



May - June 2011

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES NEWSLETTER

Editorial

It was a peaceful Monday morning--until Stephanie arrived. She had just spent the weekend at a simulation of a tribunal on sexual exploitation and following her experience, she felt the need to share her experience with Cathy and the team. A lively discussion ensued, but the group did not reach a consensus. I am not sure if prostitution is the oldest job in the world (a non-central question in my opinion), but it's certainly one of the oldest issues of debate.

Do we have to stone prostitutes, shut them in brothels, treat them like ladies like het- aerae in Ancient Greece or courtesans in Napoleon's France, revere them like in ancient Sumer or give them complete free- dom to practice their activity? And what about their freedom of choice? Does one have to consider all forms of prostitution in the same way: prostitution as a job, or prostitution as exploitation? What is most important: rights, freedom or human dignity? Who is subjected? Who is taking advantage? Who benefits? Is there one unique and perfect solution?

There are many questions... The team concluded that it was worth thinking about and discussing it. Of course, we did not find an answer to each question, but we propose several points to explore and reflect upon.

Enjoy your reading.

Summary

- Sexual Exploitation Facts and Figures
- Women, First Victims of Trafficking
- Trafficking and Smuggling
- First Stop: A Y Action to Prevent Prostitution
- The Legal Systems of Prostitution
- A Choice or a Survival Strategy?



Sexual Exploitation Facts and Figures

- The worldwide average age of entry into prostitution is 14 years
- There are at least 70,000 prostitutes in Canada
- Indigenous and migrant women are overrepresented in prostitution in Canada
- More than 9 out of 10 prostituted women are dependent on a pimp
- Over 80% of those recruited into prostitution are minors
- There are approximately 4 million new victims of human trafficking for prostitution among women and children every year worldwide
- No country is immune from trafficking in human beings
- The vast majority of victims of trafficking are used for prostitution
- According to a conservative assessment by Richard Poulin, prostitution worldwide annually generates a turnover of \$1000 billion USD
- 67 % of survivors of prostitution suffer post traumatic stress syndrome, the highest rate along with victims of torture and rape.





FIRST STOP

A Y Action That Prevents Prostitution

At First Stop, we get about a dozen cases a year of youth who are exploited by gangs. These girls, aged 14 to 21 years have more complex problems leaving when they are attached to a pimp within the gang. Solicitation is important and the result quickly changes to threats, harassment and violence. What seemed like paradise becomes hell.

We work with youth workers in the Youth Centre and community workers from different groups that can help in various ways to quickly remove someone from one of the gangs that gravitate downtown (relocation agreement with youth centres, financial support for basic needs). The problem is still present in poor areas and for youth involved in child protection and social services. We have also seen cases of youth being lured into making Porn videos by the idea of be stars, most often participating in sexual acts initiated by adults.

It is when we take the time to talk to these girls that we see they lack information about these issues. By speaking about self-esteem and respect for one's body and privacy, the meaning of the gifts they are offered (jewellery, a furnished apartment, food, etc), and the sense of belonging created by groups and gangs, the youth become aware of the problems inherent in their situation. We then explain there are alternatives they can choose and it is necessary for them to work with the appropriate services."

Henri-Charles Baudot

First Stop is a community program situated in Montreal Central Bus Station where everyone who needs help can go; open Sunday night and during the week from 9:30 am to 11 pm.

ONE OF MANY SIMILIAR STORIES

"I remember that they always have a pathetic story as an excuse to buy me, but my own desire not to have them on me or in my mouth never seems as urgent as their desires."

Trafficking and Smuggling

The expression "human trafficking" means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, deception, abuse of or authority over , a situation of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control of another person for the purpose of exploitation.

This includes prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similiar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

"Smuggling" refers to crossing borders to reach a final destination in exchange for a sum of money paid in advance. Afterwards, neither the smugglers nor the migrants look for each other again.



Women, the First Victims of Trafficking

Women are the primary victims of human trafficking, including sexual exploitation. They are especially vulnerable because they have little protection. The countries of South and South-East Asia as well as the countries of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union are the main providers of these modern day slaves. If they are not sold by their own families, they are often abducted.

While some women are abducted or coerced, many initially leave their country voluntarily, believing that the work offered to them will allow them to escape the poverty, violence or abuse they currently suffer. The systematic violation of their rights often begins at the outset: this strategy aims to make them totally dependent on their traffickers and, later, their "owners". As the journey unfolds, they understand better and better that the work expected of them is not what they were promised. They are stripped of their papers, sometimes beaten, and almost certainly raped if they begin to protest.



