who would then excuse them for several hours or the entire night.

Eventually, on one occasion, when David returned to The Gambia for holiday, Princess became suspicious about him and Binta and decided to set them up. She pretended to go to the market one morning only to come right back and meet Binta in her room with David. After a terrible row, Princess began insulting Binta and threw her clothes out of the window demanding that she leave. Binta refused to leave and David came to her side insisting that Princess should leave instead. Princess reported the matter to Binta’s parents but the latter supported their daughter. Eventually, Princess succeeded in kicking Binta out of her house but Binta continued to see both David and ‘Uncle’ and to receive money, gifts and foodstuffs for herself and her family. Some two years later, after a bitter quarrel and physical scuffle between Princess and ‘Uncle’, Princess
moved out of the apartment, obtained some fraudulent documentation and travelled to Spain. Binta moved in with ‘Uncle’, taking Princess’ place completely. David eventually stopped coming to The Gambia and ‘Uncle’ was arrested for drug smuggling in Guinea-Bissau and never returned to the country. Unable to keep up the rent payments on her own, Binta moved out of the apartment and began ‘hustling’ full time.

Most of Binta’s customers are local Gambian men – senior civil servants and businessmen among others. She also has ‘regular’ clients who are teachers – Nigerians and Sierra Leoneans. For the most part, she refrains from toubabs. Although they may offer more money, Binta says that she does not find toubabs attractive and she does not trust them. She rents a small room in a local restaurant in Manjai for the specific purpose of receiving her clients. Her own self-contained apartment, which she shares with two other sex-workers is also in Manjai. Binta’s family continues to reside in Manjai as well.

Her family is aware of the way she earns her living and she is not the least bit ashamed. She is well-known and popular in her neighbourhood. She says that she is independent and is content with her life. Binta views prostitution as just a job that gives her a lot of freedom. She decides when she wants to work and whom she will accept as clients. Binta says that she does not give much thought for the future, except maybe to have an opportunity to travel abroad.

Case Two: Solomon (Basse)

Solomon is a 17-year-old refugee from a West African Country who resides from time to time in the refugee camp in Basse. He is an outspoken and self-confessed prostitute catering to both men and women, local, other West African and tourist clients. Solomon’s aunt fled with him and her other four children from Liberia to a refugee camp in a town in Guinea (Conakry). Solomon recalled that he was 12 years at the time yet he would go out into the town begging for alms to bring back to the camp to supplement the rations given to his family. He became familiar with a ‘white man’ with a black cap on his head, who sometimes taught English and Maths skills to children at the camp site. The white man approached Solomon one day and asked after his ‘mother’. Solomon replied that his father had been killed during the conflict in his country and that he never knew who his mother was, that the woman with him at the camp was his father’s sister.

The ‘white man’ then gave him some money and told him to meet him the next day in the town. During their weekly ‘meetings’, the white man would take Solomon to a room in a motel where he fondled him and taught him how to perform fellatio. Although he said he had not minded fellatio, he hated his first experience of anal sex, and bled continuously. He was too afraid and ashamed to mention anything to his aunt and others at the camp. His aunt always believed him when he said the money he brought home came from ‘begging’. Solomon saved most of the money given to him by the ‘white man’. Eventually, the white man had to return to America and promised Solomon that he would come back for him soon. Solomon never heard from him again, despite many letters he sent and phone calls he made.

Soon Solomon ran away to the city, Conakry, where he met a Sierra Leonean youth at a local bar. The Sierra Leonean was known locally among the refugee community as ‘Butterscotch’ referring to both his sexuality and his light complexion. It was through his friendship with this older boy that Solomon got to learn about The Gambia, and the supposed ‘hordes’ of male tourists who come looking for young lovers to take back to Europe. He travelled with his friend to The

96 See research sites (segment on transient nature of residents at Basse camp)
Gambia and registered at the refugee camp in Basse. Immediately, they looked up contacts and made their way to the tourist resorts of Senegambia and Kololi. After some months, ‘Butterscotch’ took ill and died, most likely of AIDS related illnesses and Solomon decided to return the camp. There was much competition in Senegambia, and being a foreigner, Solomon found it difficult to move with other ‘bumsters’ and felt too shy to ‘hunt’ on his own.

However, in Basse, Solomon found an ideal solution: an important local man, a well-known homosexual, took him in along with several other young boys from the refugee camp. He became one of the man’s lovers in return for food and shelter and pocket money. He supplements this with ‘dates’ with local women – older, usually married women or sugar mamas – and on occasion, other men, especially travellers.

