



Medical Tourism: A Potential Risk for Prostitution and Sex Trafficking in Low-Income or Middle-Income Destination Countries

*Fatemeh Shaygani¹, *Milad Ahmadi Marzaleh², Soodeh Jahangiri³*

1. Student Research Committee, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
2. Department of Health in Disasters and Emergencies, Health Human Resources Research Center, School of Health Management and Information Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
3. Endocrine and Metabolism Research Institute, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

***Corresponding Author:** Email: miladahmadimarzaleh@yahoo.com

(Received 12 Apr 2023; accepted 23 Apr 2023)

Dear Editor-in-Chief

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), medical tourism is defined as travel with the goal of receiving services that lead to improving health status through medical interventions. Patients who are mostly from richer and more developed nations tend to travel to less developed countries to reduce their medical costs as well as getting off the waiting list (1). It is one of the most successful and profitable industries worldwide (2). Globally, the industry generated about \$55 billion in 2020 expected to reach over \$200 billion by 2027 (3).

This industry has the potential to promote the health systems of destination countries, especially low- and middle-income countries, which are facing a lack of resources and requiring external assistance. This leads to a significant improvement in health services in these countries (4).

Of course, the medical tourism industry also has dark sides, and in addition to bringing financial resources to the destination country, it can put the country in danger in some ways. The travel of tourists from nations with valuable currency to

countries where people live on low incomes and are in unstable and difficult financial conditions may persuade them to see the situation as an opportunity, which can provide them with a lot of money, persuading them to take full advantage of this situation. This toxic idea may lead them to do anything to make money from this situation, such as high-risk behaviors and prostitution, which can lead to an increase in the rate of sexually transmitted diseases in the area and pose a threat to community sexual health. Medical tourists may take advantage of and sexually abuse children in order to get money from their poor families.

At a higher level, a mafia may be formed following this industry, doing sex trafficking and taking victims, mostly women and children, to the countries of medical tourists. This affects victims' physical and mental health, and many of them may even lose their lives.

The health tourism industry is a profitable industry, but it also has some challenges, especially in developing countries where people may live in



unfavorable financial conditions and are more likely to fall into such traps, intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, community leaders and tourism authorities should take the necessary measures to ensure that, while the health system benefits from the financial resources that these medical tourists bring to the country, the potential cultural and social consequences caused by this industry in these countries are prevented.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

References

1. UNWTO. UNWTO/ETC launch report on health tourism. <https://www.unwto.org/global/press-release/2018-12-20/unwtoetc-launch-report-health-tourism>
2. Jyothis T (2016). Health Tourism: pros and cons. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education (IJMRME)*, 2(1): 640-3.
3. Statista Medical tourism global market size, from 2016 to 2020 with a forecast for 2027 2022. [Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1084720/medical-tourism-market-size-worldwide/>]
4. Álvarez MM, Smith RD, Chanda R. *The impact of medical tourism in low-and middle-income countries*. Medical tourism and transnational health care. Springer; 2013. p. 208-22.