



**El sector educativo de Limón
frente a la problemática
de la explotación sexual comercial
de personas menores de edad**

Summary of the study

"El sector educativo frente a la problemática de la explotación sexual comercial" by Carolina Suárez for her degree in Psychology at the University of Costa Rica, December 2003.

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"The educational sector in Limón facing the problem of commercial sexual exploitation of minors"¹

Summary of results

The study analyzed the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the personnel of 13 educational centers in Limón that are part of PROMECUM with respect to the problem of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) and two of the high-risk factors for its occurrence: child sexual abuse (CSA) and school exclusion.

A total of 165 officials from the education sector participated: 72.1% corresponded to teachers of academic subjects, 13.2% to professionals of the Interdisciplinary Teams, 7.3% to school principals and 7.3% to teachers of the Open Classroom Project.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children

Results found

♦ What is known:

- As structural factors of CSEC, cultural tolerance of the problem (69.7%) and the lack of efficiency of some institutions in combating it (63.6%) are recognized. Among the risk factors, the following are cited: situations of domestic violence (82.4%) and poverty (63%). Only half of the people (52.7%) recognize school exclusion as a risk factor for CSEC situations.
- Some 78.6% admit that CSEC does not have any positive consequences for the victims, and those who believe that there is some "benefit" cite the supposed economic "gain".

Some clarifications in this regard...

- The causes of CSEC must be found in the reasons that explain why some adults subject minors to sexual slavery. Risk factors are not causes, but explain the greater or lesser vulnerability of a person to being trapped in the sex trade.
- Some research conducted with victims of CSEC shows that most of them live in conditions of poverty and marginalization.

¹Summary of the study "El sector educativo frente a la problemática de la explotación sexual comercial" by Carolina Suárez for her degree in Psychology at the University of Costa Rica, December 2003.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children

Results found

Some clarifications in this regard...

- As negative consequences for victims of CSEC, the following are mainly identified: emotional (80.1%), sexually transmitted diseases (28.4%), alleged "loss" of values (27.7%), alcoholism and drug addiction (17.7%) and repercussions on academic performance (17%).
- In terms of the forms in which CSEC is manifested, the following are recognized: paid sexual relations (89.1%), exploitation of young people who dance in nightclubs (85.5%), sex tourism (84.2%) and child pornography (80.6%). The crime of trafficking in persons was the least known (50.3%).
- A total of 88% identify the possibility of requesting protection measures in cases of domestic violence; however, a majority do not know which law establishes such measures and less than half can identify the competent institutions to request them.
- 88% are unaware of the contents of the Law against the Sexual Exploitation of Minors, which has a negative impact on its application.
- Only half of the people are aware of M.E.P.'s policies on sexual abuse.
- The P.A.N.I. is recognized as the entity that should primarily intervene in abusive situations.
- The victims of ESC have not "lost their values", they have simply seen their human rights violated.
- The crime of "trafficking in persons" for sexual purposes occurs when the entry or exit of persons into or out of the country for sexual exploitation is promoted, facilitated or favored.
- The Law against Domestic Violence establishes protection measures, which may be requested in the Criminal and Small Claims Courts, Family Courts and Domestic Violence Courts.
- The law against the sexual exploitation of minors defines the different sexual crimes and establishes the corresponding sanction for each of them.
- The M.E.P. has established the National Plan for Attention to and Prevention of Violence and although there are still no specific policies on CSEC, a commission has recently been formed within the M.E.P. to work on this issue.
- Awareness should be promoted about the need for an integrated intervention of CSE and CSA, as well as the tasks or functions of each entity or sector involved (health, education, judiciary, police, NGOs, etc.).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Child Sexual Abuse

Results found

Some clarifications in this regard...

