



Child Sex Tourism in Goa

1. Background

There are some 400,000 to 500,000 children in forced prostitution in India, according to estimates by UNICEF and ECPAT International. Local children's rights and international agencies report that many tourists travelling to Goa seek out child prostitutes, and the greater enforcement of child abuse laws in 'traditional' child sex tourism areas appears to be contributing to the growth in the sexual exploitation of children in Goa.

In Goa, children in the sex industry can be found in Baina and the Children's Park at Panaji. Baina is a red light district and frequented by locals as well as foreign tourists. Many of the children in these areas have been trafficked into prostitution from the States of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The coastal areas of Goa, particularly the beaches, are the favourite destination of tourists and also the place where many children are forced into sex through informal prostitution facilitated by their parents, relatives or other intermediaries.

Other children get involved in sex tourism themselves, such as, beach or street vendor children, or are approached by sex tourists directly. However, intermediaries in the form of brokers also exist who search for people interested in sex with children and are often asked for children by sex tourists. Most of these brokers are taxi drivers, shack owners, beach boys or former victims of sex tourism.

Goa Legislation

Goa as an Indian State adheres to all the national laws and also have its own legislative process. The national government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, which requires the State to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. The legal age of consent in India is 21 years for girls and 18 years for boys, while the legal age of marriage is 18 years.

The Goa Children's Act 2003 legislates against child sexual abuse and sentences for such offences range from one to ten years in prison and a fine. Children staying with unrelated adults also need to register with the Director, Women and Child Development. Under this Act children are not allowed to enter any hotel or other establishment with an unrelated adult and are also not to be allowed any access to prohibited Internet sites. The law authorises airport authorities, border police railway and traffic police to report any case of adults travelling with a child in suspicious circumstances or any suspected case of trafficking. However, those who exploit children for commercial sexual exploitation face a penalty and can be imprisoned for just one year. A Children's Court will be introduced to try all offences against children. It is hoped that a child friendly court will help to minimise the double trauma that abused children are subject to in courts, which even adults find awesome and terrifying. Posing children for pornographic pictures or films is also a criminal offence.

You can report specific information about a British person abusing a child in Goa to Crimestoppers in the UK 0800 555 111

UK Legislation

While British tourists who commit sexual offences in Goa can be prosecuted in that country, they can also be prosecuted in the UK for crimes committed while abroad. Under the UK Sexual Offences Act, 2003, article 72, persons can be prosecuted for a crime that is viewed as a criminal offence in both countries. Therefore, if tourists sexually abuse a child in Goa, they can be tried in the UK as both countries legislate against this offence. This Act is intended to cover crimes that may be committed by the traveller against either a travelling child companion or a child living in the country, but in which the crime is not detected until returning to the UK.

Additionally, the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act, 1996, allows for the prosecution of those who conspire to commit a sexual offence outside the UK, or incite someone else to commit the offence. Therefore if one person either helps or pushes another to commit the offence, they too can be prosecuted in the UK.

2. Who are the children and aspects of vulnerability?

Many of the abused are migrant workers children and local children from the coastal areas who are especially vulnerable during the tourist season. Child vendors who frequent beach areas and resorts are by the nature of their work required to be friendly to tourists and therefore open to offers by sex tourists. There is also some evidence to suggest that children are being trafficked to Goa from other parts of the country or even from abroad for purposes of sexual exploitation.

The children abused are from ten to eighteen years of age. Girls are abused within brothels that are frequented by both local and foreign child abusers, whereas boys are picked up on the streets.

The factors making children vulnerable to sex tourism include:

Organised prostitution: Many children, particularly girls, are abused within brothels that are frequented by both local, regional and foreign child abusers. Some research suggests that girls enter the sex industry as a direct result of coercion or an unspoken expectation by other family members, including sisters or mothers already in the industry. Many of the girls are from the States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra and often are the daughters of migrant prostitute women.

