

# Prostitution in Sweden 2003

Knowledge, Beliefs & Attitudes  
Of Key Informants

The Board classifies its publications into different types of document. This is a **Situation description**. This means that it contains reports on and analysis of surveys and other forms of follow-up of legislation, activities, resources, etc. conducted by municipalities, county councils and private principals in health care, the social services, public health and infectious diseases prevention. It may constitute background material for the authority's positions and be included as part of broader follow-ups and evaluations of e.g. reforms and the allocation of means for incentives. The Board is responsible for contents and conclusions.

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# Foreword

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The National Board of Health and Welfare has, in accordance with the Proposition on Women's Safety (Kvinnofridspropositionen 1997/98:55), been assigned by the Swedish government to gather information on and to monitor the extent and development of prostitution, and of social measures applied at the local level. The first report in connection with that assignment was published in 2000 under the title of "Prostitution in Sweden, 1998–1999". (Kännedom om prostitution 1998–1999). It is now followed up with this, the second report which focuses on the extent and development of prostitution.

This report is based primarily on interviews with a number of individuals whose work involves dealing with prostitution. We also cite the relevant research in this area.

The report has been produced by a working group comprised of Eva Ambejöö, Annika Eriksson and Merike Lidholm, all of whom are employed with the Individual & Family Unit of the National Board of Health and Welfare.

The text has been reviewed by the Board's expert advisory panel, as well as Prof. Malin Åkerström of Lund University, Prof. Sven-Axel Månsson of the Malmö Institute of Advanced Studies, and Eva Tiby, Ph.D., of Stockholm University. Their suggestions have been carefully considered and, to the fullest extent possible, incorporated into the report.

Inger Widén Cederberg, Director  
Individual & Family Unit  
National Board of Health and Welfare



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# Summary

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The National Board of Health and Welfare has been assigned by the Swedish government to gather information on and monitor the extent and development of prostitution and of social measures applied in this area. The first status report, published in 2002, described the situation in both 1998 and 1999– i.e. before and after a new Swedish law proscribing the purchase of sexual services went into effect.

This report is divided into three main sections:

- The first section presents informants' estimates of the number of men and women engaged in prostitution, along with their ages, the incidence of substance abuse, exposure to violence, etc.
- The second section deals with the multi-faceted world of prostitution or, rather, the many different worlds of prostitution.
- The third and final section describes various social measures that have been taken with regard to prostitution, and the need for preventive measures.

## Methodology

The report is based on interviews with some 35 individuals whose work involves dealing with prostitution. Presented here is their knowledge– or rather their perceptions and assessments– regarding prostitution. Their contacts with and opportunities to observe prostitution vary, however. This helps to explain why different views of prostitution emerge, and why assessments and perceptions of the same phenomena may vary. In addition to the interview data, other research in this area is cited.

## Street prostitution

Street prostitution is reported to be less widespread now than it was before the new law against buying sex went into effect. Compared with the previous study of the National Board of Health and Welfare, there have been no significant changes in the extent of prostitution since 1999. The exception is the city of Malmö, where a slight increase in the number of women engaged in prostitution has been observed– although the current total is still less than before the new law went into effect. According to available information, the number of female substance abusers engaged in street prostitution in Stockholm and Göteborg has declined in recent years. There are fewer prostitution clients and less prostitution-related traffic in the three major urban areas.

## Indoor prostitution

It is considerably more difficult to develop a clear view of indoor prostitution, as it is more hidden. The interview respondents have knowledge of prostitutes meeting prospective clients at certain restaurants, hotels and dance halls. It is also known that prostitution occurs in connection with conferences, private parties, on the Baltic ferries between Sweden and Finland, etc. In addition, police know of certain business establishments, such as solariums and massage parlours, where prostitution takes place. Informants also have some knowledge of prostitution outside the major cities, some of which is mediated via Internet advertising.

## Internet

In recent years, the Internet has become a new arena of contacts linked to prostitution, pornography and other sex-related activities. It is sometimes claimed that the new law against purchasing sex has led to an increase of Internet-mediated contacts. But since a similar increase has also occurred in other countries which lack such a law, it would appear that this increase is due to the availability of new information technology rather than to new legislation.

It is difficult to estimate the number of men and women who sell sexual services via the Internet, partly because web sites and other contact channels on the Internet are constantly changing. Estimates vary; according to one, between 80 and 100 women in Sweden offer their services via the Internet, while another puts the figure at between 200 and 250.

## Age

The interview respondents report that women engaged in prostitution represent a broad range of ages. Those in Malmö are reported to be 20–25 years of age, which is somewhat younger than the average. Informants in Göteborg seldom see women under age 25 involved in street prostitution; they also refer to a group of women aged 40 and older. Information regarding the age distribution in Stockholm varies, but most women engaged in prostitution in that city are said to be between 30 and 45 years old; many of them are believed to have spent many years as street prostitutes.

In addition, there are reports of individual prostitutes in various parts of Sweden who are between 60 and 80 years old.

Informants seldom see very young women in street prostitution; social workers and police act very quickly when they are detected. One voluntary organization has reported contacts during the past five years with a number of young women, most of them from small towns, who have offered their services via Internet chat rooms or been "loaned out" by boyfriends. There are also reports of women under age 18 advertising their services as "traveling companions" on the Sweden-Finland ferries in exchange for the cost of the trip, a new mobile telephone, or the like.

## Violence

We cannot state with certainty whether there has been an increase of violence affecting prostitutes since our previous report or during the last few years. Some informants speak of greater risks for prostitutes, but few have observed an actual increase in violence.

It is mentioned, for example, that there are fewer clients, resulting in a larger proportion that are "dangerous". It is said that they want to do "worse things" and have "weird cravings" (e.g. rough sex), or are prepared to pay more in order to avoid the use of condoms.

Police who have studied the occurrence of violence have not found any evidence of an increase. They also feel that the women have enough trust in the police to report any incidents of violence to which they are subjected.

The interview data and other research indicate that violence and prostitution are closely linked, whatever sort of legislation may be in effect. Several informants note that many of the women have been subjected to violence from men other than clients, for example the men with whom they are living.

## Men who sell sex to men

It is difficult to acquire knowledge concerning male-to-male prostitution. Some of the interview respondents are aware that this type of prostitution exists, but have little direct knowledge of it.

The Stockholm social services prostitution team has conducted an outreach programme directed to men who sell sex to men, and have concluded that it is becoming more widespread. The prostitution team and the police in Malmö are aware that male-to-male prostitution takes place, but not to what extent. The corresponding officials in Göteborg report that men previously sold sex to men at the same locations frequented by women engaged in street prostitution. It is said that male-to-male prostitution now takes place at other locations, but it is difficult to prove that such encounters are acts of prostitution.

## A multi-faceted world

From the interview data emerge some general impressions of those who sell and buy sex, as well as the driving forces of prostitution— impressions that vary according to the circumstances under which the respondents have encountered prostitution. It is a complex and multi-faceted problem. Common to several of the impressions that have emerged is a pattern of vulnerability and emotional isolation.

## Women with problems of substance abuse

According to the information received, most of the women engaged in street prostitution in Stockholm and Malmö have serious problems of substance abuse. Informants describe women who have long been trapped in drug dependency, and are both physically and mentally run-down. Prostitution can be their only way to finance a heavy drug habit. The emotionally numbing

effect of narcotics can also be a precondition for the women's ability to endure prostitution. It is reported that physical violence and sexual assault are very much a part of these women's daily lives.

According to informants, some of the women previously had well-ordered lives, while others have become addicts at an early stage and have never experienced an orderly adult existence with stable relationships. Some of the women have children, but they have generally been placed in care. Despite the general pattern of vulnerability, it is emphasized that these women also possess unusual strength and endurance.

### **A way out of social isolation**

It is reported that in Göteborg there is a small group of somewhat older women, aged 40-50, who do not abuse drugs and have been street prostitutes for many years. For them, prostitution is said to be a way of breaking out of loneliness and social isolation. Several are reported to be in early retirement due to illness or other causes.

### **Functionally impaired women**

Informants in Stockholm and Malmö are familiar with a number of women with mild intellectual impairments engaged in street prostitution. They are reported to be highly vulnerable, and it is difficult to win their trust.

There are also reports of emotionally disturbed women engaged in prostitution. In Göteborg, for example, there are several women engaged in street prostitution who receive social services under the Act regarding Support and Service to Certain Functionally Handicapped Person<sup>s</sup>.

### **Well-established women**

Prostitution also occurs among women who outwardly seem to be well-established. It is reported that there are well-educated and well-paid women who arrange the sale of their bodies via the Internet, for example.

Informants familiar with this type of prostitution describe it as an "arena of illusions". Women of this description who sell sexual services may temporarily feel that they are worthy and attractive. Via prostitution it is possible to buy (or sell) an illusion of closeness that entails no risk of becoming threatening or suffocating. Prostitution may provide a sort of contact in which both parties can control the degree of dependence and independence and of closeness and distance, while dispelling anxiety, depression and feelings of emptiness.

According to informants, the basic causes of prostitution may include early disturbances and traumas such as sexual assault; but other problems may be involved, as well. Prostitution is described as part of a generally self-destructive pattern of behaviour.

## **Young women**

Young women are seldom observed engaged in prostitution; but adult women with experience as prostitutes often report that they began to sell sex when they were young. One voluntary organization has knowledge of young women who drifted into prostitution, often in response to offers made by men contacted via the Internet. It is reported that many of these young women alternate between periods of prostitution and other self-destructive activities, such as self-starvation, binge eating, self-harm and suicide attempts. Their backgrounds vary; but it is said to be not unusual that they are otherwise high-achievers, ambitious and well-adjusted.

There are also reports of young women who are attracted or lured into drug dependency via a romantic relationship. Some informants tell of girls who grow up in drug-abuse environments in which they are both drugged and sexually exploited at an early age, for example by the mother's male partner or acquaintances. There are reports of girls who go to the homes of neighbourhood men to sell sex in exchange for money or other rewards.

It is the opinion of the social services prostitution teams that there is a lack of awareness, including within the social services generally, regarding the extent and serious nature of prostitution among young people.

## **Trafficking**

This study of the National Board of Health and Welfare deals only to a limited extent with trafficking. The national police force estimates the number of trafficking victims in Sweden during year 2003 to be around 400-600 women. Among other things, trafficking of Russian women in the Norrbotten region has been investigated. According to the police, the new Swedish law against purchasing sex acts as a barrier to the establishment of trafficking in Sweden: It is difficult for traffickers to make a profit, since they do not dare to put "their" women on the street due to the risk of discovery.

## **Men who sell sex**

In connection with various types of treatment, informants come in contact with men who have sold sex to other men. It is likely that this problem is more hidden than female prostitution. But the thoughts, feelings and experiences that need to be dealt with are much the same for both men and women engaged in prostitution.

During 2002, the Stockholm outreach programme identified some fifty men aged 18-25 who sold sex during that year. For these young men, according to informants, prostitution is related to self-contempt and is part of a generally self-destructive behaviour pattern. Many of those involved have in the past been subjected to sexual assault and other serious problems. Most of them had prior contact with authorities due to substance abuse, homelessness or mental health problems.

The Skåne region counselling service of the Swedish Federation for Sexual Equality (*RFSL, Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande*) has conducted a small-scale interview survey among homosexual men who sell sex. It has yielded a somewhat different impression of prostitution, one that ap-

pears to reflect a higher degree of mutual interest and benefit than is the case with other forms of prostitution.

However, these men were worried about the possibility that their prostitution activities might become known within their social circles. They used the Internet to attract clients; several had been subjected to bullying, badgering and threats from other users of the same Internet web sites. The men describe how they actively attempt to keep prostitution as a separate part of their lives so as to avoid negative consequences for their basic identities.

Based on what informants have learned, there are men who sell sex to women or couples; but there is little specific information about this type of prostitution.

### **Prostitution clients**

The prostitution clients whom the police encounter in connection with street prostitution are often described as men with jobs and families. But there are also single men, substance abusers, and individuals who are known to the police from other criminal contexts.

The men range in age from just over 20 to around 75; but it is estimated that the largest age-group is 45-50.

In connection with various types of treatment, informants encounter an increasing number of clients who exhibit compulsive sexual behaviour and are heavy consumers of pornographic films, magazines and web sites.

According to those who provide treatment, these men "sexualize" emotions such as grief, loss and rage. At the bottom of it all lie poor self-esteem and problems with close relationships— even for those who have partners and, on the surface, seem to be well-adjusted. There may also be a history of various kinds of trauma.

### **Pimps and other promoters**

There are reports of women who are forced by pimps to become or remain prostitutes through emotional dependency, threats, etc. This appears to be less common in Sweden than in many other countries, however. According to informants, many of the women have a man whom they support by means of prostitution. However, these women seldom regard such men as pimps; instead, they interpret the relationship as one based on love.

Informants also report that, in addition to pimps, there are many men who promote and earn money from prostitution in other ways. It is said that there are taxi drivers, hotel owners and receptionists, guards at hotels and restaurants, and spa personnel who look the other way or mediate sexual services. Prostitution is also promoted by those who maintain web sites for advertising sexual services.

### **Measures taken**

The fact that prostitution is a multi-faceted problem influences the efforts that are made to deal with it. Most such measures are taken by the social services. But to some extent, voluntary organizations and the healthcare

system are also involved in activities directed to both men and women engaged in prostitution and their clients.

### **Detecting prostitution**

The social services develop various kinds of contact with men and women engaged in prostitution, but usually not in direct relation to prostitution. Instead, it may be in connection with social assistance, substance abuse or other problems. According to several informants, it is not at all unusual for female prostitutes to have contacts with various authorities for years without them becoming aware of their involvement in prostitution.

It is important to be very sensitive in dealing with these women. In all likelihood, they never voluntarily relate their experiences, due to shame and to fear of public authorities. One must dare to pose questions about prostitution and to follow them up. In order to identify those who have been involved in prostitution, it is important to be alert to any signs of such activity—for example, squandering money, heavy indebtedness, or some other problematical relation to money.

Prostitution is also associated with substance abuse and homelessness. For this reason, it is important for those who are involved in the care of substance abusers to take up the subject of prostitution and to deal with any such experience. This is necessary in order for the women to get on with their lives and to reduce the risk of relapsing into prostitution and substance abuse.

### **Treatment and support**

Extricating oneself from prostitution is a process that places heavy demands on the individual. There are many challenges during and after leaving prostitution—to process one's experiences as a prostitute, to deal with feelings of shame toward oneself and before others, and to dwell in a transition zone between two ways of life.

The interview survey and other research indicate that the experiences of prostitution often lead to complex needs for support by public authorities during and after the exit process. It is mainly a question of providing basic resources such as financial support, housing and employment. But it is at least equally important to maintain supportive contacts in order to bolster the man's or woman's self-esteem, reduce the sense of isolation during the transitional phase, and to serve as a stable reference point in the event of major changes.

In Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, the prostitution teams are administered by the social services. They are specially designed to help men and women extricate themselves from prostitution. They work with outreach programmes, treatment and the spread of information.

In Stockholm, there is also a Prostitution Centre that provides group and individual treatment to current and former prostitutes. The treatment is based on processing earlier trauma, and feelings of shame and guilt. It is also designed to increase clients' self-confidence and their possibilities for taking

control of their lives— all of which is encapsulated in the term, empowerment.

These specially designed services are provided in major cities, but they are not the only locations where prostitution takes place. Smaller towns usually do not have a sufficiently large problem or the resources to supply prostitution teams or similar services. In such cases, the alternatives may be to co-operate with other municipalities, consult experts on prostitution, or appoint a social worker with special competence in this area.

Support is also provided by voluntary organizations and special gynaecology clinics. Examples include the Spiral Project in Stockholm and the needle-exchange centre in Malmö. Other services include the "KAST" programme for prostitution clients, and the clinic operated in Stockholm by the Swedish Association for Sex Education (*RFSU, Riksförbundet för sexualupplysning*) which provides counselling and treatment.

In addition, there have been a number of efforts at prevention and early identification in order to help men and women extricate themselves from prostitution. However, there is a need to assess what kinds of resources are required for such activities, what effects they have, and whether some strategies are more successful than others. Likewise, there is a need for the systematic compilation of international experience in the evaluation of various measures against prostitution.

### **Need for preventive measures**

There is a need for various types of measure to prevent new recruiting to prostitution. Informants point out that measures directed to young people are especially important. It is difficult to get through to young people in this matter, partly because they seldom regard their activities as prostitution. Rather, they interpret them as services in exchange for visits to restaurants, narcotics, clothes and other non-monetary benefits. Young people's use of the Internet provides new contact possibilities, and several informants think they see a development in which boundaries are becoming unclear. It is therefore urgent to engage young people in discussions of such issues as sexuality, prostitution, limits of personal integrity, and relationships.

Further, it is important to be on the lookout for, make early contact with, and support young people who show signs of emotional distress— for example, in the schools (including health services), youth health clinics, and psychiatric services for children and young people.

# Introduction

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## Assignment

The Proposition on Women's Safety (*Kvinnofridspropositionen 1997/98:55*) resulted in a number of tasks being assigned to various government agencies. In addition to a study of men's violence against women, the National Board of Health and Welfare was also assigned to study various aspects of prostitution. From a report issued in advance of the proposition, it is clear that the basis of the latter assignment is the criminalization of any successful or attempted purchase of sexual services (Prop. 1997/98:55, p. 107). That is clear from the following excerpt:

*In light of the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services, and the findings of the public inquiry [SOU 1995:15] concerning the continual changes that occur with regard to the types and contact channels of prostitution, it is important to continually follow developments at the national level. There is a need for up-to-date knowledge on the extent of prostitution, as well as an overview of the research conducted in this area. The influence on Sweden of international developments regarding trafficking with women and views of prostitution should also be considered.*

Consequently, the National Board of Health and Welfare's assignment regarding prostitution was formulated as follows:

*[Further], the National Board of Health and Welfare shall monitor and gather knowledge of the extent and development of prostitution, and of social measures that are carried out at the local level. The National Board of Health and Welfare shall also monitor international developments in matters of prostitution.*

The first report in connection with this assignment was published in year 2000 under the title of "Prostitution in Sweden, 1998–1999" (*Kännedom om prostitution 1998–1999. SoS-rapport 2000:5*). The report presented here is the second on the extent and development of prostitution since the new law went into effect. As will become clear from the following, the two reports differ somewhat with respect, for example, to focus, structure and some of the methodology.

