



ECPAT International  
END CHILD PROSTITUTION  
CHILD PORNOGRAPHY &  
TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN  
FOR SEXUAL PURPOSES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Prostitution of boys in India's pilgrimage sites is pervasive, new study finds

10 March 2009

**Bangalore, India** – A ground-breaking study focusing on male children in prostitution in three of India's major pilgrimage centres – Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Puri in Orissa and Guruvayoor in Kerala – has found that the sexual exploitation of male children in these tourism hotspots is pervasive and reportedly on the rise.

The study, conducted by EQUATIONS (Equitable Tourism Options) with support from ECPAT International, found that in these centres, tourism development without protective measures has led to sexual exploitation of children, in the form of child abuse, child trafficking, child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism and child labour.

'There is a dearth of information on male child sexual exploitation and prostitution due to the assumption that most sexual exploiters are men and therefore their victims are women or girls. However, this is not true,' said S.Vidya, Programme Coordinator, Child & Tourism Programme, EQUATIONS, 'The double standards that society has about homosexuality and the fact that it is criminalised in India only makes the problem less visible.'

In Tirupati, which receives mostly domestic and non-resident Indians, a survey of male children aged between six and eighteen years revealed that the sexual abuse of boys is rampant due to demand from domestic tourists. Pressure on male children to earn a living for the family was cited as a reason why male children were forced into prostitution. Family members see less risk when male children are involved in selling sex as compared to girls, as the social stigma is less and fear of pregnancy does not exist.

In Puri, male children interviewed reported that exploiters were both domestic and foreign tourists. Foreign tourists came into contact with children under the guise of being an English teacher or social worker, and/or approached children and their families in slums, and then sexually abused the children once they gained the trust of the family and child. Domestic tourists were reported as making contact through middle men or hotel staff. A number of 'massage' parlours and 'health' clubs have mushroomed in Puri that primarily cater to foreign and domestic tourists, where prostitution takes place involving both adults and children (both male and female children).

In Guruvayoor, child sexual abuse was less visible due to the enforcement of the ban on child labor by the government and has perhaps pushed the problem underground. However, focus group discussions with community members revealed that several male children are involved in prostitution – a practice that they said was culturally acceptable in the region. Domestic tourists and local men returning from the Gulf States were cited as creating demand. The researchers could not find any evidence of foreigners being involved in child abuse in Guruvayoor.

The study calls for specific national, regional and local actions to safeguard children who are being sexually exploited, or are at-risk of sexual exploitation. Recommendations include the Ministry of Tourism creating a *National Plan of Action to Counter Child Abuse in Tourism* and for businesses in

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the tourism industry to shoulder more responsibility for this problem by, for example, joining the Code of Conduct ([www.thecode.org](http://www.thecode.org)). It was recommended that state and central tourism departments report annually on the status of child abuse cases, set up mechanisms along with other bodies for the protection of children, and to demonstrate a clear stand against any form of child sex abuse. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) are also called on to create a comprehensive Act that imposes severe punishment of offenders, including extradition laws (through the Ministry of Home Affairs). The report also calls for child sex tourism cases to be treated as non-bailable offences. Training on child rights laws and how to handle child abuse cases for Police was also recommended, along with sensitization training and mandatory reporting of child abuse (including adults traveling with children under suspicious circumstances) both by Police and by airport and railway authorities. More in-depth study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children is also necessary to inform policy, protection mechanisms and campaigns.

The full report *Unholy Nexus: Male Child Sexual Exploitation in Pilgrim Tourism Sites in India: Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Orissa*, can be downloaded at [http://www.ecpat.net/EI/Publications/South\\_Asia/Unholy\\_Nexus-MCSE\\_Research\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ecpat.net/EI/Publications/South_Asia/Unholy_Nexus-MCSE_Research_Report.pdf).

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**Notes to editors:**

ECPAT International is a global network of organisations and individuals working together to eliminate child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes. It seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. For more information, see [www.ecpat.net](http://www.ecpat.net)

EQUATIONS is a research, advocacy, campaigning organisation charged with the vision of democratizing tourism in India. We study the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of tourism on local communities. A key area of our work is on the impact of tourism on children. We are alarmed at the growing links between tourism and the abuse of children in the forms of child labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking. We actively work with local communities, concerned groups, government, the tourism industry and other players to devise strategies so as to ensure that tourism is not based on the exploitation of children.



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