Poverty and economic insecurity: The majority of the children, both migrant and local, come from poor backgrounds and have little or no access to education. The parents are unskilled workers from neighbouring States who need to migrate to various regions in search of employment. As a result, many of the children are also compelled to work and can be found around beach and resorts areas, often working as vendors. The nature of their work requires them to be friendly to tourists and therefore leaves them open to offers by sex tourists.

Weak family structure: Family breakdown is seen as an important aspect leading to children being exposed to abuse. Many children have run away from home and live on the streets due to problems at home ranging from drug abuse, alcoholism or physical or mental illness.

Lack of parental supervision: Many of the abused are migrant workers' children who are unsupervised and alone on the streets while their parents take up casual or daily wage work in Goa. These children often end up wandering on the streets and are vulnerable to the lures of sex tourists.

Trafficking: There is also some evidence to suggest that children are being trafficked to Goa from other parts of the country or even from other countries for purposes of sexual exploitation. Children are also sold by poor families from different regions and then forced into working in the sex industry or other labour around coastal areas where they are at risk from sex offenders.

Discrimination: Many prostitutes in India are victims of the Devadasis (temple prostitute) system and have been 'dedicated' to the Goddess Yellamma (around 10,000 girls in India are dedicated annually). Goa is no different and many of the girls in its red light districts are victims of this system.

Consumerism: It appears that some families sexually exploit their own children by either selling them to traffickers or by forcing them into prostitution. Such families prize material benefits at the cost of any abuse to their child.

3. Who are the abusers?

In Goa one can find both opportunistic and preferential foreign sex offenders, although much of the demand for child prostitution is by local men and migrant workers. Such child sex abusers are most often middle-aged or older men, but a number of foreign women also appear to develop sexual relationships with adolescent boys or young men. Generally, there is a stark imbalance in terms of the age and economic power between such women and the boys/men that are with them. Research suggests that female sex tourists are often approached by young boys or men on beaches and resorts, but generally male sex tourists have to go through an intermediary to procure children who are either in organised prostitution or being prostituted informally by their relatives.

The sex tourists, mainly from Western Europe, Australia and North America, are often frequent travellers to Goa who try to establish long-term relationships with certain children. However, they are also known to take up long-term residence in Goa and seek employment where there is an opportunity to easily abuse children or an occupation that enables them to employ young people. A notorious case illustrating this is that of Freddy Peats who was convicted in 1996 for abusing boys in a shelter home that he set up himself. Peats, now dead, also took pornographic pictures of the boys and forced them to have sex with other men visiting his shelter.

The methods that sex offenders use to lure children into abusive situations range from offering them money or gifts, convincing parents that the child will enjoy a better life and providing children with shelter and employment. Such grooming methods are the hallmark of the preferential sex offender whereas the opportunistic ones exploit the children they meet on the street or are offered by pimps.

The justifications that sex tourists offer for their abuse of children include the perception that they are helping the children monetarily and also giving children the 'love' that they appear to crave.

4. How is the travel industry involved?

In the 1970's Goa became famous as the destination for young tourists known as 'hippies'. It was during this time that a tourist drug culture developed, which is now well entrenched. Many tourists travel to Goa to experience this lifestyle. However, along with the drugs, Goa is also known for its growing sex tourism industry.

Tourism is the third largest revenue earner for the State of Goa. As in other tourists destinations the effect on the local area has been considerable. Tourism services have grown exponentially compared to the decline of the original employment sectors of mining and fishing. This has resulted in the impoverishment of many Goans who were already living on the poverty line.

The media and NGOs claim that the government of Goa has been slow to recognise the problem of sex tourism and has done little to address it effectively. One measure taken by the government to combat the problem includes having tourist police monitor the behaviour of tourists towards local children on the beach. The initial emphasis was on protecting tourists from local children on the beach. However, in general the government does not appear to appreciate the seriousness of the issue and has instituted few measures to protect vulnerable children from sex abusers.

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