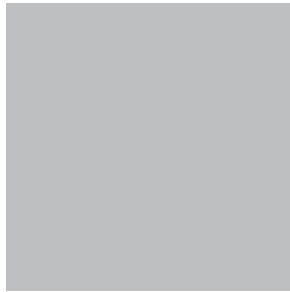


# Mythologies and Panics: Twentieth Century Constructions of Child Prostitution

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*This paper examines twentieth century social constructions of child prostitutes and child prostitution, the origins of these representations and the extent to which they have been used as metaphors for other perceived social, economic and political problems. It is important to recognise that these children have been sexually abused and that discourses that have portrayed them as either assertive and blame-worthy seducers or as abducted and coerced innocents are constructed myths which detracted from recognition of the actual problems these children have faced. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

**T**he sexuality of children and their level of understanding of this aspect of their nature are difficult issues in western society. In part this is because the ideal of childhood as a time of innocence and dependence has become embedded in our social roles and expectations since the late nineteenth century. As a result the response to issues such as child sexual abuse and child prostitution when they have been raised has often been denial, confusion or rejection of those involved. Even where the sexual abuse of children, including that through prostitution, has been accepted and the children identified as innocents and blameless, they were for a large part of the twentieth century still deemed to be tainted by this unnatural 'knowledge of evil' and therefore as corrupting to other children.

This paper is based on research which sought to bring together historical work published on child prostitution and also to uncover additional primary evidence. Perhaps the most useful source material was located in the archives of voluntary organisations such as The Children's Society and The NSPCC. Historically, little has been published directly on the subject and primary evidence is scarce and fragmented. Furthermore, what is available must usually be filtered through the perceptions and representations of both the many who had heard of it only in its most dramatised form, the white slave trade, and the few who both encountered child prostitution and recorded its existence. Historically, the images that have been constructed of children abused through prostitution have

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served to detract from the problems these children have faced and inhibited work to access and help them.

Until the late twentieth century the perceived dangerousness of child sexuality was a persistent theme in the records of welfare institutions and was instrumental in the often unsympathetic and/or restrictive ways children abused through prostitution were depicted and treated. This is theme that has been highlighted by Harry Hendrick's discussion of the dualism inherent in the portrayal of children as both threats and victims (1994: 1–2). Children involved in prostitution have been epitomised as 'dangerous' because they have not conformed to idealised versions of childhood or to popular, and largely fictional, images of a 'white slave trade' in which pure and innocent victims were abducted, drugged and forced to work in brothels overseas.

Because of the largely negative historical characterisation of children with sexual experience as being unnatural, the meaning of child prostitution has been abstracted from negatives. Child prostitutes have been perceived, therefore, as *not* asexual, dependent, moral or 'real' children, but also *not* as adults. This tendency for negative abstraction has led to assumptions about what child prostitutes are, so that they have been seen as sexually assertive, independent, immoral, and as a distorted or perverse form of childhood or something 'other'. Historical usage of vague and euphemistic language, such as 'moral danger' and 'corruption' in relation to the sexual behaviour and/or vulnerability of children has in one respect served to summon up the worst of scenarios and images and so exacerbate this stigmatisation of girls with 'knowledge of evil' (Brown and Barrett, 2002).

Louise Jackson suggests that many accounts of juvenile prostitution in the late nineteenth century were euphemistic descriptions of child sexual abuse that composed a more acceptable articulation of the problem, locating it outside of the home and family (2000: 16). Jackson's argument and evidence are convincing, the issue of child sexual abuse may indeed in part have been framed as child prostitution. This does not negate evidence regarding the existence of child prostitution but rather locates it appropriately as a form of child sexual abuse. Historically, however, something else has also occurred. Over the twentieth century, as discourses of child sexual abuse were being constructed, those relating to child prostitution have taken a distinct journey, one more likely to lead to condemnation and even criminalisation. The negative portrayal of child prostitutes as sexually knowledgeable and experienced, and the assumption of comprehension and choice on the part of the child have been instrumental in excluding child prostitution from being encompassed in definitions of child sexual abuse such as that by Schecter and Roberge (1976), 'The involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in activities they do not fully comprehend to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles'. Child victims should not, therefore, only be innocent but passive, helpless and 'unknowing' victims so that the level of their culpability is zero (Blagg, 1989).

