

The
reality of **violence**

against women in prostitution is the same worldwide. Women in Korea report they were beaten, raped, humiliated and threatened to 'season' them and break down their resistance. Once in prostitution, they endured these forms of **violence** to keep them in line. In the long term, the victim of prostitution suffers psychological trauma similar to torture victims – flashbacks, depression, suicidal tendencies, insomnia, stress, and anxiety. A 1985 Canadian report found that prostituted women had a mortality rate 40 times higher than the national average. Of the women, mostly First Nations, 82% had a history of childhood abuse, 90% were physically assaulted in prostitution, 67% said that pornography was made of them, 75% had injuries such as stabbing, beating, and broken bones, 50% had head injuries, 88% suffered verbal abuse and 95% wanted to leave prostitution. The average life span for a woman after entering prostitution is four years. According to the Canadian study no population of women had a higher death rate due to murder which accounts for 50% of the deaths among prostitutes (Farley and Lynne, 2005).

A study in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Venezuela and the United States found much the same. **Violence** against women was endemic in prostitution with rates of repeated **violence** ranging from almost 70% to 100%. In Indonesia, the **violence** included use of belts, wooden sticks, fists, hands, rape, isolation, working through the night even if ill and use of law enforcement or military to protect the brothels. In the Philippines, 60-70% reported repeated **violence** such as objects thrown, hit with whip and objects, kicked, hands tied with barbed wire, burned, slapped, tossed off a stage, dragged, pinched, biting nipples, tied up, use of guns, truncheons, batons and knives, forced to use methamphetamines and cocaine, being fed only once or twice a day to keep them thin, and punishment by detention and lock up in a padlocked room naked and cold for a week without the ability to communicate with anyone. In Latin America and Venezuela, the women were pushed, hit with objects, punched, isolated, had guns and knives used on them, had their movements controlled, and were forced to have sex with law enforcement and immigration officials. In the U.S., 84-100% of the women surveyed reported physical **violence** including being beaten, hit, burned with cigarettes, chased, choked, crushed, dragged, hit with objects including shoes and a liquor bottle, punched, pinched including breasts, scratched, shoved, smacked, strangled with a bandana, stripped, thrown out of a car, twisted, hair pulled, urinated on, sodomized, objects inserted into the vagina and anus, bestiality, filmed, money withheld, weapons used such as sticks, knives and guns, and forcible injections of drugs. In spite of all the physical torture, what they reported hating most was being broken physically and spiritually (Raymond et al., 2000).

Legalized prostitution: a violation of women's rights

“The prostitution of women and girls for profit is one of the fastest growing global enterprises, ...” It is now ranked by the United Nations as Number two in international crime. A society that strives for full gender equality cannot at the same time support the idea that women are commodities that can be bought, sold, and sexually exploited.

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This article argues that the legalization of prostitution violates international human rights. I will first look at the facts about prostitution and its connection with crime and trafficking in different countries. Secondly, I will discuss the consequences of the law that abolished the Ban of Brothels in the Netherlands. In conclusion, I will suggest patriarchy and the unequal balance of power between women and men are the real problems that need to be addressed.

Opposite results

The violence against prostituted women is equivalent to and in many cases greater than the violence experi-

enced by victims of torture who have been recognized as such under international law. In a study covering five countries (South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, USA, Zambia), Melissa Farley and her fellow researchers found an extensive array of violence against prostituted women and its consequences which did not differ among these countries. More violence occurred in street prostitution than in brothels but the incidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) did not vary. The level of PTSD was higher in prostituted women than in people seeking refuge from state-organized violence.

