



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

REPORT ON SEX BUYING AS A FORM OF SYSTEMIC, SUBSTANTIVE DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

TO: Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls

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SUMMARY:

Sex buying is a globally pervasive, predominantly male-based, practice of gender-based violence which results in substantive inequality for, and discrimination against, women and girls.

As the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls prepares its thematic report on women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights in situations of crisis for the 47th session of the Human Rights Council, it is vital for the Working Group to acknowledge the long-standing structural discrimination and inequality perpetuated through the practice of purchasing sex.

The definition of discrimination against women in article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that "discrimination against women shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

The historical origins of sex buying are subsumed in patriarchy, colonization, conquest and marginalization of the most vulnerable women and girls in any society. When men leverage economic power (i.e. money) over disadvantage women in order to gain sexual access, it subsumes women as an unequal class whose bodies can be bought and sold.

BACKGROUND:

- **Who Are The Victims:**

Sex buying, through the system of prostitution, is primarily perpetrated against women and girls, although males and transgendered persons are also at risk and exploited in this way. Victims of sex buying are found in every nation, ethnicity, age-group etc.

However, those in marginalized groups face increased vulnerability and harm. For example, a study in Vancouver, B.C. found that 52% of prostituted women and children interviewed were Canada's First Nations (Native Indians) persons, whereas the general populace of Vancouver is only 1.7-7%.¹ Native people, and people of color, are routinely groomed and exploited in the practice of sex buying through prostitution. Colonialism persists whether through sexualized exoticism of people of color in a sex buyers' home country or abroad. In Thailand, it has been noted that "men from around the world come to perform their role of male supremacy over Thai women, and their white supremacy over Thai people."² Occupied and migrant women are also inherently vulnerable, as it has been long recognized that "wherever militarism goes in the world, so goes prostitution."³ Examples of occupying military forces engaging in sex buying behavior span centuries and countries, from U.S. military forces in the Philippines, to Japan in South Korea, to—more recently—UN peacekeepers in war-torn regions.⁴

Poverty is also a major driver of women and girls into prostitution. In South Korea, interviews found that 78.3% of prostituted persons experienced serious economic crisis including homelessness.⁵ And a study conducted in 9 different countries found that 75% of women in prostitution had experienced homelessness.⁶ Sex buying, then, works as a coercive system to provide socio-economically advantaged men with sexual access to the most vulnerable populations and castes.

Victims of sex buying are primarily women and girls who experience intersectional discrimination through racism, prior sexual abuse, colonialism, poverty, lack of opportunity/education, and more. Sex buying preys on these populations.

- **Who Are The Perpetrators:**

Sex buying perpetrated overwhelmingly by males, in every country in the world. According to one study, "about 14% of men in the United States report having ever paid for sex."⁷ A survey of sex buyers in Minnesota reported that sex buyers were found in a "wide variety of employment sectors, including businessmen, doctors, lawyers, dentists, judges, professors, police officers, correctional officers, pastors, executives, truck drivers, manual laborers, farmers, and sailors."⁸ In this same survey, a law enforcement officer stated: "A good majority of them are going to be

¹ Farley, M., Lynne, J. and Cotton, A. (2005). Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the colonization of First Nations women. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 42(2), 242-271.

² Seabrook, J. (1996,) *Travels in The Skin Trade: Tourism and the Sex Industry*. London, Pluto Press, p. 89

³ Santos, A. (1992) *Gathering the Dust: The Bases Issue in the Philippines*. In S. Sturdevant & B. Stolfus, B. (eds.) *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution in the US Military in Asia*. Pp 33-44 New York: The New Press.

⁴ Allred, K. J. (2006). Peacekeepers and Prostitutes: How Deployed Forces Fuel the Demand for Trafficked Women and New Hope for Stopping It. *Armed Forces & Society*, 33(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X06288803>

⁵ Choi, H., Klein, C., Shin, M. & Lee, H. (2009, August). Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and disorders of extreme stress (DESNOS) symptoms following prostitution and childhood abuse. (2009). *Violence Against Women*, 15(8), 933-951.

