Child Prostitution in 12 Countries: An Exploratory Study of Predictors

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<u>Abstract</u>

Few empirical studies have focused on examining the predictors of childhood prostitution across countries. In this exploratory research article, I examine the predictor variables of child prostitution in 12 countries. These variables include literacy rates for women aged 15 to 24, total population literacy, Per Capita Gross Domestic Product, dominant religion, HIV/AIDS infection, life expectancy, and percent of young women who are economically active, total fertility rate, and age population structure. Thailand has the highest rate of child prostitution among the 12 countries included in the analysis. Findings show that as literacy rates for women, life expectancy and percent of women who are economically active increase, rates of child prostitution decrease. Additionally, as fertility rates decline so does child prostitution.

Keywords: child prostitution, country, predictors.

Introduction

Child prostitution has received considerable attention in the academic literature. Very few studies, however, have focused on predictors of child prostitution by country. The current study focuses on predictors of child prostitution by examining macro-level variables including female literacy, abortion, gross domestic product, poverty levels, and laws to protect the women and children as well as the relationship of these predictors to child prostitution rates within a country. Twelve countries chosen for the availability of

data estimates of child prostitution are included in the analysis. This research is exploratory in that very little accurate data on child prostitution is available. The focus of this study is to determine if there are any consistent predictors of childhood prostitution among these 12 countries. I will be unable to determine if there is a cause and effect relationship between these variables and child prostitution due to the kind of data used in the analysis. I will also focus on the policy implications of the research findings. Children are often called our most precious resource but societies do not necessarily do everything they can to protect children. Since children are powerless, it is important to conduct research, research that may lead to an increase in their quality and quantity of life.

Definition of Child Exploitation

In order to examine child prostitution, it is important to be able to define and measure the concept. In the "*Training Manual to Fight Trafficking in Children for Labour, Sexual and Other Forms of Exploitation: Understanding Child Trafficking,*" *child* is defined as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (UNICEF 2009:13). The definition of **trafficking** included in this manual is,

> The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, or fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organ (UNICEF 2009:14).

Although there is no concrete definition of *child prostitution,* there is, however, a definition for *child trafficking* "a child has been trafficked if he or she has been moved within a country, or across borders, whether by force or not, with the purpose of exploiting the child" (UNICEF 2009: 14). Even though there is not a definite definition of what child prostitution is, it is in a way similar to prostitution generally. Child prostitution would then only mean that adults are not included in the definition and the focus will be solely on children.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are not mutually exclusive. The two ideas are similar in the way that they involve sex and exploitation but they are different in other aspects. Butcher (2003) wrote in *Confusion Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking*,

> Distinction between trafficking and prostitution is important because it pivots on individual agency. Trafficking, though variously defined, covers coercion, forced labour, and slavery. Prostitution describes the sale of sex, by no means necessarily without consent or with coercion. At a time when trafficking is increasing, as are

international efforts to tackle it, it is critical to clarify the differences between the issues (Butcher 2003:1983).

The data for the current study focus on child prostitution. Since children cannot engage in this activity of their own volition, it is implied that child trafficking is also taking place.

Explanations for Prostitution

Economic Explanations

There are many factors that drive women and children into prostitution, such as "extricating themselves from poverty or from a difficult home life, and earning enough to help the family of origin out of poverty or to build a foundation for their own futures" (Muecke 1992: 897). Prostitutes are like any other member of society, with common goals of financial stability for themselves and their families. Davidson (2001) stated that

> Prostitution is simultaneously a sexual and economic institution, and it is able highly gendered. The majority of prostitutes are female, and an even larger majority of customers are male. While men's prostitute use is widely tolerated, female prostitution is popularly viewed as a form of social and sexual deviance, and mainstream social scientists have traditionally reproduced such attitudes in their research on the topic (Davidson 2001: 12244).

Women are viewed as sexual objects in many countries. The status of women in each country affects how others, especially men, view them.

Researchers have given considerable empirical attention to economic explanations for prostitution. Taylor (2005) did a 14-month study in two northern villages of Thailand. Her study was intended to examine the relationship of parents' investment in their children and the familial roles that is related to child labor, prostitution, and also trafficking (Taylor 2005: 411).

What Taylor found in her study was that "girls who have spent most of their childhood in school and their families expect high returns on their human-capital investment" and also, children who enter the workforce at an early age does not essentially mean that it leads to a high chance for child trafficking or prostitution. At the same time, high education and entrance into the labor force at a later age does not equate with low risk and child trafficking or prostitution (Taylor 2005:423).

The reason for entering the sex industry may vary from country to country, but in order to examine these differences, the demographic variables of each individual country must be included in an analysis.

Taylor (2005) concluded in her study, homes where the females are the head of the family they are often unable to afford to take care of their children. Sending the

children away to go into the city to work helps provide a reliable source of income for the family. This is often the common solution for families with financial instability. Findings also show that Thai parents would discontinue their children educational attainment, with the agreement of the children sometimes along with their parents in the decision to stop attending to school and go work in the city because of the opportunities the city has to offer (Taylor 2005: 414).

The order in which children, especially females, are born determines their chances of being forced into prostitution due to either moral obligations or economic reasons.

Limoncelli (2009) emphasized the gendered nature of prostitution by focusing on issues of power as an explanation for prostitution. She stated

> Understanding and analyzing trafficking and prostitution as gendered components of economic globalization is particularly important, because it illuminates a variety of processes that make different groups of women vulnerable: economic disparities between sending and receiving countries, conflict and militarization, structural adjustment policies, the worldwide growth of informal work; and the dependence of some governments on the remittances of women migrants (Limoncelli 2009:266).

The status of a woman can contribute to trafficking in multiple ways that are specific to local context. Discrimination against women from work that is formal and placing them in the informal economy contributes to them being unable to own property and others kinds of source of wealth, or marginalize them within families. In certain cases, these women are more vulnerable in a sense that exploitation can be agreed upon by the female's family as an economic strategy or because they see it as a better alternative than being exploited at home (Limoncelli 2009: 266).

Jeffreys (2009) disagrees with the position held by Limoncelli (2009) and others, saying that,

> Segrave, Musto and Limoncelli all argue strongly that a huge mistake has been made in focusing concern about trafficking, amongst feminists and by governments, on the problem of trafficking for prostitution. They consider that prostitution is ordinary work and should not be separated out from other forms of work into which men and women are trafficked. Thus trafficking in women should be renamed 'migration for labour.' Segrave argues that trafficking should be seen 'as a crime that may occur in any industry,' and that 'advocates and scholars' need to shift their critical gaze away from the traditional circular debates that remain largely tied to issues of sexualized forms of exploitation.' The main problem with this argument is that it does not fit the facts of trafficking, which are that the vast majority of victims are women and the vast majority of these women are trafficked into prostitution. (Jeffreys 2009: 318).

Only females are prostituted due to the familial obligation and their value within the family.

Prostitution may not be viewed as a form of slavery since it is voluntary but sex-trafficking itself is a form of slavery. Jeffreys (2009:319) continues to state that

> In the case of some trafficked women, those who are kidnapped, tricked, deceived or clearly forced, this is the condition in which they find themselves. The girls who are auctioned on the concourse at UK airports fit that [definition] (Weaver 2007). They are owned and controlled. Other trafficked women are aware that the recruiters who enlist them are going to place them in prostitution, but have no idea of the degree of force and control that will be exercised over them at their destination. But what unites both groups is that they will be in debt bondage. Debt bondage is the sine qua non of trafficking, because it creates the profits of the practice. Debt bondage is defined as a contemporary form of slavery in the Supplementary convention which 'acts to ban debt bondage serfdom, servile marriage, child servitude' (Jeffreys 2009:319).

Prostitution may be viewed as a form of sex work that is a choice, but when it is sex trafficking, it then can be a form of modern sex slavery.

Although seemingly at odds with prostitution, dominant religions in some societies can have an influence on women being prostitutes. Religion in some countries emphasizes personal responsibility, especially for females. Theravada Buddhism. The dominant religion in Thailand, "teaches that a good deed for one's mother is equivalent in merit to a good deed for ten mothers" (Taylor 416).

