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Child and Adolescent Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Mexico: The Exploiters and the State


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Abstract

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Keywords

Mexico, child commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking in persons, exploiters, child sexual abuse, human trafficking, institutional violence, sex trafficking, state

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CHILD AND ADOLESCENT COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN MEXICO: THE EXPLOITERS AND THE STATE

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ABSTRACT

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a form of violence in which children, mainly girls and female adolescents, are reduced to sexual objects for rent. In this study, we argue that the concept of who is an exploiter must be broadened to include everyone who directly or indirectly benefits from CSEC. This paper is based on life stories of 10 female residents from a shelter, which we call Casa Libertad (a fictitious name) in Mexico City, for female victims of violence. Researchers also used semi-structured interviews with experts on CSEC to examine the exploiters' profiles. The research challenges the social representation of all exploiters as members of criminal trafficking networks. Some of the girls did not have direct exploiters, but often acted on their own. Among the victims who had exploiters, relatives and acquaintances played a central role. Our data revealed that the Mexican State, which formally prevents exploitation and assists victims, also contributes by action by not enforcing CSEC existing laws. The State also does not provide sufficient services to victims and has in its ranks sex buyers and abusers.

KEYWORDS

Mexico; commercial sexual exploitation of children; child sexual abuse; human trafficking; institutional violence

VICTIMS ARE EXPLOITED EVERY DAY in the global market of human trafficking (International Labour Organization, 2012; U.S. Department of State, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009); yet the exact number is unknown (Meshkovska, Siegel, Sutterheim, & Bos, 2015). Among trafficked persons, children and teenagers are especially vulnerable because they are exploited in the making of child sexual abuse images (child pornography), sold into sex tourism, and prostituted. Although adolescents and children of both sexes are exploited, girls and female adolescents seem to be victimized at a higher rate (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, 2006; Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres, Organización de Estados Americanos, Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2006).

Children and adolescents in Mexico are victims of trafficking and exploitation. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2000), also known as the Palermo Protocol, defines trafficking in persons (TIP) as the

“recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

Although traffickers exploit victims, some victims are exploited without the intervention of a trafficker.¹ The observable boundaries between trafficking involving a trafficker and the direct exploitation of a victim are often unclear.

By some estimates, in Mexico, 16,000 to 20,000 children are sexually exploited every year (Azaola, 2000; U.S. Department of State, 2008). Nevertheless, the sources of data and methodology for such estimates are questionable. According to the Foundation Scelles (2014), this figure may be between 25,000 and 75,000. Regarding the trafficking of persons (TIP) in Mexico, “there are no exact official statistics on trafficking of women” (Acharya, 2017; p. 220). The War against Drugs (*Guerra contra las Drogas*), a policy initiated by President Calderón consisting of a military offensive against Mexico-based drug cartels, and a zero-tolerance drug use policy (Daly, Heinle, & Shrik, 2012; Pereyra, 2012) with the objective of guaranteeing public security (Chabat, 2010; Escalante, 2011), has been associated with an increase in trafficking in persons (mostly of female migrants in transit to the U.S.), due to a diversification of activities by drug cartels (Casillas, 2012; Pereyra, 2012).

Published research on TIP and commercial sexual exploitation in Mexico is limited. It tends to relate to victims’ experiences with criminal and trafficking/exploitation networks (Azaola, 2000, 2006; Cacho, 2010; Pérez, 1995; Raymond, Hughes, & Gomez, 2010; Reyes, 2007), and does not differentiate among victims’ developmental stages (Acharya, 2008, 2010). In addition to criminal networks, other individuals participate in Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), for instance individual traffickers, sex buyers, and business owners who passively allow children’s exploitation. These individuals have not received enough attention in current research about CSEC in Mexico, and often are not labeled as exploiters. However, exploiters are those who in some way, individually or collectively, contribute to CSEC (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes International, 2012), regardless of whether they play an active or passive role in the exploitation.

¹ According to Williamson and Prior (2009; p. 47), in the U.S. the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, “helped to change the language of child sex trafficking in the U.S. (...) the act of manipulating a child into prostitution is now called *child sex trafficking* and those who were once *pimps* are now referred to as *traffickers*.” According to this perspective, both those involved in direct exploitation and those trafficking children are referred to as traffickers.

This small empirical study of girls and adolescent victims of sexual exploitation in Casa Libertad, a fictitious shelter in Mexico City that provides assistance to girls and teenage victims of violence, has three main objectives: a) to describe the different actors who in some way promote or facilitate CSEC; b) to study the role of the State in protecting children and adolescents from CSEC; and, c) to challenge stereotypes about CSEC in Mexico that link the phenomenon only with pimps and criminal trafficking networks. The underlying hypotheses are that there are both direct and indirect exploiters who profit from CSEC. Some of the direct exploiters tend to be from the girls' inner social and family circles.

The first section of this article addresses the phenomenon of violence against children and its manifestations, including CSEC. Next, it describes the protection offered by the Mexican State to victims of TIP and commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). The third section examines direct and indirect exploiters. The article reviews the role that the Mexican State and nonprofit organizations play in preventing CSEC and assisting victims. Finally, it presents the conclusions and limitations.

Child Sexual Exploitation as a Form of Violence against Children

CSEC is an expression of violence against children and adolescents that has consequences for children's mental and physical health. It damages their abilities to learn and socialize, undermines their growth as functional adults, and even leads to death (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2006). CSEC consists of sexual abuse in exchange for a payment in currency or goods, either for the exploited child or his/her exploiter. Payment in goods includes housing, food, clothes, drugs, medicines, and/or "protection" for the victim.

CSEC is a form of sexual violence in which exploited children are systematically raped and sexually abused, mainly, but not only, by male adults. It can also be perpetrated by an underage person who is significantly older than the victim, or holds power over the abused person. Victims of CSEC often suffer violence and extreme physical, sexual, and psychological abuse by exploiters (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005). In some cases, CSEC also includes other forms of aggression that further victimize children, such as beatings, threats, and/or abduction (Azaola, 2000). In others cases, exploiters establish emotional ties with victims as a subtle form of control. This strategy can be as effective and harmful as physical violence or threats.

While victims of CSEC are usually exploited by someone who profits from their bodies, this is not always the case. Some victims of CSEC have reported they are willing to exchange sex for money or other kinds of payment, while other people benefit from their exploitation. Since minors are not legally capable of making this "decision" and because they do so in contexts of poverty, violence, inequality, and exclusion, these girls and teenagers shall be considered victims of exploitation. In the case of adults, however, the definition of trafficking is "a battleground between those who consider it possible for sex work to be a voluntary choice and those who consider prostitution to always be forced" (Meshkovska et al., 2015, p. 382).