Case Three: Fanta (Brikama)

Sixteen-year-old Fanta has been a sex-worker for nearly one year. She became pregnant whilst she was still in school and had to drop out at the age of 14. She was a ward who came from the provinces at the age of 12 to live at the compound of a man, Lamin, married to her elder sister’s friend. Instead of enrolling Fanta at school as she had promised her family, Lamin’s wife kept her at home to take care of her two small children whilst she returned to work. Lamin’s wife reassured Fanta’s elder sister who had travelled to Europe, that Fanta would be given private tutorials at home. While Lamin’s wife was away at work, Lamin, attempted several sexual advances towards Fanta, who initially rebuffed him but then later acquiesced and lost her virginity. Lamin gave small sums of money to Fanta and promised to enrol her at the local primary school when school reopened. Fanta was eventually enrolled in school and sought to end her affair with the man she called Mr. Lamin. She confided her plight to one of her schoolteachers, who showed a special interest in her welfare.

Her schoolteacher, John, invited her over one afternoon for ‘studies’ and as they discussed Fanta’s strenuous home situation, he offered to marry her and take her back with him to his country of origin when the war finished. Before she knew it, Fanta was pregnant. When she faced Mr. John, he denied that it could be his and warned her never to let anyone know about their affair. He threatened to reveal Fanta’s previous affairs with her care-giver if she ever accused him of being the father of the child. Ashamed and shocked, Fanta denied to herself that she was pregnant and ‘tied’ her stomach to keep it flat. Lamin’s wife soon became suspicious and confronted her ward. She took her to a local doctor who confirmed that Fanta was in fact, five months pregnant. She sent for Fanta’s relatives to report their daughter’s behaviour and threatened to send her back to the village. Fanta’s father insisted that Fanta would not go back and bring shame to his family. Lamin secretly arranged to rent a room for Fanta at a compound in another part of town and Fanta left the house and had the child.

Fanta came to know of a few other girls in Brikama with a similar plight and befriended one of them. She came to know about tourists in the Senegambia tourist area and was made to understand that she could make a lot of money, have nice clothes, go to nightclubs and still take care of her baby. Fanta recounted that it was not easy for her at first, that it took her several months to get used to selling her body. She said that she was always fearful that someone from Brikama would recognise her. After some time, she met a ‘nice toubab’ who promised to help her find an apartment in Kololi for her and her child as long as she agrees to keep herself for him only. The toubab sends her money but not as frequently as she would like so she goes to the Senegambia tourist area from time to time to see what she can earn on her own. Fanta says that she knows prostitution is not a good life and that she can get diseases but she feels she has no choice. Having a child and no husband is like a death sentence, she laments. She says she does
not believe she will ever have a husband in The Gambia, since many people suspect what she is up to, but she insists that one day she will marry a toubab and go to United Kingdom to settle down.

Case Four: Fatou (Senegambia)

Fatou is 15 years old and frequents The Garden, a well-known ‘market’ for children engaged in prostitution and mainly European tourists. Of all the case studies, Fatou’s was the most challenging to follow up as she told many half-truths regarding her family – where they lived, who her parents are etc. Despite the fact that much could not be confirmed concerning her background, Fatou gave lots of interesting information regarding her attitudes and motivations for engaging in prostitution. She started coming to Senegambia tourist area and other tourist haunts roughly six months prior to fieldwork for the current study. The first time we met her, she was sitting at The Garden with two other underage sex-workers; her sister and her cousin. She approached one of the fieldworkers, who was sitting apart trying to blend into the atmosphere. A conversation ensued and later a friendship developed between them.

Fatou explained to the fieldworker that she and her younger sisters were living with an older sister and her husband but that she was thrown out of the compound by her older sister when she complained that the latter’s husband was making sexual advances towards her. She said she had already made the acquaintance of one Lebanese man when she was on her way to a popular shopping boutique near Senegambia Hotel, so she telephoned him for assistance. He provided her with an apartment in Manjai but then soon afterwards he forgot about her and concentrated on a new girlfriend – a winner of local beauty contest. Fatou said that losing her ‘sugar daddy’ or benefactor did not bother her because by that time she knew all about following toubabs in Senegambia and that there was a lot more money to be made in that area. She stated in a matter-of-fact way that she dropped out of school because she felt it was a waste of time, considering how much she was earning in Senegambia going to nightclubs. Thus, she can afford to go to hair salons and to buy very expensive clothes. She admitted that she personally convinced her younger sister Awa, 13, and cousin Bintou, 15, to come with her on weekends to The Garden where they can meet wealthy toubabs one of whom may one day take one of them to Europe or “God’s own country” – America. Fatou was adamant that, unlike her eldest sister, she had no intention of marrying any “old fool” in The Gambia and being treated like a “slave” by a mother in-law, when she can go to Europe and enjoy herself with anyone she likes.

