

Describing the factors that have lead to child-sex tourism in Cartagena, Colombia

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this research project will be to describe the factors that have led the children in Cartagena, Colombia to get involved in the booming industry of sex-tourism. As the literature reviews demonstrates the gap in research regarding child sex tourism in the city and as there are no scholarly articles written in English or Spanish. It thus, becomes crucial to undergo scholarly research in the area to determine the factors causing the encouragement of children to the market. The research will be qualitative in nature, requiring the researcher to travel to the city and use snowball sampling to gather a sample of 50 children. Using Fundacion Renacer, a non-governmental organization that works to provide services to children who are or who were involved in sexual exploitation, as the main source for gathering data around the city. The research would be a stepping-stone to encouraging further research in the area and hopes to shed light on the government to take action to the increasing sexual exploitation of minors in this soon to become "Thailand of the Americas" (Castaneda, 2009).

## Introduction

Sex tourism has become the main entertainment for those foreigners who wish to have a little bit more than some margaritas at the beach in Colombia's paradise cities. The sex industry is filled with underage children who commit to have sex with foreigners for as little as six dollars and as they go unnoticed, the popularity of tourist cities such as Cartagena keeps foreigners coming. My research will take place in this city of Colombia, Cartagena, as it represents a big sex tourist destination involving many children and women where there have been recent increases of children engaging in this type of industry. The non-governmental organization, Fundacion Renacer, works hand-in-hand with UNICEF in providing safety for children who are or who have been sexually exploited and is able to provide up-to-date rates of child exploitation in the city

This study is very important because in 2004 Colombia ratified the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and as such has the duty under article 9 paragraph 5 to "adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking" (UNTC, 2010). In addition, Colombia must uphold article 44 of its Constitution that "calls for the protection of children against all forms of exploitation, which includes economic and labor exploitation and hazardous work" (U.S Department of Labor, 2010). As the numbers of children for sexual purposes keeps increasing in this area, there seems to be little or nothing done at all by Colombian authorities in regards to the children and to those who seek this type of entertainment in the city. Therefore, Colombia is in violation of an international treaty and of its own constitution.

In addition, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict estimates that in Colombia, there are between 20,000 to 35,000 children working in the sex industry and 1,500 of these children are found in Cartagena alone (Watchlist, 2004). The literature demonstrates that child sex tourism in Cartagena has not yet been researched in depth; it is thus crucial to study the area in order to gain knowledge of the situation in this city. My research question would be "How do the children in Cartagena end up working for the sex industry?" In order to answer the question I will be conducting interviews with the children that are presently working for this industry and in assessing their responses I will be able to gather information in what factors have led them to get involved in the industry.

In gaining more knowledge of the victims of this crime, it will help policy makers in Colombia to address the issue of sexual exploitation in Cartagena and promote further policies in cities in the country, such as Bogota, Bucaramanga and Medellin, as they are also hit with high sexual exploitation statistics among children. Not only it will be a stepping-stone to informing local policy but also it can be viewed as an example at the international level on how to address issues in similar countries around the globe. In addition to raising awareness at the government level, it will also raise awareness at the community level and has the potential to spur the creation of new non-governmental

organizations or community based projects to develop in the area to help those who are victims of the sex industry and provide at the scientific level more explanations as to why these children get involved in such industries and what can be done to avoid further recruitment of minors.

## **Literature Review**

The wellbeing of children should be among the priorities of every country, since they represent the next generation of ideas, but many problems surround children that a country ought to protect; among these problems is the use of children for commercial sex exploitation. The soaring prevalence of child prostitution in Colombia and in many parts of the world represents an overwhelming problem for these countries and the children themselves. How can there be children working as prostitutes in the streets? How can some parents or other adults not notice the harm done to these children? These are just some of the many questions people may ask as they read through newspapers saying “Sex tourism taints Cartagena: Colombia's 'Jewel of the Caribbean' has become a centre for underage exploitation”, an article written in 2004 exposing the soaring child prostitution in this city in Colombia.

