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The Harms of Orphanage Voluntourism: Misperceptions among Volunteers

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ABSTRACT

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Volunteer tourism is a form of travel that allows participants to engage in a charity project in a developing country. The popularity of working with impoverished children is increasing the demand for orphans, and incentivizes those involved in the orphanage industry to bring children from villages to orphanages in highly frequented tourist areas. This research project focuses on the perception of volunteers and their experience volunteering at an orphanage. A qualitative approach was used involving surveys and semi-structured interviews with females between the ages of 20-25 who had previously volunteered at an orphanage abroad. Evidence from this research suggests that most volunteers are unaware of the harms caused by orphanage tourism such as attachment disorders, abuse, and family separation. I argue that this lack of education is one of the main reasons that orphanage tourism remains a popular volunteer option. This research project also shows that volunteers would be more inclined to help children through family reunification and family strengthening rather than spending time at an orphanage, if provided those opportunities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Statement of the Problem

Volunteer tourism is a growing trend that allows participants to travel to different countries and engage with the community. Unfortunately, the altruism showed by these volunteers is actually harming children and their families. The influx of volunteers willing to pay to visit an orphanage abroad has created an orphanage-business system- a demand for more orphans in order to open more orphanages. Families are encouraged to give up their children with false promises of better education, food, and care; when in reality, they are taking children from their families in order to supply orphanages with the children they need to make a profit. To put it simply, volunteers are fueling the growth of orphanages in the developing world.

Social Orphans

The U.N. estimates that over 8 million children around the world are living in care institutions, however approximately 80% of these children have at least one living parent.¹ According to a study conducted by UNICEF in 2007, there were up to 500,000 children in institutions in Indonesia, and 94% of them had a living parent.² This is the case in many developing countries around the world. The table below shows the number of children in institutions in each country, and the percent of those children with at least one living parent.³

¹ LUMOS, "Children in Institutions: The Global Picture," (2015), 1.

² UNICEF, "Someone that Matters: The quality of care in childcare institutions in Indonesia," (Save the Children, UK, 2007), 19.

³ LUMOS, "Children in Institutions: The Global Picture," (2015), 3.

Country	Number of Children in Institutions	Percent with a living parent
Bolivia	15,000	54%
Turkey	20,000	60%
Cambodia	12,000	77%
Rwanda	2,500	78%
Nepal	15,000	85%
Paraguay	5,000	90%
Ghana	4,500	90%
Sri Lanka	21,000	90%
Indonesia	500,000	94%
Russia	400,000	95%
Moldova	2,955	96%
Bulgaria	3,262	98%
Czech Republic	9,561	98%

Table 1.

The term “social orphan” refers to a child who has at least one living parent, but is without parental care. A child becomes a social orphan when one or both parents become unable to perform parental duties because of illness, poverty, or other reasons.⁴ A social orphan can be a street child, a child in a mental facility, a child in an orphanage, or simply a child living on their own. There are many reasons why a child might become a social orphan, such as gender discrimination, disability, abuse, and poverty.

Gender discrimination is a problem worldwide, and a common reason why baby girls are abandoned or sent to an orphanage. The most popular example of female child abandonment was in reaction to the 1979 “one child” policy in China, created to curb population growth. In a culture with a strong preference for male children, many families would give away daughters in hopes to try again for a son. This led to the influx of orphan girls with living parents in China. The preference for a male child is not unique to China. In 2007, the India Human Rights

⁴ “Orphans and Vulnerable Children Defined,” The Partnership for Child Development, last modified 2017, <http://hgsf-global.org/en/ovc/background>.

Commission reported that the 90% of 11 million abandoned orphaned children were girls.⁵ Disability is another reason why children end up in institutions. This can be seen heavily in Eastern Europe and Russia, although it occurs all over the world. According to Human Rights Watch, “nearly 30 percent of all Russian children with disabilities live separately from their families in closed institutions.”⁶ Additionally, it is estimated that approximately 45% of children living in care institutions have some form of disability, despite the fact that children with disabilities account for only 2 to 5 percent of Russia’s total child population.⁷ While discrimination and disability are widespread reasons for child abandonment, poverty is the true leading cause. Many times, parents believe that the best decision is to send their child to an orphanage when they cannot feed, clothe, or educate them. It is not uncommon for impoverished families to use orphanages as a mechanism for coping with their economic situation, especially if they have numerous children.

Not all children are given to an orphanage freely, recruitment by orphanage directors is a common practice in poor and rural areas. Recruiters take advantage of impoverished families by further incentivizing them to give up a child. Deception is also frequently used to take children from unknowing parents. Families can be encouraged to give up their children with false promises of a better life, education, care. In some cases, families are even paid for their children. Orphanages recruit children for a variety of reasons, such as trafficking and foreign adoption, however, a large cause of the recruitment of children for orphanages is because of the profit made from volunteers.

⁵ Save the Children, “Keeping Children out of Harmful Institutions,” (2009), 5.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Abandoned by the State: Violence, Neglect, and Isolation for Children with Disabilities in Russian Orphanages,” (2014), 2.

⁷ Ibid., 2.

Negative Effects of Institutionalized Care

Research on the harms of institutionalized care on children began in the early 1940s and 1950s with the work of researchers such as Rene Spitz (1945), William Goldfarb (1945;1955) and John Bowlby (1953). Their work was the first to prove that institutionalized care damaged both the child's mental and physical development. Since then, a number of studies have compared institutionalized children to noninstitutionalized children. The majority of these studies came to the same conclusion- institutionalized children have significant developmental deficits across virtually every domain that has been examined.⁸

Children raised in institutions are proven to show delays in their physical development. Relative to their peers, they show atypically short height, low weight, and small head circumference.⁹ Physical stunting- defined as lower than average height for a child's age is common among children who are affected by institutional environments. This is mainly caused by malnutrition, especially during the most rapid growth period between birth and 18 months.¹⁰ In most institutions child-to-caregiver ratios are so high, it is difficult to adequately attend to even a child's most basic needs¹¹ such as bottle-feeding. A child's height is not the only reported stunting for children in institutions, brain stunting and low IQs have also been shown through the research of Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer. In a meta-analysis of 75 studies, they found that children living in institutional care scored on average 20 points lower on intelligence tests than children who were raised in families.¹² The Lack of human eye contact and visual and physical

⁸ Mary Dozier, "Institutional Care for Young Children: Review of Literature and Policy Implications," (National Institute of Health, 2012), 4.

⁹ Kristin Myers, "What is Stunting?" (2016), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹¹ R. Muhamedrahimov, "New Attitudes: Infant care facilities in St. Petersburg, Russia," (WAIMH handbook of infant mental health, volume 1. 1999), 245.

¹² Femmie Juffer et al., "IQ of children growing up in children's homes: A meta-analysis on IQ delays in orphanages," (Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, volume 54, issue 3, 2008), 341.

stimulation means that the essential neurological processes within the brain are sometimes never triggered, causing brain stunting and low IQs. Additionally, the lack of toys, play facilities, and developmental education leave children with reduced motor skills and language abilities.¹³

Institutions are not only harmful to a child's physical development; they are harmful to their emotional developmental as well. Children who are raised in institutions frequently suffer from attachment disorders. According to Better Care Network; in terms of emotional attachment, even "good quality" institutional care can have a detrimental effect on children's ability to form relationships throughout life.¹⁴ "Children in orphanages frequently grow up with a series of caregivers, many of whom do not spend enough time with each child to form strong attachments."¹⁵ This is only made worse by the influx of volunteers, who only stay for a short period of time, contributing to the child's feelings of abandonment.

Volunteer Tourism

At the crossroads of volunteering and tourism is volunteer tourism, otherwise known as "voluntourism." Volunteer tourism is a growing phenomenon that allows travelers to give back to the destination they are visiting. "Voluntourists" typically stay with a host family or community as opposed to a resort, and engage in projects such as teaching, conservation, child care, community development, and healthcare. While construction and conservation are activities that voluntourists routinely engage in, projects including children and orphanages are the most popular.¹⁶ "Volunteer tourism relies heavily on cross-sector collaboration, and typically

¹³ Save the Children, "Keeping Children out of Harmful Institutions," (2009), 15.

¹⁴ Kevin Browne, "The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Institutional Care," (2009), 13.

¹⁵ Stahili Foundation, "The Harm of Growing up in Institutionalized Care," May 3, 2017, <http://www.stahili.org/harm-growing-institutional-care/>.

¹⁶ Martha Honey, "Travelers Philanthropy Handbook," (2011), Chapter 3.

involves people traveling from developed countries to developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.¹⁷ International volunteering has become increasingly popular with college students, especially those taking a “gap year,” a period, typically an academic year taken by a student as a break between secondary school and higher education.¹⁸ It has also become popular for the Baby Boomer generation who are now entering their retirement years. A study conducted by A Conde Nast Traveler’s shows that 86% of volunteer tourists believe that voluntourism benefits both the traveler and the destination, and 75% of those who had volunteered are “very likely” to do so again.

Volunteering abroad, however, comes at a very high cost. Travel agencies have taken advantage of the new popularity of voluntourism, and serve as the middle-man between volunteer and host country for a very lofty price. Organizations such as Projects Abroad, Frontier, and United Planet charge in the thousands for as little as 2 weeks of volunteering. Agencies defend their prices by offering lodging, airport pick-up, and “cultural activities.”¹⁹ In an interview with Projects Abroad, they admitted that only 29% of the price goes to the direct cost of the volunteer experience (accommodations, transportation, and resources) where 49% of the cost goes to the travel agency itself for things such as recruitment, taxes, and staff.²⁰ Below is a graph showing how much each travel organization charges for volunteering for 2 weeks at a local orphanage. In 2008, it was estimated that the value of volunteer tourists globally was approximately \$2 billion, and there was an average of 1.6 voluntourists a year.²¹

¹⁷ Kristin Lamoureux, “Voluntourism: An Overview,” (CREST, 2011), 99.

¹⁸ Random House dictionary, s.v. “gap year,” accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/gap-year>.

¹⁹ “Your Comprehensive Quest Fee Includes,” United Planet, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-abroad/short-term>.

²⁰ “Questions about Money,” Projects Abroad, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://www.projects-abroad.org/how-it-works/questions-about-money/>.

²¹ Next Generation Nepal, “Orphanage Trafficking and Orphanage Voluntourism,” (2014), 3.

