



Family Digest 4 **26th March 2015**

Family Digest: The vulnerability of the girl-child

The rise of the interest in the girl-child is of significant importance in an era in which young women are notoriously disregarded and frequently the victims of violence. One of the many ways in which young girls are targeted is for sexual and/or domestic exploitation. What follows is some information on the rise of trafficking in girls and women, and on young women who go missing in South Africa. Broadly, human trafficking is the trade in human beings, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labour or the extraction of organs or tissues, including surrogacy and ova removal.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of 1993 recognized “the urgent need for the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings” and affirmed “that violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women and impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms.” It also expressed “deep concern about the long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women”.¹

The Declaration continued that “Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following: (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs”. (Article 2(b))

This ‘objectification’ of women and girl children occurs when women are regarded as a commodity to be exchanged for gain; her body, parts of her body, or sexual parts and abilities are separated from her person and regarded as representing her to the exclusion of other personal attributes.

According to Graeme Hosken, “SA ranks among the ten countries in Africa where human trafficking is worst”². SA became a hotspot in 2013 due to reasons such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, drugs and a new trend where parents began selling their children for adoption or sex. These factors show that the rise in trafficking was influenced greatly by people’s lack of resources. Hosken cites Dr Monique Ernsler of the KZN Human Trafficking, Prostitution, Pornography and Brothel Task Team in saying that “South Africans need to be worried. Human Trafficking is the final stage in exploitation... South Africa is an extremely exploitative society with poor attitudes regarding women and children [there is] a low value of life that leads to people being viewed as commodities”³. The ‘gender value’ that is placed on females in SA is an important factor contributing to the fact that so many young girls are trafficked here. In 2013, 540 people were potentially trafficked (67 of them children). In February 2012 – in what was termed one of the country’s largest anti-trafficking raids – “16 under-age girls were rescued from a Durban brothel”⁴.

Across the world UNICEF and World Concern estimate that “as many as 1.2 million children are being trafficked every year”. According to Missing Children SA, a child goes missing every five hours in South Africa. Their statistics indicate that between December 2013 and November 2014, 285 children went missing. Reasons for these disappearances were runaways (51%), unknown (42%), getting lost (3%), parental abduction (3%) and stranger abductions (2%)⁵. While it seems that many of South Africa’s children are going missing because of social or domestic issues at home, the reality is that children, and specifically girls, are the focus of targeted abductions.

Unfortunately, girl children are frequently regarded as commodities that can be exchanged for gain. Girls may be trafficked with the collusion of family members. This is particularly the case across the rural/urban divide where young girls are trafficked for the purpose of domestic labour. The practice of ‘ukuthwala’⁶ is sometimes an example of such exploitation for profit. Domestic violence plays a very destructive role in the socialization of children of both sexes –boys grow up to regard such behaviour as normal while girls are likely to grow up to regard it as the ‘lot of women’.

As is evident from the above much of the discourse regarding the exploitation of the ‘female person’ is framed in terms of ‘women’. However, there has been increasing recognition of the extreme vulnerability of the ‘girl child’. On December 19, 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted [Resolution 66/170](#) to declare 11th October as the International Day of the Girl Child, and to recognize girls’ rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated, "On this International Day of the Girl Child, I call on all governments to take action to end all forms of violence against girls in all parts of the world. Together, we must create a world where violence against women and girls is never tolerated and girls are always empowered to reach their full potential".⁷

Below, please find links to some articles that provide further insights and information on the vulnerability of the girl child and the issue of human trafficking. There are a number of related papers on the CPLD website, and Sister Melanie O’Connor HF of the SACBC Human Trafficking Desk has recently published a book entitled ‘The Church and Human Trafficking’.

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www.salvationarmy.org.za/index.php/our.../anti-human-trafficking
http://www.s-cape-home.org/?page_id=8
<http://africacheck.org/reports/are-30000-kids-trafficked-into-south-africas-sex-trade-every-year-the-claim-exaggerates-the-problem/>
<http://www.irinnews.org/report/80229/south-africa-how-heavy-is-human-trafficking>
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fe30c9620.html>
http://www.unicef.org/gender/gender_66021.htm
<http://www.publicintegrity.org/2014/03/13/14415/united-nations-report-children-run-violent-homelands>
<http://lostgirlssa.org/>

¹ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

² Hosken, G. ‘SA is a major highway for human trafficking’

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2013/11/06/sa-is-a-major-highway-for-human-trafficking>

³ Hosken, G. (2015). Op cit.

⁴ Hosken, G. (2015). Op cit.

⁵ Missing child every five hours in SA. (2014). <http://randfonteinherald.co.za/171010/missing-child-every-five-hours-sa/>

⁶ The CPLD recently made a submission to the South African Law Reform Commission on the issue of ‘ukuthwala’ which is available on our website.

⁷ <http://www.un.org/en/events/girlchild/>