⁶ Farley, M., Cotton, A., Lynne, J., Zumbek, S., Spiwak, F., Reyes, M. E., Sezgin, U. (2003). Prostitution and trafficking in 9 countries: Update on violence and posttraumatic stress disorder. In M. Farley (Ed.), *Prostitution, trafficking and traumatic stress* (pp. 33–74). New York: Routledge

⁷ Monto, M. A., & Milrod, C. (2014). Ordinary or Peculiar Men? Comparing the Customers of Prostitutes With a Nationally Representative Sample of Men. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 58(7), 802–820. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X13480487>

⁸ "Mapping the Demand Sex Buyers in the State of Minnesota." *University of Minnesota*, uroc.umn.edu/sites/uroc.umn.edu/files/EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY%20Mapping%20the%20Demand.pdf. Accessed 2017.

your middle-aged to older white males as a demographic on them. A little bit, I would say, higher up on the economic scale – they have a little extra money to spend. A good majority of them, I would say 80-90 percent are married with children.”⁹

Instead of demographics, however, sex buyers are primarily defined by sexist and harmful belief systems. Sex buyers do not view the women they purchase as individuals worthy of respect, but instead as subhuman objects to use.

In a comparative study, sex buyers were more likely than non sex buyers to express a preference for impersonal sex, had greater hostile masculinity, greater self-reported likelihood of raping, and a greater history of sexual aggression.¹⁰ Interviews of sex buyers have found that 43% agree that if the man pays the woman for sex, she should do anything he asks.”¹¹

The majority of violence against women within prostitution is perpetuated by sex buyers. 75% of women in prostitution surveyed in the Midwest of America noted that they were raped by sex buyers.¹² The authors observed that,

Once a prostitute has consented to any exchange of sex for money, these women see many men as assuming that she has given up the right to refuse consent in any situation. Once her sexuality has been ‘purchased,’ her body ‘belongs’ to the purchaser to use. This was the constant theme in the interviews. Many women encountered men who treated their agreement to engage in some form of sex as permission to abuse the women’s bodies in any way they wished, as long as they gave the women monetary compensation.¹³

Among First Nation women in prostitution in Canada, 90% were physically assaulted and 82% of assaults were perpetrated by sex buyers.¹⁴ And a study of 220 women in prostitution in Chicago found that sex buyers were responsible for 62-100% of violence against women in street-based prostitution.¹⁵

REMEDIES AND NEXT STEPS

It is vital that the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls recognize sex buying as a practice of gender-based violence, discrimination, and substantive inequality for women and girls around the globe. The United Nations should 1) support laws which seek to

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Farley, M., Golding, J., Matthews, E., Malamuth, N., & Jarrett, L. (2015, August). Comparing sex buyers with men who do not buy sex: New data on prostitution and trafficking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

¹¹ Durchslag, Rachel, and Samir Goswami. “Deconstructing The Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights From Interviews With Chicago Men Who Purchase Sex.” *Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation*, 2008, prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Deconstructing-the-Demand-for-Prostitution.pdf.

¹² Miller, J., & Schwartz, M. (1995). Rape myths and violence against street prostitutes. *Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16(1), 1-23.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Farley, M., Lynne, J. and Cotton, A. (2005). Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the colonization of First Nations women. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 42(2), 242-271.

¹⁵ Raphael, J. and Shapiro, D. (2002, August). Sisters speak out: The lives and needs of prostituted women in Chicago. Center for Impact Research, 1-35.

decrease and ultimately end demand by strongly penalizing those who pay to use the bodies of other people for sex, 2) work to create robust services for those seeking freedom from organized systems of sexual exploitation, 3) prevent sexual exploitation by opposing policies and reforming systems which facilitate harm, and 4) support legal reforms that decriminalize victimization.

The long-standing structural discrimination and harm caused by sex buying must be addressed if vulnerable women and girls are ever going to experience meaningful sexual health, autonomy, and equality in society.