



Scenario for sexual exploitation on roadways

Illustrations: Telnov Oleksii

The most strategic roadways for the country's economy are also the roads where child and adolescent sexual exploitation abounds. It is essential that society as a whole unites to put an end to this problem.

When the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (ECA) [Statute of the Child and Adolescent (SCA)] was passed into law in the 1900s, the Brazilian society finally included on its agenda, via this legal

benchmark, a problem that has always afflicted families, schools, governments and human rights organizations: child and adolescent sexual abuse. Child and adolescent sexual abuse and exploitation represent two distinct phenomena, both of which are equally serious and difficult to address. Abuse frequently happens at home. Exploitation, in turn, involves money and feeds an organized network, which deals with huge amounts of money capable of bribing authorities, purchasing parents' silence and sometimes sealing the fates of children who are exploited at

brothels and gas stations, and dives along the roads or wherever there is a client willing to exchange money for sex with a child.

The weakest links in this process are children and adolescents, the principal victims of the exploitation networks, which are not at all ashamed to act in broad daylight, at well-known, busy places where lack of information and legal repercussions transform children into merchandise.

Dealing with this situation still requires actions that may lead to an efficient answer. We do not even have consolidated statistics revealing the scope of this problem. What cannot be denied is that it does exist, on a large scale, and spans throughout the country. A survey conducted by the *Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos* (SEDH) [Federal Special Human Rights Department] identified at least 937 cities where commercially organized exploitation networks operate.

Between 2002 and 2003, for example, more than 18 thousand crimes relating to child and adolescent sexual violence were called in to the National Telephone Hotline, which is accessed by dialing 100 from any part of the country.

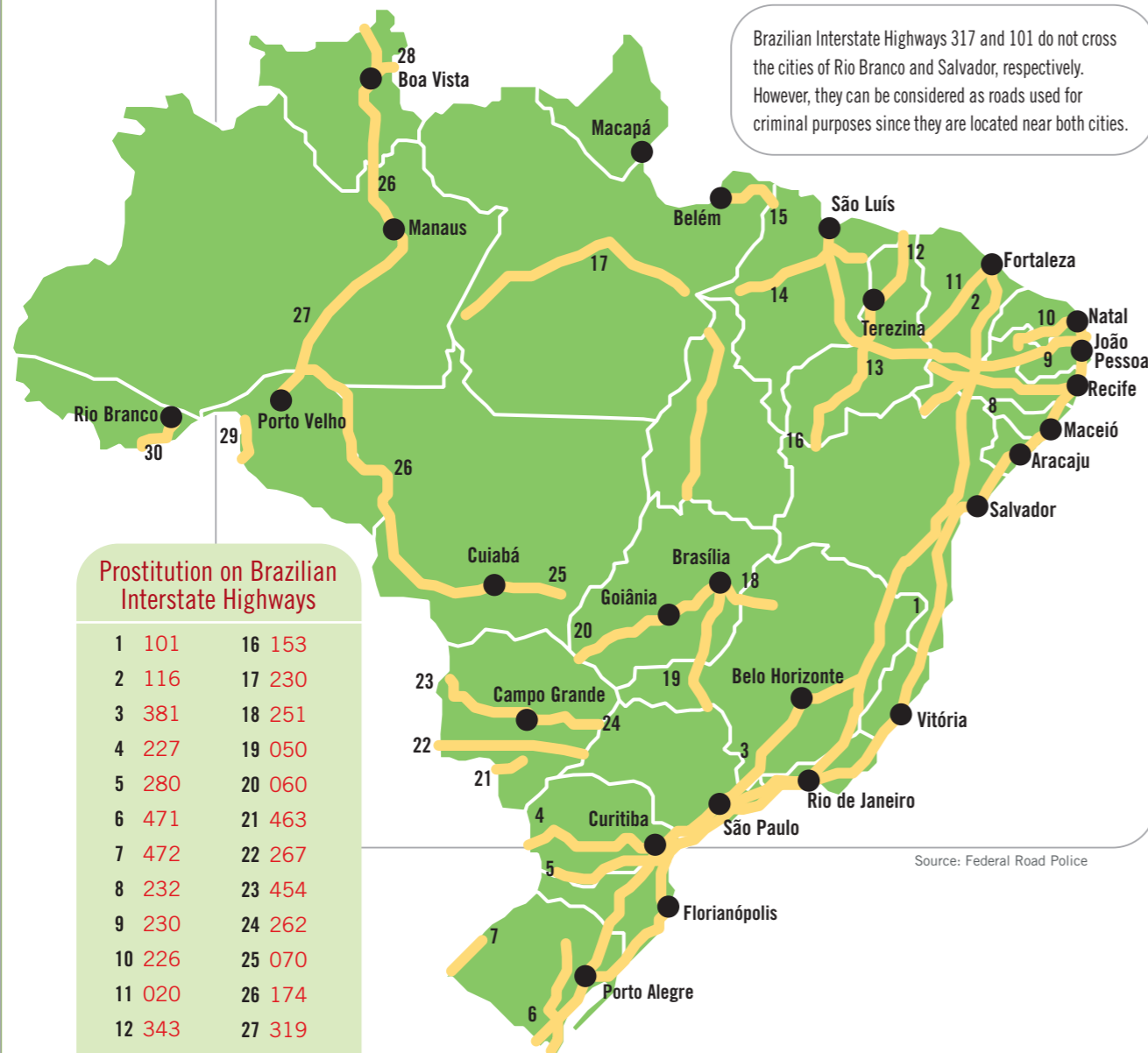
The reasons for this phenomenon are as complex as addressing the issue itself. Poverty is a key and oftentimes a decisive factor. The number of cases is staggering in which children exchange sex acts for either just a plate of food or a handful of coins. Cultural values, which grant an adult authority over a child, also contribute to the operation of these exploitation networks. Prejudice and male chauvinism are also indicated as causes worth being considered. Factors such as a low level of education and non-attendance at school are present in most of these victims' lives.



