

Introduction

Children and Youth Exploited through Prostitution

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For over fifteen years now, Canadian research has been conducted on children and youth involved in prostitution. Numerous things have taken place in that time. We have expanded and confirmed our knowledge about certain aspects of this complex social issue, we have asked new questions, we have changed terminology, we have engaged in new debates, and we have introduced some innovative (albeit controversial) social programs and policy initiatives. However, even within this recently developed knowledge and practice, there exist many misconceptions and different perspectives on conceptualizing youth prostitution. Questions and answers fly from feminists, non-feminists, sex-trade workers, advocates, concerned citizens, service providers, mothers, fathers, youth, government bureaucrats—the list goes on. Within these differing points of view it is easy to become lost. The goal of this volume is to view the issue by hearing the voices of those involved, as a way to clarify important issues, dispel myths and misconceptions, and challenge conventional views of young women who sell sex.

Prostitution and Youth—How Do They Fit? Definition/Terminology

Prostitution has historically been deemed a moral crime. The so-called “world’s oldest profession” has a precarious position in society. Prostitution has generally been tolerated as something that invariably exists, as something that happens with regularity and some degree of normalcy. Prostitution, while never fully accepted, is not fully rejected. It is rather condoned as a “necessary evil” by most segments of society. This precariousness is encapsulated in our legislation. Although the practice of prostitution is legal in Canada, solicitation and other activities associated with the act of prostitution are illegal.

The debate on how to conceptualize prostitution has taken place primarily in the feminist literature concerning adult women. Broadly

speaking, there are two sides to the debate. Generally, the “feminist perspective” holds that the existence prostitution is an expression of male domination, through which women are commodified and exploited. Debates from this perspective frame the issue in the discourse of victimization and exploitation. They argue that prostitution is yet another site of inequality, degradation, dehumanization and the objectification of women (MacKinnon 1987; Dworkin 1988). Thus, embedded in the solution to end female inequality is a commitment to eradicate prostitution on the grounds that it oppresses and harms women. While most who support this perspective agree that prostitution should be eradicated, they do not support the criminalization of prostitution. Rather, they support de-criminalization as support for working women until underlying conditions can be changed. The other side of the debate, loosely termed “pro-sex-work feminism,” critiques the general feminist contention by arguing that women must redefine their experience with sex and embrace all definitions and experiences of women’s sexuality. Rather than victimizing, in certain historical times and places, prostitution empowers women financially and socially, as well as personally and politically, and allows women to interpret sex for themselves (McElroy 1997). Thus, sex work is, in principle, considered legitimate work, not violence (Vanwesenbeeck 2001: 243).

It is important to note that neither of these perspectives focuses directly on the experience of youth, although both indirectly implicate girls. This is a recognized gap in the feminist prostitution literature, namely theorizing about youth involved in the sex trade. Youth and adult sex-trade work is traditionally separated in both research and theory. The issue of youth is primarily addressed through the lens of examining street youth and child abuse, and is focused on the abhorrent and abusive nature of the act. Over the past two decades there has been a growing assertion among concerned parties that this activity on the part of children and youth is better viewed as distinct from adult prostitution. Rather, utilizing the framework of child abuse of a sexual and commercial nature is increasingly seen as the most appropriate way to describe this activity. This viewpoint was given more legitimacy with the publication of the Badgley report in 1984, which considered youth prostitution to be sexual abuse of a young person rather than a case of delinquency by a youth. This attitude is prevalent today. Out from the Shadows and into the Light, an ongoing national project operated by experiential (former sex-trade involved) youth devoted to the prevention of youth prostitution, put it this way:

The term child or youth prostitute can no longer be used. These children and youth are sexually exploited and any language or reference to them must reflect that belief. We declare that the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth is a form of child abuse and slavery. (Bramly et al. 1998: 8)

This notion of youth prostitution as abuse is clearly reflected in our laws and the legal discourse. The *Criminal Code* is indeed a major site of separation of youth from adult prostitution. Legal indicators include the elements of the *Criminal Code of Canada* that specifically address youth prostitution, particularly section 212(2), procuring or living on the avails of a person under eighteen years of age, and section 212(4), attempting to purchase or purchasing sex from persons under eighteen (see also Dawson 1987; Lowman 1987, 1998, 2000; Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group 1998; Alberta Task Force Report, 1997). Whether these legal approaches are effective in protecting children is a topic of considerable debate (see Lowman 2000; Bittle 2002). There have been few arrests and fewer convictions. As Lowman argues (1998), youth are reluctant to testify because they would not want to alienate their potential sources of income, and are intimidated by the process of having to appear in court. Thus, these laws may compromise independence and autonomy of youth.

