

Factors that Drive Sex Tourism in Malawi

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Operating within organised networks, sex tourism is one of the transnational challenges that has a great impact on persons (especially women and children) in developing nations such as Malawi. This study explored the status of sex tourism, the attitudes that people have on sex tourism, the influential factors that drive the practice of sex tourism and, the opportunities and challenges that are encountered by those that are involved in sex tourism in Malawi. Involving 120 respondents, data for this study was collected from the districts of Nkhatabay, Salima and Mangochi. Motivations of sex tourism are economic gains, chances of emigrating overseas, getting a spouse/partner, sponsored trips, support of local community projects as well as exploring one's sexuality. Sex tourists enjoy anonymity when they engage sex workers in a developing country. Interwoven in sex tourism in Malawi are heterosexual identities, issues of romance and commercial sex relationship, culture and religion. All these dynamics happen in an equation of socio-economic, cultural and legal platform. In general, foreign tourists find the Malawian sex workers and children as easy prey. Though sex tourism has its negative effects, these are downplayed because of the economic gains that the locals get. For sex tourism to thrive, there must exist a labour market in which men and women are economically disadvantaged which spurs them entry into sex work. That presents the locals as readily accessible objects of consumption. Unlike in other studies where there are more male sex tourists, in Malawi female sex tourists are more. For these female sex tourists, it is an avenue of accessing handsome, young and fit bodies to obtain affirmation of their own sexual desirability, a thing that they would not easily get in their home countries. The study recommends that Malawi should accelerate its economic development efforts to ensure they escape poverty that traps them in sex tourism. Also, more efforts should be made to sensitize the public on some negative aspects associated with sex tourism such as child sex tourism and human trafficking.

Keywords: Sex tourism, Malawi, poverty, development, tourism policy, children, white women, white men, black women, black men

Introduction

Sex tourism, a subset of tourism, is one of the world's most controversial industries, globally pervasive, embracing multiple stakeholders and contextualised within complex systems. Tourists travel to other places, usually some distance from their place of residence, for exploration. By definition, sex tourism refers to 'tourists who travel to other countries, specifically to purchase sexual services of local women and men' (Brooks & Heaslip 2018; Lu et al 2020). It is travel by buyers of sexual services for the purpose of procuring sexual services from another

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person in exchange for money and/or goods. Sex tourism can occur between countries or cities. A major aspect of sex tourism is the commoditisation of the bodies of the participants in the destination area. Sex tourism is in most cases practiced to satisfy certain sexual inclinations. Lu et al. (2020) have pointed out that many men choose to travel to particular destinations because they know that it is possible to pursue their sexual interests more cheaply and safely. In most cases, men and women from developed countries have a desire for experiencing myriad sexual encounters with the locals in developing countries. Some foreigners do not travel to developing countries specifically to buy sexual services, but enter into sexual relationships with locals as soon as the opportunity presents itself (Kachipande 2019). Usually, these sex tourists have fantasies regarding sex with men and women of other races. They travel so that they can have easy sexual access to cheap Black or Latino, Asian and 'Oriental' women, men and/or children. In sex tourism, the bodies of women, children, and young men become commoditised (Mendoza 2014; Scott 2022). In this case, the tourists buy the person at a price for sexual services. Sex tourism has become prevalent, especially in South-East Asia and some African countries (Neal 2018). Despite the high prevalence of sex tourism, few travelers are willing to identify with the label of 'sex tourist' due to the negative stigmas associated to it, such as being called exploiters or dirty old men and women (Villar 2019; Wolf 2019). This is perhaps due to the ambiguities in the definition and the common perceptual parameters limiting a sex tourist to one who directly pays for sex. Sexual tourism is viewed as social exchange instead of an outright sex-for-money commerce. Sex tourism is the practice of travelling somewhere for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity. This does involve, though not limited to, (but is not limited to) full-service sex work (prostitution), massage parlours, brothels, strip clubs, brothels and foreign dating sites that cater specifically to tourists looking for a good time (Hillis 2021). Sex tourism has been practiced probably as far back as tourism. Sex tourism is a complex and multifaceted issue. The complexity is in that it is not easy to pin point and measure it since it is in many, if not most cases, practiced in secrecy. Mostly, it is men travelling to developing countries seeking sexual pleasure (Cervone 2021). Over the past few decades, the sex tourism industry has diversified beyond its traditional patriarchal form of exploitation and leisure (Boruah 2021, Despres 2021). Sex tourism is no longer restricted to Western men traveling to have sex with women in developing countries. The industry has expanded to include Western females engaging in transactional sex with men in developing countries and even gay sex tourism (Muendo 2022). Sex tourism is anchored in networks that provide services such as sex workers, tourist guides, show organisers or massage parlours, and that serve not only foreign tourists but local customers as well (Quevedo-Gómez 2020).

Sex tourism exists in all continents inasmuch as some countries may be known so much for the practice of commercial sex (Stončikaitė 2020). Sex tourism is a major source of earning money for certain countries, especially the developing ones, to an extent that some countries promote the practice. As Carvalho (2022) argues, sexuality appears as a productive instrument in advertising news, campaigns, newspapers, magazines, books, films or television shows. In different contexts, sexuality is used as powerful marketing tool; used successfully in the sale-purchase

process of diverse products or services. Chronis (2015) has contended that the economic sector of tourism is frequently promoted through advertising campaigns that associate dream places and landscapes with the image of beautiful women or manly men. A new tourist attraction appears that they cannot access at home due to certain social, political, religious, moral, norms or standards. The body is therefore born as a tourist attraction, through which passions, desires and curiosities of any kind, can be satisfied by a simple trip to a country or locality, where the travelers can satisfy their sexual curiosity (Nimara 2021). Many sex tourists, who would not even be eligible for a date back in their country, find solace in the fact that their money buys their egos back, at the expense of someone else's health or happiness (Hassan & Noaman 2017; Stončikaitė 2020). The gratification is in the fact that they have monetary resources and power, and the society supports the idea that finances can procure you anything, including a beautiful girl or woman.

