

01 Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Chicago

The Issue

On any given day in Chicagoland, it's estimated that 16,000–24,000 women and girls are involved in the commercial sex trade, which includes sex trafficking, prostitution and other businesses that profit from the sale of sex. Research has found that approximately 90% of prostituted people are physically and sexually abused at the hands of traffickers and customers. Many of these women have experienced homelessness, domestic violence, sexual assault, and untreated mental health and substance abuse issues.¹

No one deserves to be harmed. Sex trafficking isn't just something that happens overseas. Traffickers in the United States target vulnerable women and children using coercion, physical and sexual violence, and economic exploitation.

If you believe you are a victim of human trafficking or may have information about a potential trafficking situation, please contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC): 1-888-3737-888

Demand Change

Everyday Actions

1. Stop using words that normalize aspects of the sex trade and hide its harm such as “pimp,” “ho,” and “whore,” and challenge your friends when they use similar language.
2. Work to alleviate the stigma surrounding individuals in the sex trade by challenging stereotypes about prostitution and helping others understand the broader context of the sex trade. For myths and facts about prostitution, visit www.caase.org/fact-sheets.

Raise Awareness

3. Host book clubs, film screenings and art projects to raise awareness. Find recommendations at www.caase.org/other-resources.

Volunteer

4. Volunteer at organizations working to help at-risk women gain supportive housing and jobs that pay a living wage.

Examples include Women Employed, www.womenemployed.org; Inspiration Corporation, www.inspirationcorp.org; and Deborah's Place, www.deborahsplace.org.

Advocate for Change

5. Advocate for shelters and clinics to be equipped and staffed to offer medical and psychological treatment for women who have been in the sex trade industry. If you volunteer with a local shelter or clinic, inquire as to whether they provide these specialized services and, if not, encourage them to do so.
6. Work with religious groups to speak out against commercial sexual exploitation. Have a “safe person” in your religious community who serves as a resource to victims of sexual exploitation. Talk to the religious leader at your place of worship about how to make this happen (download CAASE's Communities of Faith toolkits for more resources and recommendations).
7. Support legislation aimed at ending sexual exploitation and expanding options for prostituted individuals. Join the End Demand Illinois campaign, led by CAASE, to stay informed about initiatives in Illinois and beyond: www.enddemandillinois.org.
8. Make sure the needs of sexually exploited individuals are being addressed in the domestic violence community, the sexual assault community, among homeless rights

advocates, and among individuals working in the field of substance addiction. If you hold any type of leadership role within one of these organizations, share your support for creating inclusive services that address the needs of prostituted individuals.

9. Urge your local police department to implement mechanisms that keep prostituted women and girls safe from their pimps. Encourage law enforcement to provide prostituted people with alternatives to arrest, detention, and incarceration.

Keep Learning

10. Find more resources and connect with organizations listed in the Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Chicago section in the index.

¹Raphael, J. & Shapiro, D. (2002). *Sisters Speak Out: The Lives and Needs of Prostituted Women in Chicago*. Center for Impact Research.