The following section reviews some elements of the first report as a frame of reference for this one.

## **Prostitution in Sweden, 1998–1999**

The main purpose of the first inquiry was to develop an overview of the extent of prostitution in Sweden after the new law against purchasing sex went into effect. The following data-gathering methods were used:

- questionnaire survey of regional police authorities
- questionnaire survey of social services in all municipalities
- questionnaire survey of a sample of restaurants, hotels and related businesses
- questionnaire survey of the Federation for Sexual Equality's local branches
- survey of Internet web sites that mediate contacts with prostitutes
- interviews with key informants within the police, social services, healthcare and other agencies
- interviews with a number of prostitution clients.

In the 44 of Sweden's 201 municipalities which responded to the questionnaire, one or more units within the social services reported having knowledge of women who had engaged in prostitution during 1998. The corresponding figure for 1999 was 48, i.e. only slightly higher.

There was wide variation among the respondents regarding the number of women known to engage in prostitution. The broad range was due primarily to the fact that the prostitution teams in Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö reported significantly higher numbers than elsewhere. Respondents in most other municipalities reported that they were aware of only a few women engaged in prostitution.

The regional police authorities which had knowledge of prostitution in 1998 and 1999 were largely the same. Of the 21 regional authorities, six reported knowledge of prostitution within their districts during 1998. Some of these also reported knowledge of women who during 1998 had altered the type of prostitution they practised: Women who had been street prostitutes had begun to work in apartments, restaurants and clubs, for example.

There were also reports from regional police authorities that other types of prostitution had increased, for example use of the Internet, apartments, restaurants and hotels. However, it is necessary to exercise some caution when interpreting information on changes in types of prostitution. This is because the responses were similar to those given to the question on changes *before* the new law went into effect. It is therefore uncertain if the reported changes in type of prostitution were due solely to the new law.

Despite that uncertainty, however, one change was quite evident— namely, that the number of women known to engage in prostitution decreased in the three major cities between 1998 and 1999 (at least as of the point in time when the data were gathered). With regard to the entire country, there did not appear to be any major differences. One possible interpretation of these data is that street prostitution is concentrated in the three major cities, and it is primarily those individuals who have been affected by the new law.

All told, seventeen respondents within the social services of twelve municipalities reported having knowledge of men who sold sexual services to men during 1998. The same was reported for 1999 by sixteen respondents in the same municipalities.

Some regional police authorities also reported knowledge of men who sold sexual services to men. However, both the questionnaire survey and the interviews yielded limited information about minors of both sexes, men and young women in prostitution.

To judge from the questionnaire responses from a sample of restaurants, hotels and similar businesses, there was no increase in prostitution in such milieus between 1998 and 1999. This refers to the fifty per cent of businesses that responded to the questionnaire.

In connection with the survey of the Internet, a number of searches were conducted in order to locate web sites related to prostitution. During the months of the survey, a total of 2668 sites were found using the search words, "Escort service, call girl, Sweden". However, only 27 of these offered sexual services. Most of the sellers were men, the majority of whom were offering their services to women.

To sum up: Both positive and negative experiences of the law against purchasing sex emerged from the interviews with key informants in the police, social services, etc. But the majority were positive toward the new law.

## Current study

### Methodology

The previous study was based primarily on quantitative data, derived primarily from questionnaire surveys of various categories of respondent. As noted above, a number of interviews were also conducted with key informants. Since that study was intended to provide a basis for future research, it tested a variety of methods and approaches which yielded experience that has proven useful in this, the second study.

This time, the research was based almost entirely on qualitative interviews. In the first study, it was the interviews that yielded the most thorough and abundant information.

The choice of method can also be understood in terms of available resources in relation to the information yielded by the various methods. For example, to administer and process the large number of responses that would result from a questionnaire survey would be a sizeable task. Of course, it is also a complex task to process the interview data, but the resulting information is more substantial.

Lastly, it is also a question of what type of information is regarded as important in this context.

The method of the second study was applied at the expense of alternative methods that yield other types of information. For example, the interviews provide information that refers mainly to the extent of prostitution in the three major cities. Only to a limited extent do they yield knowledge of any prostitution that may occur in other municipalities, given the limits of the interview subjects' direct personal knowledge.

Accordingly, the results of this study do not make it possible to draw such conclusions as, for example, that informants in X number of municipalities have knowledge of Y number of women engaged in prostitution. Also, it is possible only in a few cases to make comparisons with the first study.

In addition to the fact that the choice of method for the second study prioritizes a certain type of knowledge, there are some basic questions that are related to certain characteristics of prostitution. Much of that which takes place in the worlds of prostitution is hidden. This applies, not least, to what occurs outside the context of street prostitution in the major cities.

As a result, surveys and other studies of prostitution inevitably encounter a variety of obstacles (see SoS-rapport 2000:5, in which some of those obstacles are described). This means that, no matter what method is used, we can never develop a complete picture of prostitution and its extent. What we *can* establish is existing knowledge of prostitution– or rather, informants' *perceptions* and *assessments*. In other words, it can happen that Y number of women have engaged in prostitution in X number of municipalities without the police, social services, youth health clinics or other agencies becoming aware of it.

In this study, the National Board of Health and Welfare has chosen to focus more on the type of knowledge that qualitative methods can yield– i.e. to acquire more thorough knowledge of such matters as contact channels, paths in and out of prostitution, and eventual changes in the types and conditions of prostitution– by drawing upon the knowledge of informants whose work places them in close contact with prostitutes.

## **The interviews**

Some 35 persons were interviewed in connection with this study. Most of the interviews were conducted individually. The exceptions were a couple of interviews with social services prostitution teams and other groups in connection with an all-day seminar during which as much information as possible was gathered. Some of the interviews were conducted via telephone. The interview subjects represented the following agencies and services:

- Stockholm social services prostitution team
- Göteborg social services prostitution team (inc. KAST)
- Malmö prostitution team
- Haparanda<sup>1</sup> social services
- Norrköping social services
- Spiral Project in Stockholm
- Stockholm Prostitution Centre
- Prostitution team of Stockholm police
- Prostitution team of Göteborg police
- Prostitution team of Malmö police

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the interview, this informant had just left the social services for another job. But the focus of the interview was on the subject's experiences with the social services.

- National police force
- Malmö needle-exchange centre
- City Mission's emergency housing for women in Stockholm ("Nattis")
- City Mission's drop-in centre for women in Stockholm ("Klaragården")
- City Mission's night shelter in Malmö
- Stockholm social services' emergency and short-term housing ("Hvilan")
- Stockholm clinic of Association for Sex Education
- Federation of Sexual Equality counselling service in Skåne
- Göteborg Cathedral (Lutheran Church)
- Women's crisis centre in Luleå ("Iris")
- "Bellas Vänner" cultural society in Umeå<sup>2</sup>

Also:

- Alcohol and drug therapists with work experience in residential treatment clinics
- Former head of homeless women's unit in Stockholm
- A woman who has been engaged in prostitution.

A semi-structured interview protocol with a number of different themes was used. The protocol was used as a guideline for all of the interviews, but the emphasis varied depending on the respondent's type of work or activity. In some cases, the standard protocol was supplemented with additional questions with particular relevance for the respondent's work or activity. The opposite also applied: Themes that were not relevant to the individual's experience were excluded. Although the information provided by informants served as the primary basis of the report, it was also related to other types of research data.

In addition to the standard interviews, a special question was asked of the seventeen youth health clinics in the sample— most of them in the major cities, and some larger clinics elsewhere— concerning their experience with young people involved in prostitution or similar activities.

The authors of this report have on several occasions conducted observation studies of Malmskillnadsgatan, a street in Stockholm which is a known meeting-place for prostitution, in order to acquire a sense of the milieu.

Through their professional or volunteer work, all of the interview subjects had developed close contacts with the world of prostitution, and most of them had many years of such experience. Their contacts with and opportunities to observe prostitution varied, however. For example, contacts between and street prostitutes tend to differ from those between a prostitute and a counsellor at a clinic of the Association for Sex Education. Such differences help to explain why divergent views of prostitution emerge, and why assessments and perceptions of the same phenomena may vary.

Further, the informants represent various societal interests, for example public agencies and voluntary organizations. That should be kept in mind

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<sup>2</sup> Bellas Vänner has been discontinued since the interview was conducted. Parts of the programme were transferred to the Umeå women's crisis centre.

while reading this report; a voluntary organization, for example, may wish to convey certain kinds of information of particular relevance to its ideological foundation, its basic purpose, general focus, etc. Representatives of the police or social services may, on the other hand, address the same issues within the framework of their occupations, their legal responsibilities, etc. It is therefore not inconceivable that the interview subjects provide different interpretations of the same phenomena, or that for various reasons they emphasize certain factors and interpretations.

As is evident from the categories of interview subject listed above, only one individual with a background in prostitution has been interviewed. The inclusion of more would have been desirable— so that both men and women engaged in prostitution could be heard, for example. Attempts were made to contact additional informants with backgrounds in prostitution, but unfortunately they were not successful. A couple of planned interviews were cancelled at the last minute because the appointed times conflicted with the informants' current condition<sup>3</sup>. That the interviews were to be conducted by representatives of a public authority may also have been an inhibiting factor for some potential interviewees.

It is certainly also the case that some groups whose work or other activities bring them in close contact with prostitutes were not represented in the sample. This was partly due to a lack of sufficient resources, and partly to the fact that a certain degree of "satiation" develops after a while when no new knowledge appears to result from additional interviews.

A majority of the informants represent agencies and organizations that were included in the interview sample of the previous study of the National Board of Health and Welfare (although the sample for the second study was broader). This made it possible to maintain continuity between the two studies.

## Terms and definitions

Views of prostitution have changed over the years. Not infrequently, the focus has been on "the prostituted woman". In the 1830s, the Frenchman Parent-Duchatelet published the results of a major study of prostitution in Paris. He concentrated on women engaged in prostitution, who were said to be characterized by ". . . recidivism, or the concurrence of several immoral acts which have been legally established; generally notorious; caught in the act with other eyewitnesses than the informant or policeman". (Borg *et al.* 1981, p. 616). Nearly one hundred years later, in 1912, German researcher Iwan Bloch defined prostitution as follows.

*Prostitution is a specific form of extramarital sexual relationship in which prostituted individuals incessantly, and more or less indiscriminately, give themselves to an indeterminate number of persons, publicly and notoriously, seldom without compensation, usually in the form of a corrupt occupation, for the purpose of sexual intercourse or other acts,*

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Lautrup (2000), who discusses the same problems and difficulties— some relating to arranging interviews with women engaged in prostitution, others to carrying out the interviews (e.g. repeatedly postponed meetings).

*or otherwise to provoke and satisfy others' sexual desires and, as a result of that indecent life, acquire a specific and constant character. (Borg et al. 1981, p. 617)*

The following definition can be read in the Swedish dictionary published by Bonniers in 1965:

*Prostitution means that a person (the prostitute) regularly earns income by means of more or less brief sexual encounters. (Borg et al. 1981, p. 620)*

Following a public inquiry which published its findings in 1977, a different view of prostitution was established in Sweden. Although similar ideas had previously been suggested by some individuals, it was a new approach for an official body to recommend. Based on a review of various definitions of prostitution, the commission concluded that a distinction has seldom been made between the female prostitute and acts of prostitution which involve at least two parties (Borg et al. 1981, p. 46). The most recent public inquiry into prostitution (SOU 1995:15) offers the following definition:

*Prostitution occurs when at least two parties buy or sell sexual services in exchange for (usually financial) compensation, which is a basic condition for the provision of a sexual service.*

This is also the definition upon which the study reported here was based. It will become evident later on, especially in the section concerning young women, that this definition is not entirely unproblematic. (For a further discussion of the problems associated with the definition of prostitution, see Pettersson & Tiby, 2003.)

In consequence of the emphasis on prostitution as a phenomenon which involves at least two parties, expressions like "the prostituted woman" are avoided in this report (except where such terms are used in cited sources, e.g. the foregoing excerpts). The effect of a phrase like "the prostituted woman" is to assign a sort of identity to the woman involved and to make of prostitution a personal characteristic. In other words, prostitution could be identified as a female characteristic or condition.

The expressions used in this report are "women involved in prostitution", "women engaged in prostitution", "women who prostitute themselves", "women who sell sex", and the like. Where relevant, the same kinds of expressions are used in reference to males— "men who have engaged in prostitution", "men engaged in prostitution", etc. In this way, prostitution is conceptualized as an activity which involves at least one other party (a buyer/client).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Another expression used by some observers is "woman who is prostituted". However, this suggests a woman who entirely lacks alternatives or a will of her own. That may, of course, be the case with some women engaged in prostitution, but perhaps not all.

## Structure of the report

The first section, "Trends in prostitution", provides something of a status report on prostitution in Sweden. Estimates of the number of men and women engaged in prostitution, age patterns, extent of substance abuse and violence are some of the issues addressed. In other words, it is based on a fairly quantitative approach.

The first section also distinguishes between street prostitution and indoor prostitution. But to a large extent, this is a purely analytical distinction, since the boundary between the two is more or less flexible in real life. There are, of course, women who only engage in street prostitution; but that is not always the case. For example, a woman may manage all of her contacts with clients from her home via a mobile telephone, but work the street now and then in order to expand her client list. This is not unusual, according to our informants. The question is whether to classify this as a pattern of street or indoor prostitution.

The next section reflects the multi-faceted world of prostitution. It is based on close contacts that have been established with men and women engaged in prostitution (as well as other actors); and it attempts to convey something of the diversity involved. Instead of referring to prostitution in the singular, one may follow the practice of Pettersson and Tiby (2003), and refer to various *prostitutions*.

It should also be noted that this report treats women who are victims of trafficking for sexual purposes as belonging to a special category. However, trafficking is not a major aspect of prostitution in Sweden. Instead of treating trafficking as something distinct from "ordinary" prostitution, it can be seen as yet another of prostitution's many forms. Accordingly, this distinction should also be regarded as analytical.

The national police force is the Swedish rapporteur regarding prostitution, and publishes an annual status report on the subject. In order to avoid duplication of that effort, trafficking is only briefly dealt with in this report.

The concluding section describes the measures that have been and can be taken in this area, primarily within the framework of the social services. It also emphasizes the importance of preventive measures.

# Trends in prostitution

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## Street prostitution

Street prostitution is conducted in Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. Previously, Norrköping was also the scene of street prostitution. The first study of prostitution carried out by the National Board of Health and Welfare found that the number of women engaged in prostitution declined between 1998 and 1999, i.e. during the period when the new law against purchasing sex went into effect. The Stockholm prostitution team reported that it was aware of 280 women engaged in prostitution in 1998, and 170 in 1999. In Göteborg, the observed decrease was from 286 to 90, and in Malmö from 160 to 80.

What has happened since then? Several informants have reported that street prostitution has remained at a constant level since the reduction that occurred directly after the new law went into effect.

## Stockholm

The social services prostitution team in Stockholm reported that it was aware of some 180-200 women who had engaged in prostitution at some time during the course of one year. It is estimated that there are around 25-30 women working the streets every night. The corresponding figure before the new law was about fifty.

The Stockholm police, however, report significantly lower figures, namely 5-7 women on the street every night and a total of 50-60 engaged in street prostitution. The divergent estimates of the prostitution team and the police may be due, for example, to the fact that they have observed street activity at different times of day or days of the week, and other factors (see p. 20 for a discussion of various types of prostitution, points of contact, etc.).

The police estimate that the number of sex purchases on the street has declined by ninety per cent compared with the situation in 1998. They also believe that the number of substance-addicted women has declined drastically during the past two years. Some addicted women are now in the correctional system, others have voluntarily sought treatment.

According to the police, the women who remain in street prostitution include some with problems of substance abuse, some with immigrant backgrounds (from Latin America and Southeast Asia, for example), and some older women. All of the women are Swedish citizens, according to the social services prostitution team.

The police estimate that the women with problems of substance abuse are around thirty years of age, while the others are forty and above. It is reported that some of them turn up on the streets sporadically, i.e. that they may be absent for some time before experiencing a "relapse".

The social services prostitution team believes that the women currently engaged in prostitution are more "well-kept" and not as often clearly under the influence of drugs. It is believed that this may be due to the presence of fewer amphetamine abusers than previously. The team also has knowledge of a number of women who are being treated with methadone and are not engaged in prostitution during the treatment period. However, those who discontinue treatment for various reasons may return to the streets when they need money for heroin. (However, it is not only a craving for drugs that causes some women to return to prostitution; see for example the section entitled "Leaving prostitution" for further details.)

One observation of the prostitution team is that more men now appear to be engaged in prostitution than previously. But team members feel that they may simply have become better at noticing such men (more details on this under "Men who sell sex to men").

### **Göteborg**

The social services prostitution team in Göteborg has knowledge of some 100 women who engaged in prostitution at some time during the course of one year. That represents a sharp reduction: Before the new law went into effect, the team knew of ca. 300 women who were engaged in prostitution. Now, there are said to be roughly 10-15 walking the streets every night; occasionally there may be around twenty. A certain amount of new recruiting is reported, but it is estimated to be slight.

According to the prostitution team, there are not as many substance-abusing women engaged in street prostitution as previously. The women who use heroin are reportedly between 22 and 25 years of age, but available knowledge suggests that most of them do not usually work the streets. Tending to confirm this, the police report that they do not observe many street prostitutes under the age of 25. According to the police, there is also a group of women in their 40s who are engaged in street prostitution, most of whom have been thus engaged for many years. The women in this group are said to live more ordinary lives than the homeless and addicted women.

The prostitution team estimates that roughly 30-40 per cent of the women engaged in prostitution in Göteborg are foreign-born in, for example, Latin America, Thailand, Poland, former Yugoslavia, Rumania, Russia, Moldavia, the Baltic states and various African countries.

During the past five years, the prostitution team has encountered some twenty women who, it suspects, are victims of trafficking. Due to threats and other factors, however, these women are usually not willing to talk about their situations.