Some studies on sex tourism tended to focus on the image of a Western male sex tourist travelling to a developing country, such as Southeast Asia (Lines 2015, Koops et al 2017). While traditionally, sex tourists have always been men, in recent years there has been a surge in the number of women from United States of America (USA), Canada and Europe that travel to developing countries for the reason of having sex with local men (Lodinová 2018). From the mid-1990s, there is a growing realisation that sex tourism is a critical aspect of the tourism industry, with gender variables constantly changing. One now has the opportunity to study either one or both sexes together, theorising how behaviours and roles are given gendered meanings, how labour is divided to express gender and gendered disparities symbolically, and how the social structures integrate gender values and present gender advantages in hierarchical relationships. Erin (2017) has opined that the entry of women as consumers within the sex tourism industry dates back to the early 1960s. At that time, Scandinavian, British, and German women began to travel to other European destinations - particularly to Italy, Spain, and Greece - in order to engage in situational sexual relations with local men. The arrival of mass tourism allowed women to travel farther afield to find young men (Babar 2019). While the demographics of female sex tourism differ from place to place; in general, female sex tourists are usually older White women, from developed countries who might struggle to find love or a sexual connection in their home countries and travel elsewhere for the promise of excitement and romance (Babar 2019; Spencer & Bean 2017). The men that have sex with these women are called 'bumsters' in Gambia (Gothenburg 2018), 'Rastitutes' or 'beach boys' in the Caribbean and 'sanky pankies' in the Dominican Republic (Cabezas 2019). These are the men who, in increasing numbers, are providing sex in return for money or goods to women who want a holiday 'romance'. The men are in most cases from poor families, have limited or no education and are sometimes illiterate. Samarathunga (2018) has reported that the beach boys claim that there is little shame or stigma in selling sex to older White female tourists, and some claim earning money this way affirms their masculinity. Most of these tourists travel alone or with female friends and often have a history of unhappy relationships with men at home. They are looking for attention and excitement but end up, often without realising it, being one half of a sex work deal (Spencer & Bean 2017). Women who feel rejected by men in

the developed countries for being overweight and older find that in the developing countries, they are admired (Falconer 2015; Keppel 2016). There, they are romanced, appreciated and loved by men. This appeal can emanate from the ethnicity differences between the sex tourist and the sex worker or the foreign lifestyle that the locals live. Women who have sexual encounters with such men are typically middle-aged and of European ethnicities (Omondi & Ryan 2020; Frohlick et al. 2016).

Sex work is sometimes framed within the context of state-sponsored decision-making and corporate expansion. Laws that make sex work illegal often contradict economic development policies that indiscriminately seek profit off the bodies of working-class people (Pitcher 2015). Sex work is illegal in some countries while in others it is legal (Mendoza 2014). The position of most countries on sex tourism is mostly obscure as the practice has an economic dimension to people. Sex work in Malawi is legal but living off the proceeds of sex work is illegal. Niu et al (2021) have pointed out that sex work is a popular trade and is prevalent around hotels and bars in urban and tourist areas in Malawi. Malawi is experiencing a rise in the number of sex workers with young girls even dropping out of school to join the trade. For most young girls and women, poverty exposes them to unprotected sex (Jimu et al. 2023). This might be due to their inability to access condoms and pressure from their clients who bargain to pay more if they do not use a condom. The consequences are dire: infection with STIs including HIV, unplanned pregnancies which in some cases result in unsafe abortions (Odimegwu & Ugwu 2022). While commercial sex work is the business or practice of engaging in sexual activity in exchange for payment, sex tourism involves the exchange of money coupled with the strategic movement of people travelling from developed countries to less developed countries seeking sexual pleasure. Regardless of whether it is not legal or accounted for, every country is directly or indirectly involved in sex tourism in some way. Some are known to be sex tourism generators while other countries are known to be sex tourism destinations (Grouchy 2020).

Sex tourism is a global phenomenon (Gwoździwicz & Koryluk 2018). Sex tourism is rampant where there is high poverty and gender inequalities, limited employment opportunities, large family sizes, inadequate awareness about its effects (Kabue 2021; Koning & van Wilsem 2022). Koops et al. (2017) have pointed out that certain tourism destinations are frequented by paedophiles and supported by networks of pimps, taxi drivers, hotel staff, brothel owners, entertainment establishments, and tour operators. These serve as links in facilitating sex tourism. Interventions to discourage sex tourism are seen by some stakeholders as key to reducing the demand for sex trafficking (Bah et al 2021; Brooks & Heaslip 2018).

As is true in different parts of the world, poverty is a powerful force fuelling human trafficking. Different countries have major markets of commercial sexual services, and each country is a destination for sex tourists from abroad and internally. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. It is a crime against humanity (Sweileh 2018). The practice of sex tourism and child sex tourism as well as the use of hotels in sex trafficking are some instances of the overlap between the travel industry and modern slavery (Zhang 2018). Child sex tourism is considered one of the major ethical issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. These tourists violate the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, and of the

Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (UN 2000). Minors and children have the right to be protected from sexual trafficking and exploitation from adults and traffickers. Child sex tourism is a serious global problem, with child sex tourists travelling mostly from developed countries such the United States and Europe to poor developing countries in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. In most countries, the younger a girl is, the more a client will pay (Deb 2020). These are not people that would conventionally be labelled 'predator'. These are people who are found middle-class, suburban neighbourhoods.

In Malawi, sex tourism is prevalent along the districts of Lake Malawi (Kachipande 2019). These are the destination places for most tourists that visit Malawi.

Materials and Methods

Research Design. This research utilised the Qualitative Approach that focuses on how people interpret and construct their experiences and their worlds, and the meaning that attributes to their experience. Specifically, case study design was employed as it allows the researchers to explore a real-life situation through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as observation, interview, documentation and reports.

Population and Locale of the study. This study was conducted in Nkhatabay, Salima and Mangochi. These are districts along Lake Malawi. Data was collected from 120 respondents: 30 through key informant interviews (KIIs), 30 participants from in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 60 participants from focus group discussions (FGDs). The participants were selected based on their information, knowledge and experience with sex tourism. To arrive at the number of participants, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is a technique whereby respondents are chosen based on the discretion or judgement of the researchers. The criteria in the selection of the participants include: (a) they are at least 18 years of age and (b) currently residing in the targeted three districts.

Data Gathering Tools. The main data gathering instrument used in this study is interview aided by an interview guide. Notes were taken during the interviews. The researcher formulated interview guide questions based on the needed information that are related to the topic and specific problems of this study. The interview guide tackled the status of sex tourism, the motivations that drives one into sex tourism and the opportunities and challenges that those who engage in sex tourism encounter.