Whether organized in criminal networks or not, sex traffickers and exploiters prey on the vulnerable. Their targets are often children and young women who, among other vulnerability factors, live in poverty, have been sexually abused (Acharya, 2010; Azaola, 2006; Carro & Treguear, 1997; Chase & Statham, 2005; Goldenberg et al., 2015; Negrete, 1998; Scoppetta Díaz & Rodríguez Cruz, 2006),

grew up in dysfunctional families (Pérez, 1995; Reyes, 2007; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2001), or have been victims of family violence (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Goldenberg et al., 2015; Reyes, 2007; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Mexico and the Role of the State

To protect trafficked and sexually exploited girls and adolescents, Mexico has committed to and enacted a number of international regulations such as the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Sanction, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women also known as Convention of Belém do Pará signed and ratified by Mexico (1995), as well as the UN Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children – known as the Palermo Protocol (2000). Mexico agreed to protect minors (birth to 17 years of age) from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and to take appropriate measures to prevent and eradicate TIP.

Regarding sexual exploitation of minors, the 1929 Mexican Federal Criminal Code included corruption of minors or aggravated procuring (*lenocinio* in Spanish) as a crime associated with prostitution. Currently it is defined as the sexual exploitation for profit of the body of a minor. Until 1999, TIP could only be prosecuted in Mexico through indirect legal charges such as corruption of minors or aggravated procuring (Azaola, 2006).

In 2007, the Law to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons was enacted in Mexico. It was harshly criticized for its shortcomings and limitations, such as not considering all forms of TIP and exploitation, not aligning with international prevention protocols, and lacking provisions regarding federal and state coordination efforts on crime prosecution. In 2009 the Special Commission against Trafficking in Persons was created in the Mexican Congress to draft a general law that would overcome the limitations of the 2007 law. The General Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Trafficking in Persons and the Protection and Assistance of Victims of These Crimes (General Trafficking Law) was enacted in 2012. The law sought to differentiate among trafficking ending when exploitation begins, slavery and other forms of exploitation (Coalición contra el Tráfico de Mujeres y Niñas en América Latina y el Caribe, 2016). In 2014, this law received minor reforms, which included the non-criminalization of victims for activities carried out while trafficked and/or exploited, and the recovery of prosecution powers by sub-national governments.

The major contribution of the General Trafficking Law is that trafficking is now considered a crime regardless of the victims' consent. In addition, it takes into consideration sexual and non-sexual exploitation such as slavery, servitude, labor exploitation, forced work or services, forced mendicancy, use of minors in criminal activities, illegal adoption of children, forced or servile marriage, organ trafficking, and illegal biomedical human experimentation. The General Trafficking Law punishes, among other activities, the exploitation of one or more individuals through prostitution, pornography, public or private sexual exhibitions, sexual tourism, or

any other paid sexual activity that has been driven by deceit, physical or psychological violence, abuse of power or of a vulnerable situation, serious harm, or threat of serious harm.

Trafficking is a federal crime when at least one of the following situations occurs: a) it was started, set up, or committed abroad and has or will in the future take place in Mexican territory, or vice versa; b) public authorities are involved; or c) it is perpetrated by organized crime (three or more associated individuals associated temporarily or permanently to perpetrate crimes). FEVIMTRA (Special Federal Attorney's Office for Violence against Women Crimes and Trafficking) investigates and assists victims in the first two situations. The last is responsibility of the UEITMPO (Unidad Especializada en Investigación de Tráfico de Menores, Personas y Órganos, Specialized Unit for the Investigation of Trafficking in Minors, Persons and Organs) at the SEIDO (Assistant Attorney General's Office for Special Investigations on Organized Crime). In all other cases, it is considered a state felony unless the General Attorney's Office takes the case. Eighteen months elapsed between the enactment of the General Trafficking Law and the approval of its enabling regulations. However, as of November 2014, the laws in 142 of Mexico's 32 states did not comply with the General Trafficking Law (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015). This is an obstacle for prosecuting non-federal trafficking crimes and providing assistance to victims.

In 2015, 578 individuals were prosecuted for both sexual and non-sexual TIP and exploitation crimes; 86 were convicted, a conviction rate consistent with other crimes in Mexico (U.S. Department of State, 2016) and prosecution rates from previous years (Rivas Rodríguez, Cendejas, Pérez Morales, & Díaz Sosa, 2015). According to governmental records, 1,814 victims were identified in 2015. Of these, 43.2% experienced CSE; 26% forced labor; 21.1% forced mendicancy; 1% forced criminality; and 9% other forms of exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Other studies based on data from state agencies found that, from June 2012 to June 2015, 93% of TIP and exploitation victims were female, and at least 26.5% were underage (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2016). At the federal level, the SEIDO reported that only around 45% of victims were female and 65% were underage (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2016). Detailed CSEC figures are not available because the National Census on Law-Enforcement does not tend to differentiate among different sexual crimes. For example, in the 2015 census, sexual tourism, pornography, procuring, and forced labor exploitation of minors or persons with disabilities were grouped in the same category. The reliability of TIP and CSEC data is limited because "the anti-trafficking experts and people in prostitution reported officials often did not always differentiate between sex trafficking victims and women in prostitution due in part to the overly broad anti-trafficking law making victim identification statistics unreliable" (Acharya, 2017; p. 225).

The number of CSEC and TIP cases prosecuted in Mexico is low. Mexico faces a number of challenges that have been also identified in other countries. Difficulties are associated with police inability to recognize CSEC cases, low victim reporting, complex definitions of trafficking that influence decisions about prosecution, trafficking techniques that prevent identification of victims, and victims' lack of

² Baja California Sur, Morelos, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Sonora, Yucatán, Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa and Tabasco.

cooperation (Nichols & Heil, 2014). Other obstacles that hinder law enforcement and victims' protection include lack of human and material resources to provide proper assistance to victims, police corruption and, police participation in organized crime networks.

This lack of resources is evidenced by the fact that as of 2013, only 11 of 32 states had special investigation units for TIP crimes in State Attorney's Offices (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2013). Investigation of such cases in the remaining states was left to 219 state-level agencies specializing in sexual crimes, family violence crimes, and gender-based crimes, also responsible for investigating CSEC.

As for the second obstacle, institutional violence has been documented in cases of police officers who offer "protection" to child victims in return for sex, judges who accept bribes and set exploiters free, and the complicity between some State authorities and trafficking networks or individual traffickers (Acharya, 2017; Azaola, 2006; Cacho, 2010; U.S. Department of State, 2016). There is evidence that government officials have accepted or extorted bribes (including sexual services), falsified victims' identity documents, discouraged trafficking victims from reporting their victimization, and failed to report sex trafficking and exploitation in commercial sex locations (U.S. Department of State, 2013). In sum, "governmental actions seem to be isolated, disorganized, lacking reliable diagnostics, and therefore, without objectives or specific actions for eradicating the problem (Rivas Rodríguez et al., 2015, p. 54)."

