

ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS: Pimps and Traffickers

Modern culture glamorizes the role of pimps in prostitution. Movies, TV shows, and music portray pimps as admirable figures who protect the women and girls they prostitute. The true function of pimps in prostitution, however, is to control, manipulate, and abuse the women and children they exploit through the sex trade for their personal profit. This is not a mutually beneficial relationship: Instead, the prostituted individual becomes the commodity and the pimp the profiteer.

Misconception:

Pimps keep prostituted women safe.

REALITY:

The assertion that women under the control of a pimp are safer and suffer less violence contradicts findings in many research studies that show that pimp-controlled girls and women suffer the same amount or even more violence than those without pimps.¹ Additionally, at least one study found that the pressure to earn money for their pimps forced many women to expose themselves to additional risk, including allowing customers not to wear a condom (which usually raises the price) or accepting “dates” with men with whom they may not feel comfortable.² Moreover, in addition to the violence perpetrated by customers, these women face enormous violence from the pimps themselves. Pimps often perpetrate much of the regular physical, psychological, and sexual violence suffered by prostituted women. In one study, which is reflective of many others on the same subject, 86% of women under the control of a pimp said they were physically abused by their pimps, and 50% of these women stated that their pimps assaulted them frequently or daily.³ Eighty percent of the women also reported sexual assault by their pimps. Any value or protection pimps are believed to provide is quickly negated by the actual violence that the pimp inflicts or causes.

Misconception:

Women seek out pimps to help them stay safe and/or gain more “business.”

REALITY:

As with international sex trafficking, domestic sex trafficking often occurs through the use of force, fraud, or coercion against the victim by a trafficker or pimp.⁴ Some of the “recruitment” tactics used by pimps include rape and gang-rape by the pimp and his or her associates, forced drug or alcohol use, use of a feigned romantic relationship with the girl or woman to coerce her into prostitution, and threats of violence toward family members of the girl and the girl herself.⁵ Pimps frequently focus on vulnerable people like runaways, girls with low self-esteem or girls from abusive homes.⁶ For many pimps, recruitment never stops, meaning vulnerable girls are never safe from their influence. As one former pimp stated, “It’s impossible to protect all girls from guys like I was, because that’s what we do. We eat, drink, and sleep, thinking of ways to trick young girls into doing what we want them to do.”⁷

¹ Norton-Hawk, M. (2004). A comparison of pimp- and non-pimp-controlled women. *Violence Against Women*, 10(2), 189-194.

² Norton-Hawk, M. (2004). A comparison of pimp- and non-pimp-controlled women. *Violence Against Women*, 10(2), 189-194.

³ Hughes, D.M. (n.d.) Fact sheet: *Pimps in the United States*. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from <http://www.cwfa.org/images/content/factsheetplayersball.pdf>

⁴ Hughes, D.M. (Spring 2004). Demand: The driving force of sex trafficking. *Coalition Commentary*. Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

⁵ Brantley, N. (June 2009). Presentation on victims of commercial sexual exploitation on behalf of Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSEY).

⁶ Williamson, C. & Cluse-Tolar, T. (2002). Pimp-controlled prostitution: Still an integral part of street life. *Violence Against Women*, 8(9), 1074-1092. See also Raphael, J. & Myers-Powell, B. (2009). *Interviews with five ex-pimps in Chicago*. Research for DePaul University College of Law Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.enddemandillinois.org/docs/Family_Law_Pimp_pilot_project.pdf

⁷ Raphael, J. & Myers-Powell, B. (2009). *Interviews with five ex-pimps in Chicago*. Research for DePaul University College of Law Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.enddemandillinois.org/docs/Family_Law_Pimp_pilot_project.pdf

⁸ Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D.L. (2002). *Sister speak out: The lives and needs of prostituted women in Chicago*. Center for Impact Research.

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Misconception:

Pimps allow the women they prostitute to keep their earnings.

REALITY:

Women who are prostituted by pimps are rarely, if ever, allowed to keep their earnings. A study of 222 women in the sex trade in Chicago found that 44 to 50% of these women give the money they make in prostitution to someone else, and 79% of those women believe they would be harmed if they stopped.⁸ Even in escort services, girls and women are required to give up most of their earnings—dividing the money between the escort business and the pimp. Often they are allowed to keep only 10% for themselves.⁹ As one former pimp explained, “You can’t control your stable if you allow your ho’s [*sic*] to keep a dime of the money.” Still another said he set an earnings quota of \$1,000-\$1,500 a day for each woman or girl, but they were allowed to keep none of it.¹⁰ Even when a woman receives costly gifts from her pimp (providing the illusion of prosperity), he will typically retain or destroy her property if she leaves him, impeding her from accumulating any wealth. In a study conducted on recruitment tactics, one pimp explained, “They got to go broke. That’s the only rule for them leaving is that they gotta leave broke. They can’t take nothin’ with them ... If they leave me they gotta pay goin’ out the door.”¹¹

Misconception:

All pimps and traffickers are men.

REALITY:

We may not use the term “pimps” to describe them, but women often operate in this role as well. Madams who control call-girls or escorts and female heads of massage parlors where sex is also sold often act as pimps for the women being prostituted through these establishments. All too often, former victims of prostitution become perpetrators themselves, sometimes recruiting other victims for their pimps as an alternative to their own sexual enslavement. Women are often more likely to trust another woman than a man, so a male pimp will use one of the women he has prostituted to gain the trust of a younger girl and convince her to come along with them.¹² Eventually, some of these prostituted women begin recruiting other women and girls on their own, perhaps seeing no other way out of the world of sexual slavery.¹³

In some parts of the world, women trafficking and pimping other women has actually become the norm.¹⁴ A 2009 United Nations study found that, in 30% of countries that provided information on the gender of traffickers, women actually make up the largest proportion of traffickers.¹⁵ According to this study, female offenders have a more prominent role in present day slavery than in most other forms of crime.

⁹ Raphael, J. & Myers-Powell, B. (2009). *Interviews with five ex-pimps in Chicago*. Research for DePaul University College of Law Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.enddemandillinois.org/docs/Family_Law_Pimp_pilot_project.pdf

¹⁰ Raphael, J. & Myers-Powell, B. (2009). *Interviews with five ex-pimps in Chicago*. Research for DePaul University College of Law Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.enddemandillinois.org/docs/Family_Law_Pimp_pilot_project.pdf

¹¹ Giobbe, E. (1993). An analysis of individual, institutional, and cultural pimping. *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law*, 1(1), 33-57.

¹² Crouse, J.S. (2009). *Do female pimps do it better?* Concerned Women for America. Retrieved June 7, 2010, from <http://www.beverlylahayeinstitute.org/articledisplay.asp?id=17738&department=BLI&categoryid=commentary&subcategoryid=blitraf>

¹³ Crouse, J.S. (2009). *Do female pimps do it better?* Concerned Women for America. Retrieved June 7, 2010, from <http://www.beverlylahayeinstitute.org/articledisplay.asp?id=17738&department=BLI&categoryid=commentary&subcategoryid=blitraf>

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2009). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* [Electronic version]. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.unodc.org/documents/Gloval_Report_on_TIP.pdf

¹⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2009). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* [Electronic version]. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.unodc.org/documents/Gloval_Report_on_TIP.pdf