### **Malmö**

The social services prostitution team in Malmö knows of some 135 women who are engaged in prostitution. It is estimated that, normally, there are 30-35 women on the street. The team reports that there are some news recruits, and that most of them are addicted to heroin. Street prostitution in Malmö takes place within a fairly large area; this means that there may be an unk-

known number of women who engage in prostitution only occasionally, with whom the team never comes in contact. The information provided by police agrees with that of the prostitution team.

It is estimated by the prostitution team that a large majority of the women use heroin (possibly as many as ninety per cent). Most of these are reported to be 20–25 years of age; also, according to the Malmö police, the average age has decreased somewhat since 1998, and is today estimated to be under thirty. This is believed to be due to the use of heroin.

Informants in Malmö also have knowledge of women who leave prostitution while they are on methadone, but later return to the streets after discontinuing their treatment for various reasons. The prostitution team estimates that roughly one-fourth of the women engaged in prostitution in Malmö are of foreign extraction.

### **Norrköping**

Street prostitution has previously been conducted in Norrköping, and there has also been an outreach programme with a prostitution team like those in Göteborg, Malmö and Stockholm. Street prostitution was limited to a special area and was conducted rather openly. But after the new law against purchasing sex went into effect, all signs of prostitution in that area disappeared. The social services field team still visits the area, since other forms of criminality still occur there; but in 2003, there were no signs of prostitution.

Our informant with the Norrköping social services has speculated about what may have become of prostitution in that city, and has suggested several possibilities:

- prostitutes may have moved indoors
- they can have moved to some other area of Norrköping
- women engaged in prostitution may have moved to Stockholm; our informants know of some women who have done so.

The few reports of prostitution received by the social services field team during 2003 involved male-to-male prostitution. For example, notices and handbills with the telephone numbers of men who sell sex to men were posted in one area of Norrköping. There were also reports of male-to-male street prostitution. However, neither the social services nor the police were able to observe any such activity.

### **Summary of situation in major cities**

In Göteborg and Stockholm, informants reported that the number of women engaged in prostitution was roughly the same in 2003 as in 1999 (except for the Stockholm police, who reported a much lower figure than the social services for 2003). In Malmö, on the other hand, informants had knowledge of slightly more women engaged in prostitution in 2003—roughly 135, compared with 80 in 1999. In all three major cities, it was estimated that there were fewer women in street prostitution after the law against purchasing sex went into effect.

According to the prostitution teams and police that were interviewed, the number of clients has declined on the streets of the three major cities since the new law went into effect. The amount of traffic is said to be less, and some informants believe that the transactions have become briefer. In all three major cities, there are now police who are assigned to patrol areas where street prostitution is known to be conducted.

From all three major cities, there are reports of transsexuals who sell sex to men. Informants also have knowledge of a number of men who have undergone sex-change operations and now work the streets as female prostitutes.

## Indoor prostitution

For obvious reasons, it is much more difficult to get a clear view of indoor prostitution. In addition and as previously noted, the boundary between street and indoor prostitution is often flexible.

The foregoing section on the more visible street prostitution noted that, according to the assessments of informants, fewer women are now engaged in street prostitution than before the new law against purchasing sex went into effect. Based on the information that we have received, however, it is not possible to state whether this perceived reduction is real, or a consequence of greater use of other areas by women engaged in prostitution.

In any event, it is impossible to establish a causal link between the perceived reduction and the new law. The use of mobile phones and the Internet, is not a purely Swedish phenomenon, for example; it is a consequence of new technology rather than of legislation (see following section concerning the Internet).

The prostitution teams in the three major cities have often acquired their knowledge of indoor prostitution indirectly, or from women engaged in prostitution who have initiated contacts with the teams. Among the information thus acquired is that prostitutes contact clients at restaurants, hotels and dance halls. The teams have also been informed that prostitution takes place in, for example, the homes of clients, in connection with conferences, on the Sweden-Finland ferries, and at private parties.

According to information that the Göteborg prostitution team has received from foreign-born men, prostitution is organized in Sweden by some of their countrymen. Information about such services is shared only with trusted individuals within each ethnic group. This tends to be confirmed by observations of the Göteborg police that bordellos reported to be operating in city apartments are often located in areas with large immigrant populations. However, the police say that they do not receive very many tips about indoor prostitution.

The Malmö police say that they have knowledge of prostitution conducted on the premises of massage parlours, solariums, etc. They have also spoken with personnel at pubs and restaurants. The odd restaurant has barred some women who are known to sell sex. The police have also cooperated with taxi companies to obtain information from drivers.

The Stockholm police say that they do not devote much effort to investigating indoor prostitution. It is very time-consuming and, in some cases, it

may also be difficult to distinguish between purchasing sex and ordinary "wooing". The police also know of restaurants where prostitutes make contact with clients. But some of these restaurants are anxious about complaints from customers or losing their liquor licences, and therefore bar women who are known to sell sex.

The Stockholm police also know of some places of business where prostitution takes place— solariums, massage parlours, etc. The number of such locales is said to have remained constant for several years, and many of them have been operating for 20-25 years. They have steady clientele, according to the police.

The prostitution teams know less about prostitution that takes place outside the major cities. From advertising on the Internet, however, it is evident that there is some prostitution in the provinces of Östergötland, Halland and Dalsland. Other localities that are named in this context are the cities of Örebro, Karlstad, Borås, Strömstad and Helsingborg. It is also known that some prostitution takes place in rural areas.

## **Internet**

Prostitution changes in response to changes in society. In other words, it is affected by the conditions that currently prevail in society (Månsson & Hedin, 1998). For example, new information technology has opened up new opportunities for prostitution. In recent years, the Internet appears to have become a new arena for making contacts with prostitution clients, for pornography, and for other sex-related activities such as the sale of sex products.<sup>5</sup>

It is sometimes stated that the Swedish law against purchasing sex has led to an increase in prostitution mediated via the Internet. This is an assertion that must be regarded with great caution, however. For one thing, the phenomenon of Internet-mediated prostitution is not limited to Sweden; the same trend is evident in other countries. For example, the *New York Times* observed on 23 February 1998 that the amount of visible prostitution in the United States had declined, but seemed to have been replaced by similar activities mediated by mobile telephones, personal pagers, and web sites (RFSU, 2003). In connection with a Danish study, women engaged in prostitution reported increasing use of the Internet to advertize their services, as it was "cheap and efficient" (Haansbæk, 2001).

It should also be noted that not all women involved in prostitution have access to the Internet in order to make contact with potential clients. For these women, the street remains their point of contact (RFSU, 2003).

It is also said that prostitution mediated via the Internet has "gone underground" and become more hidden. But there is some question as to whether the prostitution advertised by men and women on their own web sites sho-

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<sup>5</sup> Sex is the general subject most often sought after by Internet browsers. According to a study of Internet use conducted at Göteborg University, viewing erotic materials, especially pornography, is one of the most frequent Internet activities. But few of those included in the study said that they used the Internet to contact women engaged in prostitution; only two per cent of the men reported doing so. (Foreword by Sven-Axel Månsson in RFSU, 2003).

uld be regarded as hidden. Their services, prices and contact procedures are announced clearly and openly. Thus, prostitution can be said to have become more openly public on the Internet (see for example RFSU, 2003; Renland, 2002; Haansbæk, 2001). Personal ads with formulations such as "woman seeks generous man" are more readily classified as hidden prostitution, because it is difficult to determine what lies behind such an ad (RFSU, 2003, p. 31).

The advantage to prospective clients is that they do not need to visit some prostitution quarter, but can stay at home with their computers. In other words, the Internet offers prostitution clients anonymity. For the same reason, the Internet may lower the threshold of resistance for those who are inclined to sell sex. But in the end, the woman has to meet her male client in person, at which point the procedure is most likely the same as for other prostitution encounters ((Månsson in *Hivaktuellt*, 2003).

From another standpoint, however, the Internet does not necessarily provide anonymity to those who advertise via their own web sites. These often include photos of the seller's face and body, which involves an entirely different level and type of exposure than in the past (Haansbæk, 2001).

It is not known whether the lower threshold theoretically offered by the Internet leads, in fact, to increased prostitution in comparison with more "traditional" arenas for purchasing sex. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which print advertisements, web sites, etc. actually lead to more purchases of sexual services (*SoS-rapport, 2000:5*).

Another aspect of prostitution via the Internet is that it may serve as a sort of pornography for men, where the motive is to satisfy curiosity. The Internet provides an opportunity to approach the mythical "whore", to observe her closely but at a safe distance via the computer screen, perhaps to communicate with her via e-mail or a chat room— all without actually having to meet her in person (Månsson & Söderlind 2004, p. 10).

It may therefore be said that, compared with the comparatively open conditions of street prostitution, it is more difficult to observe or develop an overview of prostitution on the Internet. Web sites and other contact channels on the Internet are constantly changing— new sites are established, others are shut down, etc. This makes it difficult to get a sense of how many women and men are offering sexual services via the Internet at any one time.

There are also differences in the figures reported. In one interview, Sven-Axel Månsson said that there are 80-100 women in Sweden who sell sexual services via the Internet (*Hivaktuellt*, 2003; see also Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). He explained that:

*If you surf the Net, you can get the impression that there are numerous web addresses, lists and web sites with information about women who sell sexual services. But it is often the same women who turn up at different locations. Also, the names may not be current.*

The Stockholm police, on the other hand, estimate that the number of women selling sex via the Internet is much higher— between 200-250 women in all of Sweden.

Based on a search of the Internet (see below), the Göteborg prostitution team estimates that about 250 women in Sweden were advertising their services via that medium. However, they emphasize that this figure is not the result of a systematic survey, but merely an estimate based on the information derived from their Internet outreach programme.

Another source of uncertainty regarding the extent of Internet-based prostitution, is that some individual women may appear in several different contexts. For example, there are photos which show a particular woman's face, but others which do not or in which her eyes are covered over. Some may place new advertisements or set up new web sites without removing the old ones. Prostitution may also be concealed in advertisements that do not clearly indicate their purpose. In addition, according to some informants, some false advertising of prostitution occurs.

Some members of the prostitution teams have got the impression that women who advertise their services on the Internet take greater risks than those involved in street prostitution. They believe that the former engage in more unprotected sex and offer "rougher" services. The explanation offered is that women who advertise sexual services via the Internet are probably alone and inexperienced, and may therefore be uncertain about how and where to set limits. In contrast, women who begin their prostitution careers on the street are usually educated in such matters by experienced women.

Otherwise, not much is known about the personal characteristics of the women who sell sexual services via the Internet. Based on the information which the women publish about themselves, their average age can be estimated at around 27-30 years (according to Göteborg prostitution team; see below). However, the real average may be older, since it is conceivable that the women generally state their ages as somewhat lower than they actually are.

Informants, such as those at the Association for Sex Education, who come in contact with these women report that they comprise a very heterogeneous group— as do the women who are engaged in other types of prostitution. For example, they are reported to have varying backgrounds and experience with regard to education, employment history, etc.

### *Internet outreach programme*

For the past few years, the Göteborg prostitution team has conducted an outreach programme via the Internet. They have produced an electronic "postcard" which, among other things, includes the names and telephone numbers of prostitution team members in Göteborg, Stockholm and Malmö, along with a brief text on the kinds of assistance they can provide. The postcard is sent to men and women who offer sexual services via web sites, including some personal ads which are strongly suspected of offering sexual services but (a purpose which can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty).

A total of 731 such postcards had been sent by mid-year of 2002. They produced 157 replies, most of which were automatic responses activated by the recipients' computers. Such responses often include a description of the services and prices on offer, and a mobile phone number to the seller.

Some of the personal (i.e. not automatic) replies indicated that the man or woman in question was not interested in making contact with a prostitution team. But thirteen responses led to further exchanges via e-mail and nine of these recipients, all women, have made personal contact with a prostitution team.

A meagre result, one might think. But it should be compared with outreach programmes in street milieus. There, as well, one encounters prostitutes who clearly indicate that they are not interested in any contact with outreach personnel.

There are also cases of individuals who initially reject such contacts, but later— perhaps years later— express an interest in the help offered by a prostitution team. This is something that has been experienced not only by the Göteborg team, but also by informants from other parts of Sweden. There are examples of women who for several years have kept a business card, telephone number, advertisement or the like from a prostitution team or centre until the day they "feel it is time" to quit prostitution.

Thus, the nine personal contacts generated by mid-year of 2002 is not necessarily the final outcome of the Internet outreach programme. It is quite possible that it will eventually result in additional contacts. The Göteborg prostitution team is planning to further develop this method of approach.

## Age

According to the Stockholm police, the average age of women who are engaged in street prostitution and have problems of substance abuse is around thirty; but there are also some who are older. Among the homeless who frequent the Klaragården drop-in centre are substance-addicted women engaged in prostitution who are estimated to be 30–45 years old and have been engaged in prostitution for many years. Our Stockholm informants are in fairly good agreement regarding the situation of this group (i.e. homeless addicted prostitutes).

In Göteborg, both the police and the prostitution team report that they seldom see women engaged in prostitution who are under 25 years of age. Some female heroin-users are reported to be between 22 and 25, but they are said to be only sporadically involved in street prostitution.

Göteborg informants also have knowledge of women aged forty and over who engage in street prostitution. Some of these are reported to have more orderly lives— compared with heavy drug users, for example— while the circumstances of others are quite difficult.

The police and the prostitution team in Malmö estimate that women engaged in street prostitution are somewhat younger compared with those in the two other major cities. Most of the women engaged in prostitution who use heroin are reported to be 20–25 years of age. Other sources of information in Malmö, for example the needle-exchange centre and the City Mis-

sion, agree with that estimate. According to the police, the average age has declined in recent years.

The police, the prostitution teams and other informants in all cities also report that, even though it is possible to estimate an average age, the age range is great. There are, for example, reports of women engaged in prostitution who are between 60 and 80 years of age. One informant has helped an elderly woman engaged in prostitution find a place in a retirement home. There are also reports of families with several generations involved in prostitution— mother and daughter, or even a grandmother to make three generations.

At the other end of the age-scale are very young women. "Bellas Vänner" (Bella's Friends) in the northern city of Umeå, for example, has been in contact with young women who have been involved in prostitution or very similar activities. Few of them are reported to be from the major cities; rather, they are from the region of Norrland or other parts of Sweden.

From its start in 1998 until 2003, Bellas Vänner has been in contact with around seventy young women who have been involved in prostitution. According to the staff, some of them have been under legal age, and they may have been led into prostitution by, for example, an older boyfriend who sells his girlfriend to his mates.

Information from other informants regarding young women in prostitution is somewhat more sketchy. For example:

- The Göteborg prostitution team reported that during 2003 it encountered five young women in street prostitution, the youngest of whom was fourteen. During the preceding three years, however, the team had not come in contact with any women of such tender years engaged in prostitution.
- The Stockholm prostitution team also reported that few young women have become established in street prostitution. But during 2003, the team came in contact with slightly more under-age females engaged in prostitution than in previous years. There are also reports of girls under 18 who advertise themselves as "amusing travelling companions" on the Sweden-Finland ferries in exchange for a new mobile telephone or the like.
- The Malmö prostitution team reported that it had not encountered any under-age girls in street prostitution for many years.

A recently published study of young people's sexuality included a specific inquiry into their experience of selling sex for money or some other form of compensation (Svedin & Priebe, 2004). Among the 4,343 young people at a number of secondary schools who were included in the study, 1.0 per cent of the girls and 1.8 percent of the boys reported that they had sold some kind of sex in exchange for some form of compensation. (The issue of young people in prostitution is further discussed in the section on "Young women".)

## Violence

There have been discussions in various contexts about whether or not the new law against sex-buying has led to women engaged in prostitution being subjected to more violence than before it went into effect.

For her graduate thesis, Petra Östergren interviewed fifteen women with experience as prostitutes. Their opinion was that clients had become more stressed and anxious than before the new law, making it more difficult to assess their suitability as clients. The women also reported that they no longer dared to seek help from the police— if they were threatened by clients, were subjected to physical assault or were cheated— for fear that they would be urged to file a complaint against the client in question.

Also, before the new law was introduced, it was possible for the women to warn each other about dangerous clients. But afterward, with the streets more stressful and fewer women on them, it became more difficult to share such knowledge. As a result, the women had become more anxious about the risk of physical attack (Östergren, 2003, p. 38 ff.).

It is not clear from Petra Östergren's thesis if the women had, in fact, been subjected to more violence than previously. But what does clearly emerge is that the women sense that their situation has become more insecure and risk-filled.

Our informants are largely of the same opinion. Some of them— at Klara-gården and Nattis in Stockholm, and at the needle-exchange centre in Malmö, for example— believe that there are now fewer clients, and that this may mean that a larger proportion of those who remain are "dangerous". Most of the "nice" clients have reportedly disappeared from the streets.

Thus, a number of informants believe that the situation has become more risky and dangerous. However, a closer study of their responses suggests that it is not necessarily an increased risk of violence to which they refer. Many say that the women now have to do "worse things", that the level of "weirdness" has increased, that the client make "stranger demands" (e.g. rougher sex). Some of these acts border on or constitute violence, but that is not always the case.<sup>6</sup>

Another aspect of the danger which may have become greater, as indicated by several informants, has to do with negotiations on the use of condoms. According to some of Petra Östergren's interview subjects, the new law against purchasing sex has led to a situation in which prices on the street have been reduced, and women who are in desperate need of money do not insist on condoms. Some informants believe that the use of condoms is a matter of personal integrity for most of the women; when they are forced to give up that demand during negotiations with clients, it leads to lower self-esteem, a feeling of being dirty, and fear of becoming infected (Östergren, 2003, p. 39).

Our informants do not provide a clear-cut answer to this question. Some feel that, due to competition on the street, women may occasionally submit

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<sup>6</sup>This is a matter of definition, of course. The same act may be experienced as violence by some, but something quite different by others. Acts that are not experienced as constituting violence need not be "harmless"; they may be experienced as extremely degrading, for example.

to sex without a condom. When prices are depressed, it is necessary to take risks. Others believe that the women are very careful about protecting themselves, and reject all proposals for unprotected sex.

