

# A Standard 6 girl's double life

## CHILD PROTECTION

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Grace looks like any other schoolgirl walking through Lunzu Trading Centre in Blantyre. Her blue uniform with white collars and sleeves hangs loosely on her small frame.

However, the school dress conceals a girl trapped in pain and sexual exploitation.

The 14-year-old claims to have slept with over 1 000 men since February 2024 when she started selling her body to beat hunger and poverty.

"I could spend three days without a meal and often went to school hungry," recalls the Standard Six pupil, born on July 22 2011.

During her debut, the standard six pupil was hooked by men who gave her K6 000 when all she needed was a meal worth K500.

"It was like a miracle, but the pain was unbearable," Grace says. "I slept with three men on that first. They left me bleeding."

For a week, the minor stayed

away from the streets, nursing wounds her young body should not endure in a country where child protection laws work.

However, a week later, she returned—with no one to safeguard her from the dangers of the night.

"That was a turning point. That night, I slept with six men. Since then, I sleep with men almost every day. From 2024, I have slept with over 1 000 men," she says.

Grace, who turns 15 next July, is one of numerous minors trapped in sexual exploitation at Kameza, Lunzu, Lirangwe and Mdeka in Blantyre where child protectors in government agencies and non-governmental organisations look away.

Apart from neglected sexual abuse tantamount to defilement, she endures beatings and threats from older sex workers who feel jealousy of underage girls.

"Most men like young girls like me," she says.

A seasoned sex worker



**Chiotcha:** Lunzu and Kachere are hotspots of underage sex. | Nation

**Grace:**  
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concealed as Jacqueline says underage girls entering the trade are increasing dramatically.

"At Lunzu alone, there are

pills that prevent infection after possible exposure.

Section 138 of the Penal Code criminalises sex with a girl below 18 years, the marriageable age.

Section 3 (1) of the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act places primary responsibility on parents or guardians to protect children from neglect, violence, abuse, exploitation and exposure to sexual, physical and emotional hazards.

However, such laws scarcely protect the girls trapped in sexual exploitation in the streets, pubs and backrooms of places like Lunzu.

"I want to quit and concentrate on school, but who will provide my basic needs?" asks Grace, who dreams of becoming a lawyer.

Malawi 2063 envisions every child enjoying lifelong learning, including quality early childhood development and at least 12 years of formal education.

Action Hope Malawi helps sex workers find safe sources of income.

Project officer Kulimbantima Chiotcha says works is underway to withdraw

about 100 underage sex workers identified in Blantyre and Machinga.

"Lunzu and Kachere townships in Blantyre are among the hotspots for underage sex workers," she says.

The activist asks authorities to intensify child protection work in markets where sexual exploitation hides in plain sight.

Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare spokesperson Linda Moyo says government is implementing the End Child Marriage Strategy to protect and support vulnerable girls like Grace.

She said the strategy ensures that affected children are not left behind, with a focus on restoring their dignity and future opportunities.

Said Moyo: "A key priority is the reintegration of children back into the education system where possible, enabling them to continue their education in a safe and supportive environment."

"Through these efforts the Ministry is working to reduce vulnerability, prevent exploitation and support girls in rebuilding their lives."