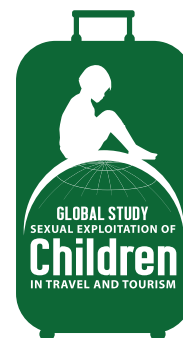


EXPERT PAPER

CHILD SEX TOURISM IN SAMOA

LURLENE CHRISTIANSEN



INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a snapshot of child sex tourism in a Samoan tourist setting, based on research conducted in 2009 which focussed on the scope, risk factors and underlying causes. The research findings are largely based on interviews with key stakeholders: government and intergovernmental agencies, civil society, urban and rural focus groups and taxi drivers. It includes recommendations for improvements in policy, advocacy and research.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the scope of child sex tourism in Samoa is widespread and serious. The Transnational Crime Unit (TCU), a law enforcement network under the Prime Minister, monitors transnational crime, including child sex tourism. The TCU keeps a close watch over tourists who are from overseas and there have been incidences of tourists asking taxi drivers to facilitate sex with local children and child sex tourism paralleling the established adult prostitution industry. Research interviewees describe perpetrators as older male tourists who are frequent flyers to Samoa and are identified as 'preferential' and 'opportunistic' types. The perpetrators arrive from several parts of the world that include Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Peru, and the United States. The facilitators of child sex tourism represent a cross-section of the community: male taxi drivers, mothers of pimped daughters, and transgendered (*fa'afafine*) adults. Parents keep in contact with perpetrators via the internet, and child victims solicit other children for incentives such as luxury items or money. Child victims are both girls and boys, although a rising trend is transgendered (*fa'afafine*) boys.

Risk factors and underlying causes

Common risk factors are:

- Poverty and hardship
- Hospitality
- Philanthropic exploitation
- Marginalisation of boys

- Family under pressure, and family dysfunction
 - Unsafe schools: for example, while in school, a secondary student is contacted by a taxi driver using a cell phone requesting the student to leave the classroom to meet a tourist and engage in sexual activity
 - A culture of shame, which results in under-reporting of the crime
 - An established heterosexual and gay adult sex tourism industry that operates in Samoa
 - Lack of proactive engagement by the Ministry of Tourism on preventive measures
 - Widespread lack of awareness about what child sex tourism is and entails
3. The Ministry of Education should review secondary school education costs. Review policy and procedures around students' cell phone use in school. Monitor patterns of truancy (boys, girls, fa'afafine boys), particularly rates of truancy in the height of the tourist season; such truancy must be made known to parents. In addition, integrate the issue of child sex tourism into both formal and informal health education.

Specific underlying causes are:

- Widespread complacency
- Lack of commitment to invest in research
- Need for empirical evidence to prove the magnitude of the problem and its seriousness to undertake prevention activities
- Perpetrators escape prosecution, resulting in under-reporting

Recommendations for policy, advocacy and research:

1. The Ministry of Justice should review child-sensitive judicial systems and programmes, to protect child victims and child witnesses. Particularly, anonymity is required, to obtain reliable data.
2. Conduct a review of current laws concerning child sex tourists grooming children for the production of child pornography. Adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000).
4. The Ministry of Health should devise a high priority education campaign against child sex tourism. The focus should be on its links to sex tourism, unwanted pregnancy and abortion, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, including short- and long-term physiological and psychological effects on children. Part of the campaign should focus on sensitising the general population about the victims of child sex tourism, to counter a culture of shame.
5. There is a dependency on tourism in Samoa. The Government of Samoa has not fully considered the negative effects of child sex tourism on families and communities. The Ministry of Tourism should adopt and promote the World Tourism Organisation's Global Code of Conduct, set up a hotline to report suspected sexual abuse in collaboration with the police, develop a plan of action against child sex tourism and incorporate it into the next Samoa Tourism Authority Development Plan.

6. No Samoan organisation is working studiously on preventing child sex tourism in the country. The appointment of a national champion could reverse this trend. The champion could devise a national public awareness programme corresponding with global and regional initiatives such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and Stockholm Regional Commitment and Action Plan of the East Asia and Pacific Region against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (2001). The champion could gather and disseminate resources to appropriate agencies, and liaise with government agencies, donor, civil society groups, village councils and communities on how best to approach this issue.
7. In Samoa, there is a lack of integrated data to provide inputs for policy formulation and programming against child sex tourism. The Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development should redo the Situational Analysis on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and child sexual abuse (CSA) that the Ministry abandoned in 2006. As was the original intention of that study, to disseminate findings for advocacy, lobbying and child protection programmes, particularly, the upcoming National Policy for Children and National Plan of Action for Children.

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About the author

Lurlene Christiansen is a New Zealander of Samoan descent, currently working as an educational professional in New Zealand. She holds a doctorate in Humanities and Social Sciences from *Va'aomanū Pasifika, Victoria University of Wellington*, New Zealand and has presented a number of papers on this topic to academic audiences in New Zealand and Samoa. Under the auspices of Post-Colonial Studies and Critical Theory, her early research and writings have explored the sexual exploitation of Pacific Island women and girls, as seen on early 20th-century picture postcards, and popular culture tourism promotions. Lurlene advocates strongly for Pacific Island government responsibility to advocate and legislate strongly against child sex tourism, as given by their undertakings to protect the rights of children. Such a stand is mandated by their signatures on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and required by the imperatives of social justice.