Exploiters Indirectly or Directly Involved in Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

In Mexico, the social representation of exploiters has historically been linked to pimps (*padrote* in Spanish). However, a variety of individuals take part in CSEC. There are direct exploiters such as pimps and sex buyers, as well as traffickers and often their underground networks composed by connectors, transporters, recruiters, traders, "mommies," groomers, bottoms, watchers, and wives-in-law that promote and perpetrate the abuse (for definitions see Chin & Finckenauer, 2011; Territo & Kirkham, 2010; Williamson & Prior, 2009). A recent study in two major U.S. cities, however, found that exploiters tend to act without these support networks (Marcus, Horning, Curtis, Sanson, & Thompson, 2014). There are also indirect exploiters such as civilians who promote or allow the abuse, public authorities, taxi drivers, hotel and motel owners, and merchants and businessmen who indirectly benefit from the sex trade (Muñoz-Echeverri, Noreña-Herrera, Rodríguez-Garzón, Ossa-Estrada, & Bastidas-Lopera, 2016). The latter tend not to be labeled as exploiters in previous research (Negrete, 1998; Nichols & Heil, 2014).

Traffickers and Direct Exploiters

The public perception is that exploiters are linked to criminal networks that, in addition to TIP and CSE, tend to be involved in other criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, money laundering, fraud, extortion, migrant smuggling and theft (CIM et al., 2006; Negrete, 1998; Raymond et al., 2010). Chin and Finckenauer (2011) have questioned this view because traffickers recruit their victims using a variety of methods. Methods may include seduction (developing a romantic relationship), fake job offers (as dancers, hostesses or models), finesse pimping (manipulating victims to make them believe they had to pay back kindnesses shown to

them through commercial sex), trading, and abduction, as well as guerrilla pimping (the exploitation of victims through the use of threat, intimidation and/or physical violence) (Kara, 2009; Meshkovska et al., 2015; Pinheiro, 2006; Williamson & Prior, 2009). The most common technique worldwide is based on seduction. A study of sex trafficking in the United States revealed that husbands and boyfriends acted as pimps for 20% of international and 28% of U.S. female victims (Raymond et al., 2010).

Men represent the great majority of traffickers and exploiters; however, women also appear to play a prominent role (Meshkovska et al., 2015; Negrete, 2005; Torres Falcón, 2011). Traffickers and exploiters' typical ploys are creative and ruthless, designed to trick, coerce, and win the confidence of potential victims. Very often these ruses involve promises of a better life, including marriage, employment and educational opportunities.

Traffickers—exploiters as well as other people who benefit from CSEC—develop socially acceptable excuses and justifications to diminish their responsibility. Copley (2013) identified several justifications for sex trafficking across heterogeneous contexts and cultures: a) denial of responsibility by attributing their crime to forces beyond their control (i.e. victims themselves or their parents decided to engage in prostitution); b) denial of injury arguments that minimize the extent of the harm caused to girls and women—some even contend that they are being helped by having employment provided for them; c) denial of the existence of a victim by dehumanizing exploited children, lessening the perceived wrongfulness of the crime, or claiming the harm was deserved; d) necessity, since exploiters believe that CSEC is necessary for reasons such as satisfying soldiers' sexual desires; and, e) condemning the condemners, which involves exploiters blaming those who condemn and reject their actions. Those using this fifth justification, argue that sex trafficking persists due to corruption and the lack of governmental intervention, claiming that society itself is furthering the sex trade. Regardless of the argument, exploiters neutralize and justify the sexual exploitation of girls and teenagers in order to continue profiting from their bodies.

The views that sex trafficking and CSE entail violence correspond to what Marcus et al. (2014: 228) have labeled traditional narratives of exploitation arguing that these involve “[in the United States] pimp trickery, seduction, captivity, and brutality as the dominant or sole mode of recruitment and management.” They contested these views by providing empirical data derived from a large respondent-driven sample in the specific case of street sexual exploitation in New York City and Atlantic City. They found that the vast majority of individuals studied (70% were minors) did not have a pimp, and those who did were not tied to this person through seduction, violence, addiction, control or debt. They found that vulnerabilities such as lack of education, unemployment, drug-addiction, housing problems, or abusive parental relationships kept them tied to their exploiter. It is plausible, though, that CSEC occurring in non-street settings such as brothels might fit traditional narratives.

Sex Buyers

Although sex buyers of CSEC tend to remain invisible, they contribute as much to the sexual exploitation of girls and teenagers as traffickers (Kara, 2009; Ulloa, 2011). In Mexico, CSEC consumers may lead lifestyles that approximate society's

and seem to be “normal people (Cacho, 2010).” There are two types of CSEC consumers: preferential (pedophiles and hebephiles) and situational sex buyers (see Azaola & Estes, 2003; Scoppetta Díaz & Rodríguez Cruz, 2006). In Mexico, some of them are child sex tourists who travel from affluent countries in North America or Europe, to have sex with children and/or teenagers (Azaola, 2000, 2006; Risley, 2010; Scoppetta Díaz & Rodríguez Cruz, 2006). Most sex tourists are adult males, though there are a small number of women (Azaola, 2000). Sometimes these travelers rationalize their behavior by assuming it is culturally acceptable (Copley, 2013).

Sex buyers share traffickers’ and exploiters’ arguments justifying CSEC. Many of them do not consider themselves to be abusers. Instead, they find rationalizations such as telling themselves that the children voluntarily engaged in prostitution; that the natives of tourist spots are less sexually repressed than westerners; that children gain “sexual experience” at a very early age; and that far from exploiting, they are “employing” children in need (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2001).

Indirect Exploiters

There are people who promote CSEC and indirectly profit from it, such as hotel owners or managers, taxi drivers that promote and advertise girls’ sexual “services,” waitresses, valet parking attendants, hostesses, security guards, peddlers, drug dealers, tourism entrepreneurs, inspectors, and restaurant, brothel, spa, and bar owners (Azaola, 2000; Muñoz-Echeverri et al., 2016; Reyes, 2007). These individuals are indirect exploiters since they allow, tolerate, and benefit from children’s sexual exploitation.

METHOD

In order to describe the different actors who in some way promote or facilitate CSEC in Mexico, and to study the views of expert informants regarding the role of the State in protecting children and adolescents from CSEC, we interviewed key informants and reconstructed the life stories of girls living at a nonprofit shelter for female victims of violence in Mexico City.

The Life Stories of Survivors of CSEC

Victims and survivors of CSEC are members of hidden populations, “special populations that cannot be studied using standard sampling and estimation techniques” (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004:195). Victims of TIP and CSEC have been studied through different sampling methods: snowball or chain referral (Acharya, 2015), respondent-driven (Marcus et al., 2012), convenience (Chin & Finckenauer, 2011), a mix of simulated clients and snowball (Acharya, 2010), target samples (Goldenberg et al., 2015) and samples drawn from institutions (Williamson & Prior, 2009). In this research, we examined 10 identified cases of CSEC survivors sheltered in a not-for-profit institution in Mexico City.

