Child Abuse Essay, Research Paper

People in the rich world tend to assume that child labor, like

slavery, is something that was abolished a century ago and that now only

exists in third world countries. This can not be any further from the

reality of this issue. In fully developed countries like Canada and the

United States, parents encourage their children to have a job at an

early age, as a way of letting their children gain experience of the

real world. Few people see it as exploite that a child should work

(for example to have a paper route) even if they are paid less than

adult wages and local child-labour laws are infringed by their working

before seven in the morning and after seven o’clock in the evening.

Child labour’ in general is too explosive and negative a word to be

applied to all children workers. It is insulting to those whose lives

are ruined by hard labor to lump them into the same category as those

children who help out in the family shop after school. If people treat

all work by children as equally unacceptable they are trivializing the

whole issue and making it less likely to be able to root out the most

damaging forms of child labor. It is simply the nature and conditions

of children’s work that determines whether they are exploited, not the

plain fact of their work age. Another term that is too loosely used in

the business world and elsewhere is that of a sweatshop’. The term

sweatshop’ stems from the word sweating, originally used in the late

19th century America. It was thought to describe “a subcontracting

system in which the middlemen earned their profit from the margin

between the amount they received for a contract and the amount they paid

workers”. This margin was said to be sweated’ from the workers because

they received minimal wages for excessive hours worked under unsanitary

conditions.

Unlike some problems that are just surfacing in the world today and are

not too predominant, child labor is well developed with around 500

million children enslaved in its trap, including those working as

domestic slaves. Out of these there are over 73 million children that

are under the age of 10. Children, who should be out in the sunshine

having fun with their friends, or playing on a local soccer league are

in actuality slaving over machines in factories or serving families as a

domestic slave. These frail beings work in places like India making

rugs that need 4000 knots per square inch. They are sold as slaves in

Sudan for a mere $15 per child or in Africa for domestic work. In

Pakistan they are enslaved in the brick industry, in Turkey they work in

textile industries, and in Italy they sweat over making shoes that

people all over the world buy and proudly wear. The mines in which some

children are forced to work in Columbia and Peru collapse upon them and

severely injure or kill hundreds of workers. What is unbelievable is

the amount of money that these children are paid for their long hours in

the factory. While most children prefer to work in a factory over doing

domestic chores the conditions are not that much better. Granted there

are hundreds of other children their age surrounding them, but they are

not allowed to talk with them, if they do, they are beaten. They work

between 16 and 18 hours a day, are sometimes shackled to their looms and

can not go to the bathroom or take breaks of any kind. This is indeed

unfortunate, but what may be more regrettable is that children in Canada

complain that they earn only $6.85 an hour as minimum wage. For doing

what, flipping burgers or serving drinks? What they do not realize is

that they can eat when they are hungry, they are allowed to take breaks

(in fact it is mandatory), they can socialize while working and they

work under sanitary conditions with benefits. These children that are

being exploited earn only 31 cents an hour in Honduras, 24 cents in

Nicaragua, and a whopping 56 cents in El Salvador. In Sri Lanka they

are given 18 cents an hour and in China and Vietnam they reportedly

receive 11 cents an hour for their hard work. This may indeed seem like

a very small amount, but it is more than what domestic workers are

usually paid. These invisible millions have money constantly taken away

from them to pay for their shelter, food and clothing. It is very hard

to recognize why as they sleep under the kitchen table in some instances

and their nourishment only consists of whatever falls off that table.

They are denied sleep as they are on call 24 hours a day and are also

sometimes expected (especially if it is a female worker) to provide

sexual favors for the master of the house. As a direct result of this

the girl is beaten by the wife, as she is taking over her role in the

family structure. What is incredibly horrific is that in most cases

people refuse to admit that their worker is a slave. They claim that

they did him or her a favor as they brought them from their poor village

and gave them shelter and a job. The owners admit that they do

household chores, but why wouldn’t they? They are now part of the

household and have some responsibility to keep it up and functioning.

