

# Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women



*"Women like myself need someone they feel they can trust without being judged by how they lived their life. We didn't wake up and choose to become a whore or a hooker or a 'ho' as they call us. We need someone to understand where we came from and how we lived and that half of us were raped, beat, and made to sell our bodies. We need people with hearts."*

~Survivor

## **In Order to Understand Prostitution, it is Necessary to Understand:**

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1. Lethal gender inequality
2. Incest and other childhood sexual assault
3. Poverty and homelessness
4. The ways in which racism and colonialism are inextricably connected with sexism in prostitution
5. Domestic violence, including rape
6. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, mood and dissociative disorders as consequences of prostitution
7. Drug and alcohol addiction
8. The fact that prostitution is a global business which involves interstate and inter-country trafficking as a necessary part of its profitable operation
9. In non-dominant states - the ways in which economic development programs erode traditional ways of living
10. The need for culturally relevant treatment
11. The ways in which diverse cultures normalize and promote prostitution
12. Stripping, exotic dancing, nude dancing, table dancing, phone sex, trafficking, child and adult pornography, lap dancing, massage brothels, and peep shows as prostitution

Information taken from: [www.prostitutionresearch.com](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com)





Prostitution is sexual exploitation and slavery. It is inherently violent and fundamentally rape. Prostitution violates a person's human rights and is a means of maintaining male dominance over women and girls. Child sexual abuse is oftentimes at the core of prostitution. Prostitution is oppression, based on gender, creating an inferior class of people.

Most women and girls are coerced, tricked or pushed into prostitution. Average entry age in to prostitution is 12- 14 years of age

The separation of trafficking from prostitution creates a false distinction between two inseparable institutions of sexual violence and places a nearly impossible burden of proof on those victimized by prostitution.

Prostitution is a multi-billion dollar industry that includes bartering sex for food, shelter, and favors; street prostitution; brothel prostitution; massage parlors; saunas; live sex shows; escort services or outcall; peep shows; phone sex; domestic and international sex tourism; domestic and international trafficking; adult and child pornography; ritual abuse; and mail order bride services.

Women and girls are trafficked into the sex trade by organized criminals, both inside and outside of the U.S. Pimps are typically men, but sometimes women, from all races. The major pimps in the USA include organized crime, gangs, corporations, and individual men.



**"... Indian women have been systematically oppressed through the historical construction and manipulation of ideas about their sexuality."** *After the Fur Trade: First Nations Women in Canadian History 1850-1950, Janice Forsyth*

The physical and sexual abuse of Indian women, once a rare social phenomenon, transformed over time into a pattern of behavior common within tribal communities.

Pre-contact: many Indigenous languages have no words for rape, prostitution, etc.

The sexual violence of prostitution experienced by Native women is both an attack on her as an individual and an attack on her as a Native.

### **Many of the women felt they owed their survival to Native cultural practices**

"Back then I was not connected to my cultural identity. I thought prostitution was normal living."

*"My auntie tried to help – she would talk to me, get me involved in women's groups, took me to sweats."*

"My culture doesn't put you around drugs or alcohol. It teaches you different values. It gives you belonging and faith."

"The insidious societal belief that these women were not worthy of protection, a message that is explicitly conveyed to the johns, giving them the go-ahead to act toward these women with impunity."

Aboriginal Women's Action Network

# The Effects on the Survivor

Statistics taken from Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota

- 79% of the women had been sexually abused as children by an average of 4 perpetrators.
- 52% had PTSD at the time of the interview, a rate that is in the range of PTSD among combat veterans
- 92% had been raped.
- 84% had been physically assaulted in prostitution.
- 72% suffered traumatic brain injuries in prostitution
- 98% were currently or previously homeless.
- 80% had used outpatient substance abuse services.
- 77% had used homeless shelters
- 92% wanted to escape prostitution
- 42% of women reported racial verbal abuse by pimps and buyers
- As with other types of sexual violence towards Native women, a majority of perpetrators were non-Native

“...Dispossession and relocation of indigenous peoples on this continent both necessitated and precipitated a highly gendered and sexualized dynamic in which Native women’s bodies became commodities —bought and sold for the purposes of sexual gratification (or profit)... the commercialization of Native women’s bodies became commonplace.”

-Sarah Deer

**“When one in three Native American women will be raped in their lifetimes, that is an assault on our national conscience; it is an affront to our shared humanity; it is something that we cannot allow to continue.”**

-Administration of Barack Obama, 2010

## After Centuries of Subjugation, Native Women Speak

"It's like incest- no one wants to talk about it."

*"As far as I'm concerned, all prostitution is rape."*

"Prostitution is dangerous. It's like suicide."

*"There's times I'd walk around in a space-out because when I stop and think about reality I break down and can't handle it."*

### Facts about Native Women Exploited in Prostitution and Trafficking:

1. It is **not** a choice.
2. It DOES happen on the Rez.
3. It is a problem in Indian Country.
4. It **IS** rape.
5. It is not a job.
6. It is not just young adult women doing it.
7. It **IS** prostitution if she is exchanging sexual favors for a place to sleep, drugs, alcohol, or food.

**“Native women are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of homelessness, poverty, medical problems, a lack of basic services and resulting emotional distress and mental disorders.”**

- Research has shown that a history of sexual assault is a common precursor to prostitution
- Native women are disproportionately impacted by prostitution
- 98% of the women were currently or previously homeless
- 92% wanted to escape prostitution but did not have other options.

*“My dad was very abusive to my mother, and I ended up running away to Chicago. When I was 17, I was stranded in Chicago and had to get home to Wisconsin. I went to a party, there were lots of drugs. I got left there, and I was roaming around. A pimp was nice to me, he gave me this, gave me that. Then he took me to someone’s place and he said this guy – age 40 – he’s interested in you. Then he started hitting me after I said no. I was so scared I just did it. After that, I kept doing it because I was afraid to get hit.”*

# Resources for Survivors

Division of Indian Work: Minneapolis	612-722-8722
Prostitution to Independence, Dignity, and Equality: Minneapolis	612-728-2062
Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center: Minneapolis	612-728-2000
Breaking Free: St. Paul	651-645-6557
Dabinoo'igan (Shelter): Duluth	218-722-2247
Polaris Project: 24/7 Trafficking Hotline	1-888-373-7888

***"The women's strengths as well as their vulnerabilities must be seen in the context of a history of colonial harm on Native people."***

Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota – [www.miwsac.org](http://www.miwsac.org)

**Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition**  
**1619 Dayton Ave, Suite 202**  
**St. Paul, MN 55104**  
**651-646-4800 or 1-877-995-4800**  
**[www.miwsac.org](http://www.miwsac.org)**

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