More generally speaking, separating youth from adult sex-trade work is necessary to unveil important issues that uniquely impact youth. In separating, one can reveal that youth experience the social world (as a labourer, as a citizen, through culture) in distinct ways from adults. Thus, their experience of sex trade involvement will also be different.

However, others argue that it may be counter-productive to separate adult and youth prostitution because the process of prostitution and the life circumstances of those involved do not differ solely or perhaps even largely according to age. Many advocates for prostitute rights suggest that separating youth from adult prostitutes is inadequate because, in doing so, the contextual nature of prostitution is lost, situating youth purely as victims who need to be saved.¹ Research has clearly indicated that the circumstances that bring youth and adults to sex-trade work and keep them there are more similar than different. In addition, the experiences of sex work are similar. Thus, some researchers suggest it is confusing and potentially non-constructive to study youth prostitution as child abuse alone. As Brannigan and Fleischman argued in 1989, researching and intervening from this mutually exclusive stance are

potentially incompatible. For example, is it realistic and effective to treat youth as victims and adults as non-victims? What does that mean to a seventeen-year-old youth prostitute? Will she have access to social service supports for one year as a victim of child abuse, then become a public nuisance? Another difficulty in researching youth prostitution exclusively through the lens of victim and abuse is that issues concerning the experience of sex work for youth are left unexamined. A relatively high number of research studies have focused on adult prostitution's working routines and how risk, stress and identity are managed (see Vanwesenbeeck 2001 for a review). Not examining work-related issues, such as how youth sex-trade workers manage their work and risk, and the way they cope with stressful demands, may unintentionally harm the health and safety of youth sex-trade workers. By casting the net in terms of victimization, one runs the risk of entrenching stigma and pushing girls further and further away from supports. Thus, viewing youth prostitutes solely as victims both legislatively and theoretically may be problematic.

What Is the Sexual Exploitation of Youth and Children?

Although there is no completely typical experience of youth and children involved in prostitution, there are some commonalities that are consistently expressed in research. Research in the past twenty years has focused on defining who youth prostitutes are and why they enter prostitution.

The definition of sexual exploitation is best conceptualized on a continuum. It ranges from female sexual slavery (the gorilla pimp) to survival sex (sale of sexual services by persons, such as homeless youth and women in poverty, who have very few other options) through to the more bourgeois styles of sex trade (including some street prostitution) where both adults are consenting, albeit in a way that is shaped by their gender, occupation, ethnicity, socio-economic status and cultural values (Lowman 2000). In-between is a whole host of different locations of exploitation, from casual to full-time, or self-employed to working in pairs or groups. It appears that youth are less often found in off-street work such as escort services or exotic dancing, which are more highly regulated through municipal policies; they primarily work the street or are found in non-regulated off-street work such as gang houses, trick pads, or drug houses. It is argued that by simply being on the street, de-familied and homeless youth find themselves more likely to take part in forms of prostitution (Hoyt, Ryan and Cauce 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt

and Yoder 1999; Weisberg 1985). Other forms of commercial sexual exploitation such as child pornography, child sex rings and the sexual use of minors are beyond the scope of this book.