Name of organization	Volunteer destination	Cost for 2 weeks
Projects Abroad	Romania	\$2990
A Broader View	Costa Rica	\$1025
Frontier	Cambodia	\$1045
Global Vision International	Nepal	\$1700
United Planet	Ghana	\$2595

Figure 2.

While most volunteer tourists go into their experience with good intentions and a full heart, there have been many critiques about the harms of volunteer tourism. Volunteering abroad has been advertised as a resume-builder, and an easy way to give back; because of this, “volunteering placements are seen to be increasingly designed with the convenience and motivation of volunteer tourists in mind, rather than on the needs of the local communities they assert to be supporting.”²² In fact, volunteers can actually be doing more harm than good, especially when working with children. Orphanages have transformed from a safe home for children, into a money-making business operation- and volunteer tourism is in part, to blame. While not all orphanage operators are corrupt, many are well versed in the economic potential of the industry and have turned to orphanage tourism to make a profit.²³ According to UNICEF, “In some cases, residential care facilities are being used to raise money in a way that begins to

²² Jenny Morgan, “Volunteer Tourism: What are the benefits for international development?” (Voluntourists Newsletter, 2009). volume 6, issue 2.

²³ Robert Carmichael, “Cambodia’s Orphanages Target the Wallets of Well-Meaning Tourists,” *The Independent*, March 25, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/cambodias-orphanages-target-the-wallets-of-well-meaning-tourists-2252471.html>.

resemble a business. Tourism generates funds that are often unmonitored and therefore more susceptible to corruption.”²⁴ The most common funds given to orphanages through tourists are cash donations, and therefore unrecorded. Disturbingly, a study conducted by UNICEF found that less than 1/3 of the profits made by the orphanage actually goes to child care.²⁵

The Harms of Orphanage Voluntourism

Orphanage-businesses are highly aware of the profits gained by tourism, and know exactly how to pull on the heart strings of foreigners and volunteers. In fact, many orphanages set up their homes in popular tourist destinations in order to increase donations given by tourists. Of the registered orphanages and children’s homes in Nepal, 90% are located in the five main tourist districts, out of a total of 75 districts across the country.²⁶ Next Generation Nepal, an organization that reconnects trafficked Nepalese children with their families, has received reports of orphanage deliberately keeping children in destitute or unhealthy conditions to attract more and larger financial donations.²⁷ This can include not feeding the children proper meals, not allowing the children to bathe, and not providing the children with appropriate sleeping conditions, even if they have enough money to do so. By presenting these “orphan” children in this way, the orphanage owners can ‘make a strong case to sympathetic and compassionate volunteers for financial and material support.’²⁸ In most cases, the motivation of the orphanage director is not in the best interest of the children, but to simply make a profit.

²⁴ UNICEF, “A Study of Attitudes Towards Residential Care in Cambodia” (2011), 65.

²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁶ Next Generation Nepal, “The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering: combating child trafficking through ethical voluntourism,” (2014), 14.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Next Generation Nepal, “Orphanage Trafficking and Orphanage Voluntourism: frequently asked questions,” (2015).

When volunteers visit an orphanage, they expect children to be constantly available to them. In many cases, orphanages intentionally keep children out of school to entertain tourists.²⁹ Instead of school, volunteers spend the day playing with the children, and can even take a child away for the day or the night.³⁰ Not only that, some orphanages force the children to put on song and dance performances every day to entertain and gain more money from volunteers. While most volunteers come home with selfies with the orphans, some can also come home with t-shirts, bracelets, and other souvenirs with the name of the orphanage on it, sold at the orphanage gift shop.³¹

Volunteer tourism is increasing the demand for orphans, and incentivizes those involved in the orphanage industry to bring children from villages to orphanages in the city and tourist areas.³² The dramatic growth of orphanages despite the decrease in the actual number of orphans, raises concerns about the ethics of orphanages, particularly those in tourist destinations. A specific example of this is in Cambodia, where the number of orphans has reduced dramatically, but the number of orphanages continues to increase. UNICEF found that there was a 75% increase in orphanages between 2005 to 2010, going from 154 centers to 296.³³

International Human Rights Law

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a human rights treaty that outlines the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the child. The CRC was

²⁹ Daniela Papi, "Why you Should say No to Orphanage Tourism," *Huffington Post*, November 20, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniela-papi/cambodia-orphanages-_b_2164385.html.

³⁰ Hanna Tuovinen, "Shadows of Voluntourism and the Connection to Orphanage Business in Asian and Cambodia," (Thesis, HAAGA University of Applied Sciences, 2014), 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

adopted by the General Assembly in 1989, and has been ratified by 195 countries, making it the mostly widely ratified international human rights treaty in history.³⁴ At the heart of problem with volunteer tourism, is that it is encouraging the separation of child and family. In the preamble of the CRC, it states that. “the family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children.”³⁵ It also states the CRC “recognizes that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment.”³⁶ This is reiterated in Article 7, acknowledging the child’s right ‘to know and be cared for by his or her parents.’³⁷ As well as in article 8 respecting the right of the child “to preserve his or her identity... including name and family relations.”³⁸

While the CRC makes it clear that being raised in a family-setting is in the best interest of the child, it also requires the State to ensure that parents and legal guardians receive the assistance they require to be able to adequately care for their child. In many cases, a child will be given to an orphanage because their family can no longer care for them financially. In accordance to international human rights law, “state parties shall render appropriate assistance to the parents... in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities.”³⁹ Similarly, if biological parents are not able to care for their children, extended family or other family care arrangements are to be made, using residential care facilities as a last resort.

The separation of child and family is not the only part of the CRC that orphanages

³⁴ United Nations, “UN Lauds Somalia as Country Ratifies Landmark Children’s Rights Treaty, *UN News Centre*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49845#.WnuUh2aZPEY>.

³⁵ UN General Assembly Convention on the Rights of the Child, preamble, (1989).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, preamble.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, article 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, article 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, article 18.

violate. Many children in orphanages are subjected to physical violence, neglect, and maltreatment, in violation of article 19. When children are kept out of school to entertain foreign volunteers, it is a violation of every child's right to education (article 28). Most specifically, State parties "recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing work that is likely to... interfere with the child's education or to be harmful to the child's healthy or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development."⁴⁰ This occurs when children are used to beg for donations, when children are forced to sing and dance to gain money from volunteers, when children are kept out of school to entertain foreigners, and when children are purposely kept in destitute conditions in order to gain more sympathy from donors.

⁴⁰ Ibid., article 32.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Research regarding the harms of institutional care of children began as early as 1945 with the work of Rene Spitz and William Goldfarb. Their research focused on the developmental consequences of extreme deprivation in infancy, and was followed by later research on children ages 0-3. Goldfarb was the first to conduct an experiment comparing fifteen children raised in an institution and those raised in foster care. His conclusion was clear. “Babies should be kept out of institutions.”⁴¹ By the 1960s, many developed countries began transitioning from orphanages to family-based care. In a study by UNICEF’s Innocenti Research Center, *Children in Institutions: Beginning of the End?* describes the transition that the United States, Italy, Spain, and Chile made by “addressing the underlying causes of family separation, including poverty and a lack of access to basic services, to become better able to provide targeted, community-based alternatives to children in need.”⁴² Additional research by the journal of children and poverty shows. “resources committed to institutions can be more effectively used to combat poverty if provided the alternative, community support to children and families.”⁴³

Although the history of child institutionalization and the causes of parental abandonment are important topics for my thesis, this literature review will focus on two main questions. How does volunteer tourism impact the orphanage business system? Would volunteers be interested in family reunification and family strengthening if presented these options?

According to literature by Alexandra Coghlan and Steve Noakes, voluntourism is a billion-dollar industry (worth about \$173 billion annually) with 1.6 million travelers donating

⁴¹ Kim Maclean, *The Impact of Institutionalization on Child Development*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 853.

⁴² UNICEF, “Children in Institutions: Beginning of the End,” (2003), 5.

⁴³ Andy Bilson, “Caring about poverty,” *Journal of Children and Poverty* 12, no.1 (Feb 22, 2007): 49, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10796120601171294>.

annually.⁴⁴ Most voluntourists come from Western Europe and North America, as a way for the “rich” to help the “poor.” Initially, academic literature on voluntourism described its positive aspects, such as in Stoddart and Rogerson (2004). Literature by Lyons and Wearing agree stating, “the increase in voluntourism programs should be seen as a positive change towards a more sustainable and responsible form of tourism.”⁴⁵ However, Clifton and Benson argue that “Because a community is hosting volunteer work, it does not mean that the community benefits from it.”⁴⁶ UNICEF makes their opinion clear. “Volunteers are not helping, but supporting institutions that should not exist.”⁴⁷ Literature from Better Care Networks understands that well-meaning donors only see the benefits of contributing to both residential care and impoverished children, and it is harder to see both the long-term negative consequences and the alternatives.⁴⁸

A gap in the literature revolving volunteer tourism to orphanages is the statistical details on how much volunteers pay to work at an orphanage; how much money the travel agency makes vs. how much money the orphanage makes, and where the money is spent. The only study available that touches on this subject was published by Tourist Studies. This research shows that for-profit international tourism organizations that send volunteers to orphanages give only a minimum of the revenue to the orphanage, the majority of it is retained by large international organizations, and volunteers are unaware of this.⁴⁹ They hypothesize that the money given to the orphanages may not be going to the orphans, but the directors and their families. Another gap includes the psychological impact of orphaned children with the constant overturn of volunteers.

⁴⁴ Alexandra Coghlan, “Towards an Understanding of the Drivers of Commercialisation in the Volunteer Tourism Sector,” *Tourism Recreation Research*, (January 12, 2015), 37.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02508281.2012.11081697?journalCode=rtrr20#.VZ_GO_IVhBc.

⁴⁵ Kevin Lyons, “Journeys of Discovery in Volunteer Tourism,” (2008), 48.

⁴⁶ Daniel Guttentag, “The Possible Negative Impacts of Volunteer Tourism,” (2009), 544.

⁴⁷ Tuovinen, “Shadows of voluntourism,” (2014), 35.

⁴⁸ Better Care Network, “Families not Orphanages,” (2010), 12.

⁴⁹ Tess Guiney, “The Political Economy of Orphanage Tourism,” (2014), 143.

