

DarkBali FAQs

What factors have led to the rise of sex trafficking in the world generally, but in Indonesia specifically?

To start off with, it's important to define what sex trafficking is. Human trafficking is the modern name for slavery. Sex trafficking adds in a sexual purpose to exploitation (as opposed to something like labor trafficking). Essentially, victims are used sexually for the profit of someone else, whether they are being prostituted or being forced to participate in the making of pornography or forced into marriages against their will (especially as children).

Like all forms of human trafficking, sex trafficking is about supply and demand. It's more financially lucrative than other criminal activities because the "products" can be sold and re-sold. For example, cocaine can only be sold for one consumption, but a sex slave can be sold over and over and over again. This is why criminals are more and more trafficking humans (human trafficking now makes more money annually than weapons trafficking and other illegal enterprises). It's second only to drug trafficking, but the profit gap between the two is getting smaller every year.

One major reason for the increase in human trafficking is globalization and easy transportation. It's cheap to move humans from one country to another, so bringing a group of women from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic slaves costs very little compared to the potential profit to be made from selling them there or the savings in using their virtually free labor versus employing a housekeeper with fair wages.

As for the increase in sex trafficking in Indonesia, there are four factors that I find the most significant:

First, there is the rise of international sex tourism. Sex tourists, whether they are targeting women or children, will go to the place of least risk. Two decades ago, Cambodia was the favorite destination among pedophile sex tourists because they could abuse with virtually no resistance from the locals or from law enforcement. With efforts from a host of people, Cambodia began prosecuting cases and confronting cultural factors that led to such a huge market. Then tourists began traveling more to Thailand. Now Thailand is cracking down on this crime, and Indonesia is rising to be the next "hot spot" for sex tourists. Bali and Batam islands are particularly well known for sex tourism, both adult and child.

Second, there are cultural factors in Indonesia that keep the issue hidden. Indonesian culture, like most Asian cultures, highly values honor. To bring shame to a family is really the worst thing that you can do. Combine that cultural value with the heavy patriarchal beliefs that insist that a girl's virginity is the most important thing about her, and you have a perfect combination for hiding abuse. For a family to seek justice for their daughter can essentially be condemning her to permanent social stigma that could rob her of her future. Victims nearly always go without justice (93% of rapes in Indonesia are unreported) and without help in the healing

process. In addition, children are seldom taught about sex or abuse prevention. For these reasons, there are numerous cases of trafficking occurring while the child is still living at home with her parents.

The third factor is the corruption of the police and justice system. Like many other developing countries, police are not paid a living wage and so an expectation of bribery and "purchased justice" has become normative as police supplement their income with what Westerners would call bribes. If somehow a child does find a way to report, and the family seeks help, very often an abuser can pay his way out of charges. Even in a better scenario, police will simply ask the abuser to pay the family off. In their eyes, justice is done and without the hassle of paperwork. But in reality, it means that pedophiles can abuse with very little fear of true consequences. The last factor is simple poverty. So many victims (especially teens) end up in trafficking situations when they think they are moving to the city to work in a restaurant or hotel or as domestic help in order to earn money to send back to their families (a cultural expectation). They arrive alone in Jakarta or Batam or Bali and the only contact they have there ends up selling them for sex. Virtually all of the young women that I know who are involved in prostitution are single mothers. They are from poor families and have inadequate education to do anything but menial labor. Most of them were abandoned by their husbands (or had a child out of wedlock). They go looking for work and either realize that selling their bodies will make them enough money to actually clothe, feed, and educate their kids or they were tricked into thinking they are headed to legitimate employment.

Why is so much sex trafficking concentrated in Bali? What about Bali makes it attractive to traffickers?