Recruitment

We identified and contacted seven not-for-profit organizations working with CSEC and TIP survivors in Mexico City. Four of these organizations shelter and deliver services to victims of other crimes. We sent letters explaining our interest in working voluntarily in the institution and collecting research data. We followed

up with emails and phone calls. One organization agreed to participate in the study: Casa Libertad (fictitious name). Casa Libertad is located in one of the most violent and dangerous neighborhoods in Mexico City. Founded in 1994, Casa Libertad shelters about 60 girls. They have suffered, among other forms of abuse, domestic violence, abandonment, homelessness, TIP, and CSEC. Casa Libertad is supported by donations from individuals and companies and public funding.

Consent, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

Casa Libertad's founder and director provided institutional consent for us to examine their files and conduct ethnographic research regarding the functioning of the institution, as well as consent to interact with the sheltered girls. This strategy avoided ethical dilemmas about researchers' need to report CSEC cases (Allen, 2009) because subjects were already receiving assistance and protection.

We guaranteed the founder and director of Casa Libertad that data would only be used for research purposes and that the identities of the girls would be kept confidential and anonymous, a common standard in participant observation (Musante (DeWalt), 2014). The director requested that we not interview the girls and adolescents to avoid re-victimization and uncertainty about who should provide consent for an interview. She agreed that one of the authors would conduct participant observation while working in Casa Libertad as a volunteer assisting personnel in the social work department and organizing cultural and handcraft workshops for the girls.

This participant/volunteer role is appropriate when conducting research in understaffed institutions that rely on volunteer and community service work to carry out their daily activities. Access to the institution and information was exchanged for volunteer work, which resulted in greater opportunities to complement, compare and contrast information to be used to reconstruct the life histories of the girls and adolescents. In this context, the volunteer work is interpreted as a means to compensate researched subject or institutions with service (Abebe, 2009). Applying Grenier's (2000, cited in Abebe, 2009: 461) argument to institutions rather than communities in developing countries "the researcher can't really expect to go into local communities [organizations and institutions] and just take. If a person is going to do research, something has to be given back." Therefore, there is reciprocity between researcher and institution with each gaining something from the experience (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Musante (DeWalt), 2014).

Data from Casa Libertad

We identified 10 survivors of CSEC sheltered in Casa Libertad from January 2012 to December 2013 and reconstructed their life stories (the names of the girls are pseudonyms) using data from three different sources: a) participant observation by one of the authors from December 2012 to February 2013, during which more than 100 pages of written observation notes were generated and informal conversations with personnel were recorded in a fieldwork diary; b) information available in the shelter's database and printed file records (including police and social services reports and information gathered by personnel at Casa Libertad), which was recorded in a notebook; and c) informal conversations with female residents in which their experiences of CSEC emerged spontaneously, which were also recorded in a fieldwork diary.

For example, one of the authors organized a cultural trip to Frida Kahlo's museum with a group of adolescents. On her way back to Casa Libertad, she engaged in a two-hour conversation with one of the residents who disclosed that she had been on drugs for six years and had engaged "voluntarily" in prostitution to pay for drugs. The author also escorted another girl weekly to a not-for-profit organization providing assistance to rape victims. During the time they spent together, she disclosed that her father had raped her and that she was involved in CSEC. As Musante (DeWalt) argues, field notes are the primary method of capturing data from participant observation, resulting in a "product constructed by the researcher" (Musante (DeWalt), 2014: 276) because they are simultaneously data and analysis. Information in the fieldwork diary comprised sociodemographic and contextual data; information about the girls' CSEC experiences and consequences; and the interactions among the girls and between them and Casa Libertad's staff (all these topics were included in the observation guide).

These three sources of complementary data enabled us to reconstruct 10 life stories (unit of analysis). The contribution of each source of data to the life stories is heterogeneous and varies across cases. These life stories allowed us to identify the victims' exploiters' profiles and modus operandi, and to examine the role of governmental institutions in victim protection and/or further victimization. It is plausible that Casa Libertad sheltered more CSEC survivors, but they were not identified through our data gathering strategy.

Interviews with Expert Key Informants

Simultaneously, we conducted seven semi-structured interviews with key experts in CSEC from different public institutions (FEVIMTRA and the State Prosecutor's Office for Trafficking in Persons), directors or/and founders of four not-for-profit organizations providing services to victims and lobbying for the enactment of legislation. We also requested six additional interviews with experts in other not-for-profit organizations as well as in health, public security and social services agencies. However, we were not able to interview these experts because they did not answer our emails, letters and calls, or they did not set a date for an interview.

The interviewed individuals were selected because of their knowledge and involvement with TIP victims and CSEC, their role in the institution and their impartiality (Tremblay, 1959). We asked them questions regarding how victims of CSEC reach nonprofit organizations and governmental institutions; what types of services are delivered to victims of CSEC; prevention efforts of governmental and nonprofit organizations; obstacles and facilitators for the prevention of CSEC and assistance to victims; the role of the Mexican State in protecting children and adolescents; factors associated with the persistence of CSE; and profiles of victims and perpetrators of CSEC. Each interview lasted 40 minutes to 1.5 hours and all of them were transcribed by one of the authors.

Analytical Approaches

The qualitative data (notes from the fieldwork diary based on observation, conversations with the shelter's personnel, interactions with the female residents, revision of both the record files and shelter database), were used both to obtain sociodemographic information and to reconstruct their life stories around their ex-

periences of CSEC. These were analyzed for themes by both authors seeking information about exploiters, techniques used to exploit children and female adolescents, protection, and victimization. We included in the results section extracts of the reconstructed life histories and report files.

We performed an essentialist or realist inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants to examine their own views on the role of the State in protecting children and adolescents from CSEC. In general, we followed the analytical steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): first we transcribed the data, read the transcriptions and manually coded the interviews. We developed descriptive semantic codes that identified governmental actions (prevention of CSEC and assistance of victims), and experts' assessment of the strengths, challenges, and limitations of such actions. It means that the themes were identified "within the explicit or surface meanings of the data." Some of the codes were informed by the question asked, and some were derived from analysis of the interviews. We classified the different codes into potential themes based on whether they captured relevant information regarding the research question, and reviewed them; and finally, we defined, described, and named these themes.

RESULTS

Figure 1 presents information regarding the experience of CSEC by girls and adolescents of Casa Libertad. Someone directly profited from the sexual exploitation of eight of the 10 identified victims of CSEC. In the remaining two cases, there was not a direct exploiter (Maria and Selene). As shown in Figure 1, four of the 8 girls who experienced direct exploitation were exploited by non-relative males or their boyfriend/husband.

