

# 11 Myths About Prostitution

## THE MYTHS

Many myths and stereotypes exist about prostitution as well as the people involved in it. Without an understanding of these, one cannot fully appreciate the exploitation that exists for people involved in prostitution

### **MYTH 1 - *Prostitution is a natural expression of sexuality and a necessity for inadequate sexual relationships.***

This view supports a sexual myth that men have uncontrollable sexual urges that must be fulfilled. Herein lies a justification for prostitution. The person involved is dehumanized by the implication that prostitutes serve a useful purpose as an object for sexual gratification. The reality, as described by many former prostitutes, is that they are often appalled at and damaged by the acts demanded of them. Their participation is often a threat to their physical well-being. The act of prostitution is structured by the desires and fantasies of the customer, which are incongruent with the desires and sensitivities expressed by the women and men involved in selling sex..

### **MYTH 2 - *Prostitution is a victimless crime.***

Prostitution creates a setting whereby crimes against men, women, and children become a commercial enterprise. When a customer uses a sexually exploited youth for their own sexual gratification, they are committing the crime of child sexual abuse. It is an assault when they force a prostitute to engage in sadomasochistic sex scenes. When a pimp or drug dealer compels a prostitute to submit to sexual demands it is exploitation, sexual harassment, or rape--acts that are based on the prostitute's compliance rather than her consent. The fact that a pimp, drug dealer or customer gives money or some other consideration to a prostitute for submitting to these acts does not alter the fact that child sexual abuse, rape, and/or battery occurs; it merely redefines these crimes (in the minds of the abusers) as prostitution.

### **MYTH 3 – *Young people, men, transgendered and women freely choose prostitution.***

The self-reported data on the impact of child abuse shows that victims of violence can lose their sense of psychological and physical well-being. Case histories suggest that a number of juveniles engaged in prostitution grew up in abusive and/or neglectful homes. A fragile self-esteem and limited resources lead some young people to believe that they have no other choice but to enter the world of prostitution.

#### **MYTH 4 - *Prostitution can be an exciting and glamorous life.***

Cultural mythology about prostitution is built on misinformation and fantasies of sexuality that are circulated through movies, television, videotapes, and printed material including pornography. These may entice naive young women into prostitution with false promises of glamour and riches. In reality juvenile prostitutes suffer pain, humiliation, and degradation at the hands of their pimps and customers. They are susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

#### **MYTH 5 - *The system of prostitution offers wealth to the participant.***

The economics of prostitution are complex. If a person is controlled by a pimp or madam most, if not all, of his/her earnings are turned over to the pimp or madam. If working independently for a house of prostitution a large percentage of his/her earnings are turned back to the house. Their lives are strictly controlled, and their ability to set up independent funds is carefully guarded. Part of the strategy for control over their activities is for pimps and madams to keep them economically dependent upon the system of prostitution itself. Any profit is often spent as rapidly as it is obtained, reinforcing the efforts that go into prostitution. A rapid turnover of "feel good or look good" money into immediately expendable, positively reinforcing products perpetuates the need for continued participation in prostitution.

#### **MYTH 6 - *Prostitutes have power and control within the system.***

Reports from these female prostitutes concerning their exchange of sex for money illustrates the reality that they are controlled by their customers. The demands for money placed upon them by their pimps with the instructions to charge accordingly for what the customer wants illustrates a continuum in which the more involved or more deviant the sex act the more that can be charged. These juveniles report being raped and beaten. Sometimes they have been kidnapped or held against their will, taken to deserted areas and abandoned, and robbed or not paid. In some cases they are murdered. The recent case of the "Pig Farm" in Vancouver BC speaks to the horror and lack of quick public and police response to the plight of women they describe as "high risk" and are not easily noticed when missing. Once involved with a pimp, the prostitute loses autonomy. The more involved one becomes, the more difficult it is to leave. The ability of the prostitutes to find recourse for violations committed against them is limited. Assaults are rarely reported to law enforcement officers. The unwritten "code of conduct" discourages contact with law enforcement in regards to reporting abuse. Also these women often function under the belief that they are responsible for the consequences of their own involvement in prostitution. The pimps who claim to protect may, in reality, "discipline" the prostitute for any perceived shortages of money.

**MYTH 7 - *Prostitution is a deterrent to sexual crimes.***

This myth provides faulty justification to prostitution and pornography. There is no evidence that prostitution deters sex crimes. In fact the opposite may be true. Prostitutes can be victims of violent acts including rape and murder. Young prostitutes can be easy victims for perpetrators. Pornography can feed their fantasies about women and prostitution. Rather than these phenomena being a deterrent, they may reinforce sexual violence.

**MYTH 8 - *Prostitutes are from specific socioeconomic groups.***

Teenage prostitutes come from all socioeconomic groups. While other common denominators exist (drugs, alcohol, wanting to fit in), there is no causative relationship with socioeconomic status.

**MYTH 9 - *Juveniles make an educated decision to become prostitutes.***

Entry into prostitution may begin in the teens or earlier. The majority have been sexually abused as children--usually by fathers, stepfathers, or other trusted adults. Many also suffered physical abuse and neglect. For most of these young women the only way to stop the violence was to run away from home. Young, frightened, with limited skills, and unable to find shelter, teenagers are easy prey for pimps who promise them friendship, romance, and riches. Once involved in prostitution both pimps and customers replicate the abuse these teenagers endured in their families.

**MYTH 10 - *There are laws to control prostitution.***

Historically there has been an unequal application of laws prohibiting prostitution. Until recently only a few customers and even fewer pimps were arrested or convicted.

**MYTH 11 - *There is a difference between being a high-class prostitute and a street walker.***

The most prevalent fantasy is that of the high-class call girl who is typically envisioned as an independent, sophisticated businesswoman whose rendezvous' with well-heeled executives in luxury suites are intellectually stimulating, sensual interludes for which she is handsomely compensated. The following account by one such prostitute dispels that myth:

I was a New York City call girl with my own book. My johns had careers in the fashion industry, finance, law, and the media. I visited them in their homes, offices, and at well-known hotels like the Plaza. I also worked for madams in well-established brothels around the city. However, this is where any resemblance between my experience and the mythical call girl ends. I was a young teenage girl, not a sophisticated woman. I wasn't an independent agent, but controlled by a brutal pimp who had a stable of women. People believe only streetwalkers are drug addicts, but I abused drugs until well into my twenties. It was the only way I could cope with the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that defined my job. As for my well-heeled

clientele and their fancy suites, all I can say is, whether you turn tricks in a car by the Holland Tunnel or in the Plaza Hotel, you still have to take your clothes off, get on your knees or lie on your back, and let this stranger use you in any way he pleases. Then you have to get up, get dressed, and do it again with the next trick, and the next. In the movies, call girls make lots of money which they invest in legitimate businesses when they retire from the life. It's taken me close to twenty years to undo the damage that was done to me in prostitution. Not only did I leave prostitution impoverished, I was totally isolated from mainstream society. The only people I'd had contact with for almost a decade were pimps, tricks, and other prostitutes. I was deprived of a basic education. I had no job skills. My health was severely compromised. I required surgery and repeated medical treatment for reproductive damage and remain infertile. In addition to these tangible issues, I've coped with the trauma resulting from years of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that is common in the lives of prostitutes. Like battered women who escape abusive partners, women escaping prostitution must totally rebuild their lives.

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