Other informants believe that addicted women may sometimes schedule their prostitution by going out on the streets before their withdrawal symptoms become too severe. Otherwise, they might agree to unprotected sex in desperation to get money. Still others believe that it now happens more often that clients offer to pay extra to avoid using condoms.

According to several other sources, prostitution and violence appear to be closely connected, regardless of whatever laws may be in effect. The "Pro Sentret" centre in Norway <sup>7</sup> reports that, at least once a week, a woman engaged in prostitution in that country is subjected to extreme violence in the form of rape, physical assault and/or robbery (Renland, 2002). Renland also refers to a number of studies that have disclosed the vulnerability of women engaged in prostitution, particularly those who work the streets <sup>8</sup>.

A Norwegian study by Høigård and Finstad (1986) found that 19 of 26 women engaged in prostitution interviewed had experienced violence at the hands of clients. A survey by "Natthjemmet" (Night Home) in Oslo found that 90 percent of the women engaged in prostitution interviewed had been subjected to violence by clients on one or more occasions (Müller-Nilssen in Renland, 2002). Skilbrei (1998) points out, however, that women engaged in prostitution have a relatively high threshold in their definition of violence, which therefore may be under-reported.

The social services prostitution teams in Sweden also report that client violence against women engaged in prostitution is common, but are of the opinion that the women are used to everyday violence. This is nothing new: There was violence even before the new law against purchasing sex.

Informants at Stockholm's Prostitution Centre, which deals primarily with men and women involved in indoor prostitution, report that the women with whom they come in contact almost always tell of serious incidents that they have experienced, including aggravated assault, rape, knife threats, confinement, etc. However, these incidents reportedly occurred in the past, before the new law against purchasing sex.

The Göteborg police say they lack evidence that violence has increased. Through conversations with women engaged in street prostitution and by other means, detectives have conducted a special investigation of violence but have not been able to find any evidence of an increase. Neither have the Stockholm police detected any such evidence.

The police in all three major cities emphasize the importance of maintaining contact with and winning the trust of women engaged in prostitution. The women must be able to feel that it is safe to report any violence to which they are subjected. The police claim to have developed such relations. Those in Malmö, for example, report that they receive numerous complaints, most

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<sup>7</sup> Pro Sentret in Oslo, Norway, is a national resource centre which works with men and women engaged in prostitution.

<sup>8</sup> Renland's purpose is to demonstrate differences between indoor and street prostitution. She concludes that there is less violence in the former.

of which concern threats by clients or robbery (primarily by clients who take their money back by force after services are performed).

Women engaged in prostitution also demonstrate their trust in the police when they report matters other than violence to which they have been subjected. Examples include a client who had his year-old child with him in the car, and a man who asked to be supplied with an under-age girl.

However, some informants report that women engaged in prostitution generally do not say very much about violence, even though many of them are afraid. The women may carry various weapons of defence— sprays, hammers, knives, etc.— and also make sure that there are no objects nearby which clients might use as weapons. But informants also believe that there are women engaged in prostitution who do not report violence to which they have been subjected.

One informant knows of several women who have dared to file rape complaints against clients, thanks to the law against purchasing sex which, in these cases, has been a source of strength and support.

A few of our informants believe that violence by clients has increased in recent years. The needle-exchange centre in Malmö, for example, is of the opinion that there are more physical assaults now than previously, because women engaged in prostitution cannot afford to reject dubious clients.

Several informants also mentioned that some women engaged in prostitution have been victims of violence by men other than clients. Staff at the Stockholm City Mission's "Nattis", for example, report that the women with whom they have contact have been subjected to a great deal of sex-related violence in their lives. The Klaragården staff believes that many of the women engaged in prostitution who visit that drop-in centre are physically abused by their male partners.

To sum up: Given the available information, it is not possible to state with certainty whether there has been an increase in violence in connection with prostitution. While some informants speak of a more risk-filled situation, few are of the opinion that there has been an increase in actual violence. Police who have conducted a special investigation into the amount of violence have not found any evidence of an increase. Other research and the responses of our informants both indicate a close connection between prostitution and violence, regardless of what laws may be in effect.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is possible that, with other methods than the one used here, it would be possible to determine with greater certainty if there has been an increase in violence against women engaged in prostitution. But even if it were found by such methods that violence has increased, it would still be possible to speculate as to whether there is a direct causal relationship with the new law against purchasing sex— just as it is necessary to be cautious in making direct connections between the new law and prostitution mediated via the Internet (see [p. 27](#)). For example, what is the trend for crimes of violence in general? The statistics of the National Council for Crime Prevention show, for example, that reported violent crimes increased by six percent in Sweden during year 2003, compared with 2002. The statistics also indicate a trend toward an increase in reported violent crimes during the past ten years. As noted, this refers to *reported* crimes of violence, which is not necessarily the same thing as the *actual* frequency of such crimes. But if it is in fact the case that violent crimes have increased during the past ten years, is it inconceivable that an increase in violence against women engaged in prostitution may be related to that overall increase, and not a direct result of the new law against purchasing sex? Although this is mere speculation, it illustra-

## Men who sell sex to men

If there is anything more difficult than to get a clear view of the varieties of prostitution in which women sell sex to men, it is to do the same with regard to the sale of sex by men to other men.

The behaviour of men who wish to have sex with each other, without any element of prostitution, may in some cases resemble the kinds of behaviour associated with heterosexual prostitution. For that reason, estimates regarding the extent of homosexual prostitution may vary widely, depending on the observer's understanding of the homosexual subculture (SOU 1995:17; see also SoS-rapport, 2000:5).

Nor is it a given that men who sell sex to other men regard themselves as homosexual (ibid.). It may therefore be more appropriate to refer to "men who sell sex to men" or "male-to-male prostitution", rather than to "homosexual prostitution".

The report of the National Board of Health and Welfare published in 2000 referred to twelve Swedish municipalities which reported knowledge of men who sold sex to men. Four local chapters of the Federation for Sexual Equality also reported possession of such knowledge.

However, inasmuch as this follow-up report does not have a new questionnaire survey to draw upon, it is not possible to make comparisons with regard to the incidence of male-to-male prostitution in various municipalities. Several informants are uncertain about this issue. They are aware that this type of prostitution occurs, but have relatively little specific knowledge of it.

The social services prostitution team in Stockholm has attempted to make contact with men who sell sex to other men, and believes that it has observed an increase in this type of prostitution (for further details, see p. 55 ff.). During year 2002, some fifty men aged around 18-25 were identified as male-to-male prostitutes. The team feels that it is generally difficult to estimate the extent of such activity, as they hear many rumours and it is necessary to critically assess such information. But prostitution is said to occur at those meeting places where homosexuals seek contacts. According to the prostitution team, it is more difficult to establish contact with men than with women engaged in prostitution.

The Stockholm police say that they have knowledge of a few individual men who sell sex to other men.

The social services prostitution team in Malmö is also aware that male-to-male prostitution occurs in that city, but not to what extent. Its members have seen individual men in prostitution settings, but has not been able to follow up such observations. The Malmö needle-exchange centre has some male-to-male prostitutes among its clients, and the City Mission's night shelter knows of a few.

The Malmö police report that they know that male-to-male prostitution occurs; but, along with many other informants, they say that it is difficult to estimate its extent.

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tes the statistical problems involved in studies of the relationship between violence and the new law.

In Göteborg, both the police and the prostitution team report that men previously sold sex to men in the same area that was used by women engaged in street prostitution. But they no longer observe any such activity there. According to some reports, similar activities take place at other locations, but it is difficult to prove that prostitution is involved.

## Sex clubs

It may perhaps be said that sex clubs occupy a grey zone with regard to the sale of sexual services. The first report on prostitution by the National Board of Health and Welfare (*SoS-rapport 2000:5*) treated sex clubs as a marginal issue. At that time, five regional police authorities reported knowledge of sex clubs within their jurisdictions.

In 1998, the National Commission on Sex Crimes conducted a more thorough study which found that in 1999 there were thirteen sex clubs in Sweden, based on the information then available.<sup>10</sup> Almost half of the clubs were located in Stockholm and Göteborg. (SOU 2001:14)

The commission found that it was difficult to determine how many women were involved in the sex club branch, but came to the conclusion that their numbers had probably increased during the latter part of the 1990s.

Sex clubs were also treated as a marginal phenomenon in the study that is the basis of this report and, for reasons of methodology, it is not possible to make comparisons in this regard with the first study. However, informants from Stockholm and Göteborg have stated that they know of several clubs operating in each of those cities.

The social services prostitution team in Stockholm has been assigned by local government officials to look more closely into this type of activity. The team knows of two clubs that announce their presence by means of special advertising cars. Those two cars disappeared from sight for a time after the new law against purchasing sex was introduced, but they have since returned to the streets.<sup>11</sup>

According to the prostitution team, there is a risk that women at such clubs will end up in prostitution, even if no such activity regularly takes place there.

There is knowledge of a number of such clubs in Göteborg, as well. But to the extent that they are scenes of prostitution, it is assumed to be on a small scale. According to the prostitution team, the club owners are opposed to any such activity, and the women who work at the club keep an eye on each other. But the team believes that women engaged in prostitution do make arrangements to meet club visitors afterward.

Thus, informants believe that the sex clubs can function as gateways to prostitution. They also report that there are various connections with existing prostitution, although they may not be clearly visible. It happens, for

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<sup>10</sup> An increase from the total of seven sex clubs counted in 1993, as reported in the report of the prostitution inquiry of that year (SOU 1995:15).

<sup>11</sup> The authors of this report observed the two cars several times on Malmkillnadsgatan during the study period.

example, that men purchase sex from a street prostitute after a visit to a sex club.

The women who work at the clubs are regarded as a high-risk group, but they do not necessarily end up in prostitution. Some of them are said to draw a strict line against prostitution, while others who begin as strippers at a club may gradually cross more and more boundaries.

The prostitution teams stress that the women who work at sex clubs do not necessarily feel better emotionally than those directly involved in prostitution. But they believe that all types of prostitution and other sexual services— at sex clubs, as escorts, street prostitution, etc.— result in an increased tendency to shut off feelings and become distant from one's inner self. One woman who had formerly worked at a sex club told a prostitution team that it was worse than prostitution. At the sex club, she felt more exposed to the gazes of the men.

# A multi-faceted world

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The preceding section reviews the assessments of informants regarding the extent of prostitution and certain related themes, e.g. age and the incidence of violence. This section also deals with those issues to some degree; but its focus is on the men and women who are involved in prostitution. Who are the individual human beings concealed behind the facts and figures?

A number of different perspectives on those who sell and buy sex emerge, depending on who encounters them—their positions in society, the types of prostitution they encounter, and how those encounters take place.

The survey data yield impressions of visible prostitution— that which takes place on the street, in pubs and restaurants, or via advertisements on the Internet— which in turn yield impressions of buyers and sellers. Other kinds of impressions— of patterns, motives and experiences—emerge from interview survey, support programmes, etc.

There is also many aspects of prostitution that are hidden— contacts via the Internet, the actual purchase of sex, and the emotional consequences for those involved. Those who meet both men and women engaged in prostitution and their clients in treatment contexts acquire some insight into these hidden aspects, and thereby a more nuanced understanding of the individuals and forces involved in prostitution.

The various impressions of prostitution which emerge indicate that it is a complex and multi-faceted problem, and that the people involved are very heterogeneous. Common to all of these views, however, is a large measure of vulnerability and emotional isolation.

Based on the information provided by informants, we have sorted men and women engaged in prostitution into different categories. This classification is to be regarded as primarily *analytical*— not an exact reflection of reality in which men and women possess distinct characteristics. In reality, the boundaries between most of the categories are extremely flexible, with a great deal of overlap.

It can be said that informants convey *different images* of prostitution and those involved. As noted above, the fact that the images do not look alike depends, among other things, on the different contexts in which the various informants encounter prostitutes. It is also a question of interpretation and the background knowledge of the observer. In addition, prostitution is a varied activity: It can serve different functions and assume different expressions. There are also different paths in and out of prostitution.

The various images are of men and women who sell sex, but also of the buyers. In addition, we have acquired some limited knowledge of pimps and other promoters of prostitution.

Based on the images that have been conveyed by informants, we attempt to portray something of prostitution's multi-faceted world in the following text.

## Women with problems of substance abuse

It is reported that, in both Stockholm and Malmö, there are women engaged in street prostitution who have one or another problem with substance abuse. Some of the women are also homeless. Many of our informants (police; personnel in social services, municipal and voluntary programmes for homeless women; and the needle-exchange centre in Malmö) have described women who are trapped in drug addiction and need large sums of money to finance their habits. Many, but not all of the women have been using drugs for a long time and are in poor condition, both physically and emotionally. It should also be noted, however, that various types of substance abuse also occur in the other subgroups discussed here. The focus here is on the category of woman who, according to our informants, predominate in the street prostitution of certain cities. For them, prostitution may offer the only means of financing a heavy drug habit.<sup>12</sup>

Many of these women are reported to be longtime substance abusers. But, often, it is not until they develop a heavy addiction to heroin or amphetamines that they are forced to finance their habits by means of prostitution. One informant tells, for example, of a woman who was able to finance her habit by other means until middle age. But when her veins were eventually ruined by needle punctures, she switched to the more expensive smoking heroin. It was only then that she started prostituting herself, in order to finance the more expensive form of heroin.

According to our informants, some of these women previously had well-ordered lives, while others early began using drugs and may never have experienced a well-ordered adult existence with stable relationships. Staff at the Spiral Project in Stockholm tell of addicted women engaged in prostitution who in many cases have a background that includes an insecure childhood and problems at school; as teenagers, they felt that they were "different" and outsiders. It is reported that many of them entered puberty at an early age and got involved with gangs, in connection with which they were sexually exploited and introduced to drugs. It is not a long step from that type of milieu to prostitution.

In this context, one may perhaps speak of a combination of:

- a social arena with early problems of social adjustment
- a biological arena with early puberty
- a structural arena in which women are exploited.

Police and social services also tell of women who would probably never have ended up in prostitution if it were not for drugs. They are trapped in a vicious circle— in which prostitution is necessary in order to obtain drugs, and the numbing effect of the drugs is necessary to cope emotionally with prostitution. When they succeed in freeing themselves from heroin addic-

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<sup>12</sup> But this is not always the case. During the period from the autumn of 2002 to the spring of 2003, for example, the Spiral Project had dealings with some 465 clients, of which 400 were women and 65 men. Of the 465 of both sexes, 121 were currently or had been engaged in prostitution.

tion, they disappear from the streets; but as previously noted, it happens that some of them later return to prostitution for various reasons.

Some of the women have children, but they are usually under the care of the authorities. Self-esteem is often at a low; these women are nearly everywhere treated with contempt, according to informants. But as a rule, the women trust the police, the social workers in the prostitution teams, and personnel of the City Mission such as those on night patrol. One reason may be that these people treat the women with respect and see them as complete individuals, not merely as prostitutes.

According to many informants, including the prostitution teams and the needle-exchange centre in Malmö, women engaged in prostitution often have partners who are drug addicts. Sometimes the women also finance their partners' habits by means of prostitution (see section below on pimps). It is reported that violence and sexual assault are very much part of these women's daily lives. According to several informants, it is not uncommon for male partners to physically abuse women engaged in prostitution, or for the women to feel great contempt for clients.

Despite the problems noted above, it is stressed by most social workers and other informants that many women engaged in prostitution possess unusual strength and endurance. These are positive attributes to build on and to utilize in the work of helping women extricate themselves from prostitution and drug addiction.

There is also an alternative image, to that of the broken-down, addicted woman engaged in prostitution (referred to by some informants in such terms as "scrawny chickling", i.e. usually toothless and with infected cuts, abscesses, etc.) Even if her internal and outward problems are the same, it is not always evident from her appearance that a woman engaged in prostitution is addicted to heroin. She may, as one informant expressed it, "look like any other young woman".

## A way out of social isolation

As previously noted, street prostitution in Göteborg differs somewhat from that in Stockholm and Malmö, in that it is not dominated to the same extent by women with serious problems of substance abuse. Such women are reported to a less common feature of the prostitution that takes place on the streets and in the parking areas of Göteborg.

But some informants in Göteborg, including police, tell of another category of women who participate in that city's street prostitution (which is not to say that this category is not also represented in Stockholm and Malmö). These are somewhat older women in their 40s and 50s, who have been involved in street prostitution for many years and are said not to use drugs. For them, prostitution is described rather as a way of ending loneliness and social isolation. Informants perceive these women as extremely lonely. One of them is said to have told one of our informants that, "If they are simply kind and talk with me a little, I could almost do it for free." Some of them have their own cars in which they wait for clients, passing the time by crocheting, doing crossword puzzles or reading a book.

Informants say that some of these women may be content with this type of activity, and approve of neither the law against purchasing sex nor interference by the police. Some of them might prefer to quit; but to go on the street one or two nights a week in order "to pick up some clients" seems to be a habit that is difficult to break.

One informant in Göteborg relates that some of these women are addicted to bingo. They go to bingo halls and lose large amounts of money; then, after closing time, they go on the streets. This informant describes such women as "kindly matrons who one could just as well see at an open-air market, selling eggs". The informant also says that they are very lonely, with no families. Several of the women are said to be old-age or disability pensioners, and some receive social assistance. Most of them are reportedly in debt to various merchants, landlords, private persons, etc. (see also p. 43 ff. on the role of money and overconsumption).

## Intellectually impaired and emotionally disturbed women

Stockholm and Malmö informants have knowledge of a number of women engaged in street prostitution who suffer from mild intellectual impairment. As far as is known, they do not use drugs. It is reported that they are very vulnerable, and that it is difficult to win their trust. According to several informants, some of them have been lured onto the streets by other women who have persuaded them that it is a way to meet a man with whom to develop a romantic relationship. An intellectually impaired woman may, indeed, perceive an encounter with a sex buyer to be part of such a relationship.

There are also reports of emotionally disturbed women in street prostitution. According to the Göteborg prostitution team, for example, there are some women engaged in street prostitution who have been treated under the Swedish law on the care of emotionally disturbed persons. One informant with work experience at a residential treatment clinic knows of some emotionally disturbed women who have been forcibly confined by men— in many cases a family relation— and forced to perform sexual acts. This is reported to have aggravated their emotional illness.