Sexual exploitation map

Roadways with incidents of sexual exploitation pass through 25 capital cities. The only exceptions are Palmas and Macapá.

Brazilian Interstate Highways 317 and 101 do not cross the cities of Rio Branco and Salvador, respectively. However, they can be considered as roads used for criminal purposes since they are located near both cities.



Source: Federal Road Police

Risk factors

In the case of child and adolescent sexual exploitation on roadways, it is possible to outline a very clear profile of the causes of this problem.

Sociologist Marlene Vaz from Salvador conducted several surveys on this topic. She traveled all over the country and interviewed exploiters, families and victims of exploitation. For her, the leading causes of this social malaise are poverty, broken homes, dysfunctional families and domestic violence.

Other risk factors include a history of domestic sexual abuse and the male fallacy that men can extend their youth by having sexual relations with younger sex partners.

Marlene also blames the media and its double standard of fighting against violence while at the same time selling the idea of a child's or adolescent's body as the most expensive of all products. "The dictatorship of consumerism and eroticism is beneficial to commercial sexual exploitation, as the ideology of consumerism has transformed eroticism into merchandise," she states.

This researcher also points out the collapse of the school system as a prevention tool which further contributes to this malady, since most children and adolescents drop out of school at the time they start becoming exploited.

They quit school because they need to work or they have family problems. Or because they just cannot manage to get used to the teaching model. "Schools are neither capable nor willing to address the issues of student dropout rates and child and adolescent sexual exploitation in order find a viable solution," the sociologist continues. "In addition, most public schools are unattractive and they do not strive to compete with sexual exploitation, which involves arousal and sexual pleasure. The institution does not invest in getting children and adolescents to become interested in new and/or different activities."

Surveys conducted by Childhood Brasil (Instituto WCF) outline the following profile of two important social actors involved in this issue:

Family

- Overall, these children and adolescents come from low-income families that are in a situation of high social vulnerability, and the earnings obtained by the child or adolescent are important for the survival of each family member.
- Frequently, one or more family members have problems with alcohol and drug abuse.
- Occurrences of domestic violence and sexual abuse in the family are commonplace.

- Many times family members themselves initiate or keep the children and adolescents in a sexually exploitative situation.

Schooling

- Ties to school are usually fragile and may be easily severed when sexual exploitation occurs.
- However, a study conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Foz do Iguaçu, state of Paraná, showed that a considerable percentage of sexually exploited children and adolescents were both still attending school and included in income redistribution programs.

Addressing the problem

Only with the involvement of society as a whole will it be possible to address this issue properly. Public and private sectors as well as non-governmental organizations play specific roles in this process.

Considerable progress has been made in the public sector: Guardianship Councils have been improved, the toll-free National Telephone Hotline has been implemented, the Sentinel Program has been created, and policies to combat human trafficking have been sanctioned. Also available are the National Network for the Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Health, the *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) program and the Program for the *Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil* (Peti) [Eradication of Child Labor Program], which provides support to families. The government's role is questioned in the interview on page 42 with Cristina Albuquerque, Coordinator of the National Program Against Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents of the Federal Special Human Rights Department.