Child sex tourism is not a new crime trend but a problem that came to public awareness during the 1990's as a result of campaigns mounted by End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual (ECPAT). Child sex tourism has been fed by globalization, poverty, the growth of consumerism, an increase in travel opportunities and internet access, weak law enforcement as well as “racist fantasies on the hypersexual nature of the inhabitants of developing countries”(Vrancken & Chetty, 2009, p. 3). Children are easier to access and lure to such practices as they are vulnerable and unknowledgeable of the world around them, and it has been seen in many cases that their own parents or family members pressure them into this lifestyle or through agreements with traffickers (U.S Department of Justice, 2010).

In a multi-database search of the topic ranging from 1990 to present day, is noticeable the turn this topic took in its first years of research. From 1990 to 1992, the only journal article that was written regarding sex tourism was devoted to South Asia and the booming industry of international tourists coming to Thailand for sex, as well as the many problems encountered in researching sex tourism (Truong, 1990). 1992 was the year when the first articles linking AIDS with sex tourism were published, showing how the industry was encouraging further spread of the disease (Herold & Kerkwijk, 1992). The following year, 1993, the first newspaper article regarding a country (France), making citizens liable to prosecution at home for sex offences committed abroad was published (The Guardian, 1993), as well as a journal article regarding how sex tourism was being promoted through tourism brochures & adult videos (Miller, 1993).

During the first years of the 1990's there were no articles that focused on child sex tourism; rather they focused on South Asia as major tourist attraction for sex tourism and the health problems that sex tourism was raising. In 1994, the first article dedicated to child sex tourism came aboard, claiming that child prostitution was worsening due to poverty worldwide and as a consequence of the global economy (Ayres, 1994). This same year political appreciation and concern regarding child sex exploitation came as an important issue as many countries such as Australia, Germany, Sweden and Norway passed similar laws to that of France, in prosecuting residents at home for sex offenses

abroad (“Child sex”, 1994).

In 1995, there was a shift of view from the victims to those who were participating in the promotion of sex tourism. Travel agents were being targeted as they were being charged for the promotion of sex tourism abroad and looked at as the main perpetrators with Sweden pressing charges against a home resident who had sex with a 14 year old boy in Thailand (Globe & Mail, 1995) and the Philippine court pressing charges against a British travel agent who had been promoting child prostitution in the Philippines. These five years gave solid ground on what sex tourism was and how from 1990 to 1995 the topic expanded. From thereon after, sex tourism and AIDS, soaring child prostitution as well as women prostitution, bills to protect minors and to punish perpetrators was published.

Moving from sex tourism to child sex tourism in Cartagena, there is no published scholarly research in English or Spanish on child sex tourism in Cartagena. Non-scholarly sources such as Colombian newspapers *El Tiempo*, *Colombia Reports*, *Cambio* or English based sources as *Children of the Andes*, *USA Today* and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) as Fundacion Renacer, reveal the tragic circumstances that this city is living with regards to the child prostitution. In a most recent report provided by the Colombia Reports in 2009, Cartagena was identified as the soon to be called “Thailand of the Americas” as the city noticed the many foreigners that were coming to the city to engage in underage sex and avoid jail time (Castaneda, 2009).

In addition to this report presented by the Colombia Reports newspaper, El Tiempo newspaper gave a perfect example of what the outcome for some of the children could be. In 2009 a 15-year old Cartagenian boy named Yesid Torres died on the way to the hospital because of a cocaine overdose as he “had been hired by Paolo Pravisani, an Italian pedophile 72 years of age, to provide sexual services under the guise of domestic help in the apartment that the Italian had rented in an exclusive area of the city” (Davey, 2009). This illustrates the constant threat the children face daily in the streets of Cartagena. The popular NGO, Fundación Renacer, which works with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), publishes estimates on the children who are currently working for the industry of sex tourism and provides help to those children who have been victims.

As the literature reviews reveals, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding child sex tourism in Cartagena, Colombia. This research would provide further understanding on what the situation is in Cartagena and provide ground for further research to be done in the area in order to gain more knowledge on what are some of the factors that can lead children to this life-style and what has prevented them from getting out. In order to have a detailed explanation on how the research would be carried out in the city, the methodology section will give a detailed plan on what the research design will be, how the subjects would be selected and how the data would be analyzed.