Other informants related that some substance-abusing women engaged in prostitution have emotional problems. One informant is of the opinion that it is difficult to determine what comes first— an emotional disturbance which is "treated" with drugs, or drug use that leads to emotional disturbance

Some informants also describe a number of the women involved in street prostitution as "a bit odd", even if it is not a question of mental illness. One thought that has occurred to these informants is that, for those who are a bit odd, prostitution may provide the only setting in which they feel that they belong and are accepted.

## Well-established women

Prostitution and social problems are closely linked, especially in connection with drug abuse. But prostitution also takes place in settings and among people who outwardly seem to be well-adjusted and well-established in society. For them, economic motives appear to have a more psychological than practical basis. Informants report, for example, that there are well-established women with well-paid jobs who feel a compulsion to sell their bodies.

Also buyers can be well-adjusted and well-established. There are men with settled family lives and stable partners who nevertheless feel a compulsion to buy sex in impersonal encounters.

It should, however, be noted that we are not able to state anything about the extent of these patterns, or the number of men and women of this description who sell and buy sex.

Knowledge of well-established women who engage in prostitution comes primarily from services such as the Association for Sex Education clinic and the Prostitution Centre in Stockholm. Counsellors with those services who meet both parties (i.e. seller and buyer) describe prostitution as an "arena of illusions" in which men and women, in what appears to involve the purchase of some kind of sexual service in exchange for payment, are actually trying to satisfy completely different needs.

The men and women whom the counsellors meet may have acted as sellers and buyers in various types of prostitution— everything from street prostitution to other forms which can be described as more sophisticated in terms of setting and contact procedures. The Internet is said to be a common arena for making contacts.

But there are more similarities than differences between the various arenas of prostitution. The individuals whom the counsellors have met have all related experiences of exposure to violence and insults, self-contempt, sexual excess and, again, an "arena of illusions" which at first can seem tempting.

Informants with experience in the treatment of men and women who have activities as symptoms of underlying problems— for example, weak ego, low self-esteem or self-contempt— which in turn lead to self-destructive behaviour and make it difficult to develop close relationships.

In this way, prostitution acquires a double meaning and fulfils a double psychological function. Individuals who sell a certain level of access to their bodies or provide other types of sexual service can, by so doing, briefly feel that they are worthy and attractive. At the same time, prostitution serves another function by making it possible to buy (or sell) an illusion of closeness that does not include a risk of becoming emotionally threatening or suffocating.

According to informants, the basic reasons for prostituting oneself may include early disturbances and traumatic experiences, for example sexual assault, but also other types of problems<sup>13</sup>. Growing up with parents who are

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<sup>13</sup> According to informants, the underlying causes here cited to explain why men end up in prostitution also apply to women in other subgroups discussed in this report; see for example the section on young women.

emotionally distant or deficient in some other way can result in a weak or non-existent ego, or an inadequate sense of one's personal identity. Individuals with such an upbringing may feel that they are mere extensions of their parents, and exist only to serve others. To be "ignored" and not seen, to be deprived of self-respect and self-esteem are other themes that are mentioned in this context.

To submit to prostitution may be one way to place such problems outside oneself in order to control anxiety. According to informants, prostitution is often just one aspect of a generally self-destructive behaviour pattern.

Economic motives can be one reason for getting started in prostitution. But informants claim that there are often deeper causes and psychological mechanisms underlying the economic motives. The phenomenon may be described as a form of overconsumption leading to economic difficulties that can force someone into prostitution. However, this seldom provides a solution to those difficulties. Instead, the money is spent quickly in order to provide some sort of satisfaction, and also compensation for the negative aspects of prostitution (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). Dependence on the extra income may make it more difficult to leave prostitution. One informant tells of a woman who quit prostitution but would still say to herself, "There goes a hundred quid", when she happened to notice a wealthy man.

The money that these women make by prostitution can be used for such luxuries as taxi rides, expensive restaurants or buying new clothes instead of cleaning old ones.

Informants also provide examples of strong negative feelings connected with the money earned by prostitution. One woman regularly burned up the client's money after every encounter.

A wardrobe can be filled with things that are not really wanted. There are also examples of women who spend their prostitution earnings on luxury items such as fur coats which they then "forget" and leave behind somewhere.

The money and the fact that one is desired can provide the woman with a sense of worth, however short-lived. One informant feels that the money does provide short-term consolation, but that it is somewhat like eating too many sweets— one becomes nauseous and wants to vomit. (The following section on young women includes additional examples of the very complex role that money can play in connection with prostitution.)

The risks involved in prostitution, the act of doing something forbidden, to "have sunk so low", the risk of discovery and thereby the shame, the degradation, the contempt and self-contempt— all that can be important in itself, according to informants, It has the effect of confirming a sense of worthlessness already present.

The money that changes hands serves as a means of possessing and receiving value, and of buying oneself out of the intimacy that both partners seek to avoid. The prostitution encounter is described as a way of controlling the degree of dependence and independence, intimacy and distance. A seemingly intimate act performed without intimacy creates distance— between the individuals who perform it, and between the act and any personal relationships in which both the buyer and the seller may otherwise be involved.

According to the Association for Sex Education, both parties are ambivalent toward the prostitution encounter, torn between a strong desire for intimacy and a fear of it. For both parties, prostitution may serve as a way of blocking out anxiety, depression and feelings of emptiness.

Some of our informants tell of women who describe how their experiences with prostitution leave them with feelings of disgust which they literally attempt to scrub clean. This has also been mentioned by informants who deal with women in other types of prostitution, for example those who are homeless or addicted to drugs.

Well-established women engaged in prostitution often feel themselves completely alone with their experiences. They are not able to speak with others about their activities, which must at all costs be hidden and may become a secret that is a constant burden.

This pattern has emerged from other research, as well. According to Hedin and Månsson, for example, the shame that is felt vis à vis the surrounding world must be managed not only during the period one is engaged in prostitution, but also afterward. Even after leaving prostitution, the shame associated with such a past must constantly be dealt with. How much should one reveal to one's friends and relatives? If one choose to conceal as much as possible, as most do, the result becomes more lies and more anxiety about the truth emerging (Hedin & Månsson, 1998, p. 211 ff.).

Our informants are of the opinion that, even if a woman attempts to keep her experience as a prostitute secret, it is difficult in the long run to prevent it from seeping into her identity. Increasingly, one comes to regard oneself as a "whore" and looks down upon oneself accordingly. Informants believe that this is among the most difficult aspects of extricating oneself prostitution— to re-establish one's personal integrity, to stop seeing oneself as a whore, and to deal with the disgust felt toward oneself, clients and the sexual acts performed. This view is also held by informants who deal with women engaged in prostitution other than the well-established.

## Young women

As previously noted, informants seldom see young women engaged in street prostitution. Those observations resemble findings included in the report of the National Board of Health and Welfare published in year 2000, namely that few young people of either sex seem to be involved in street prostitution.

But there are some young women who are. Social services come in contact with adult women engaged in prostitution who report that they started early in life. Ages 14-15 and even younger have been mentioned.

Why is it that young women are so seldom seen in street prostitution, when there are consistent reports that many of them begin before they reach legal age? In a publication issued by the Norwegian organisation, Pro Sentret, a similar pattern in Norway is referred to as an apparent contradiction: "How could so many tell us of an early start, while we encountered so few juveniles?" (Jessen, 1998, p. 3).

The following analysis describes many different types of young people involved in prostitution, primarily females, based on the knowledge acqui-

red by our informants in connection with their work in this area. The young women are sorted into categories based on the manner in which they got started in prostitution. Again, these are analytical categories: We do not know the extent to which they overlap, nor whether the informants have merely observed different aspects of the same phenomenon.

The analysis is based on information from a variety of informants who have established personal contacts with young people involved in prostitution or similar activities. It is therefore difficult to determine whether this limited sample of impressions is representative. Also, it is likely that informants' views of these young people are influenced by their contacts with them— their nature, purpose, etc.

Much of the information provided seems to agree with the findings of the above-mentioned study of young people who sell sex in return for various kinds of compensation (Svedin & Priebe, 2004). That study found, for example, that young people who report that they have offered or sold sex in return for some form of compensation exhibit many special characteristics and problems. This is also evident from the information provided by our informants.

### **Entering into prostitution by chance**

Bellas Vänner in Umeå report coming in contact with about seventy young women who have engaged in prostitution. As previously noted, few of them come from the major cities; most are from much smaller towns, where prostitution has also taken place.

According to Bellas Vänner, these are sexually traumatized girls who have apparently glided into prostitution by chance. Most are reported to have been victims of sexual assault as children. Some are said not to have had such experiences, but are reported to have been subjected to other forms of abuse, such as extensive bullying by age-mates.

The lure of money can be a strong motive for getting started. But according to Bellas Vänner, prostitution soon becomes a compulsion, one of several expressions of a generally self-destructive behaviour pattern. A comparison can thus be made with the well-established women described above.

Bellas Vänner report that many of the young women are also well-established. They come from a variety of backgrounds, but it is not unusual for them to be high-achievers, ambitious, and otherwise seemingly well-adjusted.

Some have sold sex only a few times, while others are reported to have been stuck in prostitution for several years.

The most common means of making contacts with clients is via the Internet, according to Bellas Vänner. Often this does not involve specifically sex-oriented web sites, but more "neutral" chat rooms. It is seldom the young women who initiate contacts; instead, they are contacted by men and offered money for sex. In this way, their first prostitution transaction often occurs by chance.

In addition to the Internet, this type of contact (in which a man offers a young woman money in exchange for sex) may also take place at a café or

pub. None of the young women with whom our informants have been in contact are reported to abuse any substance. It is rather a question of drifting into a pattern of behaviour that is self-destructive.

Bellas Vänner also has knowledge of young women whose boyfriends play a role in the process by which they end up in prostitution. The males may sell their girlfriends to mates or "loan them out" in exchange for compensation. It is reported that, in such cases, the boyfriend is usually somewhat older than the young women— i.e. 18-19 years vs. 14-15 years of age.

These young women are often described as alternating between periods of intensive activity as prostitutes and periods of other self-destructive behaviour such as anorexia, binge eating, self-harm (with self-inflicted cuts, for example), and contemplating or attempting suicide.

According to Bellas Vänner, some of the young women have had contact with psychiatric services; but as a rule, these have not been aware that the women are prostituting themselves. Some of the women have also had contact with social services, but few of them have disclosed that they have been selling sex.

According to Bellas Vänner, the young women may give away the money they have earned by prostitution, for example to an animal rights organisation or some other type of charitable activity. Bellas Vänner also report that the money earned from prostitution may be used to finance binge eating.

Another example illustrates the complex and often paradoxical relationship between prostitution and money. One young woman is reported to have been saving her prostitution earnings for a lengthy period, as a reserve for the future time when she would leave prostitution. This planning was based on the insight that she would have to go into therapy in order to deal with and repair the damage done by prostitution.

The young women who have found their way to Bellas Vänner have often done so via the cultural activities conducted by that organisation. It is not unusual that they begin by relating that they were subjected to sexual assault during childhood. After that, it can take a long time before they summon the courage to talk about their prostitution activities. Most are reported to believe that they are the only ones who have had such experiences.

### **Paths to substance abuse and prostitution**

There is another view of how young women get started with substance abuse and prostitution. It has been conveyed with particular clarity by an informant who works at a treatment clinic, helping women to process their experiences with relationships.

This informant tells of young women, aged 16-20, who are drawn or lured into both drug addiction and prostitution through a romantic relationship. These women may have had a well-ordered childhood and a naive understanding of drug addiction. They fall in love with a somewhat older man with drug problems whom they believe that they can "save" through their love. Instead, they end up in an increasingly strong relation of dependence on the man, which eventually leads to a choice between ending the relationship or adopting the man's life style. Very often they choose the latter and, when

they become hooked on the drug, they are also ensnared in dependence on the man.

When the woman is completely trapped, relates the informant, it happens that the man exercises total control over her, locks her in, forces her to provide sexual services to other men for pay, and decides when she receives her drug dose. This is a path into prostitution that is not very visible– which may partly help to explain the above-mentioned paradox that so many women have said they entered into prostitution at an early age, but so few have been observed doing so.

Some of our informants have reported that younger substance-abusing women may meet their clients in settings other than the street– restaurants, for example. These women have not been involved in prostitution for very long, and their substance abuse has not yet left very deep traces on their bodies or general appearance. By contrast, many of the older substance-abusing women no longer have that option due to the effects on their appearance.

Some informants who have worked with substance-abusing women tell of girls who grow up in such environments and are both drugged and sexually exploited at an early age, for example by the mother's male companion or other type of partner. The path to addiction and prostitution can thus be laid out. As previously mentioned, there are examples of women whose mother and grandmother both were actively involved in substance abuse and prostitution.

Our informants also provide information which relates to treatment clinics. For example, one informant knows of young women at a clinic who serviced clients during the treatment period, using mobile telephones to arrange meetings. Reportedly, the girls did not regard this type of activity as prostitution, but merely as a means of "getting things". They regarded themselves as somewhat superior, and felt contempt towards street prostitutes. They were dependent on drugs, but still had their looks.

Other informants tell of several young women who had been subjected to sexual assault as children, and later happened to be at the same treatment clinic at the same time. Either they have run away and ended up in prostitution or, as they are reported to have later said, "gone on the street with the clinic's consent".

A survey conducted by the National Council for Crime Prevention, regarding sex crimes against children with elements of exploitation which have been reported to the police and been tried in court, also includes reference to a case of a girl who ran away from a treatment clinic to prostitute herself (Nilsson, 2003, p. 17).<sup>14</sup>

### **Payment in kind**

Some of our informants, with the prostitution team in Malmö for example, tell of young girls who go home with men in their own neighbourhoods and sell sex, in some cases in exchange for money but also for other valuables.

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<sup>14</sup> The survey was conducted by the *Utredningen om kunskap om sexuell exploatering av barn i Sverige* [Public Inquiry on Knowledge of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Sweden].

The above-mentioned survey by the National Council for Crime Prevention includes several examples of this and similar types of activity (which also include the exploitation of boys). Men may, for example, entice young people by offering them cigarettes, beer, computer games, video films, etc.

The survey by the National Council for Crime Prevention also includes examples of cases in which the male culprits and the girls make contact with each other via telephone and the Internet, and then reach an agreement on sexual relations in exchange for money, alcohol, etc. The survey also uncovered examples of the pattern mentioned by Bellas Vänner (see above), in which young women are led into prostitution by their boyfriends.<sup>15</sup>

A question to a selection of youth health clinics disclosed several variations on that theme. For example, one such clinic has been in contact with some young women who often frequent various "in" restaurants where they associate with a large crowd of men. They allow themselves to be offered "one thing or another" in exchange for sex. The clinic staff refers to this behaviour as "selling sex".

The responses of youth health clinics include other examples of young women who have sex in exchange for drugs, among other things. One speaks of a grey zone in which girls have sex with men who "contribute" valuable objects and services, and where vulnerable girls are exploited by men with whom they live in a strong dependency relationship.

It has also been reported that there are young men and women whom clinic personnel suspect of engaging in some type of prostitution because, for example, they often return to be tested for venereal disease.

Several youth health clinics are able to state a specific number of young male and female visitors who are definitely known to have engaged in prostitution.

### **“Drifting into prostitution“**

A history of sexual assault or other forms of abuse is a recurrent theme among the categories of prostitute referred to above. The same themes emerge from other research in this area.

Figures on the proportion of women engaged in prostitution who have been victims of sexual assault during childhood vary between ca. 30–70 per cent. (Månsson & Hedin, 1998, p. 66). However, Månsson and Hedin point out that there are grounds for caution when interpreting the significance of sexual assault for entry into prostitution. While a significant portion of women engaged in prostitution have been victims of sexual assault during childhood, an equally large or even larger portion have not been. Research which stresses the exclusive significance of childhood sexual assault is often

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<sup>15</sup> The survey of the National Council for Crime Prevention is based on cases that have come to the attention of the judicial system, and the emphasis is on cases resulting in conviction. The clause with greatest bearing on the cases referred to above is that concerning seduction of young people (Section 6, § 10): “Anyone who, by promising or providing compensation, acquires or seeks to acquire temporary sexual relations with anyone under eighteen years of age shall be sentenced, for seduction of young people, to financial damages or imprisonment for a period of up to six months.” The purpose of this provision is to prevent street prostitution among young people age 15-17 (Nilsson, 2003, p. 7)

based on a highly selective sample consisting of those who have been most victimized by the sex trade (ibid., p. 67).

However, most researchers agree that the experience of assault and exploitation tends to induce a self-image which facilitates prostitution-like behaviour, i.e. using one's body to provide sexual services in order to achieve non-sexual benefits such as a sense of belonging, comradeship, money and other material advantages (ibid., p. 74).

Several researchers have called for a more complex explanatory model than those currently available. One alternative is the theory of "drifting into prostitution", according to which the first step into prostitution results primarily from a combination of several factors. The individual's interaction with the surrounding world is emphasized (Vanwesenbeeck, 1994, p. 28).

In this theory, the notion of a direct connection between childhood victimization and prostitution is rejected. As Månsson and Hedin point out, focusing entirely on such a connection poses a risk that other actors relating to prostitution are obscured. Focusing on harmful childhood experiences renders invisible the surrounding society and its significance for the existence of prostitution. Demand, market forces, and power relationships between the sexes are hidden (Månsson & Hedin, 1998, p. 69).

According to the drifting theory, the process of entering into prostitution consists of a series of experiences and events which aggravate the individual's lack of trust and the sense of being an outsider. Stigmatization is regarded as an important factor. Also stressed is the importance of poor self-esteem and the internalization of a deviant self-image (ibid., p. 95).

### *An invisible subgroup*

According to our informants, it appears that the young women in question do not always regard the various ways of selling described above as constituting prostitution. For example, young women whose boyfriends have reportedly played an active role in this context do not perceive themselves as "prostitutes": They have boyfriends— not pimps<sup>16</sup>. If and when these girls come in contact with social services or the like, this perception of their situation can be one reason that their prostitution experiences remain invisible (see section below on preventive measures directed to young people).

