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## **WHITE PAPER: Prostitution is Not a Choice**

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**I think so much about what has happened to me. Why these men did what they did to me. Old, disgusting men. It was horrible. They knew I did not want to be there, but they paid their money. They used me. I was their property for the night. They destroyed me.**

*-- 14-year-old girl at Casa Hogar, a shelter in Costa Rica for children rescued from the country's sex trade<sup>1</sup>*

### **Overview**

Prostitution has been called the world's oldest "profession." In reality, it is the world's oldest "oppression" and continues to be one of the most overlooked human rights abuses of women on the planet today.<sup>2</sup> Prostitution of women is a particularly lethal form of violence against women, and a violation of a woman's most basic human rights.

While society attempts to normalize prostitution on a variety of levels (discussed later in this paper), prostituted women are subjected to violence and abuse at the hands of paying "clients." For the vast majority of prostituted women, "prostitution is the experience of being hunted, dominated, harassed, assaulted and battered."<sup>3</sup> It is "sexual terrorism against women at the hands of men and little is being done to stop the carnage."<sup>4</sup> And in "no other so-called profession are so many women murdered each year."<sup>5</sup>

More than anything, prostitution is not a choice, as some claim. Survivors of prostitution have described it as "the choice made by those who have no choice."<sup>6</sup> The global forces that "choose" women for prostitution include, among others, gender discrimination, race discrimination, poverty, abandonment, debilitating sexual and verbal abuse, poor or no education, and a job that does not pay a living wage.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Malarek, *The Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It*, (Arcade Publishing, April 16, 2009), 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue xii.

<sup>3</sup> Melissa Farley and Vanessa Kelly, "Prostitution: A critical review of the medical and social sciences literature," *Women & Criminal Justice*, (2000), Vol. 11 (4), 29.  
[www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farley\\_Kelly.pdf](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farley_Kelly.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Malarek, Prologue xii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Melissa Farley. "Prostitution, trafficking and cultural amnesia: What we must not know in order to keep the business of sexual exploitation running smoothly," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, (2006), 102.  
<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/laws/000151.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

Regardless of the reasons for prostitution, or physical location (strip club, massage parlor, brothel, street, escort/home/hotel), prostitution is extremely dangerous, both psychologically and physically to women. And it all starts with the buyer. Therefore, prostitution must be exposed for what it really is—a “male social system in place to ensure the satisfaction of male demand for sexual servicing and for objectified sex.”<sup>8</sup>

This white paper examines women forced into prostitution and then highlights the demand side of prostitution. In economic parlance, this refers to men as the “demand” side of the equation, with women as the commodity or “supply” in prostitution. Without buyers, there would be no demand, and therefore, no supply.

In addition, this paper will also examine different approaches to address prostitution, favoring the “abolitionist” model that, in essence, views women used in prostitution and sex trafficking as victims who need to be offered supportive services, while criminalizing and prosecuting johns, pimps, brothel owners and traffickers.

At the heart of this abolitionist belief is that violence against women will not be stopped nor gender equality achieved as long as there is tacit approval for the buying and selling of the bodies of women and girls. “Gender equality will remain unattainable as long as men buy, sell and exploit women ... by prostituting them.”<sup>9</sup> It is the human rights struggle of our time.

*Many of us began as children ... our parents are poor and they sell us. We obey our parents. We have no choice.  
-- Mei, a 20-year-old veteran of the Thai sex market<sup>10</sup>*

### **The Supply: Women and Girls with No Choice**

Sadly, the majority of girls enter prostitution before they have reached the age of consent.<sup>11</sup> Research shows that most women in prostitution were sexually and physically abused as children, suffered myriad deprivations and were pushed into the flesh trade very young, on average, at age 14.<sup>12</sup> In the United States, the average age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14 years old.<sup>13</sup> First responders from across the country report that the average age of victims with whom they come into contact is 15 years. However, “most of these youth report having been prostituted for some time before coming into contact with services or juvenile justice.”<sup>14</sup> They enter prostitution after

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<sup>8</sup> Solidarity Philippines Australia Network, “Prostitution as a Choice?” *KASAMA*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (October–November–December 1997).

<http://cpcabrisbane.org/Kasama/1997/V11n4/Choice.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Malarek, 239.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> Donna M. Hughes, “Men create the demand; women are the supply,” *Lecture on sexual exploitation, Queen Sofia Center*, Valencia, Spain (November 2000), 2.

<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Malarek, 214.

<sup>13</sup> Shared Hope International. “The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America’s Prostituted Children.” (May 2009), 30.

[http://www.sharedhope.org/dmst/documents/SHI%20National%20Report\\_without%20cover.pdf](http://www.sharedhope.org/dmst/documents/SHI%20National%20Report_without%20cover.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

enduring incest, abuse and rape by family members or acquaintances, which accommodates them to violence and exploitation until eventually they believe this is their role in life.<sup>15</sup>

Sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators is common, as is physical abuse in childhood.<sup>16</sup> In one study of prostituted women, 90 percent of the women had been physically battered in childhood; 74 percent were sexually abused in their families, with 50 percent also having been sexually abused by someone outside the family.<sup>17</sup> Of 123 survivors of prostitution at the Council for Prostitution Alternatives in Portland, Oregon (an agency offering support, education, shelter and access to health services to clients of all sex industries) 85 percent reported a history of incest, 90 percent a history of physical abuse, and 98 percent a history of emotional abuse.<sup>18</sup>

One woman in prostitution stated:

“We’ve all been molested. Over and over, and raped. We were all molested and sexually abused as children, don’t you know that? We ran to get away. They didn’t want us in the house anymore. We were thrown out, thrown away. We’ve been on the street since we were 12, 13, 14.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to childhood sexual and physical abuse, other reasons drive women into prostitution, including poverty, desperation to support family members and drug addictions.<sup>20</sup> Other forces include lack of education or a job that does not pay a living wage. Women also turn to prostitution as a last resort when the social infrastructure of a country collapses as a result of terrorism and war, famine, natural disasters and economic crisis.<sup>21</sup>

Although prostitution preys on women and girls with seemingly no other choice, it is not the cause of prostitution. At the root of prostitution is overt gender-based discrimination and gender inequality, which creates a situation where men can sexually exploit women experiencing poverty, abuse and racism with the complicity of law enforcement, society and culture. Women’s interests, needs, demands and specific problems are widely ignored in political arenas because they are marginalized.<sup>22</sup> Even with a widening gender wage gap, poorly-paid jobs and discriminatory practices in the workplace, prostitution would not thrive without ingrained gender inequality and the demand for paid sex.

### **Racism in Prostitution**

Research also shows there has been a “deafening silence” regarding racism in prostitution.<sup>23</sup> Throughout history, women have been enslaved based on race and ethnicity, as well as gender.<sup>24</sup> According to Dr. Melissa Farley, a psychologist and researcher with the non-profit Prostitution Research & Education based in San Francisco, “You cannot understand prostitution unless you understand how sex, class and race all come together and hurt a person at the same time. People

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<sup>15</sup> Farley and Kelly, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, “Men create the demand,” 2.

<sup>21</sup> Louise Gerdes, book editor, “War and Terrorism Increase Prostitution,” *Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Opposing Viewpoints* (Thomson Gale 2006), 142.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Farley and Kelly, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

are chosen in prostitution because of the extreme imbalance of power. The poorest, the most vulnerable women, are basically made available for constant sexual access.”<sup>25</sup>

Sexual exploitation is a vehicle for racism and "first world" domination, disproportionately victimizing minority and "third world" women.<sup>26</sup> Indigenous women are “brutally exploited” in prostitution, such as Mayan women in Mexico, Hmong women in Minneapolis or First Nations women in Vancouver.<sup>27</sup>

African-American women are forced to deal with the oppression that arises from being black in a white-supremacist culture and the oppression that arises from being female in a male-supremacist culture.<sup>28</sup> Racism makes black women and girls especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation and keeps them trapped in the sex industry. This happens because educational and career opportunities for African-Americans as a whole are limited in the United States.