Are these unfortunate village children slaves or are they to be

considered foster children? Ignorance, then, obviously plays a huge

role in discovering child laborers and being able to identify their

situations in order to help them. How are people supposed to determine

whether or not what they are purchasing is made by children who are

being exploited? It is a very difficult task and can only be curbed

when companies take responsibility for their actions, factories and

employees. Unfortunately not many companies are willing to do this, as

they are receiving a greater profit by employing young children because

they do not have to pay them as much money. It is true, however, that

some businesses are beginning to take action, like The Gap, Sears, and

Kathy Lee Gifford’s clothing line with Wal-Mart. However, there are far

too many companies out there that are not. J.C. Penny, a clothing line,

refused to check into their factories that are stationed abroad even

after four warnings from the Labour Department. Parents are unknowingly

buying products from companies like Walt Disney, where their workers

only earn 5 cents for every $11.99 item they produce. They proudly give

these items as gifts to their own children, children that are the same

age as those working in Haiti, not realizing that they are stained with

other’s fingerprints. Another widely known company that exploits

children is Nike. This company pays its workers in Indonesia about

$2.20 a day while the founder of this business has over $4.5 billion in

Nike’s stock alone. Although most of the companies that have been

mentioned have factories in third world countries, this is not the only

place that one can find child laborers, or sweatshops. A 1994 study by

the General Accounting Office found that 2,000 of the 6,000 garment

shops in New York City could be called sweatshops, and 4,500 out of

5,000 in Los Angeles were given the same title. If sweatshops and child

labor are to vanish from the earth, a multi-prolonged effort will be

needed to tackle some sizable related problems such as illegal

immigration, intemperate corporate profit-seeking and inadequate

schooling for the developing world’s children.

Although the above jobs sound dangerous and difficult, the most risky

form of child labor has yet to be discussed: child prostitution.

People in today’s society, and especially those in developed countries,

refuse to admit that this is indeed a large problem. They view children

as innocent beings, not as sexual objects. The fact still remains that

there are enough people out there that are willing to exploit children

in this way. There are over 300,000 children who sell their soul in the

United States, 20,000 in Sri Lanka, while Venezuela is home to over

40,000. India is reported to have between 400,000 and 500,000 and

Thailand has once been quoted to have over 800,000 child prostitutes

invading their streets. There will be an expected one million child

prostitutes joining the industry every year if current conditions do not

change.6 Most of the children enter the industry around the age of 9.

This is not always the case as Bob Matthews, an OPP officer of the

anti-pornography unit, has seen a case where a young girl of 18 months

was depicted in child pornography. This child has only lived for a year

and a half and already she is scarred for life. Children around her age

are also being portrayed through the media. There is a picture that was

published in Marie Claire, a US printed magazine, which shows a naked boy

(of about 2) standing beside a bent over woman (refer to page 10). The

item that was trying to be sold were the shoes that the woman was

wearing. Why does it seem necessary to exploit children in this

manner? Why do people of influence like Anne Geddes, a renowned

photographer, find it essential to portray young naked children as her

sole subject? Most of these children have no idea what is going on

around them, they have no say and no authority over what is happening to

them. This is probably one of the main reasons that they are becoming

victims, they are easy to manipulate. They are more willing to believe

what is told to them, as is the case of Nok (age 14) and Tong (11). A

foreigner came into their village one day and promised them happiness

and fortune if they came into the city and worked as waitresses. Three

weeks later, Nok and Tong were not selling drinks, they were selling

their bodies. They were trafficked across borders into a Bangkok

brothel called Max 29.7 they were told that their freedom would cost

them $2000, but this money would not be easy to earn.8 Just as money

was taken from the domestic workers, so too was it confiscated from

these young girls. Money was constantly deducted for the 4 birth

control pills they were forced to take a day, the clothes they had to

wear, makeup, hairstyles, food, and the condoms that were purchased but

never used.9 without using condoms and having to serve between 6 and 10

customers a day, these children are very susceptible to diseases like

HIV and AIDS and are dying as a result. One girl mentioned that she

felt “just like a machine” which is understandable as she works 22 hours

a day, 7 days a week.0 The girls are forced to take drugs that the

customers bring into the brothel, if they refuse, they are beaten.