The social services prostitution teams in the three major cities feel that they receive entirely too few referrals from other agencies which deal with young people— that there appears to be insufficient awareness of both the incidence of prostitution among young people and how serious it is. There are examples of social workers who have dismissed, as lies, well-founded information from the teams regarding young girls who have been involved in prostitution.

The information received by the National Board of Health and Welfare indicates that most prostitution involving young women appears not to be conducted on the street (see also ECPAT, 2001).

A Norwegian study found that young people conduct their activities in settings that are not generally associated with prostitution— friends and ac-

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<sup>16</sup> See also, "*Är det möjligt att få veta?*" [Is it possible to find out?], the report of a hearing conducted by the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in November, 2001.

quaintances, the Internet (including chat rooms), neighbours, etc. (Hegna & Pedersen, 2002).

Sotter and Svennecke (1992) claim that young women engaged in prostitution often have knowledge of the laws that apply to them, for example the Care of Young Persons Act, and therefore try as best they can to conceal their prostitution activities. After reaching the legal age of twenty, they may then "come out in the open".

The foregoing discussion has reviewed several methods and procedures by which young women enter into and conduct prostitution, and it applies equally to those who have problems of substance abuse. To the extent that such young women participate in street prostitution, they are spotted relatively soon by social services outreach teams or the police who then take action. On the other hand, according to some of the police who were interviewed, the youngest girls can be difficult to spot, since they tend to attract clients quickly and do not linger on the streets very long.

However, our informants are in complete agreement that few young people "succeed" in establishing themselves in street prostitution. Among other things, it has been known to happen that older women engaged in prostitution notify the police if they see young women on the streets. This is partly because the younger women are a source of competition; but consideration for the girls' welfare may of course play a role, as well: The older women do not want their younger sisters to "go under", as one informant put it.

## Trafficking

Another view of prostitution is related to the organized exploitation of the difficult economic and social situations of women from other countries. Trafficking is described in a report of the National Council for Crime Prevention entitled *Organiserad brottslighet – lösa maskor eller fast nätverk* [Organized Crime: Loose Net or Tight Network], as a form of prostitution in which women— primarily from Asia and from Eastern and Central Europe—are lured to Western Europe. They are brought in under false pretences for the purpose of performing sexual services. The countries in which the women are recruited suffer from poverty and unemployment, and there is often little or no social safety net (BRÅ-rapport 2002:7).

The national police force estimates that there were up to 400-600 female victims of trafficking in Sweden during 2003. That estimate is based on information received, preliminary investigations, and assumptions about the number of undetected cases.

Most of the women who are transported to Sweden for prostitution come from neighbouring countries, and therefore do not require an entry visa (BRÅ-rapport 2002:7). Our informant with the national police relates that most of the women are 18–30 years of age and come from Estonia, Lithuania, Russia and Poland. It was reported that some Polish women under age 18 were trafficked to Sweden during the summer of 2003.

Most of the women brought into Sweden have their passports and other travel documents taken from them. Many of them are kept under lock and

key in various flats and other locations where they are forced to provide sexual services (BRÅ-rapport 2002:7).

The national police draw a similar picture, but also report that women may be delivered to customers by their pimps or handlers. They are frequently subjected to physical abuse, sexual assault and threats by both handlers and clients.

The situation of the women is further aggravated by the fact that it is difficult for them to get help due to language problems, as well as fear of the police and other authorities. According to the national police, most clients are contacted via the Internet, handwritten notices, and calling cards left at bars and restaurants.

Judging by the information provided to the national police, it would appear that trafficking takes place in nearly all Swedish counties. Also, the volume of trafficking appears to be growing in areas outside the major cities—keeping in mind that most reports thus far are from those particular areas (ibid.).

According to the national police, the new law against purchasing sex is impeding the establishment of trafficking in Sweden. Evidence from telephone taps indicates that traffickers and pimps have experienced difficulty in finding prostitution clients. Demand for the women's services has been less, and the profits lower, than the perpetrators have anticipated. They do not dare to place the women on the street, and the risk of discovery is always present. Some pimps have said that, as a result, they prefer to conduct their activities in Norway and Denmark (see also *Rikskriminalpolisen, rapport 2004:2*).

If they are to maintain that point of view, note our informants with the national police, it is essential to continue applying active measures. Guilty verdicts on criminal charges appear to have a deterrent effect; those imposed on pimps send a strong signal about the risks associated with trafficking in Sweden. It is a signal that is directed first and foremost to those who are responsible for trafficking, but is also intended for clients, women engaged in prostitution and the general public.

### **Trafficking in Norrbotten**

During recent years, especially 2002 and 2003, reports and statements about a growing trade with Russian women in the northern region of Norrbotten have issued from daily newspapers, the police, women's crisis centres, politicians and others.

Police, customs officials and other sources describe how Russian women from the Murmansk region cross the border with Finland and are then transported to various locations in Finland, Norway and Sweden where they offer sexual services to men. It is said that there are well-known locations for such activity, for example parking areas, petrol stations and campsites.

One of our informants described how Russian women are transported from Murmansk to a permanent location in Finland where they remain during Thursday through Sunday every week. The women are fetched by men from Sweden in their cars, or travel by taxi to parties, bachelor parties, sauna evenings, etc.

According to the national police force, it is probably the economic situation in Murmansk which makes it relatively easy to recruit women to serve as prostitutes in Norrbotten. In order to support themselves and their children, some women— including well-educated professionals— see no other solution than to sell their bodies for perhaps an entire weekend to men of Swedish and other nationalities.

The national police also note that new visa regulations in the Nordic countries have led to an increase in the number of visitors from the Barents region. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of border crossings between Russia and Finland, offering new opportunities for travel between the two countries.

The ages of the Russian women vary, but our informants estimate that many of them are relatively young; the majority are reported to have been born in the 1960s and '70s. Police have also received tips about women under the age of 18 (*Hivaktuellt* nr 4, 2003).

Our informant at Iris, a women's crisis centre in the northern Swedish city of Luleå, reports that most of the Russian women are treated very badly. Violence and sexual assault are common features of their prostitution activities.

There has also been a large increase in the abuse of heroin in northern Russia, and our informant in the northern town of Haparanda points out that this has led to an increased risk of HIV infection. An increased risk of antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis connected with trafficking has also been mentioned.

The extent of Russian prostitution in Norrbotten is difficult to determine; different figures have been reported by the national police and the Norrbotten regional police authority. It is also unclear how the women are organized; but several reports have referred to an extensive network of pimps (*Hivaktuellt*, nr 4, 2003).

The national police feel that the information currently available indicates that the trade is well-organized. But whether it takes place in violation of Swedish laws on trafficking and procuring is not clear.

According to informants at the Iris crisis centre in Luleå, most of the tips they receive tend to reinforce the suspicion that many people are involved in organizing the Russian prostitution in Norrbotten.

Our informants point out that, in the long run, in order to alter conditions for trafficking in Sweden, structural changes are needed in the countries of origin. Under current conditions, young women in impoverished countries are easy prey for those who exploit hopes of earning money to cover their daily expenses or to finance a decent future.

Among the efforts being made to counteract that syndrome are a project in Murmansk that is financed by the Swedish International Development Agency. The aim is to get through to vulnerable Russian women by means of various campaigns. One of these involves the use of advertisements, posted on buses and other public spaces, which warn of the risks that may be involved in offers of certain kinds of work abroad.

In another project, information handbills are distributed to both women and clients. The one for women contains information about the risks associated with prostitution, along with telephone numbers to women's crisis cen-

tres in Sweden, Norway and Finland. The handbills are meant to be available to the women when they visit consulates to apply for visas. The handbills for prostitution clients are to be distributed at a variety of locations, including travel agencies that arrange trips to Russia.

## Men who sell sex

The knowledge provided by various informants regarding men who sell sex to other men has been briefly reviewed above. All of the informants had knowledge of individual men who sell sex, but they had difficulty estimating its extent. This type of prostitution is less visible, and it can be difficult to "interpret the code". However, some experience has been acquired in connection with several related projects (see below).

Through its treatment programme, the Prostitution Centre comes in contact with men engaged in prostitution. Their numbers include men who got started in prostitution via video clubs and, according to them, it is easy to make contact with clients. ("All you have to do is go there and wait for somebody to ask.") The Prostitution Centre has also been in contact with men who have sold sex to woman or heterosexual couples.

The Centre reports that the problems of males engaged in prostitution are similar to those of women engaged in prostitution. Both sexes have the same kinds of thoughts, emotions and experiences that need to be dealt with. But it is likely that the problems of men engaged in prostitution are more concealed than those of their female counterparts. Among other things, the report of the 1993 prostitution commission mentions the double taboo associated with male prostitution, which results in its being more hidden than is the case with heterosexual varieties (SOU 1995:15).

In the previous survey of the National Board of Health and Welfare, informants reported that feelings of shame can be stronger among women engaged in prostitution, compared with females in the same situation. The males may therefore find it more difficult to talk about their experiences (*SoS-rapport 2000:5*).

## A qualitative interview survey

The Federation of Sexual Equality's counselling centre in the Skåne region has conducted a project on male prostitution<sup>17</sup>. In the course of its counselling and treatment sessions over the years, the centre's personnel have met a number of men who have engaged in prostitution; to some extent, so have the Federation's outreach personnel. In order to acquire greater knowledge, a qualitative interview survey was conducted for the purpose of investigating the situations of men engaged in prostitution— their motives and strategies, what kinds of problems they encounter and how they deal with them.

There was some difficulty in finding suitable subjects, but eventually six men were interviewed. One had no experience of selling sex, but planned soon to begin doing so via the Internet. The six men ranged in age from 18 to 22 at the time of the interviews, and two had started in prostitution while

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<sup>17</sup> A written report by project leader Niklas Eriksson is to be published during 2004.

they were still minors. Five had some other principal source of income at a level no lower than that provided by the Swedish national system of loans to university students for their living costs. The sixth was still residing in the parental home. None of them reported using illegal drugs.

None of them said anything about being subjected to sexual abuse during childhood, and five described their family backgrounds as stable and affectionate.

With one exception, their entry into prostitution had been preceded by a fairly long period during which they contemplated the question of whether or not to start. The six men also had very active sex lives. All of them said that their motive for starting with prostitution was money— more precisely, "that little bit extra" for travel, electronic equipment, furniture, etc. One respondent also named excitement and adventure as additional motives.

Two of the men had limited their prostitution activities to periods when they were studying abroad, with the explanation that their student loans did not cover all their expenses and they regarded no other alternatives as feasible. Their prostitution ceased when their foreign studies were concluded.

For a couple of the men, prostitution seemed to be a useful method of combining the acquisition of money with their own desires for anonymous sexual encounters. An especially attractive client might be offered sex at a lower price, for example.

For the other interview subjects, prostitution was an occasional means of earning income within the framework of an otherwise well-ordered existence, or a way to earn extra income for some desired benefit such as a trip abroad or a residence. A couple of the men lived in stable relationships in which both partners sold sex during a limited time until they accumulated enough for a major expenditure of some sort.

In one or two cases, relationships with regular clients developed into something like a friendship which happened to include the sale of sex for payment.

Thus emerges a somewhat different view of prostitution, one that appears to include mutual interest and advantage. This may be partly explained by the concept of sexuality which is found in some homosexual circles, wherein sex is something that can be obtained with relative ease and convenience by means of brief anonymous encounters, for example via Internet chat rooms, clubs or on the street (Ross *et al.*, 2000).

Several of the men were quite aware that prostitution could lead to undesirable side-effects on feelings and relationships, for example. They were also anxious about the possibility that their social networks might learn of their prostitution activities.

These men used the Internet to get clients, and several reported that they had been subjected to bullying, harassment and threats from other users of the same web sites. One of them had been raped by men who knew that he sold sexual services. Some of the men described how they actively attempt to keep their prostitution activities separate as a limited part of their lives in order to avoid negative consequences for their identities. They seem to regard prostitution as a special area of activity which one may enter and leave at will. The Federation for Sexual Equality's counselling centre in the Skåne

region has speculated that this might be a defensive strategy to avoid being influenced too greatly by various negative consequences.

The fact that this type of prostitution is subject to threats and harassment demonstrates that it, too, is deeply stigmatized. The risk of threats, violence and rape may also be greater than for female prostitution, inasmuch as men are much less likely to report such incidents to the police.

Research in this area shows that some prostitution clients are ambivalent in their relationship to homosexuality and that some may even be homophobic. This may lead to emotional conflicts in clients, who then take out their frustration and aggression on sellers: "It's not enough that your a queer—you're a whore, as well!" (Keeler & Jyrkinen, 1999).

### **Stockholm outreach programme**

Through an outreach programme directed to men engaged in prostitution that was conducted by the Stockholm prostitution team during 2002, some fifty men aged 18-25 were identified engaged in prostitution.<sup>18</sup> They were contacted in public places where there were many other people moving about.

The team's description of these men complements the picture of homosexual men engaged in prostitution that has been drawn above. The description may be said to correspond with the widely prevailing view of men who sell sex in parks, clubs, train stations, etc. The prostitution team has learned from other sources (e.g. a youth outreach programme) that there are some twenty men who sell sex in such settings and are in very poor condition, physically and emotionally.

For these young men, prostitution is reported to be part of a general pattern of self-destruction and self-contempt, with backgrounds that include sexual assault and other abuse. They sell sex in brief encounters, making frequent use of mobile telephones. Most of them were already known to outreach personnel in connection with substance abuse, homelessness and/or emotional problems. Quite often they have immigrant backgrounds (*Hivak-tuellt* nr 4, 2003; see also Svedin and Priebe, 2004, in which boys with immigrant backgrounds were over-represented among those who reported selling sex).

### **Men who sell sex to women**

Some informants have direct or second-hand knowledge of men who sell sex to women and heterosexual couples. However, there is a great lack of knowledge regarding the extent and conditions of such activity, including how contacts are made and the effects on those involved.

The National Board of Health and Welfare's previous report on this subject (SoS-rapport 2000:5) referred to a few municipalities where this type of prostitution was reported to have occurred (six municipalities in 1998 and six in 1999); but there was no information about its extent.

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<sup>18</sup> See also proceedings of an all-day seminar on the subject of young men engaged in prostitution, which was held on 16 May 2002.

A study conducted in Finland found that this type of prostitution takes place, but not to any great extent. The most common methods of contact are via advertisements in the daily press and on the Internet. The men included in the study conveyed a certain occupational pride in their ability to satisfy many women sexually. But they also had feelings of shame and a sense of stigmatization, as with other forms of prostitution. Even though they sometimes felt that the surrounding world regards them as "gigolos", a somewhat less negative label, they would never admit to friends and acquaintances that they sell sex.

They feel a certain superiority in relation to the buyer because they take the active role. But they also perceive themselves as "made-to-measure merchandise whose attractiveness is based largely on how well-equipped they are" (Keeler and Jyrkinen, 1999, p. 70).

A majority of these men are also students or have a regular occupation, and regard prostitution as a quick way to earn a little extra money (Keeler and Jyrkinen, 1999).

Currently in progress at the Göteborg School of Social Work is a study of men who sell sex to women. The study includes interviews with both men who sell and women who buy sex.

## Prostitution clients

The foregoing section on violence included a review of reports which indicate that purchasers of sexual services now appear to be "more dangerous" and make "weirder demands" than before the new law against buying sex. As previously noted, our informants report that there are now fewer prostitution clients in the streets. The following section analyses that trend on the basis of interview data.

It is reported that, in those parts of Stockholm where street prostitution is conducted, the amount of traffic has declined and prospective clients stop their cars for only a brief moment. Some are regular visitors, but many new clients have also been observed. According to the police, the prostitution clients that are involved in arrests usually do not have any record of other offences. The police say that they "could be anyone".

The Göteborg police report a fairly large number of cars with lone men who circle the prostitution district. Most of the buyers with whom the police come in contact are described as men with jobs and family lives. But there are also single men, substance abusers, and men known to the police from other criminal contexts.

The ages of the men vary from just over 20 to 75 years, but the largest category is estimated to be around 50 years. When the police make an arrest, it comes as a shock to many of the men and most of them confess.

After the new law went into effect, the pattern of prostitution-related traffic in Malmö changed in much the same way as it did in Stockholm, with briefer contacts between buyer and seller. Such contacts are now reported to have again become more open, although they are slightly fewer in number than before the new law. The police estimate the average age of prostitution clients to be around 45. The youngest encountered was 19, and the oldest 79.

In this context, it may also be noted that some of the youth health clinics which have provided information to this study report that they occasionally come in contact with young men who have purchased sex (quite often abroad), and that some of them have been worried that they might have been infected with one or another venereal disease.

### **Motives of prostitution clients**

The previous study of the National Board of Health and Welfare included interviews with a number of men who had purchased sex. Although the focus at that time was on their views of the new law against purchasing sex, some information about their motives for buying sex also emerged from the interviews.

Some of the men said that they bought sex to satisfy particular desires, others because sexual relations with their life partners were not satisfactory. Some said they had difficulty making contact with the opposite sex, still others were seeking excitement and variation. These responses correspond well with the results of other research in this area (see also *SoS-rapport 2000:5*).

Those among our informants who encounter prostitution clients in treatment contexts (especially the Stockholm clinic of the Association for Sex Education and the KAST programme in Göteborg) also speak of motives that lie at a deeper psychological level (which does not necessarily exclude the above-mentioned motives).

KAST personnel say that most of the prostitution clients who previously sought their services fit the description of the "classic sex buyer" (see motives described above), but that they now encounter increasing numbers who themselves define their problem as compulsive sexual behaviour. In addition to their purchases of sexual services, many of them are also heavy consumers of pornography in video films, magazines and on the Internet.

According to informants at KAST, the men sexualize feelings such as sorrow, loss, rage, etc. It has to do with sexual identity and lack of love, affirmation and self-esteem, but also with relationships that have cooled, lack of time, sex lives that have ceased or stagnated, partners who no longer see each other.

Most of the men who seek help from KAST live together with a life partner, and many of them have children. Their average age is fairly high, but increasing numbers of younger men (under age 30) are seeking help.

The experience of KAST is very similar to that of the Association for Sex Education's clinic (see also section below, "The well-established"). Clinic personnel believe that prostitution clients seek the illusion that the transaction is about sexuality and that it includes an element of mutuality. Underneath it all is a weak self-image and problems with emotional intimacy in relationships, even though prostitution clients may have partners and outwardly seem to be socially well-adjusted.