In addition, racist stereotypes in the mainstream media and in pornography portray black women as wild animals who are ready for any kind of sex, any time, with anybody.<sup>29</sup> Strip joints and massage parlors are typically zoned in black neighborhoods, which gives the message to white men that it is acceptable to solicit black women and girls for sex—that all black women are prostituted women.<sup>30</sup>

Once in prostitution, women of color face barriers to escape. With a lack of culturally sensitive services, black women are forced to go to white agencies for help.<sup>31</sup> This creates a double bind, with a strong taboo in the black community of speaking to outsiders, especially whites, about problems within the black community, and white-dominated agencies ill-equipped to understand and deal with problems of poor black women.<sup>32</sup>

As a result, prostitution exploits women’s lack of survival options. Women go into prostitution because of forces that choose for them, with survivors describing prostitution as “volunteer slavery.”<sup>33</sup> Women who enter prostitution don’t make a free choice, according to Vanessa Kelly, coordinator of the Traumatic Stress Treatment Program at the University of California in San Francisco. “If you look at what is perceived as a free choice,” she states, “it is significantly impacted by one’s financial situation or by poverty, racism or prior sexual abuse. When you consider all those factors, it is not a decision at all. It’s the limited choices that people have.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Katia Dunn. “Prostitution: Pro or Con?” *The Portland Mercury*. (May 9, 2002.)

<http://www.portlandmercury.com/news/prostitution-pro-or-con/Content?oid=26820&show=comments>

<sup>26</sup> Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “An Introduction to CATW.” Harm.

<http://www.catwinternational.org/about/index.php>

<sup>27</sup> Farley, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Cultural Amnesia,” 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Melissa Farley, “Unequal,” *Prostitution Education and Research*, (September 13, 2005), 2.

<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Unequal.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Constance Johnson, “Prostitution: Not a victimless career choice,” *Women’s E-news*, (September 22, 2000).

<http://www.womensenews.org/story/prostitution-and-trafficking/000922/prostitution-not-victimless-career-choice>

## A Continuum of Abuse

The violence and abuse women and girls experienced in childhood becomes ongoing and pervasive in prostitution. Women who experienced early sexual abuse are at risk for a later recurrence of sexual and physical trauma.<sup>35</sup> Incest, rape and prostitution, therefore, may be seen as points on a continuum of sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>36</sup> Even though sex industry apologists contend that prostitution is “sex work,” unpleasant labor much like factory work, the following statistics prove otherwise.

In a 1998 international study of 475 people in prostitution in South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, Zambia and the U.S., 55 to 82 percent reported being physically abused and up to 75 percent reported being raped by a customer.<sup>37</sup> Studies show that women in prostitution are not only beaten, they’re beaten repeatedly.<sup>38</sup> And in no other so-called profession are so many women murdered each year. Women in prostitution are 18 times more likely to be murdered than women of similar age and race.<sup>39</sup>

One 14-year-old stated: “You feel like a piece of hamburger meat—all chopped up and barely holding together.”<sup>40</sup> Prostitution, therefore, is not a profession or “work.” It is torture. Women in prostitution are battered women.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the techniques of physical violence used by pimps are often the same as those used by torturers.<sup>42</sup> In one instance, a teenager was beaten with a six-foot bullwhip, and another was tied to a car and forced to run behind it.<sup>43</sup>

One of the myths about prostitution is that “high-class” call-girl prostitution is vastly different and much safer than street prostitution. Escort prostitution simply means that an ad is placed online or in a newspaper, that she or her pimp has a cell phone, and there is access to a home or hotel room.<sup>44</sup> “High-class call girl” also means that more money passes through several people’s hands.<sup>45</sup> The booker—whoever organizes the appointments—usually makes 10 percent off the top, then splits the money 50-50 between the woman and the agency.<sup>46</sup>

As to harm, research has not verified that call-girl prostitution is safer than street prostitution.<sup>47</sup> It is not uncommon to find high-class call girls charging \$10,000 per night, still, these women

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<sup>35</sup> Farley and Kelly, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Malarek, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>39</sup> Brenda Zurita, “Prostitution is not a profession,” *Concerned Women for America*, (December 14, 2005). <http://www.beverlylahayeinstitute.org/articledisplay.asp?id=9691&department=BLI&categoryid=family&subcategoryid=blitraf>

<sup>40</sup> Farley and Kelly, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Melissa Farley. “Prostitution Harms Women Even if Indoors: Reply to Weitzer.” *Violence Against Women*, (2005).

<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Farley%20Indoor%20Prostitution.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Mike Celezic. “Q&A with a call girl.” *Today MSNBC.com*, (March 12, 2008)

<http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/23589422/>

<sup>47</sup> Farley and Kelly, 28.

report being abused twice a year.<sup>48</sup> One report states that women in all forms of prostitution (escort, strip club, street, massage parlor and brothel) were subject to sexual violence.<sup>49</sup>

While many people see a big difference between high-class call girls and prostituted women in a brothel, beneath their glossy exteriors the high-priced call girls have a lot in common with the women in the brothels. Many come from broken homes, were homeless at some point, and were abused as children and suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>50</sup> For example, the call girl in the scandal of former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer appeared to be living a glamorous life, making more than \$4,000 in one night. But the reality was far from different. The 22-year-old identified as “Kristen” in court documents left a broken home, abused drugs and had been homeless.<sup>51</sup>

In an interview with Today.msnbc, Natalie McLennan, a native of Montreal, was a 24-year-old aspiring actress when she started working for a top-end escort service in New York City. Struggling and starving, she decided to try the “escort” business to survive financially, but finally got out. “I had so much anxiety and panic attacks because I felt something might happen,” she said. “I couldn’t sleep at night.”<sup>52</sup>

Despite the alarming stories and statistics, much of the literature continues to focus on prostitution as a vocational choice. The notion that prostitution is work, however, tends to make its harm invisible.<sup>53</sup> Prostitution is institutionalized and mainstreamed when it is considered to be unpleasant but legitimate “sex work.” Even organizations such as the World Health Organization and Amnesty International USA have made the policy error of defining prostitution as a job rather than as human rights abuse.<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately, viewing prostitution as a viable “choice” for women, such as secretarial work or waitressing, diminishes the possibility of getting women out and improving their lives. In fact, more than 90 percent of prostituted women in various surveys want out, but lack viable options.<sup>55</sup> They are unable to leave because of their pimps, their addiction, and/or the need to feed their children. In order to leave, they need housing, job training, jobs and medical care—including substance abuse treatment—issues to be discussed later in this paper.<sup>56</sup>

### **Harm to Women**

Inevitably, the rape-like acts of prostitution cause harm to women’s and girls’ mental and emotional states. Sixty-eight percent of women in prostitution suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and may have symptoms of anxiety, depression, insomnia, irritability,

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<sup>48</sup> Megan K. Scott. “Prostitution realities are unlike glamour myth in wake of Spitzer scandal.” *Associated Press*, (March 28, 2008).  
[http://www.caase.org/pdf/articles/2008/2\\_Prostitution\\_Realities-are-Unlike-Glamour-Myth-in-Wake-of-Spitzer-Scandal\\_AP.pdf](http://www.caase.org/pdf/articles/2008/2_Prostitution_Realities-are-Unlike-Glamour-Myth-in-Wake-of-Spitzer-Scandal_AP.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Scott.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Celeizic.

<sup>53</sup> Gerdes, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Melissa Farley, “Prostitution is sexual violence,” *Psychiatric Times*, Vol. 21, No. 12, (October 1, 2004).  
<http://www.psychiatristimes.com/display/article/10168/48311?pageNumber=2&verify=0>

<sup>55</sup> Gerdes, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Farley, “Unequal,” 2.

flashbacks, emotional numbing and hyper-alertness.<sup>57</sup> One woman described how her symptoms of PTSD were ignored by her therapist:

“I wonder why I keep going to therapists and telling them I can’t sleep and I have nightmares. They pass right over the fact that I was a prostitute and I was beaten with two-by-four boards. I had my fingers and toes broken by a pimp and I was raped more than 30 times. Why do they ignore that?”<sup>58</sup>

A health study in Minnesota focusing on women in prostitution found that 46 percent had attempted suicide and 19 percent had tried to physically harm themselves in other ways, such as cutting themselves.<sup>59</sup> The Council for Prostitution Alternatives found that 65 percent of prostituted women had seriously attempted suicide, and 38 percent had attempted it more than once.<sup>60</sup> Public records show that 15 percent of all suicide victims in the U.S. are prostituted women and girls.<sup>61</sup>

Chronic violence and abuse within prostitution also makes women vulnerable to physical health problems. One survey of prostituted women in San Francisco found that half reported joint pain, cardiovascular and respiratory symptoms, neurological problems and HIV.<sup>62</sup>

For increasing numbers of women and girls, prostitution is a death sentence when they contract HIV.<sup>63</sup> Violence is a primary risk factor for HIV because the virus can spread more easily through broken or abraded tissue.<sup>64</sup> The number of prostitutes with HIV is staggering. For example, in Burkina Faso in West Africa, 58 percent of the prostitutes and 74 percent of prostitutes in Kenya are HIV-positive.<sup>65</sup> Yet, most research treats HIV as if it were only a threat to the male customers who must protect themselves from “irresponsible females.”<sup>66</sup>