The most relevant study on the impact of orphanage tourism comes from Richter and Norman in 2010. In their research on “AIDS orphan tourism” in Africa, they documented the negative impact that short-term western volunteers have on the social and psychological development of children, especially in terms of attachment.⁵⁰

One of the main questions I seek to answer is, “Why do orphanages continue to exist?” I hypothesize that volunteer tourism is one of the main economic factors keeping the orphanage business alive. According to Richard Bridle from UNICEF, the number of orphans in Cambodia has decreased, but the number of orphanages has increased from 153 to 269 during the years 2007 to 2012.⁵¹ In the literature by Tourist Studies, orphanages are able to make a profit due to a lack of regulation by authorities. Guiney and Mostafanezhad state, “the funds given to orphanages by tourists do not go through any official channels in most cases (and are largely unrecorded cash donation) therefore they are not governed by formal charity or policies.”⁵² In my search to find out how orphanages make so much money through donations, I came across the literature of Ana Baranova. Baranova claims many orphanages advertise themselves to tourists via hotels, guesthouses, shops, and through brochures.⁵³ Some even send children to busy tourist areas to seek out tourists willing to donate. Finally, research from Guiney (2012) states that some orphanages force the children to host cultural performances every night, in order to attract visitors who will give donations, and keep them out of school in order to entertain

⁵⁰ Linda Richter, “AIDS Orphan Tourism: A Threat to Young Children in Residential Care,” (2010), 225.

⁵¹ Helen Davidson, “Cambodia: Child Protection Workers call for an End to Orphanage Tourism,” *The Guardian*, (January 2, 2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/02/cambodia-child-protection-workers-call-for-end-to-booming-orphanage-tourism>.

⁵² Guiney, “The Political Economy,” (2014), 141.

⁵³ Anna Baranova, “Rethinking the Dangerous Practice of Orphanage Tourism,” (2012). <http://pepyempoweringyouth.org/rethinking-the-dangerous-practice-of-orphanage-tourism>.

tourists.⁵⁴ Carmichael (2011) reminds us that not all orphanages are corrupt, but many have used the economic potential of the industry in order to turn their orphanage into a money-making business.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Tuovinen, "Shadows of voluntourism," (2014), 38.

⁵⁵ Carmichael, "Cambodia's Orphanages," (2011).

Chapter 3: Case Studies

Volunteering at an orphanage is not the only way that one can support the orphanage-business system. Child sponsorship programs, orphanage sponsorship programs, adopting children from orphanages, and gap-year programs are all activities that can have negative consequences. These case studies show how through seemingly altruistic volunteer opportunities that do not involve going to an orphanage, people are still contributing to the separation of child and family.

Sponsoring a Child

Many people want to help support a poor child in the third world, but sponsoring a child is not the right way. There are over 1 million people in the west now sponsoring a child, each giving around \$20 a month.⁵⁶ By sponsoring a child, the donor can actually be doing more harm than good.

Focusing on one single child means that agencies single out children and families for preferential treatment.⁵⁷ One child in the family may receive extra education, clothes, and medical treatment, while other family members do not. This can cause jealousy and resentment within the family, and isolate the sponsored child. On the other hand, a child who has not been sponsored might feel left out among his or her sponsored friends. This can cause long-term emotional damage as well as feelings of insecurity and low self-worth.

Additionally, sponsoring one child does not fix the larger problems in the community. For example, a sponsor might pay for extra food for a child, but that does not address the poverty in the community. A child sponsor may pay for education for a child; instead, if money went

⁵⁶ Peter Stalker, "Please, do not sponsor this child," *New Internationalist*, (May1, 1982) <https://newint.org/features/1982/05/01/keynote>.

⁵⁷ Chantelle Baxter, "How Child Sponsorship Works and Why We Won't Do It," *One Girl*, (February 3, 2014), <https://www.onegirl.org.au/challenges/how-child-sponsorship-works-and-why-we-wont-do-it>.

towards infrastructure, transportation, and teachers, more than one child's education would benefit.

Finally, Child sponsorship programs are expensive. It is said that more money is spent for the benefit of the donor rather than the benefit of the child.⁵⁸ Melvin Van de Workeen, executive director of National Information Bureau, suggests that administrative and fundraising costs total 30 percent or more of a donor's dollar, "then the child or community is getting an unreasonably low amount."⁵⁹ Child-sponsorship schemes perpetuate the myth that a single child's fortune can be changed by a monthly donation. This is an attractive idea to the Westerner, but all you are really paying for is a picture to put on your fridge.

Case Study: Happy Home Orphanage

Location: Kathmandu, Nepal

Volunteer Moria Waterfall was taking a hike one day in Kathmandu, Nepal, when she recognized one of the children from the orphanage. The young girl was with her mother, which shocked Mora, "to my knowledge, the majority of these children were orphans," she said. The woman frantically explained to Moria that orphanage director Bishwa Archarya was stealing from them, and physically abusing the children there. She spread word among the other volunteers, and eventually brought a case against Bishwa Archarya, who was found guilty of severe child neglect.

⁵⁸ Emilie Livezey, "Child Sponsorship Donors; How Much Goes to Him?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, (August 6, 1981), <https://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0806/080657.html>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, (1981).

Happy Home Orphanage is located in Kathmandu, one of the main tourist destinations in Nepal. While some orphanages in Nepal are legitimate, an estimated 90 percent of them are located in the main tourist hubs, and open their homes to foreign volunteers. After volunteering for a few weeks, Moria Waterfall wanted to do more to help the children at the orphanage. She started fundraising money from donors in the U.S. and encouraged individuals and companies to sponsor children. Once she realized that the children at Happy Home were being physically abused and neglected, she cut off all funding immediately.

Dorota Nvotva, a Slovakian tourist, began volunteering at Happy Home orphanage in 2008. She was so moved by the children, that she started a campaign and found a sponsor for every single one. She raised over \$17,000 for the orphanage, before realizing that the money was going to the orphanage director, and not towards child care. She reported that the children were deprived of using donated toys and blankets, and that the donation money was being spent on Archarya's family rather than the children's basic needs such as food, plumbing, and hygiene.

Moria and Dorota were two of the many volunteers and families who filed a complaint against director Bishwa Archarya. Including Lojung Sherpa, who found out her children were living in different hostels around the Valley, and registered as orphans or abandoned. She accused Archarya of fraud and kidnapping when she was denied visitation or the location of her children. In 2014, Archarya and his wife were convicted of inflicting 'sever torture' on two girls, and ordered to pay \$660 each. Archarya only spent 11 months in Jail, and one year later, re-opened his orphanage. He currently has nearly 100 children in his care.

Happy Homes is still asking for volunteers to sponsor their children. On their website, nepalhappyhome.org, there is a picture of and description of every child. A call to volunteers says, "Your financial help will go directly to our children's education, food, and house rent." On

the website, there is also a direct link to a bank account with the account name, number and address. Happy Homes also has a facebook page, where they post pictures and call upon volunteers to visit, donate, or sponsor a child.

There is currently a petition against the orphanage which states, “We all call on you to take an action and help the children of Happy Home orphanage in Kathmandu, Nepal. We strongly protest against the abuse and how the children are treated by the appropriators. We call on you to follow the Convention of the Rights of the Child ratified by Nepal in 1990 and remove them from the fake orphanage that ignores the children’s rights!”

Sponsoring an Orphanage

In the New Testament, James 1:21 states, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." This quote is widely used in the Christian community to encourage congregations to sponsor or build orphanages abroad. Unfortunately, these religious organizations are uneducated about the harms of institutionalizing children. They are also unaware that by building or sponsoring an orphanage, they are contributing to the orphan crisis, and they are taking children away from their families.

Churches are eager to build an orphanage and fill it with as many children possible, but they do not consider the consequences. One in particular, is the distress a child faces once they “age-out” of care. Children who leave an orphanage at age 16, 17, or 18, are more likely to fall into drugs, prostitution, and suicide. Without the support of a family, these children do not know how to survive on their own or provide for themselves. While orphanages focus on the immediate care of the child, they do not prepare the child for life outside of the orphanage.

A church might sponsor or build an orphanage for many reasons. One reason is to provide a destination for mission groups and congregation volunteers to visit. Another reason is because they are motivated by the heroic image of putting their name on an orphanage. Building an orphanage looks good on paper, and can be the leading factor in a church's decision. The International Cooperating Ministries (ICM) Christian Alliance encourages all churches to build congregations and religious orphanages around the world. When a church partners with ICM they commit to planting five daughter congregations in three years, in the form of either a traditional church building or a church orphanage.⁶⁰

The Village Church, an Evangelical Presbyterian church raised \$250,000 to build an orphanage in Sudan. Their slogan was, "Get Hip and Help Build an Orphanage."⁶¹ To raise some of this money, the Village Church partnered with Collision records and released a song on iTunes, where the profits went to building the orphanage. The Jesse Lee United Methodist Church in Connecticut has their own foundation called "Foundation 4 Orphans," their motto is, "building an orphanage in Mozambique one brick at a time." The website states that the orphanage will house 48 children who "currently live on the streets because both parents and their adult relatives are dead."⁶²

The organization Life Song for Orphans makes it easy for a church to "adopt an orphanage." The program promotes yearly mission trips to meet the children, encourages members to write letters to the children to point them to Jesus, to financially support the

⁶⁰ "Get Involved," International Cooperating Ministries, accessed on November 2, 2017, <https://icm.org>.

⁶⁰ Matt Chandler, "Get Hip and Help Build an Orphanage," (November 16, 2010),

⁶¹ Matt Chandler, "Get Hip and Help Build an Orphanage," (November 16, 2010), <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/articles/get-hip-and-help-build-an-orphanage>.

⁶² "Supporting Four Foundations for Care of Orphans," Foundation For Orphans, (April 25, 2016), <http://f4o.org/our-mission/>.

orphanage, and to assist in fundraising campaigns. With one click of a button, a church can begin giving their money to an orphanage in need.

After the recent earthquake in Haiti, the number of orphanages run into the hundreds. In one Google search for “Christian orphanage Haiti,” six orphanages (For his glory, God’s little angels, Love a Child, Cazeau Christian Orphanage, Thomazeau Christian orphanage, and House of Hope Haiti) all show up on the first page.

The religious community must be educated on the realities of orphan children, and how their work might be harming children worldwide instead of helping them. The most important facts that a church should know before sponsoring or building an orphanage are:

1. Most of the children who live there have (or will have) at least one living parent.
2. Institutionalization should be the last resort for children without care, and causes severe physical, emotional, and mental damages.
3. The creation of new orphanages creates a demand for more orphans, separating children from families with false promises of food, care, and education.
4. It costs much less to support families and family-strengthening practices than it does to support an orphanage, and allows a child to stay in the care of their families.