Case Five: Amie (Banjul/Barra)

When I first met Amie in April 2002, she was 19 years old and dying of ‘pneumonia’, ‘cancer’, ‘tuberculosis’ and a host of other predatory infections related to AIDS. She was born in Banjul and attended junior secondary school until grade 7, when she dropped out at 14 after she became pregnant by a local ‘sugar daddy’ that worked in an office in Banjul. Some months after she delivered, she met a wealthy Serahule businessman who asked for her hand in marriage promising to take her to reside in his large mansion in Dakar. Coming from a very large family, Amie felt that her mother would only be too happy to see her leave home for a promising future with a rich, well-travelled husband. Amie left her child with her mother and moved to Dakar. After only a few months, she grew restless and impatient. In her mother’s compound she had a lot more freedom than in Dakar where she felt ‘trapped’ under the gaze of her co-wife and mother-in-law. She was reluctant to share in household duties and was frequently beaten by her husband.

97 Names of certain locations have been altered as well to protect proprietors who assisted us in our research.
for her misbehaviour. She ran away from her husband and stayed with other Gambian girls she had met in Dakar. Most of these girls were sex-workers and they introduced Amie to ‘the life’ in Senegal, sometimes travelling as far as Ziguinchor in Casamance.

Amie decided to return to Banjul after two years in and out of her husband’s compound and hustling as a sex-worker on the side. Her plan was to contact her brother in Europe to send her an invitation once she arrived in Banjul. Whilst at home in Banjul, Amie linked up with her old girlfriends from the neighbourhood who introduced her to ‘big men’. However, after about eight or nine months, Amie was becoming visibly weary, and her ‘sugar daddies’ drifted elsewhere. At one point she met a toubab and moved in with him but she still went out with her friends, disappearing for weeks at a time. Things did not work out with the toubab so she moved in with an old boyfriend and continued to frequent nightclubs, still waiting for her opportunity to travel to Europe. Amie began to succumb to a series of illnesses and was in and out of hospital for several months. Privately, Amie confided to the researcher that she tested positive for HIV at the MRC where she was admitted; however she and her family maintained to friends and sympathisers that she was suffering from undiagnosed illnesses. Notwithstanding, neighbours were quick to whisper that Amie contracted her illnesses from “the streets”. It was not until after her death that the gossip quickly spread around that Amie had frequented local motels and brothels and often used local street boys to assist her to secure sailors at the Banjul and Barra seaports. She died at her home in 2002.

Case Six: Muminatu (Farafenni)

Seventeen-year-old Muminatou was raised by her paternal grandmother in Senegal. Her father died very early and her mother remarried in Senegal. She described her grandmother’s household as very poor and she had to work, undertaking all sorts of physical labour from the time she was five years old. She recalled that when she was around nine or ten, she would see girls a little older than her, returning from Farafenni where they had gone to work as maids for wealthy families. The girls were always sharply dressed in the latest fashions, and had their hair done at salons. Her grandmother agreed that the following year she could join one of the groups going into Farafenni to seek short-term employment as a maid.

As promised, when she turned 11, Muminatou was permitted to travel with a group of pre-adolescent and adolescent girls to Farafenni and lodged with a relative. One of the boarders in this compound was a middle-aged ‘stranger’ or itinerant farmer. He used to give money to Muminatou’s grandmother from his farm work and buy gifts for Muminatou as well. Muminatou believes it was around this time that her grandmother colluded with the farmer to hand her over to him as his ‘wife’. The farmer forced her to have sex with him when she was twelve years old and she became pregnant. To ‘cover up’ the problem, the grandmother quickly arranged a wedding ceremony for Muminatou. Still 12 years old, Muminatou gave birth to a tiny boy. After two years, the farmer went back to Senegal and never returned, abandoning Muminatou with a two-year old boy and a newborn girl.

