



Obstacles to report suspicions of sexual exploitation of children



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Information for this brochure was arrived from the research *'Reluctance to report sexual exploitation of children related to travel and tourism'*

The research report was produced by Defence for Children – ECPAT the Netherlands, with joint data collection from Universiteit Leiden, ECPAT Austria, ECPAT Belgium, ECPAT France and ECPAT Germany. The research consisted of a literature review, an online survey with more than 1,000 travellers from 5 countries and focus group discussions in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands with 90 participants (young travellers, tourism professionals and other experts).

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Introduction

The International Labour Organization estimates there are 1.2 million child victims of sexual exploitation each year (2017). But there is no sound estimate of the non-detected number of victims of sexual exploitation worldwide. Children exploited in the commercial sex industry are particularly unlikely to report abuse: many risk retaliation, do not perceive themselves as victims, distrust the justice system, and fear long-term placement in government facilities and social stigma. Because children's silence about sexual exploitation may be the number one barrier to their ability to access justice as well as one of the most difficult to overcome, reporting by bystanders and professionals is crucial.

However, research on the reporting behaviour of bystanders shows that the willingness to report suspected criminal activity is lowest for suspicions of both emotional and sexual abuse.

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The research *'Reluctance to report sexual exploitation of children related to travel and tourism'* (Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands, 2019) confirmed the under-reporting of sexual exploitation of children. Although 183 travellers stated in an online survey that they had witnessed possible signals of sexual exploitation of children while they were abroad, only 4% reported their suspicions to the authorities or at a reporting website. Another 10% told someone at the hotel or restaurant or told a travel guide. The majority discussed the suspicious situation with their travel companions but did not make a report.

Reporting websites in the home countries of the travellers enable travellers to report allegations of child sexual exploitation they witnessed while travelling abroad. These sites are listed at the reporting portal: www.dontlookaway.report. Unfortunately, many travellers are not aware of these reporting websites. There is a need for publicity campaigns to make travellers aware of the signals of sexual exploitation of children and the existence of online reporting websites.

Those who have witnessed a crime have different decision-making processes in choosing whether to report a crime or not. This is because third parties - as opposed to victims - don't directly benefit from reporting a crime. Their motivation to report depends on the information available to them at that time and their perception of the severity of the crime. Even though sexual exploitation of children is a very severe crime with devastating effects on the wellbeing of children, bystanders experience different obstacles to reporting to authorities signals of child sexual exploitation. This brochure provides insight into signals of sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism, discusses the obstacles people might have to report this while they are travelling abroad, and offers tips on how to overcome these obstacles.

"There were very young looking girls scantily dressed at a bar that gave massages."

Signals of child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. Perpetrators exploit children and youth by giving them things like gifts, drugs, money, shelter, food, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. There are three primary and interrelated forms of sexual exploitation of children: prostitution, pornography (images, movies and live-stream webcam) and trafficking for sexual purposes. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every person below the age of eighteen has the right to be protected against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Articles 19, 34).

Common sense is often the best guide for recognizing sexual exploitation of a child. Trust your gut feeling when you see a situation you feel is inappropriate.

"A man was touching a young girl in an obscene manner in a restaurant. She said: 'you have to wait until we are hidden.'"

Good to know

- A child is any person below 18 years
- Girls and boys can be victim of sexual exploitation
- The contact between the suspect and the minor is inappropriate, no matter the country or the culture
- Both men and women can be perpetrators

Suspicious situations

- An adult touches a child inappropriately at the pool, beach, restaurant, bar or club
- An adult isolates himself/herself with a child, e.g. in a hotel room or a (private) apartment
- A child is dancing (half) naked for people
- Someone offers a child or young person for sex
- Someone is looking for sexual services from children or young people
- A hotel or organisation allows child abuse on its premises or via the company
- An adult talks about his/her sexual experience with a child
- An adult takes many pictures of children, especially on the beach and at the pool
- An adult shows sexual abuse images to a child

"A tourist we met was totally insinuating the fact of having an affair with a child."

"Young girls on the street who ask elderly Western men to take them out for dinner. It was prostitution on the street."

"At the exit of a hotel I saw 2 elderly men hand in hand with 2 young women who seemed minor."



Key details to report

- As many details about both the victim and suspect's identity:
 - Name
 - Age
 - Clothing, hair colour, weight, height, distinguishing features, tattoos
 - Languages used, accents
 - License plate numbers, vehicle
- The exact time and date
- Location details: street name (use Geotag), name of establishment (bar, hotel, restaurant)
- Details of other witnesses
- Whether you are worried about your own security or safety
- Picture (only if it is safe to do so)
- Whether you informed anyone already (hotel, local police, tour guide, etc.)

"There was a man with a very young girl in a restaurant. The girl barely spoke English and the man could not keep his hands of the girl."