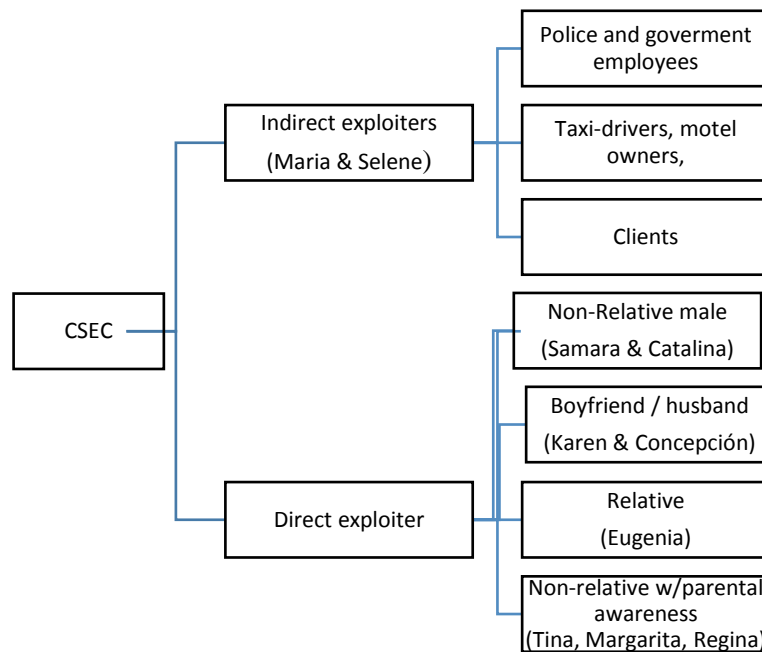


Figure 1: Those Who Directly Profited from the Commercial

Four of the girls were exploited by a relative (her own mother in the case of Eugenia) or someone their parents left the girls with and who was known as a potential threat (Tina, Margarita, and Regina).

Table 1 shows that 6 out of the 10 girls experienced child sexual abuse (CSA) before their CSEC, and therefore had multiple victimizations. The girls who experienced CSA suffered from CSEC at a younger age than those that did not experience it. Three of the girls were illiterate and the rest had dropped out of school—some as a consequence of the CSEC and others before its occurrence. An equal number lived in urban areas and in rural areas. All the girls of Casa Libertad were poor, as are 53.8% of the population under 18 years old in Mexico (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, & United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2013).

Seven of the girls were from Mexico City—where Casa Libertad is located—or the surrounding states: Morelos, and the State of Mexico. Another girl came from the northern state of Coahuila, and one each came from Chiapas and Oaxaca—states with a high percentage of indigenous population. These last were respectively, Karen and Concepcion (not their real names). They were taken to Casa Libertad from federal institutions, which may mean that their exploitation occurred in a foreign country; that public authorities were involved; or that organized crime was involved in their victimization. Karen and Concepción were the only two girls exploited by a husband/boyfriend, who presumably belonged to trafficking crime networks.

The girls were referred to Casa Libertad by a variety of institutions: municipal- and state-level family and child protection agencies (DIF- Defensa Integral de la Familia³), State and Federal Attorneys’ offices and federal agencies such as PROVICTIMA, predecessor of the Executive Commission for the Assistance of Victims (CEAV).

Indirect Exploiters

For some victims, the absence of a direct exploiter does not imply that other individuals are not profiting from their apparently “voluntary” sexual exploitation. Maria’s and Selene’s cases (not their real names) illustrate how girls and teenagers may be victims of CSEC without a direct exploiter in the context of social inequality and vulnerability. In these cases, different actors such as taxi drivers, hotel owners, drug dealers, pornographers, tourism entrepreneurs, or bar, spa, and brothel owners profited from their exploitation.

According to the printed records, Maria arrived at Casa Libertad when she was 17. Her father was an alcoholic and her mother died of a drug overdose when she was 10. That same year, her father was sentenced to prison for theft. Two years later, Maria became addicted to paint thinner and other drugs and dropped out of school. At age 14 she engaged in prostitution to fund her addiction. In an informal conversation, Maria disclosed that she was taken by a friend to Casa Libertad for the first time when she was 15. She mentioned that after one month, she ran away

³ Defensa Integral de la Familia (DIF) provides social services.

Table 1: Selected Characteristics of Identified Victims of Child Sexual Exploitation at Casa Libertad

Fictitious Name	Aprox. age first CSEC	CSEC Duration	Exploiter	State where CSEC took place	Age of arrival Casa Libertad	Child sexual abuse	Illiterate	Rural residency
Direct exploiters								
Tina	13		Non-relative female (bar owner) with mother's awareness		13	√	√	√
Margarita	8		Non-relative female (bar owner) with parents' awareness	Morelos	8		√	√
Eugenia	13		Mother	State of Mexico	13	√		
Karen	17		Boyfriend / Husband	Chiapas	22	√		
Catalina	14*	Less than 1 year	Non-relative male (taxi driver)	Coahuila	14	√		√
Regina	14		Non-relative female (madam) with parents' awareness	State of Mexico	14	√	√	
Samara	16		Non-relative male	Federal District	16			
Concepción	15*	1.5 years	Boyfriend / Husband	Oaxaca	17			√
Indirect exploiters								
María	14	3 years		Federal District	17			
Selene	10			Morelos	10	√		√

Notes: In most cases, age at which CSE began is unknown, thus age of arrival to Casa Libertad is taken as reference. * = Accurate age

No information was obtained in blank spots

DIF: System for Integral Family Development (*Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*); PGI: General Attorney's Office (*Procuraduría General de Justicia*);

PROVICTIMA: Social Attorney for Crime Victims' Assistance (*Procuraduría Social de Atención a las Víctimas de Delitos*); FEVIMTRA: Attorney's Special Office for

Felonies of Violence against Women and Human Trafficking (*Fiscalía Especial para los Delitos de Violencia contra las Mujeres y Trata de Personas*). PGR: General

Attorney's Office of Mexico (*Procuraduría General de la República*).

and returned to prostitution. She began stealing and spent a month at a juvenile detention center. When she came out, her strong addiction to drugs and her low self-esteem led her back into prostitution. She even became an exploiter, according to her testimony: She prostituted other girls.

Selene (not her real name) arrived at Casa Libertad at the age of 10. Selene's files indicate that at seven, she had already been raped by her father, who was later convicted for her rape. Selene's mother worked all day, and her brother forced Selene to work as a domestic worker for their neighbors. Selene also received money for sex. A copy of her testimony in the State's Attorney's Office's records included in Casa Libertad's files states, "I let other men do what my daddy did to me. But it does not hurt me anymore. They give me money if I have sex with them. I have done it with many."

Direct Exploiters

Social representation of CSEC exploiters often links them to mafias, criminal networks, and organized crime. This may have been the case for Concepción and Karen (not their real names), who were rescued by the federal government. Nevertheless, in the cases of half of the girls at Casa Libertad, the exploiters who directly benefited from the victims' CSEC belonged to the victim's inner circle—their mothers or other women who were supposed to supervise and take care of the girls. Two of the girls were exploited by non-relatives. The direct exploiters of the girls of Casa Libertad were both men and women; four of them were women and three of these women were themselves engaged in prostitution. The complexity of the category "exploiter" is further illustrated by the case of Maria (not her real name). She was not only a victim of sexual exploitation, but she also turned into an exploiter and prostituted other girls.

