

Myths About Women's Involvement in Prostitution

Myth 1: Women choose prostitution.

The Reality: A 2008 Chicago study of 100 women up to age 25 found their average age of entry into prostitution was 16. Girls this young are often exchanging sex for clothes, shelter, or food—in order to survive. Many have run away from dysfunctional homes and are often in foster care. Women and girls in prostitution are frequently forced to turn over their money to a pimp, and many will face violence if they do not. Pimps and traffickers look for people to recruit into the sex trade who have few, if any, meaningful choices in life.

Myth 2: Prostitution is the world's oldest profession.

The Reality: If this were true, should pimps be allowed at a school career day? Referring to prostitution as a “profession” negates the physical and emotional trauma that women experience through their involvement in prostitution. Viewing prostitution as “work” accepts the long term emotional, physical and mental health problems associated with involvement. It ignores the fact that prostituted women often do not keep the money they make, cannot access health care, and have no recourse for the violence inflicted on them. Prostitution is not a career. It is exploitation.

Myth 3: Prostitution is a victimless crime.

The Reality: Prostituted women experience rates of post-traumatic stress similar to that of combat war veterans. Most women involved in prostitution have experienced routine physical and emotional abuse, theft and sexual assault. Some women are kidnapped or murdered. Most women involved in prostitution do not believe they will be treated fairly by our court system and do not report the crimes against them. Survivors of prostitution and trafficking say that the violence they experienced was “normal.”

Myth 4: Women involved in prostitution make a lot of money.

The Reality: The profits made in the sex trade are kept by a multi-billion dollar industry that includes brothel and strip club owners, traffickers, pimps, and websites that facilitate sex trafficking. The overwhelming majority of women involved in street prostitution live in poverty, are frequently homeless, and have substance abuse problems. In a recent Chicago study, 53% of prostituted women said they had to give ALL their money to a pimp—many said they couldn't leave prostitution because they were afraid of what their pimp would do to them.

*End Demand Illinois is a campaign led by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.
The campaign partners are Chicago Coalition for the Homeless; Cook County Sheriff's Women's Justice Programs;
DePaul University College of Law's Schiller DuCanto and Fleck Family Law Center; Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault;
Polaris Project; The Voices and Faces Project*

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