Meucke (1992) provides a cultural interpretation of female prostitution in contemporary lowland Buddhist Thai society. Meucke's (1992) major point is that historically, the study of prostitution has not focused on the socio-cultural aspects of prostitution. Meucke (1992) does this by focusing on the

> Heterosexual transmission of AIDS through prostitution. Data were collected through case studies, participant-observation, and review of Thai language media and texts in order to examine this issue. Findings showed that in the past decade or so, the simultaneous rapid growth of prostitution as a lucrative sex industry and of the Thai economy as an emerging newly industrialized country have, paradoxically, enabled female prostitutes to preserve the basic institutions of society. Prostitution, although illegal, has flourished at least in part because it enables women, through, remittances, home and merit-marking activities to fulfill traditional cultural functions of daughters, conserving the institutions of family and village-level Buddhism, as well as of government (Muecke 1992:891).

Muecke's study concluded that while in Thai society where gender difference is normal, one thing is for sure and that is children are socialized to understand that real men need sex and good girls control their sexuality so as not to overcome men with their appeal.

Prostitution is also viewed in a positive light by parents because they can monitor their daughters' sexual activity (Muecke 1992: 898).

Sons are often not expected to be in the sex industry as compared to daughters because their familial obligation to their parents end once they move in with their wife's family. The most parents will expect from their sons is for them to become a monk for a period of time since their mothers cannot because of their sex (Taylor 2009:417). After this, they then are more obligated to their in-law's family. They have less of a moral obligation to provide economically for their birth family as compared to their daughters'.

Marriage, Family, & Norms

Researchers have also focused on the stigma attached to prostitution and the ability of the prostitute to take on normative roles of wife and mother. Peracca (1998: 255) explored the common attitudes people have towards female sex works in Thailand by examining the general public's perception of the prostitute's ability to marry based on a focus group data. The findings were that the social stigma towards females who once were in the commercial sex industry is mild. To an extent, with the lack of social stigma is what contributes to the spreading of prostitution recruitment and its acceptance in the society (Peracca 1998: 255-265).

Peracca (1998) wrote that if a female is a prostitute with the motive to purely help others people than her merit will cancel out the merit she posses for prostituting herself because in Theravada Buddhism, prostitution itself is unacceptable (Peracca 1998:264).

Ariyabuddhuphongs and Kampama (2008,) in a study focusing on women, focused on female sex workers (FSW) and female office workers (FOW) and their intent to marry outside their race. They "hypothesized that Thai female sex workers intend to marry inter-racially because of their dependence security, esteem and belonging needs satisfaction. One hundred and fifty FSW from bars and a control group of 150 female office workers in Bangkok participated in the study" (Ariyabuddhuphongs and Kampama, 2008:282). The authors concluded that FOW did not want to marry outside their race as compared to FSW because FSW still needed to continue to support their families even after marriage. They can marry someone who is in their race and stop working in the sex industry but doing so would that mean they will lose the kind of income they once had and no longer be able to support their families. To marry someone who is German, more preferably than any other race, can lead to greater income stability and social advancement for themselves and their families (292). Germans were more preferred over others because they believe German can offer more financial stability support for them. It is not unusual for FSW to put financial stability as their primary interest when it comes to what they most desire in a partner. Prostitution is not what they prefer but it is the best source of income for themselves and especially for their families. So despite negative opinions and social stigmas that exist within a given society, these women view prostitution as a job. They view their familial obligation to their parents as more important than their reputation to an extent.

Demographic Theories and Prostitution

There are many predictors that contribute to why certain countries have prostitution or sex trafficking; theories such as Demographic Transition Theory (D.T.T.) and Epidemiologic Transition Theory (E.T.T) apply to the patterns and trends that I have found in existing research findings on child prostitution (Weeks 2002).

Demographic Transition theory focuses on fertility and mortality to explain how countries become more developed. Factors that lead to development include higher female literacy since this can contribute to the status of women and their fertility rates in certain countries. Also, lower rates of fertility contribute to development because women are not spending their most productive years in child bearing, and also contribute to a higher life expectancy since the chance that a woman will die in childbirth is reduced. Based on D.T.T., I expect that countries with lower rates of fertility, higher female literacy rates will lead to lower rates of child prostitution. Lower fertility, higher literacy and longer life expectancy are indicators of a more developed country and an increased level of power for woman. I also expect that lower rates of HIV/AIDS will lead to lower levels of prostitution. E.T.T. posits that as societies become more developed the results should be lower levels of communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS. High rates of HIV/AIDS would result in higher levels of child prostitution since there is some evidence that men prefer having sex with a child since children have a lower likelihood of having the disease (Limoncelli 2009:264). Conversely, lower levels of HIV/AIDS would result in lower levels of child prostitution since the demand would decrease.

Methods

In this paper, I examine the relationship between poverty rate, female literacy rate, countries' PCGDP, religiosity, and child prostitution. The focus of the study is how these variables affect rates of child prostitution in twelve countries. These countries were selected from an article from Taylor (2005). This research is exploratory in that very little accurate data on child prostitution is available. Also, while the predictor variables may be related to child prostitution, they are not necessarily causes of childhood prostitution.

The data gathering technique used in this research is analysis of existing statistics, a type of unobtrusive measure (Babbie 2010). Although there are data for each of the variables examined in this research, there are also validity issues. The data may not be an accurate measure of the variables and this is seen in the measurement of the dependent variable, rates of childhood prostitution. The unit of analysis for this research is the country.

Independent Variables

All of the independent variables were gathered from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA 2010). The CIA's definition of *life expectancy* is, "the average number of years to be lived by a group of people born in the same year, if mortality at each age

remains constant in the future. The entry includes *total population* as well as the *male* and *female* components. Life expectancy at birth is also a measure of overall quality of life in a country and summarizes the mortality at all ages. It can also be thought of as indicating the potential return on investment in human capital and is necessary for the calculation of various actuarial measures" (CIA 2010).

The CIA's definition of *literacy* is broad: "Unless otherwise specified, all rates are based on the most common definition - the ability to read and write at a specified age. Information on literacy, while not a perfect measure of educational results, is probably the most easily available and valid for international comparisons. Low levels of literacy, and education in general, can impede the economic development of a country in the current rapidly changing, technology-driven world" (CIA 2010).

Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the entry that gives a figure for the average number of children that would be born per woman if all women lived to the end of their childbearing years and bore children according to a given fertility rate at each age. This indicator shows the potential for population change in the country. A rate of two children per woman is considered the replacement rate for a population, resulting in relative stability in terms of total numbers. Rates above two children indicate populations growing in size and whose median age is declining. Higher rates may also indicate difficulties for families, in some situations, to feed and educate their children and for women to enter the labor force. Rates below two children indicate populations decreasing in size and growing older (CIA 2010).

People living with HIV/AIDS is measured as an estimate of all people (adults and children) alive at year-end with HIV infection, whether or not they have developed symptoms of AIDS (CIA 2010).

Gross domestic product (per capita) is the purchasing power parity basis divided by population as of 1 July for the same year (CIA 2010).

Dependent Variable
    The dependent variable is childhood prostitution; numbers were taken from an article by Willis and Levy's (2002) called "*Child prostitution: global health burden, research needs, and interventions.*" The authors of this article got their data from the End Child Prostitution Child Pornography and Trafficking of children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) website. ECPAT is a non-government umbrella organization that is working to eliminate exploitation of children. The data are estimates of numbers of children exploited through prostitution. ECPAT (2010) defines "child prostitution as…the use of sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration." The data are gathered with the assistance of the country and local agencies that work with prostitutes. In order to convert the numbers into child prostitution rates, estimates were taken, dividing the child prostitution number by the population size of a country and then

multiplying it by 100,000.

<u>Analysis Method</u>

All of the data for this analysis were entered into an Excel program. In order to examine the relationship between the independent variables and the child prostitution rate, scatter plots were drawn for each independent variable by country. Names of countries that are outliers are included in each figure.