Eugenia's (not her real name) case illustrates how perpetrators may be relatives. According to Casa Libertad's records and database, Eugenia arrived there when she was 13. Her mother was engaged in prostitution and was often away from home for several days at a time, leaving Eugenia in charge of her younger siblings. According to a report from the Attorney's Office (June 2012), Eugenia's mother forced her and her siblings to watch her having sex. Eugenia's mother started prostituting Eugenia's older sister, Esther, at age 14. Esther (not her real name) was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend, became pregnant and had an abortion. She ran away from home. Eugenia was also sexually molested by this man, and barely escaped being raped. Eugenia's mother decided to prostitute Eugenia and took her to a bar where she was forced into prostitution.

The case of another girl, Tina (not her real name), also challenges the social construction of CSEC's exploiters as members of trafficking and criminal networks. By age 13, Tina had already been pregnant four times as a result of sexual exploitation. It began four years earlier when she was raped by her drunken uncle. Then, according to Tina's records, her mother made an economic arrangement with the madam of a cantina (bar) to allow Tina to work as a waitress. The madam forced her to have sex with sex buyers. Despite not being the direct exploiter, Tina's mother received money for her daughter's work and exploitation. Her mother was aware that cantina girls had sex with men, and was thus an accomplice in her exploitation. According to Tina's records, by age 13 she had already had two abortions, a dilation and curettage procedure due to death of the fetus, and gave birth to one baby whose whereabouts remain unknown.

Similarly, Regina (not her real name) arrived at Casa Libertad at age 14. She was illiterate. She reported during informal conversations with one of the authors being systematically raped and beaten by her father since the age of two. Despite her father's constant threats to kill her, Regina managed to tell her mother about the abuse. Regina's mother did not believe her. When Regina's mother became sick, she sent Regina and her siblings to live with an acquaintance who beat them. This woman prostituted Regina and her sister at a cabaret. According to Regina's records, she became pregnant by a sex buyer and when she gave birth, the woman took the baby from her. She has not seen the baby since. Regina's parents are currently in prison.

Other exploiters apparently act independently of an organized group, such as Catalina's trafficker. Catalina (not her real name) was from the northern state of Coahuila, and her exploiter was a taxi driver. Catalina's records and Casa Libertad's database revealed she was sexually abused by her father for two years. At age 14 she was drugged, raped, and forced into prostitution by a taxi driver who threatened to kill Catalina's mother if she were to say anything or if she resisted.

Some traffickers act as boyfriends to their future victims, and may even marry them in order to take them out of their hometowns and exploit them in unfamiliar cities. This was the case for both Karen and Concepcion (not their real names), who were born in two of the poorest states of Mexico, and were the only two identified cases of CSEC perpetrated by a network. They both fell in love with men who became their exploiters. Karen's records state that she was born in the southern state of Chiapas and arrived at Casa Libertad when she was 22 years old. Around the age of 17, Karen was sexually exploited by her boyfriend—who was the father of her twin girls—and her boyfriend's father. Karen and her daughters were referred to Casa Libertad by a federal agency.

Concepcion, who was born in the state of Oaxaca, arrived at Casa Libertad at age 17. At 15, she married a 17-year-old boy, who one month into their marriage "asked" her to engage in prostitution due to economic necessity. For a year and a half, Concepcion "agreed" to have sex for money. Her husband's brother also exploited his own wife, which suggests TIP and CSE was a family business. Concepcion's sister-in-law's case reached a federal agency, and she let them know about Concepcion's exploitation. This led to her being rescued later. Concepcion said she had agreed to prostitute herself and was thus never forced into anything. Casa Libertad's staff mentioned she probably experienced manipulation that was less than physical violence. Although Concepcion's case might seem voluntary, legally it is not, since the General Trafficking Law states that the consent of the victim is not a cause for excluding the criminal responsibility of perpetrators.

The Sex Buyers

Buyers of CSEC are usually national or foreign exploiters who pay to have sex with children. In Casa Libertad, all the girls were exploited in Mexico, but both national and foreign sex buyers were identified. For example, Catalina's clients were mainly from the U.S., as revealed by Casa Libertad's legal advisor:

"This guy [taxi driver] began by giving her small amounts of drugs to get her addicted. I guess the girl was around 14 [years old] (...) Then, he contacts Americans who cross the border and sets a date. It was not in a hotel, it was in a non-occupied brand-new building complex. (...) He took the girl

there, she was already on drugs, and she was the object of a mass rape. I mean, several men [had sex] with her. It lasted for a long time.”

When victims of CSEC are directly exploited, as in the cases of Catalina, Regina, Concepción or Karen, all or most of the payment is kept by the exploiter. In cases of indirect exploitation, children receive the payment themselves. However, in such cases there are also rapists who pretend to be buyers and force their victims to have sex without payment. According to Maria’s reconstructed life story, she was constantly battered and raped by sex buyers; on several occasions they even tried to kill her. In an informal conversation, she said:

“When I arrived at Casa Libertad for the first time, I had only been raped once. By the second time I arrived, I had gone through 10.”

Her last rape occurred after she had taken drugs and stood on a street looking for sex buyers. When a taxi stopped, Maria got in, looked at the mirror, and immediately recognized the driver; he had already raped her before. She tried to get out of the car, but the taxi driver raped her again. He dropped Maria far away from where he picked her up, where some people helped her and paid for a taxi. She asked the taxi driver to take her to the same street where she had earlier met the first taxi driver.

There is no specific profile for sex buyers in Mexico. They can be of any age or belong to any socioeconomic strata. The buyers of the sheltered girls were not always adults. According to Selene’s official records, by the age of 10, she had already had sexual intercourse with eight males; four of them were 15 or 16 years old. One of these men was her cousin. The ages of the remaining four were not included in Selene’s records, but at least four out of the eight sex buyers were underage. In exchange, Selene received between 25 pesos and 200 pesos (around 1.6 and 13.3 U.S. dollars).

Public authorities, police, and State attorney’s agents are also consumers. Maria’s records show that, despite not being directly exploited by a trafficker, she had to have sex with police officers who intimidated and threatened her with arrest. At times, they paid her with money or drugs they had taken from other people (payment in goods); other times she received no payment at all. With the data available from the girls of Casa Libertad, we do not have direct evidence that any of the other girls had law enforcement agents and civil servants as sex buyers. However, the experts interviewed recounted many cases in which exploiters were law enforcement agents or civil servants. The Attorney General of FEVIMTRA revealed that some victims of CSEC had state-level civil servants as sex buyers.

“Sometimes the victim tells me: ‘You know what? When I was being exploited, high ranking public authorities came. If I press charges in my state... I put myself at risk.’”

The following testimony from a victim of CSEC exploited for three years since the age of 13 is also revelatory:

“Public authorities are accomplices. We went [with other victims of CSEC] to their parties. It was obvious that we were underage. We were forced to be their sexual entertainment against our will. These people do not have

moral authority at all” (see Special Commission Against Trafficking in Persons 2011, p. 30).

According to the U.S. Department of State, “despite persistent reports of extensive official complicity, authorities did not report any prosecutions or convictions of government employees complicit of trafficking in 2015 (U.S. Department of State, 2016; p. 268).” In fact, not a single civil servant or authority has been convicted since 2010.

