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Age of child prostitutes in Israel dropping, report finds

Knesset study cites cases of 11-year-olds used for commercial sex that are among the several thousands of teenagers involved in prostitution.

By Vered Lee | Aug. 20, 2013 | 1:47 PM | 13

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Prostitutes in Tel Aviv. Photo by Nir Kafri

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Neither government agencies nor welfare organizations have accurate information regarding the scope of youth prostitution in Israel according

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to a report on prostitution involving minors, submitted recently to the Knesset.


The Elem association for youth in distress believes that there are thousands of teenagers involved in prostitution here, yet from 2008 until July 2013, only 29 police files were opened against the clients of these young prostitutes, 12 of them during the first half of this year. Of the 12 cases opened this year, 10 have been transferred to the prosecution and two are still being investigated. Of the other 17 files, 12 were transferred to the prosecution; of those, one case from 2009 was prosecuted and four other investigations were closed, three for lack of evidence.

The report, written by the Knesset Research and Information Center and submitted to the Knesset subcommittee on the fight against trafficking in women and prostitution, states that child prostitutes come from all sectors of society – there are Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, new immigrants and minors who have no legal status in Israel, such as Palestinians and migrants. The report also supports the general assumption that the age at which children start working as prostitutes is dropping; research here and abroad shows that the average age is 13-14, though there have been cases of children as young as 11 being used for commercial sex.

Professionals generally agree that youth prostitution is closely linked to sexual abuse at home, parental neglect, problems in school, low socioeconomic status, gang membership and living in the streets with no safe shelter. However, the report's authors also say that a new pattern of occasional prostitution is emerging among young people from normative families who have not dropped out of school. These youngsters are lured into sexual exploitation because they want money for brand-name clothes and other consumer products, or to improve their social status.

The report stresses that the Internet has become one of the primary arenas for commercial sexual exploitation of minors.

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