



Encyclopedia of
Prostitution
and Sex Work

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2

Edited by Melissa Hope Ditmore

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
PROSTITUTION AND SEX WORK

Volume 2
O-Z

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This pattern is allowing prostitutes in many U.S. cities to resist police harassment and go more unnoticed, even though prostitution is legally prohibited in most parts of the country.

In other parts of the world, the geopolitical climate of the post-Cold War era, as well as vast economic changes associated with globalization, have combined to create a situation where new port cities have materialized seemingly overnight and engendered paid sex economies sometimes run by organized crime and often involved in the human trafficking in a situation not unlike the purported white slave trade of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, the port of Shenzhen, China, now the hub of the vast Pearl River Delta across the Shenzhen River from Hong Kong (the busiest seaport of the world, where most prostitution is illegal), in two decades has been transformed into the sixth busiest port city of the world, where prostitution is open and attracts much of the business prohibited in Hong Kong. Before 1990, picturesque fishing villages and Chinese junks dominated the region. Local officials are apparently lax in monitoring the trafficking of women and children from China's interior, as well as neighboring Asian countries, to centers of commercial sex such as Shenzhen. Designated by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s as a "special economic zone," Shenzhen is described by Westerners as a Wild West. In the downtown area, Las Vegas-like hotels promote prostitution alongside a gritty red light district catering to the business created by the maze of dockyards that dominate its shores, a steel and concrete testament to the velocity of China's emergence as a free-trade titan. The case of Shenzhen shows how prostitution in China has been transformed from a condemned economic activity to an exploited one.

Santos, Brazil, the largest port city of South America, offers another example of how problems associated with prostitution—in this case child prostitution—have been amplified by local poverty combined with the greater market for sexual services made possible by globalization. Estimates of numbers of children in prostitution in Brazil by 1990 were half a million with a good percentage of this number in Santos. In the past, the great seaport of Rio de Janeiro was often romanticized by merchant marines as the site for exotic encounters with beautiful prostitutes. Today, no one dares to characterize commercial sex in the port of Santos as anything but sad and typical of prostitution in ports throughout the world of the 21st century.

Further Reading: Gilfoyle, Timothy J. *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992; Riccio, Rita. "Strolling the Strip: Prostitution in a North American City." In *Geographical Snapshots of North America*, ed. Donald G. Janelle. New York: Guilford Press, 1992, pp. 114–16.

Anne Hayes

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD). Individuals who have been victimized in the sex industry may experience biologically based reactions such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other trauma-related symptoms. "Posttraumatic stress disorder" refers to a group of symptoms that some individuals experience after overwhelming, frightening, or horrifying life experiences. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV)* describes three symptom clusters occurring in PTSD, including: Reexperiencing the trauma through intrusive memories, dreams, and flashbacks; physical and mental distress in response to reminders of the event; avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and reminders of the trauma; loss of interest in activities; a general numbing of feeling; feelings of estrangement from others, and persistent symptoms of increased bodily arousal manifested in sleep problems, irritability, and anger, concentration problems, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle responses.

Exposure to Violence and Trauma within the Sex Industry

Individuals working in prostitution who develop PTSD have been exposed to one or more extreme traumatic stressors, including threats of harm, physical assaults, sexual assaults, witnessing harm to someone else, or hearing about serious harm to someone close to them. Physical abuse and sexual abuse are common occurrences in the sex industry, as is psychological abuse. Individuals working in the sex industry report experiencing brutality from a range of sources, including customers, organizers of prostitution such as "pimps" and "madams," gang members, and the police. Because prostitution is an illegal activity in the United States, individuals involved in the sex industry may think that they have no recourse for the violence perpetrated against them. This perceived lack of control is a risk factor for the later development of disorders such as PTSD and depression.

Traumatic Stress in Sex Trafficking

In situations of human sex trafficking, individuals are forced to work in the sex industry through violence, fraud, or coercion. These individuals are essentially victims of modern-day slavery and may be physically assaulted and raped repeatedly over the course of months or even years. Traffickers often physically and psychologically brutalize their victims to gain total control over them. Victims of human trafficking are typically exposed to multiple traumatic experiences, including verbal and psychological abuse, enforced physical and emotional isolation, lack of basic human necessities, threats, forced abortions, physical assaults and violence, and sexual violence. Women are often forced to continue prostituting even when they are menstruating, pregnant, or sick. They may witness others being assaulted, and their family members may be threatened or hurt as a way of pressuring them into continuing to prostitute.

The Cadena Case

In a landmark case of sex trafficking in the late 1990s, members of the Cadena family lured Mexican women and girls as young as 14 years old to Florida and the Carolinas with promises of employment as waitresses and domestic workers. In the United States, the traffickers repeatedly raped their victims to "initiate" them into the sex industry; they then forced the women to work as prostitutes servicing migrant workers in remote farm locations. Many of the customers had weapons and regularly threatened and beat the women. Several of the women became pregnant and were forced to have abortions. In one instance, one of the traffickers kicked a pregnant woman in the stomach, leading to a miscarriage. The women were beaten if they attempted to escape; in one case, a young woman was locked in a closet for 15 days after attempting to escape. Forced prostitution, sexual abuse, and physical abuse were daily occurrences for these young women.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Victims of trafficking often endure brutal conditions that result in physical, sexual and psychological trauma. Sexually transmitted infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, and HIV/AIDS are often the result of forced prostitution. Anxiety, insomnia, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are common psychological manifestations among trafficked victims. Unsanitary and crowded living conditions, coupled with poor nutrition, foster a host of adverse health conditions such as scabies, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases. Children suffer growth and development problems and develop complex psychological and neurological consequences from deprivation and trauma.