Data Gathering Procedure. After the identification of the participants and before the data gathering, an informed consent form containing the conditions of the interview was presented and clearly explained to the participants. Upon explanation, the researcher asked the participant if they fully understood the undertakings of the informed consent and they were requested to affix their signature as proof of their consent. The interview was conducted at the time the participants were available because they were interviewed individually and privately. For some questions, the respondents tackled them in groups.

Treatment of Data. The data obtained from the interview were organised and divided into sections. Through joint and thorough analysis of the researchers, the researcher could reflect on what the participants' want to express during the interview without bias. The researcher interpreted right away the data collected and made sure that there was no any bias and empathy with the participants' life events. Using axial coding, the data were related together in order to reveal codes, categories and subcategories ground within one's collected data. The codes and coding technique utilises the case-oriented approach strategy referred to as 'partial ordered displays' to analyse the case study data. This strategy allows for the quick identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes. The process involves creating codes to be used for the analysis of the case study data and then coding the data. Codes are tags or labels that assign units of meaning to the data and for the quick identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes.

Data analysis. The recorded interviews from the participants were translated and transcribed into written form. Verbatim transcripts are considered authentic as they can be true to the intentions of the participant. It was very vital for the researcher to ensure that the data was free from bias and distortions. The researcher used the qualitative thematic content analysis and the discourse analysis to analyse the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019). Discourse analysis was mainly used to focus importantly on the language that was used by the participants. In discourse analysis, language is examined in terms of construction and function; that is, language is considered a means of constructing rather than mirroring reality (Macrae 2020). Discourse analysis was critical to this study as it goes hand in hand with the study's theoretical framework. The researcher followed the steps set out in doing the thematic content analysis. Initially, it was important for the researcher to familiarise himself with the data by perusing through the transcripts. According to McMullin (2023), the process of transcription, while it may be seen as time-consuming, frustrating, and at times tedious, can be an excellent way to start familiarising yourself with the data. Transcription is about transforming spoken discourse into a written form that is fully amenable to analysis and available for inclusion in the report of the research. Transcription was an essential first step to discourse analysis as it is challenging to keep in mind the emerging discourses. Collins & Hardie (2022) agree that transcription is essential that a record of the data may be made available for checking the analysis by other researchers and also for reanalysing. A thorough reading of the data ensures that the researcher became immersed in the data. Immersion usually involves repeated reading of the data, and reading the data in an active way-searching for meanings, patterns and so on. Immersion meant that the researcher became familiar with the data to the depth and breadth of the content. The second phase of the analysis focused on coding interesting patterns of data emerging. Marshall & Rossman (2011) postulated that 'coding data is the formal representation of analytical thinking'. Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst and refer to 'the most basic segment or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Linneberg & Korsgaard 2019). This entailed 'working systematically through the entire data set,

giving full and equal attention to each data item and identifying interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set' (Coates et al. 2021). The sentences, lines and phrases were coded. All the actual data extracts were coded and then collated together within each code. In the third phase, the researcher sorted the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. The researcher considered how different codes combined to form an overarching theme. This was done with the utilisation of visual representation in the form of mind-maps and tables to sort the codes into themes. After this phase, the researcher moved to the next phase of reviewing themes by verifying if they corresponded with coded extracts, thereby creating a thematic map of the analysis. Phase, 4 begins when you have devised a set of candidate themes, and it involves the refinement of those themes, and it will become evident that some candidate themes are not themes while others might collapse into each other (Nowell et al. 2017). This meant that the researcher needed to read all the collated extracts for each theme and considered whether they appeared to form a coherent pattern. In this phase, the entire data set was reread for two purposes. The first was to ascertain whether the themes work with the data set. The second was to code any additional data within themes that have been missed in earlier coding stages (Dawadi 2020). At the end of this phase, the researcher had a pretty good idea of the various themes and the way they fit into each other. The researcher then defined and further refined the themes, and made sure that consideration was made to link the themes to the research questions and objectives of the study. The recorded and transcribed interviews were analysed based on their themes. NVIVO software was used to identify broad themes and relevant verbatim quotations from the oral interviews conducted. Thematic analysis, a qualitative methodology common within social research and a popular form of social constructivist analysis, was the process utilised to interpret the data collected for this study. The interpretive nature of thematic analysis greatly compliments the interpretive turn taking place with the social sciences (Nowell 2017). According to Kiger & Varpio (2020), the purpose of all forms of constructivist analysis is to reveal the 'cultural materials from which particular utterances, texts or events have been constructed'. Through the framework of a social constructivist paradigm, emphasis is placed on identifying themes that show how social constructions of reality are created and how they influence the thoughts, experiences, and decision-making of groups and individuals. Thematic analysis is a methodology used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke 2019). Inductively driven data analysis works 'down' from pre-existing theoretical understandings (Connelly & Peltzer 2016). Thematic analysis allows categories to emerge, putting great emphasis on the interpretation and inductive deductive abilities of the researcher. There was a grid to collate the data provided in the interview guides. The responses were put into a set of broad categories. The elicited responses from the interview guides provided commonality of thoughts about sex tourism in Malawi. The data from the interview guides were interrogated based on commonality of ideas. The results from the qualitative data enabled the researcher to come up with conclusions on sex tourism in Malawi.

Results

Factors that Influence Sex Tourism

There are a number of reasons reported that make sex tourism to flourish in Malawi. Some of the reasons are: availability and easy access to sex workers in Malawi, availability of infrastructure along Lake Malawi and other parts of the country, interest of sex tourists in local men and women, poverty, veil of anonymity of the tourists in a foreign country, loneliness of sex tourists, trying to find something new and, searching for long-term relationships.

Availability and Easy Access to Sex Workers

Commercial sexual activity means any sex act or sexually explicit performance for which anything of value is given, promised to, or received by any person and includes, but is not limited to, sex work and participation in the production of pornography (Finkel & Matheson 2015). Apart from the law that criminalises having sex with those below the age of 18, there are no legal, policy and moral restrictions in accessing sex workers in Malawi. While the government disapproves sexual exploitation, it mostly does not come out strongly against the practice for fear of turning away tourists. The majority of the respondents stated that tourists tend to seek commercial sex services in Malawi because the services are readily available and quite cheap compared to what they would pay for the same services in their home countries. Though not found everywhere in Malawi, there are a lot of places where one can easily access commercial sex from willing locals. The community members stated that the government seems not interested in monitoring the operations concerning sex tourism.