Perceptions and associations that have varied according to social, political and economic contexts have also influenced social constructions of child prostitutes. These contexts include: ideologies of childhood and the family; the perceived threat of lower class social standards; assertions of declining morality; the perceived threat of foreigners to Imperial Britain and the vulnerability of young people moving to find work. Doezema has also identified the importance of context in her study of white slavery and adult women,

While the discourse on white slavery ostensibly was about the protection of women from (male) violence, to a large extent, the welfare of the 'white slaves' was peripheral to the discourse. A supposed threat to women's safety served as a marker of and metaphor for other fears, among them fear of women's growing independence, the breakdown of the family, and loss of national identity through the influx of immigrants (Doezema, 1999: 37).

An important factor is the malleability of such a 'dangerous' and shocking image as that of the child prostitute, which has provided additional impact when related to various identified social problems. The difficulty has often been attempting to decipher the actuality behind the rhetoric.

It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the involvement of children in commercial sex began to attract significant and sustained attention from voluntary organisations, government and the public. However, as with child abuse in the 1960s this was not a discovery but a rediscovery. As one writer has noted, 'Within the field of child welfare, the emergence of new areas of need is more often than not the rediscovery of some very old ones' (Van Meeuwen, 1998: 3). This is one of the reasons why the term 'prostitute' is used here to refer to children in the sex trade. It is not to suggest that they should be considered as something other than victims of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse through prostitution was precisely the experience of these children. It is rather because historical commentators used the term 'child prostitution'. Indeed, in the recent history of legislation surrounding prostitution and soliciting, generally one important and defining case of 1918 involved a child. *R v de Munck* (1918) stated that prostitution meant the 'offering for reward by a female of her body commonly for the purposes of lewdness, and that it is not necessary to prove that the offer was for the purpose of natural sexual connection.' Since that case it has not been necessary for commercial sexual transactions to involve monetary payment or indeed to constitute penetrative sex to be legally defined as prostitution. The case of *R v de Munck* involved a child of 14 participating in 'led acts with men'. The Court of Appeal decided that even though no sexual intercourse had occurred such acts brought the child within the definition of 'common prostitute.' Her father was then charged with attempting to procure his daughter to become a prostitute (Edwards, 1998). Historical usage of the term 'prostitute' informs the broad nature of the activities involved in a way that no other term allows, albeit that it is much less helpful in explaining the social, cultural and economic context in which prostitution has occurred.

### History and the 'white slave trade' victim

Culturally in the west there is discomfort when victims appear to be less than perfect, and this is particularly the case with regard to children. An article by Benjamin Waugh, founder of The NSPCC, and Archbishop Edward (1886) in which 'A child is not only made in the image of God, but of all His creatures it is the most like to Himself in its early purity, beauty, brightness, and innocence' illustrates the rather demanding ideal of children that had been established by the late nineteenth century. Yet the perceived fragility of such innocence, particularly within the context of working class families, meant that the purity of children was seen to be vulnerable to corruption. Thus childhood had to be protected, had a right to be protected. The ideal of a protected childhood was established as the moral and social standard to be maintained by families and communities. It was the standard of protected childhood that provided the rationale and purpose for both voluntary and state provision and action on behalf of children. Historically, however, the distinction between

protection and control has been blurred and can present two sides of the same coin. As Harry Ferguson (1992) has noted with regard to child protection in the period 1880–1914, it was a restricted notion of protection that was utilised, one that emphasised protecting children from their own impulses and protecting society from the threat abused children posed. Part of the threat lay in the belief that deviance could be transmitted between generations. Hence, the subject of children living in, or frequenting brothels was a significant factor in pre-Second World War child protection legislation (that is, The Children's Act of 1908 contained a measure to prevent children frequenting 'the company of any common or reputed prostitute'). Inherent in this was a belief that prostitution was a lifetime or even hereditary profession, or at least irrevocably contaminating, and that prostitute mothers might initiate their children into it.

