

# GLOBAL FUND TO **END MODERN SLAVERY**

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## Respondent-Driven Sampling Study of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) In Kampala, Uganda

### Context

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This briefing note presents a summary of methods, findings, and conclusions from a study conducted by ICF in collaboration with Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. This respondent-driven sampling (RDS) study, involving in-person interviews, took place in March through April 2021 in Kampala to measure the characteristics of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and to estimate the prevalence of children among all people

engaged in CSE. The purpose of this study is to inform Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS)-funded programming intended to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Kampala and Napak District. No prior studies offer an estimate of the prevalence of CSEC in Uganda based on a probability sample, and the characteristics of CSEC have not been fully studied in Uganda.

### Key Findings

#### CSEC prevalence and vulnerability

- The study finds that an estimated 26.3 to 29.3% of individuals engaged in the sex industry in Kampala are under age 18. An estimated 22.5% of children engaged in the sex industry in Kampala are male.

#### Remuneration

- While three-fourths (76.1%) of children are always paid for their engagement in the sex industry, one-fourth (23.9%) are paid only sometimes. Nearly all children engaged in the sex industry (92.9%) receive their payment directly from the client, and by far the most common form of payment is money, followed by alcoholic drinks and gifts. A third party receives payment on behalf of the child engaged in the sex industry “sometimes” for one-third of children (36.1%) and “always” for 3.6% of children. The most common third-party recipient of payments are pimps and friends. More than one-third of children (40.3%) give some of their remuneration to friends. One-fifth (20.7%) give some of their remuneration to their parents, and one-fourth (25.4%) give to other family members.

#### Pressure and violence

- Nearly half of children (46.6%) feel that someone is pressuring or forcing them to do sexual things sometimes or always. More than half of children (58.3%) have felt they would be hurt if they did not do sexual things they were told to do. One-third of children (33.7%) report having been hurt by someone pressuring them to do sexual things. The third parties most commonly involved in the fear or experience of violence are clients, for one-fourth of children (24.4%); friends, for one-fourth of children (23.0%); and pimps, for 12.8 percent of children. Almost half of children (44.3%) report working for a pimp or broker sometimes or always. The findings as a whole suggest that friends may be playing the role of brokers or pimps in some cases.

#### Impact of COVID-19

- Respondents report that the COVID-19 pandemic has made their work more difficult, less lucrative, and more dangerous. Some respondents report having entered into the sex industry as a result of the pandemic.

#### Respondent advice to youths considering commercial sex

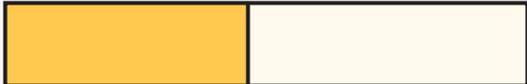
- Respondents were asked what advice they would give a youth considering sex work. Most respondents advise



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**AN ESTIMATED 22.5% OF CHILDREN** engaged in the sex industry in Kampala are male.



**NEARLY HALF OF CHILDREN (46.6%)** feel that someone is pressuring or forcing them to do sexual things sometimes or always.



**ONE-THIRD OF CHILDREN (33.7%)** report having been hurt by someone pressuring them to do sexual things.



**ALMOST HALF OF CHILDREN (44.3%)** report working for a pimp or broker sometimes or always.

youths to avoid engagement in commercial sex if possible and to take precautions against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## Methodological Approach

The sample was recruited using RDS, a network-based sampling method that overcomes the traditional biases associated with similar approaches (e.g., chain-referral and snowball sampling) by approximating probability sampling methods and allowing for the calculation of selection probabilities and survey weights. The RDS weights reflect the varying sizes of respondents' social networks as established in RDS theory, which adjusts for recruitment biases. Initial respondents in an RDS study (i.e., seeds) are recruited through convenience sampling methods. Each of these seeds recruits peers by referral, allowing researchers to access members of typically hard-to-reach populations who may not otherwise be accessible.

