

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT PROSTITUTION
A Summary, based on Myths and Facts about Trafficking for Legal and Illegal Prostitution (March 2009)* From Prostitution Research and Education,
<http://prostitutionresearch.com/>

1. MYTH: Legalizing prostitution gets rid of its criminal elements - pimps and traffickers.

FACT: Legalizing prostitution *benefits* pimps and traffickers. It also benefits buyers of sexual acts.

Some people believe that legalizing prostitution would offer dignity and professionalism to women in prostitution. Legitimizing prostitution by legalizing it does not change the actual experience of prostitution nor does it dignify prostituted women who still experience stigma and other harms in legal prostitution. Once prostitution is legalized, pimps become legitimate businessmen. The predatory purchase of another person for sex is now a legitimate business transaction.

2. MYTH: Men need sex therefore prostitution must exist. Prostitution is a natural form of human sexuality.

FACT: The sex of prostitution is not “sex” for women in it.

The act of prostitution is structured by the desires and fantasies of the buyer, which have nothing to do with the sexual desires of the person who is being bought. No one ‘needs’ sex like they need food, water and air, and no one has the right to purchase access to another person’s reproductive organs in order to masturbate themselves. Men do not have the right to unlimited sexual access to women.

3. MYTH: Prostitution is sexual liberation

FACT: Prostitution is sexual exploitation, not sexual liberation.

The sex acts performed in prostitution may be liberating to the buyer (although over the long term, it is likely that prostitution harms johns). For women, however, prostitution involves acting and usually also dissociating the mind from the body. One of the long-term effects of prostitution is the destruction of women’s sexuality.

4. MYTH: Women choose to enter prostitution. It’s better to choose to make lots

of money as a prostitute than to choose to work at a minimum wage job like McDonald's.

FACT: Prostitution is an intrinsically abusive institution that preys on those who are mostly poor, mostly women of color, and mostly young.

Women are in legal prostitution for the same reasons they're in illegal prostitution – a lack of alternative survival options. Most women in prostitution did not make a choice to enter prostitution from among a range of other options. They did not decide that they wanted to be prostitutes instead of doctors, lawyers, or politicians. Instead, their “options” were more in the realm of how to get enough money to feed themselves and their children.

5. MYTH : Prostitution is a victimless crime. Legal prostitution protects women in prostitution.

FACT: All prostitution harms those in it. Legal prostitution does not protect women in prostitution from harm.

It's not the legal status of prostitution that causes the harm, it's the prostitution itself. The longer a woman is in prostitution – legal or illegal – the more she is psychologically harmed and physically endangered. Women who sell sex report high levels of physical and sexual violence, including verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, and many suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result. Legalized systems of prostitution may mandate health checks, but only for women in prostitution – not for male buyers. Therefore, women are not protected from HIV (or other sexually-transmitted infections) contracted from buyers.

6. MYTH: Most prostitution does not involve pimps.

FACT: Most prostitution involves pimps. Health service providers, shelter staff, survivors of prostitution, and law enforcement sources estimate that 65%-85% of all prostitution is pimp-dominated.

Pimps are the people that buyers pay to outsource the violence necessary to keep women in prostitution obedient. While it is difficult to obtain accurate percentages of women who have pimps, consider that pimps are not named “pimps” by women in prostitution. They are named boyfriends, husbands, friends, sometimes girlfriends.

Pimps are also taxi drivers, casino hosts, strip club owners, valets, massage parlor managers, bartenders, and many others who earn money by selling or helping to sell women in prostitution.

7. MYTH: Legalizing prostitution would protect sexually exploited children. When prostitution is legal, licensed brothel owners do not hire minors or trafficked women.

FACT: Legal prostitution increases the sexual assaults of children in prostitution.

Legalization of prostitution increases the number of minors who are prostituted. Legal prostitution means that there are more locations for children to be sold for sex. And wherever there is a legal sex business, there are likely to be 5 times as many illegal sex businesses as well. There has been inadequate protection for children against prostitution in New Zealand since decriminalization of prostitution in 2003. According to the New Zealand decriminalized prostitution law, the police have no right of entry into brothels, and have no right to ask for age-identification papers of those in prostitution – thus investigation of suspected youth prostitution is extremely difficult, according to police officers.

9. MYTH: Social stigma is the most harmful aspect of prostitution.

FACT: The social stigma around prostitution will not end if it is legalized.

Women don't want to be prostitutes and the shame and stigma of prostitution persists despite legalization. Although they would have been earning retirement benefits if they registered, women in Dutch prostitution did not register as legal prostitutes because they are ashamed to be publicly known as prostitutes. Regardless of its legal status, women would prefer to get out of prostitution and usually feel ashamed of it.

10. MYTH: If you try to abolish prostitution, it will go underground.

FACT: There is no evidence for the claim that if you try to abolish prostitution, it will go underground.

This myth assumes not only that men have a right to buy sex, but that if they are denied that right, then they will make things a whole lot worse (meaning rape) for “good” women who are not prostituting. This myth also hints its converse: that we can “control” prostitution by legalizing or regulating it. This is also not true, as once socially tolerated or state-sanctioned, both legal and illegal prostitution increase.