Findings

Figure 1 presents child prostitution rate by country. Thailand has the highest numbers of child prostitutes, 903 for every 100,000 people. Coming in second is Zambia with 580 child prostitutes per 100,000 people. Russia and Indonesia have the same numbers of child prostitutes for every 100,000 people.

Figure 1. Child Prostitution Per 100,000 by Country
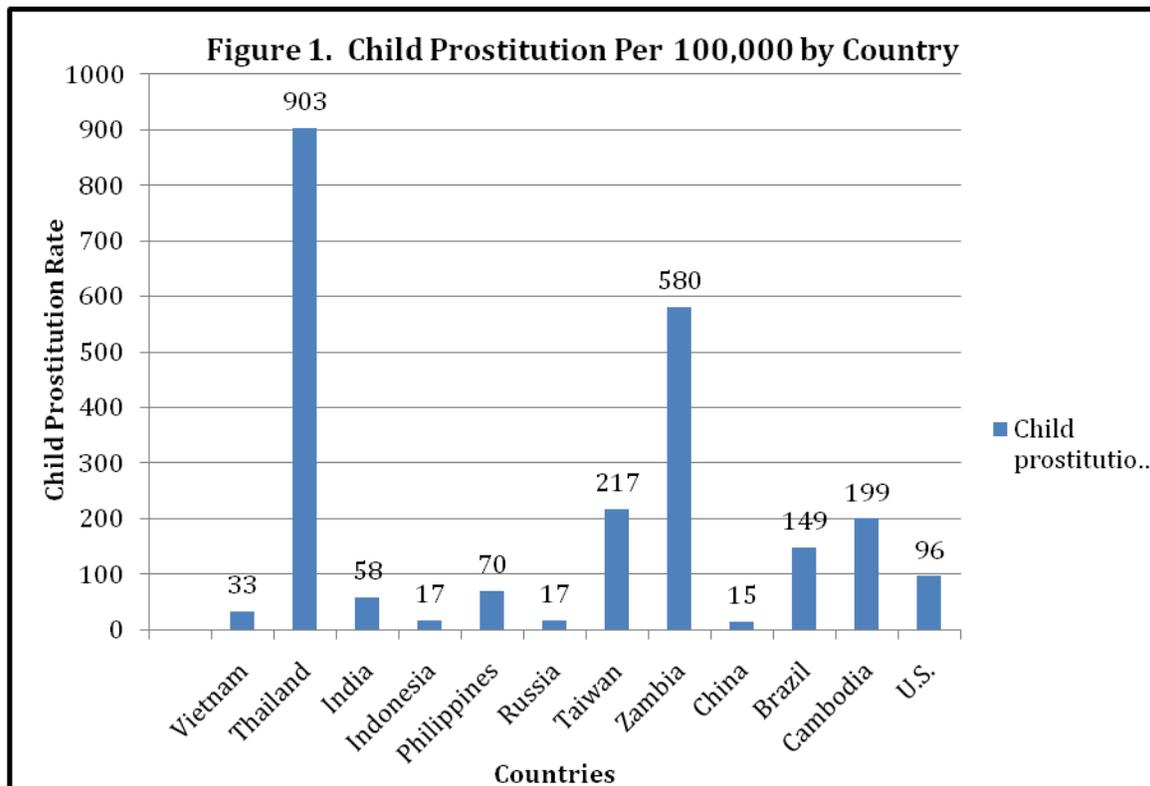
The next figure, Figure 2, presents the PCGDP of the 12 countries' rate of child prostitution. This graph indicates that as a country's PCGDP increases, its numbers of child prostitutes decreases. Countries like Cambodia, Thailand and Zambia, whose GDP is less than $10,000, have the most child prostitutes out of all the 12 countries. However, there are outliers in Figure 2, including the United States, which who has the highest GDP of $46,400 and comparably high rates of child prostitution. Taiwan has the second highest PCGDP but also has more child prostitutes than the ten countries with lower PCGDP's.

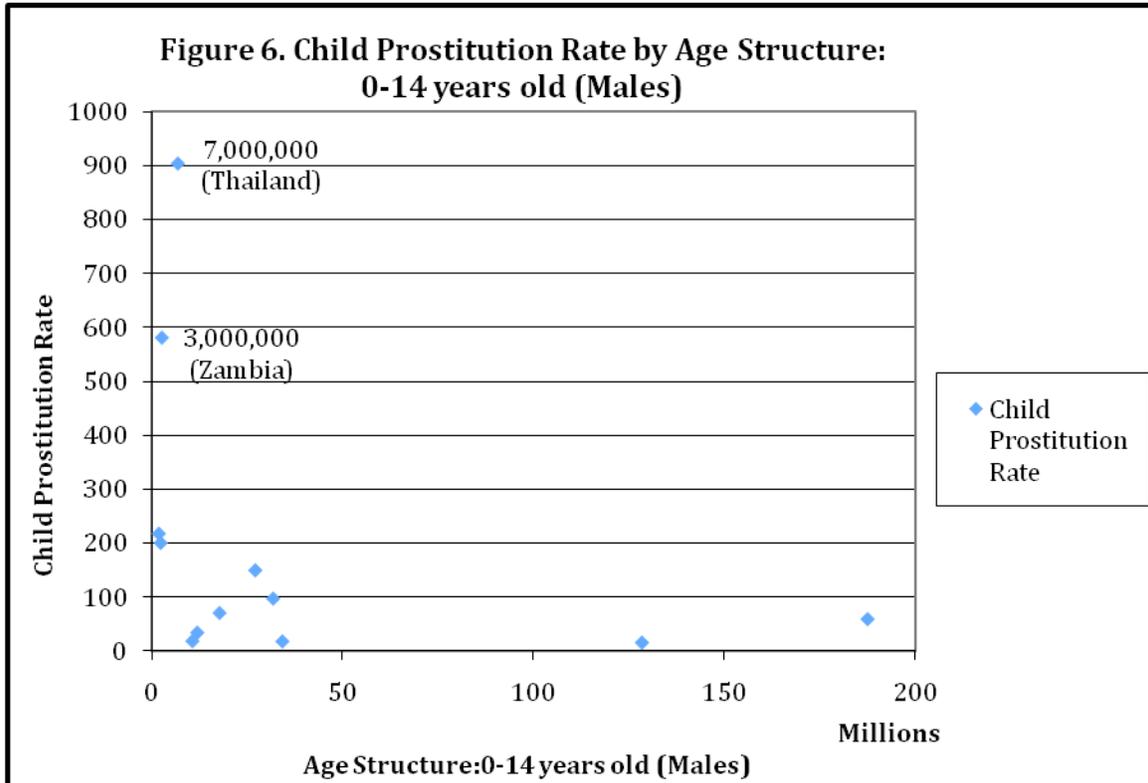Figure 2. Child Prostitution Rate by Per Capita GDP 2009, U.S$
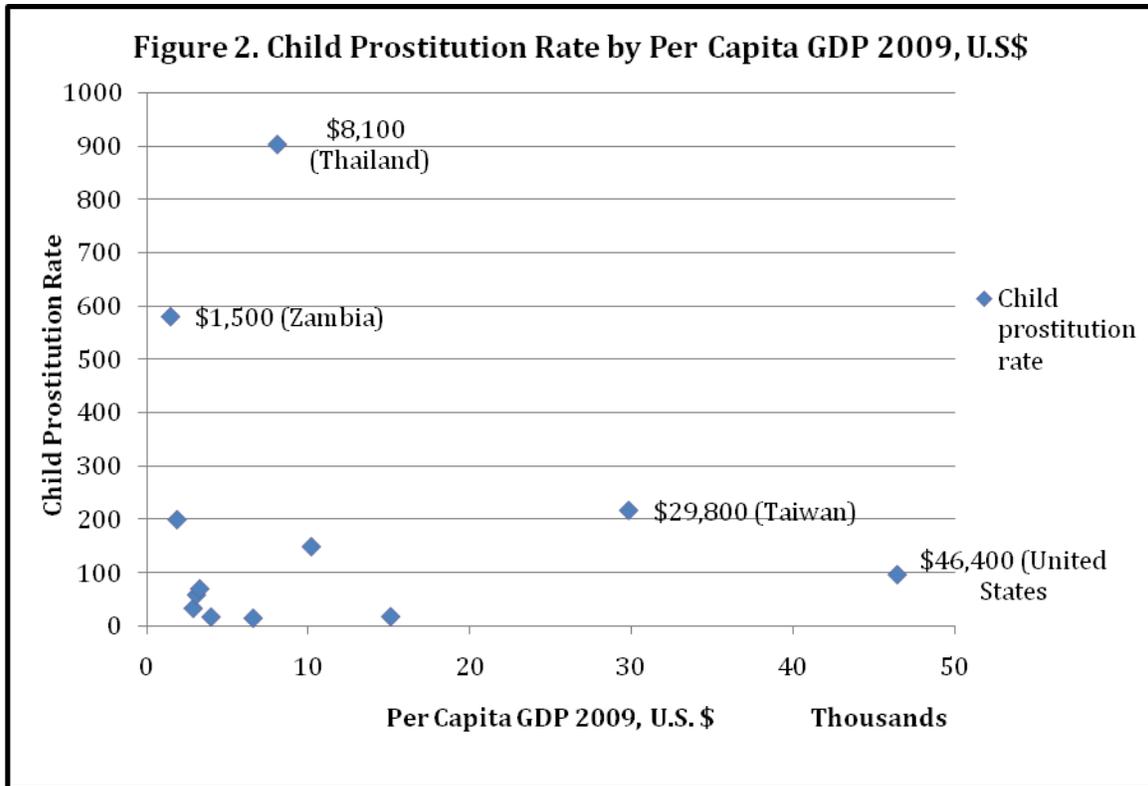
The pattern presented in Figure 3 shows that with the increase of life expectancy for each country's population, the number of child prostitutes decreases. There are exceptions such as Zambia whose population has a life expectancy of 38.86, which is the lowest out of the 12 countries in this study. Zambia also has the second highest rate of child prostitutes. Thailand is another outlier with a population's life expectancy of 73 years, but it has 903 child prostitutes for every 100,000 people in its population.

