

# 2011

DEFEND DIGNITY  
TOGETHER WE CAN END PROSTITUTION



**Prostitution  
in Canada**  
*By Glendyne  
Gerrard*

# Prostitution in Canada in 2011

By Glendyne Gerrard

Defend the weak and the fatherless;  
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

Rescue the weak and the needy; Deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Psalm 82:3,4 NIV

National Women's Ministries of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada has taken up the cause of justice and mercy in regards to prostitution. Historically, Women's Ministries has raised awareness and funds for justice and mercy projects globally. It is time we engage in justice on our own soil. In order to respond to it as God would have us to, we must be aware of some key factors.

1. **Prostitution is violence against women.** There is little dispute that prostitution is a dangerous activity.

In an authoritative 9-country study, Dr. Melissa Farley, a clinical psychologist, concluded that "...the physical and emotional violence in prostitution is overwhelming." She and other researchers interviewed 854 people in prostitution in Canada, Colombia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, United States and Zambia. The study concluded that prostitution causes many traumas. 71% of respondents were physically assaulted in prostitution; 63% were raped; and 68% had the clinical symptoms of post-traumatic-stress disorder. Of the Canadian women participants, 75% were injured during prostitution. These injuries included: "stabblings and beatings, concussions, broken bones...Half of the Canadian women suffered traumatic head injuries as a result of violent assaults with baseball bats, crowbars or from having their heads slammed against walls or against car dashboards."<sup>1</sup>

The violence listed above is in addition to the violence that the act of prostitution is in and of itself. Non-consensual or coerced sex constitutes violence against women.

**Injustice anywhere is  
a threat to justice  
everywhere.  
-Martin Luther King Jr.**

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<sup>1</sup> Prostitution: Violating the Human Rights of Poor Women Shelagh Day, 2008

“Prostitution is a transaction in which women provide commoditized sexual services to men, in exchange for money. It is a form of social and sexual subordination, “says Shelagh Day, human rights advocate and expert. She is founder of the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund, the Court Challenges Program, and the Women’s Court of Canada and has held leading positions with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Day is currently Director of the Poverty and Human Rights Center and Senior Editor of the Canadian Human Rights Reporter.

Day goes on to say, “In effect, prostitution is a denial of the equality of women, and the purchase of a woman for sex, or the sale of her by another for sexual purposes, are violations of a woman’s right to equality.”<sup>2</sup>

A Canadian Report on Prostitution and Pornography concluded that girls and women in prostitution have a mortality rate 40 times higher than the national average.<sup>3</sup>

83% of prostitutes are victims of assault with a weapon.<sup>4</sup>

Describing the trauma of prostitution, and its consequences, one fourteen year old stated: "You feel like a piece of hamburger meat – all chopped up and barely holding together"<sup>5</sup>

When asked, 92% of prostitutes want out.<sup>6</sup>

**Every sixty seconds, two more children are forced into slavery.**

2. **Prostitutes start young.** The average age of entry into prostitution is 13 or 14 years. Most of these girls were recruited or coerced into prostitution. Others were ‘traditional wives’ without job skills who escaped from or were abandoned by abusive husbands and went into prostitution to support themselves and their children.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shelagh Day, Pg. 48

<sup>3</sup> Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution, 1985, Pornography and Prostitution in Canada 350

<sup>4</sup> National Coalition Against Sexual Assault as seen in <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com>

<sup>5</sup> D.KellyWeisberg, 1985, Children of the Night, Lexington Books, Toronto as found in <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com>

<sup>6</sup> S.M. Berg [www.genderberg.com](http://www.genderberg.com)

<sup>7</sup> Denise Gamache and Evelina Giobbe, Prostitution: Oppression Disguised as Liberation, National Coalition against Domestic Violence, 1990) as seen in <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com>