During the late nineteenth century, the power of the depiction of pure and innocent child victims *versus* their brutal and predatory abusers became the cause that united feminists, social purity organisations and religious bodies to campaign for an increase in the age of consent and other child protection measures. Child prostitution first became a subject of national public attention and indeed alarm following publication of a, now well-known, series of sensationalist articles written and published by W.T. Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1885). These 'Maiden Tribute' articles and their emotive presentation of innocents betrayed and sexually abused provided the crucial force to ensure the final passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, which increased the age of consent from 13 to 16 years of age and augmented police powers to deal with vice. The balance between control and protection was then to become an enduring feature of debates on child prostitution and youthful delinquency in general. Campaigners served to highlight effectively the sexual and physical abuse of both women and children by men and worked to bring about the 'purification of national life' (Mort, 1987). Indeed, in one respect the cultural myth of the white slave trade operated to begin to redirect condemnation from the 'victim' to the exploiter, and from women to men by constructing an image of the victim of sexual abuse requiring unquestioned protection (Irwin, 1996: 3). The term 'white slave' was in common usage by the 1870s and became the parody which denoted the abduction and violation of innocent youth by, usually foreign, evil agents, thus incorporating concerns about overseas threats to British Imperialism.

Judith Walkowitz has suggested that the 'Shifting of the cultural image of the prostitute to the innocent child victim' at this time operated to mystify wider issues of sexuality (1992: 84). This also operated to obscure the rationales that led young girls into commercial sex, the nature of their abuse and the personal consequences for them. According to Deborah Gorham and Judith Walkowitz many underage girls were engaged in prostitution in late Victorian England through economic necessity 'because their choices were so limited', and not as the 'passive, sexually innocent victims' depicted by Stead (Gorham, 1978: 355; Walkowitz, 1992; see also Roberts, 1993: 117).

In late Victorian England, the rapid expansion of children's voluntary organisations sought to establish new standards for 'proper' child-raising. This was illustrated in the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Protection of Children Act 1889 (extended and consolidated in 1894 and 1904). The NSPCC repeatedly claimed that its role was not to replace parental authority and responsibility but to reinforce it. In so doing they, and other children's societies, helped to distinguish between 'normal' and 'abnormal' or deviant family cultures productive of juvenile delinquency. Children perceived as being in need of

discipline and control were thus used as a 'wedge to prise open families' (Mahood, 1995: 2). One prominent theme in the rhetoric around juvenile delinquency constructed the vicious and sexually promiscuous girl who, unless removed from her existing environment, would drift inevitably and irredeemably into prostitution.

### Strategies and evidence

The strategy of the children's societies was to separate delinquents from 'normal' children by relating to them concepts of dirt and filth, income earning and independence and in particular sexual knowledge (Mahood, 1995). The moral panic regarding child prostitution in the late nineteenth century can then be seen as part of social discovery and ideological exploration of the constitution of childhood, sexuality and the family. It was, Jackson writes, 'part of a move to naturalise and normalise the childhood condition amongst all social classes' (2000: 17). During the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century childhood became an idealised and sentimentalised stage of life. Examples of child prostitution jarred considerably against this idealisation and were used, along with evidence of neglect and physical violence, to legitimate and promote the work of children's societies. Care was nevertheless taken to protect those involved and identifying details were omitted. For instance, the case in 1906 in which women sanitary inspectors in Bradford reported two under-nourished girls found living in a house which 'resembled a pigsty'. The elder girl, who was 15 years of age, was, according to the report, 'being encouraged to earn her living by immorality' (*Child's Guardian*, 1906). Another case was revealed in 1913 in which a father had forced his 15-year-old daughter under threats of violence into prostitution and had been living on her earnings for at least a year (*Child's Guardian*, 1913). In addition during an NSPCC investigation in the late 1920s in the south of England, witnesses testified to soldiers frequenting the house of their neighbour in the evenings (a household headed by a woman with three children) and to years of 'immoral' behaviour by the mother. The pregnancy of the daughter, who gave birth when only 14-years old, was 'the talk of the neighbours'.<sup>1</sup>

According to Pam Cox (1996) 'child and teenage prostitution was widespread' in the early twentieth century. Girls tended to be brought before the courts (under sections of 1908 Children's Act) as 'being beyond control', 'living in circumstances likely to cause corruption', 'being without visible means of support', 'association', or for theft (Cox, 1996). This may in part explain why it was not until the inter-war period that child abuse was consistently linked to sexual precociousness in girls, although it is clear that children's societies were dealing with such cases. One case in 1906 involved a ten-year-old girl who had been living in a one-roomed home with two siblings and a lodger who was described as a 'prostitute'. The mother later became a live-in domestic servant and left the children in the care of another woman who was recorded in Children's Society documentation as stating that the girl acted

In a very immoral manner she pulled up her clothes for boys to see her private parts and asked the other girls to do the same she also took boys to the bedroom to have sexual communication with her them to pay her a penny a time as she [sic] stood at the Bedroom Window quite naked and called to boys in the street come for she was ready for them.