Case Study: Love in Action orphanage

Location: Phnom Penh, Cambodia

In May 2013, Love in Action orphanage (LIA) was shut down after allegations of child abuse and neglect. Reports from an inspection showed that, “some of the children were visibly ill and not taken to a doctor, the facility was dirty, sewage was blocked, and the living quarters were

overcrowded.”⁶³ 21 children, some as young as one-year-old, were taken away after children reported to the authorities that they were being physically beaten by the orphanage director.

Love in Action was a Christian orphanage run by Ruth Golder, an Australian woman, who admitted that her orphanage was not registered, and she had no legal authority to take care of the children. The orphanage, with links to the Christian Outreach Centre in Australia, had operated illegally for years, and received the entirety of its funding from church groups and donations. Love in Action was personally sponsored by at least 5 Australian Christian organizations, and was constantly receiving money from foreign volunteers.

Tyrone Peterson, an American missionary who lived in Phnom Penh met Ruth Golder in late 2012. Tyrone reported, “I’ve never seen anybody running an NGO, let alone a faith-based NGO, living in a house like this; it was something I would have expected a high-level executive to live in.”⁶⁴ He also said that Golder’s house had four levels, floor-to-ceiling glass windows, and western toilets, while the children’s home had barely any furniture and one old toilet.

After the children were taken from LIA orphanage, medical tests showed that many of the children had lice infections. Three children had untreated tuberculosis, and a five-month-old baby was severely malnourished. The report also shows that five of seven boys under six had anemia, and one had developmental delays. Ruth Golder claimed that she always treated her children if they had health problems, but one volunteer who spent five months at LIA observed that a child with tuberculosis had not seen a doctor the entire time he was there.

“The closing of Love in Action marks the first time the Cambodian criminal justice and social services have used due process to close an institution on short notice,” an official

⁶³ “Cambodia Shuts Orphanage after Reported Abuse,” *USA Today*, (March 25, 2013), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/03/25/cambodia-shuts-orphanage-after-reported-abuse/2017279/>.

⁶⁴ Stephanie Wood, “Dodge City,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (February 15, 2014), <http://www.smh.com.au/national/dodge-city-20140209-32amy.html>.

statement from SISHA reported. “The shutdown is a massive step forward, demonstrating the Cambodian government’s increased capacity to deal with abusive orphanages”⁶⁵

The Christian Adoption Movement

Beginning in the mid 2000s, Christian leaders took a vast interest in adoption. Motivated by the bible passage James 1:27, churches began to preach about adoption, and encouraged their parish to adopt foreign children. A prominent voice in this moment was Evangelical pastor Rick Warren, who argued that Christians are uniquely called by god to solve the “orphan crisis” of the world.⁶⁶

Churches began to create adoption ministries, and adoption funds. Evangelical adoption funds would give grants or interest-free loans to couples trying to adopt. By 2009, the Christian Alliance for Orphans encompassed over 100 nonprofits around “orphan care.”⁶⁷ The Southern Baptist Convention even passed a resolution direction all members to consider whether God was calling on them to adopt. In 2010 Bethany Christian Services, the largest adoption agency in the country, reported a 26 percent increase in the number of adoptions which they stated was “largely due to the mobilization of Christians newly interested in adopting.”⁶⁸

While the amount of people wanting to adopt was increasing, the amount of children up for adoption both domestically and internationally was decreasing rapidly. While there were many children in need of adoption, the majority of them were not healthy infants, but children

⁶⁵ William Jackson, “Local Trafficking NGO Denies Financial Misconduct,” *Cambodia Daily*, (August 17, 2013), <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/local-trafficking-ngo-denies-financial-misconduct-39947/>.

⁶⁶ Kathryn Joyce, “The Evangelical Orphan Boom,” *New York Times*, (September 21, 2013), <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/22/opinion/sunday/the-evangelical-orphan-boom.html>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, (2013).

⁶⁸ Kathryn Joyce, “The Trouble with the Christian Adoption Movement,” *New Republic*, (January 11, 2016), <https://newrepublic.com/article/127311/trouble-christian-adoption-movement>.

older than 5 and kids with special needs.⁶⁹ The U.S. adoption demand was and still is for healthy babies and younger children, which results in dishonest agencies and adoption fraud. Adopting a child internationally can cost up to \$40,000 in adoption fees,⁷⁰ and in order to make this money, adoption agencies must meet the demand for healthy babies, rather than true orphans. This orphan market leads to children being taken from their families, trafficking, and even kidnapping. Specifically, in African nations, a cultural misunderstanding about adoption resulted in thousands of children being separated from their families and sent to live in foreign countries.⁷¹ In Africa, adoption is often misconstrued as temporary guardianship instead of permanently giving away a child. Because of this, many children are offered up for adoption with the belief they will come back. This also happens when a family sends a child to an orphanage, expecting to get them back at a later date, only to find they have been adopted out.

Case Study: The Sibsby Child Abduction Scandal

Location: Haiti

On January 21, 2010 a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti, killing more than 200,000 people, and leaving some 380,000 children on the streets or in an orphanage.⁷² Within one month, an estimated 300 children were already adopted into to new families in the U.S. and Canada.⁷³ To speed up adoptions even further, the White House approved a fast-track system by lifting visa

⁶⁹ Ibid., (2016).

⁷⁰ Ibid., (2016).

⁷¹ Ibid., (2016).

⁷² “Haiti Quake Creates Thousands of New Orphans,” *NBC News*, (January 19, 2010), http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34934553/ns/world_news-haiti/t/haiti-quake-creates-thousands-new-orphans/#.WnsO6maZPEY.

⁷³ Howard LaFranchi, “Haiti Earthquake Reignites Debate over Fast-Tracking Adoptions,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (January 10, 2010), <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2010/0125/Haiti-earthquake-reignites-debate-over-fast-tracking-adoptions>.

requirements. With this immigration program, called humanitarian parole, children could be adopted without the required screening required to make sure they had not been improperly separated from their relatives.⁷⁴

Three weeks after the earthquake, Haitian authorities arrested ten U.S. Baptist missionaries for attempting to take 33 children by bus across the border into the Dominican Republic. Laura Silsby, the leader of the organization New Life Children's Refugee, had planned to take the children to her newly built orphanage. She described her orphanage as "a loving Christian home-like environment," but her intent, according to her online action plan, was to place the children up for international adoption. When Silsby and the others could not produce proper paperwork for the children, they were arrested and charged with child kidnapping and criminal association. The Social Welfare Ministry of Haiti verified all 33 of the children's identities, and they were all returned to their families. This confirms that none of the children taken by Silsby were orphans.

During Silsby's court case, it came to attention that Silsby's legal advisor, Jorge Torres-Puello, was linked to a network that trafficked Haitian and Central American children into the United States. He was arrested in March of 2010 for sex trafficking, conspiracy, and fraud. In April, Laura Silsby's kidnapping charges were dropped and she was instead charged with arranging illegal travel. By May, she and all other missionaries were released.

Gap-Year Programs

Spending a gap-year or a gap-semester volunteering abroad is a popular trend for teenagers and young adults. Many students take the time in-between high school and college to

⁷⁴ Ibid., (2010).

travel and “find themselves.” However, while they may spend part of their time abroad volunteering, the main focus of their time is prioritized on their own experience, and often times not the experience of those they are serving.

The gap-year was a tradition that started in Britain in the 1960s, and became a rite of passage for young people in Western nations to visit and volunteer in poor countries. But gap-year volunteering is more about the privileged tourist than about actually helping underprivileged communities.⁷⁵ Ethan Knight, executive director and founder of American Gap Association said, “While the hope is for the local students to interact and learn from these communities, there is a decent chance that the project isn’t part of a larger vision for the community, thus leading to a much reduced benefit if at all.”⁷⁶

Due to the high cost of gap year programs, these opportunities are limited to upper- class families. The significant difference in social status between the volunteer and the community can cause confusion, especially when working with vulnerable children and orphans. Ella Dickieson, who spent four years at an orphanage in Botswana said, “I felt as though everyone wanted a profile picture of themselves with orphans in Africa, like it was a check off their bucket list.” The idea that financially wealthier people have the right to introduce themselves into a community where they don’t speak the language, do not understand the culture, and do not have any skills or qualifications, is the main problem with the idea of gap-year voluntourism.

The main problem is that gap-year volunteer programs can cause significant emotional damage to the children. When a volunteer spends months, or even weeks at an orphanage, the children form an attachment. This causes grief and anxiety every time a different volunteer

⁷⁵ Sara Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price: college costs, financial aid, and the betrayal of the American Dream*, (2016), chapter 2.

⁷⁶ Vikram Barhat, *Is Gap-year volunteering a luxury for the rich?* BBC, (2016), accessed on October 12, 2017.

leaves with whom they have formed a bond. “During the course of a child’s short life growing up at an orphanage, they may form and break emotional bonds with hundreds of different volunteers that come and go like visitors to a zoo,” says non-profit Next Generation Nepal.⁷⁷ This leads to attachment disorders and an incapability of forming healthy relationships later in life. In an article, “*From Orphanage Volunteering to Ethical Volunteering*” country director Martin Punkas shared this quote from a young boy who spent his childhood in an orphanage.

“There were so many volunteers: short-time, long-time, middle-time. Sometimes they organize program and I don’t want to go. Children sometimes feel angry because they want to do what they want. There is a nice movie and children they want to watch, but volunteers organize a football program and house managers say you have to go. Why foreigners come to Nepal? Why do they go in orphanage? That time they come for short time and they give love to us, but then they leave, and when I write they don’t reply. I say to a volunteer, ‘Sister, I am very lonely’, and they say, ‘No problem I am here’, but then they go their country and I write but they don’t reply. When I was little everyone can love me, now I am big and I need love.”

- Karjit⁷⁸

Case Study: International Language Program

Location: Iasi, Romania

The International Language Program, based out of Orem Utah, offers students the opportunity to travel to foreign countries and help children learn English. While this program is praised for building schools and providing school supplies, it is condemned for offering semester-long orphanage trips.

The International Language Program promotes itself as “a non-profit organization that arranges for young adults to have a life-changing semester abroad volunteering around the

⁷⁷ Martin Punkas, *From Orphanage Volunteering to Ethical Volunteering*, Next Generation Nepal, (2016), accessed on October 12, 2017.