As her grandmother was too old to work and was no longer receiving income from boarders, Muminatou set out to town to find work as a maid. She met some other Senegalese girls who introduced her to a local brothel operator. As with all the girls that worked at this brothel, Muminatou regarded woman who owns the brothel as a godsend who saved her from a life of poverty. Unlike the other Senegalese girls that this brothel owner handpicked and brought to Farafenni, Muminatou did not reside at the brothel but only came on weekends, leaving her son and daughter with her elderly grandmother. Of all the prostitutes, Muminatou was the most
outspoken against men and a life, which, she felt has cheated her of proper marriage and happiness.
ANNEX VIII : TOURISM OFFENCES ACT

TOURISM OFFENCES ACT, 2003

Definition of a child

Article 2
In this Act, unless otherwise the context requires, „„a “child” means a person under the age of 18 years and includes a juvenile and young person;

Offences by employees

Article 4
(1) A person who, being an employee in a Tourism Development Area, tourist enterprise or in any other place that provides services to tourists, alone or jointly with any other person, whether that person is an employee in the Tourism Development Area, tourist enterprise or place, or is posted to the Tourism Development Area, tourist enterprise place to provide any service to or for the benefit of tourists (...) makes sexual advances, or offers any illegal service or product to a tourist, commits an offence.

(2) A person who commits an offence under subsection (1) is liable on conviction to a fine of twenty thousand Dalasis or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to both the fine and imprisonment and, in addition, the person shall be disqualified for ten years from –

(a) working in a Tourism Development Area or a tourist enterprise; or

(b) providing any service whatsoever to a tourist.

(3) In this section, “employee” includes a self-employed person.

Unwanted sexual advances

Article 5
A person who makes an unlawful sexual advance to a child commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of twenty thousand Dalasis or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to both the fine and imprisonment.

Sex abuse of a child

Article 6
(1) A tourist who sexually abuses a child commits an offence whether or not the child consented to the sexual abuse and whether or not at the time of the sexual abuse the tourist believed the child to be over eighteen years of age.

(2) A tourist who commits an offence under subsection (1) is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of fourteen years.
**Procurement of a child for sex**

**Article 7**
A tourist or any other person who procures a child –

(a) to have sexual intercourse with any person either in The Gambia or elsewhere;

(b) for prostitution, whether or not the child procured is already a prostitute, either in The Gambia or elsewhere; or,

(c) to become an inmate of a brothel or to frequent a brothel whether or not the child procured is already an inmate of a brothel in The Gambia or elsewhere, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of ten years.

**Child pornography**

**Article 8**
(1) A tourist or any other person who –

(a) takes any indecent photographs of a child,

(b) distributes or shows an indecent photograph of a child whether or not with a view to its being distributed or shown by that person or any other person; or,

(c) publishes or causes to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that the advertiser distributes or shows indecent photographs of children or intends to do so, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of five years.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a person is to be regarded as distributing an indecent photograph if that person parts with possession of the photograph, or exposes or offers it for acquisition by another person…

**Sexual exploitation of a child**

**Article 9**
(1) A tourist, or any other person in a position of trust or authority towards a child or with whom a child is in relationship of dependency, who for a sexual purpose –

(a) touches, directly or indirectly, or with an object, any part of the body of the child; or

(b) invites, or counsels a child, to touch, directly or indirectly, or with an object, any part of the body of any person, including the body of the person who so invites, or counsels, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years.

**Bestiality in the presence of a child**

**Article 10**
A tourist who, in the presence of a child, commits bestiality or who invites a child to commit bestiality commits an offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than ten years.
Owners, occupiers and managers not to permit children in premises for sexual activities

Article 11
Every owner, occupier or manager of premises or any other person, who has control of premises or assists in the management of, or control of premises who knowingly permits a child to resort to or to be in or on the premises for the purposes of engaging in any sexual activity prohibited by this Act commits an offence, and is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than fifty thousand Dalasis or imprisonment for a term of not less than five years, or to both the fine and imprisonment.

Indecent acts by tourist

Article 12
A tourist or any other person who, in any place, for a sexual purpose, exposes his or her genital organ to a child commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than ten thousand Dalasis or imprisonment for a term of not less than two years.

Trafficking

Article 13
A tourist or any other person who buys, sells, procures or, traffics in or brings into or takes out of The Gambia for the purpose of trafficking, a child, commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than one hundred thousand Dalasis and imprisonment for a term not less than five years.

Conspiracy, attempts, aiding and abetting, etc.

Article 14
A person, who conspires with any other person or attempts to commit, or aids, abets or counsels the commission of an offence under this Act is liable on conviction to the same punishment as the principal offender.