

Forgotten No More: Male Child Trafficking In Afghanistan



MEDIA RELEASE

April 4, 2014



Afghan Boys, Photo courtesy of Jane Thorson

NEW HAGAR STUDY SHEDS LIGHT ON MALE CHILD TRAFFICKING IN AFGHANISTAN

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN: An unprecedented study of 210 stakeholders in Afghanistan, including 130 boys, has found that on average one in 10 of the boys interviewed had experienced human trafficking. The study, *Forgotten No More: Male Child Trafficking in Afghanistan*, was conducted by Hagar field researchers and funded by the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP).

Honor and shame

The study, which asked boys about their experience of human trafficking, highlights a profound lack of understanding of male child trafficking and the systematic failure to support survivors of trafficking. "In Afghanistan, a culture of honor and shame quickly buries discussions deemed shameful," says Jane Thorson, Hagar Afghanistan's Education and Technical Advisor. Thorson conducted field research for *Forgotten No More* in four Afghan provinces, including Kabul, Kunduz, Herat and Nangarhar. "The rights of male child victims and survivors in Afghanistan are consistently denied," says Thorson.

"During the night they would make me dance"

Forgotten No More highlights the prevalence of bacha bazi ('boy play' in Persian), a form of child sexual slavery and prostitution in which young, prepubescent boys are recruited for dance and sexual entertainment, particularly at weddings. Fifty per cent of sexual abuse cases documented in *Forgotten No More* were related to bacha bazi and the report found that dancing boys are more likely to be arrested than their recruiters. Afghan boys are also regularly found to be sexually exploited in their roles as assistant truck drivers. In addition, boys living on the streets – or ending up in Juvenile Residential Centres (JRC) – were highly vulnerable to human trafficking.

Other key findings of the report

- Three main types of exploitation of male child survivors of trafficking were identified: sexual (including bacha bazi), forced labor and child recruitment for military groups.
- Multiple forms of exploitation were often found within cases.
- While services for survivors of trafficking in Afghanistan are limited in general, provisions for male child trafficking survivors do not exist and need to be developed urgently.
- Understanding of human trafficking continues to be plagued by confusion; male child survivors of trafficking are likely to be identified as 'children in conflict with the law' and referred to Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres (JRC) instead of seen as victims.

Combatting modern slavery

"Modern slavery is a crime that victimizes men, women, and children around the world, and we need research to shine a light on every aspect of this issue. Hagar's study is providing critically needed information about the trafficking of boys in Afghanistan which will help guide responses and interventions going forward," said Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, of the U.S. Department of State's TIP Office. "This sort of work builds on our understanding about aspects of modern slavery that are too often ignored. With the commitment of Hagar and others, we'll be able to help bring more and more victims of modern slavery out of the darkness."

Forgotten male child survivors

The qualitative study began in October 2012 using existing gaps in knowledge as the starting point. Though reports by UNICEF and IOM in 2008 and the US Department of State in 2011 emphasised the vulnerability of boys in Afghanistan, Forgotten No More is the first research to focus entirely on male child trafficking in Afghanistan. "This study is a startling reminder that boys in Afghanistan are even more at risk than girls for trafficking. Even more startling is the severe lack of services and care for this cohort. Boys have been completely overlooked as an exploited group and lack any access to justice," said Sara Shinkfield, Country Director, Hagar Afghanistan.

"They look for the invisible," Caregiver, Kabul

"Knowledge on male child trafficking has been relegated to the phrase 'including boys'. This research changes things," said Thorson. "It puts the phrase 'including boys' under the microscope, establishes a baseline understanding of the extent and nature of male child trafficking in Afghanistan, and thereby provides service providers with the knowledge necessary to sharpen their programmes to address the real needs of male survivors of child trafficking in Afghanistan."

Protection, prevention and prosecution

The Forgotten No More report includes first-hand accounts of boys at-risk of and surviving trafficking – and its key recommendations focus on increasing awareness of male child trafficking and improvements in the protection of survivors, prevention of trafficking and prosecution of perpetrators:

- Introducing male child trafficking education and early identification skills into training programs in existing Afghan law enforcement agencies.
- Prevention of trafficking through raising awareness of the issue with police and the wider community.
- Investment in recovery programmes for boy survivors of male child trafficking, as well as community based recovery and awareness programmes in high risk areas of the North.

Hagar is a specialist aftercare agency that works with survivors of human rights abuse such as trafficking in Cambodia, Vietnam and Afghanistan. Established in 1994, it is committed to the protection, recovery and reintegration of women and children who have suffered severe human rights abuses. It began its Afghanistan operations in Kabul City in 2008.

For more information/interviews please contact:

Afghanistan Jane Thorson, jane.thorson@hagarinternational.org Sara Shinkfield, sara.shinkfield@hagarinternational.org
USA Martha Heassler, Martha.heassler@hagarinternational.org , +1-978-337-9900
Australia Kate Kennedy, kate.kennedy@hagar.org.au
United Kingdom Peter Holt, peter.holt@hagarinternational.org , +44 (0) 7515 571033
International (Cambodia) Amie Gosselin, amie.gosselin@hagarinternational.org ,

Visit: www.hagarinternational.org

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Hagar Overview

Hagar works to restore the lives of women and children who have survived severe human rights abuses. **Hagar's mission** "Whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to restore a broken life".