3. **Prostitutes are most often victims of sexual abuse as children.** The Farley study found that 63% of prostitutes had been abused as children with the numbers in Canada reporting 84%<sup>8</sup>. Being abused seems to almost be a training ground for prostitution and most girls have had several predators. 72% reported that as children, they had been hit or beaten by a caregiver until they had bruises or were injured.<sup>9</sup>
4. **Prostitution and poverty go hand in hand.** Poverty drives women into prostitution and keeps them there. Women usually enter prostitution to survive – to pay the rent, support kids, because they have run away from home, or because they are not eligible for welfare.<sup>10</sup> According to Amber Hollibaugh “...prostitution always begins as survival; - the rent, the kids, the drugs, pregnancy, financing an abortion, running away from home, being undocumented, having a ‘bad’ reputation, incest – it always starts at trying to get by.”<sup>11</sup>

“Among First Nations women raising children by themselves in urban Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon, 80 to 90% were living below poverty level. This level of poverty in any patriarchal culture is associated with a high rate of prostitution.”<sup>12</sup>

The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women recognizes poverty as a leading cause of women being vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

Prostitution is intimately related to homelessness, with 86% of our respondents currently or previously homeless.<sup>14</sup>

5. **First Nations women are at the greatest risk for prostitution in our country.**

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<sup>8</sup> Melissa Farley, <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/FarleyVAW.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/Prostitution\\_Indigenous\\_Women.html](http://www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/Prostitution_Indigenous_Women.html)

<sup>10</sup> Shelagh Day

<sup>11</sup> Berta E. Hernandez-Truyol and Jane E. Larson, “Sexual Labor and Human Rights” (2006) 37 Colum. Human Rights L. Review 391 at 424 (Hernandez and Larson) citing Amber Hollibaugh, “On the Street Where We Live” (1988) 1 Women’s Review of Books 1 (book review).

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada 1991 census, RCAP 1996 p.171

<sup>13</sup> Shelagh Day, Pg. 40

<sup>14</sup> Federal/Provincial Territorial Working Group on Prostitution (1998) Report and Recommendations in Respect of Legislation, Policy and Practices Concerning Prostitution – Related Activities. Canadian Federal/Provincial Working Group on Prostitution

52% of prostitutes in Vancouver, BC are First Nations women, which is an over representation of this group of people when only 1.7-7% of the population in Vancouver are First Nations people.<sup>15</sup>

“Prostitution of Aboriginal women occurs globally, in epidemic numbers, with indigenous women at the bottom of a brutal race and class hierarchy in prostitution itself (in addition to being at the bottom of race and class hierarchies in other walks of life)”<sup>16</sup>

The Aboriginal Women’s Action Network writes:

We, the Aboriginal Women’s Action network, speak...in the interests of the most vulnerable women – street prostitutes, of which a significant number are young Aboriginal women and girls. We have a long, multi-generational history of colonization, marginalization, displacement from our Homelands, and rampant abuse that has forced many of our sisters into prostitution. Aboriginal women are often either forced into prostitution, or trafficked into prostitution....Given that the average age at which girls enter prostitution is fourteen, the majority with a history of unspeakable abuses, we are also speaking out for the Aboriginal children who are targeted by johns and pimps. Aboriginal girls are hunted down and prostituted, and the perpetrators go uncharged with child sexual assault and child rape....While we are speaking out for the women in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, we include women from First Nations Reserves, and other Aboriginal communities, most of whom have few resources and limited choices...<sup>17</sup>

**Prostitution is not the oldest profession,  
but the oldest form of oppression.**

-US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs,  
“The Link between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking”

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<sup>15</sup> Melissa Farley

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF. (2004) [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_19429](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_19429)

<sup>17</sup> Shelagh Day Pg. 27

The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women recognizes that Aboriginal women are trafficked internally in Canada, and that their poverty, poor conditions on reserves, and abuse in their communities cause Aboriginal women to be Canada's most vulnerable victims.<sup>18</sup>

First Nations youth who leave their home communities for urban areas are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation in that they are both homeless and in an unfamiliar cultural environment.<sup>19</sup>

"Housing instability increases reserve-to-urban migration, leaving young women extremely vulnerable to prostitution, in that homelessness has been established as a primary risk factor for prostitution."<sup>20</sup>