Partially due to the differing definitions of youth prostitution and partially due to the underground nature of prostitution and street life generally, there are no concrete reliable statistics that reflect the number of youth exploited through prostitution. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) estimates that worldwide one million children a year are sexually exploited. Others estimate the number of children and youth involved in the international sex trade to be between one and ten million (Hedmann et al. 1998; Joseph 1995). Various Canadian studies also report varying estimates. A study in Vancouver estimated that on any given night in 1995 there were thirty to forty youth working on the street (McCarthy 1995). An outreach program in Saskatoon identified ninety-three children under the age of sixteen being exploited on the street in 1996 (Thibodeau 1996). An outreach program in Regina reported that out of 2,700 contacts in 1996, 45 percent or 1,215 were individuals under age eighteen (Street Workers Advocacy Project 1996). A 1994 evaluation of P.O.W.E.R. (Prostitutes and Other Women for Equal Rights) in Winnipeg documented contact with 2,600 different individuals, one third, or 858, of whom were under age eighteen. Police statistics report that from 1986 to 1990, about 10–15 percent of prostitutes arrested under the communicating provision in the *Criminal Code* were in the young offender category (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group Report 1998:16). These numbers have declined, with only 3 percent of 1995 charges of prostitution-related offences involving youth. This most likely reflects the changes in *Criminal Code* and police enforcement practices rather than a decrease in the number of youth working the street.

Who Are They? Age, Gender and Ethnicity

Different reports describe different ages of entry into prostitution. Although age of entry is often difficult to assess given that entry into prostitution is a process, something that occurs over time rather than occurring at a given moment, it is still important to address. The differing reports are important because the variation in numbers reflects different experiences and suggests the use of caution in making sensationalistic generalizations about the age of those involved.

A Victoria survey and British Columbia consultations for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Prostitution (1998) re-

vealed an average entry age of 14 to 15.5 years. A Vancouver study estimated that females entered at age 16.3 and males at an average age of 15.6 years (McCarthy 1995). Benoit and Millar's recent study found age 18 to be the average age of entry (2001). An Ottawa survey found the average age of entry to be 17.8 years (Caputo et al. 1994). The Street Workers Advocacy Project in Regina found that 12 percent of youth on the street were under 12 years old and the average age was reported as between 12 and 14 years old. The National Youth Prostitution Survey in 1987 found that girls became involved at an average age of 14.4 years and males at 15.4 years (Roeters 1987). Shaver (1996) found that most workers began their careers between the ages of 16 and 20.

Research consistently finds that more girls than boys are sexually exploited through prostitution (Badgley 1984; Lowman 1987; Roeters 1987; Shaver 1996; Jiwani 1998). Some Canadian research indicates that the number of male youth exploited through prostitution is growing (Caputo et al. 1994). Shaver reports that males make up 10–25 percent of all street prostitutes (1996). There also exists very different experiences within the male and female sex trades. Generally males appear to be more independent in their work than females, who more often work for a pimp (Campagna and Poffenberger 1988). Men experience work differently and are found to work a more regular schedule and see more clients (Weinberg et al. 1999). Girls tend to exchange sex more often for survival than men do. Males use the street as their primary work site whereas women are scattered, working in brothels, trick pads and escort services (Campagna and Poffenberger 1988). Violent experiences also differ. Male prostitutes are more likely to use violence against customers while female prostitutes are more likely to have violence used against them (Campagna and Poffenberger 1988; Lowman 2000). Males are more likely to be beaten not by their customers, but by others because of their sexual orientation (Campagna and Poffenberger 1988; Shaver 1996). Shaver (1996) also reports that males are less likely to be arrested for prostitution-related offences; this would seem to indicate women are criminalized more often.

Aboriginal youth are overrepresented as youth exploited through prostitution (Miki 1995; First Call 1996; McEvoy and Daniluk 1995, Kingsley and Mark 2000). Due to the location of Aboriginal persons in Canadian society and the history of colonization and cultural genocide, it is argued that Aboriginal women and girls are the most vulnerable to exploitation (Miki 1995; First Call 1996; McEvoy and Daniluk 1995; Brock and Thistlethwaite 1996). Lynne argues that the combination of

patriarchy and capitalism has deeply wounded First Nations women, rendering them a sexual commodity:

Historical patriarchal and capitalist relations subjugated First Nations women collectively. This collective sexual oppression, based on gender, created our inferiority as a class of people to both First Nations men and non-First Nations men. The sexual domination of First Nations women has remained unabated to the present-day due to patriarchy's stronghold. Thus, it has had, and continues to have, profound and prolonged injurious consequences in First Nations women's lives. When sexual oppression is intersected by racism, and capitalism, the wounding worsens—this compounded wounding for First Nations women has occurred for over five hundred years. (1998: 2)

Realities of Work: Substance Use, Pimping, Violence and Stigma

While research on youth prostitution work routines is scant, some work on adult prostitution has included data on youth work.

