

Trafficking Children: An Industry of Exploitation

The classic concept of prostitution invokes the image of a client who pays a sole individual for sexual activity. Most johns like to maintain this illusion because they do not like to think of their “date” as a sex slave. As Save the Children investigators exposed, “[The clients] say that because they do not use violence to force the child or adolescent to have sex, the situation does not violate the minor’s human rights. They do not identify the children and adolescents as victims of sexual exploitation.”

Most people are vaguely aware, however, that women and children who sell their bodies for sex rarely operate independently. Even in the movies, pimps control the activities of the prostitutes.

But the tentacles of the “sex industry” go much deeper. An entire underground economy is built around sex slaves. Whether it’s Munich or Phnom Penh or Lima, similar economic sectors profit from exploitation.

The conference industry serves as a useful analogy. Major cities hire an entire staff to persuade professional associations and trade groups to host an annual convention or other big event in their city. Not only does the city’s convention facility benefit from a successful bid, so do the city’s hotels, restaurants, night clubs, taxis, airports, and so on. In other words, a major conference delivers a financial bonanza across the city’s commercial sector.

In like manner, the growth of the sex industry in a city like Lima, Peru benefits many parties, but much of the money flows through underground channels. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that a substantial number of Lima’s hotels could not survive without the sex trade.

The financial interdependence that the sex trade spins can be observed even when scaled down to the microlevel. A single child trafficked into the center of Lima brings a significant bonanza to the owner of the hotel where the victim is lodged. The food vendors and bars in the immediate vicinity will benefit from the daily visits of a dozen johns. They will in fact negotiate deals with sex slaves to bring the johns into their place in exchange for a free meal. Multiply these connections thousands of times over, and a lucrative industry begins to take shape.

The only people who do not reap financial benefits from the sex industry are the ones upon whom the whole network depends: the slaves.

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