<sup>1</sup>Special permission to view this file was obtained from the NSPCC, all identifying references have been excluded.

The least that can be discerned here is that the girl probably witnessed at close quarters the behaviour of a prostitute at work.

During the inter-war period many feminist and child welfare organisations, including The NSPCC, sought to 'explain sexual precociousness in young girls as an outcome of sexual abuse'. This contested the narrow and judgemental portrayal of 'immoral' girls seducing and inviting sex with older men and was a change of perspective that further shifted blame to the abuser (Smart, 1998: 12–13). Partly as a result of increasingly psychological approaches to child development, much more emphasis was given to children's emotions and resistances. Delinquency, within which sexualised behaviour, including prostitution, was framed, was increasingly considered as having specific origins often rooted in the home and family relationships (Urwin and Sharland, 1992).

During the inter-war years, two leading voluntary organisations, which had been established as a result of concerns with social morals, The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) and The National Vigilance Association (NVA), focused their strategies on differing concerns. The former attempted to highlight the sexual activity and even promiscuity of girls of 14 or 15 while the latter emphasised the sexual 'abuse' of prepubescent children. The NVA concentrated their campaigning upon girls under about ten years of age, reasoning that there was a significant difference in offence between 'tampering with a child of seven or eight and premature sex relation with a girl nearing 16 with a young man of her acquaintance' (NVA, 1932: 11). But not only did this not address the issue of the sexuality of adolescent girls under 16 years old who could also be vulnerable, even to adolescent boys, it neatly side-stepped the issue of responsibility with regard to sex with older girls under the age of consent.

The AMSH concentrated upon redefining the abuser of these older girls, constructing an image of them as predatory rather than as being seduced, in order to reduce sympathy for them, particularly among the legal professions. The AMSH highlighted the need for a balanced view of responsibilities and a realistic acceptance that with greater maturity should come greater blame not for the abused but for the abuser. They were not alone in this view. A section from a Report from the Children's Branch of the Home Office regarding juvenile delinquency was reprinted in the magazine of the Association, *The Shield* (1938)

Of the girls of 15 to 17 years the offences are mostly theft and prostitution. Quite a large number of these girls have become infected with venereal disease and this fact should be born in mind when so much stress is laid by some of our judges on the 'wickedness' of girls under 16 in seducing men twice as old as themselves! Very little comment is made of the venereal disease passed to girls and yet many under 16 have been already infected by men.

These debates also illustrated the social difficulties in defining the point at which the transition from childhood to adulthood has been completed and the confused meaning around what has been termed the 'no-man's-land of adolescence' (Davies, 1999: 32). Such debates within the AMSH paralleled important developments in the construction of child sexual abuse reflected in legislation which restricted the defence of 'reasonable cause to believe that a girl was 16 years or over' to men aged 22 years or under (Criminal Law Amendment Act 1922). There was also increasing pressure to modify court proceedings in sexual cases involving children and to raise penalties for sexual assault upon children.

Nevertheless, during the Commons debate on the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1922 the depiction of young, lower class girls as sexually mature seducers of innocent, and by inference, middle and upper class young men was still evident. One of a series of failed amendments to this Act sought to exclude from legal protection girls who were prostitutes, and less than 16 years old. Following the publication of the *Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences Against Young Persons* (1925), The NSPCC stressed the importance of addressing the 'present ignorance, carelessness, and indifference in sexual matters' with regard to children as well as the light sentences often imposed for sexual offences against children (*Child's Guardian*, 1925). However, the image of the sexually assertive under-age prostitute as the seducer and as a threat to the sexual control of men persisted. For example, Carol Smart (1999) has suggested that the legal professions as well as the Home Office were resistant to changing legislation relating to sexual offences against children. Even the magistrates' periodical, the *Justice of the Peace* in 1925 depicted the under-age subject of sexual assault as composing 'the helpless innocent child at the one end of the scale and the precocious temptress at the other'.