Most reports indicate a high incidence of substance use and addiction among women in the sex trade (Badgley 1984; Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Prostitution 1998). Shaver (1996) argues that this might be misleading and substance use varies based on gender and region. She found the highest rates of use in the Atlantic provinces (50 percent of workers were heavy drug users) and the lowest rates in Quebec (16 percent heavy drug users). While it is often argued whether substance use is a precursor to the engagement in prostitution (Brannigan et al. 1989) or a consequence of the work (Fraser 1985; Lowman 1987), it is generally agreed that the relationship between substance use and prostitution is somewhat circular or co-determinate (Schissel and Fedec 1999). Increased abuse of substances often occurs upon entrenchment in street work as a way to cope with the emotional consequences of the work; this results in a continuance of the work as a way to finance increased substance use (Lau 1989; Heinrich 1995).

Pimping is a highly debated topic. Kempadoo and Doezma (1998) discuss prostitution as either forced or voluntary. Many accounts of youth prostitution focus on youth being forced to engage in prostitution and girls as victims of trafficking. However, it is debatable whether pimping is as straightforward as it seems (Lowman 1987). Instead pimping is often a gray area with significant overlaps in how the relationships are defined—pimps versus boyfriends, friends, and girlfriends. Thus, caution should be taken when drawing any conclusions about coercion

into prostitution and the role of pimps (Phoenix 1998; O'Neill 2001).

Violence experienced by sex-trade workers is less controversial. Research has consistently found high rates of violence among sex-trade workers (Miller and Schwartz 1995; Dalla 2000; Weinberg et al. 1999). However, little has been done in the area of youth. It is a contentious issue as to whether it is the work of prostitution itself that is hazardous or the way it is currently structured with a lack of health and safety regulation that ultimately places women at risk of experiencing violence (Brock 1998; Shaver 1996; Vanwesenbeeck 2001). Canadian research has questioned whether youth avoidance of policies intended to assist them places them at greater risk to experience violence (Lowman 2000; Bittle 2002).

Recent research indicates that social stigma experienced by adult prostitutes appears to be on the rise. It examines emotional distress of workers experienced as a result of the stigma associated with prostitution. Research among adult workers suggests that women are rarely completely open about their work, which thus places enormous emotional burdens on them (see Ridge, Minichiello and Plummer 1997; Brewis and Linstead 2000).

Why Are They There? Childhood Abuse, Homelessness and Choice

A great deal of research on youth prostitution has focused on reasons for entry into prostitution. Much of the recent work has examined child sexual abuse as a precursor to prostitution and examined issues of homelessness and running away.

It is estimated that a majority of exploited youth have a history of sexual abuse. However, it is unclear whether this history of abuse differs from the history of abuse in the general population. The Badgley Report (1984) found no difference in levels of sexual abuse among youth prostitutes compared to the population at large. Brannigan, Kanfla and Levy (1989) found the same in a Calgary study. Others, however, found that childhood sexual abuse is a major factor contributing to becoming involved with, and vulnerable to, later sexual exploitation through prostitution. A Montreal study of prostitutes found that 45 percent had been victims of incest before becoming prostitutes (Gemme et al. 1984). Bagley and Young (1987) found similarly high levels of abuse reported.

Given these disagreements there is much debate about whether child sexual abuse is a precursor to prostitution. This may in fact be a non-issue. While it appears these women generally have a higher-than-average experience of sexual abuse, there is also evidence that this should

not be regarded as a causal relationship (Mathews 1989; Brannigan and Van Brunschot 1997). Rather, it appears that the intersection of family situation and abusive experiences within the family, culminating with running away; a lack of viable alternatives for youth generally; and a failure of the child welfare system create the situation where prostitution occurs (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1992; Schissel and Fedec 1999).

