

# KNOW THE FACTS: Prostitution in Chicago

*Hillary Clinton once said, “It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into slavery or prostitution for human greed.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, sexual exploitation is a social injustice that is happening everywhere, including Chicago. On any given day there are an estimated 16,000–24,000 women and girls involved in prostitution-related activities in Chicagoland. Research finds that many individuals in prostitution have experienced extreme violence, suffer from substance abuse addictions, experience homelessness, have health problems, and struggle with mental illness.<sup>2</sup>*

According to the Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues, the City of Chicago is a targeted location for prostitution and trafficking because of its “large airport, central geographic location, and elaborate transportation infrastructure.”<sup>3</sup>

## HOMELESSNESS:

- Many prostituted people are homeless women and children. Young girls who have run away frequently lack basic necessities for survival, making them more vulnerable to traffickers. To survive on the street, young people often turn to “survival sex,” the exchange of sexual activity for resources to meet basic needs.<sup>4</sup>
  - According to a national study including Chicago, 55% of homeless runaway youth and 20% of youth housed in shelters engage in prostitution for money or to meet basic needs.<sup>5</sup>
  - Of the prostituted women interviewed in one Chicago study, more than half were homeless.<sup>6</sup>
- Of 235 women surveyed in the Cook County Jail, 58% were regularly involved in prostitution, and 54% of those in prostitution were homeless at the time they entered the sex trade.<sup>7</sup>

## VIOLENCE:

- Research on prostitution in Chicago found that 100% of survey participants had experienced some type of violence while in the sex trade. This included being raped, kicked, threatened with a weapon, punched, or slapped.<sup>8</sup>
- Research conducted by Jody Raphael in Chicago stated that customers were the most frequently identified perpetrators of violence across all types of prostitution. As an example, customers were identified as being responsible for 62% to 100% of the acts of violence against women engaged in street-level prostitution.<sup>9</sup>
- In the study “Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution,” conducted by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, a man who purchased sex stated, “Something at your job makes you mad, you can’t beat your wife, you can’t beat your kids, and so you go out and have sex to take your frustration out.”
  - 43% of interviewees from this CAASE study stated that if the man pays the woman for sex, she should do anything he asks.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tyler, P. (1995). Hillary Clinton, in China, details abuse on women. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/06/world/hillary-clinton-in-china-details-abuse-of-women.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

<sup>2</sup> Raphael, J., & Shapiro, D.L. (2002). Sisters speak out: The lives and needs of prostituted women in Chicago. Center for Impact Research. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/79/FileItem-149903-sisterspeakout.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/79/FileItem-149903-sisterspeakout.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues. (2007). The realities of human trafficking in Cook County: Strategies for ending the exploitation of women and girls. Retrieved from <http://www.cfw.org/Document.Doc?id=148>

<sup>4</sup> O’Leary, C., & Howard, O. (2001). The prostitution of women and girls in metropolitan Chicago: A preliminary prevalence report. Center for Impact Research. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/89/FileItem-149893-Prevalencereport.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/89/FileItem-149893-Prevalencereport.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> O’Leary, C. & Howard, O. (2001).

<sup>6</sup> Cook County Commission on Women’s Issues (2007).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> City of Chicago Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence. (2006). The Intersystem Assessment on Prostitution in Chicago. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/29/FileItem-149889-IntersysAssmt\\_dec06.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/29/FileItem-149889-IntersysAssmt_dec06.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D. (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Durchslag, R., & Goswami, S. (2008). Deconstructing the demand for prostitution: Preliminary insights from interviews with Chicago men who purchase sex. Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf)



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## MEN WHO PURCHASE SEX IN CHICAGO