### **Theory:**

Giving the current situation in Colombia with its ongoing civil war, high rates of unemployment and displacements within the country, the theoretical orientation I'm taking in this proposal is that of routine activities. The reason behind this is that the main

concept surrounding the theory of routine activities is that crime occurs when routine activities produce lack of guardianship of targets in the presence of motivated offenders. In this scenario, the targets will be the children as they lack protection by an authoritative figure, (e.g parents or legal authority) to protect them from being drawn into this business. As sex tourism gives a great deal of money to those who take advantage of the lack of law enforcement in the country, it is easier for these people to draw the children into the business without consequences therefore experiencing rising trends of children into the business.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design:**

The study will be descriptive as it seeking to inform on some of the reasons that have led children to become part of the sex tourism market in Cartagena. As child sex tourism has never been researched in Cartagena, this study will depend on real world context analysis of empirical data collected through field research, not collected through experimental evaluations and simulated conditions. The research would be conducted through a cross-sectional design, where data is collected at one point in time (Chambliss & Schutt, 2010). This will allow me to see what the current factors for child sex tourism are and encourage further research to social scientists in the long term to see if there are any changes.

### **Subjects for the study:**

As the study will be focusing on the children, the unit of analysis will be the individual children who are involved in sex tourism. As sex tourism targets not only female-male sex but also male-male and female-female sex, and the minimum age in Colombia to engage in any type of sexual intercourse is 14 (AVERT, 2010), I will be then interviewing those children who are below the age standard for legal intercourse. In order to identify the children that are working in this industry and who meet the age standard that I have set, I will contact Fundación Renacer so they can help me map out sites where these children are more likely to be found or ask them to provide me with some children which they are working with so I may ask them if they want to be interviewed. In order to get their attention, I will tell them that they will be remunerated with 10,000 pesos which is the equivalent of about 5 dollars, depending on the value of the dollar at the time of the research. From these interviews, using snowball sampling, I will ask the children to identify other potential interviewees, to get a sample of 50 minors for the research. In order to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the identities of the children that I will be interviewing, I will not ask for names but rather I will assign each participant a number, utilizing the number as their name.

Primarily, I will read to them in Spanish that the purpose of my research is to get a sense of the factors that have led them to work in this industry. One of the biggest issues of conducting interviews with minors is that by asking questions about their past and current lives in the industry, it may raise psychological issues within the children, therefore, I will tell them at the end of the interviews about Fundación Renacer which can help them obtain any psychological help they may need. The project ran by Fundación Renacer, does not only work with children in Cartagena, but among other cities such as Bogota, Bucaramanga and Medellin reshaping its goals in regards to the location where children are as each city is affected differently. In the case of Cartagena, Fundación Renacer which is ran by Luz Stella Cardenas carries activities such as: prevention, research, rehabilitation, outreach, day centre, short and long term housing for children victims of sexual exploitation, offering also medical and psychological help (Fundación Renacer, 2010). As interviews goes on I will offer to take them to the centre if the children are visibly showing signs of distressed.

Further issues that may arise is that if these children are to work with people who manage them and/or arrange meetings with foreigners, the children might be afraid of releasing any type of information because they might feel threatened by their keepers. In order to avoid any damage to the children, I will personally speak to the clients and/or pimps and explain to them that I'm not a police officer or any type of law enforcement agent and that in my interviews with the children I would not be asking for names of parents or pimps or any type of name for the organization that they are working for, as for my research focuses solely on the factors that made these children join this business. To ensure my interviewees' safety, I will give their pimps and/or clients information where they can contact me. In order to secure my own safety I will buy a cell phone for the time of the research and ask Fundacion Renacer to allow me to receive calls and mail to their offices to avoid giving any personal information.