The Negligent Protective State

Experts’ views regarding the commitment of the State to battle CSEC and TIP are divided. Some state employees argue that the government is willing to act but that the phenomenon is complex. In contrast, others believe that the approval of legislation on trafficking without allocating resources for prevention, assistance, or prosecution reflects the State’s negligence. In addition, they agree that TIP in general and CSEC in particular exists due to corruption, impunity for perpetrators, and complicity between different State actors, such as police officers, public prosecutors, judges, and society’s tolerance and ignorance.

CSEC might be regarded as a manifestation of the State’s institutional violence because the State has the responsibility for protecting and ensuring children’s rights. Institutional violence, according the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence, enacted in 2007, can be exercised through action (direct victimization, re-victimization, corruption, complicity) but also through omission (impunity for exploiters and inadequate or lack of public policy).

Institutional Violence by Action

In the views of all governmental (n=2) and non-governmental experts (n=5) that we interviewed, corruption of public authorities and their complicity with traffickers and exploiters obstructs law enforcement and therefore CSEC eradication. Casa Libertad’s legal advisor highlighted that some personnel from government agencies profited from the sex trade by demanding money in exchange for not conducting raids in settings where CSEC took place. If payment is not provided “the merchandise is taken: girls and women.” Non-governmental experts agreed that they have evidence of cases of girls and teenagers who managed to escape from sexual exploitation, sought help from public authorities, and then had these same authorities take them back to their exploiters. The testimony of an expert, the coordinator of the United against Trafficking Commission, illustrated this point with the case of a girl who was being sexually exploited in a truck park.

“Drivers would stop, have sex with her and continue on their way. Her parents located her, and sought assistance from a law enforcement agency, and went together to her rescue. The girl entered the police patrol car [her parents were in a separated vehicle]. That was the last time they saw their daughter.”

“To whom do you turn? It has to be to institutions. How is that possible? It does not matter what crime we talk about, robbery, whatever ... Where do you seek help? You [speaking about CSEC] need to be sure that you can seek help in a police station and that they will not force you to return to your abuser. Imagine ... you manage to escape, you have been hit and raped, you reach a police officer, and he takes you back to your abuser.”

Institutional Violence by Omission

The number of specialized agencies created after the General Trafficking Law that investigate and prosecute TIP crimes is small, and assistance provided to victims of CSEC is likely to be delivered using protocols intended for other types of crimes. The 2012 law confers on the State the responsibility for protecting and assisting victims. As of March 2015, there was only one public federally funded high security public shelter managed by FEVIMTRA (The Special Federal Attorney's Office for Violence against Women Crimes and Trafficking) for approximately 50 female victims of all forms of violence. The State of Puebla opened in 2015 the first public-private shelter for TIP victims, funded by both the State and private organizations (U.S. Department of State, 2016). This situation contravenes the Trafficking General Law because the states and the Federation are required to build and manage shelters for victims of TIP in order to assist them until they are fully recovered.

The resources and capacity of the federally funded shelter are so limited that victims of TIP tend to be sent to other institutions. Public resources allocated to provide assistance to violence against women and TIP victims have decreased over time. The Special Federal Attorney's Office for Violence against Women Crimes and Trafficking (FEVIMTRA) used to have three specialized centers providing comprehensive assistance to victims in the Federal District, Chihuahua and Chiapas. With the creation in 2011 of the Social Attorney's Office for Crime Victims (PROVICTIMA) and its later transformation into the Executive Commission for the Assistance of Victims (CEAV) in 2012, the three centers were transferred to its control. They not only offer assistance to TIP victims, but also to victims of other crimes. At the State level, victims of CSEC and TIP are often sent to shelters for vulnerable children and female victims of violence, mostly domestic violence victims. According to data provided by the Mexican Government reported by Acharya (2017), there are 316 public agencies providing services to TIP victims and 31 not-for-profit managed institutions nationwide. Only 59 of them offer short- and long-term shelter to victims of TIP. However, they tend not to provide exclusive services to TIP and CSEC victims and the number of assisted victims is unknown (U.S. Department of State, 2016). The coordination between governmental and non-governmental efforts to provide comprehensive services to victims is weak.

Despite these efforts, the 2015 Human Trafficking Report ranked Mexico as a Tier 2 country because the Mexican government does not fully comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2016). This report recommends that the Mexican government increase resources to provide specialized services and protection to victims, as well as to strengthen investigation and prosecution of trafficking offenses.

The general coordinator of the United Against Trafficking Commission argues that the lack of specialized institutions providing services for trafficked persons, such as shelters, is associated with the inaction of law enforcement agencies. These agencies do not rescue victims because there are no specialized institutions to assist them: "Some states [authorities] say: 'Ok, I'll rescue them [the victims]. But where do I take them?'" This is likely to start a vicious cycle, since shelters are not built because there are no victims to assist. The State, therefore, contributes to the CSEC by omission of services through inadequate public policies or the lack of response to institutional violence.

There is no public guidance or control regarding not-for-profit shelters. According to the experts, shelters are overwhelmed and do not have enough resources to assist all victims. The general coordinator of the United Against Trafficking Commission asserted that some legislators are working on establishing rules, but he finds the idea of NGOs being regulated by the State, which carries the responsibility of providing such assistance, disturbing.

The lack of regulation of these nonprofit organizations and the absence of protocols for providing assistance to victims may result in poor-quality services and victims' re-victimization. While one of the authors was conducting an interview, the interviewee asked a victim of CSEC to join in the conversation and talk about her experience of being sexually exploited, without even asking if she was willing to do so. The conversation took place in a hostile and uncomfortable environment for the adolescent. In that context, to encourage a victim to talk about the abuses she suffered means re-victimizing her. The expert said this about the girl who shared her testimony:

"And what's more worrying is that she liked both drugs and going to bars, because she felt important. And she liked having sex. In fact, she now tries to provoke it. (...) It is not to say that an event such as rape could not awaken something inside you [implying that she liked it]."

From this passage it could be inferred that he believes that victims of CSEC might enjoy being raped. This not only nullifies the abuse, but it also justifies it. Thus, while "enjoying being raped," the victim "accepts being sexually assaulted," and therefore, is not a victim anymore. Similarly, the file of one of the victims of CSEC recorded a two-year-long job. This job referred to CSEC. Classifying systematic sexual exploitation as a job, means keeping the abuse unseen, and raises questions regarding the training of those providing assistance to victims.