Continued resistance contributed to the weakening of campaigning pressures to address child sexual assault in all its forms. Sheila Jeffreys has suggested that during the inter-war period indignation against such assaults was dissipated in the face of responsibility increasingly being taken away from male offenders and attributed to exceptional psychological illness which framed the stereotypical abuser as both abnormal and as an outsider (1985: 152). Furthermore, in the context of economic dislocation during the 1930s and greater emphasis on family stability, there were fears about the morality of the young. This was reflected in the rhetoric around a supposed increase in 'amateur' prostitution. Attention once more shifted to the 'white slave trade' resulting in the social distancing of the problem of child sexual abuse through prostitution and emphasis upon public protection.

Later, the important Street Offences Act (1959) served to confirm the primacy placed upon protection of the public and the public face of prostitution rather than its possible role as a form of victimisation or of child sexual abuse. The term 'common prostitute' was retained, and no age distinction was made with reference to cautioning and conviction for soliciting. However, in an attempt to insert a clause that would have prohibited conviction under this Act of any person below the age of 18, opposition to the Street Offences Bill in Parliament did use the image of the under-age prostitute plying her trade in public. Leslie Hale, MP for Oldham West drew an image of

The sort of bad girl who has got into trouble at home, quarrelled with her parents, committed a criminal offence and gone to an approved school. That is the background—and one knows the trouble that the approved schools have in dealing with these girls (*Hansard*, 1959a).

With regard to this legislation removing the need to prove annoyance and also to continued use of the label 'common prostitute', Sydney Silverman MP begged the Government, 'For heaven's sake, if you must do this thing, and you think that you will do any good by it, do not do it to children' (*Hansard*, 1959b).

### **The rediscovery of child prostitution**

Distinctions made by contemporaries between child victims of abduction and those who became prostitutes through other less easily definable or understandable routes became

much more subject to critical examination during the 1980s and 1990s. Kathleen Barry asserted in 1979 that these distinctions remained but at the same time she was making an important contribution to the emerging scrutiny of the issue. A watershed in England came during the mid-1970s when child prostitution received widespread coverage in the national press for the first time since the late nineteenth century. Evidence that several under-age girls may have been selling their bodies while in local authority care placed the unpleasant likelihood that many other children were doing the same indisputably before the public. Such evidence of child prostitution was much less open to being interpreted as extraordinary or rare occurrences and indeed statements in the press from social work spokespersons muted the possibility that it could even have been systemic.

Cases coming to light in the mid-1970s also made explicit the importance of economic, political and social contexts in the construction of such social problems. Concerns over juvenile crime and delinquency were increasing and extensive publicity was given to child welfare policy and professionals in the aftermath of the failure to prevent Maria Colwell's death in 1974. Changes in the organisation of social services during the early 1970s also gave rise to questions about the effectiveness of child welfare structures (Parton, 1985). In addition, a political climate that had seen the decline of consensus also saw the increasing influence of a New Right ideology willing and able to criticise state social provision and liberal ethics. For some believers of New Right ideology the issue of child prostitution was briefly to become a metaphor for the decline of morality under the combined influences of liberal immorality and a socialist mixed economy.

Extensive media coverage of children being involved in prostitution while in local authority care and another case concerning a child (boy) prostitution ring operating from the 'Playland' amusement arcade (Playland) in London, tended to present this phenomenon in two particular ways. These representations can be seen as founded on existing and long-standing attitudes regarding prostitution and youth delinquency and as such persisted with some of the defects of these arguments. The first was that young girls (boys continued to receive little attention) were seduced, manipulated and/or coerced into prostitution by an older man who then lived off their earnings. The second was that girls entered prostitution through peer pressure and also declining values that highlighted the desire for money to pay for a way of life that could not be afforded otherwise. Thus the loose victim/threat construction of child prostitution, albeit often in a more complex and socially aware manner, persisted. However, the victim perspective left little space for understanding why girls might be unwilling to prosecute those who prostituted them and the threat perspective continued to associate participation with blame in this form of sexual abuse.

Importantly, cases involving children in care during the 1970s made explicit the link between absconders from residential homes and/or family homes, homelessness and commercial sex. Unfortunately, more recent changes to welfare benefits for the young, in the context of increases in single parenthood, divorce and reconstituted families, have exacerbated the precarious social and economic position of children who experience severe problems within their families and/or who run away from home and/or care. One consequence of this has been increased resort to informal economic activity, such as begging, drug dealing and prostitution (Melrose and Ayre, 2002). During the 1980s and 1990s, research into child prostitution, in its attention to life chances and to the realities of the choices available to some young people, began to critically problematise the historical links made between passivity and innocence, participation and guilt.

