



Review

Transnational responses to commercial sexual exploitation: A comprehensive review of interventions



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SYNOPSIS

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), a global social justice issue, reflects gross violation of basic human rights and extreme violence against women. Little research exists on interventions and approaches enabling women to successfully exit from, and rebuild their lives after involvement in, CSE. In this article, we investigate and compare strategies and interventions adopted in the United States (U.S.) and India for commercially sexually exploited women. A transcultural analysis of interventions that prevent entry into CSE and curb the demand for commercial sex, reduce the harm in CSE, and facilitate exit and transition post-exit are presented. The article emphasizes the lack of evidence in the literature on existing interventions, along with the need to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions within different cultural contexts. Research of this nature can promote international dialogue and disseminate information beneficial to combat CSE, a social evil that dehumanizes countless women and girls within varied settings.

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Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) is a global social justice issue and a violation of basic human rights. It is one of the most destructive forms of violence against women and girls. It can be

understood as “a practice by which a person achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical and mental well-being” (Barry, 1996, p. 326). Prostitution, sex

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trafficking, and pornography are forms of sexual exploitation (Hughes, 1999) that commodifies a woman's body. One of the darker outcomes of the process of globalization has been the unprecedented commodification of women's bodies, whereby the sex industry (collection of businesses that profit from CSE — Hughes, 1999) has been massively industrialized worldwide (Jeffreys, 2009). It has created a market of sexual exchanges in which millions of women and children have been converted into sexual commodities, generating an estimated 27.8 billion USD in profits annually (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2005). It is also impossible to ignore the role of gender discrimination and inequality as important constituents and catalysts of the vulnerability of women and girls to CSE. Of the total number of individuals in forced labor, 4.5 million are identified as victims of CSE, with 98% being female (ILO, 2012). These figures are at best estimates, given the illegal nature and stigma associated with being in the sex industry, and the shifting definitions of what constitutes forced versus voluntary involvement in CSE.

Research studies examining the impact of CSE on the life experiences of women demonstrate the preponderance of violence, victimization, captivity, criminalization, discrimination and commoditization (Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Vindhya & Dev, 2011; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). These experiences are not only limited to when women are in the sex industry, but are also common prior to entering the industry, and continue to have a debilitating impact on their lives even after exit (as reviewed in Wilson & Butler, 2014). Most often, they are left with a range of health consequences, psychological illnesses, emotional problems, addiction to substances, a lifetime of stigma (Farley et al., 2003; Jackson, Bennett, & Sowinski, 2007; Suresh, Furr, & Srikrishnan, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2008) and difficulties envisioning themselves in, and transitioning into, mainstream society.

The revelation of the substantial numbers of women and girls being forced into CSE (ILO, 2012), the progressively younger age of children being trafficked for CSE (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow, 2009), as well as epidemiological concerns about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS (World Bank, 2012), have motivated researchers and activists to search for effective strategies to curb CSE. Most recent research has focused on identifying the characteristics of females in CSE, particularly factors causing entry, their experiences, and health and mental health consequences of being commercially sexually exploited (Dandona et al., 2006; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Zimmerman et al., 2008). Additionally, there is a growing body of literature examining the need for improved legislation and the impact of what currently exists, including the role of law and other policy approaches in limiting CSE (Ekberg, 2004; Roby, 2005). There is far less available research on what supports or facilitates exit, particularly interventions and approaches which would prevent entry/re-entry of women into the sex industry, and enable those affected to successfully rebuild their lives after CSE by addressing their traumatic experiences, economic empowerment, and safe environment.

Given the international nature of CSE of women and girls, a transnational perspective can enhance the development of solutions. Comparative research expands our knowledge of theoretical models and specific methods that can promote international cooperation, sharing of effective models, and advancement of strategic policy and research directions. The

goal of this article is to analyze and compare interventions and strategies, developed in the U.S. and India, that are used to assist women and girls trafficked into CSE. According to the Trafficking in Persons report (U.S. Department of State [USDS], 2013) the U.S. and India are two large and important source, transit and destination countries, where women and children are trafficked for the purposes of CSE, both internally and from other countries. The U.S. is a developed country that currently complies with the minimum standards required to curb this form of exploitation (tier 1), while India is a developing country that is making significant efforts to eliminate trafficking, but is not yet fully compliant with the minimum standards (tier 2). These two countries are culturally distinct, because the U.S. is individualistic while India is collectivistic (Triandis & Suh, 2002).

For this paper, CSE is defined broadly to encompass prostitution, sex trafficking and/or other forms of commodification of women's bodies for sexual purposes. While we do acknowledge the ongoing debate in feminist scholarship about sex trafficking and prostitution being distinct phenomena, in this paper we consider the two to be interlinked because, as Farley aptly put it, "trafficking is the marketing of prostitution" (2003, p. 248). Further, despite social distinctions between "forced" and "voluntary" victims, there is no real choice in voluntary involvement when a woman is hungry or lacks alternatives for survival. Although both adults and children are victims of CSE, in this paper we explore the interventions directed predominantly towards assisting adult women, since the needs and specifications may vary for minors or for individuals of other sexes.

Below we discuss different models of interventions used to address the issue of CSE in the two countries. These models can be broadly classified under four major phases: (i) preventive interventions, where community-based interventions prevent the entry/re-entry of vulnerable women and girls into CSE, and demand reduction strategies prevent buyers from purchasing commercial sex; (ii) harm reduction after entry, where the focus is on the safety of victims while they are in the sex industry; (iii) exit specific interventions, where victims are motivated to exit and provided with alternatives to being dependent on the sex industry; (iv) post-exit services, where the survivors are assisted with reintegrating into the community and healing from the trauma after being commercially sexually exploited. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first work that comprehensively reviews the interventions available for this population, classifying them into different phases and comparing them across distinct cultures. The emphasis here is on the cultural competence and need for interventions at different phases along with their continuous evaluation.

Preventive interventions

Community based interventions

These programs are aimed at creating large scale public awareness about trafficking for CSE, initiating training programs to educate law enforcement/judiciary/service providers (who come in contact with victims of CSE) to identify and be sensitive towards victims, developing community surveillance mechanisms especially at source points, and educating vulnerable women and girls about their risk to such forms of

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