

## **Growing incidents of human trafficking reported in SAfrica ahead of World Cup**

*Text of report by privately-owned, widely-read South African weekly The Sunday Times website on 28 March*

[Report by Monica Laganparsad -Additional reporting by Karen van Rooyen and Nashira Davids: "Human trafficking red alert"]

Women, children under threat as World Cup sees prostitution demand rocket. Pupils under surveillance outside schools, the snatching of toddlers at busy shopping malls and offers to "buy" pretty teenagers - South Africa's children are under threat.

As thousands of global soccer fans flood into the country for the month-long World Cup in June, schools will close their doors.

Now child rights experts, NGOs and trafficking authorities have warned parents to be on high alert for syndicates who regard children, particularly those aged five to 15, as "products" and "cargo" with lucrative price tags.

Malls are beefing up security, border officials are receiving specific trafficking training and researchers are calling on awareness courses to be included in the national curriculum.

The Sunday Times has verified at least 15 cases of suspicious behaviour in the last five months. These include:

The attempted snatching of a two-year-old at Gateway mall near Umhlanga;

The attempted snatching of a six-year-old at a school in Eshowe, Zululand;

Cellphone pictures taken by unknown people outside dozens of schools in KwaZulu-Natal, Johannesburg and Pretoria;

An offer to "buy" two teenage sisters at a drag race event in Port Elizabeth; and

Children in Durban offered extravagant gifts to lure them from their parents.

Johannesburg shopping malls, including Eastgate, Sandton and Hyde Park, are putting extra security staff on duty in response to the abduction threat, as are Cresta and Maponya.

Musa Zondi, spokesman for the Hawks, which has an anti-trafficking unit, said border police officers were receiving training to step up efforts to combat trafficking into the country.

"Clearly when there is such an event there are people with nefarious ideas who will try to use the cover of an event like this to do what they want to do. At the same time one cannot spread panic. Of course the danger always exists and of course there are people out there who are sick," he said. "Trafficking is a threat any time. Parents must ensure they know where their kids are at all times."

Port Elizabeth police spokesman Andre Beetge said there had "definitely been an increase" in attempted abductions by syndicates.

"We've got a serious suspicion it's 2010 related; they want more prostitutes. We are not ruling out the possibility that they are building up catalogues (by taking photographs)."

Beetge said police had recently made an arrest in Bloemfontein which was linked to an abduction in Port Elizabeth.

A study into human trafficking in South Africa released this week revealed a secretive -but active - underworld where women and children across the board are at growing risk of abduction and exploitation.

The study, commissioned by the National Prosecuting Authority and conducted by the Human Sciences

Research Council, went so far as to recommend that trafficking awareness become part of the national school curriculum.

Former Child Protection Unit policeman turned child trafficking trainer Mark Hardwick said he had received complaints from primary and high school principals of people taking pictures of kids outside schools in KwaZulu-Natal suburbs from Morningside and Westville to Chatsworth and Pietermaritzburg.

People and children are trafficked into prostitution, pornography, as domestic servants, forced labour and for criminal activity, he said.

He is investigating two suspected cases of "recruitment".

"They are here now, taking photos of the 'product', getting stock ready. They are here now doing it," he said.

Mthunzi Mhaga, spokesman for the NPA, said prosecuting human trafficking was difficult.

The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill, although drafted, has yet to be passed.

On Thursday, Ngoako Ramatlhodi, chairman of the Portfolio Committee on Justice and Constitutional Development, said "anticipation of an increase in trafficking, especially for sexual purposes" ahead of the World Cup had focused attention on SA's ability to deal with trafficking.

Patrick Solomons, director of the Cape Town-based advocacy group Molo Songololo, said they had received reports of cellphone pictures being taken and reports of the attempted luring of a teenage girl from school.

### **How to stranger proof your child**

Ensure your child understands the concept of "stranger". A child's perception of stranger can change depending on what the person looks like, says, or does.

Do not hesitate to explain to children the dangers that exist. Awareness can help protect them.

Teach your child tools they can use to draw attention and/or escape if someone grabs them. These include screaming, punching, scratching and biting.

Educate your child on the danger of abductions in a language they can understand.

Never leave your child unattended in a public place and always ensure that you can see them. If they need to go to the bathroom, always go with them.

Listen closely when your child talks about their friends and other people with whom they spend time when you are not around. If you feel uncomfortable with what you have heard, ask questions and get more clarity.

Teach your child that there can never be any secrets from you and if anyone, including family, asks your child to keep a secret he or she must tell you.

Make sure your children memorise their full names and address, including city and phone number with area code.

Using a play phone, teach children when and how to dial 1011.

Teach your children to go to a shop assistant, security officer or police officer if they ever get lost in a mall or on the street.

Have your children check in with you when they arrive home. Set rules for having friends over when you're not there and for your children going to friends' homes when no adults are there.

Explain how important it is not to let anyone into the house without your permission.

At school, encourage them to stick with their friends rather than walking or playing alone. -Monica Laganparsad