SPECIAL EDITORIAL

Juvenile prostitution in Brazil: An international call to action on female sex trafficking

Dr Paulo Serafini is the Medical Director of Huntington Medicina Reprodutiva and a Professor of Gynecology at the University of São Paulo in Brazil. He graduated from and completed his obstetrics and gynecology residency at the University of Rio Grande do Sul, and completed a second residency in obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive health at the University of Maryland, USA. Dr Serafini pursued his subspecialty training in infertility and reproductive endocrinology at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Southern California, USA. In 1988, he co-founded the Huntington Reproductive Medicine center in Pasadena, USA. Dr Serafini is the Director of Reproductive Medicine at the Clinical Hospital of the Medical School Foundation at the University of São Paulo in Brazil. His research is focused primarily on in vitro fertilization, ovulation induction, corpus luteum function, and endometriosis. Dr Serafini is an Associate Editor on the Editorial Board of the IJGO.

Recent decades have seen extensive socioeconomic and infrastructure development in Brazil. This growth has been accompanied by a frightening increase in juvenile prostitution, which requires an international collaborative effort to improve the health care of vulnerable girls in the country [1].

The Brazilian Center for Infancy and Adolescence (CBA) estimates that more than 500,000 children enter into prostitution to obtain money, food, or illegal drugs. These young people (aged 9–15 years) come from very poor homes and are often exploited by their parents and abductors. The CBA has identified 4 main “allure hubs.” The first is the rural north-northeast belt, where high numbers of young girls are sexually exploited. The second is sexual tourism, also primarily in the north-northeast, where clients purchase “holiday packages” that include high-end resort stays and sexual encounters with underage girls. The exposure of charter flights by law enforcement agencies in Brazil only blunted temporarily these felonious activities. Brazil is now replacing Thailand as the premier “sex tourism” location [1], and Brazilian police have identified at least 1800 localities where children are forced into prostitution. A recent New York Times article reported on an investigation into sports fishing expeditions to the Amazon allegedly used as covers for clients to have sex with underage girls [2].

The third hub comprises underage girls who are lured by the promise of employment or schooling, but who are instead held captive in small cities throughout the country. The fourth hub encompasses the high number of homeless juveniles who live in large cities and enter into prostitution to maintain their drug addictions. Approximately 80% of these child prostitutes were abused by a parent or relative. Child prostitutes suffer severe psychoemotional trauma, violence, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and unsafe abortions [3,4].

Immediate action is needed to save millions of adolescents from the heinous blight of sexual tourism. National and international societies of obstetrics, gynecology, family practice, and related medical societies should pledge to work together to disseminate knowledge and dedicate medical and psychological attention to promoting health services that will contribute to rescuing children trapped in prostitution. FIGO, its affiliated societies, law enforcement authorities, and politicians need to shed light on these crimes and divulge the results of efforts to criminalize the offenders.

References

Paulo Serafini
University of São Paulo, Brazil
E-mail address: paulofoi@terra.com.br.