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Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijgo



SPECIAL EDITORIAL

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



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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 (CBIA) 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 CBIA 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.

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