

Is Sri Lanka Still The “Pedophile’s Pleasure Center?”

Child sexual abuse is becoming a steaming complication in the current day Sri Lanka. When referred into the past records and statistics published by the National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka (childprotection.gov.lk, n.d.), it is evident that there is a significant augmentation in the number of cases reported in reference to sexual abuse including obscene publications, soliciting, rape, incest and grave sexual abuse (childprotection.gov.lk, n.d.). The human rights of children are being infringed and hence the human security aspect of the country is to be defended. This directly impact on the national security of the country. According to article 1 of the convention on the rights of the children it defines “child” as every human being below the age of 18. It should also be noted that there are many cases which go unreported. Here, the stereotyped sociocultural element is crucial. Doctor Thush Wickremanayake, chairperson of Stop Child Cruelty Trust has stated that “a child is being sexually molested once every two hours” which evidently denotes the seriousness of the complication. Accordingly, it can be identified is that the issue on the other hand refers on the augmentation of pedophiles in the country.

During the 90s and early 2000s, tourist pedophiles in the country was an abundant phenomenon specially in the coastal areas of the country. It was suggested that Sri Lanka was a principle source of child pornography providers for the US as well as Europe with reference to an article published by London Telegraph in 1997. Studies conducted by the United States has estimated that more than 250 million copies of videos on child pornography were circulating worldwide and most of them were filmed in countries like Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka during the respective time period. Sri Lanka was known as the “Pedophile’s Pleasure Center”, a slogan coined among the pedophile community. Selling orphaned children to tourist pedophiles during the tsunami and civil war times were high, where they were trafficked and prostituted to pedophiles by organized crime groups and sometimes by their own parents.

According to Psychology Today, pedophilia is an ongoing sexual attraction to pre-pubertal children. Even though there are many cases of pedophiles reported, these types of topics have been restricted by social taboos in Sri Lanka and therefore not paid enough attention or awareness. Most of the victimized children have no idea or awareness of these acts which are being exercised. It has been reported that there is a significant local demand for underage sex in the country. It should be taken into account that not only girls are becoming vulnerable before this complication but boys as well. Pedophiles can be anywhere whether at school, public transportation or religious places.

Tourist pedophiles in Sri Lanka

As a country where tourism plays a pivotal role in the nation’s economy, tourists are an abundant sight in the island. One of the major reasons here can be attributed to the fact that child sex tourists travel to countries with less constructive laws for the primary purpose of exploiting vulnerable children often with the use of local intermediation. As of 2012, UNICEF estimates over 30,000 child sex workers in Sri Lanka to be boys and that thousands of cases go unreported. A study conducted by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura denotes that there is a higher prevalence in child sexual abuse reported in Northern Sri Lanka, an area which has been affected by years of civil war and areas associated with tourism industry. Children living close to the beach find Child Sex Tourism (CST) as a novel and easy method of making money and supporting families. These boys are referred as “Beach boys” and are offered as vacation packages to tourist pedophiles, mainly of European, American and Asian origin. Some of these children are sold by their own parents to foreigners and consider it a mode of income and a normal act. Therefore,

it can be seen that there is a proportional relationship between the increase of tourism in the country as well as the increase of commercial sex work.

PEaCe (Protecting environment and Children Everywhere), a non-governmental organization reporting on sexual exploitation of children in Sri Lanka denotes that there is a distinct characteristic of sexual exploitation by organized crime groups notably in coastal areas. This can be denoted as a negative impact of mass tourism as well. Child pornographic industry can be identified as a multimillion-dollar industry and a grave issue which takes place in Sri Lanka even upto date. There is very less information on cases related to this identified in the country by respective authorities but however it was revealed by The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of India, stating about online sexual abuse of minors which included several Sri Lankan offenders as well in 2021. The CBI has also denoted that these parties were paid to share content relating to child abuse and child pornographic material across social media revealing 30 offenders from Sri Lanka.

Impact on National Security

It is apparent that the rise of pedophiles in the nation severely violates children's rights. Children are severely hampered by this not just physically but also psychologically, which has a negative effect on their growth and development as well. One of the most serious breaches of human security in the world, cases of pedophilia and child sexual abuse are becoming a rising public health and human rights issue. Additionally, it is becoming into a rapidly expanding security concern that compromises the nation's overall security.

In addition to the general protection by law, children are also entitled to special protection and assistance since they are deemed vulnerable, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Even in these conditions, mentioning how severely all of these are being violated is pitiful. Many of these situations go unreported according to children's rights activists because society, even today, tends to underestimate this issue. Pedophilia is a mental health issue even though its not being treated as one in Sri Lanka. It is regrettable to report that incest-related child sexual abuse is also on the rise. Incest can be summed up as unethical sexual contact with a family member that has an impact on the victim for the rest of their lives.

According to a study done in Nigeria, men who sexually abuse children frequently lack the confidence and social skills needed to create healthy intimate connections with peers. Due to their frustration, they seek intimacy with young partners as a result of their failure. It should be noted, though, that women are also guilty of being pedophiles. When considering the victim's perspective, it becomes clear that they frequently have health-related concerns, such as an increased risk of sexual and reproductive health issues, an increased risk of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other harmful health behaviors like drug usage and unsafe sexual conduct, creating health security risks where the necessity of coping mechanisms are utterly required. Thus, child rights are heavily violated due to the complication which creates hindrances in the human security aspect. It should be mentioned that ensuring child safety is a responsibility of a nation to maintain its national security while creating a safe space for every individual.

It should be noted that the Sri Lankan educational system lacks gender-sensitive knowledge on subjects like social norms, gender stereotypes, and sexual and reproductive health, obstructing access to awareness. Mandatory workshops and awareness campaigns on child protection, especially at schools,

would help to further reduce the problem. Even though it has been proposed to implement a sex offender registry, still it has not been exercised. From all the pedophiles that has been arrested, especially foreign ones, only a very low amount has been brought before the court and therefore measures should be implemented regarding the matter. From the standpoint of national security, it may be inferred that pedophiles and child sex violence will continue to be a concern and challenge to Sri Lanka's security, compromising the nation's ability to live in peace.



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