REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Jan 2022

Research Services to study Social Norms and Behaviours of Perpetrators of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Summary

The Freedom Fund (freedomfund.org) is a global non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate human trafficking and exploitation. One of our areas of particular focus is commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

Although CSEC is acknowledged to be a significant social problem in Brazil, there is a paucity of research on the prevalence of CSEC. A range of “between 100,000 and 500,000 cases” has frequently been cited but these figures are likely to be outdated and unreliable. Furthermore, the invisibility of CSEC is compounded by widespread community attitudes that either trivialise the problem or regard it as “normal” practice. Knowledge about perpetrators of CSEC is also limited, especially with regards to the social norms reinforcing perpetrators’ exploitation of children. This is a critical knowledge gap which needs to be addressed in order to support the design of effective and holistic CSEC prevention programming.

The research study described in this Request for Proposals is part of a broader programme implemented by the Freedom Fund in Brazil which aims to strengthen civil society and state responses to CSEC using an evidence-based approach. The proposed research study will have a stronger focus on understanding perpetrators of CSEC, using a mixed methods approach to examine the characteristics of perpetrators and the social norms underpinning their engagement in acts of CSEC, which can take place both in person and online.

The Freedom Fund anticipates that the research deliverables of the proposed study can be achieved in approximately 8 months. The exact time frame will depend on when ethical approval is granted for the research, but it is hoped that the successful applicant will commence work on the project in February 2022. Timelines and research activities are adaptable in response to COVID-19, festive seasons, and other related disruptions.

Eligibility

Individual researchers, organisations and consortia are invited to submit proposals for this research. Applicants must have the capacity to conduct field work in and around the Recife metropolitan area. Applicants fully or partially based in Brazil will be prioritized.

Budget

A fee of approximately USD 40,000 has been made available for this research. Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner - we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget. This is a fixed price contract.

Proposal deadline

Proposals should be submitted via email to Matilde Chora (mchora@freedomfund.org) no later than 4th March, 5pm UK time. Proposals should be no more than 3 pages, plus CVs and annexes.
Background to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Brazil

The Freedom Fund is a global non-profit organisation that identifies and invests in the most effective frontline efforts to end human trafficking. We select key geographic areas – our hotspot projects – known to have high rates of trafficking and exploitation, and where our interventions are most likely to be impactful.

An estimated 100,000 to 500,000 children in Brazil are forced into situations of commercial sexual exploitation. Despite the staggering scale of the problem, CSEC remains almost invisible in the country. There is little official data recorded by law enforcement or government agencies. This lack of reliable data makes it difficult to develop effective public policies or program responses. Furthermore, the invisibility of CSEC is compounded by widespread community attitudes that either trivialise the problem or regard it as “normal” practice. Linked to this, there is very little known about perpetrators of CSEC, including who they are and why they choose to engage children in acts of commercial sexual exploitation.

Children who fall victim to CSEC almost exclusively come from the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Brazil. The pathways that lead to CSEC vary. In some cases, families living in extreme poverty encourage their children to provide sexual services for food or other goods. Children may also be lured by men into exchanging sexual “dates” for gifts, such as shoes, clothes or mobile phones. Other adolescents leave their community and move to the city in search of a better life. Because of their extreme vulnerability, many end up exploited and engaged in street-based sex work or trafficked by CSEC networks and saddled with a “debt” they can never repay. According to experts, CSEC can be found in all major cities in Brazil, and there is also a high prevalence of CSEC in many regional and rural centres across the country.

Little is known about perpetrators of CSEC in Brazil. The term ‘perpetrators’ is used to refer to individuals who materially benefit from children engaging in CSEC, such as ‘pimps’, or to individuals who directly exchange money or goods with children in return for sexual acts. The proposed research study aims to better understand the latter group, specifically the dynamics of their behaviours, their underlying motivations and the social norms lying behind the way they target and exploit these children. Although evidence remains scarce, specific demographic groups are believed to be more likely than others to engage girls in commercial sex acts, including male tourists and male truck drivers.