⁷⁸ Ibid., accessed on October 12, 2017.

world.”⁷⁹ The problem with this is that the focus is on the positive experience of the volunteer and not on the experience of the child. In fact, in Romania, the International Language Program does not even teach the children English. Instead, it offers the opportunity to “hold babies,” “crawl around with young children,” and “play games with the older children.”⁸⁰ Similarly, the ILO presents three reasons why you should spend your gap-year abroad with them; “Find yourself,” “explore another country,” and “build your resume.” For the hefty price of \$5470, ILO is entirely focused on creating a positive trip for the client, at the expense of vulnerable children.

"It's not a glamorous European vacation like it sometimes looks on my Instagram or from my pictures. It's really hard work emotionally and physically and doing it every day is not always easy. As happy as they make me, sometimes my heart breaks for them. But it's the love and hugs and break-through that make it more than worth it. The things you don't see from my photos. The special little quiet moments with the kids and the change happening inside myself. Even the trying times where they won't stop crying or are in pain or sick or sad. I get to be the one to help them and be there for them. Being that person who can help these kids know love is an honor. I feel extremely honored."

– International Language Program volunteer Emma Pussey.

As shown in this statement from a recent ILP volunteer, Emma speaks only about how the orphanage affected her. She mentions it was “really hard work” and “my heart breaks for them.” This excludes the feelings of the children who live at the orphanage every day, and do not

⁷⁹ International Language Program, *The ILP Story*, (2017), accessed on October 14, 2017.

⁸⁰ International Language Program, *The Orphanage Program in Romania*, (2017) accessed on October 14, 2017.

get to leave after only a few months. Emma feels “honored” to “be that person who can help these kids know love” This is an example of the “western savior complex” and lack of education about the harms of orphanage tourism that continues to make orphanage volunteering a profitable business.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the mind of the volunteer. This study interviews 15 women who have volunteered abroad at an orphanage, and questions whether or not they viewed their impact as positive or negative. This study also questions whether or not the volunteer would do it again, after hearing 5 facts about the harms of orphanage tourism. Finally, this study aims to find out if a participant who previously volunteered at an orphanage would be interested in an alternative volunteer opportunity if it was provided to them.

Research Design

I used a qualitative research approach for this study. Qualitative research seeks to explore, explain, and understand a phenomena.⁸¹ For this study I am seeking to understand the phenomena of volunteer tourism. I chose to use a qualitative research approach because I wanted to gather information in the form of a narrative, through interviews and analysis. Qualitative research asks open ended questions⁸² which I asked in order to explore what drives people to volunteer at an orphanage and how they perceive their experience. “A phenomenological research study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation.”⁸³ In this study, I used a phenomenological approach in order to understand how people perceived their volunteer experience.

⁸¹ Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, “Qualitative Research,” (Grand Canyon University 2010), https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/qualitative.

⁸² Ibid., (2010).

⁸³ Van Manen, “Researching Lived Experiences: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy,” (1990), Chapter 1: Human Science.

There are several strengths to phenomenological research. It provides a detailed description of a human experience through in-depth interviews. “Another strength of phenomenology is that the results emerge from the data, instead of being imposed by a structured statistical analysis.”⁸⁴ This was the appropriate strategy to use for my research because I used a small sample population (15 volunteers) and my primary data collection method was an interview using open-ended questions.

The disadvantages of this type of research method was the prevention of research induced bias. I tried to avoid this through statements that were as neutral as possible as well as clarifying that I did not feel positively or negatively about the issue. The other disadvantage is that, because of my small sample size, it is hard to claim that my results produce generalizable data.

Participants

15 subjects participated in this research study. All of the respondents were female and between the ages of 20 and 25. 5 participants volunteered abroad under the age of 20 and 10 volunteered at the age of 20 or older. In order to find my participants, I used a purposive sampling technique. “A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study.”⁸⁵

Site

Data was collected in a quiet space via telephone or facetime. The actors were the 15 females who had volunteered abroad at an orphanage. The participants were interviewed about

⁸⁴ Natalie Boyd, “Phenomenological Design: definition, advantages, and limitations,” (2017), <https://study.com/academy/lesson/phenomenological-design-definition-advantages-limitations.html>.

⁸⁵ Ashley Crossman, “Understanding Purposive Sampling,” (2017), <https://www.thoughtco.com/purposive-sampling-3026727>.

their experience at the orphanage, as well as asked questions about their knowledge on the harms of orphanage tourism. Questionnaires were given to participants before their interview to gather general data and in order to tailor their interview to their personal experience. Interviews and questionnaires were the two types of data that were collected.

I chose interviews to be my main source of data collection because this method allows participants to elaborate and go more in-depth about their experience, which is not possible in methods such as survey research. Also, with an interview, a participant can share information in their own words rather than limited response options.⁸⁶ The negative aspect about interviews is that it relies heavily on the participant being honest, and being able to accurately recall detailed information. Additionally, as mentioned before, there is the potential for research induced bias when interviewing a participant.

Recruitment

A purposeful sampling procedure (Seaberg 1985) was used in the selection of research participants; I only wanted participants who had volunteered at an orphanage abroad. In order to recruit participants, I posted an ad on facebook, twitter, and Instagram. I also reached out to friends to post on their social media. The post stated the following; “Volunteers needed for a graduate research thesis! If you or someone you know has volunteered abroad at an orphanage or child care institution and are willing to answer a questionnaire and participate in a short interview, please contact Holly Havens at heh2126@columbia.edu.” In addition to social media, a similar email was used as a recruitment technique. Because the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how volunteers’ feel about their experience, I aimed for

⁸⁶ Open textbook, “Strengths and Weaknesses of Qualitative Interviews,” (2015), <http://www.opentextbooks.org.hk/ditatopic/29793>.

achieving diversity with regard to respondents' personal characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity. A limitation of my recruitment technique was that my social media is seen by other people my age, which only allowed for me to recruit volunteers between the ages of 15-30 approximately. Another limitation of my recruitment technique was that my friends who also posted on their social media are also female's my own age, skewing the sample of people seeing it to the younger generation.

Data Collection Tools

Questionnaire

Prior to the interview, each participant filled out a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain background information on their volunteer experience such as their age, gender, the country they visited, and the length of time spent there. This questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes for the participant to complete and was sent to them via email or Facebook for them to complete on their own time.

Questionnaires were sent back to me when they were finished along with their consent form. All participants filled out a questionnaire and answered every question. A questionnaire was chosen because it allows fast results and can be analyzed in a more scientific manner with tools such as graphs and spreadsheets. The questionnaire also ensured respondent anonymity. Each volunteer was assigned a number and their name or any other personal information was not linked to their questionnaire in any way.

Interview

Interviews were conducted over the phone or through facetime. This allowed the volunteer to participate in a location and at a time that was convenient for them. Prior to the interview, I received a consent form and a questionnaire from each participant. To begin each interview, I introduced myself and explained the research aims of my study. I informed them why they were chosen (“I have asked you to participate in my research study because you have had experience volunteering at an orphanage”) and confirmed that they were aware their participation was completely voluntary and they had the option to stop the interview at any time. The first thing I asked each participant was to tell me in their own words about their experience volunteering abroad, such as the country they visited, when, and how long they spent there. I then asked them why they decided to volunteer at an orphanage, and how they decided on the particular orphanage and country they chose. Next, I inquired whether or not they had a positive or negative experience; similarly, I asked whether or not they felt they left a positive or negative impact on the children at the orphanage. When this part of the interview was through, I provided them with 5 facts about orphanages. I explained to each participant that they were to respond with “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not they were aware of each fact. Before I began, I clarified that I do not believe volunteering at an orphanage is wrong. I also provided each participant the fact that I as well had previously volunteered at an orphanage. I also stated, “I am not implying these facts apply to all orphanages or the one that you experienced.” The four questions were as followed:

- 1 Are you aware that over 80% of children living in orphanages and child care institutions have at least one living parent?
- 2 Did you know that although the national rate of orphans is decreasing, the amount of orphanages built yearly is increasing, especially in highly populated tourist areas?

- 3 Have you heard that many orphanages use recruitment techniques, and parents are persuaded to give their child to an orphanage through the promise of a better life, education, and healthcare?
- 4 Did you know that UNICEF found that less than 1/3 of profits made by an orphanage goes to childcare?
- 5 Have you heard the argument that orphanage volunteerism is increasing the demand for orphans and separating children from families?

Once each participant answered “yes” or “no” to each question, I continued the interview based on how many questions they answered “yes” and how many questions they answered “no.” If someone answered 3 or more questions with “yes”, they continued to part A of the interview. If they answered 3 or more questions with “no” they continued to part B. Of the 13 women I interviewed, 2 continued to part A and 11 continued to part B.

Part A was intended for participants who were knowledgeable about the orphan crisis; these participants were asked, “Were you aware of these facts before volunteering abroad?” and “Would you recommend an orphanage to someone looking to volunteer?” Part B was intended for participants who were unaware of the above facts. These participants were asked, “If you knew this information before your trip, would you still have gone?” and “Knowing this information now, would you volunteer at an orphanage again?”

The conclusion of the interview was the same for both A and B participants. To finish, volunteers were asked about their interest in alternative volunteer opportunities. Two alternative volunteer trips were offered to them, and they had to respond if this volunteer trip was something they would be (or have been) interested in. The first alternative option was a volunteer trip that focused on reuniting children in orphanages and child care institutions with their families. The second alternative option was a volunteer trip focused on family strengthening to prevent families from sending their children to an orphanage. Once participants answered these final two questions, they were thanked for their time and participation. Once again, they were ensured that

any information that could identify them by name was kept confidential and that their questionnaires were assigned a code number and separated from any personal information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding, or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating.⁸⁷ To analyze my qualitative research, I used Giorgi's scientifically-driven descriptive phenomenology method (2009) to answer the question, "What is this experience like?" "Free imaginative variation is the process that determines which of your integrated meaningful units are essential for, and are made up of, a fixed identity for the phenomena you are studying."⁸⁸ Clark Moustakas explained imaginative variation as, "to seek possible meaning through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, and approaching the phenomenon from different positions, roles, or functions."⁸⁹

Ethical Considerations

In order to preserve anonymity for this study I assigned every participant with a number. This number was put on their questionnaire and their interview transcripts so that neither could be identified with any personal information. To keep the file documents secure, I saved them in a password protected file on a password protected laptop. To prevent against the violation of human rights or unethical procedures, my research was proposed to the Institutional Review Board and approved before beginning my research with human subjects. Additionally, each

⁸⁷ Anne Lewins, "What is Qualitative Data Analysis?" (December 1, 2010), http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php.