Most tourists are able to enjoy lifestyles they could never enjoy in their home countries. Furthermore, some of the tourists may hold menial jobs in their industrialised home countries but because of the disparity in salaries and high exchange rates, they appear comparatively rich when in Malawi (Male Key Informant, P2).

While in Malawi, the tourists tend to spend their money on sexual activities that are associated with the rich and the famous in their home countries. When compared to the thrill of having exotic sex with a local and the sense of adventure that other activities can provide, the former weighs more. Cheap and easy access to sex workers enables the tourists to procure services of sex workers.

Availability of Infrastructure

It was reported that sex tourism thrives along Lake Malawi partly because there is available infrastructure. There are a number of hotels, nightclubs, bars, and beaches where sex workers and client relationships are formed and sexual relations consummated. There are marketing strategies that help to attract the attention of sex tourists about the benefits of visiting Malawi.

Brochures packed with alluring images of naked skin, often represented by models pictured by the lake in bikinis and happy couples walking along the beach of Lake Malawi does promote marketing of sex tourism for Malawi. The images of beautiful women and muscular men incites interest in tourists to explore Malawi. By using sexy adverts, sexual tourism phenomenon appears in the strategy of promoting Malawi, through a wide range of representations with sexual or erotic notes (Female Key Informant, P1).

Interest of Female Sex Tourists

Most informants in the study stated that most female sex tourists are fascinated with certain men including rastas, curio sellers and others with simple jobs. This is because they are viewed as honest, outgoing and easy to live with.

Those that are muscular are viewed as being strong in bed. Some of these women are slim while others are overweight. Ordinarily, it is difficult for Malawian men to propose to a White woman. This is because the White women are viewed as being on a high social stratum. Apart from that, most Malawians do not have financial muscles to entertain a White woman. For most men, having a relationship with a White woman is like having a gold mine (Male Key Informant, Tour Guide, P2).

Most of the locals that interact with the White tourists have basic rudiments of spoken English and this is what they use when interacting with tourists. Unlike in other countries, women that travel to Malawi for sex tourism are usually younger than fifty years. The informants in the study stated that most female sex tourists are attracted to the unkempt, low ranking Malawian men. This is partly because they want to experience 'loose' life in Malawi. Most of these men smoke marijuana, take drugs and engage in other illegal transactions. Another reason provided by the respondents is that in European and North American countries, the Rastas are regarded as peaceful and trustworthy people. The White women are interested in someone who will take them to places where they can find fun. The White women like these men because they take them to places of entertainment where they get excitement. The White tourists, especially the women are not interested to have sexual relations with decent looking, formally dressed men. It was stated that they are in most cases suspicious of such men as they suspect them to be government and police investigators. Another reason is that formally dressed people are viewed as high class and the White tourists would not be able to ask for certain illicit things that happen in Malawi. In general, the Whites are in Malawi for fun and therefore interact with people that will enable them to maximise their pleasure. Most of the tourists are looking for a 'good, quality' time. In a way, they want to spend time with someone that they can relax and be free.

In most cases, the ones that can provide them maximum fun are tour guides, curio sellers and others since they are well versed with the culture of the Whites. They are also viewed as romantic and faithful. The decently dressed and well to do men are viewed as people that can cheat on them (Male Key Informant, P8).

The informants stated that male tourists tend to get attracted to women with 'loose' morals since they are the ones that are easily found in places of entertainment.

The informants in the study stated that in some cases, Malawians can bad mouth each other just to ensure that they win over the heart of a White tourist.

These tourists tend to give their partners some funds before they travel back to their home countries. The sex tourists also give the locals gifts such as guitars, CDs, USB drives, an MP3 player and a DVD player (P1 Female Sex Worker, age 28-37, In-depth Interview)

Poverty of most Malawians

A majority of Malawian sex workers that are into sex tourism in Malawi are in the age ranges of 18-40 years. They are able to speak basic English which enables them to communicate with the tourists. The sex affairs are not confined to girls, as more young men join the practice in search of financial resources. Many young men and women (most of them primary and secondary school dropouts) have had their lives dramatically transformed by befriending European tourists. The Lake Malawi shores are known to attract tourists looking for sex, mainly from European countries. Most of the sex tourists that travel to Africa are driven by fantasy stories that the African (in this case Malawian) men and women are energetic in bed. They also promise the young unemployed men and women marriage and a trip to their countries.

There was unanimous agreement among the respondents that despite having a stable political environment for the past 60 years, Malawi continues to suffer from a number of social and economic problems. The country is plagued by high unemployment rates, large disparities between the rich and the poor, gender inequality, high government debt, and lack of investment in education and health. In addition, more than 50 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line. These inequalities, lack of opportunities and social programmes result in men and women creating economic means for themselves. It was stated that most locals are weighed down by financial issues. They pointed out that most Malawians practice sex tourism due to poverty (Hassan & Noaman 2017). One respondent stated that poverty forces a person to make decisions that they would not otherwise make if their living conditions were better.

Malawi has more than 50% unemployment rates that keeps surging. Moreover, the country is characterised by mismanagement of public funds and poor legal systems. These issues cause unemployment and poverty. Some people also go into sex tourism due to family problems such as child abuse or chauvinism. Street children are also lured into sex tourism because they lack basic needs (Female Key Informant, P5).

Some parents or relatives encourage children into sex trade so that they generate money for the household (Male Key Informant, P3).

In the case of young and uneducated Malawians that are expected to put food on the table for their family, the issue of making a free choice to sell their body becomes a critical issue (Male Key Informant, P8).

Some face family problems and resort to using drugs. They do this as they think that by taking drugs, their problems will be sorted. In the long run, they also become sex workers. Drugs and sex work have been documented to have a direct correlation. Sometimes drug use is influenced by either the client, the sex worker or both. Drug use tend to predate sex work among low-level sex workers with the connection most likely due to economic necessity. Low-level sex workers tend to use depressants (Jeal et al. 2018).

Some people go into sex tourism to seek sexual adventure with different races (P19 Male Sex Worker, Age 38-47 In-depth Interview).