Every Wednesday at this brothel there are ritual beatings that take

place between 3pm and 5pm. The captains’, men in charge of the

organization, come into a room in which all the 37 girls are lined up

against a wall and hit them, kick them, and beat them with iron rods and

metal balls on chains. In brothels like Max 29, a girl’s virginity is

sold from anywhere between $40 and $4000.1 something so sacred should

never have a price tag attached to it, but unfortunately it does. In

fact, a young female’s virginity is no longer sacred. These girls are

forced to go through a reconstructive surgery so that to their customers

it feels like they are having sex with a virgin, and a higher profit can

be made . The search for pure virgins’ is a great quest that many

people take to heart. In China it is believed that if a man has sex

with a virgin, power and luck with business will come to him.2 there is

also the wide belief that a virgin is a safer bet when thinking about

STD’s and AIDS. Companies that are involved in the sex tourism

industry, like Bushwhackers in Las Vegas, advertise where people can find

these virgins or “cherry girls” that are usually between the ages of 10

and 15.3 Another well known company is called Big Apple Oriental Tours,

located in New York City. This organization offers an incredible deal

for just $2000. For that money the customer will receive, airplane

tickets, car transportation, luxury hotel accommodations, free drinks,

free food and a personal tour guide that will introduce them to 400

girls. Out of these 400 children the client can pick one or two and for

$20 a night they can do whatever they please with them and throw them

out like trash in the morning. Or, if they took a shining to the girl,

Big Apple Oriental Tours will arrange the immigration papers, for an

additional fee, if they wish to take the youngster home with them.4

One of the biggest problems that these child prostitutes face is that

they have no where to turn. In some cases their parents sold them into

the industry as part of a bondage agreement. This means that they had

a debt to pay that they could not afford and therefore had to sell their

children to do their dirty work for them. Even when a child gathers up

enough courage to go to a local authority their pleas are often

ignored. In one case, a girl who had been a prostitute for a few

months, went to the police and told them her story. The officer in

charge took half an hour to change her statement from one of sexual

harassment to that of rape.5 Why does this happen? It is because

authority figures are profiting from exploiting children. They are paid

to turn a blind eye to several problems like when tourists come into

their country looking for cheap sex and when prostitutes are trafficked

across borders, because this brings much needed revenue into their

country. As for the sexual tours that are arranged the laws regarding

them are very discouraging as well. It is not against the law, in the

United States, to organize tours to exploit erotic nightlife in other

parts of the world. However, it is illegal to sexually exploit children

at home and abroad, which is why most of the U.S. sex tour operators are

very careful about how they word their advertising brochures.6 The

problem here is obviously that there is a very fine line between what is

legal and what is not, and this is why many people can slip through the

judicial cracks. There are also laws aplenty dealing with child labor,

but again they do not seem effective. In India no employer has ever

been imprisoned for employing children. Of 4,000 cases registered

against Indian employers for violating child labor laws, 3,500 were

dismissed or the fines were less than $6. The rest remain before

India’s courts.7 In the Declaration of the Right’s of a Child, which

became a resolution of the UN general assembly in 1959, article 9 states

that: “the child shall be protected against all forms of neglect,

cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic in any

form. The child shall not be admitted to employment before an

appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to

engage in any occupation or employment, which would prejudice his health

or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral

development”.8 Who is supposed to decide for these children about what

an appropriate age should be, so that they are not put in danger but are

still allowed to work to support their families? In 1819 there was a

prohibition of children under the age of 9 working in mills.9 Is this

really an acceptable age?

Child labor has been around since the Industrial Revolution, why then

are there still no solutions? If poetry, like Elizabeth Barrett

Browning’s poem The Cry of The Children (refer to pages 11-13), books

and music address the issue, why can people not come to terms with it?

It is because individuals can not relate to the lives that these

children are forced to live. People in Western society find it

impossible to identify with children who are faced with such cruel and

deceiving circumstances.

What is desperately needed is a form of education for these less

fortunate children so that they are free to learn and can determine for

themselves what is right and wrong, thus developing their own moral

beliefs. This is essential so that they will be less likely to enter

exploitied circumstances in the first place. Governments and people in

general are so concerned about finances that they refuse to acknowledge

that they do have spare cash that could be spent on furthering

education. Sub-Sahara Africa currently pays $12 billion in servicing

its debts, yet just $2 billion would be enough to ensure that every

child in the region could have a place in school and a better chance of

Survival.

Are people willing to just sit idly by as the children, the future,

fall one by one into the deadly trap of exploitation? Is it possible to

say to them, that this problem will eventually solve itself, and just

hope and pray that they do not die in the meantime? Children are losing

their innocence and their childhood because people refuse to admit that

this issue of child exploitation can affect them in their town, in their

country. These children are not free to play or to socialize at all.

This deprivation leaves scars that can take years to heal. They lose

trust in others, particularly adults and become vulnerable to further

exploitation. Can people still use children as sexual objects, or keep

them in working conditions that are unacceptable after they realize the

devastating results these acts can have on children? This is the

question that must be answered. People must find it in themselves to

protect these children and no longer ignore them.