Once women are prostituted, it’s difficult to get out. Many professionals who have contact with women in prostitution recognize their inability to leave. In one study, 76 percent of law enforcement officials and 71 percent of social service providers interviewed said that some women in prostitution are held captive and are not free to leave.<sup>67</sup> Even if they are not being held

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<sup>57</sup> Farley and Kelly, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ruth Parriott, “Health Experiences of Twin Cities Women Used in Prostitution: Survey Findings and Recommendations,” (Unpublished, May 1994), available from *Breaking Free*, 1821 University Ave., Suite 312, South, St. Paul, Minnesota 55104; also available from the *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*. <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/mhvhealth.htm>

<sup>60</sup> Donna M. Hughes, “Best practices to address the demand side of trafficking,” *Women’s Studies Program, University of Rhode Island*, (August 2004), 5. [http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand\\_sex\\_trafficking.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand_sex_trafficking.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Farley, “Prostitution: A critical review,” 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, “Prostitution: Not a victimless career choice.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Janice G. Raymond, Donna M. Hughes and Carol J. Gomez, “Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States,” *The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*, (March 2001), 5. [http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand\\_sex\\_trafficking.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand_sex_trafficking.pdf)

by physical force, one of the best things society can do for women is to support them “to get out of it” and “try not to pretend that one of the worst forms of sexual violence in the world is something that is benign and something a woman chooses.”<sup>68</sup> Statistics and studies have made it clear that prostitution is not a victimless crime.

**Guys get off on controlling women, use physical power to control women, really. If you look at it, it's paid rape. You're making them subservient during that time, so you're the dominant person. She has to do what you want.**<sup>69</sup> – *A john*

### **Players in the Demand Side of Prostitution**

There are four key players in the demand side of prostitution:

1. Men—or the johns—drive the demand for prostitution and are complicit with other players who are also part of the demand side of prostitution. These include:
2. the profiteers, e.g., pimps, brothels, escort services, clubs, etc., in the sex industries;
3. countries that complicity derive revenue from the sex industries; and
4. a culture that indirectly creates a demand for victims by normalizing prostitution.

**1.) The first and key part of demand: The johns.** While women continue to be branded as prostitutes, whores, sluts, hookers and harlots, the users of prostituted women are benignly labeled as clients, patrons, customers and johns.<sup>70</sup> It's impossible to tackle the myriad issues surrounding prostitution, however, “without taking a hard look at these men [johns], at their characters, actions and motivations.”<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, the media and researchers have shown great interest in prostitution and women who are prostituted, but little attention has been paid to their male customers. The stark reality, however, is that “little will be done to stop this insanity until men start taking responsibility for their actions, until men realize that *they* are the problem.”<sup>72</sup> Today women who are prostituted are still seen as the sexual deviants while men who purchase sex are pursuing a normal and accepted “need.”

“It would not be profitable for pimps and criminals to stay in this business if platoons of men weren't prowling side streets in search of purchased sex—male buyers who are willing to close their eyes and shell out \$50 or \$100 for a few minutes of physical bliss while deepening the misery of countless women and children.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, in most discussions and research, the ultimate consumers of prostituted women are largely ignored. “They are the missing link.”<sup>74</sup>

Several explanations have been given for this lack of study of males who prostitute women. Some argue that lack of research of males who buy and sell women reflects a sexual double standard in which women are seen as responsible for men's deviance. As with most double standards in society, women are blamed for men's sexual behaviors, and as such, men's buying and selling of

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<sup>68</sup> Malarek, 241.

<sup>69</sup> Melissa Farley, “Prostitution and trafficking in Nevada: Making the Connections,” *Prostitution Research & Education Publishers*, (September 26, 2007), 88.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue, xiv

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue, xv.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

women is not reflected in the research.<sup>75</sup> Others contend that lack of focus on men as the demand side of prostitution is consistent with the assumption that men's demand is natural and inevitable, which is addressed below.<sup>76</sup>

How many johns are there? Because of lack of research on johns, it's difficult to calculate numbers. However, one thing is certain: They vastly outnumber the estimated 10 to 40 million prostituted women and children worldwide, who, on average, service four to six men a day.

Studies that have been conducted vary from country to country, with the highest rates of men who purchase sex in Southeast Asia, with Thailand, Cambodia and Japan leading the pack at more than 70 percent.<sup>77</sup> In Europe, Spain has the highest numbers of men who have paid for sex at 39 percent. In Germany, 18 percent of men pay for sex regularly. In Italy, 17 percent purchase sex regularly; in Switzerland, 19 percent; and in Britain, Finland, Russia and Norway, it's anywhere from 14 to 19 percent. In the United States, an estimated 16 percent of men have paid for sex on at least one occasion.<sup>78</sup>

### **Why do men pay for sex?**

Men who pay for sex, far from being a tiny minority of men, are a substantial subsection of the male population and broadly representative of it on most demographic variables.<sup>79</sup>

They are men like Sgt. Dan Jacober, a 16-year veteran of the Sherwood City Police Department, who arrived at the Hilton Hotel in Portland to meet a girl named Haley.<sup>80</sup> Haley had posted an ad on Craigslist, the Web's largest classified advertising site, describing herself as a 20-something, blonde sorority girl in town for a night and "not afraid to try anything." He asked her to wear black panties. They agreed on \$150.<sup>81</sup> Jacober was hoping to get lucky, but along with five others, was arrested for solicitation as part of an undercover sting operation. Their friends and families were shocked.<sup>82</sup>

Why do men like Jacober seek out women for prostitution? Research finds that many assumptions made about johns are myths. Seldom are the men lonely or have sexually unsatisfying relationships.<sup>83</sup> In fact, men who purchase sex acts are more likely to have more sexual partners than those who do not purchase sex acts. They often report they are satisfied with their wives or partners. They say they are searching for "something more"—sex acts that their wives will not do or excitement that comes with the hunt for a woman they can buy for a short time.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Martin A. Monto and Deana Julka. "Conceiving of Sex as a Commodity: A study of arrested customers of female street prostitutes." *University of Portland. Western Criminology Review* (2009), 1. <http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v10n1/Monto.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Gerdes, 195.

<sup>80</sup> Malarek, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>83</sup> Donna Hughes, "Prostitution: Causes and Solutions," *Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain*, (July 1-3, 2004), 4. [http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/prostitution\\_spain\\_july04.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/prostitution_spain_july04.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 3.

Research also shows that the attitude of johns throughout the world is remarkably consistent—it is about entitlement, power and control.<sup>85</sup> Johns seek brief encounters where they express selfish desires without the burden of responsibility or reciprocity.<sup>86</sup>

A series of interviews with johns conducted by women employed by massage brothels noted that on one hand johns believe that commercial sex was a mutually pleasurable exchange, while on the other, they asserted that payment of money removed all social and ethical obligations.<sup>87</sup> As one John said: “There are plenty of whores in the sewer willing to do what I tell them for cash.”<sup>88</sup>

The most popular belief that johns have about what they’re doing, however, is that it’s perfectly natural. “The drive for sex is in the man’s genes. It’s totally natural. It’s biological. He must have sex,” says a john called Derek. There is nothing more “natural than the biological need of men to have sex,” insists another, “wanting to have sex with beautiful women is a natural male tendency,” writes a third.<sup>89</sup>

Another john, who goes by name of “Loaded,” stated: “I feel no guilt whatsoever. I am getting what I need and I am helping them get what they need. No one is being hurt ... I do not believe that God would send me to hell for acting on my natural instincts.”<sup>90</sup>

**2.) The exploiters: The second component of demand.** Men fuel the demand side of prostitution, but the entire sex industry thrives on the exploiters. These are the facilitators of prostitution and can include traffickers, pimps, brothel owners, organized crime members, and corrupt government and police officials.<sup>91</sup> They make money from the sale of sex as a commodity. In Amsterdam, where prostitution is legal, the sex industry continues to be dominated by organized crime and is rife with money laundering, trafficking, exploitation and drug abuse.<sup>92</sup>

Outcall or escort prostitution in Nevada (where prostitution is legal in some counties) generates tens of millions of dollars annually, according to several law enforcement sources.<sup>93</sup> Many outcall/escort businesses are operated by Russian, Armenian and Mexican organized criminals.<sup>94</sup> According to many sources, the sex industry and its ancillary operations in Nevada (such as loan fraud, money laundering, falsifying income tax returns and grand theft) generate between \$1 billion and \$6 billion per year.<sup>95</sup> In Nevada and many parts of the world, these “estimates include both legal and illegal activities such as lap dancing, extortion monies paid to taxi drivers for delivery of customers to specific strip clubs, illegal escort and massage prostitution, and tips to valets and bartenders for procuring women.”<sup>96</sup>

Where prostitution is illegal, corruption is also rampant, with the operation of brothels requiring the collaboration of officials and police, “who must be willing to ignore or work with pimps and

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<sup>85</sup> Malarek, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Farley, “Prostitution: A critical review,” 29.