The seeds in this study were recruited with support from five local organizations that work with and provide support to survivors of CSE in Kampala. There were 15 seeds ages 15-17 and 5 seeds ages 18 and older. The majority of the seeds (16) were females and 4 were males. The seeds recruited additional respondents, who then recruited other respondents. Respondents were offered a maximum of three coupons to refer other respondents. To encourage participation and referrals of peers, respondents were offered an incentive for completion of an interview and for referring other respondents who successfully completed an interview. The final sample includes 209 respondents ages 15 or older who live or work in Kampala and engaged

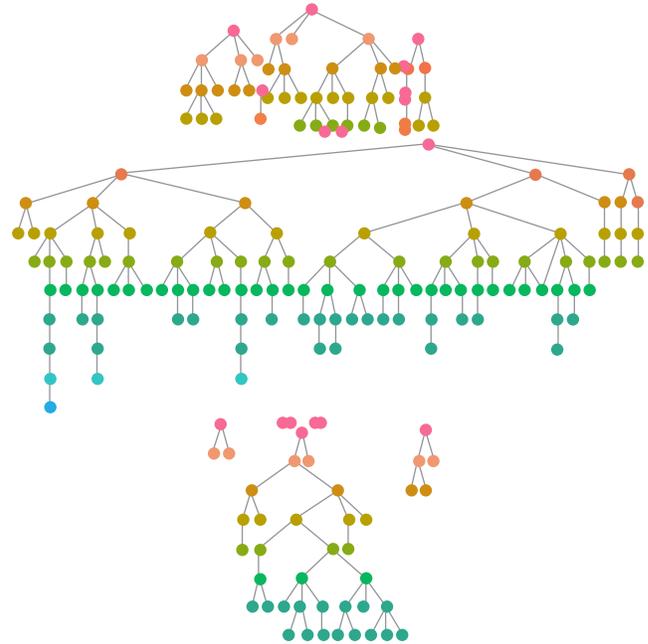


Figure 1. Recruitment Trees Plot

in CSE in the past year. Figure 1 shows the structure of recruitment. The shading indicates the depth of recruitment (i.e., waves).

## Limitations and Considerations

Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and changes related to the pandemic may have affected our results. A similar study undertaken before or after the pandemic may yield different findings.

Due to logistical constraints, this study had a relatively large number of seeds, and therefore relatively short referral chains. Three-fourths of our seeds were minors (under age 18); the predominance of minors as seeds likely skews the estimated prevalence of minors among individuals engaged in the sex industry generated using our weighted sample. One-fifth of our seeds were male, which may skew the estimated prevalence of males among children engaged in CSEC.

Another general limitation of RDS methods is that while weighting compensates for the reduced probability of capturing eligible individuals who are not well connected, the approach cannot cover persons who are not connected at all.

Weights and estimates based on RDS are premised on a semi-probability sampling method (at best). Therefore, it is difficult to compute the variance of the RDS sample estimates, including the estimated prevalence. Estimated standard errors involve approximations related to the RDS assumptions.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

To our knowledge, this study, along with our simultaneous CSEC study in the Karamoja region of Uganda, is the first to offer a prevalence estimate of CSEC for any region of Uganda. Likewise, it is one of the first studies in Uganda to systematically explore the characteristics of CSE among children in Kampala and to include males who engage in the sex industry. The study offers insights into the experiences of those engaged in the sex industry to allow for more relevant and effective programming targeting this population.

This study offers several recommendations for programs and policies seeking to reduce child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children:

- The finding that an estimated 26.3 to 29.3 percent of individuals engaged in the sex industry in Kampala are under age 18 suggests a need for significant intervention in this area to reduce the numbers of children involved in CSE. Interventions should target both girls and boys, given the finding that nearly one-fourth of children involved in CSE in Kampala are male.
- With nearly a third of those involved in the sex industry estimated to be minors and nearly half of those minors reporting experiencing force or coercion, it is important to give this group a voice to continue to understand their circumstances, identifying options for employment choice, and increase their agency and decision-making. Organizations and government agencies working with those involved in commercial sex should institutionalize the incorporation of youth feedback into programming and policymaking.
- Further research should be conducted to better understand the motivations and challenges experienced by these youth.



**Organizations and government agencies working with those involved in commercial sex should institutionalize the incorporation of **YOUTH FEEDBACK** into programming and policymaking**



**Some respondents discussed a need for improved dissemination of general, mental, sexual, and reproductive **HEALTH INFORMATION AND SERVICES****

- Future research should also explore the role that friends may play as brokers or pimps including an examination of the dynamics of these relationships and the degree of involuntariness experienced by children.
- Respondents provided recommendations on how best NGOs and the government can provide support to people engaged in the sex industry. Most children recommended employment support, and many mentioned cash transfers. Other children recommended the implementation of laws that would allow for better regulation and security of people engaged in commercial sex. Some respondents discussed a need for improved dissemination of general, mental, sexual, and reproductive health information and services.



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