Obstacles to reporting and how to overcome them

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There are two main reasons why people don't report sexual exploitation of children when they are abroad; either they don't recognize the signals, or they experience motivational obstacles to reporting suspicious behaviours. One of the main obstacles to reporting is that people are not sure if a crime actually happened and therefore afraid of false accusations.

Obstacles to report sexual exploitation of children

- Not being sure, fear of false accusations
- Fear of misinterpretation of the situation due to cultural differences and mixed couples
- Fear of interfering in someone's personal life
- Afraid of getting the child(ren) into trouble
- No possibility to report anonymously
- Lack of knowledge on further involvement in the case
- Afraid of getting involved in criminal activities
- Lack of trust that the police will act on the report
- No access to Wifi and forgetting to report later or afraid that it would be too late
- Being in a lazy holiday mode, not interested
- Tourists don't expect to see this activity and don't want to be confronted with this during vacation

How to overcome obstacles to reporting?

Reporting websites and reporting campaigns should try to overcome obstacles to reporting by providing the right information. People should know that reports are taken seriously; that children can be protected and offenders can be stopped when individuals report suspicious situations. It should be clear that even a little information could be crucial in police investigations and that suspects will not be arrested immediately, but that the police will investigate the report further. Understanding the latter is crucial to overcome the fear of making false accusations.

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People need to know what their role is after they report in order to dispel all kinds of prejudices, fears and misconceptions. It should be clear what effort is required of the reporter during the police investigation and possibly in court. It should be clear that the reporter's involvement is minimal and that people can always report anonymously.

Travellers should be informed both online and offline about sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism and on the existence of reporting websites, preferably at different stages of the travel (before, during and after). The tourism industry has a unique position and an important role to play in the awareness raising. Campaigns should show signals of sexual exploitation of children related to travel and tourism and include testimonials of reporters and survivors, statistical data and success stories. The tone should be positive and show that people can help a child when they report suspicious situations.

"I saw a Western looking man with a relatively young woman at breakfast in a hotel. The girl was dressed very provocative."

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Checklist for reporting websites

In order to overcome obstacles to report, reporting websites need to include the following criteria and information:

Criteria for reporting websites

- ✓ There is a possibility to report anonymously
- ✓ It has a clear layout
- ✓ It is easy to see where to make the report
- ✓ Responses are given to non-anonymous reporters (possibly automatically)
- ✓ It is easily found in search engines
- ✓ It is smartphone-friendly
- ✓ It contains images and short videos

Criteria for reporting forms

- ✓ It is not too long and the questions not too difficult
- ✓ There are examples of information to show what is expected
- ✓ There is an in-between save option to pause the report or add something later
- ✓ There is the possibility to upload pictures (when it is safe to take pictures)

Information on reporting websites and in campaigns

- ✓ What sort of crimes/situations can be reported and links to other relevant reporting channels
- ✓ How to report (reporting form is easy to locate on the website)
- ✓ That a report can be made anonymously
- ✓ What to do if someone is not sure and how false accusations are being prevented
- ✓ What steps are taken after a report
- ✓ What the role of the reporter is after a report
- ✓ Success stories of previous reports
- ✓ How reporting could help children
- ✓ That even little information could be useful for the police

It should be clear that people should not do their own investigation but only report the information that they have to the authorities.

Usage of images on websites and in campaigns

- ✓ Do not use ordinary situational images of a man and a child: this could lead to people becoming suspicious of everything
- ✓ Next to girls, images should also include boys
- ✓ Make children strong in the communication: active children, not passive victims
- ✓ Ask yourself:
 - ✓ Is there permission of the person on the photo or her or his guardians to use for this topic?
 - ✓ Is the dignity of the person in the picture assured?
 - ✓ Would the person in the photo be happy with this image of him/her for this topic?
 - ✓ If it were your child, your nephew or niece: would you like it if he/she were depicted like this?

Further reading

- Quality standards for low-threshold reporting mechanisms to report sexual exploitation of children, ECPAT Austria, 2019
- Reluctance to report sexual exploitation of children related to travel and tourism, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands, 2019
- Offenders on the move, a global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, Hawke A., Raphael A., ECPAT International, 2016
- www.ecpat.org
- www.protectingchildrenintourism.org

The Code

As the travel and tourism industry expands with cheaper tickets and better connections, the opportunities for child sex offenders to exploit children also increases. Child protection measures need to be integrated in travel/tourism/hospitality business operations, such as the criteria of The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism:

1. **Establish a policy and procedures** against the sexual exploitation of children
2. **Train employees** in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation and how to report suspected cases
3. **Include a clause in contracts** through the value chain stating a common repudiation and zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children
4. **Provide information to travellers** on children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and how to report suspected cases
5. **Support, collaborate & engage stakeholders** in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children
6. **Report annually** on implementation of the six criteria

www.thecode.org

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