**6. To abolish prostitution means we must address the issue of demand. In Canada, 1 in 9 men buy sex at some point in their lives<sup>21</sup>. Taking steps to abolish prostitution is possible as we review the Nordic law first established in Sweden in 1999. Compared to The Netherlands, Sweden's approach is proving successful in abolishing prostitution.**

"Sweden officially recognized prostitution as a form of exploitation and violence against women and children. By choosing to solely prosecute the purchasers of sexual services (predominantly men) rather than the prostitutes, Sweden is the first country to criminalize demand while decriminalizing supply. Sweden has taken the view that there is no such thing as voluntary prostitution – prostitution is always an enforced activity, and therefore the prostitute is detrimental to both the prostitute on an individual level, and to society as a whole. They have taken a firm position that prostitution entails oppression of women and is therefore an affront to gender equality, and as long as the prostitution of women and children exists, equality cannot be achieved.

The Law on the Prohibition of the Purchase of Sexual Services is the legislative tool applied to eradicate prostitution in Sweden. The legislation is based on a "zero vision" policy in hopes of completely eliminating prostitution. In addition to eradicating prostitution, the law was also purposed to bring about a fundamental change in societal attitudes. Children are taught in school at a young age that the purchase

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<sup>18</sup> Shelagh Day Pg. 40

<sup>19</sup> Federal/Provincial Working Group, 1998, pg. 14

<sup>20</sup> Prostitution of Indigenous Women: Sex Inequality and the Colonization of Canada's First Nations Women by Melissa Farley, PH.D & Jacqueline-Lynne, pg. 2

<sup>21</sup> Victor Malarek, Thane Burnett, Niagara Falls Review, April 13, 2009

of sex is illegal and unacceptable, in hopes that the next generation will grow up considering prostitution a much more heinous offence than it is considered today.”<sup>22</sup>

What are the effects of the law in Sweden? “Before the law came into effect, there were nearly 2,500 prostitutes in Sweden. This figure was cut by half within a year of the law being enacted. In Stockholm, street prostitution has been reduced by two thirds and the number of johns has gone down 80%.”<sup>23</sup>

“This month, the government of Sweden published an evaluation of the law’s first ten years and how it has actually worked in practice. Compared to the report’s understated and cautious tone, the findings are strikingly positive: street prostitution has been cut in half; there is no evidence that the reduction in street prostitution has led to an increase in prostitution elsewhere, whether indoors or on the Internet; the bill provides increased services for women to exit prostitution; fewer men state that they purchase sexual services; and the ban has had a chilling effect on traffickers who find Sweden an unattractive market to sell women and children for sex. Following initial criticism of the law, police now confirm it works well and has had a deterrent effect on other organizers and promoters of prostitution. Sweden appears to be the only country in Europe where prostitution and sex trafficking has not increased. The Swedish results should be contrasted to neighboring countries such as Denmark where there are no legal prohibitions against the purchase of persons in prostitution. Denmark has a smaller population than Sweden (roughly 5 ½ million to Sweden’s 9 million), yet the scale of street prostitution in Denmark is three times higher than in Sweden”<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, the Netherlands removed the penal provisions surrounding brothels on October 1, 2000.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Sweden, the Netherlands’ objective was never to eliminate prostitution entirely, but rather to regulate it in order to control and tolerate the practice.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Selling Ourselves: Prostitution in Canada Where are we Headed? April, 2010 EFC, pg.10

<sup>23</sup> Purchasing Sexual Services in Sweden and the Netherlands, Legal Regulation and Experiences:, A Report by a Working Group on the Legal Regulation of the Purchase of Sexual Services, The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 8 October, 2004, p. 45

<sup>24</sup> Trafficking, prostitution and the Sex Industry: The Nordic Legal Model by Janice Raymond on [www.portside.org](http://www.portside.org) July 20, 2010

<sup>25</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, supra note 28, p. 15