Nearly all of Bali's economy is tourism based. And where there are tourists, there are industries catering to the desires of those tourists. This is true anywhere in the world. It's why events like the Olympics and the World Cup are always accompanied by a sharp increase in sex trafficking. Greed drives both traffickers and buyers of sex. For one, it is greed for financial profit, and for the other it is greed to participate in commitment-free sex. But both disregard the cost to the human beings that they are exploiting. Bali is an island of 4 million, with the same number of tourists traveling here every year. There is simply a lot of demand, so the supply increases to match it with women and children being brought in from Balinese villages, other islands in Indonesia, and from around the world.

As I mentioned above, there is very little risk of arrest and prosecution for sex tourists even though prostitution is illegal. They can do essentially what they want without worrying about people back home learning about it or without worrying about getting arrested. For the most part, if a sex tourist is caught, he can pay a couple of hundred dollars in a bribe to the police and walk away. There is far more risk in coming into the country with a bag of pot than there is in raping a child.

Can you give a few statistics regarding sex trafficking in Bali? In the world?

According to the most recent research 45.8 million people are in slavery (all forms) around the world today. Roughly a quarter of that figure represents those in sexual slavery. In Indonesia, 40,000 -70,000 children are sex slaves. The islands of Batam, Lombok, and Bali are the most well known for child sex trafficking. It is extremely difficult to find reliable statistics regarding Bali specifically for the simple fact that no one is researching it. The government doesn't seem to want to know and no organization that I know of is currently trying to find that data. There was a report from the Australian Federal Police about two years ago that said that Bali had become the number one foreign destination for registered Australian sex offenders (25 per month). Extrapolating that out to other nationalities (including Indonesians) and non-registered offenders, that's a lot of pedophiles visiting our tiny island of 4 million people.

What type of services does DarkBali provide for sex trafficking victims and how are they differentiated in accordance with the age needs of victims?

Our coalition supports several organizations doing multiple kinds of victims services. For example, one is a live in facility for underage girl survivors, another takes adult women. One is focused on mentoring and skills training in different arts (culinary arts, graphic arts etc.) for teenagers, and one works directly with women and teenagers still inside of the sex trade doing victim identification. Another is focused primarily on prevention (children).

How would you lower the incidence of individuals becoming re-trafficked for sexual exploitation in the ASEAN region or in a specific country where you offer services?

For younger people, education completion including secondary education and university scholarships. For older people, increased job skills and jobs with adequate income. Decreasing the occurrence of child marriage (and thus young parenthood) would relieve much of the pressure that drives young women into the sex industry or makes them vulnerable to trafficking.

How much help do you get from the government and does the Indonesian government try to coordinate efforts between charities to prevent human trafficking in any way?

We do not get any funding from the government. And while there are certainly MOUs between many charities and governments of different islands, we don't have one. In Bali however, there are a number of organizations which do work with different government ministries, though mostly in the field of recovery. For example, one partner has an aftercare center and all of the children who join are referred by the government so that custody of those children is legal. I believe they also get a stipend of some kind from the government to help with living costs. I've

not seen any prevention-focused coordination between the government and NGOs. As far as I am aware, only NGOs are active in prevention in Bali at this time.

How do you come into contact with your victims? Do they voluntarily come to you or are they referred by different agencies and what type of agencies?

For our partners: Children are referred by the Indonesian government through a formal MOUs. Women at times access our partners through relationships built through contact inside the red light district. Some of these women are trafficked, and some are sex workers by choice.

How effective do you think Southeast Asian law enforcement is at apprehending sex traffickers in the area/s you offer support?

They get a 1 point out of ten. There has been one trafficking case that I am aware of (in 2016) against traffickers (and it ended in no jail time only restitution). I am told it was the first on Bali. While law enforcement has rescued a few victims, there have been no consequential arrests and prosecutions of the criminals. This is a huge need in our context. I do think that there is a desire in the police force to do better and even work being done to equip the police to investigate and prosecute, but it has yet to make much of a difference on the ground. One thing that is a new, positive action from the police is that for the first time ever, foreign pedophiles flying into Bali are being denied entry and sent back to where they came from.