Many Malawian women are overburdened by high fertility rates and lack of family planning services. This situation is exacerbated by poor maternal health and inadequate nutritional status. Thus, most women have family care burdens including caring for children, which makes it very difficult for them to engage in any meaningful economic activity.

There is general lack of knowledge about both their rights and the resources that are potentially available to them. The situation is further compounded by the prevailing attitudes of the society to women's abilities and socio-economic roles (Female Key Informant, P6).

It was stated that due to massive poverty in Malawi, those living in poverty are the most vulnerable to sex tourism. Those that hold little power or status in the society in which they live, find themselves in positions of powerlessness and inferiority. They are perceived as having little intrinsic cultural worth or value and therefore become rendered as a commodity, to be sold in exchange for money, which is especially prevalent for women and children living in extreme poverty.

This perception of them as a commodity is further perpetuated when they enter the sex industry, either by choice or coercion as they can find themselves dehumanised, perceived as an object with little worth. This in turn, further increases their vulnerability (Female Key Informant, P6).

Due to poverty, the respondents reported that some people in Malawi rely on the sexual commerce industry as a means of economic survival.

Sex is used as one of the tools that some people use to participate in the sex tourism industry to balance the economic disparity created by various policies and inequalities. The selling of sex continues to be used by men and women in Malawi to access financial resources (P1 Female Sex Worker, age 28-37, In-depth Interview)

While the young Malawian men and women are not being controlled by violent pimps or traffickers, it is difficult to ascertain true freedom of choice when somebody is living in abject poverty. Rampant poverty, mass unemployment and lack of opportunities for education makes it difficult for young Malawians to survive. For some Malawian men and women, their bodies are their main source of capital (Male Key Informant, P1)

Deep-rooted sexism ensures deep-seated and daily discrimination, while engrained customs from polygamy to child marriage leave girls and women disproportionately vulnerable. Despite the evidence of this growing problem, Malawi underestimates, misunderstands or ignores the scale of this crime. On online child sexual exploitation, legislation and child protection measures are failing to keep up. Buying and selling of ones' body as a commodity also leads to certain abuses. Often, underage girls are abused for the sexual satisfaction of clients. The multiple number of times sex workers engage with their clients also gradually decreases their feeling of worth.

Some of the respondents in the study disclosed that in some cases, families or friends 'sell' their children in sex work so that those families are able to meet their basic needs. The average family size is large and it is difficult to make a living that will support a large family.

While the government and other institutions advocate for birth control, so many poor families continue to have 4 to 5 children which just make their situation worse. Many parents struggle to find a way to support their family. Many parents sacrifice the future of their daughters by marrying them off. Many marry at a tender age or become sex workers when they see that their families are struggling to earn a living (Female Key Informant, P2).

Malawi's rapidly increasing population is putting pressure on the government to scale up services in social services, including education. Job opportunities on farms in rural areas are becoming fewer each year partly because of the effects of climate change. It was pointed out that due to this status of poverty, many persons decide to migrate to urban areas from the rural areas. For some girls, becoming a sex worker is one of the easiest options to make some money.

The rationale to this migration is strongly done to find better jobs and opportunities. It is strengthened by the thought that there are better opportunities of success in urban areas rather than in their poor, undeveloped and rural homesteads, where they will only perform hard, labour work and receive low wages in return. Most females in Malawi are attracted to sex work and to the sex industry because it is considered as an easy way to earn money, providing better-paid opportunities for them (P1 Female Sex Worker, age 28-37, In-depth Interview)

Most young sex workers have a difficult choice to make between staying in their rural areas and that of migrating to urban centres. They have to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. This view is held against a choice of otherwise spending their life working in more tough and challenging jobs such as domestic work or labour. Sex work- related mobility is often undertaken to maximise trade opportunity.

It was disclosed that sex tourism is considered as the main source of income for those practicing it and their families. Some women achieve economic independence despite the great adversities they encounter in their daily lives and work. The majority of women in this study reported being the highest income earners in the household, caring for up to three dependents, and demonstrated entrepreneurial characteristics and aspirations for the future. For some, apart from earnings they

get from sex work, others are into businesses like selling groceries, clothes and home utensils.

Some youths, especially women, migrate to the lakeshore with hope of finding a White tourist who can pay more or who might marry them and take them to the West; or at least who might become their boyfriend and give them money to take care of their needs (Female Key Informant, P6).

The respondents stated that most female tourists from Europe and North America send cash and gifts to their Malawian boyfriends and girlfriends when they leave for their home countries.

Most Malawian sex workers receive money from their White tourists. One can receive monthly remittances of between US\$20 and US\$100. Most White tourists do not always realise how their local partners extract a financial benefit from them (Female Key Informant, P5)

It was reported that when they are attractive destinations, it is the sex tourists that pay for things such as transport, food and gifts. In most cases, the sex tourists are twice the age of the local sex workers.

The Malawian men participating in sex tourism are not the ones that cater for the needs of the woman but it is the other way round. The relationship with the white woman removes the economic burden that a man has to satisfy the financial needs of the woman (P19 Male Sex Worker, Age 38-47 In-depth Interview).

One of the benefits that the sex workers gain from sex tourism is that they also get to travel through Malawi and other countries on the budget of the sex tourists. This is on top of the finances that they get and use for their family needs.

While those engaged in sex tourism are called names, they do not mind it as far as they are able to earn a living. The locals that participate in sex tourism are motivated in that they are provided resources in cash or in kind (Key Female Informant, P12).

The resources that the sex workers acquire from sex tourism outweighs the challenges that the sex workers encounter in sex tourism. The respondents pointed out that sex tourists create demand and pay big money for local male partners. Apart from the money that they give to sex workers, communities in areas where sex workers stay also benefit from educational resources, support to charity institutions and other development projects.

In some cases, it is a conduit for them to obtain a visa and an air ticket to the country where the sex tourist is coming from. For these locals, the older the woman or man, the better (Key Male Informant, P10).

These relationships are mostly between European sex tourists and local partners, often with vast age differences. Some locals having the European girlfriends and boyfriends have managed to build houses from the proceeds of sex tourism. Even while abroad,

some of these sex tourists send gifts and money to their partners in Malawi (P7 Male Sex Worker, age 28-37, FGD).