The Legal System & Prostitution

Total Decriminalization

This approach treats prostitution as just a job, which would entail the withdrawal of all related articles of the Criminal Code.

This option would give the green light to pimps and prostituting. In reality, this would allow the sex industry to increase its market.

Regulation / legalization

This option would allow pimping to become legal and the state would receive a share of the profits. Licensed brothels would obtain permits, and prostitutes would undergo medical checks, but not the 'customers'. This approach is found in Austria, the Netherlands and Germany. However, these countries are now questioning its value.

Prohibitionism

In countries where the Puritan tradition prohibits prostitution, the law provides for its repression indiscriminately, without regard to power relations involved. In fact, it is mainly women who are arrested and convicted. This model applies to countries like China and Canada.

Abolitionism

Abolitionists want a revision of the Criminal Code to decriminalize sexually exploited women, to target more the customers and pimps. Sweden passed a law in 1999 which is the best example of the abolitionist approach. Schools offer courses on sexuality and equality awareness campaigns discouraging the purchase of 'sexual services'. Social measures also help women to leave prostitution. Since then, Norway and Iceland have followed suit and Ireland and France are considering adopting similar legislation.

Sexual Slavery

"Finally, I landed in a bar in Kosovo, I was trapped and forced to prostitute myself. I was never paid, I could not be left alone, the owner became increasingly violent as the weeks passed, and he beat me and raped me and the other girls too. He told us that we belonged to him. By buying us, he had acquired the right to beat us, rape us, let us die of starvation and force us to have sex with clients." (a young prostitute in Kosovo)

The Effects of Legalization

At a time when the general trend is the legalization or decriminalization of prostitution, it is appropriate to consider its effects by examining the countries that have made this choice.

- The pimps and traffickers become entrepreneurs, whose activities are perfectly legal
- Trafficking in human beings is encouraged and will strengthen legal prostitution but also illegal prostitution which has gone underground and hidden from public view.
- The demand increases by making it socially acceptable for a man to buy a woman (or man)
- Inequality between men and women is reinforced; girls see it as a "career choice" to become a prostitute, but also as an employment opportunity for unemployed women.
- There are no more community programs to prevent the entry into prostitution, or exit support for prostitutes, as prostitution becomes a profession like any other.
- A system of legalized prostitution involves medical examinations and certificates to women only and not to the customers, is clearly discriminatory against prostitutes.



The oldest profession in the world...

Human beings have existed for 12 to 13 million years. Homo sapiens have existed since 400,000 BC.

Prostitution emerged between 400 and 500 BC and, therefore, is more than 3,000 years old.

Can we say it is really the oldest profession?



A choice or a survival strategy?

Some factors identified by former prostitutes which lead to entry into prostitution:

- Sexual assault in childhood and adulthood
- Violence and emotional rejection
- Learning disabilities
- Poverty
- Substance abuse
- The hypersexualization and increased commoditization of pornography and prostitution.

Bitterness... by Phéméris

"I still feel every smack on my back, belly to face. I still hear the shouting, threats and insults to my ears, while attempting to smother me. Those wild eyes expressing so much hatred towards me. I still have images of scary places, frightening cars. I tried to be someone else, because he demanded it of me. And because I had to survive.

This country has been my life, my body. My strength of life, my desire to fight. They showed me the most horrible side of humans. The darkness of the world, in its purest. My free will was no more, only the instinct of survival showed me the next day. The worse things; I saw them, I heard them, I lived them."

"Everything is bought and sold, yet not everything can be bought and sold without undermining the very foundations of mankind."

André Gauron

Events Calendar

June 12: World Day Against Child Labour

June 20: World Refugee Day Exhibition in all local Y centres.

References :

- United Nations
- La CLES – Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle
- Sisypho.org
- Mouvement du nid
- Abolir la prostitution, Richard Poulin
- ATTAC France "Mondialisation de la prostitution : une attente à la dignité humaine"

Writer: Stephanie Poos
Graphics: Benni Hodkin

Editor: Michel Forgues

Mission

"The YMCAs of Quebec is a charitable organization that contributes to the development of spirit, mind and body, and to the well-being of individuals, families and communities.

International Initiatives

1435 Drummond Street, 4th Floor
Montréal
514 849-5331, ext. 264
www.ymcaquebec.org