When asked if legalizing prostitution would make it safer, large majorities of prostituted women answered

no because prostitution itself embodies physical and sexual assault. Virtually all of the women surveyed (92%) wanted to leave prostitution. In addition to the physical violence, the study describes the psychological damage. The women suffer from depression, lethal suicidality, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, dissociative disorders and chemical dependence. Violence against prostituted women in the study ranged from a low of 40% to a high of 94% in more than a dozen countries. Two-thirds of the women in the study had symptoms of PTSD that rivaled those of refugees from state-organized torture. Traumatic brain injury similar to that found in other torture victims results in significant health problems. Many of the chronic symptoms are similar to the long-term consequences of torture (Farley et al., 1998).

Dutch women do not think legalization has helped them, nor do women in Colombia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Washington, D.C, or Zambia. Some women in the U.S. and New Zealand actually felt safer on the streets where they could reject customers and write down license plate numbers. German women do not register under the prostitution laws because they don't want to be labeled as a 'prostitute' for the rest of their lives and because they fear that the zoned areas are more dangerous. A Scotland police officer noted that women have less control in brothels because the owners control what they do and with whom and thus they are exposed to even more violence (Raymond et al., 2000).

Extensive documentation in the CEDAW Committee Shadow Report, 2005, from Australia shows that legalization did not stop buyers who refuse to use condoms nor protect women from violent attacks. Nor did legalization stop the harms of illegal prostitution. Again from the Australian report: "Indeed, countries where prostitution has been legalized in an effort to reduce its harms have experienced quite the opposite result: huge growth in the illegal sex industry. Following legalization of prostitution in Victoria, Australia, legal brothels proliferated, but the greatest expansion was in *illegal* brothels, which increased by 300% in one year. This is because legalized prostitution creates a hospitable environment for sex tourists and other buyers, thus driving up demand. Local women constitute an inadequate supply, so women and girls are trafficked in to meet the demand. There will always be buyers seeking women and girls who are younger, cheaper, and easier to control. The result is that legalization not only places the imprimatur of the state on violence and abuse intrinsic to the prostitution industry, but also increases both legal and illegal prostitution." The International Organization of Migration attributes the rise in trafficking to the rise of prostitution in Europe. In fact half the women in prostitution in the EU are not from the EU, showing they had to be trafficked in. No research shows that legalizing prostitution decreases illegal prostitution. As in Australia, the

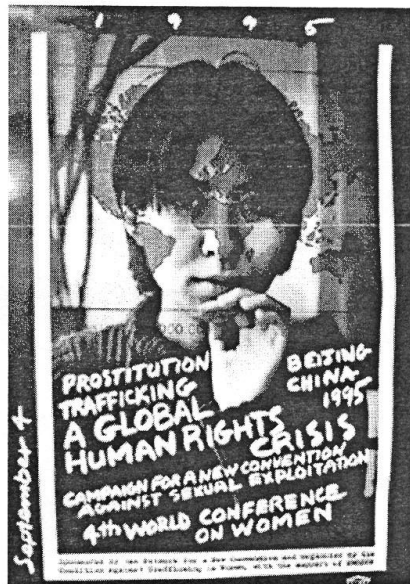
number of legal brothels doubled and illegal brothels went up to 300%. In the Netherlands, the sex industry increased by 25% after legalization.

Suitable targets

It is estimated that about 30 000 persons 'work' in prostitution in the Netherlands. The exploitation has a turnover of 1.6 billion EUR every year. The Netherlands passed a law on Abolition of the Ban of Brothels in 2000. The purpose of the law was to increase the surveillance of the about 2000 brothels and sex-clubs in the country. These regulations were supposed to make it unattractive and impossible to employ illegal immigrants as prostitutes, in order to diminish trafficking to the Netherlands.

In an evaluation in 2002, it was noted that the law had not succeeded in accomplishing its purpose to cease the illegal prostitution, where trafficking is common. Brothels which have moved to areas where the surveillance is the least, have continued their activity without further disturbance from the authorities, and thus the problem with minors and illegal immigrants in prostitution has not diminished. But the number of customers to legal brothels did drop. This is seen as a problem since lesser profit chances make brothel-owners less willing to cooperate with the authorities and respect the law.