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 57

Prostitution is a fact; it has always existed and will never go away. It doesn't matter how you feel about it. Therefore we believe it is important not to forbid prostitution, but to organize it better, otherwise the problems will only become greater.<sup>27</sup>

Some supporters of legalization argue that prostitutes would be safer moving indoors rather than being on the streets. Their expressed fundamental concern is for the safety of the prostitutes and allowing them a venue where they can safely carry out sexual transactions. However, it has been proven that women practicing indoor prostitution (such as in saunas and massage parlours) have little control over the services that they will provide. On the street, prostitutes can choose which acts they are willing to perform, and which they will refuse. Within the indoor saunas and massage parlours however, the owners of the establishments obligate 'their' workers to perform whatever the client desires. This usually includes oral, vaginal or anal sex, and often without protection.<sup>28</sup>

**For those of us who are in position to do something to combat human slavery, however small our contribution, neutrality is a sin.**

Esohe Aghatise, founder of IROKO (Associazione IROKO Onlus), a nongovernmental organization which assists female victims of sex trafficking in Italy, is convinced that brothels rob prostitutes of whatever protection they may encounter on the streets, since women behind closed doors have little to no chance of coming into contact with outreach social workers who might be able to help them exit prostitution.<sup>29</sup>

The Dutch government is of the belief that voluntary prostitution is a legitimate choice on the part of the prostitute. It also believes that this choice must be respected and therefore, legalized and tolerated. Many critics are quick to point out this philosophy's

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 26 Prostitution Information Centre (PIC), online: [www.pic-amsterdam.com](http://www.pic-amsterdam.com)

<sup>28</sup> Janice G. Raymond, "Ten Reasons for Not Legalizing Prostitution and a Legal Response to the Demand for Prostitution" Binghamton: Haworth Press, 2003, p. 6

<sup>29</sup> Monica O'Connor, Grainne Healy, "The Links Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: A Briefing Handbook", Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), A Swedish and United States Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisation Partnership, 2006, p.21



inaccuracies. Numerous studies show that the majority of women in the sex trade did not in fact make a fully consenting, rational choice to enter the trade.<sup>30</sup> These 'choices' weren't really choices at all, but more so, means and strategies of survival. Women who participated in a study conducted by Raymond et al, reflected that the decision to enter the sex industry can only be understood while taking into account the lack of other viable options available, and reported that prostitution was their last choice, necessary to make ends meet.<sup>31</sup>

**Therefore, if Canada were to follow the example of Sweden, the abolishment of prostitution would be possible!**

The Swedish model is one of the most coherent and successful prostitution policy models ever developed. The key, many believe, is its unique and unprecedented twin-legislative objectives of criminalizing the purchaser of sexual services and providing support and resources to the prostitute.<sup>32</sup>

**Conclusion**

The abolition of prostitution demands our time and energy as an issue of the rights of the poorest and most marginalized among us. We dare not ignore the commands of Scripture by failing to join hands with our God who stands for the oppressed, the poor, and the hungry. As we let the reality of these key factors sink in, may the Holy Spirit guide us in response to take up the cause of these women.

**Glossary of Terms**

*All definitions from Encarta Dictionary*

**Abolition** - the act of officially ending a law, regulation, or practice. The official ending of the practice of slavery.

**John** - a man who is a prostitute's customer

**Patriarchy** – a social system in which men dominate; a social system in which men are regarded as the authority within the family and society, and in which power and possessions are passed on from father to son.

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond, supra note 95, p. 9

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> DeSantis, "Why Hasn't Anyone Tried This Before?" 'Women's Justice Center, online: [http://www.ayudaparamujeres.com/cj\\_sweden.html](http://www.ayudaparamujeres.com/cj_sweden.html) as seen in EFC's April, 2010 report

**Pimp** - somebody, usually a man, who finds customers for a prostitute in return for a portion of the prostitute's earnings

**Prostitution** - the act of engaging in sexual intercourse or performing other sex acts in exchange for money, or of offering another person for such purposes

**Traffic** – illegal trade; to have dealings with somebody or something; to trade or exchange anything or anyone.