Historical analysis has suggested that circumstances that have led young people into prostitution were the result of limited choice. Nevertheless, child prostitutes have often been portrayed as choosing to be involved in prostitution and therefore as bearing at least part of the responsibility and guilt for this illegal activity. In common with, and perhaps to a greater extent than sexually abused children generally, children abused through prostitution have frequently been held to be responsible for their own victimisation. Unable to fit the idealised mould of the white slave trade image, children involved in commercial sex have too often been condemned as having unnatural knowledge and experience and as being something other than a child.

This has been evident in the realities of working with such children for welfare agencies and police. Historically, it is clear that these young people have borne little relation to the fragile and coerced image portrayed by writers like W. T. Stead in the late nineteenth century. Gorham (1978) has observed that the 'real young girls' who emerged from the rhetoric were 'unmanageable and flightly' in the 'eyes of their would-be reformers' and in

the privacy of their minute books and printed annual reports, organizations which manage rescue or 'preventive' homes reveal that one of their biggest problems was controlling the unruly behaviour of the girls with whom they came into contact.

The historian of The Children's Society, John Stroud (1974: 106), has observed that staff running the homes in some cases had to cope with what he describes as, 'wild, foul-mouthed, undisciplined children, many of them steeped in the practices of crime and prostitution'.

There are clear similarities here with problems faced by social workers in trying to help young girls involved in prostitution in the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Patrick Ayre and David Barrett note that child prostitutes may not be adequately provided for by welfare agencies, largely because of challenges they pose to the victim concept. As they state '[a]ggressive, streetwise, anarchic young people who steal and do drugs as well as prostitution do not conform obviously to our idealised image of a child in need' (Ayre and Barrett, 2000: 55). However, in the twenty-first century, and primarily as a result of pressure exerted by voluntary sector agencies, this situation may be improving. The Government issued specific guidance in relation to the treatment and management of child and juvenile prostitution (Department of Health, 2000). Guidance recommends, for the first time, that 'primary law enforcement effort must be against abusers' and suggests that 'where children are already involved in prostitution, the emphasis must be to protect them from further abuse and to support them out of prostitution' (Section 2.5) (Melrose and Ayre, 2002). A recent white paper, *Protecting the Public* (Home Office, 2002) aims to increase penalties for sexual offenders and to introduce new laws relating to the sexual exploitation of children and young people. Under this proposed reform, the law will protect children from commercial sexual exploitation up to the age of 18, offences will cover both buying sexual services and 'causing', 'encouraging', 'facilitating' or 'controlling' the commercial sexual exploitation of a child.

### **Trafficking rediscovered**

Given the history of rhetoric surrounding the white slave trade and its trafficking of innocents abroad, it is perhaps ironic that in the twenty-first century a subject of concern is not the trafficking of children out of England, but trafficking into England. David Blunkett,

Home Secretary, recently commented that 'The nature of trafficking means that it is a hidden crime and there are no reliable figures about children' (*The Guardian*, 14 December 2002). A spokesperson from ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking) stated in 2002 that there were believed to be between 5,000 and 10,000 unaccompanied children in the UK. Many were sent to get a British education but 'some fell into the wrong hands' (*The Guardian*, 14 December 2002). Indeed, one of the strategies listed within the recent (February 2002) Government white paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain*, aims to introduce new offences of 'trafficking people for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation'. A further strategy listed in the white paper is 'better protection for the victims of trafficking and multi-agency operations to tackle the traffickers and smugglers'. Yet, in the midst of Government concern to increase immigration control, it is doubtful whether significant resources will be devoted to this largely hidden problem (Refugee Council, 2002). The confused modern rhetoric surrounding asylum seekers and illegal immigrants may serve to attach blame to victims of trafficking and undermine efforts to construct them as in need of protection.

The extent to which greater public discussion of children in trouble, and specifically children who are sexually abused through prostitution, will impact upon providing more sympathetic and appropriate responses to the experiences of these children and the problems they raise awaits the passage of time to enable in depth appraisal. In fact it is children's charities rather than social services that have conducted much of the directed and effective outreach work in this area. Unfortunately, cultural attitudes change slowly and the media continue to make unhelpful use of terms such as 'white slave trade' (*The Guardian*, 26 January 2002). Certainly, children who have been sexually abused through prostitution remain a hard to reach and vulnerable section of society.

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