<sup>88</sup> Malarek, 82.

<sup>89</sup> Malarek, 96.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>91</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and Solutions,” 4.

<sup>92</sup> Malarek, 220.

<sup>93</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and trafficking in Nevada,” 123.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

traffickers.”<sup>97</sup> Pimps and brothel owners have to advertise to men that women are available for commercial sex acts, with officials ignoring this blatant advertising.<sup>98</sup>

**3. The State: The third component of demand.** By tolerating or legalizing prostitution, the state, at least passively, is contributing to the demand for victims.<sup>99</sup> The more states regulate prostitution and derive tax revenue from it, the more actively they become part of the demand for victims.<sup>100</sup> Many governments protect commercial sex businesses because of the huge profits. In many places in the world where prostitution is legalized, the state is put in the role of pimp.<sup>101</sup> Like slavery, prostitution is a lucrative form of oppression.<sup>102</sup>

According to various reports:

- The sex industries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines account for 2 to 14 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of those countries.<sup>103</sup>
- In Japan, where prostitution is not legal but widely tolerated, the sex industry is estimated to make \$83 billion annually.<sup>104</sup>
- In Germany, where prostitution and brothels are legal, an estimated 400,000 prostitutes serve 1.2 million men a day in an industry with an annual gross of \$18 billion.<sup>105</sup>

Sex trafficking in women also drives revenue for states. In destination places, strategies are devised to protect the sex industries that generate hundreds of millions of dollars per year for the state where prostitution is legal, or for organized crime groups and corrupt officials where the sex industry is illegal.<sup>106</sup> While some question the link between sex trafficking and prostitution, many agree the two cannot be separated. According to Lisa Thompson, liaison for the Abolition of Sexual Trafficking of the Salvation Army USA, National Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, “I like to make the example between the demand for prostitution and trafficking like the relationship of rocket fuel to the space shuttle. It’s the stuff that makes it go.”<sup>107</sup>

Traffickers ensure there is an endless supply ready to satisfy the burgeoning demand—women of all ages, ethnicities, shapes and sizes, women trained to submit to the full range of what johns demand. There’s no question that “the skyrocketing demand has contributed to global sex trafficking.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and Solutions,” 4.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Melissa Farley. “Prostitution in Five Countries: Violence and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” *Prostitution Research & Education*. (1998).

<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/fempsy3.html>

<sup>102</sup> Farley, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Cultural Amnesia,” 102.

<sup>103</sup> International Labour Organization. “Sex Industry Assuming Massive Proportions in Southeast Asia.” (August 19, 1998).

[http://www.ilo.org/global/About the ILO/Media and public information/Press releases/lang--en/WCMS\\_007994/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/About%20the%20ILO/Media%20and%20public%20information/Press%20releases/lang-en/WCMS_007994/index.htm)

<sup>104</sup> Suvendrini Kakuchi. “Sex Work, Illegal Status Add to Risks for Trafficked Women.” *IPS News*, (2003). <http://ipsnews.net/migration/stories/sexwork.html>

<sup>105</sup> terroristplanet.com . “Human Trafficking, Slavery and the Sex Trade.”

<http://www.terroristplanet.com/2010/02/human-trafficking-slavery-and-the-sex-trade/>

<sup>106</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and Solutions,” 4.

<sup>107</sup> Marielena Zuniga, “Caged Birds,” *Soroptimist International of the Americas Best for Women*, 15. (September/October/November 2000).

<sup>108</sup> Malarek, 294.

States are also complicit in sex tourism, with sex tour companies organizing trips for their customers to another country for the primary purpose of engaging in prostitution.<sup>109</sup> In Cuba, for example, as in many other countries, governments seeking low investment, high-yield industries have turned to this “service industry” to facilitate the generation of income for state coffers. In doing so, states have become integral players in the selling of their own citizenry.<sup>110</sup> Sex tours originate mainly from Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States, among others, and go to developing countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.<sup>111</sup>

A seasoned john said, “Go to a monger (or a john) destination and give it a try. As you probably know, you will be risking addiction to cheap rental p----. Keep a close hold on your wallet. You might be a prime candidate for exploitation by a cheap rental girl. All is not lost. Enjoy.”<sup>112</sup> Today, the expansion of sex tourism continues unabated, in part as a result of the promotion of tourism as a development strategy, particularly in developing countries, where poverty forces women into prostitution.<sup>113</sup>

In addition, laws against prostitution in many countries are usually not enforced, or unevenly applied, and traditionally have represented one of the most direct forms of discrimination against women. The woman who engages in prostitution is punished criminally and stigmatized socially, while her male customer, either by the explicit design of the statute, or through a pattern of discriminatory enforcement, is left unpunished and unscathed.<sup>114</sup>

**4.) Culture: The fourth component of demand.** Culture, particularly as it is influenced by mass media, is playing a large role in normalizing prostitution by portraying prostitution as a glamorous way for women to make a lot of money quickly and easily.<sup>115</sup> Media depiction of prostitution and other commercial sex acts, such as stripping and lap dancing that romanticize or glamorize these activities, influence public knowledge and opinions about the sex trade. These images suggest that prostitution is a victimless crime.<sup>116</sup> They also reflect the sexual objectification of and sexual violence against women occurring in a cultural environment where women are legal objects for sale.<sup>117</sup>

One example is the movie “Pretty Women” with Julia Roberts, a myth about prostitution as a way to get the guy. But in an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* by Ann K. Ream, a past recipient of the Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award and founder of the Voices and Faces Project to give a face and voice to rape survivors, she refers to the ever-growing culture of “Prostitution

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<sup>109</sup> Equality Now, “Spotlight on: Sex Tourism,” *feminist.com*, (December, 2003).  
[www.feminist.com/violence/spot/tourism.html](http://www.feminist.com/violence/spot/tourism.html)

<sup>110</sup> Thomas F. Carter. “Of spectacular phantasmal desires: tourism and the Cuban’s state’s complicity in the commodification of its citizens.” *Leisure Studies*, (July 2008) 241-257.  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a794698060&fulltext=713240928>

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Malarek, 63.

<sup>113</sup> Ann Barger Hannum, “Sex Tourism in Latin America,” *ReVista, Harvard Review of Latin America*, (Winter 2002).  
[www.drclas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/53](http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/53)

<sup>114</sup> ProCon.org. “Should prostitution be legal?” (2009)  
<http://prostitution.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=1315>

<sup>115</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and Solutions,” 5.

<sup>116</sup> Hughes, “Best practices,” 2-3.

<sup>117</sup> Farley, “Prostitution and trafficking in Nevada,” 179.

Chic” today. She writes of “Pimp and Ho” nights as staples in clubs and uptown benefits parties and “Turning Tricks” as the name used for pole-dancing classes being offered at gyms. Ream also points to shows such as HBO’s “Entourage” and “Cathouse” – where a Nevada pimp and his “girls” are portrayed as one big, happy, sexually uninhibited family and of Chicago’s Discovery Center’s Sex Tour brochures that “promise to take tourists to the ‘freaky and little-known locations of Chicago’s sex industry.’”<sup>118</sup>

A more recent “normalization” of prostitution has made its way into the advertising of household chores, with Sun Products Corporation creating a “Pimp My Laundry Room” contest. The makers of Wisk detergent offer a laundry room makeover for the winner of the contest, but by using the word “pimp” the company is glamorizing what pimps really do – sell and exploit women and young girls in commercial sex.<sup>119</sup>

In addition, the Internet has become a site for the global sexual exploitation of women. In the past few years, sex industries have been the leaders in opening up the Internet for the business of selling sex.<sup>120</sup> The Internet is almost without regulation because its international reach has made local and national laws and standards either obsolete or unenforceable.<sup>121</sup> As a result, countless johns seek sex closer to home, scouring local web sites and discussion boards for ads and reviews. The World Sex Guide is an Internet-based trove of information informing men about what country, what brothel, and even what women to exploit if the man prefers a certain ethnic group, a certain kind of sex, and a certain preference in women.<sup>122</sup>

In another example, Craigslist closed its erotic services category in 2009 under pressure from critics who said it fostered prostitution and other illegal services.<sup>123</sup> Craigslist announced the changes as several highly-publicized cases converged to put the 14-year-old site under scrutiny. The case of Philip Markoff, a 23-year-old medical student in Boston, allegedly accused of killing a woman who offered masseuse services through Craigslist, received national attention.<sup>124</sup> Craigslist stated that it would more closely monitor the sex advertisements and doubled the price to post them to \$10. Largely because of this, Craigslist was estimated to have a 22 percent increase in profits to \$36 billion a year. Lawmakers and activists claim that Craigslist is not doing what it said it would do. Rachel Lloyd, executive director of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services stated that “Craigslist has not given any indication that they are outraged and disturbed

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<sup>118</sup> Anne K. Ream and R. Clifton Spargo. “Prostitution Looks Chic but the Truth is Ugly.” *Chicago Tribune*. April 27, 2008.