The Netherlands CEDAW report also showed an increase in violence against immigrant women and women of color because of prostitution. The Netherlands had the first national rapporteur on trafficking but at the same time it admitted sexual violence against women had increased. Again, this comes as no surprise as legalization of prostitution sets up the image of women as suitable targets of violence.

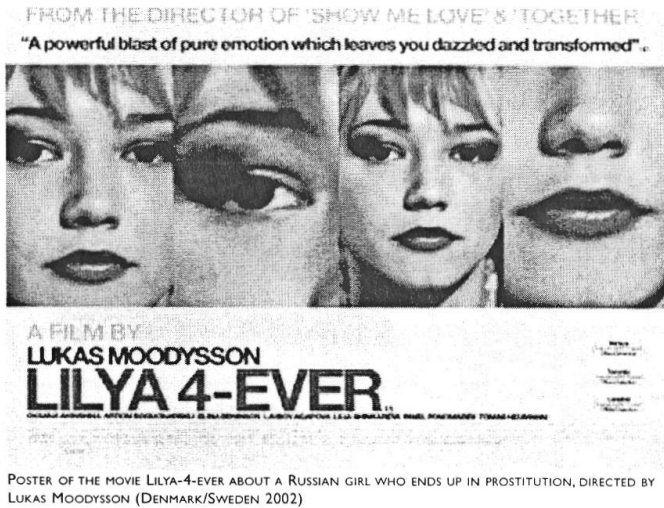


ARTIST MONA MARK (NEW YORK, NY) CREATED THIS IMAGE FOR THE COALITION AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, BEIJING 1995

Brenda Zurita, the Project Director for CWA's Crossing the Bridge initiative against sex trafficking and child exploitation, stated in December 2005 that prostitution is not a profession but exploitation. "Amsterdam is known for prostitution. Its red light district draws tourists from around the globe in search of sex and voyeurism. So, how did legalizing prostitution work for Amsterdam? The mayor admitted in October that the Dutch experiment to end abuse by legalizing prostitution has failed. An article on *LifeSiteNews.com* quotes Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen: "Almost five years after the lifting of the brothel ban, we have to acknowledge that the aims of the law have not been reached. Lately we've received more and more signals that abuse still continues." The police admit, "We are in the midst of modern slavery." The Netherlands strategy has been a complete failure. States like the Netherlands that legalize prostitution are violating several international conventions including the UN Protocol against Trafficking, CEDAW, the Vienna Declaration, existing Conventions against slavery and torture and the International Criminal Court. After years of international activism to ensure that crimes against women are included in legal discourse at the international level and treated equally with crimes against men, it is a significant step backward to suggest that the crimes involved in organized prostitution should be not only ignored but encouraged.

Men's beliefs

The growth of prostitution internationally is evidenced by a 2005 study in the UK that found that, over a 10-year period, the number of men in Britain who have paid for sex has almost doubled. Acceptance of prostitution justifies violence against women. More prostitution and pornography is correlated with more violence against women and children. Violent behaviors against women have been associated with attitudes which promote men's beliefs that they are entitled to sexual access to women, that they are superior to women, and that they are licensed as sexual aggressors. The men who engage in prostitution have more discriminatory attitudes against women and are more accepting of prostitution and rape myths as well as more violent themselves. The problem is not the women; the problem is the gender relationship of power and control. Legalizing prostitution only institutionalizes that relationship and gives it government credibility.



Boriana Jönsson, member of Stockholm-based *KvinnatillKvinnan*, pointed out that "The ban [on prostitution] demonstrates the ethical and political attitude of the state towards prostitution and gender equality in general. From the viewpoint of human rights, there can't be such a relationship in which a man would purchase and own the body of a woman as a commodity. No civilized society, regardless of the possible fiscal or other benefits, should allow for that." Governments that legalize prostitution are nothing more than pimps exploiting the earnings from the naked and abused, chained and beaten bodies of women.

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