144

Figure 3. Child Prostitution Rate by Population's Life Expectancy
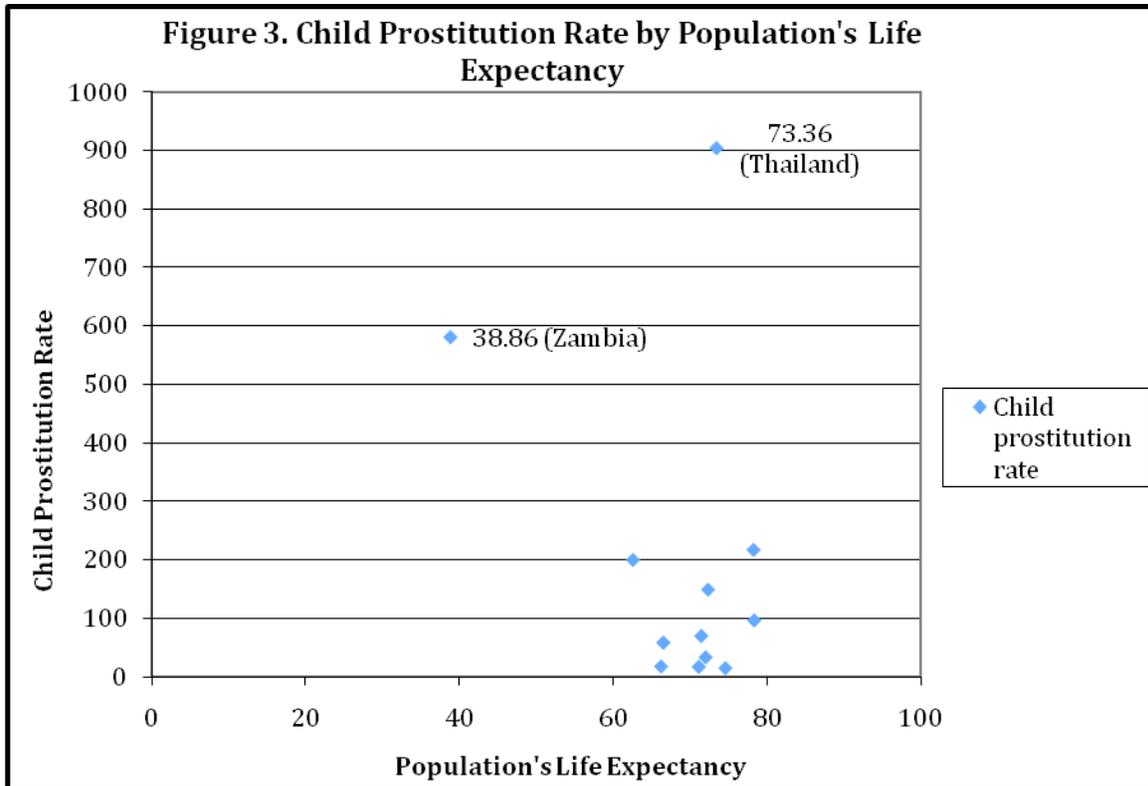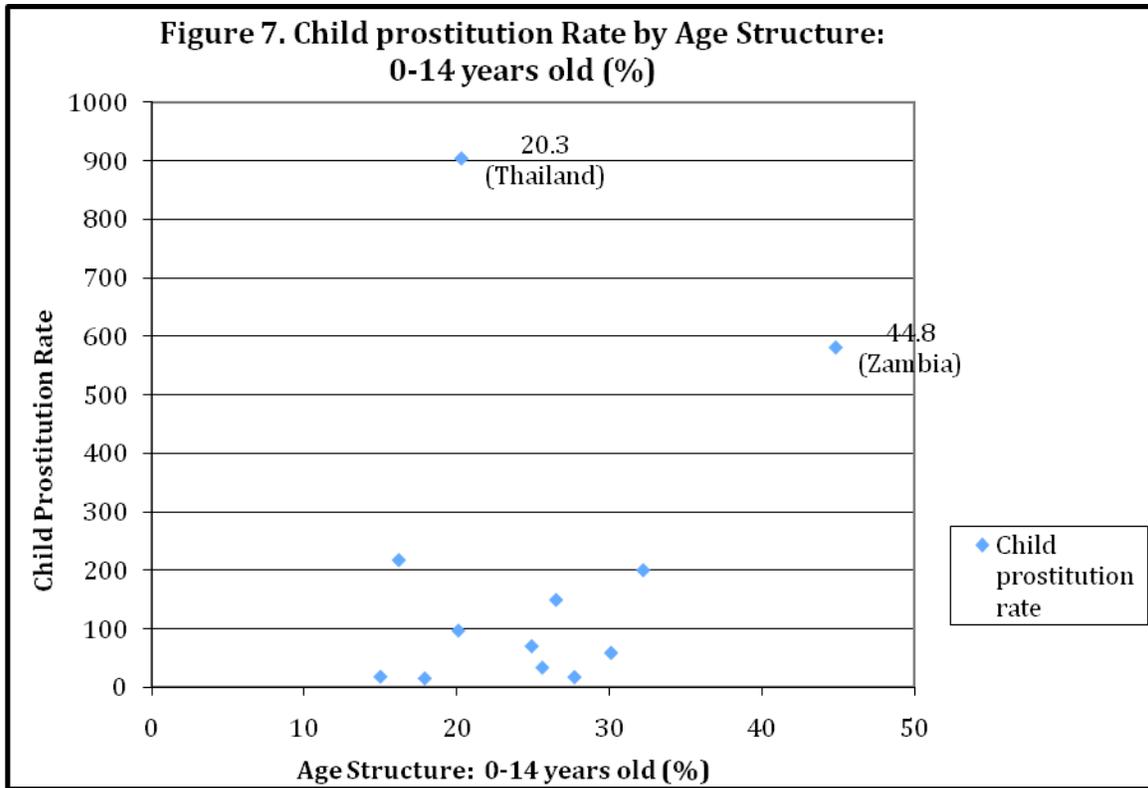

The next two Figures, 4 and 5, show the same pattern as identified in Figure 3. Zambia has the lowest life expectancy for both females and males, but has the second highest rate of child prostitutes. The second outlier is Thailand, with a life expectancy of higher than 70 years, but also with the highest child prostitution rate. Overall, countries that have longer life expectancies have lower levels of child prostitution, although the relationship is weak.