⁸⁸ Ibid., (2010).

⁸⁹ Clark Moustakas, "Phenomenological Research Methods," (Sage, 2010), 98.

volunteer was required to sign a consent form before participating. The consent form reminded each volunteer that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could terminate their participation at any time. They were also fully informed that there were no potential risks, and that their privacy would be fully protected.

Trustworthiness

In order to produce trustworthy research, I used a meticulous record keeping process which included excel spreadsheets and comparison graphs to ensure transparent data. “The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.”⁹⁰ In order to generate reliability in my research, I used three of the five approaches for reliability in qualitative research as proposed by Silverman. The three approaches I used were constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, and use of tables. The issue with reliability in qualitative phenomenology research is that no two human experiences duplicate each other exactly. To ensure reliability, I received feedback from my informants. Member checking is the process of verifying information with the targeted group. I read back each participant’s interview to them so that they had the chance to correct errors of fact or errors of interpretation. This member check process also added to the validity of my interpretation of the qualitative data.

⁹⁰ Marion Joppe, “The Research Process,” (2000), <http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/rp.htm>.

Limitations

One limitation of my study was the self-reported data. When data is self-reported, there is no way for sure to verify the information. In self-reported data, there is also the chance of selective memory (remembering or not remembering experiences that occurred in the past) telescoping (recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time), attribution (attributing positive events to one's own agency, and attributing negative events to external forces), and exaggeration (embellishing events as more significant than it is actually suggested from other data).

Another limitation was access to research participants. Due to my age and location, I was only able to reach out to volunteers who were in a similar demographic as myself. All 15 of my research subjects were female and between the ages of 20 and 25. All but 2 of my participants lived in NYC, and all but 3 participants were white. All participants had at least an undergraduate degree, and all participants were born and raised in the United States. These limitations did not allow me to answer my research question in a way that is generalizable to the entire population.

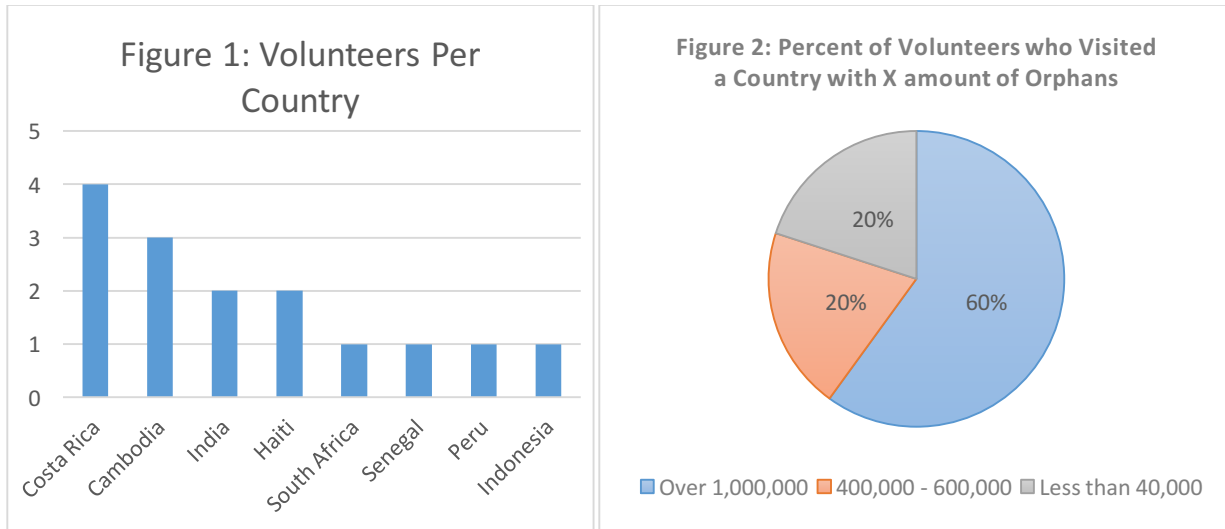
Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

The purpose of this survey was to determine the background of the participants, as well as to identify how they got involved in volunteer tourism. The survey gathered information about each participant's orphanage experience in an effort to understand their role as a volunteer and their perception of the impact they made. This survey was answered by 15 females between the ages of 20 and 25 years old. These 15 participants volunteered between the years 2010 and 2017, and for lengths of time ranging from five days to six months.

The major questions I set out to answer were: what countries did they volunteer in? How did they decide to volunteer abroad? Did they have to pay for their experience, and how much? What agencies or organizations did they use to facilitate their trip? And, what were their major responsibilities as a volunteer? I also used this survey to determine the amount of time they spent volunteering and the age range of the children they worked with.

All 15 participants answered a set of 15 questions. Of these 15 responders, 13 went on to participate in an interview. I chose this demographic of female volunteers from the United States between the ages of 20-25 because statistics have shown this group is the most likely to volunteer abroad. According to the 2014 Global Volunteering Report, 76% of volunteers are women, the majority of volunteers (29%) are from the United States, and young adults between the ages of 18-25, are the most likely to volunteer abroad.

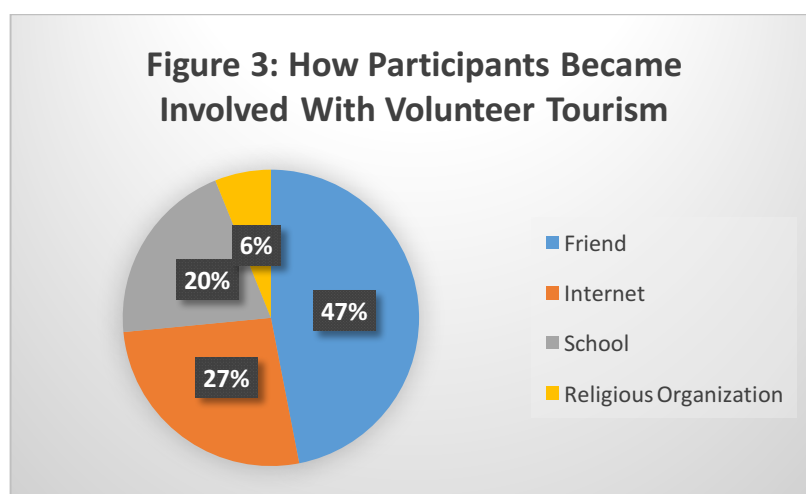
Countries



The survey allowed me to see which country each participant volunteered in, and which countries were the most popular among volunteers (figure 1). Results showed that the most popular country to volunteer in was Costa Rica, with four participants volunteering at an orphanage there. Cambodia was ranked second in popularity, with three participants choosing this country as their volunteer destination. Two participants chose to volunteer in India, and two participants chose to volunteer in Haiti. South Africa, Indonesia, Senegal, and Peru each only had one volunteer. I found it interesting that out of these eight countries, the least popular volunteer destinations were countries that had a significantly higher orphan population than the more popular destinations (figure 2). For example, South Africa has approximately 3.7 million children labeled as orphans, where Costa Rica only has an estimated 36,000. Similarly, only one volunteer went to Indonesia, where there are more than 500,000 children living in institutions, and 3 volunteers went to Cambodia, where there are as few as 12,000 orphans.

In comparing these results with the 2014 Official Volunteer Abroad Trends Report, I found that 11 of the participants who partook in this survey volunteered in a country that was listed in the top 10 searched countries for volunteer work. These countries were (in order) India, Cambodia, South Africa, Costa Rica, and Peru. I cross referenced this with Go Abroad's research of the 10 most popular places to volunteer abroad in 2017, and found the same thing. 11 out of the 15 volunteers who completed this survey volunteered at a country on the list. These countries were (in order), South Africa, Peru, Cambodia, India, and Costa Rica. This research shows that when choosing to volunteer at an orphanage abroad, the popularity of the destination does not have to do with the number of orphans or number of children living in institutions in that country.

Recruitment and Participation



An important part of this survey was to determine how each volunteer chose to volunteer abroad, as well as the process in choosing their destination and orphanage. The survey first asked how they heard of volunteer tourism (Figure 3). 47% of participants heard about the opportunity through a friend, 27% heard about it through the internet, 20% heard about it through their

school, and 6% heard about it through their religious organization. Once they heard about the opportunity, they were asked if they went through a volunteer tourism travel agency, or not. The survey showed that 8 volunteers chose to go through an agency, 3 went through a school, 3 went individually, and 1 went with a church. This was important information to know, because most volunteer travel agencies charge a high price for their services. The amount each volunteer pays for a trip abroad is an important aspect in this research. This money is being spent with the intention of benefiting orphans, and making a difference in a child's life. However, research has proven that in most cases, the orphans and orphanage are not benefitting from this money. In reality, it is the travel agencies and orphanage directors who are receiving the profits. In this group of 15 volunteers, 67% had to pay in order to work at the orphanage, with 26% of these volunteers paying \$1,000 or more. The money that these volunteers are paying to the travel agencies or organizations used could be better allocated to the children in need.

Decision to Volunteer

An important part of my interview was to understand how people decided to volunteer at an orphanage, and what factors influenced their decision about where to go. When making the decision to volunteer, six respondents did not have an orphanage specifically in mind. These respondents were more interested in finding a volunteer opportunity abroad, and did not go for the sole purpose of volunteering at an orphanage. These volunteers used the internet to find a service project and destination country that was the most interesting to them. In order to better understand the mind of the potential volunteer, I visited the web pages of the volunteer agencies the participants used, such as; IFRE tours, Rustic Pathways, Adventures in Mission, and International Volunteer Headquarters. On the main page of the IFRE website, an ad states, "We

need volunteers looking for opportunities to share their love, passion, and support with these very unfortunate children.” Similarly, Adventures in Mission advertises their orphanage trip “for people who love playing with children and have a heart for the poor and disadvantaged.” Volunteer travel agencies are very persuasive in encouraging people to choose their trip opportunity, as they are directly aimed at the compassionate human. Not only do these agencies describe the volunteer work that would be done, such as playing with children and helping with school work, they also provide photographs of orphan children smiling with Western volunteers. When I asked each of the six participants who used the internet to choose their volunteer opportunity how they made their final decision, they all had a similar answer. The common theme between all six participants is that they searched online for volunteer trips, read explanations about various opportunities, and decided that an orphan trip would be the most meaningful choice.