- Most of the participants are unaware of the competent authorities for filing criminal complaints for sexual crimes.
- 82% of the people stated that they have not received training in CSC and the few people who have received training have been trained by the RAHAB Foundation and IPEC (ILO) project.
- Only 9.1% of people feel sufficiently prepared to detect and attend to cases of CSA and CSE. In general, people feel more capable of carrying out preventive work on CSA and CSEC, by training students in the topics, compared to attentional work.
- The training needs identified are multiple and include training in: the procedure for filing criminal complaints, procedures for dealing with victims of CSEC and CSA, and how to handle the family.

- The competent authorities include the Public Prosecutor's Office, the O.I.J. and the Public Force.
- The complexity of CSEC situations means that in order to address the problem, people require specialized training in the subject, which enables them to perceive themselves as qualified to intervene.

♦ Attitudes held:

- The prevalence of some myths is determined, such as: the belief in the supposed "precocity" and "perversity" of some minors; the conception of CSEC as a "personal choice" and the perception of offenders or sexual exploiters as "sick" or as people who "faced childhood traumas"; all these myths minimize and question the prevalence of abusive situations, blaming the victims and justifying the exploiters.
- Belief in this series of myths could lead to the disprotection of the rights of minors in practice.

- First, there must be a change in the perception and beliefs about CSEC, in order to ensure that our attitudes tend toward respect for and compliance with the rights of minors.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Child Sexual Abuse

Results found

♦ What is done:

- In practice, most cases are being referred to the Interdisciplinary Teams for care, and priority has been given to the preventive dimension of CSA and CSEC, through training for parents and students, as opposed to the attentional dimension of both problems.
- Not all of the recommended practices (interviewing the child, interviewing the person in charge, referral to the P.A.N.I., reporting and follow-up of the case, among others) are being implemented in all cases, as it is left to the discretion of the officer to carry them out or not.
- A contraindicated practice such as inquiring into the version of the alleged offender or abuser is always carried out by 51% of the participants.
- In most cases, the teacher is the one who first detects the cases and then refers them to the Interdisciplinary Team. The team tries to get the mother, father or person in charge to file a complaint, however, in most cases, the complaint is not filed, thus promoting impunity.
- In the educational sector under study, 426 cases of CSA have been detected and only 27% of them have been reported to the courts. In the case of the ESC, impunity is even greater, since 115 cases have been detected and only 4.3% of them have been denounced.
- The main perceived difficulties in intervening were: few institutional resources for referrals, fear of jeopardizing personal safety, and the somewhat negative perception of the judicial process to enforce the law sanctioning CSEC.

Some clarifications in this regard...

- Both the preventive and attentional dimensions of both problems are equally important.
- For an intervention to be effective, all recommended practices must be followed.
- Such a practice may lead to retaliation by the offender or exploiter against the victim and could lead to the victim's retraction.
- In cases where the persons in charge of the children or adolescents are not responsible for their protection, the intervention of personnel from the education sector and other public agencies is all the more justified.
- According to Article 49 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code, school personnel have the obligation to report to the Public Prosecutor's Office any reasonable suspicion of mistreatment or abuse of a child.
- Whether some circumstances become limiting or difficult to intervene in depends on the attitude that people take towards them in order to face them.

School exclusion as another risk factor for CSEC

Results found

♦ What is known:

- With regard to the causes of exclusion, there is a tendency to focus the responsibility on factors external to the educational system (family, economic or intrinsic factors of the student) and, consequently, the educational sector's share of responsibility for the problem is minimized.
- There is a need for greater awareness of the seriousness of the consequences of exclusion for students, since being aware of their seriousness is what can lead them to intervene effectively in order to prevent their students from experiencing them.
- Very few people are able to identify the relationship between school exclusion and CSEC.
- 50% are aware of what the Childhood and Adolescence Code establishes about the right to education.
- Only 20% feel sufficiently prepared to intervene in situations of exclusion.

Some clarifications in this regard...

- School exclusion should be perceived as a multi-causal phenomenon, i.e., originated by the confluence of educational, social, family and economic factors, among others.
- When a student is left out of the educational system, he/she may face the following consequences: poverty, child labor, homelessness, unemployment, risk of being involuntary in CSEC, among others.
- Some studies conducted with victims of CSEC show that more than 90% of them are out of the educational system.
- The Code defines education as one of the rights of minors. It also establishes the obligation to report cases of exclusion and gives a priority role to the M.E.P. to guarantee the permanence of minors in educational centers.

