

# Sexual Photographs Involving Young People

Miriam Saphira PhD DipEd Psych, DipClinPsych  
Averil Herbert PhD, DipClinPsych, Tainui, Ngati Paretekawa, Ngati Maniapoto

ECPAT NZ 2004

## Abstract

This study explores how young people who are involved in commercial sexual activity may subsequently become involved in the making of erotica and pornography. The target group were people who began commercial sexual activity before the age of 18 years. The respondents outlined the factors leading to this first involvement and indicated whether they were subsequently used in sexual photography. Twenty three (50%) had been asked to do photographs. A quarter were under 16 years at the time. A majority of respondents considered that the males who wanted photographs were different from other men who paid them for sex.

## Introduction

Article 34 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that parties must undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It specifically stipulates the prevention of the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials as well as the exploitative use of children in prostitution and other unlawful sexual practices (Carr, 2001).

ECPAT (NZ) conducted a national survey of counsellors and welfare agencies and found over 195 known cases of child prostitution. Children under 16 years of age were involved in 145 of these cases (Saphira, 2001).<sup>1</sup> There were no reports of children being involved in sexual photographs. Cases of children being photographed in sexual poses were cited in the Annual Report of the Evidential Video Units.

Stages of development are not complete by the early teenage years. Characteristics of early adolescents may make them especially susceptible to persuasion (Unger, Simon, Newman, Montgomery, Kipke, & Albornoz 1998). Early adolescents are typically beginning to question their parents' values and experiment with behaviours that are inconsistent with those values simply because their peers are doing so. This is part of their gradual separation from their parents (Seiffert & Hoffnung, 1987). Most early adolescents lack the moral development necessary to make decisions based on either internalised or external standards of appropriate behaviour (Kohlberg, 1964).

Intellectual development in adolescent years is described as "formal operations", with young people beginning to attend to possibilities, to develop scientific reasoning and to combine ideas in a logical fashion. While they master this logic, they develop an unrealistic idealism and their social cognition is still steeped in ego-centricity (Seiffert & Hoffnung, 1987).

---

<sup>1</sup> This study surveyed counselling agencies, truant officers and non-governmental welfare services to ascertain how many young people they knew of doing sex work in the three years from March 1998 to March 2001. The demographic details and circumstances given ensured that the young people were not counted twice (Saphira, 2001).

The cognitive thinking of an adolescent has yet to master planning ahead and the ability to contemplate long term consequences. Two weeks is still a long time for a thirteen year old. It is consequently difficult for them to anticipate the outcomes of their actions (being photographed nude, using a condom, mixing pills and alcohol). Despite being streetwise, their intellectual and socio-emotional development may be slower than others of the same age if they have come from a dysfunctional family. This may be particularly true of those who have suffered from physical and sexual abuse (Briere, 1992). Some abuse survivors find it difficult to *ever* plan ahead. As children they learned that to think ahead was to anticipate another night of abuse. The inability of abuse survivors to accomplish this developmental task may make it difficult for young people to see what harm there might be in a few suggestive photographs.

Recovering from initial abuse can be seriously compromised when a person learns or believes that images of themselves in abusive situations are available on the internet (Carr, 2001). Their vulnerability is heightened when they feel people can recognise them.

The widespread international consumption of child pornography on the Internet is well documented (Hecht, 2001). Sales of traditional sex magazines have declined with the rise of pornographic images on the Internet. Pornography and the attitudes it fosters can be placed on a continuum. Girls as young as 12 years old can be used in the fashion industry to advertise garments that suggest they are sexually desirable. While the media does have a responsibility, the Internet is by far the greatest user of suggestive and pornographic images of children (Carr, 2001).

## **Method**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Funding Authority Auckland for the use of questionnaires and interviews in the Auckland, Northland and Waikato regions. A questionnaire was developed in consultation with medical and psychological researchers, the Auckland Ethics Committee and Maori Community Workers in South Auckland. Questionnaires were returned from massage parlours and escort agencies, private workers, New Zealand Prostitutes Collective drop in centres, former workers from a snowballed sample and from street workers.