Most research indicates that youth end up on the street for two reasons: an unstable home life and a failure of the child welfare system to assist them (Mathews 1989). Thus, there appears to be a general pattern. A youth will leave home because of dysfunction that may include physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated against her/him by a family member, witnessing domestic violence, general neglect, and/or drug abuse. The youth will generally have contact with some helping agency, most likely a provincially mandated agency. The majority of youth don't find success with programs like these and end up as runaways from group homes who find themselves homeless on the street. As they become entrenched in street life, they increasingly become vulnerable to exploitation through prostitution. Encouraged by friends and street peers, tired and hungry youth engage in selling sex by choice—a choice that is fuelled by necessity. Many engage in the sex trade as the only viable means of survival and feel empowered by being self-sufficient.

Canadian research consistently found that youth prostitutes were either uninformed about accessing social assistance, ineligible for assistance because of their transient lifestyle and age, or simply not prepared to subsist on welfare-level incomes or low skill jobs. Indeed, Vanwesenbeeck, in a review of sex-trade research over the past ten years, found that the most common and obvious factor for entry into prostitution was economic need (2001: 262). Phoenix argues that while adults usually cite inadequate benefits or income as one reason for their entrance into prostitution, for young people “inadequate” usually means nonexistent: entrance into the legitimate labour force and the provision of social security benefits are age restricted (2002: 361–362). Sullivan (1988) indicates there are significant economic incentives for youth to prostitute. However, the amount of money to be made on the street is debated. While the Badgley report indicated that female youth can make up to \$40,000 a year working the street: when compared with the average annual income for women (\$9,522), it is easy to see the economic gain to be made. However, other research argues that the amount of money is not great and is indeed a misconception of sex-trade work generally (Shaver 1996; Lowman 1998).

Much of the resistance to assisting those involved in prostitution comes from the commonly held notion that people freely choose to engage in prostitution. Thus, since it is an individual choice, any negative experiences are regarded as consequences of a personal choice and the responsibility of the individuals themselves. A study from Save The Children Canada, *Canadian Attitudes about Children in the Sex Trade*, found that 47 percent of those surveyed agreed that most young sex-trade workers actually “chose to do it” (Bruton 2000). Others refute this notion of free choice, indicating that choice is constantly mediated by factors outside our control. Lowman argues:

Once we transcend a phenomenal level of analysis to consider the context of a youth’s choice to sell sexual services, it becomes obvious that the choice must be located in the “wider origins of the deviant act,” particularly the marginal position of youth in the labour force, and patriarchal power structures both inside and outside the family. (1987: 111)

It is clear that some segments of the population are more vulnerable to having to make this choice than are others. Jiwani (1998), in theorizing about global commercial exploitation, expands reasons for vulnerability to include larger socio-structural contributors such as poverty, marginalization, devaluation of women and girls, previous experiences of violence, racism, and the intersection of these issues with one another. Indeed she argues that some individuals such as gay and lesbian youth, Aboriginal and migrant/immigrant girls, and the poor are in positions where they are more vulnerable to choosing sex-trade work simply because of these characteristics. Homophobia, racism and cultural genocide, and lack of opportunities for the poor impact on children’s decisions to run away and seek approval from other sources.

Larger socio-economic issues creating the situation for prostitution to exist need to be examined. The context of sexuality, the sexualization of female bodies and the inequitable attitudes about male and female social roles (paired with the cultural conception and exploitative sexualization of youth and sex) contribute to the situation where prostitution can occur, while also determining who is most vulnerable. This wider social construction of youth and sexuality also plays a role in creating the demand for young female prostitutes, increasing opportunities for their participation. As Mathews (1989) indicates, analysis of youth prostitution must include issues such as unfair differences in male/female socialization

(rendering women as submissive and men as dominant), the disenfranchisement of youth from institutional decision making and labour market employment, the failure of social services to assist street youth (indicated in the high number of homeless youth), and the lack of political will to enable families to provide quality care for their children. Thus, we must ask how the decision to prostitute intersects with the power and economic inequities between males and females, and between adults and children. A lack of adequate job opportunities and housing for youth combines with the sexual demand for young women to make prostitution appear as a viable source of income and independence.