Prevention Efforts

In the experts' views, most governmental efforts regarding CSEC and TIP are focused on prevention rather than assistance and eradication. This is explained by the fact that assistance entails higher costs than prevention. According to their testimonies, prevention efforts are centered on educational strategies promoting awareness and identification of the problem, as well as dissemination of information about human rights rather than actually tackling the causes of the problem. An example of an initiative targeting all social groups is Blue Heart, a U.N.-promoted campaign adopted by the Mexican federal government in 2010. Similarly, in 2011 the Mexican Youth Institute launched a campaign addressed to children and adolescents in order to educate them about TIP. It consisted of posters and brochures and its slogan was "To play with puppets is fun, to play with persons is not... It is trafficking." Some of these prevention actions were implemented in schools and were therefore limited to those who attend school. Experts agreed that prevention actions carried out by the Mexican State are limited and disconnected. Most of the preventative actions are carried out by national and international NGOs working on sexual trafficking in Mexico: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), Coalition Against Trafficking in Women—Latin America and the Caribbean (CATWLAC), Child Development Areas (Espacios de Desarrollo Infantil, A.C.), Common Childhood (Infancia

Común A.C), Infancia Foundation, Casa Alianza, Your Voice: Alliance Against Human trafficking in Mexico (Tu Voz: Alianza contra la Trata de Personas en México), and Without Trafficking (Sin Trata).

Not-for-profit organizations also promote prevention. According to the Citizens' Observatory for Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons (Observatorio Ciudadano de Tráfico y Trata de Personas) and the Secretaría de Gobernación – Department of State, as of January 2017 there were 24 non-profit organizations and foundations addressing TIP and exploitation of persons;⁴ these organizations organize direct prevention campaigns in high-risk communities, and sponsor training in TIP and CSE.

CONCLUSIONS

This article addresses CSEC as a form of sexual violence against children, the prevalence of which in Mexico is unknown. CSEC exists because consumers demand it, traffickers offer it, others facilitate it, and the majority of society allows it. In Mexico, the social representation of exploiters tends to be simplified to be male traffickers who belong to big criminal networks. This small research study challenges this assumption by examining the life stories of 10 children and adolescents, sheltered in Casa Libertad, who experienced CSEC. The life stories of these girls might not be representative of all the girls experiencing CSEC, but reveal that they were exploited by both males and females and their exploitation was possible because families and their inner circle are accomplices. This finding supports previous research (Scoppetta Díaz & Rodríguez Cruz, 2006). Some direct exploiters, in two out of 10 cases, belonged to trafficking networks composed by members of the same family. The existence of more or less extensive underground networks that promote and perpetrate the abuse identified in previous research did not emerge from the reconstructed life histories or the expert interviews (Chin & Finckenauer, 2011; Territo & Kirkham, 2010; Williamson & Prior, 2009). The majority of cases called into question existing stereotypes of modes of recruitment and management through exploiters' trickery, seduction, captivity, and violence, thus confirming previous research (Marcus et al., 2012).

In addition to direct exploiters, there are several other actors involved in the sexual exploitation of girls and adolescents. As found in previous research, for some, complicity involves action, while for others, it involves omission (Muñoz-Echeverri et al., 2016). International legislation focuses mainly on traffickers and victims, leaving aside sex buyers and those who facilitate exploitation. This omission also occurs in Mexico, where sex buyers are punished only if they know that the victim is the object of exploitation, which turns out to be difficult to prove. Ignoring sex buyers as exploiters probably explains the failure to recognize that CSEC without a direct exploiter is a form of commercial exploitation of children, since it is believed that there is no victim without a victimizer. Not recognizing victims of CSEC without a direct exploiter can lead to biased interpretations of the

⁴ These organizations' efforts are focused on three main areas: a) prevention through education and direct intervention in high risk communities; b) generation and diffusion of data; and c) provision of services for victims. Information available at <http://ccceh.org.mx/traficoytratadepersonas/index.php/redes-de-apoyo/> (last accessed March 14, 2017).

problem, such as conceptualizing CSEC as voluntary and dismissing the role played by individuals profiting from the child's exploitation.

The narrow definition of exploiters is reflected in the design of public policies; hence according to experts' views, preventive campaigns tend to be focused on victims rather than exploiters and sex buyers. Girls and adolescents are taught to protect themselves from exploiters, to identify risk situations, and to seek help from public authorities. However, campaigns should also raise awareness in boys, male teenagers, and adults about the violence that traffickers, exploiters, sex buyers and others perpetrate on victims of CSEC. In order to prevent the problem, public interventions need to address some of the factors associated with CSEC, such as poverty, and the occurrence of other forms of victimization linked to CSEC such as CSA and parental neglect (see Meshkovska et al., 2015).

This research also illustrates the disconnection between the formal protection for victims of TIP in the law and the actual protection offered through public policies and law-enforcement agencies. Public resources allocated for assistance and prevention are scarce; in 2011, the federal government spent around 247 million of pesos (approximately \$12.3 million dollars as of March 2017) on TIP prevention and assistance actions (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2013). Nevertheless, only one third of the States in Mexico have a special unit in the State Attorney's Office to prosecute TIP and provide victims with comprehensive services provided by social workers, psychologists, doctors and legal consultants. In addition, there is only one publicly funded specialized shelter for victims of sex trafficking, and attention to victims is generally left to a few not-for-profit organizations. The scarcity of public shelters and the lack of regulation and protocols regarding shelters exemplify the State's institutional violence by omission toward TIP victims. Moreover, as suggested by key informants the lack of shelters is likely to start a vicious cycle, since shelters are not built because there are no victims to assist. The State, therefore, contributes to the CSEC by omission since inadequate public policies or the complete lack thereof results in institutional violence.

The Mexican State is obligated to guarantee children's rights and to protect them from sexual exploitation. Some governmental prevention efforts that target female children and adolescents are implemented in schools and are therefore limited to those who attend. Three of the Casa Libertad's girls, Tina, Margarita and Regina, could not have benefited from school-based prevention efforts since they were illiterate and never went to school. According to the 2010 Mexican census, only 88% of the children and adolescents from 5 to 17 years old go school (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2010). The rationale behind these prevention efforts seems to be that if children and adolescents could be taught about the dangers of TIP and CSE, they would be able to identify CSEC situations and they would avoid them. Similarly, if the public, including direct or indirect exploiters, received similar information, they would presumably protect children from CSEC.

In experts' views, however, corruption, abuse of power, and impunity among public authorities allow the existence of CSEC. Some public authorities also play a prominent role as sex buyers, therefore becoming direct exploiters.

This research offers a methodological approach to the study of hidden populations such as institutionalized victims of CSEC by reconstructing their life stories by using several data sources. The results are limited due to incomplete institutional information in databases and files and the limitations of participant observation. Though valuable information emerged from these institutionalized cases in

Casa Libertad, the results cannot be extrapolated to all victims of CSEC because institutionalized individuals are a nonrandom sample of the hidden population (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). They do, however, illustrate the need to adopt broader non-stereotypical definitions of exploiters, and to expand the understanding of contexts in which CSEC occurs.

This research underscores the relevance of studying the phenomenon of CSEC regardless of whether there is a direct exploiter or not. Despite the absence of a direct exploiter, children and adolescents engage in prostitution in a context of social inequality and vulnerability, where different actors take part in victimization and benefit with their exploitation. The Mexican State needs to further its efforts to effectively prevent TIP and CSEC and to protect its victims, not only by enacting legislation but also by allocating resources to design and implement public policies that address the roots of the problem, and by considering the State itself as part of the problem.

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

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