[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-04-27/news/0804260404\\_1\\_prostitution-sexual-pussycat-dolls](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-04-27/news/0804260404_1_prostitution-sexual-pussycat-dolls)

<sup>119</sup> Amanda Kloer. “Tell Wisk: Don’t Glamorize Exploitation with Pimp My Laundry Room,” *End Human Trafficking*. March 11, 2010.

[http://humantrafficking.change.org/blog/view/tell\\_wisk\\_dont\\_glamorize\\_exploitation\\_with\\_pimp\\_my\\_laundry\\_room](http://humantrafficking.change.org/blog/view/tell_wisk_dont_glamorize_exploitation_with_pimp_my_laundry_room)

<sup>120</sup> Hughes, “Men create the demand,” 4.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Janice C. Raymond, Public Hearing on “The Impact of the Sex Industry in the E.U.,” Committee on Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities,” European Parliament, *The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*, (January 19, 2004).

<http://action.web.ca/home/catw/readingroom.shtml?x=53795>

<sup>123</sup> Brad Stone, “Under pressure, Craigslist to remove erotic ads,” *The New York Times*. (May 13, 2009).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/14/technology/companies/14craigslist.html>

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

that their site is the primary way children are bought in the country. All they have done is made cosmetic changes.”<sup>125</sup>

In addition, intense competition on the Internet has led pornographers to attract buyers with more extreme images, such as bondage, torture and bestiality, leading to increased violence against women, as more degrading and violent images, videos and live performances are made and marketed. An American in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for example, set up a live video chat site to broadcast the pay-per-view rape and torture of women.<sup>126</sup> These hardcore porn images continue the process of objectifying women and institutionalizing gender inequality.

What is most disturbing about all this information is that not only is the sex industry big business on the Internet, but that the selling of its “products”—pornography, prostitution, sex tourism, mail-order brides—all depend on the commodification of women and has become “more acceptable, more normal, and even fashionable and cool.”<sup>127</sup>

In addition, the perpetuation of stereotypes in advertising, television, magazines and music videos continue to solidify women’s sexual roles and unequal gender relations in multiple ways. Provocative images of women’s partly-clothed or naked bodies are especially prevalent in advertising, sexualizing women to grab the viewer’s attention.<sup>128</sup> Women become sexual objects when their bodies and their sexuality are linked to products that are bought and sold. Furthermore, women’s bodies are often dismembered into legs, breasts or thighs, reinforcing the message that women are objects rather than whole human beings.<sup>129</sup> Commodification of women at stag or bachelor parties has also become normalized in many cultures. Today, men may hire a stripper or lap dancer for such parties, and it is becoming common for these parties to extend to three or four nights in a foreign city where visiting a prostitute becomes part of the events.<sup>130</sup>

### **Solutions to Addressing Prostitution**

There are four general approaches to addressing the issue of prostitution: prohibition; legalization; decriminalization; and abolition.

**Prohibition.** With the prohibition approach, prostitution is defined as a criminal activity, and all activities related to prostitution are criminalized: soliciting, procuring, pimping and brothel keeping.<sup>131</sup> No distinction is made between those who sell sex, those who buy sex, or those who facilitate the buying and selling of sex or who manage establishments where prostitution takes place.<sup>132</sup> In the U.S., with the exception of a few counties in Nevada, there is a prohibition approach to prostitution.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Stone, Brad. Sex Ads Seen as Adding Revenue to Craigslist. *The New York Times*. (April 25, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/technology/26craigslist.html?pagewanted=1&th&emc=th>

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. Stone, 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Raymond, Public Hearing on “The Impact of the Sex Industry in the E.U.”

<sup>128</sup> Media Awareness Network. “Sex and relationships in the media.” (2010)

[http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women\\_and\\_girls/women\\_sex.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_sex.cfm)

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Just Thoughts Salvation Army blogspot. “Stag parties fuel sex trafficking.” (January 24, 2010).

<http://justhumantraffick.blogspot.com/2010/01/stag-parties-fuel-sex-trafficking.html>

<sup>131</sup> Donna M. Hughes, “Approaches to Prostitution: Impact on Sex Trafficking,” *Women’s Studies Program, University of Rhode Island*, PowerPoint Slide 5.

<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/approaches.ppt>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Donna M. Hughes. “The Demand for Victims of Sex Trafficking.” 37. (June 2005)

[http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand\\_for\\_victims.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/demand_for_victims.pdf)

Some U.S. state statutes punish the act of prostitution, and other state statutes criminalize the acts of soliciting prostitution, arranging for prostitution, and operating a house of prostitution. On the federal level, the Mann Act (18 U.S.C.A. § 2421 [as amended 1986] makes it a crime to transport a person in interstate or foreign commerce for the purpose of prostitution or for any other immoral purpose.<sup>134</sup>

Other governments, however, such as Thailand, legally prohibit prostitution activities and enterprises but in reality tolerate brothels and the buying of women for commercial sexual exploitation, especially in its sex tourism industry.<sup>135</sup> And in the Philippines, where prostitution, brothel ownership and pimping are illegal, the area continues to be a capital of prostitution, with an estimate of at least half a million prostituted women.<sup>136</sup>

The prohibitionist approach often results in discrimination against victims of prostitution and trafficking when laws are more vigorously enforced against women instead of men who purchase sex acts and exploiters who market sex acts.<sup>137</sup>

**Legalization.** Legalization means that the state imposes regulations under which women can be prostituted. In effect, regulation means that under certain conditions it is permissible to exploit and abuse women.<sup>138</sup> This is the case in several counties in Nevada, the only state in the United States where brothels are legal. Under the legalization approach, prostitutes become sex workers; men become clients; pimps become managers; brothel owners are business people; and traffickers are employment agents who assist migrant sex workers to destination countries to find jobs.<sup>139</sup> The state expects to collect tax revenue from the industry and income earners, as is the case in the Netherlands, Germany and some states of Australia.<sup>140</sup>

The expected benefits of legalization have not materialized, however. Organized crime groups continue to traffic women and children and run illegal prostitution operations alongside the legal businesses.<sup>141</sup> In Germany, legalization was supposed to enable women to get health insurance and retirement benefits, and to join unions, but few women have signed up for benefits or unions. The reason has to do with the basic nature of prostitution; it is not work but abuse and exploitation.<sup>142</sup> In addition, instead of creating a safe haven for women who are prostituted, legalization creates a safe haven for traffickers and organized crime.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Legal Dictionary. Prostitution. <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Prostitution>

<sup>135</sup> Janice C. Raymond. "Ten Reasons for Not Legalizing Prostitution and a Legal Response to the Demand for Prostitution," *Journal of Traumatic Practice* (2003). 315-332.

<http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/10%20Reasons%209-15-03%20FINAL%5B1%5D.doc>

<sup>136</sup> ProCon.org. "100 Countries and Their Prostitution Policies." (June 11, 2009).

<http://prostitution.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000772>

<sup>137</sup> Hughes. "The Demand for Victims of Sex Trafficking." 38.

<sup>138</sup> Donna M. Hughes, "Making the harm visible; legalizing prostitution will not stop the harm," published by the *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women*, (February 1999).

<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/mhvlegal.htm>

<sup>139</sup> Donna M. Hughes, "Combating sex trafficking: Advancing freedom for women and girls," Keynote address Northeast Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, (March 5, 2005), 4.