The Girl Child Project²

This volume aims to advance our understanding of the experiences of girls exploited through prostitution and ways to best respond to the issue. Each chapter describes a distinct component of a research project that was conducted by the tri-provincial research network RESOLVE (Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse).³ Following a preliminary year of funding by Status of Women Canada to undertake research on violence prevention and the girl child, RESOLVE focused three subsequent years of research on the issue of sexual exploitation through prostitution.

The focus of this work was to examine the lives, and to hear the voices, of girls sexually exploited through prostitution. Although there is considerable research on prostitution generally, there is a paucity of research on girls and adolescents who are sexually exploited through prostitution and a lack of research that allows youth to explain their own perceptions of their needs. This research asked girls to describe their experiences with programming (how it helped or harmed them) and to identify service gaps and best practices. In addition to issues of programming, the girls were given the opportunity to speak about their experience of identity formation, social networks, health issues, experiences of violence and the factors that push them into and may draw them out of prostitution.

The research applied three main methods. First was an examination of service provision in Canada. A total of 173 agencies were canvassed⁴ in a program review of each Canadian province on existing policies and programs for sexually exploited and street youth. Of these agencies, innovative programs were selected for site visits and in-depth service provider interviews. Forty-three interviews were conducted. Second, we interviewed fifty-four adult women and men who had become

involved in prostitution before age eighteen. These interviews took place in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. And finally, we undertook an examination of the legal issues related to the topic. This examination assessed new legislation and the capacity of the current child welfare acts across the country to accommodate intervention strategies for this group of youth.

The interviews with women and men were done using a semi-structured interview schedule. The only requirement for taking part in the interviews was that the participants had been involved in sex-trade work as youth. The participants told their stories in their own way and thus not every respondent discussed the same issues. Further, each of the three RESOLVE teams in the three Prairie provinces had a somewhat different emphasis and this is reflected in some of the interview outcomes. With the exception of four focus groups ranging from two to four participants, the interviews were conducted individually. The participants were recruited through their past or current involvement with specialized services for prostitution, counselling, criminal diversion programs or substance abuse.

Several limitations are worth noting. As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted differently in the three provinces, allowing for tailoring to the special interests of the research team members. This means that not all respondents were asked similar questions. The women respondents were contacted because of their involvement with agencies; therefore, we only spoke with those who had perceived a need to be involved with formal services. This group may be different from others working in prostitution who have chosen not to seek help or it may be more reflective of street prostitution than of other forms such as working in escort services. Further, the demographics of those interviewed varied greatly across the three provinces. Alberta respondents were mostly Caucasian and were younger, in contrast to interviewees from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where a high proportion were of First Nations background, and many were older. We cannot ascertain whether this reflects actual differences in who becomes involved in prostitution in the three provinces or is an artifact of the way that we obtained participants.

In reading this volume, three things must be taken into account. First, the participants often had a difficult time distinguishing between life on the street as youth and as adults. Although we do our best to separate the experiences, the continuity of experience becomes diminished when we do so. Thus, more often than not, the experiences revealed here are both those that occurred to participants as youth and as

young adults. Second, although we interviewed men, we have included only women in the analyses presented here. The number of men we interviewed was quite small and so they were excluded from these analyses. Also, we interviewed some women who were eighteen and over when they began sex-trade work. In the effort to focus on youth experience, these women's narratives were excluded. Therefore, throughout the volume, the number of narratives analyzed in each chapter varies between forty-five and forty-seven due to individual researcher categories. Also, the terminology used to refer to the participants is women and often "the women." The third and most important issue is around terminology. The terminology surrounding youth engagement in the sex trade is a difficult one. The difficulty stems from how one conceptualizes youth prostitutes: solely as victims, as agents, or as a combination of both. This difficulty was reflected within our research team. While some preferred the term sex trade, others found it unacceptable in that it didn't capture the abusive and exploitive nature of prostitution; others found the term exploitation or exploited youth to be too victimizing. Therefore throughout this volume various terms will be used, such as youth/girls/women exploited through prostitution, prostituted youth/girls/women, youth/girls/women involved in the sex trade or sex-trade work, youth/girls/women involved in prostitution, and youth prostitutes.

