

SEX TOURISM: WHAT THE TRAVEL MEDICINE PROVIDER NEEDS TO KNOW

Compiled by the DCSIG and Alan Magill

Reasons for travel are varied and encompass leisure travel, business, adventure travel, medical tourism and now more recently, sexual tourism. Studies have shown that sexual diseases are not infrequent in the returning traveller indicating that sexual intercourse takes place when the traveller is away from home. It also underlines the necessity for counselling on these aspects in the pre-travel consultation.

It is unlikely that the tourist who is on a specific sex seeking trip will disclose this in the pre-travel consultation and even less likely to consult prior to travel. Travellers should none the less be made aware of the implications, both legal and illegal, of such intentions so as to minimise harm to both the traveller and those who are involved in the sex tourism trade.

Sexual tourism is travel specifically arranged for, or planned by, travellers to facilitate the procurement of sex abroad. It encompasses travelers who have a general pleasure-seeking attitude towards casual sex with fellow travelers or with local people who don't mind trading sex for an evening's entertainment and gifts. It may also involve specifically arranged tours to gain access to full time commercial sex workers in destination countries, or to satisfy a specific desire to have sexual contact with underage girls and boys that is illegal and extremely exploitative in nature. Many commercial sex workers are forced to engage in the trade as a result of deceptive practices and are part of human trafficking networks. The main concern is with the exploitative aspects of the sexual tourism market where travelers seek sex with workers who may not be free to choose their occupation, or with young children forced to participate against their will. Sexual tourism represents the unseemly underbelly of the travel industry.

Sexual tourism also involves children. This is the commercial sexual exploitation of children by travelers; some travellers targeting children specifically. While some of these tourists are pedophiles that preferentially seek out children for sexual relationships, many child sex tourists are "situational abusers" – persons who do not consistently seek out children as sexual partners, but who do occasionally engage in sexual acts with children when the opportunity presents itself. These individuals often use an array of distorted and disheartening rationales to justify their actions. To assuage their sense of guilt, some rationalize these encounters by claiming that they are helping the children and their families escape economic hardship. Others justify their behavior believing that children in other countries are less "sexually inhibited" and assume that the destination country does not have the same social taboos against child sex. Still others are drawn towards child sex tourism because they enjoy the anonymity that comes with travel. Consequently, they feel free from the social restraints governing their behavior at home; they discard their moral values abroad and think that they can avoid accountability and escape the consequences.

WHY DOES SEXUAL TOURISM EXIST?

Sex tourism is a very lucrative industry that spans the globe. In 1998, the International Labour Organization reported that 2-14% of the gross domestic product of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand derives from sex tourism. Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines have long been prime destinations for child sex tourists, but in recent years, Mexico, Central America, and South America have been increasingly popular destinations as well. The non-profit organization End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and the Trafficking of Children (ECPAT) estimates that more than one million children worldwide are drawn into the sex trade each year.

Illiteracy, dependency, violence, social stigma, cultural stereotypes, gender disparity and endemic poverty are the main factors placing women and children in powerless, non-negotiable situations that contribute to the emergence of sex trafficking. Both sex trafficking and sexual tourism fuel the spread of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and pose a threat to community health, poverty alleviation, and human emancipation.

WHAT CAN A TRAVEL MEDICINE PROVIDER DO ABOUT SEX TOURISM?

The pre-travel visit should include counseling for prevention of sexually transmitted infections for all travelers and in particular those who are most likely to have casual sex abroad.

The following characteristics have been shown to be predictive indicators of a higher level of sexual activity while traveling;

- young age,
- travel without a spouse or partner,
- long-term travel,
- high numbers of partners at home,
- routine alcohol and/or recreational drug use, and
- practicing unsafe sex.

This may be a fundamentally different profile from the determined sex tourist.

What should a travel medicine practitioner do when faced with a client seeking pre-travel advice in preparation for a trip whose primary purpose is sexual tourism? What if one suspects that the purpose of travel is to engage in child sex tourism? This practice is both morally reprehensible and illegal. *These individuals should be informed that there are legal consequences punishable under the laws of the traveler's country of origin, if reported.*

What Can Travel Medicine Providers Do to Help Combat Child Sex Tourism?

Travel medicine providers need to:

- Be aware of this disturbing global phenomenon.
- Inform certain groups of travelers about the legal implications of child sex tourism.
- Provide travelers with information about what they can do if they suspect or are confronted with child sex tourism:
 - Report to the authorities abroad and at home if children are suspected of being sexually exploited in tourism destinations.
 - Support the efforts of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other agencies working to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation.

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL RESPONSE?

More than 40 countries have extraterritorial laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for child sex tourism crimes committed abroad. Eliminating child sex tourism will be difficult since the crime is fueled by weak law enforcement, corruption, easy access to purveyors of child sex tourism, the anonymity of international travel, and the desperate poverty of those victimized.

In response to the phenomenon of child sex tourism, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the tourism industry, and governments have begun to address the issue. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) established a task force to combat child sex tourism and in 1999, with Nordic tour operators and ECPAT, created the global Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

List of Countries With Extraterritorial Laws on Child Sex Tourism

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Kingdom, and the United States.

GOVERNMENTS AND CHILD SEX TOURISM

In the United States, for example, the government strengthened its ability to fight child sex tourism by passing the Prosecutorial Remedies and other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act and the Trafficking Victim's Protection Reauthorization Act. These laws, passed in 2003, increase penalties to a maximum of 30 years in prison for engaging in child sex tourism. Since the passage of the PROTECT Act, there have been over 20 indictments and over a dozen convictions of child sex tourists. The Department of Homeland Security has also developed the "Operation Predator" initiative to combat child exploitation, child pornography, and child sex tourism. The United States is also funding the NGO World Vision to conduct major public awareness and deterrence campaigns overseas that include public service announcements, internet messaging, brochures, posters, and billboards.

Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism

Suppliers of tourism services adopting the code commit themselves to implement the following six criteria:

1. To establish an ethical policy regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children.
2. To train the personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations.
3. To introduce a clause in contracts with suppliers, stating a common repudiation of commercial sexual exploitation of children.
4. To provide information to travellers by means of catalogues, brochures, in-flight films, ticket-slips, home pages, etc.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. To provide information to local "key persons" at the destinations.6. To report annually. |
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Sources of Additional Information

U.S. Department of Justice: Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS)
<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/sextour.html>

Child Sex Tourism Resources http://www.vachss.com/help_text/sex_tourism.html

End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
International <http://www.ecpat.net/EI/index.asp>

U.S. Government Federal Child Pornography Statutes
http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/ceos/childporn_stats.html

Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism
<http://www.thecode.org/>

World Vision Child Sex Tourism Prevention Project
<http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/globalissues-stp>