

Press Release

Is Sex Getting Safer?

“Not according to the information we are collecting” says Dr. Miriam Saphira of ECPAT Child Alert. “Data gathered from counseling centres throughout New Zealand who provide counseling services to almost 150 sexually exploited children state that only 14 % of those children practice safe sex.”

ECPAT Child Alert is an NGO working to prevent the sexual exploitation of children through child prostitution, child pornography and child trafficking. Director Alan Bell says this, and other factors revealed in Dr Saphira’s survey are of concern. “Firstly the fact that this many child prostitutes were identified through a relatively small scale survey of counseling centres suggest a larger number of children will be involved as many do not get referred for counseling. The 14% means 86% of the children surveyed do not practice safe sex all the time. The survey showed only 36% were practicing safe sex some of the time and the remaining 50% were practicing safe sex infrequently or not at all. This represents a serious sexual health and social problem that is not being adequately addressed.”

Dr Saphira says that the information gained from the survey reinforces her own experience over many years of involvement as a psychologist. “The statistics do not surprise me” she said. “What surprises me more is that this situation seems to prevail year after year and little is done to rectify it. The children surveyed said they need more trained specialists working on the streets so that information was available on self-protection from sexual abuse. The children also said they wanted safe shelters. Here children who had opted out of violent and dysfunctional family situations could find respite.”

ECPAT Child Alert will continue to research the sexual exploitation of children and use this information to educate New Zealanders about the reality of child sexual abuse in New Zealand and to advocate for improved services for those that have suffered at the hand of offenders. Previous research carried out by Child Alert indicates many sex workers have a background of early childhood abuse. When they run away and begin working on the street they are subjected to more violence. With such a background of abuse many used alcohol and drugs to lessen the psychological pain they were under. Child Alert research indicated this increased when they were doing sex work.

For more information refer www.ecpat.org.nz, www.childalert.org.nz

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