Demographics and Background of the Women

As mentioned, the analyses in this volume are based on 45 interviews with women from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba who had been involved in prostitution before age eighteen.⁵ Of these women, a higher percentage were of Aboriginal descent (26 or 57.7 percent) than Caucasian (19 or 42.2 percent). This proportion was different across the three provinces, with the Saskatchewan interviews exclusively Aboriginal, Manitoba 70 percent Aboriginal, but Alberta only 22.2 percent.

At the time of the interviews, the women ranged in age from 18 to 36: 10 (22.2 percent) were 20 or below, 14 (31.1 percent) were aged between 21 and 25, 11 (24.4 percent) were between 26 and 30, and 9 (20 percent) were 30 or older (one respondent did not specify age). With respect to the age at which they became involved with prostitution, 17 women (37.8 percent) were between 11 and 13; 16 (35.6 percent) became involved between 14 and 15, and 12 (26.7 percent) were aged 16 to 17. Thus, almost three quarters of the women began their involvement when they were 15 years old or less.

Almost 40 percent of the women had been involved for five years or less, another third (34.7 percent) for over eleven years, and 22.2 percent had six to ten years of involvement. The participants were almost equally divided between those who had left the streets (51 percent) and those who were still involved (49 percent). As children, 63 percent of the respondents had been involved with the child welfare system. Of these, most (77.8 percent) had been taken into care and resided in foster and group homes, often for many years. A high proportion (32 or 71 percent) of the respondents reported an abuse history as children. Of those who reported abuse, 21 (65.6 percent) had been sexually abused, most by family members. Only five individuals noted that they had not been abused in their families. Thirteen respondents did not mention that they had been abused as children, although a number of these had been taken into care by child welfare authorities, indicating significant problems in their families of origin.

Fifteen women became pregnant while under the age of eighteen and while they were on the streets; they bore one or more children. Of these, nine no longer have custody, although some visit their children, who live with relatives.

Hearing the Voices of the Women

This volume speaks to current debates and concerns of sex trade research outlined above, often questioning common assumptions and public notions of life on the street. This is done through hearing the voices of sex-trade involved women.

The book begins with “Selling Sex? It’s Really Like Selling Your Soul”: Vulnerability to and the Experience of Exploitation through Child Prostitution.” Leslie Tutty and Kendra Nixon examine the push and pull factors for young women on the street. They examine the issue of childhood sexual, emotional and physical abuse as a precursor to life on the street. Further, they examine the avoidance of state-mandated services and homelessness as reasons for sex-trade work. They also discuss the definition of prostitution as survival sex and engage in the debate on economic incentive. Money is discussed as an important factor in keeping women on the street, but is also viewed in terms of its addiction and fluidity. The chapter also sheds light on issues of pimping and begins to question the traditional conception of pimps in the lives of young women, finding that many women do not distinguish between pimp and boyfriend. Questioning the common notion of forced prostitution by males, the chapter examines the finding that many girls learned

the ropes from other girls rather than being pimped by men. The chapter also discusses transitioning from the street and the stigma that many women with few outside choices endure in the face of poverty.

Stigma is a central issue on how women internalize their experiences and craft their identities as prostitutes and as women. In “The People We Think We Are,” Pamela Downe examines how young women in prostitution create self-identities. Age, drugs (as a way to cope with stigma), emotions (such as anger and fear), family, friends, gender, cultural location, race, parenthood, self-esteem and sexuality are examined within the broader analysis of how women intimately affected by prostitution come to view themselves in relation to the world around them. This chapter sets out the ways in which the women have internalized their experiences as former youth prostitutes in Canada and how that continues to affect them currently.