### **Data/Data Collection Methods:**

The nature of the data will be qualitative collected through face-to-face interviews done in Spanish, as Colombia is not an English speaking country. Qualitative research is the best way to get a sense of what the participants really think or feel about their current or past situations allowing me in getting a richer social experience. As I was born in Colombia and was raised there until the age of 12, it will be easier for me to communicate with the children in the native language and conduct the interviews in fluent Spanish, thus not requiring the services of translators. The reason for conducting face-to-face interviews is that it gives access to data that may remain out of sight when other data collecting methods are used. For example, observational techniques may not reveal perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings judgments and plans (Parker, 1984). On the other hand interviews incorporates questioning, follow-up probing and observation of nonverbal behavior.

The interviews will be based on open-ended questions and the variables to be measured would be their *age, if they live with their parents or in the street and/or if they are orphans, if they are born in Cartagena or come from a different city- if so, what city?*

*And why did they move? If they are currently enrolled in school, if so, what school? If not, why not? What neighborhood are they living in and for how long, if they work for themselves or for some other person and if they do work for someone else, would it be a pimp or their parents or some other individual? What led them to work in this industry, If their parents know what they are doing, and for how long have they being working in the industry?* These questions would be used to get back scenario on the child's life in order for me to know where he/she is coming from. Following these questions, I will ask more concrete questions regarding their feelings and attitudes, such questions would be: *How do they perceive themselves now, how do they see the world around them? How do they see the foreigners that ask for services? Is it only foreigners? What past/current experiences have led them to work in the industry? What do they dislike the most when working in the industry and why? Or what do them like and why? Do they work voluntarily or are forced to work? Are they being paid for their services by their handlers? And if so, how much on average and what do they do with the money?* As the interview continues, whenever is needed to ask further questions to develop a more thorough answer, I will ask more questions to get a substantial amount of detail and add those questions to further interviews.

In order to assess the validity/reliability issues, I will used a technique called Test retest reliability, which consist in asking a set of questions then following up with similar questions that ask the same thing but are phrased differently to see if there are discrepancies in the answers previously given with this, I will know if the child has understood the questions correctly and if not then rephrase it in order to get an accurate response for the question.

I will ask Fundacion Renacer to allow me some private space where I can conduct interviews with these children, but I will also ask the children if they feel comfortable in doing the interview there and if not, I will ask them to take me to a quiet place where they will feel much more comfortable to talk to me and not be distracted or shy in talking to me about their experiences. I will tell the children that I will be using a recording device during the interviews as it is much easier for me to focus on them and take notes than to be writing down each answer as it will take more time and I will also remind them that I will not be asking for any names of people so they don't need to be afraid. After the interview is done, I will then listen to the recording to be able to analyze the data thoroughly in order to avoid missing information.

### **Data Analysis:**

Having a qualitative approach to this study, the primary source for data analysis would be text available from transcribed interviews and field notes assessing the attitudes of the participants in order to reach the desire goal of understanding the factors that led these children to be working in the industry. Analyzing the data doesn't come at the end of the research but is an ongoing process as I go on with my interviews analyzing what other questions are important to ask, what attitudes to look for, or what questions have to be rephrased to get a thorough understanding. The approach taken to analyze the data would follow the following criteria:

- Thorough documentation of data collected. All transcribed interviews, field notes, numbers assigned to children, the date and time, place of data collection, must be correctly saved and listed.
- A complete revised examination of all field notes and transcribed interviews to note any patterns, connections or similarities that arise through the data analysis and to be also able to look for any deviations or unusual patterns in the data gathered.
- In analyzing the data, I will derived some conclusions from the data gathered and then focus my attention on the original questions asked. When attempting to answer the primary research question, I will be able to see if the data gathered was able to answer the question, or if the data provokes additional questions to be furthered researched

**Conclusions:**

Having given a thorough analysis of the literature review regarding child-sex tourism and thus, having demonstrated that the proposed study has not yet been conducted in this area of the country. It is then important for the realization of this research in order to have a background on the country status regarding child sex exploitation and therefore, becoming a stepping-stone for future research to be done in this country. This research would not be providing tools for fighting child sex tourism or provide solutions to the problem; rather it will be used as an informational tool, a descriptive research providing future scholars with a start-off for further research and critique.

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