It was stated during the study that this is done as the relationships financially benefit the Malawians in sex tourism. For some local partners, they use some of the funds for themselves and some to support their family including parents and other members.

In cases where an old woman has a relationship with a young man, the parents or the community do not get bothered at all. The interest is on the money that the young man gets. This would not be the case if the younger man was having a relationship with an older Malawian woman: the older Malawian woman would be mocked by the community. In the case of female sex tourists, they are immersed in the love as they are pampered (P19 Male Sex Worker, Age 38-47 In-depth Interview).

Others said that some women do not have partners to support them or their children so they get involved in sex tourism due to the opportunities it provides them. They venture into the sex industry due to limited opportunities but they gain financial resources. It also includes many young girls that are fed up of living a life with no clear future; they are willing to trade everything for a better life. They see sex tourism as offering them a brighter future.

Many of them are exposed through social media how a luxury easy life should be, the feeling of being rich, the ability to buy expensive beautiful things. And then they get influenced by their friends or follow the lead of the oldest among them, believing that by becoming a sex worker they could transform their lives. Moreover, for them, foreigners are equaled to money, a gateway for a better life and a ticket to overseas where they can experience what they deserve (Male Key Informant, P7).

Most of the informants were of the view that if a Malawian is lucky to attract a sex tourist, they could become lovers and have a better life.

Young people get attracted to the money and other resources that their peers get from sex tourism. The informants pointed out that these youth see the benefits their peers get from trading sexual services and attract them to sex tourists.

When young individuals see what their friends are gaining from selling sex, others get attracted to the practice. The only thing they think of is to start selling sexual services. They influence each other and the change is very rapid (Female Key Informant, 9). There are also a lot of cases where the sex tourists have found some jobs in their countries for the local partners. Some buy an air ticket for these partners to go and stay abroad, mostly in European countries (P9 Male Sex Worker, age 28-37, FGD).

Some sex tourists stated that they come to Malawi and engage in sex tourism to save the locals from poverty and the despicable conditions of life. They see their role as 'saviours' - they do not see anything wrong with their sex tourism.

The poverty rates in Malawi are quite high. One of the reasons of coming to do sex tourism here is also to contribute to the economy of the country. The local sex workers earn something from tourists (P4 Male Sex Tourist, Age 48-57 In-depth Interview).

While a majority of female White tourists admitted to certain ‘economic elements’ to their liaisons with the Malawian men, they did not perceive their sexual encounters as commercial sexual transactions, nor did they view themselves as seeking the services of a sex worker. It would be said that there is the ‘happy hooker’ trope, where young and attractive women in developing nations turn to sex work in order to live lavish lifestyles and afford luxuries that an office job would not provide. The respondents pointed out that the relationships between the White tourists and the locals are born out of need rather than want.

Anonymity of the tourists in a foreign country

Some tourists that were interviewed stated that when one goes to a destination away from the home country, there is the assurance of anonymity, which releases them from the usual restraints, which determine their behaviours in their home countries.

A person’s behaviour is often different when they are away from home. Tourism allows people ‘to lose their identity’ and gives them the freedom to escape realities and to live their fantasies. Most tourists behave differently when on holiday (P3 Female Sex Tourist, Age 28-37 In-depth Interview)

While in Malawi, most of the tourist women do not like to give their full names because their friends and family members are not aware they go abroad for sex. In another country they feel that they are able to live another secret life away from their home. They are more adventurous and are more likely to engage in risky behaviours.

Men and women that would never visit brothels in their home countries for example, end up doing so in Malawi where there is a negligible chance of detection and (or) penalty (P4 Male Sex Tourist, Age 48-57 In-depth Interview)

Loneliness of Sex Tourists

For most sex tourists, there is an impression of something lacking at home, like their needs are not being met (not only sexual but also psychological and emotional support). It was disclosed that most of the women that come to Malawi for sex tourism are shunned by men of their own age in their home countries because they want slimmer and younger women. They travel alone or with female friends and often have a history of unhappy relationships with men back in their countries. They are looking for attention and excitement. A majority of the respondents indicated that most of the tourists, especially the old female ones, lack the pampering from men when they are in their home countries.

Some of them are divorced, having fantasies about sunbathing on white sand and swimming in a fresh water source, Lake Malawi. Some Malawian young men stage-manage romantic affairs with the older women tourists and get to wine and dine with them (Key Male Informant, P10).

White female tourists, in particular, explained that they felt valued in Malawi. Their experiences are very different from when they are not back home. Their economic prowess and their whiteness mean that they are not treated as local women but respected and pampered. They are offered a stage upon which they can simultaneously affirm their womanness through their ability to command local men and reject the White men who have rejected them.

With the rise in divorce and women's economic interests in recent years, there has been an increasing number of women from Europe, Canada, and the US traveling to developing countries, such as Malawi, to have sex with local men and also to refresh. In having the relationship with the local men, the female tourists look at it as a social arrangement (Male Key Informant, P10).

Some tourists that come to Malawi to engage in sex tourism flee from unhappy relationships at home. They therefore feel that getting a partner from a developing country such as Malawi will maximise their chances of getting the right partner which will translate into having a happy relationship (Key Male Informant, P1).

A number of White women explained that they felt more valued in Malawi than back home. Their bodies are also valued over local women's. They feel more satisfied with themselves as a result.

Trying Something 'New'

The other reason mentioned, mainly by tourists, for their participation in sex tourism is the desire to try something 'nouveau' with a different race. For some reason, people think interracial sex is exotic and daring. Most people may decide to try out interracial sex just for the kick of it or out of curiosity.

As one of the developing countries in Africa, Malawi represents a country where life is perceived as raw and wild and a place where people are uncontrolled, liberal, and polygamous. These reasons can partly explain why some European women visit Malawi to look for sex and marriage partners. Sex tourists feel by engaging locals in sex tourism, they are promoting racial harmony and deconstructing myths and fears about race conflict (Male Key Informant, 10)

In the case of black men, they are considered to have a lot of masculine traits the White women desires, a bulky, rough muscular body, broad shoulders and powerful legs and arms and very long, girthy penis. For some sex tourists, they view having sex with black men and women in developing countries such as Malawi as a natural and cultural experience. It is viewed as being adventurous in sex relations, a sweet escape from the routine of enjoying life in mostly urban and modern life of the developed countries.