Quick Facts

- Hagar is 20 years old, founded by Swiss Italian National Pierre Tami in Cambodia in 1994
- Hagar has done intensive recovery work with over 15,000 victims of human rights abuse
- Clients are survivors of physical and sexual abuse, rape, and human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation
- Currently, Hagar supports 1,500 clients who are receiving protection and recovery services in three countries. Programmes include trauma counselling, legal support, medical care, schooling, job training, career placement, and reintegration follow-up.
- Hagar works in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Vietnam and is working to launch operations in Myanmar in 2014.

Background: Human Rights Abuse and Human Trafficking

Hagar works indiscriminately with people who have suffered severe human rights abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, rape, and human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation.

The UN estimates that up to 2.4 million people are trafficked each year and are forced into labour or sexual exploitation; half of these are children.

The US State Department announced in May 2012, that it believed trafficking to be the second most lucrative criminal industry after the drugs trade, racking up estimated profits of around \$32 billion a year.

Background: Human Rights Abuse and Human Trafficking in Afghanistan

- According to the US Department of State's TIP Report, Afghanistan is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labor and sexual exploitation.
- Trafficking within Afghanistan is more prevalent than transnational trafficking
- Most victims are children forced to work in carpet and brick factories, as domestic workers, begging, in the commercial sex industry, or used in transnational drug smuggling
- Families will sometimes knowingly sell their children for forced prostitution, including the cultural practice of bacha baazi, where young boys are used for sexual entertainment
- Understanding of human trafficking among police and government officials remains low and victims are often penalized and re-victimized for offenses committed whilst being trafficked

About Hagar

Hagar was established in 1994 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. In the wake of the nation's protracted civil conflict, Hagar responded to women and children who had suffered severe human rights abuse. Today, Hagar works with women and children survivors in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Hagar is a non-denominational Christian organisation dedicated to the protection, recovery and community integration of survivors of human rights abuse; particularly human trafficking, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. We serve **individual** women and children regardless of religion, political preference, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, and do whatever it takes for as long as it takes to restore life in all its fullness.

Hagar's Work

Hagar supports individual women and children on their journeys towards recovery and healing. After receiving referrals from police, government ministries and partner NGO's, Hagar does whatever it takes for as long as it takes to rebuild the lives of survivors in our care.

Comprehensive programmes for women, girls and boys include;

Protection

Hagar works to ensure each client's safety through residential care centres, by supporting women and children called to testify in court and educating each individual in their rights and how to stay safe.

Personal Well-Being

Hagar is a refuge where each individual is able to access health care, trauma counselling and a nurturing environment where the journey to wholeness might begin.

Economic Empowerment

Catch-up schooling, literacy classes, early education for young children with their mothers and university scholarships provide opportunities for clients to become more independent. Personal development and on-the-job training enable women and youth to secure job opportunities which in turn offer them greater freedom and increased power over economic decisions in their lives which is critical for resilience and sustainable community integration.

Reintegration

Hagar supports women and children as they transition back to family and community. Through a range of options (including extended family placements, community foster families, and group homes), Hagar helps each individual build healthy relationships so reintegration will be successful for the long run. The ongoing support and follow up for up to two years after reintegration has ensured that 80% of Hagar's clients have successfully integrated into community.

Social Enterprises

At Hagar, wholistic social programmes work hand in hand with innovative social businesses. Hagar has minority investments in a catering and facilities management business in Phnom Penh and a café bakery business in Hanoi. In addition, there are partnerships with a range of businesses that provide employment opportunities for Hagar clients. Each enterprise provides a safe and supportive work environment for women who may have never worked in a formal work setting and are still recovering from their traumatic past. Provision of dignified, sustainable employment opportunities is a critical part of Hagar's work.

Jane E. Thorson, Bio



Jane Elizabeth Thorson is the education and technical advisor for Hagar Afghanistan. She has a strong commitment and passion for seeing quality child protection programmes established within vulnerable communities. Three years of work within the education sector in Afghanistan fostered a desire to see children in conflict-affected populations access their rights to education and child protection.

In 2012, following the completion of her Masters in International Educational Development, Jane joined the staff at Hagar Afghanistan to lead the research on male child trafficking in Afghanistan. The six month qualitative research study provided insight and understanding into a population of children in Afghanistan that had been forgotten for too long. Since the completion of the research, Jane has designed a culturally appropriate residential based recovery programme for male child survivors of trafficking in Afghanistan and officially implemented the programme in September 2013.

Working with the dedicated staff of Hagar Afghanistan, Jane is humbled to be able to walk alongside male child survivors of trafficking as they move through their recovery process towards the goal of being active participants within their families and communities.

[Download a copy of "Forgotten No More"](#)

For more information contact:

Jane Thorson

Jane.thorson@hagarinternational.org