[http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/combating\\_sex\\_trafficking.doc](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/combating_sex_trafficking.doc)

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Hughes, "The Demand: Where Sex Trafficking Begins," 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Victoria Hayes, "Prostitution policies and sex trafficking," *Chicago-Kent College of Law*, (Fall 2008), 15. [www.kentlaw.edu/perritt/courses/seminar/VHayes-final-IRPaper.pdf](http://www.kentlaw.edu/perritt/courses/seminar/VHayes-final-IRPaper.pdf)

**Decriminalization.** Decriminalization means the removal of laws against prostitution. In other words, buying a woman would be socially and legally equivalent to buying cigarettes.<sup>144</sup> Decriminalization eliminates all laws and prohibits the state and law-enforcement officials from intervening in any prostitution-related activities or transactions.<sup>145</sup>

In New Zealand and Australia, for example, prostitution was decriminalized at the national level, meaning they removed all laws criminalizing prostitution, such as brothel keeping, etc. But decriminalization of prostitution in those countries resulted in an increase in illegal, hidden and street prostitution, and promoted sex trafficking.<sup>146</sup> In Sweden, those who sell sex are decriminalized, but the buyers, pimps and traffickers are criminalized. In this case, decriminalization was part of an abolitionist approach.<sup>147</sup>

**Abolitionism.** The term “abolitionism” refers to the 19<sup>th</sup> century movement for the abolition of slavery in the United States. Like in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when abolitionists fought for the abolishment of slavery, modern abolitionists fight for the abolishment of prostitution as “sexual slavery.” Analogous to the traditional concept of slavery, prostituted women are seen as slaves that need to be freed and to be made conscious of their oppression.<sup>148</sup>

Central to this model is that prostitution in itself is not an offense, but any “exploitation of the prostitution of another person” is criminalized, that is, any involvement of a third party, which includes the johns, or men who buy sex, as well as pimps, brothel keepers and traffickers.<sup>149</sup> Within this view, prostituted women are not seen as deviants or criminals, but as victims.<sup>150</sup> The underlying idea is that prostitution persists only through the efforts of johns, procurers and pimps, and all those “third parties,” who induce women into prostitution. Therefore, the abolition of prostitution and the protection of women against this evil can best be achieved by penalizing johns and those third parties, that is, any one recruiting for, profiting from or organizing prostitution. On the other hand, the prostituted woman herself would not be penalized, as she is a victim.<sup>151</sup>

The abolitionist movement around the world is growing, seeking to provide assistance to victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Instead of simply legalizing prostitution, Sweden passed the Swedish Law That Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services in 1999 criminalizing the buyers of commercial sex acts and decriminalizing the sellers of sex acts.<sup>152</sup> Prostitution was denounced as “an aspect of male violence against women and children,” and the government increased funding

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<sup>144</sup> Prostitution Research & Education, “Myths and Facts About the Decriminalization of Prostitution.” [http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Decrim\\_fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Decrim_fact_sheet.htm)

<sup>145</sup> ProCon.org, “What is the difference between the decriminalization and legalization of prostitution?” (February 15, 2008). <http://prostitution.procon.org/viewanswers.asp?questionID=114>

<sup>146</sup> Prostitution Research & Education. “Myths and Facts of Decriminalization of Prostitution.” [http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Decrim\\_fact\\_sheet.htm](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/Decrim_fact_sheet.htm)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Marjan Wijers and Marieke van Doorninck, “Only rights can stop wrongs: A critical assessment of anti-trafficking strategies,” *Paper presented at European Conference on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings*, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, (September 18-20, 2002). <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/wijers-rights.html>

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Gerdes, 189-190.

both toward services to help women exit the sex trade and toward public education.<sup>153</sup> Police and prosecutors were trained intensively and pushed to enforce the law. Within five years, Sweden drastically reduced the number of both women in prostitution and johns.<sup>154</sup>

In addition, Stockholm saw reductions of between 60-80 percent in the numbers of the men prostituting women. Other cities have almost completely rid themselves of street prostitution and massage parlors and brothels are steadily disappearing. Sweden also has been able to almost completely cut out the trafficking of foreign women and girls into the country. In 2002, Sweden passed legislation increasing the government's law enforcement capabilities targeting recruiters, transporters, and hosts involved in human trafficking.<sup>155</sup>

Boriana Jönsson, member of the Stockholm-based Kvinna til Kvinna Foundation, a women's group, said, "The ban demonstrates the ethical and political attitude of the state toward prostitution and gender equality in general. From the viewpoint of human rights, there can't be such a relationship in which a man would purchase and own the body of a woman as a commodity. No civilized society, regardless of the possible fiscal or other benefits, should allow for that. Furthermore, prostitution is treated in Sweden as a crime of violence and sexual exploitation in which the women are the victims."<sup>156</sup>

### **What can be done?**

Many argue that prostitution will always be around so why bother trying to stop it. But the abolitionist model seems to be a promising answer and ties in with the bottom-line answer to that question: Society needs to acknowledge the role of johns. "If prostitution is about choice, it's about the man's choice to pay women for sex."<sup>157</sup> Men *choose* to commodify women by renting their bodies and using them for sexual gratification; men *choose* to turn a blind eye to the harsh reality that women and girls suffer; men *choose* to go on sex junkets to impoverished countries and prey on vulnerable women.<sup>158</sup>

Advocates who focus on the demand side of prostitution advise: 1.) targeting the johns and all players in the demand side of prostitution; 2.) abandoning the idea of legalization; 3.) changing societal attitudes; 4.) educating boys; 5.) enforcing the laws; 6.) and helping the women.<sup>159</sup>

**1.) Targeting all components of the demand side of prostitution.** Governments, non-governmental organizations and religious communities need to focus on reducing the demand for victims of prostitution and sex trafficking. This entails penalizing all components of the demand side, including the men, or johns, who purchase sex acts; the exploiters, e.g., the traffickers and pimps who profit from the sale of women for sex; and the states that act as pimps. Greater awareness also needs to be created about the culture that distorts the nature of prostitution.<sup>160</sup>

Men who buy women for sexual exploitation are the least discussed side of prostitution. States could address this demand by penalizing, criminalizing and sentencing the men who buy women,

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Zurita.

<sup>157</sup> Malarek, 294.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 295-298.

<sup>160</sup> Hughes, "Prostitution: Causes and solutions," 7.

and teach men what's at stake.<sup>161</sup> Sweden's law against the buying of "sexual services" has been a model that could be emulated elsewhere. Sweden has clearly chosen to resist the legalization/regulation of prostitution and to address prostitution as a form of violence against women.<sup>162</sup>

In addition, men soliciting sex from women in prostitution need to face consequences for their behaviors, and a john school is a good first step.<sup>163</sup> The late Norma Hotaling, an ex-prostituted woman, started "john schools" in the 1990s for men arrested for soliciting a prostituted woman. The goal was to educate men about the harm they were doing to women and girls and the risks to themselves when they engaged in illegal activity.

Hotaling said that only when men's "demand" for victims was countered would the number of victims decrease. Her "john school" project has become a model and is replicated throughout the United States and the world.<sup>164</sup> According to Terry Jackson, former assistant district attorney in San Francisco, the First Offender Prostitution Program (a john school started by Hotaling) "gets people thinking. It makes them think about prostitution. It makes them think about the exploitation of people and the social ramifications."<sup>165</sup>

The strategy behind the city's john school—set up 15 years ago—appears to be working. A study by the U.S. Justice Department in March 2010 concluded that the program has been effective in substantially reducing recidivism among men arrested for soliciting prostituted women.<sup>166</sup> The study found that men who went through the program were about 30 percent less likely to be rearrested for soliciting a prostituted woman than men who did not attend.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to john schools, Melissa Farley also advises prison time, a letter to the family of johns (most johns are married with children, according to researchers and former prostitutes) or posting their photo online or in the media. "They really don't like letters to their family," she said at the National Prostitute Diversion Conference in Dallas.<sup>168</sup>

Equally important is criminalizing and penalizing the exploiters and traffickers. Successful prosecutions of individuals and criminal networks that traffic and pimp women will eliminate a significant portion of transnational organized crime and corruption involved in prostitution and trafficking.<sup>169</sup> And instead of governments cashing in on the economic benefits of the sex industry by taxing it, they should invest in the futures of prostituted women by providing economic resources to provide real alternatives for them.<sup>170</sup> Finally, if there were no false messages in the

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<sup>161</sup> Malarek, 295.

<sup>162</sup> Gunilla Ekberg, "The Swedish Law that Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services," *Coalition of Women Against Trafficking*, (October 2004), 1192. <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/readingroom.shtml?x=71054>

<sup>163</sup> Malarek, 295

<sup>164</sup> Kathryn Jean Lopez, "The New Abolitionist Movement," *National Review Interrogatory*, (January 5, 2006). <http://old.nationalreview.com/interrogatory/hughes200601260824.asp>

<sup>165</sup> Hughes, "Best Practices," 31.