For female sex tourists, it is based on narratives that depict African males to the assumption that they are romantic and have passionate prowess compared to Western men. Most tourists travel to Malawi for sun, sand, safari and sex. (Key Male Informant, Tour Guide, P15)

The motivations for interracial sex between White sex tourists and black sex workers, as perceived by those that participated in this study can be divided into two distinct categories; firstly, is the perceived inability by the tourists to experience different races at home and secondly is the desire to have sex with black locals in their natural habitat in Malawi. The sex tourists enjoy economic power over the locals.

Many of the tourists want to 'taste' what it feels like to have sex with an African (in this case a Malawian) in Africa. They would rather not do it within their own country or region due to being self-conscious of what their friends and family would say. This being the case, they choose to do it abroad. Sometimes the society in the region that these tourists come from would not let them have relations with those from other races. They come to Malawi because they want to have sexual relations with an African in an environment where they will not be judged for it at home. People come on vacation really to have the chance to enjoy different things, a different environment, climate and people. For most of them, it means a sexual experience in Malawi (Key Female Informant, P12).

The female tourists are interested in having a sexual relationship with Malawian men as they had heard that they possess big penises and provide very good sex. The Malawian men are regarded as skilled in having sex (Key Male Informant, P8).

The Malawian boyfriends strive to be charming, solicitous and gracious companions: they actively profess their undying love for the woman, keeping in touch for months after they have left Malawi, and even proposing marriage.

Many female sex tourists want buff, hard-bodied men. Some men get into bodybuilding and go shirtless, wearing tight bathing suits that emphasize their endowments (Female Key Informant, P5).

Searching for Long-term Relationships

For mature White women, it was reported that some come to Malawi in search of long-term relationships. Some informants pointed out that most of the White women that come to Malawi for sex tourism are not deemed beautiful in their countries. They therefore come to African countries where what matters is that they are White and are appreciated as such. Some White women said that they want a Malawian partner since most of the men in their countries are not interested in marriage. Most of the adult White women lead independent life: they are usually employed; they do not need to be approved of the partners they want. The informants pointed out that in most cases, those in sex tourism explore possibilities of having a long-term relationship. For some White women, they say that they want half caste children since they look beautiful.

It feels like you are starting a different race of people. The experience of being in love with someone from a different background is interesting (P8 Female Sex Tourist, Age 38-47 In-depth Interview).

They generally do not have to seek approval if they want to have a black man as a partner. Long-term intimate relationships are basically founded upon the kind of interactions that an individual is exposed to in the early stages of their life. The White tourists and the sex workers interact on many fronts. For those that get along so well, they take their relationships to a higher level, leading to marriage.

Some Whites come to Malawi for charity work. They therefore need someone to be coordinating those charity works while they are back in their home countries. Once they find a Malawian partner, they take them as someone they can trust with their projects. For others, it is a conduit to gaining a Malawian citizenship.

For some Malawians, it was said that having a long-term relationship with a White person is viewed as prestigious. They choose to overcome the cultural dissimilarity to maintain the relationship with financial, social, cultural and political capital.

Discussion

Among the factors that drive sex tourism in Malawi is the need by the White tourists to explore sex in developing countries and the need by the Malawian sex workers to access financial resources and search for stable, long-term relationship. With high levels of poverty in Malawi, sex work serves as an alternative to find financial resources for household use. The average person in Malawi earns about \$3 a day, according to the World Bank. For most Malawians, it is an issue of survival as life is quite tough (Machira et al. 2023). These Malawian sex workers (though they do not regard themselves as such) enter into sexual relationships with as many tourists as they possibly can, and most of these relationships result in some form of material or economic benefit for them. The dollars, euros and pounds are rolling in Malawi through sex tourism (Vuorensyrjä 2016). The local men and women are able to secure material and financial benefits from entering into sexual relationships with a series of tourists. They use strategies to extract cash benefits from their sexual partners as some sort of 'resource exchange'.

Some men are unable to accept the decline in the privileges that patriarchal societies traditionally bestowed on men, which is becoming the reality in many parts of the world (Kelley 2015). While some may argue that the Western tourists exploit the locals, it can also be said that the blacks also exploit the White tourists. Sex tourists and Malawian sex workers prey on each other through highly gendered, commonsense understandings of both 'courtship' within which each expects to benefit from the other (Vuorensyrjä 2016).

In socioeconomic terms, the female tourists have the upper hand over local men. While in their home countries some gender roles may constrain them, as sex tourists in Malawi, they are in charge over many aspects of their lives. The exploitation endemic in sex work does not disappear when women are the buyers. Whatever diplomatic arrangement they may use to support themselves, the female sex tourists are exploitative (Tremblay 2021). Just like any other kind of sex workers: they are

providing a service, and they view themselves as self-employed freelancers who work hard for what they get. For female sex tourists, they like the control and power that they have over the local men. With the financial resources, they are in charge of their sexual life in deciding when they want to have sex and when they do not. For the male sex tourists, they are able to exercise their patriarchal values.

As advanced by Quevedo-Gómez et al. (2020), in sex tourism, there are consumers from developed nations seeking exoticised, racialised 'native' bodies, in the developing world for cut-rate prices. The components of race and its associated stereotypes and expectations and the economic disparities between the developed and developing countries characterise sex-tourist destinations throughout the world. In the case of Malawi, it does provide cheap and exotic sex for travellers.

While the men reported utilising transactional sex as both a survival and an advancement strategy, and receiving a superior masculine status as well as financial and material benefits, they also reinforce and perpetuate the racist stereotype about the black male as being hypersexual. The Malawian men are economically and socially marginalised; marginalisation that is inextricably linked to both contemporary and historical racism, play into rather than resist or oppose racist stereotypes about black male sexuality, leaving the impression that in order to survive economically, they have to contribute to their own continued oppression (Cheng 2021).

In the sex tourism industry, globalisation and patriarchy cooperate so that, even in the developed countries, it is still the bodies and lives of marginalised women and girls that are commodified and objectified in order to ensure profit and pleasure for the privileged. There is a perpetuation of a system that assumes that the bodies of marginalised people (overwhelmingly women and girls) exist to satisfy the manufactured 'needs' of wealthier, more privileged people. For the White tourists, the money and the power that comes with it buys them things that they could never dream of having at home. It is impossible not to notice the unsavoury implications of a (comparatively) rich woman falling into bed with a man young enough to be her son (Despres 2021).