Figure 4. Child Prostitution Rate by Life Expectancy for Males

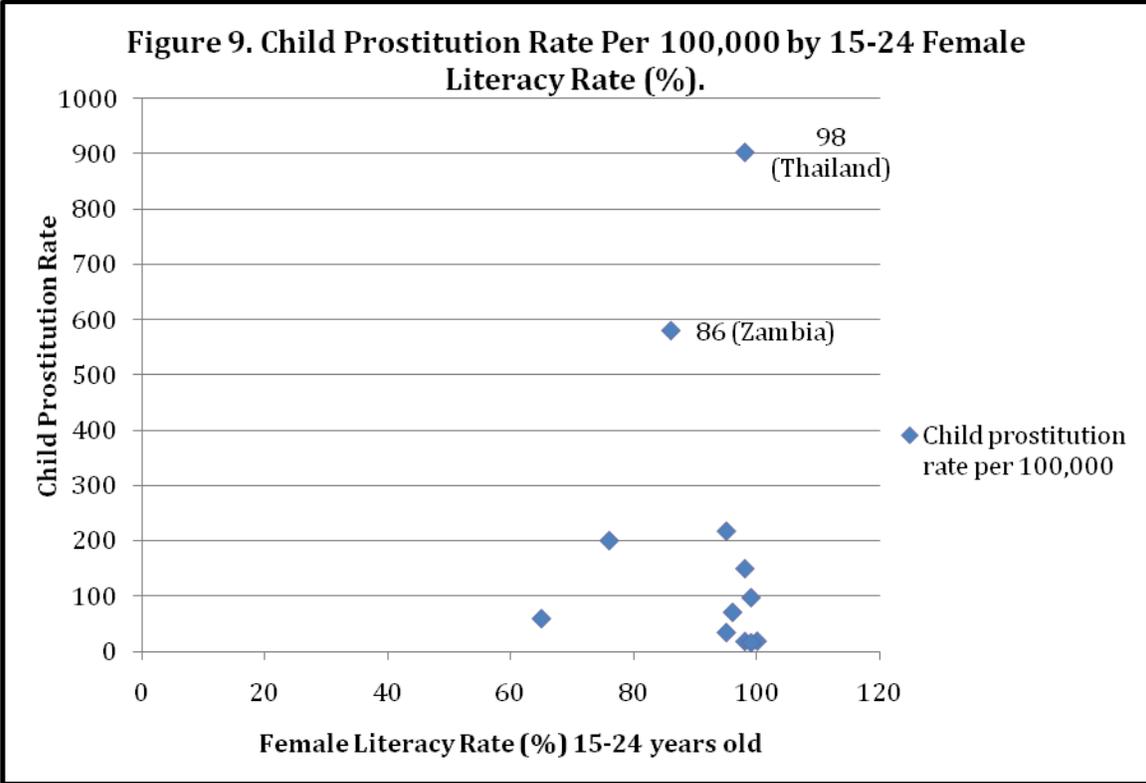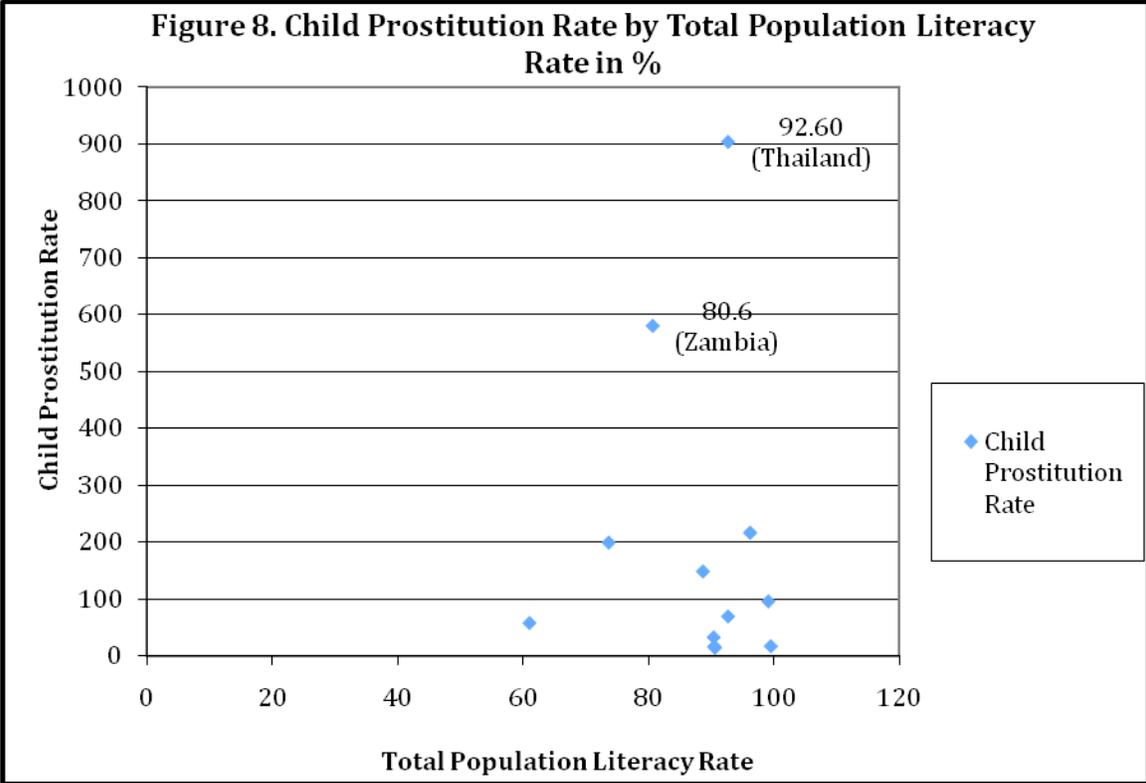Figure 5. Child Prostitution Rate by Life Expectancy for Females
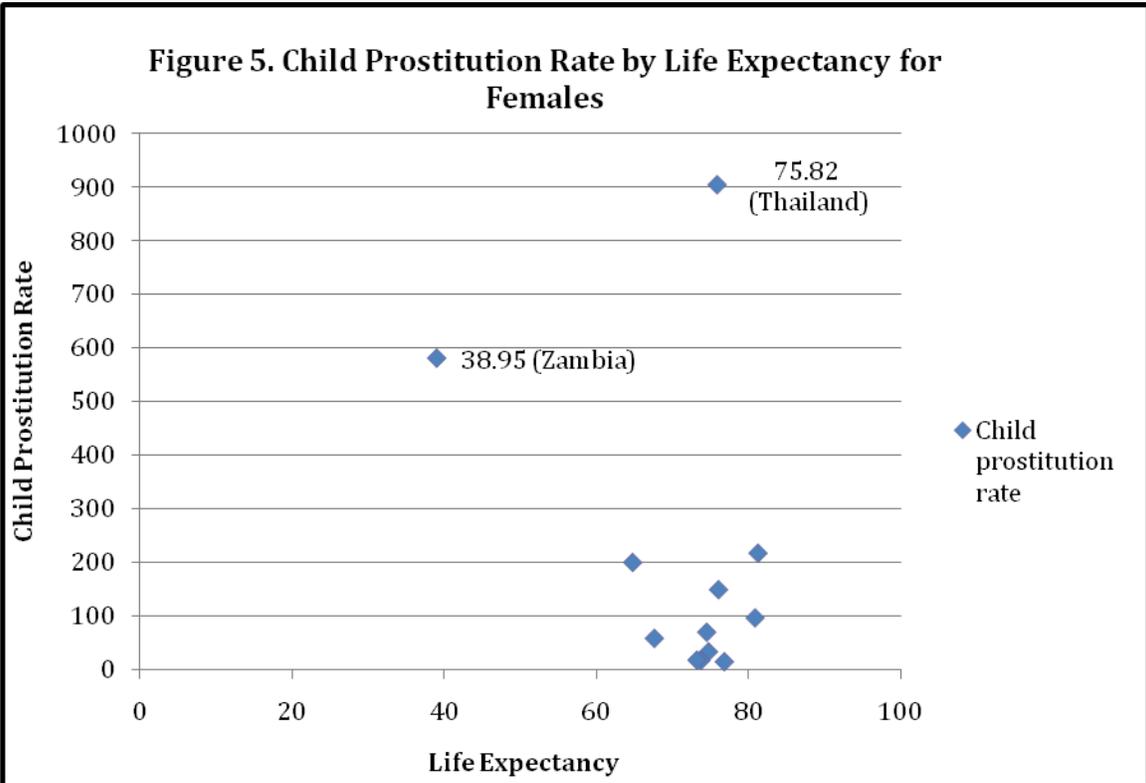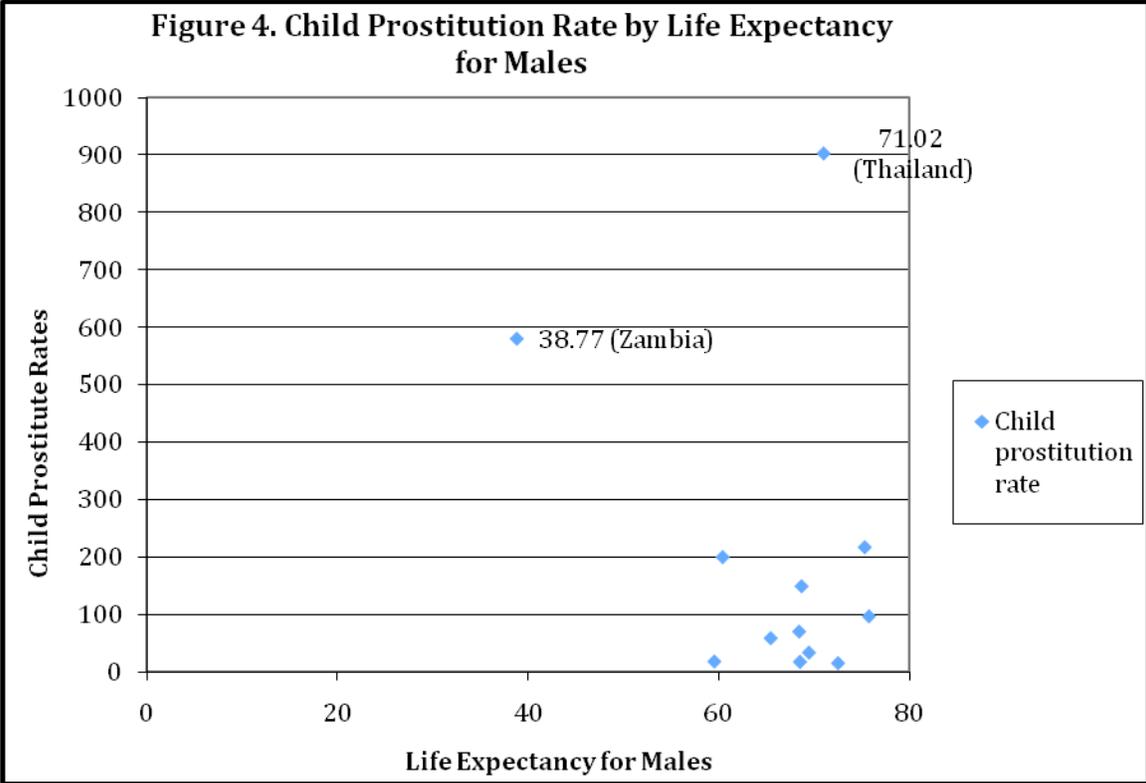
Findings in Figures 6 and 7 demonstrate that most of the countries have 15-30% of females between the ages 0-14. Zambia has the highest percentage of females and Thailand has between 10-30% percent of females (0-14 years old); they still have the highest rates of child prostitutes. Overall, the relationship between percentage of females and child prostitution is unclear.