According to the Association for Sex Education, a history of traumatic experiences of various kinds may also be involved. The sexual compulsion is experienced as a torment. It is often that torment or the threat of ruining a

stable relation that provides the motivation to do something about the problem.

Several informants also say that there are prostitution clients who feel profound self-contempt. This tends to be confirmed by reports of men who purchase sex from a "confused, emotionally disturbed woman who has wet herself", or a "heroin addict with foul-smelling abscesses".

### **Men who buy sex from men**

The study conducted by the Skåne counselling centre of the Federation for Sexual Equality also yielded a picture of men who buy sex from men, which was based on information that the interview subjects provided about their clients. The latter are said to be 35–55 years of age and can be sorted into four categories:

- The first category consists of *heterosexual men* or, rather, men who outwardly maintain such a facade. They do not want to openly demonstrate that they have sexual relations with other men, and buy discretion.
- The second category is comprised of "*insecure clients*", men who can be openly homo- or heterosexual. Due to low self-esteem, they feel that they are not able to attract other men for sexual encounters without paying for them.
- A third group consists of "*regular clients*". The interview subjects explained that, in some cases, they had developed friendships with such clients. They met for sex on a regular basis, perhaps once a month. The money was left on the table and there was no longer any discussion of payment for sexual services.
- In the fourth category were men described as "*repulsive old buggers*"—buyers who aroused disgust, due to extremely unpleasant odours for example.

### **Pimps and other promoters**

It has been previously noted that there are boyfriends who receive compensation for "loaning out" their girlfriends to perform sexual services, and that there are men who lock in women and force them to provide sexual services to other men in exchange for payment.

Thus, there are women who are forced into prostitution by men who act as pimps, and women who are confined in prostitution by threats, etc.<sup>19</sup> Within an international perspective, however, it appears that these practices are less common in Sweden than in many other countries, especially those in the Third World and in Eastern and Central Europe (Hedin and Månsson, 1998).

According to our informants, many of the women have a relationship with someone whom they support with their prostitution. They report that it is

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<sup>19</sup> Pimping appears to be most common in connection with women engaged in prostitution (Keeler & Jyrkinen, 1999). That appearance may, however, be partly explained by the fact that the world of male prostitution is less open to observation (Pettersson & Tiby, 2002).

primarily substance abusing women who finance their own and their partners' habits by means of prostitution. The informants say that the women seldom see this as a prostitute-pimp relationship, but rather one that is purely romantic. This is also described in other research, for example that of Månsson and Hedin (1998) who describe the prostitute-pimp relationship as one that is based on strong emotional dependence– the woman's desire to be seen and loved in combination with the man's emotional coldness, manipulation and violence.

Such a relationship develops in three stages. The first is characterized by seduction, promises and the exercise of psychological influence. Economic exploitation and the use of force characterize the second stage. In the third stage, the women attempts to free herself and the man responds with psychological and physical abuse.

Hanna Olsson (1981) describes how the woman, at the start, seldom sees the relationship as one involving a pimp, but rather as a normal relationship which she supports by earning money for them both through prostitution. The money may be used to finance such things as travel, a new start in life, or the drug habits of one or both parties.

Informants relate that, in addition to pimps, there are many other men who in various ways promote and, in some cases, earn money from prostitution. There are those who mediate the sale of sexual services, or promote prostitution by "looking through their fingers". These may include taxi drivers, hotel owners and clerks, and security personnel at spas hotels, restaurants. Also referred to as promoters are individuals who assist in designing web sites for advertising sexual services.

Our informants, including those with the prostitution teams, also know of women who have previously engaged in prostitution but have gone over to managing escort services. They have the kinds of contacts that are needed to "make a success" of that business. Last but not least, there is usually someone– often a woman friend– who initiates the new recruit in the ways of the street.

Given that pimping frequently takes place within the context of a love relationship with no element of trafficking, it may not always match the common view of pimps. This type of relationship contrasts with the situation in Finland where, in recent years, the authorities have seen indications that prostitution in that country is firmly controlled by various criminal elements. Those indications have now been corroborated by research findings and by national agencies, including the Finnish police.

According to a report by Jari Leskinen (2003)<sup>20</sup>, the Finnish sex trade is firmly controlled by Estonian and Russian criminal organizations which have divided Finland into districts operated by pimps, who in turn are controlled by criminal bosses in Estonia or Russia. Both the women and the pimps in the sex trade are controlled with threats, economic sanctions and violence. Some of the women are Finnish, but most have been brought into Finland from neighbouring countries by criminal organizations.

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<sup>20</sup> Jari Leskinen, a researcher with Finland's National Bureau of Investigation, publisher of the report.

According to Leskinen, the system is constructed so that each pimp takes a certain percentage of the earnings (usually in the form of money) of each woman engaged in prostitution, and pays a portion of that amount to the Estonian or Russian bosses (Leskinen, 2003).

Leskinen notes in his report that the women are not bound by lifetime agreements, but sign contracts for specific lengths of time. He also states that a certain amount of prostitution in Finland is not organized in this way.

It is not clearly established that the Russian and Estonian criminal organizations are involved in the prostitution that takes place in the Norrbotten region of Sweden; but Leskinen claims that there are strong indications of such connections.

Our informants with the Swedish national police force say that these reports are very worrying, and that one must be on the alert for any such tendency. Thus far, however, they have observed no indications of such a development in Sweden.

## Prostitution as an occupation

There is one view of prostitution that did not emerge from your interviews, but should be mentioned nevertheless. Research conducted in The Netherlands found that one-fourth of the 187 women included in the study who sold sex were content with their work (Vanwesenbeeck, 1994). However, the remaining 75 per cent of the women engaged in prostitution were in poorer health than a control group of non-prostitutes.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, 25 per cent of the women regarded prostitution as a simple business enterprise which could provide job satisfaction and was comparable to any other kind of work. "Sex worker" is the term used in The Netherlands where, as in several other countries, there are labour unions which seek to improve working conditions for both men and women engaged in prostitution.<sup>22</sup>

This concept of prostitution predominates in The Netherlands and several other European countries. Prostitution, sex-purchasing and bordellos are legal in several member-states of the European Union (EU). The extent of sex-purchasing and prostitution is greater in most of those countries than in Sweden. The fact that Sweden is a member of the EU, where acceptance of prostitution is more widespread, may of course influence public debate and efforts to eliminate prostitution in Sweden. There are, for example, prominent Swedish public debaters who advocate the approach of The Netherlands and other countries with similar policies.

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<sup>21</sup> One-fourth of the 187 women suffered from serious stress, with poor physical and mental health, and a strong tendency to risk-taking behaviour. Other women— fifty per cent of the 187— formed an intermediate subgroup with poorer health than the control group. Determining how these women felt were primarily such factors as childhood experiences, their financial situations, survival and control strategies (e.g. switching off emotions, trivializing physical or psychological abuse), support from other women, and contacts with sex-purchasers. See Månsson & Hedin (1998) for a useful summary of Vanwesenbeeck's study and a discussion of the results in relation to other research on prostitution.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, interview with Rosinha Sambo in *Hivaktuellt* 2003:4.

Our informants do not seem to encounter women who experience prostitution as unproblematic. This may be due to the informants' occupational function with regard to prostitution. They are partly or entirely concerned with encouraging, supporting and helping men and women to leave prostitution and to process their negative experiences as prostitutes. It is from the informants and their agencies that men and women seek assistance in extricating themselves from prostitution. Therefore, it is hardly likely that our informants develop close contacts with women who do not feel that they have need of such assistance.

Previously in this report, it has also been noted that not all women engaged in prostitution seek contact with a social services prostitution team, for example. There are several reasons for this; but for some of the women, it may well be that prostitution is experienced as unproblematic— at least for the time being (see below).

A similar selection process applies to those who purchase sexual services. Those who seek out the KAST programme, or the Association for Sex Education clinic, experience their sex-purchasing as a problem, while those who do not are understandably not inclined to seek help.<sup>23</sup>

It is also the case that, unlike Vanwesenbeeck, we have no way of estimating the proportion of "contented" women engaged in prostitution, compared with those who are harmed by it in various ways. Nor are we in a position to compare the perceived well-being of "contented" women engaged in prostitution with that of women who have never been involved in prostitution.

The view of prostitution presented here is also found in Petra Östergren's doctoral dissertation. Most of the female prostitutes she interviewed said that they had a positive attitude toward their activities (Östergren, 2003, p. 17). Some used prostitution to finance a career in sports or art; and two thought it was "jolly good fun" to sell sex. Some said that their self-confidence had increased as a result, and others felt that prostitution had enriched their lives both sexually and emotionally (ibid., p.16)<sup>24</sup>.

On the other hand, personnel at the Prostitution Centre were of the opinion that this is a common attitude among men and women who are still engaged in prostitution. They may express positive attitudes in the beginning, it is said, but that outlook tends to change when they leave their lives as prostitutes behind. Then, the positive attitude is replaced by painful memories.

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<sup>23</sup> However, there are examples of men who visit KAST when purchasing sex becomes a problem for their partners. There are also examples of close relations of women engaged in prostitution who contact various agencies out of concern for a sister, daughter, cohabitant, etc.

<sup>24</sup> However, the dissertation includes some information which can be interpreted to indicate that prostitution is not experienced as entirely without problems. As previously noted in the discussion concerning negotiations on the use of condoms (p. 32), some of Östergren's informants believe that the use of condoms is a point of honour for most prostitutes. Being forced to give up that demand in negotiations led, among other things, to lowered self-esteem and a sense of being dirty.

The clearest evidence that prostitution can be experienced as unproblematic (at least from a superficial standpoint) which we have come across emerged from the study conducted by the Federation for Sexual Equality.

Some of the (relatively few) homosexual men who were interviewed in connection with that study indicated that they could engage in prostitution without suffering emotional harm or identifying themselves as "whores", and without experiencing the feelings of shame and disgust that are often mentioned by other prostitutes.

The sexual transactions for which these men received payment have taken place in settings where brief, anonymous sexual encounters are more common and acceptable. On the other hand, the men also gave clear descriptions of the risks and problems which they perceived as being associated with prostitution, and they had developed various kinds of strategies for avoiding negative consequences.

# Measures against prostitution

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Following the foregoing views of prostitution's multi-faceted world, this section describes various types of support to prostitutes. The focus is on what can be done and is being done by the social services within the framework of their responsibilities, and also on the kinds of support needed by men and women involved in prostitution. Also discussed are a number of other measures and the need for preventive measures.

Based on the various views of prostitution conveyed by informants, one may speak of changing needs for support, preventive measures, etc., which respond to the many different kinds of prostitution. (Consider, for example, the difference between outreach programmes directed to street prostitutes and the above-noted work with Internet advertising.) Accordingly, some measures directed to specific subgroups will also be discussed.

## Responsibilities of social services

The responsibilities of Swedish social services are specified principally by the Social Services Act (2001:453). There is no specific provision regarding prostitution, but some clauses of the Act are relevant. One of these is Section 2, § 2, which includes the following:

*The municipality has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all those present in the municipality receive the support and assistance which they require.*

This general responsibility for the municipality's residents applies, of course, even to men and women involved in prostitution who need support and assistance. In Section 3, § 1 also contains relevant provisions. According to that clause, it is among the tasks of each municipality's social services committee to ". . . assume responsibility for care and service, information, counsel, general support, financial aid and other forms of assistance to families and individuals in need."

The social services also have special responsibility for children at risk or whose circumstances are problematical in other ways.

Section 5, § 1 of the Social Services Act specifies, among other things, that social services committees shall:

- actively seek to ensure that children and young people grow up under good and secure conditions
- in close co-operation with the home, promote the all-around personality development, and favourable physical and social development, of children and young people

- closely follow the development of children and young people who have displayed signs of unfavourable development
- work actively to prevent and counteract abuse of alcoholic drinks, other intoxicating or addictive substances, and doping preparations by children and young people
- in close co-operation with the home, assume responsibility for ensuring that children and young people who are at risk of developing unfavourably receive the protection and support they need and, if justified by consideration for the young person's best interests, care and guidance outside the parental home.

Complementing the Social Services Act is the Care of Young Persons Act (1990:52, abbrev. "LVU") which deals with situations in which voluntary measures, for various reasons, are not possible or are considered inadequate. The purpose of LVU is to make it possible for society to fulfil its obligation to satisfy children's and young people's needs for protection, care and treatment. In its § 3, LVU specifies the conditions under which young persons are to receive care due to their behaviour ("behavioural cases"). Those conditions are abuse of addictive substances, criminal activities, or some other socially destructive behaviour.

According to Section 3 of LVU, care may be ordered due to the behaviour of a young person who has not yet reached twenty years of age (LVU Section 1, para. 3). But in such cases, the behaviour of any such young persons must pose an evident risk that they, themselves, will be harmed by it.

The term, "socially destructive behaviour", refers to behaviour which deviates from the fundamental norms of society in a way that can lead to an evident risk to the young person's health or development. For example, the young person might engage in prostitution, perform at a sex club, or frequent settings where substance abuse takes place, including so-called drug-user neighbourhoods. Again, the behaviour must pose an evident risk to the young person's health or development. With regard to prostitution, this is a condition that probably applies in most cases (SOSFS 1997:15).

Section 1, § 1 of the Social Services Act stipulates that social services shall be based on respect for the individual's integrity and right to self-determination. In the work of social services relating to men and women involved in prostitution, it is important that any support provided be based on respect for the individual's own choices. It is also important to concentrate on making it possible for individuals to draw upon their own resources, and to support them in their life situations.

## Providing social services

Social service personnel come in contact with men and women engaged in prostitution in many different ways. In some cases, they contact social services, themselves, in order to request support and assistance in leaving prostitution. According to our informants, however, that kind of initiative is not very common; for a wide variety of reasons, prostitutes usually do not speak openly of their activities and experiences. Among those reasons may be that

prostitution is stigmatizing and is experienced by many of those involved as extremely shameful (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). That shame is an obstacle to seeking help, and an impediment to expressing one's need of help.

It is not unusual for prostitutes to erect a very defensive facade as a result of their difficult circumstances (Matthews & O'Neill, 2003). For women engaged in prostitution who have children, there is the additional anxiety that their children will be taken from them (Weiner, 1996).

For these reasons, the involvement of men and women in prostitution is usually not very evident when they come in contact with social services. They may have taken contact with social services for other purposes— to apply for financial assistance or in connection with substance abuse, for example.

Experience has shown that, to the extent that social services personnel are aware of clients' prostitution activities, they may play a secondary role in the support provided. Prostitution may, for example, be perceived as a free choice, and may therefore receive little or no priority in terms of support and assistance. As a result, the influence of prostitution on the individual's social situation may not be analysed (Matthews & O'Neill, 2003).

However, some of our informants take the definite standpoint that prostitution is not a free choice. That being the case, it constitutes a strong reason for providing support and assistance to affected individuals so that they can process their experiences of prostitution and other traumas.

According to some of our informants, however, there seems to be a reluctance among those who provide care to substance abusers to address issues of violence and sexuality in general, and prostitution in particular. One informant who has worked with treatment of substance abusers, argues that the care provided must meet the women's need to deal with specific problems and experiences in all-female groups. They need both time and the opportunity to deal not only with matters relating to substance abuse, but also to any prostitution experience they may have had and any related consequences for personal identity and self-esteem. Otherwise, according to several informants, there is a risk of relapse into both prostitution and substance abuse.

## Importance of being alert and receptive

From the interviews it emerges that some women have been dealing with social and/or psychiatric services for many years without these becoming aware that the women have prostituted themselves. This, even though the focus of such contacts has been on sensitive personal issues. But the women have seldom volunteered information about their prostitution activities, and no one has posed the question.

Inasmuch as shame and fear of authorities act as impediments to seeking help, it is important to be alert and receptive in dealing with these vulnerable individuals who have so many problems to cope with (interview with Sven-Axel Månsson in *Hivaktuellt*, 2003). One must dare to pose the question of prostitution, and to follow it up.

There are also factors which make it difficult for the social services and other agencies to detect prostitution. Examples include time pressures, atti-

tudes toward and inadequate knowledge of the sex trade and those who have been involved in it. This may in turn lead to lack of understanding and empathy (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). In order to determine if someone is involved in prostitution, it is important that social services personnel are able to recognize the signs, including the consequences of prostitution.

As other research and several of our informants have pointed out, it is not uncommon that prostitutes indulge in various patterns of overconsumption—e.g. going into debt by spending large amounts of money despite limited financial resources, or in other ways displaying a complicated relationship to money. Several examples of such patterns have been given previously. In addition, prostitution can also be associated with substance abuse and homelessness; it can be a means of gaining access to housing and/or narcotics (Börjesson, 1999).

With regard to women with serious problems of substance abuse, observe some of our informants, it is remarkable that the social services do not routinely ask how they finance their habits. This would make it possible to offer additional assistance in processing the women's prostitution experiences, if any.

From other interview surveys, it has also emerged that men and women engaged in prostitution often have a deep distrust of the authorities and the intervention of public officials. This distrust is based not only on fear and shame, but also on a struggle for independence and a desire to solve problems by oneself.

Since men and women of this description do not want to talk about their prostitution experiences, either, they may invent lies and leave gaps in descriptions of their situations in life (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). Important tasks for the social services are to: respectfully attempt to fill in any information gaps and find out why they exist; be more alert to any signs of overconsumption; and dare to raise the question of prostitution, especially in connection with homelessness and heavy substance abuse.

## Leaving prostitution

Drawing upon Fuchs Ebaugh's theory of the "process of role exit"<sup>25</sup>, Hedin and Månsson (1998) have described the process of leaving prostitution.

Ebaugh divides the exit process into four phases. The first two involve doubt and a quest for alternative ways of life. These can be seen as comprising a preliminary stage in preparation for the actual exit from prostitution. During the quest for another way of life, the prostitute periodically identifies with individuals who are living such a life, a counsellor for example

The third phase is called the *turning point*, which is often preceded by a sense of having reached bottom— "the straw that broke the camel's back". One example might be the threat of having one's children taken into custody by public authorities. Another might be pregnancy or childbirth. Pregnancy

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<sup>25</sup> In his book, Fuchs Ebaugh analyses exits from various kinds of role— from nun to former nun, a complete change of career, a sex change, from mother to former mother (by surrendering custody of one's children), etc. These apparently different types of role change have a number of aspects in common which form the basis of a role-exit process.

may be perceived as a way out of prostitution, due to a desire to provide one's children with a secure childhood. Expectant mothers may also fear that the stigma of prostitution will also affect their children.