Not all of the volunteers were persuaded to work with orphans through online advertisement; three volunteers chose an orphanage because it was promoted through their school, two volunteers chose an orphanage because someone they knew had previously volunteered there, and two volunteers chose an orphanage for personal reasons. In terms of choosing which orphanage to volunteer at specifically, nine volunteers did not choose the orphanage, but were assigned one through an outside source such as a school or agency. Four volunteers were able to choose the exact orphanage they wanted to volunteer at, and make arrangements personally between the orphanage directors and themselves.

Positive vs. Negative Experience

In the interview, each volunteer was asked if they had a positive or negative experience while volunteering at an orphanage. In response, every volunteer except one indicated that they had a positive experience. When asked what made their experience positive, the three most common answers among participants were; experiencing another country, meeting new people, and making a difference in the lives of children. A key finding was that these volunteers evaluated their experience as a whole to determine whether it was positive or negative, rather than just speaking about their experience at the orphanage. Every volunteer mentioned “travel” as a reason why their experience was positive. This answer came in two forms, either the excitement to travel to a new country, or the excitement to travel to a meaningful country such as a birthplace or location of family. Similarly, the majority of participants who answered that they had a positive experience mentioned the people they were with, or the people they met. Four volunteers included being with their friends as a reason for having a positive experience, and five volunteers mentioned making new friends or meeting new people as a reason that contributed to their positive experience. All twelve volunteers mentioned the children at the orphanage as a contributing factor to their experience in some way. Answers included: making a difference, making the children smile, playing with the children, donating to the children, and giving the children love and attention. These results showed that a positive experience was linked to the travel experience as a whole as opposed to solely the orphanage experience. Although each volunteer cared about their interactions with the children, the volunteer work itself was not the only factor in deciding if their trip was a positive or negative experience.

Positive vs. Negative Impact

Although twelve out of the thirteen volunteers interviewed reported having a positive experience, the results were not the same when asked if they left a positive or negative impact on the children at the orphanage. The respondents' had a variety of answers, ranging from a harmful and negative impact to an extremely positive one. The results are as follows:

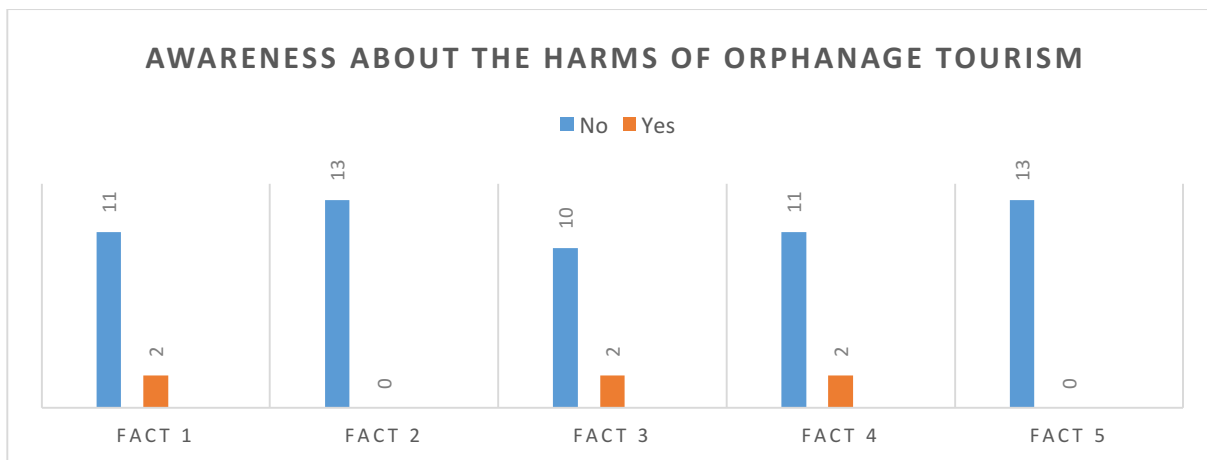
- Four volunteers felt they left a positive impact on the children.
- Three volunteers felt they left a positive impact, but felt they did not stay long enough to make a significant one.
- One volunteer felt she had a positive impact, but recognized that she was not qualified for the work she was doing.
- Four volunteers could not classify their impact as positive or negative, and chose to classify their impact as 'neutral' or 'no impact.'
- One volunteer felt she left a negative impact on the children, contributing to their feelings of abandonment and distrust of adults.

I compared these answers with the questionnaires to examine which volunteer activities led to feelings of leaving a positive impact, a neutral impact, and a negative impact. The results were clear. Out of the thirteen women interviewed, all eight of the volunteers who felt they had a positive impact on the children participated in service activities. These service activities include: teaching, helping with homework, feeding the children/cooking, working with handicap children, starting a library, house repairs, and starting a garden. Of the four volunteers who felt they did not leave any sort of impact, all four described their daily volunteer activities either "played with children," "spent time with children," or "entertained the children." Where the eight volunteers

who felt they left a positive impact spent time with the children as well, their service included more than just play. These results show that the volunteers who engaged more with the orphanage as a whole came away feeling like they left more of an impact than the volunteers who were only able to engage with the children through play.

Awareness

The most important part of my research was about awareness. Before the interviews, I compiled 5 important facts about orphanages and volunteer tourism. When speaking with the participants, I read them each fact, and asked them to answer “yes” if they were previously aware of the fact, and “no” if they were not previously aware of the fact. All five facts revolved around the idea that volunteer tourism at orphanages is not in the best interest of the child, and is perpetuating the orphanage business. The overwhelming majority of volunteers were unaware of all of the facts provided.



To summarize:

- Fact 1: Eleven out of thirteen participants did not know that over 80% of children living in orphanages have at least one living family member

- Fact 2: Thirteen out of thirteen participants did not know that although the national rate of orphans is decreasing, the amount of orphanages built yearly is increasing, especially in frequently visited tourist areas
- Fact 3: Ten out of thirteen participants did not know that many orphanages use recruitment techniques, and parents are persuaded to give their children to an orphanage through the promise of a better life and education
- Fact 4: Eleven out of thirteen participants did not know that in many cases, less than 1/3 of profits made by orphanages goes to child care
- Fact 5: Thirteen out of thirteen participants did not know that orphanage voluntourism is increasing the demand for orphans and separating children from families

When asked the question, “Knowing these facts, would you volunteer at an orphanage again?”

Almost every participant either said, ‘no,’ or that they would do more extensive research on their organization before volunteering. My research shows that altruistic volunteers genuinely want to help the people and communities they serve. It is due to a lack of education on the issue, and a lack of awareness, that volunteers continue to support orphanages. This research study proves that if volunteers are made aware of the harms of orphanages and orphanage tourism, they would likely either not participate, or do more research on the organization or orphanage before going.

Alternative Opportunities

To end my data collection, I asked each participant if they would be interested in an alternative volunteer opportunity. I provided two alternative volunteer projects that still work with vulnerable children, but do not contribute to the orphan business or separation of children

from families. The first alternative volunteer opportunity that was presented to each volunteer was focused on family-strengthening. The main goal of family strengthening is to shift the focus and resources from institutions to community-based family preservation such as childcare services, building schools, and disability services. Twelve out of thirteen participants said they would be interested in participating in a family-strengthening volunteer project. The second alternative volunteer opportunity that was presented to each volunteer was focused on family-reunification. Family reunification was explained to each volunteer as the process of maintaining family relationships as well as reuniting children with their birth parents. Examples included educating families about separation, and family tracing projects. Twelve of the thirteen participants said they would be interested in participating in a family reunification volunteer project. This further proves that volunteers want to be helpful, they just need the education and awareness on how to help children in need without causing additional harm to already vulnerable populations.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Volunteer Travel Agencies

Goal: Encourage volunteer agencies to switch from orphanage tourism to community-based care

6 core facts to present to all volunteer agencies

1. Orphanage tourism fuels the unnecessary separation of children from families
2. More than 80% of children living in orphanages are not orphans
3. Orphanages are regarded by governments and childcare professionals around the world as being the 'last option' for children.
4. Orphanages violate the Convention on the Rights of the Child- stating every child has the right to be raised in a family environment
5. Few tourists or volunteers are qualified to work with vulnerable children
6. Many orphanages do not meet the minimum standards of care, and children are often subjected to neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

One way to encourage volunteer agencies to stop offering orphanage trips is to provide them with alternative volunteer options. Family reunification programs and family strengthening programs are two options that allow volunteers to work with children and positively impact the community.

Alternative Volunteer Options

Reunification

Family reunification is the process of maintaining family relationships while children are in temporary care, and reuniting them with their birth parents after careful planning and with

sustained support.⁹¹ A family-reunification volunteer project could occur after a country has suffered a natural disaster, with countries in conflict, and with refugees. Volunteers who assist in family reunification can do so in a variety of ways such as:

1. Provide education about separation- Before separation happens, educate parents about the risks of placing a child in residential care such as an orphanage during a natural disaster or during conflict- and warn that it may result in permanent separation.
2. Family tracing projects- speak with children who have been separated from their parents, input information in the International Child Protection Database, go to the community where the child is from, or where the child was separated and try to locate the child's relatives.
3. Reunite orphan children with their families. Example: The Miracle Foundation- The miracle foundation trains and educates orphanage directors to help children in their transformation process from orphanage to 'Center for Excellence.' At the Center for Excellence, children are prepared to reunite with their birth families, or to find a loving home through kinship care, foster care, adoption, or other family care options.

Family strengthening

In most cases, children are placed into institutions because their families cannot economically support them. One goal of family strengthening is to shift the focus and resources from institutions to community-based family preservation. Family strengthening projects can include: parenting classes, creating new farms and gardens, education classes for the community such as

⁹¹ Department of Homeland Security, "Guidance on family reunification," (2012).
https://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/2012/fy12_hsgp_children.pdf.

money management, business, language etc. childcare services, building schools, and disability services.

Example: Projects Abroad

On November 8, 2017, volunteer agency Projects Abroad announced that beginning in January 2018, they will no longer be placing volunteers in orphanages. Now, all childcare-focused volunteer work will shift from orphanages to community-based care. In an interview with Jenny Puyo, head of Programme Developments, she stated, “We have always believed that institutional care should be the absolute last resort for any child... with the support available from organizations such as ReThink Orphanages, we feel now it is the right time to make a full commitment to moving solely towards community-based care.”⁹² Projects Abroad now offers volunteer opportunities that focus on the community, and support local organizations to ensure children can be raised in a stable environment. Instead of working at an orphanage, Projects Abroad now works with day care centers, kindergartens, schools, and support groups for the elderly, mothers, and babies. In addition to eliminating orphanage volunteer programs, Projects Abroad has initiated Care Management Plans in each country where they work with children. The plan gives a clear purpose of their long-term goals, an outline of safety procedures, and a global impact database where they can track the development of each child at a Projects Abroad placement. Mrs. Puyo states that the feedback from volunteers has been very positive, “Now volunteers are able to address community needs with a more holistic approach and with a greater potential for a long-lasting contribution.” I applaud Projects Abroad for their commitment to

⁹² Jenny Puyo, email interview, (November 10, 2017).

children's rights, and they should be used as an example for other volunteer agencies to abandon orphanage tours and focus on the community.