The proposed study will explore the characteristics, norms and behaviours of male perpetrators of CSEC in Recife, Brazil, with a focus on men who directly exchange money or goods for sexual acts with girls who are 17 years and under. The research findings will be used by the Freedom Fund to develop contextualized, research-driven programming, that aims to challenge the social norms supporting the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Research objectives

The overall objective of the research is to **better understand the characteristics, social norms and behaviours of male perpetrators of CSEC in Recife**, with a focus on men who directly exchange money or material goods for sexual acts with girls who are 17 years and under.

Specifically, the research study aims:
- To better understand the characteristics of male perpetrators of CSEC in the Recife metropolitan area;
- To better understand the social norms that enable male perpetrators of CSEC in the Recife metropolitan area, including factors motivating them to engage girls in acts of commercial sexual exploitation, their
perceptions of girls affected by CSEC, and any protective factors such as perceived social sanctions which could reduce their willingness to engage girls in acts of commercial sex exploitation;
- To better understand the behaviours of male perpetrators of CSEC in the Recife metropolitan area, including how and where they engage girls in acts of commercial sexual exploitation, their treatment of girls affected by various forms of CSEC (such as exchanges with girls engaged in survival sex or prostitution vs an ongoing transnational relationship with a “girlfriend”), and promising approaches to engage them in research or prevention programming.

Research methodology

The Freedom Fund invites applicants to propose a suitable methodology for achieving the objectives of the research. It is anticipated that this will be a mixed methods study, with a strong qualitative component. Applicants’ chosen methodology should allow them to better understand the characteristics of men who engage girls in commercial sex acts, their motivations for doing so, their behaviours relating to CSEC, and any other social norms either supporting or challenging their actions.

It is anticipated that the study will use a purposive sampling approach to target a diverse sample of individuals who have direct insights into the norms and behaviours of perpetrators of CSEC. Applicants are welcome to suggest a strategy for directly engaging with perpetrators of CSEC. However, the Freedom Fund recognizes that it is likely to be difficult to access men who self-report as perpetrators. If the researchers are unable to access perpetrators directly, an approach which targets men who fall within the demographic groups that have been shown to be at increased risk of perpetrating CSEC (such as male tourists, male truck drivers, or another group identified in the landscape literature review), would also be considered if an appropriate justification for excluding the general local population of men is provided. The final sample should include CSEC perpetrators (or men who match the demographics of likely perpetrators), sex workers over the age of 18, and other key stakeholders working in the CSEC field, with a focus on stakeholders who interact with male perpetrators at the identified points of negotiation, sale, or perpetration of CSEC.

Applicants should include a clear strategy outlining how they plan to collect reliable demographic data on the general population of male perpetrators of CSEC, including how they plan to obtain a representative profile of CSEC perpetrators. This should also include how they plan to build on the demographic data obtained to analyse the predominant behaviours and social norms motivating the target population’s perpetration of CSEC, and the strategy that will be used for achieving this outcome. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, applicants are also requested to provide an overview of how they will address any anticipated ethical and logistical challenges and how they will engage respondents in candid discussions on the topic of CSEC perpetration or other illegal activities. This should include information on how applicants plan to obtain ethical approval for the study.

In summary, the chosen applicants will be responsible for:

1) Conducting a landscape literature review in Portuguese and English to determine viable methodological and content approaches to engaging with the population of participants, and to determine what is known about CSEC perpetrators’ characteristics, behaviours and motivations, in studies where the offenses meet the definition of CSEC of “children aged 17 and under who exchange sexual acts for money or other goods”.
2) Developing a suitable methodology to answer the research objectives outlined above, presented as a detailed research protocol, which includes a realistic sampling strategy, all relevant data collection tools, and a detailed overview of ethical considerations.
3) Obtaining suitable ethical approval for the study (with any related fees to be covered by the contracted partner);
4) Hiring and training all data collection staff;
5) Piloting all data collection tools, amending them as required;
6) Undertaking all data collection, including monitoring the quality of data and data collection;
7) Undertaking data analysis of all collected data using appropriate methods of analysis;
8) Producing a written report of the research findings, as per a structure pre-agreed with the Freedom Fund.