Figure 6. Child Prostitution Rate by Age Structure: 0-14 years old (Males)

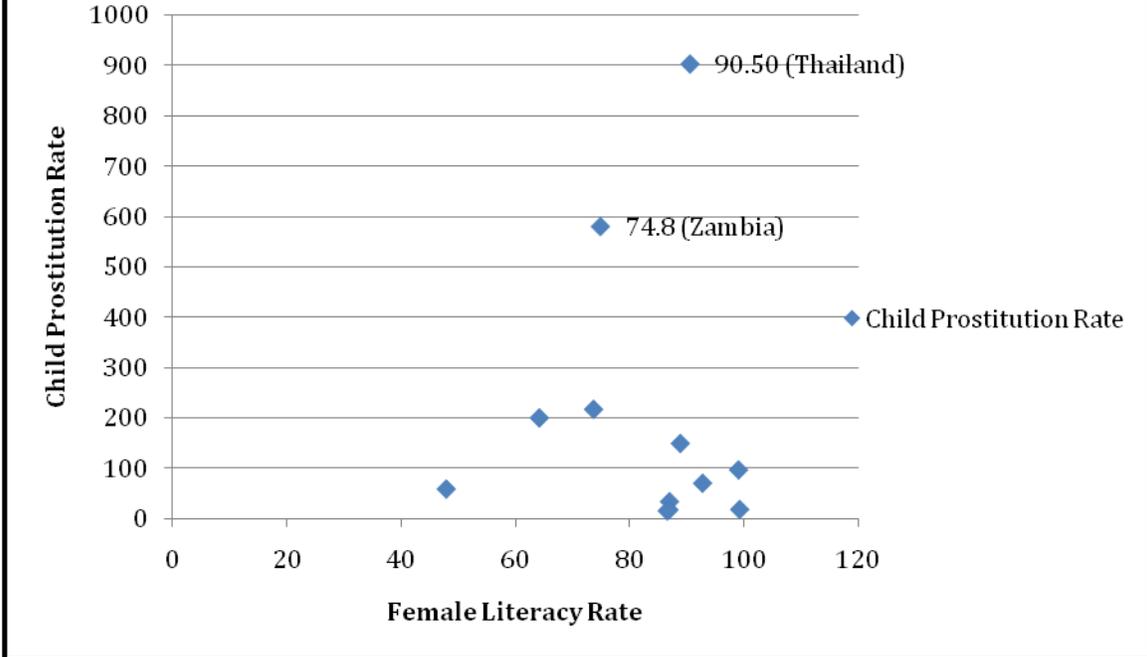**Figure 7. Child prostitution Rate by Age Structure: 0-14 years old (%)**