NGOs have developed several initiatives that directly or indirectly deal with this issue. These initiatives, however, are still insufficient to address such a complex phenomenon. Noteworthy are studies on this subject, statistical reports, programs for encouraging juvenile protagonism and human development, in addition to actions bolstered by entrepreneurship and protection of rights, among others.

Nonetheless, the scope and the attendance capacity of these initiatives are still limited by structural and economic factors. The activity occurs mostly at specific areas. Therefore, exchanging experiences is more difficult. In addition, the impact of the initiatives on the society as a whole is minimized. Several pilot-programs for generating income are being devised, implemented, and developed, which demonstrates that the processes



Dimensions involved

Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is associated with large areas of poverty but, from an economic perspective, it is not restricted only to the most vulnerable groups. Other dimensions must be considered in the genesis of the problem:

Historical/Cultural Dimensions	Legal dimensions
Poverty Inequality and exclusion Work Social class	Repression Responsibilization Legislation
Cultural dimensions	Political dimensions
Gender Ethnicity Violence Sexuality	State based on the rule of law Citizenship Democracy Civil society - networks
Psychological and social dimensions	Dimensões relacionadas aos valores
Identity Bonds Stigma	Consumption and consumerism Imaginary (media and culture)

established by these NGOs are evolving. As much as they are concerned about generating income, although it is important but per se does not have all the desired effects, the NGOs are involved in developing psychosocial actions for restructuring life projects and promoting the social reinsertion of children and adolescents.

These organizations also play an important role by innovating and testing new action models which can then be transformed into generally encompassing public policies.

With respect to the private sector, the subject is rarely included in the corporations' social responsibility programs. There is still a lot of prejudice and lack of information on this matter.

Many companies do not want to see their image associated with the crusade against child and adolescent sexual exploitation. The article on page 28 provides an in-depth analysis of the participation of companies. As of this date, their involvement has consisted of only a few specific initiatives, especially their participation in campaigns. Although occasionally, effective actions do take place. On a positive note, during a meeting with businessmen, Childhood Brasil (Instituto WCF) noticed a strong inclination on their part to participate in this type of endeavor.

“The dictatorship of consumerism and eroticism is beneficial to commercial sexual exploitation, as the ideology of consumerism has transformed eroticism into merchandise”

Marlene Vaz,
sociologist, specialist in child and adolescent sexual exploitation.

What to do?

The challenges are enormous. During meetings held with local groups in 2005, Childhood Brasil (Instituto WCF) received a number of proposals for fighting sexual exploitation on roadways. Here are the major goals that should be achieved by 2010:

Truck drivers:

- To make all truck drivers aware of the sexual exploitation problem and its social, psychological, and legal implications, among others.
- To have the largest number of truck drivers acting proactively, as protection agents.

Companies:

- To be able to rely on guidelines for the orientation of private companies.
- For businesses within the private sector to advocate for preventative actions and confronting the issue.

Technology and work conditions::

- To make use of safety tools, increasing the level of monitoring, safety, and the quality of a truck driver's professional life.

Perception:

- To make sure that sexual exploitation is largely understood as a violation of the rights of children and adolescents and, therefore, as a responsibility of society as a whole.

Follow-up:

- To adopt an efficient, effective attention and protection system.
- To collect systematic, reliable monitoring data, based not only on reports but also on the services provided.
- To obtain an early diagnostic view of risk situations at schools, churches and communities.

Advocacy, action and support:

- To develop effective advocacy in partnership with the public, private and third-sector organizations.
- To open a reference center in each city so that children, adolescents and their family members can be followed up.
- To be able to rely on effective programs that may generate work and income, and foster social inclusion.
- To be supported by police departments specialized in crime against children and adolescents.



Tatiana Cardeal

Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents on roadways is a complex problem. Brazil has become increasingly concerned about this issue. It is impossible to think of sustainable economic growth without taking into consideration social inequalities and the respect of human rights. Data provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) show that 1 million Brazilian children aged 7 to 14 years are not attending school. More than 5 million children are exploited and work and 1.9 million teenagers are illiterate. These factors contribute to the likelihood of sexual exploitation. Improving these indicators will be a great step toward building a country in which everyone is proud to live.