- CAASE conducted research with 113 men who purchase sex in Chicago and discovered that:
  - Purchasers were of varying age, race, education level, and income level.
  - 79% of the interviewees had attended some college or obtained a college or graduate school degree.
  - 21 was the average age when men began purchasing sex.
  - 62% of the men indicated they had a regular sex partner (girlfriend or wife).
  - 46% to 48% of interviewees purchased sex in order to obtain sex acts they either felt uncomfortable asking of their partner or which their partner refused to perform.
  - 53% purchased sex from women as frequently as once a month up to several times a week.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2004, Chicago police arrested 3,204 individuals in prostitution, but only arrested 950 johns (men purchasing sex).<sup>12</sup> In the study conducted by CAASE, only 7% of the johns interviewed had been arrested for soliciting a woman in prostitution.<sup>13</sup>

## YOUTH:

Under the Illinois Safe Children Act, passed in 2010, youth can no longer be prosecuted for prostitution. This law was an initiative of the End Demand Illinois campaign and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. While the average age of entry into prostitution varies by study, research in Chicago confirms that most women in the sex trade were recruited as minors:

- According to Jody Raphael's study, "Sisters Speak Out," 61.7% of respondents first exchanged sex for money before the age of 18.
  - 72% of young women in the study (those who entered the sex trade between 12-15 years old) ran away from home.
  - Several women in the study were used in prostitution by their parent/guardian to make money.<sup>14</sup>
- It has been reported that parents have sold their children to adults who request someone younger to use for sex. According to the study, "From Victims to Victimiziers," one of the young girls was pimped out so her mother could acquire drugs. She stated, "My mother was my first pimp. She used to sell me to the landlord and other men who wanted a young girl. She was a junkie."<sup>15</sup>
- Results from one focus group with women who were involved in the Chicago sex trade as juveniles showed that the average age of entry was 12.<sup>16</sup>
- According to Jody Raphael's study "Domestic Sex Trafficking in Chicago of Women and Girls," some young women who entered the sex trade began selling their bodies to support a drug addiction, while others left home due to abandonment or family dysfunction.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Raphael, J., & Ashley, J. (2008). Domestic sex trafficking of Chicago women and girls. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/de/FileItem-149885-DomesticSexTraffickingWomenGirls.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/de/FileItem-149885-DomesticSexTraffickingWomenGirls.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Durchslag, R., & Goswami, S. (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Raphael, J., & Shapiro, D. L. (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Raphael, J. & Powell-Myers, B. (2010). From victims to victimizers: Interviews with 25 ex-pimps in Chicago. Depaul College of Law. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/6e/FileItem-147944-depaul25\\_Pimp\\_Research\\_Final\\_Aug2010.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/6e/FileItem-147944-depaul25_Pimp_Research_Final_Aug2010.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ashley, J. (2008). The commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in Illinois. Retrieved from [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/Of/FileItem-149882-csecAshley2008icja.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/Of/FileItem-149882-csecAshley2008icja.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Raphael, J., & Ashley, J. (2008).



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## COALITIONS:

Though prostitution is a serious issue in Chicago, there are strong and effective coalitions that work to advocate for women and girls in prostitution, create laws that protect these victims, and end the demand for prostitution:

- CAASE leads End Demand Illinois, a campaign that refocused law enforcement's attention on pimps, johns and traffickers while proposing a network of support for survivors of the sex trade.<sup>18</sup>
- The Salvation Army developed PROMISE (Partnership to Rescue Our Minors From Sexual Exploitation) which is a steering committee of social service providers, educators, healthcare officials, and law enforcement in Chicago's community. PROMISE advocates to create awareness, prevent sexual exploitation, intervene, and provide service delivery that helps minor victims of sex trafficking.<sup>19</sup>
- Prostitution Alternatives Round Table (PART) is a campaign of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and works with prostitution survivors, advocates, and law enforcement to provide advocacy work by lobbying for new laws to help women exit the sex trade and to provide options instead of incarceration. PART also works with Women In Need for Gender Specific Services (WINGS) which offers victim services to women in prostitution.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> End Demand Illinois, Communities. Retrieved from <http://www.enddemandillinois.org/communities>

<sup>19</sup> PROMISE in Chicago. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.sapromise.org/>

<sup>20</sup> Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Prostitution Alternatives Round Table. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagohomeless.org/programs-campaigns/advocacy-public-policy/part/>