Figures 8 through 11 examine the relationship between literacy rates and child prostitution rates. As literacy rates for males and females from all ages increase, there is a decrease in child prostitution rates in the countries. However, Zambia and Thailand continue to be outliers; with literacy rates of over 80%, both are still the top two countries with the highest child prostitution rates.
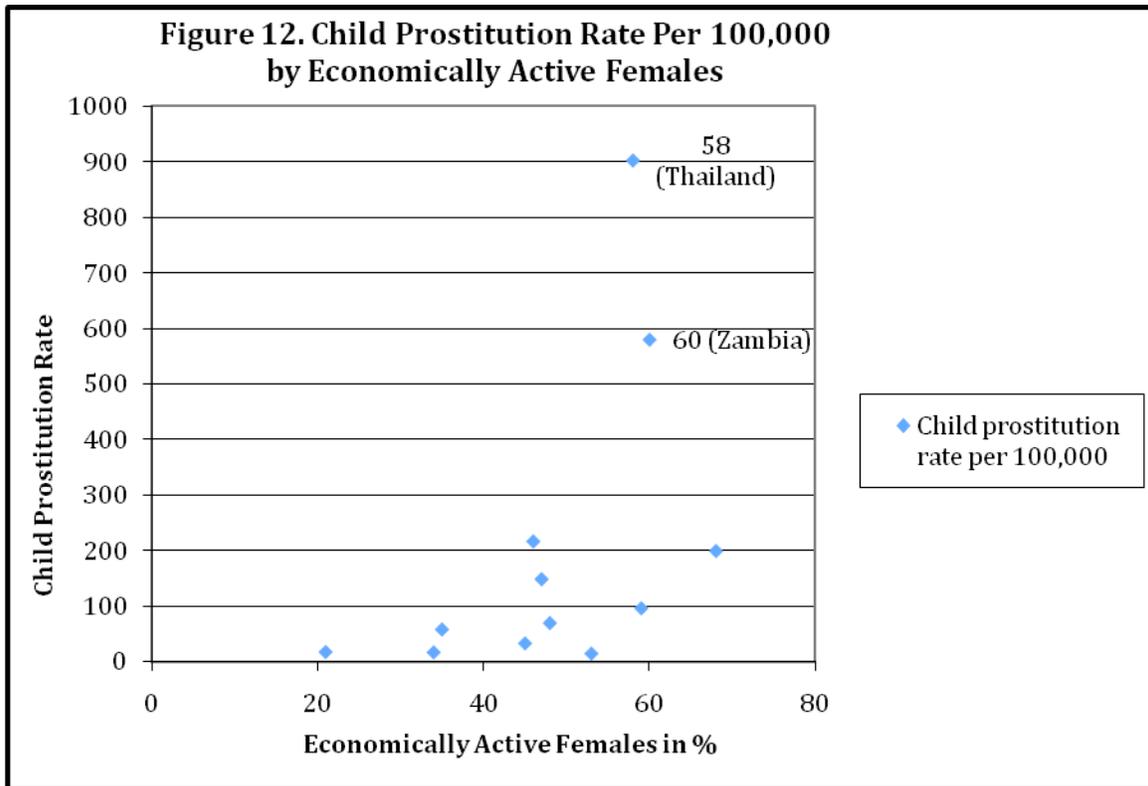
Figure 8. Child Prostitution Rate by Total Population Literacy Rate in %


Figure 9. Child Prostitution Rate Per 100,000 by 15-24 Female Literacy Rate (%).

Figure 10. Child Prostitution Rate by Female Literacy Rate

Figure 11. Child Prostitution Rate by Males Literacy Rate in %

150

Figure 12. Child Prostitution Rate Per 100,000 by Economically Active Females
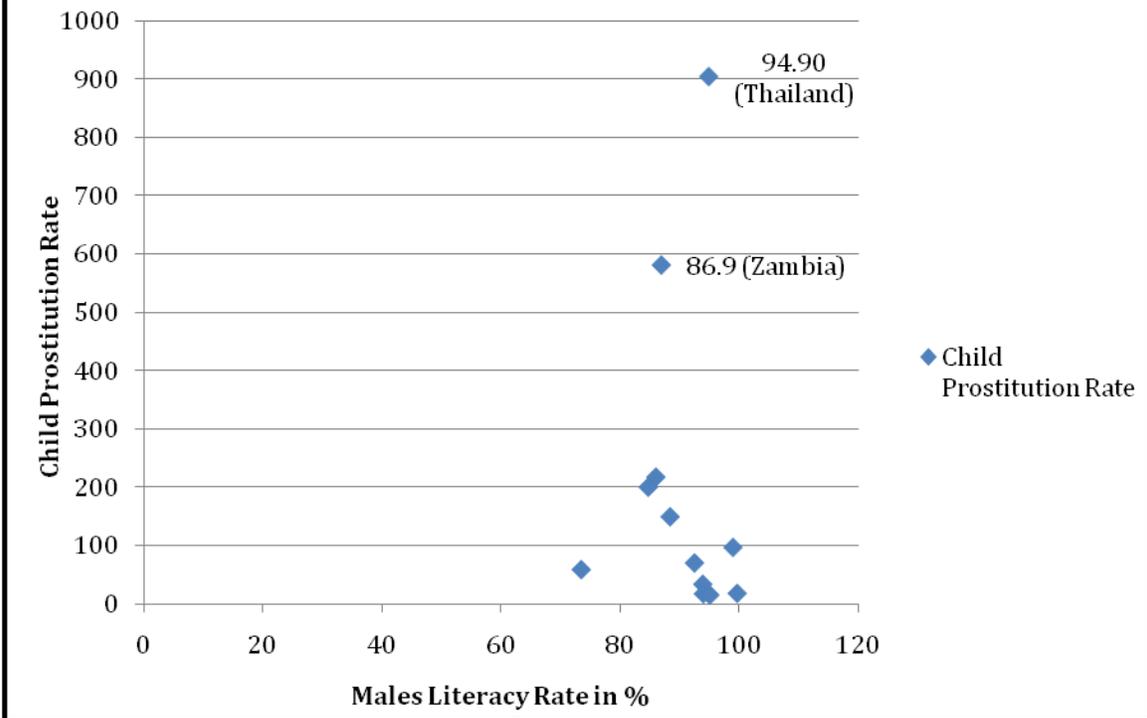
This scatter plot in Figure 13 presents the relationship between total fertility rate and child prostitution. Unlike the other graphs, where Thailand and Zambia are the most common outliers, this figure shows Zambia as an outlier. Zambia has a TFR of over 5 children per woman while the other 11 countries have between one to a little over three children per woman. Overall, the findings show that the higher the total fertility rate, the higher the rate of child prostitution.

Figure 13. Child Prostitution Rate by Total Fertility Rate Per Woman
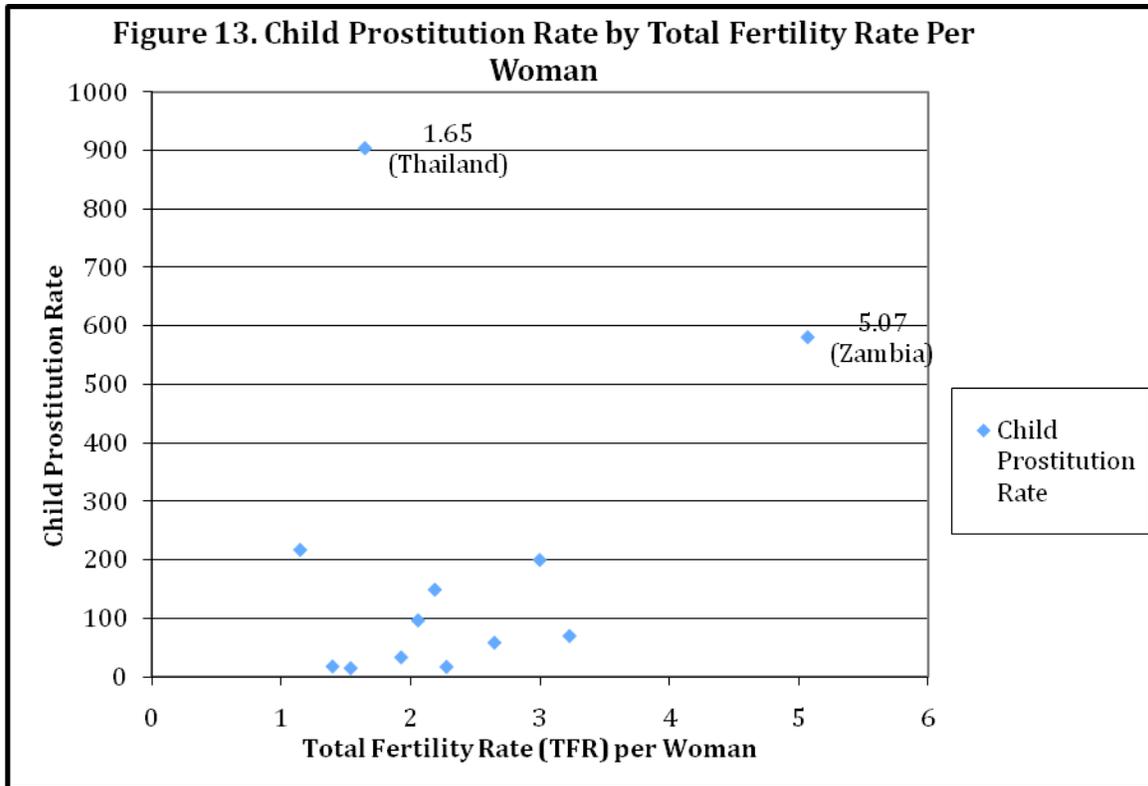
This number of people living with HIV/AIDS in each of the twelve countries by the child prostitution rate is presented in Figure 14. Zambia and Thailand, with fairly high number of people living with this disease, also have the highest numbers of child prostitutes in their countries. India is the new outlier with over two million people living with HIV/AIDS, but with one of the lowest child prostitution rates out of the twelve countries. Overall, the figure shows that as HIV/AIDS decreases, child prostitution rates decrease, although the relationship is weak.