From U.S. Department of State, *Assessment of U.S. Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, June 2004).

Anne Hayes

The Biological Basis of PTSD

Exposure to this sort of severe violence triggers an innate survival response that allows a rapid, instinctive response to danger. During a physical or sexual assault, physiological changes in the body prepare the victim to deal with the threat by fighting, fleeing, or freezing. The autonomic nervous system triggers a neurohormonal release of chemicals, activating survival responses. All of the body's resources are directed toward dealing with the threat, while functions less important for survival are shut down. For many individuals, when the danger passes, the survival mode eventually turns off and the body settles back into its normal or steady-state level, called "homeostasis"; however, for some people, the survival response remains activated. With ongoing exposure to trauma, such as often occurs in situations of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, the same physiological responses that are initially protective become maladaptive and may lead to illness such as PTSD.

Complex Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

Individuals working in prostitution who have been exposed to chronic interpersonal victimization may experience more extensive reactions than are explained by PTSD alone. Their ability to self-regulate may be impacted, with resulting emotional mood swings and problems with impulse control. Some individuals develop substance abuse problems as a coping mechanism, to avoid intrusive memories or to regulate their emotional states. For instance, in the Cadena case, a number of the victims used drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with what was happening to them. Victims may dissociate or "space out" as a way of coping with overwhelming stress. They may experience physical manifestations of stress, including compromised immune system functioning and somatic symptoms such as gastrointestinal discomfort, headaches, and muscular tension. Because trafficking victims are treated as commodities to be sold over and over, they may lack a positive sense of self and view themselves as property. Shame is a widespread emotional reaction in victims of sex trafficking; in many cases, shame about being seen as a prostitute or a criminal prevents victims from reconnecting with their families or from seeking help. In addition, the chronic interpersonal victimization that often occurs within the sex industry causes many of these individuals to have difficulties with interpersonal relationships, including issues with trust and boundaries.

Trauma-Related Symptoms in Individuals Working in the Sex Industry.

There is a paucity of information regarding trauma-related symptoms in individuals who have been trafficked or victimized in the sex industry. Despite this fact, initial investigations indicate that individuals who have been victimized in the sex industry report a range of emotional, behavioral, and psychological difficulties. Preliminary studies have found that the most trafficked and sexually exploited women have reported symptoms such as depression or sadness, guilt and self-blame, anger and rage, and sleep disturbances. Clinical experience indicates that depression and PTSD are primary problems for victims of sex trafficking. There is clearly a link between exposure to violence within the sex industry, biologically based survival responses, and trauma-related symptoms in individuals who have been victimized within the sex industry.

See also Pathology; Rape.

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Elizabeth K. Hopper and Jose A. Hidalgo

PRETTY WOMAN. *Pretty Woman*, a film about a streetwalker and a corporate raider who fall in love, was one of the highest-grossing Hollywood releases of 1990. Critics have panned it as a fairy tale with the hooker as Cinderella; others have been pleased to see a sexy, capable, health-conscious prostitute featured in a popular romantic comedy. The film has endured as a cultural reference point and marks a change in Hollywood's portrayal of sex workers.

Vivian Ward, a drug-free "hooker with a heart of gold," is luckier than her roommate, who is depicted as dysfunctional, drug-addicted, and incorrigible. In earlier iconic Hollywood movies about prostitutes, such as *Butterfield 8* (1960), *Klute* (1971), and *Taxi Driver* (1976), a prostitute was typically rescued by the male lead or "killed off" by the screenwriter. In *Pretty Woman*, the male lead is rehabilitated by a streetwalker. Attractive and malleable, Vivian is rescued from the streets, but her evolution is a prelude to her savior's transformation, for she helps him to see that his business practices are morally bankrupt. Her roommate continues to work as a streetwalker—and lives.

See also Films, Opera.

Tracy Quan and Melissa Hope Ditmore

PRISON. Under the present system of criminalization in the United States, spending time in jail or prison is a common occurrence for many prostitutes. Prostitution, both soliciting and procuring, is a misdemeanor offense in most states, with certain parts of Nevada being a notable exception. Many states have provisions to bring felony prostitution charges against "repeat offenders" or those who are HIV-positive and continue to engage in prostitution. Felony conviction typically results in a prison, as opposed to a jail, sentence. Forty-eight of the fifty states do not permit incarcerated felons to vote, and in fourteen states, there are laws that prevent even those who have completed their sentences from voting.

In prison, however, most of those engaged in prostitution had no previous experience with it on the outside. Despite the prevalence of prostitution in prison, there is very little written on the topic; the push and pull factors of prostitution in prison differ in crucial ways from those in society at large. Among male prisoners, prostitution within the institution is primarily between inmates and is an important component of both the internal black-market economy and the ongoing power struggle among inmates. In women's prisons, prostitution is more likely to occur between guards and prisoners, where the latter will exchange sex for contraband items or additional privileges from the former.

Prostitution in prison is often a result of limited access to conventional expressions of sexuality, or the need or want to participate in the prison black-market economy. Frequently, prison prostitution is far from voluntary and is linked to the prevalent phenomena of prison rape and gang violence. Prisoners perceived as weak or vulnerable—often young, nonviolent, homosexual or transsexual, first-time offenders—are "claimed" by an older or stronger prisoner or a guard. In