Exclusion from school as another risk factor for CSEC

Results found	Some clarifications in this regard...
<p>♦ Attitudes held:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some beliefs prevail, such as "vagrancy" or loss of student interest in studying, or the perception of child labor as an activity that makes people responsible and educates them, among others. The system of beliefs held by some people could encourage the toleration in practice of situations that result in expulsion from the educational system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the right to education to be fulfilled, there must first be a change in the perception that people have of the problem of school exclusion and of some situations that result in expulsion from the educational system.
<p>♦ What is done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the last 3 years, the staff of the educational sector under study reported having detected 581 cases of exclusion, an average of 194 cases per year.• Within each educational center, there is a lack of clarity about the procedures implemented in cases of exclusion.• The Open Classroom Project is in operation in 54% of the educational centers studied.• In cases where a student is at risk of being excluded from the educational system or is already out of it, the teacher together with a professional from the interdisciplinary team visit the child's home, investigate the cause of the problem and there is a tendency to "convince" the person in charge of the child and "motivate" the student to return to school. Very few cases are reported to the P.A.N.I., to the M.E.P. and almost no follow-up is provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each school must clearly establish the programs and procedures that will enable it to comply with the MEP's policies on school exclusion.• Due to the effectiveness that the Open Classroom Project has had in reducing school exclusion situations, its expansion to other educational centers is recommended.• A "convincing" strategy is ineffective if it is not accompanied by other measures that guarantee permanence in the educational system: referral to PANI, request for economic subsidies, adaptation of the system to the needs of the students, curricular adjustments, providing information about existing open education options, referrals to health centers, among others, as the case may require.

Exclusion from school as another risk factor for CSEC

Results found

Some clarifications in this regard...

- Although economic reasons are cited as the main cause of exclusion, scholarships and bonuses are limited in that they are allocated at the beginning of the school year and during the rest of the year, very few references are made to other social welfare entities such as the Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (I.M.A.S.).
- Many of the interventions that are being implemented are ineffective, since they are not guaranteeing the permanence of minors in the educational system.

Challenges for the education sector

Main recommendations

- Develop policies and establish specific procedures on ESC matters, ensuring their knowledge and compliance in each educational center.
- Promote greater dissemination in schools of the National Plan for Attention to and Prevention of Violence.
- The educational centers under study should emphasize both the preventive work of CSEC and CSA, as well as the attentional dimension of both problems.
- Modify exclusion policies and procedures that are proving ineffective.
- To seek the expansion of the Open Classroom Project in all PROMECUM schools in the province of Limón.
- Make scholarship and school voucher programs more flexible, so that students can access these types of subsidies at any time during the school year and not only at the beginning of it.
- To develop a policy of accountability at the institutional level, through the establishment of effective mechanisms that guarantee the enforceability of compliance with the policies and procedures established by the Ministry of Public Education.
- Promote awareness and training of all teaching staff and interdisciplinary teams on the problem of CSEC and two of its high-risk factors: CSA and school exclusion.
- Promote the establishment of institutional networks at the regional level or incorporate the issue into existing networks, in order to promote greater referral of cases, which guarantees comprehensive attention to CSA, CSE and school exclusion.
- Guarantee that the Interdisciplinary Teams are made up of a minimum of three professionals in the social area in order to provide comprehensive care.
- Each educational center must clearly establish the procedures to be followed in the detection, attention, reporting and follow-up of cases, in order to implement the policies established by the Ministry of Education.
- To ensure coordinated work between the teaching staff and the interdisciplinary team.





Project "Contribution to the prevention and elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic".

Tel. (506) 280 7103

Fax (506) 280 6991

e-mail: esc@ipec.oit.or.cr

WEB Page: <http://www.ipec.oit.or.cr/region/areas/esc>

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