## **Results**

This study is based on material from 47 questionnaires or interviews. The interviews included an additional question about being hit and verbally abused while engaged in commercial sexual activity. Those figures are given in brackets. The 47 respondents ranged in age from 15 – 47 years with an average age of 24 years. Maori respondents tended on average to be younger. There were 37 females, 3 males and 7 transgenders. There were 20 Pakeha (43%), 19 Maori (40%), 5 Pacific People (11%) and 3 European immigrants (6%).

Three-quarters of the respondents were living away from family when they started having sex for money. Most of the respondents initially had the price arranged by some one else. This was usually the same person who had suggested they engage in sex for payment. Young people embarking on commercial sexual activity were influenced by others involved in the sex trade. The age at which the respondents began commercial sexual activity ranged from under 12 years to 17 years.

**Table I Requested to do Photographs**

<i>Asked to do Photos</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Paid Money to do Photographs</b>	15
<b>Did photos but did not receive any money for them</b>	6
<b>Asked but declined to do them</b>	2
<b>Never Asked to do Photos</b>	24
<b>Total</b>	47

Twenty-three of the respondents (49%) were asked to do some photographs. Twenty-one were under the age of 18 years at the time (see Table I). Six did the poses required but were not paid any money for them. Two refused to do the photographs.

Five respondents who were asked to pose for photographs did not think this client was any different from other clients who wanted to pay for sex. Twelve respondents described various ways in which the client was different (see Table II).

**Table II Differences Between those Wanting Photographs and Those Paying for Sex**

<i>Difference</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Did not seem Different</b>	5
<b>Was different</b>	3
<b>Perverted, a jerk</b>	2
<b>Offered to make me famous</b>	2
<b>Paid More</b>	1
<b>Bossy</b>	1
<b>Friendly</b>	1
<b>No Physical Contact</b>	1
<b>Professional Photographer</b>	1
<b>Total Responses</b>	17

Over half the young people who were approached to do photographs had been involved in commercial sexual activity for less than a year. Ten were under 16 years of age (see Table III). One respondent experienced it as a relief that no physical contact was involved. She was flattered by the idea of being a “pin-up”.

**Table III Age and Commercial Sexual Activity Experience**

<i>Age at time of doing Photographs</i>	<i>Less than a Month</i>	<i>Several Months</i>	<i>Less than a year</i>	<i>More than a year</i>	<i>Over two Years</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Under 14 years</b>	3	2	1			6
<b>14 –15 years</b>	1	1	2			4
<b>16 –17 years</b>	3	2	1	4	1	11
<b>18 years and over</b>			1	1		2
<b>Total</b>	7	5	5	5	1	23

## Conclusion

Young people can be lured into photographic sessions by the prospect of becoming famous, of being a model or by the enticement of being made to feel attractive. Developmentally they may not have the cognitive capacity to deal with such complex situations. They will be easily flattered into posing as a model for photographic sessions.

The use of photographs has changed dramatically with the rise in pornography, the ability to transform seemingly innocent photographs into abusive ones and the formation of pornographic consumer groups on the Internet.

New technology has blurred the continuum between modelling for fashion and the making of pornographic images. Prevention will need to involve considerable public education. Coupled with this education, prevention must emphasise services that enhance parental and child attachment and at the same time decrease vulnerability and risk among all children.

#### References

- Carr J. (2001) *Child Pornography*, London: ECPAT International
- Hecht M *The Role and Involvement of the Private Sector*, London: ECPAT International
- Kohlberg L. (1964) Development of moral character and moral ideology in M. Hoffman & L Hoffman (eds), *Review of Child Development* (Vol. I) New York: Russell-Sage
- Saphira M. (2001) *The Commercial Exploitation of Children* Auckland: ECPAT
- Seiffert K. & Hoffnung R. (1987) *Child and Adolescent Development*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Unger J. Simon T. Newman T. Montgomery S. Kipke M. & Albornoz M. (1998) Early adolescent street youth: an overlooked population with unique problems and service needs, *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 18, (4), 325-348 [s]