Agencies that still offer tours to orphanages

If potential volunteers are looking for opportunities to travel, these agencies still offer tours to orphanages. I encourage potential volunteers not to support these agencies:

IFRE Volunteers

Love Volunteers

International Volunteer Headquarters

Rustic Pathways

A Broader View

Volunteer World

Adventures in Mission

Haiti180

Education to High Schools and Universities

The pledge against orphanage voluntourism

The main demographic of people who volunteer abroad are of the high school and college age. Gap year programs, study abroad, and alternative break programs often promote volunteering in another country, and child care projects are the most popular. I recommend that high schools and universities that offer these trips educate their students about responsible volunteering and alternative volunteer opportunities. Schools can follow in the footsteps of the London School of Economics, which created a pledge asserting, "Universities have a duty to stop

promoting orphanage volunteering.” With the support of Better Care Network, they created this pledge and sent it to universities in the UK, US, and Australia. The pledge states, “We pledge not to advertise orphanage voluntourism to our students and we will endeavor to ensure that such opportunities are neither facilitated nor promoted within our institution.”⁹³

Self-reporting mechanisms

A combination between Yelp and Trip Advisor- this online review site would allow volunteers to write honestly about their volunteer experience. Dedicated specifically to volunteer work with children, this site will not only rank a volunteer’s experience, but include important information about the treatment of the children. Volunteer’s will be asked to answer questions such as:

Were the children at the orphanage being provided an education?

Were the children at the orphanage allowed to leave the premises with volunteers?

Were you required to fill out a background check before volunteering?

Did you witness any abuse (verbal, physical, or sexual) while volunteering?

Did you witness the children being provided three meals a day?

Along with these optional questions, the volunteer will be able to choose, “I would recommend” or “I would not recommend” to organize the site into orphanages that meet the minimum standards of alternative care and those that do not.

This does not eliminate the problem of orphanage tourism, and one flaw is that some might argue it promotes orphanage tourism because now volunteers can feel they are doing it in a more ethical way. However, according to my research, 6 out of 13 volunteers stated they would

⁹³ Ruby Jones, “Push to End Orphanage Volunteering as World Challenge Stops Trips for Students, *ABC NEWS*, (September 2017), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-12/world-challenge-to-end-student-volunteer-trips-to-orphanages/8892142>.

volunteer at an orphanage again in the future, but only after doing more research on the particular orphanage. The data shows that informing volunteers about the harms of orphanage tourism does not immediately deter them from going again. With a self-reporting mechanism such as a website, it at least provides information to potential volunteers about which agencies promote tours to harmful institutions and which orphanages are meeting the minimal standards of alternative care.

World Tourism Organization:

Recommended addition to the Convention on Tourism Ethics

In September of 2017, the World Tourism Organization Convention on Tourism Ethics was approved by the General Assembly. Where the convention focuses mostly on the universal right to tourism, it does not address child protection. Protection of children and children's rights should be at the center of tourism ethics, and while sexual exploitation is recognized in the convention as an area where children need special protection, the issue of voluntourism involving children is not mentioned. The World Tourism Organization promotes responsible tourism and sustainable development; orphanage tourism is neither responsible nor sustainable.⁹⁴ In Australia, orphanage tourism might soon be outlawed as part of the Modern Slavery Act, and it is time the WTO acknowledge that orphanage tourism is a global concern. I recommend that the World Tourism Organization amend the new Convention on Tourism Ethics to include child protection and child care tourism practices.

⁹⁴ Stahili, "Why is Orphanage Voluntourism not in the UNWTO Convention on Voluntourism Ethics?" (2017), <http://www.stahili.org/orphanage-tourism-unwto-draft-convention-tourism-ethics/>.

If you or your church/organization still wants to donate

Do not donate to an orphanage, instead consider:

- Supporting foster-care programs in third-world countries such as Foster Care India
<http://fostercareindia.org>
- Supporting an organization that assists at-risk mothers to raise their children,
like Heartline Haiti <http://heartlineministries.org>
- Supporting a ministry that re-homes children like Hope House International
<http://hopehouseinternational.org>
- Child sponsorship that benefits the community and not an individual child, such as World
Vision International <https://www.worldvision.org>

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Although volunteer tourism can be seen as a positive way to give back to a community in need, there are many ways in which voluntourism is harming children in orphanages and institutionalized care. From increased attachment disorders, to a heightened risk of sexual assault, volunteering at an orphanage is not in the best interest of the child.

Volunteers are contributing to the separation of child and family, and are not even aware they are doing it. In my research, 11 out of 13 interviewees did not know that the majority of children in orphanages have at least one living parent, and 8 volunteers felt that they left a positive effect on the children at the orphanage. The goal of my research study was to examine whether a lack of awareness could be one of the reasons why volunteers continue to go to orphanages.

After providing 5 facts about the harms of orphanage voluntourism to previous volunteers, my research concluded that a lack of awareness was a leading cause in the problem. 4 participants stated that if they had known these facts beforehand, they would not have volunteered at an orphanage, and 6 participants stated they would be more cautious volunteering in the future. The overall pattern suggests that a change in opinion is based on education and awareness. Due to the findings of my research, I argue that educating high school and college students about the harms of volunteering at orphanages can significantly reduce the problem of orphanage tourism.

Additionally, my research showed that volunteers who chose to help at an orphanage would just as likely choose an alternative volunteer option to help children, if given the opportunity. Every participant said that they would be interested in a volunteer opportunity that

focused on family reunification, and every participant said they would be interested in a volunteer opportunity that focused on family strengthening; the results were unanimous.

By increasing education and awareness on the issue, we can start to minimize and eventually eliminate orphanage tourism. In my findings, I saw that people want to be altruistic and volunteer, however when searching to volunteer with children, orphanages are the only options they encounter. Without the awareness about the harms orphanage tourism does, people see this as a perfect opportunity. By teaching people about this topic it will allow them to focus their desire to help in a more positive way; a way that it will make a positive difference in the lives of children. Family reunification and family strengthening programs will not only offer families the help they need to prevent them from sending their child to an orphanage, it will also improve their quality of life. It will also help the volunteers as their money will be more accurately spent supporting children instead of the orphanage business and travel agencies who do not always have the best interest of children or families in mind. While the problems of volunteer tourism are numerous, there is still hope to correct the issues through hard work, education, and new programs.

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Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview

Hi _____

My name is Holly Havens, and I am a MA candidate at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University.

I have asked you to participate in my research study because you have had experience volunteering at an orphanage. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop this interview at any time. A crucial part of my thesis aims to understand what draws people to volunteer tourism, and gather different perceptions of experiences.

To begin, can you please tell me a little about your experience volunteering abroad, such as the country you visited, when, and how long you spent there?

What made you decide to volunteer at an orphanage? How did you choose this one specifically? Do you feel that you had a positive or negative experience? Do you feel you left a positive or negative impact on the children at the orphanage?

When you were there, did you witness the children being provided an education?

Were you ever asked for additional donations while at the orphanage?

I would now like to provide you with 5 facts about orphanages and volunteer tourism. When I tell you a fact, I would like you to respond with “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not you were aware of this fact beforehand. Before I begin, I want to emphasize that I do not believe volunteering at an orphanage is wrong, and I believe there are many instances where it is a helpful and positive thing. I myself volunteered at an orphanage in Costa Rica in 2012. Also, some of these facts only apply to some orphanages, I am absolutely not implying these facts apply to all orphanages or the one you have experienced.

1. Are you aware that according to Save the Children, over 80% of children living in orphanages or child care institutions have at least one living parent? (change this fact to make it more accurate if the research participant volunteered in Haiti, Bolivia, Paraguay, Rwanda, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Cambodia, Turkey, Russia, or Nepal)
2. Did you know that although the national rate of orphans is decreasing, the amount of orphanages built yearly is increasing, especially in frequently visited tourist areas?
3. Have you heard that many orphanages use recruitment techniques, and parents are persuaded to give their child to an orphanage through the promise of a better life, education, and healthcare?
4. Did you know that a study conducted by UNICEF found that less than 1/3 of profits made by the orphanage goes to child care?
5. Have you heard the argument that orphanage volunteerism is increasing the demand for orphans and separating children from families?

(Interview will split into two parts, continue with part A if the participant answered 3 or more questions with “yes.” Continue to part B if the participant answered 3 or more questions with “no.”)

- A) It seems like you have a lot of knowledge about the orphan crisis in the world, were you aware of these facts before you volunteered? Given this information, would you

volunteer at an orphanage again? Would you recommend an orphanage to someone else looking to volunteer abroad?

- B) If you knew this information before going on your volunteer trip, would you still have gone? Knowing this information now, would you volunteer at an orphanage again or recommend it to someone else?

For both A and B

If you were presented with an alternative volunteer option that focused on reuniting children with their families, would you have been (or be) interested?

If you were presented with an alternative volunteer option that focused on family strengthening to prevent families from sending their child to an orphanage, would you have been (or be) interested?

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this interview. Again, any information that can identify you by name will be kept confidential and your questionnaire responses will be assigned a code number and separated from your name or any other information that could identify you.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Subject: Individuals who have traveled abroad to volunteer at child care institution/orphanage

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female? (optional)
3. In what year did you volunteer abroad?
4. What country did you volunteer in?
5. How many days were you there for?
6. What was the name of the orphanage or institution you volunteered at?
7. Approximately how many children were living there at the time of your trip?
8. Please estimate the age range of children living at this orphanage during the time of your trip
9. Were there other volunteers there? If you answered yes, how many?
10. How did you hear about the volunteer opportunity?
11. Did you pay an outside source (travel agency, United Planet, etc.) to volunteer?
12. If you answered yes to number 10, what was the name of the volunteer organization you traveled with?
13. If you answered yes to numbers 9 and 10, how much did you pay?
14. Did you travel with a group? If so, what was the nature of the group? (religious, sorority, club, etc.)
15. What were your responsibilities as a volunteer?