

## Child Prostitution

*An estimated 1 million children around the world are forced into prostitution every year, and the total number of prostituted children could be as high as 10 million.*

UNICEF

Child prostitution involves the exchange of the sexual services of a child for compensation – financial or otherwise. Child prostitution can involve a third party offering the sexual services of a child for remuneration. Both girls and boys are involved in cases of child prostitution, and in Asia alone, over 1 million children are held in conditions of sex slavery. It is estimated that 9% of child prostitutes are less than ten years old.

In recent years the term ‘prostitution’ has become politically loaded. It is increasingly being replaced by the term ‘sex work’ which is the preferred definition used by adults participating in the mainstream sex industry. For children and young people, however, the term is not appropriate. It does not address their experiences of commercialised sexual activity.

Research shows that young people rarely identify as prostitutes. New labels for their commercial sexual activities have been developed, especially in the first world context. These include ‘sex for survival’, ‘opportunistic prostitution’ and ‘sex for favours’. These terms recognise the types of transactions involved when a young person exchanges sex for basic needs such as accommodation, food, clothing, drugs or safety.

Yet child prostitution is a serious violation of children’s basic rights, as underlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Significant health problems are faced by prostituted children, such as: infectious diseases including HIV, mental illness, pregnancy, malnutrition, violence and substance abuse. 50-90% of children rescued from brothels in parts of South East Asia are infected with HIV. It is estimated that over one-and-a-half million child prostitutes attempt suicide annually.

Child Wise has conducted extensive research into young people’s involvement in prostitution in Australia. You can download our reports from our website.

See **Speaking for Themselves: Voices of Young People involved in Commercial Sexual Activity in Australia** (2004)

**Youth for Sale: A National Inquiry into the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Australia** (1998)

**Bridging the Gap: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Young People in metropolitan Melbourne** (1997)