Sex tourism has grown in popularity amongst world travellers seeking romantic encounters, love or marriage while exploring new destinations. Some sex tourists engage in sex tourism in a bid to find true love through meaningful relationships. It is an opportunity to escape the mundane routines of everyday life and experience a whirlwind romantic adventure in the freedom of a foreign land (Simoni 2018). For some, it is for companionship or intimacy, especially if they have trouble finding a suitable partner in their home country. For others especially female tourists, they are in most cases mesmerized by the attention they get when they travel in Malawi. These are things which they feel they would not get in their home countries. Travel provides a means for middle- and upper-class Europeans and North Americans to realise sexual fantasies that hinge on the racialisation and exoticisation of people (Filep 2020).

Conclusion

Sex tourism is linked to poverty and disparities in wealth and power between the rich and poor, between men and women and between adults and children. Sex tourism is linked to causes such as poverty, marginalisation, underdevelopment and the emerging trend of tourism, and any rectification has to take a holistic view. While getting proceeds from sex work is illegal in Malawi, sex tourism is a major component of the local economy. Sex tourism has impact on the social, economic, environmental, and education aspect of Malawi. This is manifested in diverse ways. It should be noted that the way sex tourism impacts Malawi is based on the degree of dependency upon tourism and the economic plight of the country (Kelley 2015). Apart from internal efforts, international cooperation can help the sex tourism industry be regulated successfully and many children in Malawi and other developing countries be protected against exploitation. While the exploitive nature of sex tourism in places like Malawi should not be condoned, it should be recognised that many people look for sex on their own free will as part of their holiday experience. The existence of sex tourism in Malawi is directly related to the inequalities in wealth that are present between the developing and developed world.

Recommendation

Malawi as a country need to accelerate its efforts to economically develop and enforce the openness of more job opportunities for its citizens. The country has to provide more economic opportunities to its citizens. Since poverty is the major reason why most Malawian go into sex tourism, people especially women need to be empowered economically. They can be encouraged to start income generating activities and the younger ones can be advised and supported to go back to school (Grouchy 2015). The economic recommendations will deal with three main issues: the extreme poverty rampant in Malawi, the lack of career training for most Malawians (especially the women and the youth), and the insufficient and very bad payed jobs available for citizens (Nimara 2021). Regarding the socio-cultural front, there is need to give citizens, especially women, a better education, and using mass media to show the different aspects (such as corruption) that hinder its economic advancement. For those who keep accepting bribes and breaking the law with regard to the sex trade, harder correction measures should be executed. Examples of punishments are fines, jail sentences and job dismissals. Besides, the courts normally imprison an insignificant number of traffickers a year despite the many traffickers that are caught. There should be zero tolerance when convicting sex-trade involucrated individuals and apply stricter punishments for them.

The Malawi government should improve the working conditions and increase its employees' salaries. When you increase a salary, you motivate the individual to do a better job and additionally, you reduce their susceptibility to bribery from traffickers. A clear illustration of this is the actual low salaries that government officials receive, tempting them to accept money from other sources in order to have a better income (Robertson et al. 2016). Apart from training citizens especially

women, the Malawi government should provide new jobs in more areas such as medical sciences and entrepreneurial jobs which would demand the women to embody leadership roles and, therefore, break with the tradition in helping reduce the wide gap between gender inequalities that now exist in Malawi. As per the findings of this study, the main reasons as to why most Malawians engage in commercial sex activities with tourists are unemployment, lack of education, and poverty (Wang & Tziamalis 2023). In order to adequately address some challenges in sex tourism and negative impacts on society, the Malawi Government need to focus on addressing all the socio-economic factors affecting it citizen. Without other comprehensive financial avenues, most families expose children to harm to get money to feed the family. That is a real situation that many impoverished, uneducated families face ((Jeong & Lee 2023).

HIV prevention work in these communities that host tourism needs to take into account the consumption of these substances whose use create difficulties regarding safe sex practices and, in the case of injecting drugs that are shared, constitutes a risk factor for HIV transmission (Phyllis et al. 2022).

Counseling services should be made available to these victims as well as some kind of halfway house to transition them into society (Bah et al. 2021). The local police in these areas, with increased training, need to find a way to gain the trust of these victims so that the victims will not be afraid of confiding in them (Glotfelty & Miles 2018). The fears of repercussion from the pimps, brothel owners, or other criminal elements keep the victims from reporting abuse. The police or government need to find a way to create a safe zone for victims of sex tourism.

In the case of socio-cultural dimensions, it is highly recommended that the government should reinforce the importance of women completing at least secondary education, as it is one way of maintaining young women away from the temptations offered by sex traffickers and sex tourists. There should be a number of programmes with the aim of keeping girls and women away from the sex industry by issuing scholarships so that they would be able to study until they are eighteen years old (Voelkel 2017). The government of Malawi should create a conducive environment for entrepreneurship. Efforts should be made to support females to become successful businesswomen. A positive image should be communicated instead of sexual one. Consequently, the view on sex trafficking as an accessible, normal thing will be changed.

People in Malawi need to be made aware of the dark side of sex tourism. Journalists in Malawi could work on projects with the government, NGOs and the civil society in which stories and real cases about child sex tourism and sex-trafficking are exposed.

The aspects of the sex tourism discourse, should not be dealt with as a separate and unique issue which those that are involved in it face in Malawi. Rather, broader issues believed to be central to understanding sex tourism as a consequence should be focused upon including economic, political, and cultural issues. There are issues of criminalisation, stigma, and discrimination that intersect sex tourism in Malawi.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted along Lake Malawi, among sex workers and sex tourists in Malawi. The study was done on a small scale which may have not brought out certain elements of sex tourism. A further study, on a bigger scale, should be conducted to establish the status of sex tourism in Malawi. Second, due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic, the possibility exists that sex workers and sex tourists gave socially desirable responses when describing their sexual activities and health behaviours towards sex tourism in Malawi.

Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the research study was obtained from the research councils of the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) in Malawi and the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in Republic of South Africa. Approvals were also sought from district and community leadership to conduct the study in the selected project sites. Respondents were informed about their rights within the study. Interviews were conducted at locations that maximised participant safety and confidentiality, and referral procedures were established for respondents that would be distressed or required further care.

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