<sup>166</sup> PBS Now. "John Schools: Can men who hire prostitutes be reformed?" May 30, 2008.

<http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/422/prostitution.html>

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Megan Feldman. "OK, so Dallas is changing the way it deals with prostitutes, but what about the johns?" *Dallas Observer/Dallas news blog*, (November 6, 2009).

[http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/unfairpark/2009/11/something\\_about\\_johns.php](http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/unfairpark/2009/11/something_about_johns.php)

<sup>169</sup> Hughes, "Men create the demand," 2.

<sup>170</sup> Janice C. Raymond, "10 reasons for not legalizing prostitution," *Prostitution Research & Education*, March 25, 2003. <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/laws/000022.html>

mass media about prostitution, it would not be seen as a “glamorous or legitimate job” and would be seen as less normalized and accepted in culture.<sup>171</sup>

**2.) Abandoning the idea of legalization.** Over the past decade, the most popular proposed solution to prostitution and sex trafficking is legalization. Many people believe that by calling for the legalization of prostitution, they are dignifying and professionalizing the women in prostitution. But dignifying prostitution as work doesn’t dignify the women. It simply dignifies the sex industry.<sup>172</sup> Legalization will never sanitize the buying and selling of women for sexual gratification, and will never put an end to the violence and degradation they endure.<sup>173</sup>

Prostitution has been legalized with the expectation that it would bring positive outcomes in Australia, the Netherlands, Germany and New Zealand.<sup>174</sup> But legalization does not reduce prostitution or trafficking; in fact, both activities increase because men can legally buy sex acts, and pimps and brothel keepers can legally sell and profit from them.<sup>175</sup> The argument that legalization was supposed to take the criminal elements out of sex businesses by strict regulation of the industry has failed.

Amsterdam is known for prostitution. Its red light district draws tourists from around the globe in search of sex and voyeurism. So, how did legalizing prostitution work for Amsterdam? Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen admitted that the Dutch experiment to end abuse by legalizing prostitution has failed.<sup>176</sup> He has been quoted in the media as saying: “Almost five years after the lifting of the brothel ban in 2000, we have to acknowledge that the aims of the law have not been reached. Lately we’ve received more and more signals that abuse still continues.” The police admit, “We are in the midst of modern slavery.”

**3.) Changing social attitudes about prostitution.** Society must confront just how damaged “masculinity is today and how destructive male behavior has become, both inward and outward.”<sup>177</sup> The consumerist/consuming society gives priority to individualism in the U.S. and to the unrestrained consumption of people and things. In addition, patriarchal cultures rest on the idea that the unique duty of women is to satisfy men sexually, in marriage or by prostitution.<sup>178</sup> Music, videos, TV, commercials, magazine ads, Hollywood movies and pornography also contribute to teaching young men to view women, girls and sex as a commodity that can be bought and sold.<sup>179</sup>

Magazine ads that fantasize gang rape or hip-hop and “gangsta” rap all sexualize and demean women. In addition, various filming techniques, such as camera shots that pan over women’s bodies or present fragments of women’s bodies as a number of disconnected body parts, can dehumanize women and create an environment where sexual assault and violence against women are not taken seriously. Countries and communities desperately need intervention programs that change the attitudes of men, women and society at large.<sup>180</sup> While men are largely responsible for the demand side of prostitution, women in society are often complicit in their tacit acceptance of

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<sup>171</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and solutions,” 7.

<sup>172</sup> Raymond, “10 reasons for not legalizing prostitution,” 1.

<sup>173</sup> Malarek, 295.

<sup>174</sup> Hughes, “Prostitution: Causes and Solutions,” 2.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Zurita.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Gerdes, 80.

<sup>179</sup> Malarek, 297.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

prostitution and the sexualization of girls. While some women's rights groups are attempting to create awareness about the violence against prostituted women, all people concerned with human rights—men and women—must address the massive denial in society regarding its harm and its normalization as an inevitable social evil.<sup>181</sup>

**4.) Educate Young People—Especially Boys.** Young people need frank, open discussions about sex, sexuality and healthy relationships. Boys need to know what it means to be a man because what they are seeing in society today can have a devastating effect on them.<sup>182</sup> Contributing to an unhealthy sense of women and their bodies is the increasing use of pornography by young boys. One study found that 60 percent of boys have seen porn by age 16, and the average age at which boys start watching is 11 years old. Proper sex education in schools needs to start before that age.<sup>183</sup>

Society needs to teach boys about loving and lasting relationships built on respect for girls and women. The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), for example, sponsors projects that work to educate boys and young men in changing their sexual attitudes toward girls and women. The video, "First Time," critiques the "coming of age" rite in which teenage boys are encouraged to have their first sexual experience with a prostituted girl or young woman.<sup>184</sup> And in the Philippines and Mexico, the CATW disseminates an educational manual that challenges concepts of masculinity centered around sexual violence and exploitation.<sup>185</sup>

**5.) Enforcing the laws.** Every country has laws in place regarding trafficking, abduction, coercion, assault and rape.<sup>186</sup> What is needed, however, are successful prosecutions of individuals and criminal networks that traffic and pimp women. This will eliminate a significant portion of transitional organized crime and corruption that exists in countries throughout the world.<sup>187</sup> Again, Sweden is a role model in their practice of criminalizing the buying of sexual services.

**6.) Helping the women.** According to sex industry advocates, prostituted women are provided with condoms and a union, their problems will be solved. But research shows that women want more than condoms and unions—they want to get out of prostitution.<sup>188</sup> According to research, when prostituted women were asked what they needed to get out of prostitution, they responded:<sup>189</sup>

- a home or safe place to live, 78 percent
- job training, 73 percent
- alcohol and drug treatment, 67 percent
- health care, 58 percent
- peer support, 50 percent

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<sup>181</sup> Farley, "Prostitution is Sexual Violence."

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>183</sup> Alex DeBranco. "Porn Teaches Boys that Sexual Assault is A-Okay." *Women's Rights*. (January 27, 2010).

[http://womensrights.change.org/blog/view/porn\\_teaches\\_boys\\_that\\_sexual\\_assault\\_is\\_a-okay](http://womensrights.change.org/blog/view/porn_teaches_boys_that_sexual_assault_is_a-okay)

<sup>184</sup> Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. "Project to Curb Male Demand for Prostitution,"

<http://www.catwinternational.org/campaigns.php#curb>

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Malarek, 297.

<sup>187</sup> Hughes, "Men create the demand."

<sup>188</sup> Farley, "Unequal," 2.

<sup>189</sup> Annie Lobert. "Prostitution statistics – The real truth." *Powerhouse Ministry*.

[http://powerhouse-ministry.org/annielobert\\_prostitution.aspx](http://powerhouse-ministry.org/annielobert_prostitution.aspx)

- individual counseling, 48 percent
- legal assistance, 42 percent
- child care, 28 percent.

In order to “get out” of prostitution, women need a variety of supportive services. One example is the Breaking Free program in St. Paul, Minnesota. That program, suffering now due to government cutbacks, works with about 400 women a year, in all venues of prostitution—on the street, off the Internet, in escort services, or with international women being trafficked for sex work. Breaking Free offers a 12-week support group and aftercare; life skills classes; 18-to-24 month transitional housing for at least seven women; and a “john school.”<sup>190</sup>

The Council for Prostitution Alternatives (CPA) in Portland, Oregon, is another example. The mission of CPA is to support women and children affected by the sex industry to find safer, healthier life paths by exploring alternatives in a safe and supportive structure. Their services include: case management, emergency services, and educational and peer support groups.

### Conclusion

Today, men are no longer invisible in their role of perpetuating prostitution and sex trafficking. A more comprehensive view of the global sex trade has brought the “demand” side to the attention of activists, scholars, and officials.<sup>191</sup> The bottom line: If there were no demand, prostitution would not exist. “If men the world over did not demand sex, there would be no need to corral, break and submit millions of women and children to this dehumanizing experience.”<sup>192</sup>

The world at large has to continue to talk about the men who are the perpetrators. They are the ones who have to be accountable, to take responsibility for their behavior, and stop buying and sexually exploiting women and girls. Governments and non-governmental organizations have to continue to discuss and act against these buyers and perpetrators while also finding ways to assist women out of prostitution. Society also needs to become more aware of the value of women and girls and how the sexualization of girls, in particular, is a broad and increasing problem and is harmful to girls’ self-image and healthy development.