The Freedom Fund is particularly interested in working with teams that can demonstrate:
(a) a gender-balanced enumeration team, ideally with at least half of the total staff being female, (b) flexibility to do data collection outside of traditional business hours, and (c) prior experience researching perpetrators of violence or exploitation, especially if this research has been conducted in Brazil.

Main deliverables and high-level timeline

The proposed schedule outlines the main deliverables, with some flexibility to allow for delays in ethical approval being granted:

| Main deliverables                                                                 | Proposed timeline |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Finalised sampling and data collection protocol (including ethical considerations), incorporating feedback from the Freedom Fund | February 2022     |
| Ethical approval for the study from an appropriate ethical approval body, chosen in collaboration with the Freedom Fund | March 2022        |
| Slide deck summarizing preliminary literature review                             | March/April 2022  |
| Memo confirming completion of data collection (including pilot phase)             | May 2022          |
| Final report outlining the key research findings, based on a structure pre-agreed with the Freedom Fund | August 2022       |

In addition to the main deliverables listed above, the research team is also expected to discuss with the Freedom Fund any proposed design changes and share regular updates on the progress of field activities.

The research team will be contracted by the Freedom Fund US and supervised by the Freedom Fund’s Senior Research & Evaluation Manager based in London. The Freedom Fund and other funders of the program anticipate working closely with the research team through all stages of the project.

Budget

The Freedom Fund has budgeted approximately USD 40,000 for this project. *Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner; we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget.*

As part of the proposal, please prepare a brief budget with the following breakdown:
- Personnel cost
- Precautions for COVID-19 during in-person fieldwork (e.g. personal protective equipment, covid tests etc.)
Other direct costs (e.g. training workshops, refreshments, reimbursements of participant costs, computers & tablets, telecommunications)
- Overheads
- All applicable taxes related to provision of services (e.g. VAT or GST)

Proposal format

Interested parties should prepare a proposal of no more than 3 pages plus annexes. Proposals should contain the following sections:

1. **Short biography of project lead(s) and key team members**, outlining relevant subject matter expertise and prior experience leading similar research projects. CV(s) of the project lead(s) should be included in the annex. Past report(s) from similar projects could be included as a link or in a separate annex.
2. **Methodology**, addressing the topics listed in the ‘Research methodology’ section of this RFP.
3. **Team structure**, defining the role and time commitment of key project team members.
4. **High-level work plan** with timing of key project deliverables and proposed format of final report.
5. **Proposed budget** in USD.

The proposal must be written in English and sent electronically in Microsoft Office or PDF format.

Criteria for assessing proposals

In reviewing proposals, the Freedom Fund will use the following criteria:

| Technical criteria | Weighting |
|--------------------|-----------|
| a. Technical capacity of the research team, including: | 60% |
| - Experience with mixed methods research, with a demonstrable understanding of relevant qualitative research techniques (depending on the proposed method). | |
| - Proven experience conducting research on potentially sensitive topics (such as commercial sexual exploitation, illegal activities, sexual health and/or violence against women), including research engagement with 'hard-to-reach' populations. Experience conducting research on perpetrators of violence or exploitation will be an added advantage. | |
| - Proven experience producing detailed research reports in English, with a strong focus on qualitative findings. | |
| - Experience obtaining ethical approval for sensitive research studies | |

| Financial criteria | |
|--------------------|---|
| c. Consideration of all potential expenses. | 10% |

**Total** 100%
## Proposal timeline and submission instructions

| Date               | Event                                                                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| By 4th March 2022  | Final proposals due. Please submit all documents to Matilde Chora at mchora@freedomfund.org with “Proposal for CSEC Survey” as the email subject line. |
| 1 March 2022       | All shortlisted research teams will be notified.                      |