11. MYTH: Prostitution is a deterrent to sex crimes.

FACT: Research indicates that prostitution is associated with increased rates of rape.

The sex industry has been cited as a public service that reduces rape. However, there is no evidence for this. In reality, women in prostitution have been described as the most raped class of women in the world. Women in prostitution tell us that prostitution is “paid rape” to them. Even though money is paid, the sex acts of prostitution are unwanted, often humiliating and degrading.

13. MYTH: Legalization of prostitution is an entirely separate issue from human trafficking.

FACT: Prostitution is the destination point for trafficking. Legalization of prostitution promotes sex trafficking.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are linked. Sex trafficking happens when and where there is a demand for prostitution and a context of impunity for its customers. Legal prostitution sanitizes prostitution, making the harms of trafficking for prostitution invisible. Trafficking of women into the sex industry is a direct consequence of men’s demand for sexual access to women and girls in prostitution. In countries where prostitution is legal, sex industries are larger and create a demand for more women to sell sex, attracting traffickers and others who exploit women for financial gain.

14. MYTH: Even if it’s not perfect, legalizing prostitution would at least make prostitution a little bit better.

FACT: Legalization of prostitution increases illegal prostitution. It does not improve the lives of women in prostitution.

Prostitution can’t be made “a little better” any more than domestic violence can be made “a little better.” Women in prostitution tell us that they want the same options in life that others have: a decent job, safe housing, medical care including psychological counseling. They deserve that, not just an HIV test to make sure that they are “clean meat” for johns or a union to ensure that they get an extra dollar or two for being paid to be sexually harassed, sexually exploited and often raped.

15. MYTH: Legalized prostitution would control the sex industry.

FACT: Legalization/decriminalization of prostitution expands the sex industry.

Over the last decade, as pimping was legalized, and brothels decriminalized in the year 2000, the sex industry increased by 25% in the Netherlands. Similar increases have been documented in Australia, since prostitution was legalized. Once prostitution is legalized, men who previously would not have risked buying women for sex now see prostitution as acceptable. When legal barriers disappear, so do the social and ethical barriers to treating women as sexual merchandise. Legalization of prostitution sends the message to new generations of men and boys that women are sexual commodities and that prostitution is harmless fun.

16. MYTH: Legal prostitution brings tremendous tax benefits to cash-strapped regions. Nevada's rural counties reap economic benefits from legal prostitution.

FACT: Regions with legal prostitution experience adverse economic impacts.

The money that might be raised by taxing prostitution is offset by the need to police prostitution. The fact that organized crime is attracted to areas with legal prostitution also necessitating increased police activity. Pimps are known to launder money, and they avoid reporting the cash revenue from prostitution. Pimps do not suddenly become law-abiding taxpayers because prostitution is legalized and taxed. Additionally, major corporations have avoided setting up businesses in Nevada because of many counties' proximity to legal prostitution.

17. MYTH: If you oppose legalization of prostitution, you're saying that prostitutes should be arrested.

FACT: The Equality Model decriminalizes women in prostitution but arrests their predators: johns, pimps, and traffickers.

Being desperately poor, abused or sexually exploited is not a crime. Johns, pimps and other sexual predators perpetrate criminally abusive behaviors and should be appropriately charged with those crimes. While legalization is a failed social experiment, Sweden has had excellent success both criminalizing sexual predation while at the same time assisting people in getting out of prostitution.

18. MYTH: If you oppose legal prostitution, you're a moralistic, judgmental, prudish person who is pushing your value system on people who think differently from you.

FACT: While people are entitled to their moral and religious beliefs, our opposition to the institution of prostitution is based on evidence of the harms of prostitution documented by researchers, health service providers, and law enforcement.

Legalizing prostitution is a failed experiment and we now have much evidence that it does not work to benefit individuals or communities. Regardless of prostitution's legal status and regardless of its indoor or outdoor location, prostitution is a violation of women's human rights that results in massive harms.

Source: Myths and Facts about Trafficking for Legal and Illegal Prostitution (March 2009) These myths and facts are adapted from 5 sources by Melissa Farley:
<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Myths%20&%20Facts%20Legal%20&%20Illegal%20Prostitution%203-09.pdf>

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http://www.genderberg.com/phpNuke/modules.php?name=FAQ&myfaq=yes&id_cat=2&categories=Prostitution+FAQ
- 2) Melissa Farley "Legalization Fact Sheet" from Nevada Coalition Against Sex Trafficking
<http://www.nevadacoalition.org/content/blogsection/1/2/>
- 3) National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "Female Juvenile Prostitution: Problem and Response" © 1992 Available at
http://www.operationlookout.org/lookoutmag/11_Myths_About_Prostitution.htm
- 4) Janice G. Raymond "Ten Reasons for Not Legalizing Prostitution And a Legal Response to the Demand for Prostitution" in Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress (M Farley (ed) 2003) Also available at <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/readingroom.shtml?x=32972>
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