Detailed accounts of violence experienced in families of origin, on the street as sex workers, and by societal institutions are examined in the third chapter, “That Was My Prayer Every Night—Just To Get Home Safe.” Kendra Nixon and Leslie Tutty present a convincing case that girls involved in prostitution are a highly victimized population. This chapter examines the experience of violence as related in many ways to the stigma attached to the work (violence by the general public) and how the stigma is internalized by young women through forms of self-harm (such as suicide attempts, self-mutilation). It also documents resiliency and management of risk associated with street work such as survival and safety strategies.

In Chapter Four, “I Don’t Know What the Hell It Is But It Sounds Nasty,” the health and well-being of women and girls in the sex trade is of paramount concern. Little is known about how these young women actually experience, assess, prioritize and respond to health-threatening conditions. The women discuss how experiences with, as well as knowledge and fear of, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis-C, addictions, fatigue, mental illness and trauma are recounted in their life on the streets. Bio-medical models are questioned as the appropriate way in which to frame health concerns of sex-trade workers. A discussion of how the women have utilized the health care resources as well as the prevailing use and abuse of prescription medication also figures prominently in this chapter.

Chapter Five reviews the Canadian structure of child welfare legislation including traditional child welfare intervention models, as well as the newer protective confinement regimes in place in Alberta and British Columbia. Karen Busby argues that such regimes deny rights

guaranteed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and questions how these denials are justified by governments. She explores the issue of gender as it relates to confinement models and state intervention.

Providing services to youth involved in the sex trade is explored by Kelly Gorkoff and Meghan Waters under the umbrella statement of “Balancing Safety, Respect and Choice in Programs for Young Women Involved in Prostitution.” This chapter reviews three primary modes of service delivery for youth in the sex trade: state-mandated service, special legislative initiatives and non-governmental programs. The chapter contrasts the lived experiences of youth and compassion of service providers within the three models. It addresses debates among service providers and among youth on the most effective service delivery as well as the differing experiences with apprehension models. It concludes with some policy concerns distinct to Canada and demands that larger social concerns be brought to bear on programming issues.

Overall, the collection of chapters contained in this volume gives voice to a population whose voices need to be heard. Through examining the various issues presented in this volume, we can begin to appreciate the complexities of the lives of young women exploited through prostitution. As the women courageously share their stories, you will hear their pain, their struggles and their fears, and you will know that childhoods have been lost. Their voices will challenge your own thoughts and beliefs of this issue and take you to a higher level of understanding the realities of this life. Is this a lifestyle choice? No. Is this an easy way to make money? No. Each chapter clearly describes the harsh realities of sexual exploitation, how it affects these women’s relationships, health, esteem and identity and how this turns into a vicious cycle that becomes difficult to escape.

The answers to this issue are here, as long as these women’s voices are “Being Heard.”

Notes

1. See work by advocate groups such as COYOTE (Call off your tired old ethics), Maggies, Stella, SWAV (Sex Workers Advocacy Project of Vancouver), website <www.walnet.org>. It is interesting to note however, that while these groups advocate for health, safety and choice among adults involved in sex-trade work, youth are sometimes left out of their approach: the argument is focused on consenting adults, and advocating is for those over age eighteen.
2. This description of the research, its limitations, and demographics is a version of “Examination of Innovative Programming for Children and Youth

Involved in Prostitution” by Busby, Downe, Gorkoff, Nixon, Tutty and Ursel, in Berman and Jiwani 2002, pages 89–113. For that report the majority of what is included here was compiled and written by Leslie Tutty.

3. RESOLVE is one of five Centres of Excellence across Canada originally funded in 1992 by the Family Violence Initiative to study Violence against Women and Children. This project was conducted as part of a larger study of the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence. A condensed version of all of the chapters in this volume can be found in Berman and Jiwani 2002.
4. Working east to west, we conducted 18 interviews in the Atlantic provinces, 17 in Quebec, 69 in Ontario, 8 in Manitoba, 11 in Saskatchewan, 24 in Alberta, and 26 in British Columbia.
5. This includes one transgendered person.