Figure 14. Child Prostitution Rate by People Living with HIV/AIDS
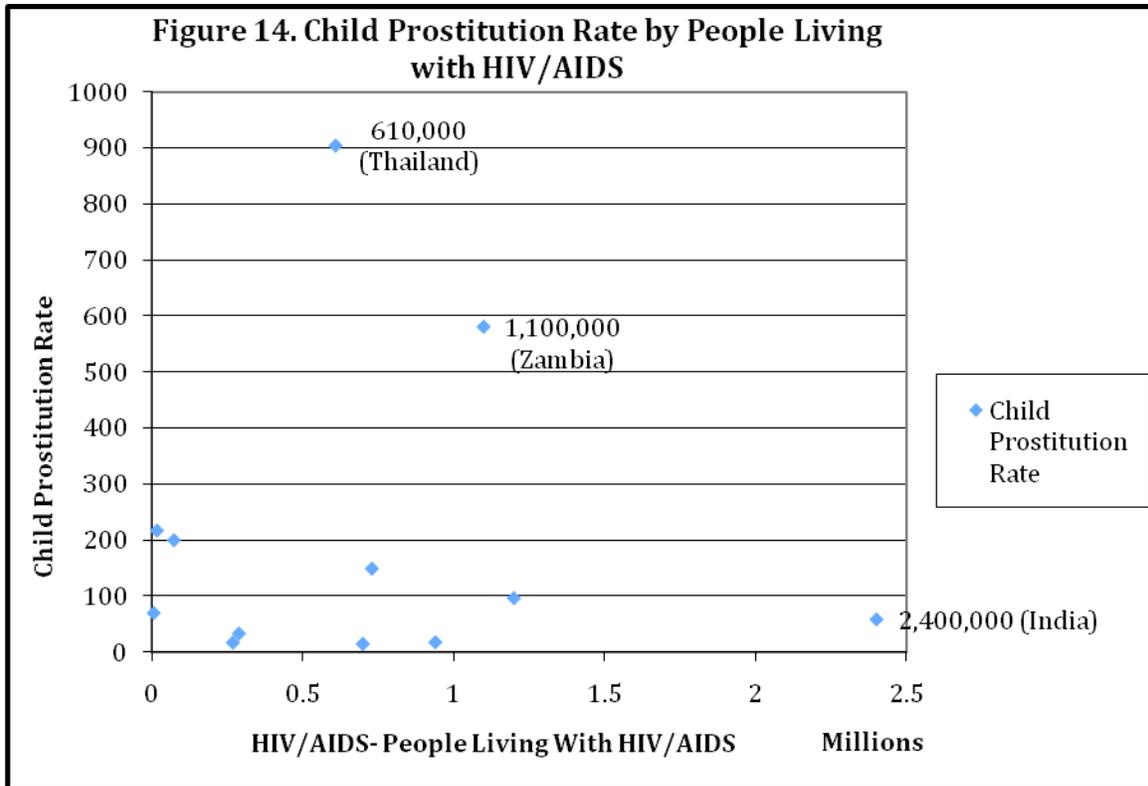
Discussion

In this research I identified a relationship between Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (PCGDP), life expectancy and literacy rate for females, and economically active females and rates of child prostitution. As these increase, there is a decrease in rates of child prostitution for most of the twelve countries included in this analysis. Also, as the total fertility rate and the number of people living with HIV/AIDS decreases, the child prostitution rate decreases.

These results are consistent with both research findings and summary statements made by other people studying child prostitution. Davidson (2001) and Limoncelli (2009) state that prostitution is not just a sexual activity; it is also an economic and income-producing activity. Countries that have lower levels of economically active females performing legal work tend to have higher rates of child prostitution.

Out of the twelve countries included in this study, Thailand and Zambia do not follow the pattern observed in the other countries. Additionally, the outliers do not fit the pattern of findings when examining people who are living with the degenerative disease, HIV/AIDS, even though their total fertility rate is lower than Thailand and Zambia.

Explanation for why the relationship between many of these independent variables and rates of child prostitution does not hold for Zambia include Zambia's status as a Sub-Saharan African country that, like many other countries in the region, suffers

153

from a poor economy and lack of access to technological advancements. Zambia's lack of modernization prevents the Zambian people from having the advantages of the other ten countries. Their high total fertility rate is influenced by their lack of medical technology, which prevents them from having a longer life expectancy and lowering their population growth rate. Families end up with more children to care for than families from countries with lower fertility rates and consequently may be more likely to prostitute a daughter. These factors contribute to Zambia being one of the two outliers throughout this research.

As for Thailand, their high child prostitution may be due to their religious beliefs. Theravada Buddhism is the main factor since it emphasizes familial obligations of the females to provide for their families, specifically the parents to no exceptions. Unlike many other cultures where males are the financial provider for the family, females tend to turn towards prostitution because it helps with providing for the family most easily since "most commercial sex work in Thailand does not typically involve streetwalking, beatings by pimps, or scuffling with deviant customers, nor does most involve trafficking" (Taylor 2005:416). Even though prostitution is wrong in Theravada Buddhism, the emphasis on females supporting their families is greater. Prostitution itself is wrong, but it is allowed if it is done in order to help others. Religion is the main reason why Thailand has the highest child prostitution rate (Taylor 2005).

One pattern that was present in this research was that countries with higher rates of female literacy and lower fertility rates had lower levels of child prostitution. Women and girls who are educated and are not spending their childbearing years having many children may be less likely to be exploited by others. The pattern of high female literacy and lower fertility rates resulting in lower levels of child prostitution supports the Demographic Transition Theory. These countries have transitioned from lower levels of development and modernization to a more developed position.

I also found support for the Epidemiological Transition Theory. Countries with higher levels of HIV/AIDS infection rates tended to have higher levels of child prostitution. There is research that shows that men want to have sex with children because they think it reduces the chances of their getting AIDS since children have fewer sex partners than adult females (Limoncelli 2009:264).

Limoncelli (2009) wrote that,

> In prostitution, this means that men negotiate to pay as little as possible and that they can and do negotiate terms that endanger the sex worker or foster exploitation---such as paying extra to forgo condoms or purchasing what they understand to be a young girl in order to reduce their risk of sexually-transmitted diseases in unprotected sexual encounters. Many clients want young women, preferably under 25, and/or migrant women precisely because they see them as cheap, malleable, and easier to control, i.e., a good return for the money (Limoncelli 2009:264).

Conclusion

To do research on child prostitution is difficult, because it is nearly impossible to find exact numbers of how many child prostitutes are in each country; I used the data from an article by Willis and Levy's (2002) called "*Child prostitution: global health burden, research needs, and interventions,*" although they are not perfectly valid numbers. There was no explanation about how these data were gathered from the End Child Prostitution Child Pornography and Trafficking of Child for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT). The organization does indicate on their website that their data came from the countries and from local organizations that work with child prostitutes. Since there is no one measure of child prostitution used by all countries, there are likely to be validity issues with these data.

It is important to do more research on this issue because it will result in a greater understanding of exactly why and how children and women, even boys and men, become prostitutes. Although prostitution may not be totally eliminated, having more knowledge will help us prevent the numbers of child prostitution from increasing. Also, it may help us to provide the appropriate aids and support to those who are or once were prostitutes. Finally, systematic research in the area of child prostitution might result in policies and laws being developed. Of the twelve countries in this analysis, only eight had specific laws focusing on treatment of prostitutes and their clients (INTERPOL 2010).

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