Even with these measures, however, many people still throw up their hands in surrender, asking “why even bother?” Some argue that it is unrealistic to think that prostitution can ever be abolished. They may feel it is too intimidating, ugly, entrenched and pervasive a problem.<sup>193</sup> This is a dangerous position. By accepting defeat and surrendering to pro-prostitution forces, society is basically accepting that these women and girls deserve to be abused and raped.<sup>194</sup>

What is at stake is too important, too critical to continue to ignore—that is, the dignity of women and girls worldwide. In prostitution, there is no dignity, no empowerment, no equality in any form. As long as men continue to feel they have the right to rent, buy and sell the bodies of women and girls, there will never be equality in the world of any kind. This is NOT a right and never should be, and everyone needs to do all in his or her power to abolish prostitution.

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<sup>190</sup> Pat Pheifer, “A way out of prostitution.” *StarTribune.com*, (October 14, 2009).  
[www.startribune.com/local/63937547.html](http://www.startribune.com/local/63937547.html)

<sup>191</sup> Donna M. Hughes, “Demand for Child Victims,” *Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Brussels*, (December 1-2, 2004), 14.  
[http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/child\\_victims.doc](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/child_victims.doc)

<sup>192</sup> Malarek, 293.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

## **How Soroptimist Works to End Prostitution and Trafficking**

Soroptimist is an international volunteer organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world. Soroptimist clubs undertake a number of different projects to confront local realities facing women and girls. Many projects directly and indirectly help victims of prostitution and women and girls vulnerable to prostitution by providing direct aid—giving women economic tools and skills to achieve financial empowerment and independence. As an organization, Soroptimist supports the following programs:

**Soroptimists STOP Trafficking**—In 2007, Soroptimist launched a public awareness campaign to address the sex trafficking and slavery of women and girls. A launch event was held on December 2, the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery (non-U.S.) and on January 11, the National Day of Human Trafficking Awareness (U.S.). Soroptimist chose an awareness-raising project because a necessary first step in ending sex trafficking and sex slavery is ensuring that everyone knows it exists. Soroptimist clubs also pursue initiatives addressing prevention, advocacy for better laws, and victim services.

Soroptimist International of Makati, Philippines, focused on providing at-risk women with economic alternatives to prostitution. The club conducted a nine-month livelihood skills training program for trafficked and prostituted women ages 14 to 18. Recognizing these women lacked skills that would make them otherwise employable in the professional world, the club developed skills training modules in partnership with the Third World Movement against the Exploitation of Women. Each module included practical lessons in “How to Start a Small Business,” “Values Formation/Guidance Counseling,” and “Skills Training Demonstration.” The aim of the project was to educate and empower trafficked and prostituted women to become financially self-reliant entrepreneurs. The participants worked in teams with each creating a business plan eligible for a loan (from the Makati club) to start from its own business.

Soroptimist International of Dazaifu, Japan, advocated for trafficking victims’ rights by partnering with nine other Soroptimist clubs and a local women’s empowerment organization to carry out a signature collection campaign. The campaign called for legislation provisionally titled “Protection of Sex Trafficking Victims Act.” By the end of the project, the club and its partners had collected more than 2,000 signatures that were sent to the Women’s Empowerment Center in Fukuoka for further action.

Soroptimist International of Ripon, California, supported Lighthouse, a program that offers friendship and hope to prostituted women in the red light district in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The club donated funds to Lighthouse for a resource center on human trafficking aimed at educating the prostituted women. Twice a week, Lighthouse members serve coffee and tea to the women in their “display windows,” providing practical help and resources on how to start a new life. The program also started a weekly support group, offering immigration referrals, access to healthcare, job training, counseling, rehabilitation, and legal assistance.

**Soroptimist Women’s Opportunity Awards**—The Women’s Opportunity Awards program is Soroptimist’s major program. The awards improve the lives of women and their families by giving them resources to improve their education, skills, and employment prospects. By helping women receive skill and resource training, Soroptimist provides women with economic alternatives to prostitution.

Many Women's Opportunity Award recipients have overcome enormous obstacles in their quest for a better life, including poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, prostitution and trafficking. Each year, about \$1.5 million is disbursed through the awards to help women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. Since the Women's Opportunity Awards program began in 1972, it is estimated that \$25 million has been disbursed and more than 30,000 women have been assisted.

One recent recipient, Minda Pascual of the Philippines, endured years and years of abuse—first at the hands of her mother's live-in partner and then as a trafficked woman working in the sex trade. She was drugged and her life was destroyed. She had three children by foreign men from the nearby military base and feared that her children would suffer as she had. Even when she did try to leave prostitution, she couldn't find other work that would pay enough to feed her children. Finally, with the help of an NGO, she enrolled in a vocational course. She managed to continue her education until she ran out of money. She was introduced to Soroptimist International of Sampaloc and received the club's 2008-2009 Women's Opportunity Award so she could continue her education. Minda dreams of becoming a social worker but it hasn't been easy—the temptation to return to the sex trade was strong at some points. But she never returned because of her children and her passion to help other women victims regain their dignity. She plans to help prostituted women with practical help, specifically in rescuing women and helping them to find gainful employment.

**Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls**— Often the abilities and ambitions of Soroptimist clubs exceed their financial resources. Soroptimist introduced the Soroptimist Club Grants for Women and Girls in 1997 to assist with community projects that improve the lives of women and girls. Each year, grants are given to clubs working on projects that help foster economic independence, provide job skills training and education, and provide women with the resources necessary to move themselves and their families out of poverty. Projects of this type give women economic alternatives to prostitution. In the 2009-2010 club year, Soroptimist is awarding thirty-one projects with a total of \$175,000 in funding. Since the program's inception, more than \$2.5 million has been awarded for 427 projects assisting more than 200,000 women and their families. Several grants have supported anti-trafficking projects around the world.

**Ruby Award: For Women Helping Women.** Formerly the Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award, the newly named Soroptimist Ruby Award honors women who have worked to improve the lives of women and girls through their professional and/or volunteer work. Each year, Soroptimist chooses one finalist, who is honored and receives a \$5,000 donation to the charitable organization of her choice.

A recent region recipient, Theresa Flores, was a 15-year-old girl from a good, upper-middle-class, Catholic family when she was forced to work as a sex slave for two years in an upscale suburb of Detroit, Michigan. Her father was an executive who moved every two years with his job. When the family moved to a Detroit suburb, Flores met a boy who raped her. His cousins had secretly taken photos of the rape and the boy threatened to send the pictures to her father unless she "earned" them back. For the next two years, the boys plied her with drugs, raping and beating her and selling her body to others. Finally, Flores was saved when her family was relocated to Connecticut. After the move, she graduated from high school, attended Ball State for her undergraduate degree and later, earned a master's degree in counseling education from the University of Dayton. While at college, Flores found the courage to speak out about her experience and today works to end human trafficking. A single mother of three, she is a licensed social worker and has written two books, "The Sacred Bath: An American Teen Story of Modern Day Slavery" and "The Slave Across the Street." Working to help pass human trafficking

legislation in Ohio, Flores is also director of awareness and training for Gracehaven, a safe home for girls under the age of 18 who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

**Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls**—Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls provide funds ranging from \$1,000 to \$20,000 to assist women and/or girls prepare for or recover from disasters or acts of war. Disaster grants can be used for projects that address disaster risk reduction or recovery. Disaster risk reduction projects are projects designed to lessen the intensity and adverse impacts of a disaster, such as early warning systems. Disaster recovery projects are longer-term projects, such as job training and community revitalization. Clubs are encouraged to conduct research in their community to find out what types of disaster services are needed by women and/or girls. Grants can be used for projects administered by Soroptimist clubs or regions or to assist other organizations that specialize in disaster support nationally or internationally.

While disasters create hardships for many, women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable because of existing gender inequalities that are magnified during and following a disaster. Poor women and single mothers—the poorest of the poor—who lack access to support services and aid following disasters are especially vulnerable to traffickers. Because relief efforts targeted to women are often overlooked during a crisis, and because women and girls have special needs in times of crisis and disaster, the Soroptimist Disaster Grant program provide grants for projects targeting the special needs of women and girls prior to, during and after disasters.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, SIA donated \$20,000 to the SARA Center which helps victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Following a flood in 2008, SIA donated \$20,000 to Soroptimist International of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which partnered with Waypoint, a safe house for women victims of domestic and sexual violence. Funds were used to rebuild the commercial laundry facilities at the safe house, which had been destroyed by the flood.

Soroptimist International of the Americas is a 501(c)(3) organization. In December 2004, Soroptimist received the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO) Seal of Excellence for its successful compliance with the Standards for Excellence program. Soroptimist was re-certified in 2007. Soroptimist programs have won many awards for their ability to help women and girls transform their lives.