The fourth phase, consisting of *shock and reaction*, is a period of crisis that follows the exit from prostitution. For some of the women, the pattern of reactions during this crisis period is very similar to post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). According to DSM-IV, this syndrome or pattern of reactions can occur after incidents of violence or other traumatic events that lead to psychic injury.

PTSD is characterized by a constant reliving of the event, emotional numbing and withdrawal. It involves a number of reactions, including persistent thoughts and memories, nightmares, anxiety, heightened alertness, self-blame, lowered self-esteem, irritability and concentration difficulties.

Some of our informants who encounter women formerly engaged in prostitution during the crisis period refer to it as a very difficult time during which the women have a great need for support and assistance. The emphasis is on understanding and processing their experiences, and memories of prostitution can arouse feelings of disgust and nausea.

Several of our informants, including personnel at the Prostitution Centre and with the prostitution teams, also refer to the ability to deal with prostitution by "switching off" emotions, thoughts, impressions and experiences. By doing so, men and women engaged in prostitution can distance themselves from what is happening. This switching-off mechanism can be explained with the concept of *dissociation*, which can be described as a psychological defence against traumatic events.

According to the research literature, dissociation is a reaction that is more common among children than adults, and among girls than boys; but it does occur among adult men and women, as well. In order to endure a traumatic experience, one may dissociate— a sort of internal flight— in order to subdue the physical stress reaction. This may mean that one "goes along", switches off emotions, feels that one is separate from one's body or is somewhere else, displays odd behaviour, etc.

Daydreaming and fantasizing are other forms of dissociation; so is the development of multiple personalities, which lies at the other extreme. The latter is a common defence mechanism among children who have been subjected to sexual assault or other psychologically overwhelming events (Perry *et al.*, 1996). The ability to switch off emotions can be developed at an early age by men and women engaged in prostitution who have been victims of assault during childhood.

Several challenges may arise during and after the exit from prostitution. The first task is to process one's experiences as a prostitute. Among other things, this involves dealing with a sense of shame toward oneself and before others. Former prostitutes also find themselves in a transition zone between two different ways of life, and may have to remain there for a shorter or longer period of time.

Another challenge is to deal with close and intimate relations (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). Some informants report that many women engaged in prostitution develop great contempt for clients and that, after leaving prostitu-

tion, find it difficult to develop close relationships with men or avoid them altogether.

These challenges may also lead to a certain ambivalence toward the exit from prostitution, poses a risk of relapse. That risk is present not only during the period immediately following exit: Several of our informants tell of women who "return to the streets" several years later. One informant feels that it is a major adjustment to endure a normal existence after prostitution has become a part of one's daily life; it may be regarded as a viable alternative in the event of financial difficulties. The way of life and milieu of prostitution may also exert an attraction, possibly because it offers at least some sort of security— something one knows how to do, compared with a new and unfamiliar situation.

In short, it is not a simple process to extricate oneself from prostitution. It is something that one has to struggle with for a long time after leaving that way of life (Matthews & O'Neill, 2003).

### **Role of authorities in exit process**

Both our interviews and other research yield evidence that the experiences of prostitutes may lead to complex needs for support. Through their work in this area, social services personnel encounter many individuals who live in difficult social circumstances and are often subjected to abuse. In many cases, it is largely a matter of providing resources and supporting men and women engaged in prostitution in their contacts with social workers, healthcare personnel, police and other public officials. Basic resources such as housing, employment and living expenses are important underpinnings on which to build a new life (Hedin, 2002).

The transition zone in the process of leaving prostitution has been previously mentioned. Coping with its conditions is made more difficult by the fact that former prostitutes often live in relative isolation, with few support persons nearby. Consequently, the risk of relapse is often very great (SOU 1995:16, p. 115). This isolation is mentioned by several of our informants, who report that it is not unusual for them to serve as alternative "social networks" for many of their clients. Many informants have been invited to join in the celebration of birthdays, holidays, a new job or home, and other special occasions. One informant told, for example, of a woman who waited several hours for an unscheduled meeting because she wanted to show off her son's school marks and had no one else to turn to for that purpose.

In addition to providing certain basic resources, therefore, it is at least as important to try to strengthen the self-esteem of men and women formerly engaged in prostitution, and to serve as a source of support in times of change (SOU 1995:16). This may be done by means of a designated support person, for example.

Our informants emphasize the importance of showing respect for the former prostitutes and the choices they make, and also to inform them about various opportunities for assistance. It is a question of helping them to di-

scover their own strengths, abilities and other valuable assets. In other words, it is a question of *empowerment*.

## **Empowerment**

An important question in this context is whether or not these men and women are to be rescued from a life in prostitution, or if that life is to be regarded as a choice to be respected. Not infrequently, attitudes toward men and women engaged in prostitution are very close to a stereotypical image of them as victims and not much else. This in turn may lead to the notion that they neither can nor should make any decision for themselves— other than that they must leave prostitution. The opposite view is that prostitution is a free choice and, that as long as it does not disturb the general public, they may continue to engage in it. (See for example the foregoing section on "Prostitution as an occupation", and the view of prostitution as a simple business transaction.)

What is seldom presented, however, is a view of these men and women as resourceful individuals— the principal actors in their own lives— whose situation in life drains their vitality, and who therefore may need support in order to discover their own strengths and make their own choices (Weitzer, 2000).

Many of our informants state that it is very important not to see men and women engaged in prostitution merely as victims, but to exploit their strengths. They possess great ability to devise survival strategies to cope with their difficult situations. One informant points out that it takes time to build up trust, but that once it is established, there are substantial personal resources to draw upon.

This is also the view of Pro Sentret in Norway, which argues that seeing prostitutes only as victims denies them respect for their ability to make their own choices (Pro Sentret, 2002).

Within the field of social work, the term "empowerment" is increasingly used as a guiding principle which is based on the approach outlined above. The idea is to help clients acquire the power to make decisions and take initiatives regarding their own lives. This is done by:

- 1) diminishing the effect of anything that may be hindering clients from making use of their abilities
- 2) increasing their self-confidence and capacity to make use of their abilities
- 3) transferring power to clients from their surroundings (Payne, 1997).

In the Norwegian Pro Sentret's annual report for 2002, empowerment is described in relation to prostitution. The basic idea is that the individual comes first, and that emphasis should be on clients learning how to reduce their sense of powerlessness, achieving greater control over their daily lives, and being provided with opportunities to alter their circumstances.

Since men and women engaged in prostitution comprise a segment of society that is underprivileged and stigmatized, they often internalize society's view of prostitution and blame themselves for their powerlessness. For such

individuals, promoting empowerment would appear to be a good approach, since it is based on the notion that clients know best what their needs are, and what would be good, useful and important for them.

## Tailored assistance

In Sweden, there are now three prostitution teams within the social services— in Stockholm<sup>26</sup>, Göteborg and Malmö. The teams combine various aspects of social work, including outreach activities in the street milieu (and to some extent also via the Internet), support, counselling, treatment and the dissemination of knowledge. The main purpose of the teams is to help men and women extricate themselves from prostitution.

Preventive efforts are also important. Among other things, they include impeding new recruitment to prostitution, and providing information to political leaders and other decision-makers, voluntary organizations, students, and all those involved in the sex trade.

In Stockholm, the Prostitution Centre directs itself to individuals who are now or have been previously engaged in prostitution. Along with the prostitution team, the Centre is part of the social services. It works with support to individuals, crisis handling, processing traumatic experiences from the past, preventive measures, and disseminating information about prostitution. Clients are dealt with both individually and in groups.

Like the prostitution team, the Centre operates a telephone hotline in order to augment its accessibility. But it does not conduct any outreach activities.

Experience has shown that, in their encounters with the social services, it is important for women engaged in prostitution that they deal with someone whom they can trust and who is accessible even after normal working hours. Social workers' knowledge of prostitution is important for the women engaged in it. Social workers can also suggest alternative ways of life and encourage women engaged in prostitution to change (SOU 1995:16, p. 27 ff.).

In their work, the prostitution teams emphasize the importance of establishing good relationships with the client. This requires that the work be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the individual. Respect, empathy and understanding are key attributes in this context; they are necessary in order to make change possible (*ibid.*).

In connection with the 1993 public inquiry into prostitution, the relevant social work was documented and evaluated (SOU 1995:16). Among other things, the commissioners concluded that the Swedish prostitution teams conducted an effective and sometimes highly diverse programme of social work in this area at a relatively low cost. They also proposed methodological improvements, expanded knowledge, public discussion of the issues, and the development of special forms of support for certain categories of prostitute.

Ten years have elapsed since that evaluation of special measures against prostitution. Presumably, there is a current need to assess what additional resources are required, the effect of measures taken thus far, and the compa-

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<sup>26</sup> In Stockholm, the prostitution team is part of the outreach unit.

rative success of various strategies. There is also a need for a systematic compilation of knowledge derived from evaluations of various measures against prostitution in all parts of the world.

## Efforts in smaller municipalities

Prostitution is not only a big-city phenomenon. It also takes place in smaller towns in various parts of the country. The previous study of prostitution by the National Board of Health found that 48 of Sweden's 290 municipalities had knowledge of women engaged in prostitution within their jurisdictions during 1999 (*SoS-rapport 2000:5*). According to the 2002 annual report of Pro Sentret in Norway, eighty per cent of its clients reported that they had engaged in prostitution in municipalities other than the capital city of Oslo. But the social services, political leaders and other officials in the smaller towns were unaware that prostitution had taken place there.

Respondents to the interviews on which this report is based also relate that prostitution takes place in smaller municipalities. Some women engaged in prostitution are said to move about and service clients in various towns according to an established schedule. Others are said to travel to the major cities from surrounding areas to engage in prostitution on the street or in restaurants and the like. Homeless women may prostitute themselves in various parts of the country. In such cases, it may be difficult to determine which municipality is responsible for providing support— the municipality of residence, the one where the prostitution takes place, or the one where the prostitute seeks assistance.

Smaller municipalities hardly have the resources to establish prostitution teams or similar programmes. It may also be difficult to acquire and maintain the necessary competence and facilities to deal with problems of prostitution. In that case, co-operating with neighbouring municipalities and/or consulting experts may be viable alternatives. Another alternative is to employ a social worker with special competence in this area, in the same way that some smaller municipalities have employed social workers with up-to-date knowledge and skills for helping female victims of violence.

## Other measures

Voluntary organizations such as the City Mission carry out extensive measures on behalf of homeless women. These include outreach programmes, daytime services, emergency housing and various kinds of support— in some cases on assignment from municipal social services.

The Spiral Project in Stockholm and the needle-exchange centre in Malmö offer out-patient care and gynaecological services for women engaged in prostitution and/or substance abuse. For women engaged in prostitution, however, a visit to a gynaecologist can be very difficult, since the genital region is associated with unpleasant experiences, memories and feelings of disgust.

The Spiral Project offers counselling and deep interviews to women who are or have been engaged in prostitution. Project personnel also co-operate with other key societal actors and resources, including social workers, tre-

atment centres, housing managers, and various medical specialists (Söderberg, 1996).

### **Pregnancy and children**

As previously mentioned, a pregnancy may be a turning point that results in a decision to free oneself from drug addiction and prostitution. However, women who make such decisions are often socially isolated, with few support persons nearby, and may therefore need relief from the burdens of parenthood and other kinds of help (Hedin & Månsson, 1998).

A woman who receives strong support can break a destructive pattern and become a good parent (Trulsson, 1998; see also Hedin & Månsson, 1998). However, both our interview survey and other research have found that some women engaged in prostitution have profound emotional problems which make them ill-suited for parenthood unless they receive treatment and have a long period in which to process their experiences. In addition, there are serious risks of damage to the foetus if the mother continues to use drugs during pregnancy (Weiner 1996).

According to our informants, those who sell sex usually demand that the buyer use a condom (cf. p. 32). But several informants have cited examples of women who have been impregnated by clients, not their partners. The children who result risk being "fatherless", as there is seldom any possibility of determining who is the biological father.

There are also examples of children who grow up in milieus where prostitution takes place– when the mother receives clients in the home, for example. At present, there is little knowledge about any significance this might have for the child's development, sexuality and future relationships. In addition to the potential influence of growing up in a prostitution milieu, the child may be harmed by the mother's double life, and by any emotional coldness that may result from her experiences as a prostitute.

According to Hedin and Månsson, the sense of shame vis à vis the surrounding world is something that must be dealt with, both during and after one's life as a prostitute. Since such a heavy stigma is attached to prostitution, it is something that many of the women attempt by all possible means to keep secret from their surroundings, especially if they have children.

Several women formerly engaged in prostitution have told of their efforts to create a better existence for their children with their earnings from prostitution (Hedin & Månsson, 1998). But at the same time, they live in great anxiety that their children or others in their surroundings will discover that they are prostituting themselves. If that happens, it could result in the mother being reported to the authorities, and possibly lead to her children being taken away. It is fear of such an outcome that compels women engaged in prostitution to lead a double life which can be difficult to maintain in the long run (Weiner, 1996). The children may also live in fear that others will learn that mother is a prostitute (SOU 1995:16).

## Measures directed to prostitution clients

Prostitution may have serious negative consequences for both buyers and sellers. Rehabilitation and support programmes must therefore be designed and developed for both categories (Keeler & Jyrkinen, 1999).

Research and practical experience clearly indicate that, in order to deal effectively with prostitution and eventually reduce its extent, it is necessary to work with clients. Without them, there would be no sex trade (Hedlund, 2000).

The KAST project, which is directed to buyers of sexual services, was started in Göteborg in 1997. Its purpose is to support those who want to change their life styles and stop buying sex. KAST operates a counselling centre and a telephone hotline; anyone who makes use of these services may remain anonymous (Hedlund, 2000).

As previously noted, our informants have said that buying sex may be a way of sexualizing emotional needs and feelings. With the help of a project like KAST, prostitution clients can learn how to channel their feelings in other ways. KAST now operates in Stockholm, as well as Göteborg, and there are plans for a third centre in Malmö.

The Association for Sex Education in Stockholm also offers treatment to prostitution clients. Since year 2000, the Association has been working with both men who buy sex and women who sell it. It offers sex counselling to others, as well, and has disseminated information about its prostitution-related activities via healthcare facilities, mass media, the Internet, etc..

According to information from the Association for Sex Education clinic, the prostitution project has thus far been contacted by around 160 individuals, most of them men, via telephone and e-mail.

The clinic also offers individual and group therapy, including everything from psychodynamic therapy to counselling sessions in combination with practical advice on how to avoid tempting situations. Roughly 30 men and 25 women have visited the clinic to meet with a psychotherapist (Svensson, 2003; RFSU, 2004).

## Need of preventive measures for young people

There is also a need for measures to prevent new recruitment to prostitution. Several informants report that men and women engaged in prostitution often relate that they started at an early age, in many cases as teenagers. As previously noted, minors are seldom observed in visible prostitution settings. But several informants have noted worrying indications that the younger generation is having difficulty setting limits, and may be developing a more accepting attitude toward prostitution and sexual abuse. In recent years, an increase in sexual harassment in the schools has also been the subject of attention (JämO, 2000).

A 1996 interview survey of teenagers aged 14-17 in Oslo, Norway, yielded information about prostitution activities among that age-group. Of those interviewed, 148 (1.4 per cent) reported that they had sold sex; 127 had done so during the preceding year, and half had done so more than ten times. Of the 148 who sold sex at least once, 116 were boys and 32 were

girls. The average age at which they began was just under thirteen for boys and around fourteen for girls. Two-thirds of those who sold sex were unknown to the authorities (Hegna & Pedersen, 2002).

In response to a Swedish interview survey, one per cent of the girls and 1.8 per cent of the boys said that they had sold sex. Five of the children were between 10-13 years old when they started, while the remaining 46 said that they had been 14-18 years old on the first occasion. Seventeen reported selling sex more than five times, ten reported a figure of 2-5 times, and seventeen said they had done so only once.

Based on its contacts with men engaged in prostitution, the Hope Society in Sweden states that the men have varied backgrounds, but that they have been subjected to sexual abuse during childhood and many started in prostitution as early as age 13-17 (Socialdepartementet, 2001).

The experience of Pro Sentret in Oslo indicates that young women may, in retrospect, note that their first prostitution activity took place within the context of something like a romantic relationship, but that they did not define it at the time as prostitution. These can be girls under age 18 who have "love relationships" with men up to age 45, and who allow themselves to be sexually exploited in exchange for drugs or other compensation. Pro Sentret personnel feel that it is important to focus attention on these "grey-zone relationships" and make young people more aware of the need to set limits (Misje & Matre, 2002).

Young people are often familiar with various contact possibilities via the Internet, which has also been documented as a channel for the spread of pornography and other sex-related materials. Several informants have got the impression that there has been a general lowering of the threshold for both the sale and purchase of sex, due to the fact that initial contacts via the Internet can be anonymous, invisible to anyone not directly involved, and can be followed up via mobile telephone.

Taken together, the new contact possibilities provided by the Internet and a possible shift in attitudes toward the sale of sex could have as a consequence that increasing numbers of young people come in contact with prostitution. It is therefore urgent to reach out to young people by various means in order to discuss sexuality, prostitution, limits for personal integrity, relationships, etc. The goal must be to establish a foundation for a sexuality based on mutual consideration and enjoyment, and to increase awareness of the harmful consequences that prostitution can have.

As previously noted, prostitution can be part of a generally destructive pattern of behaviour, both for men and women who buy and sell sex. Such behaviour may be a result of early victimization in the form of sexual assault or other abuse, or of emotional abandonment. Prostitution may also be an expression of low self-esteem or difficulties in forming close relationships; it may also be related to a pattern of compulsive sexual and risk-taking behaviour.

According to several sources, prostitution is often linked with self-harm and eating disorders among young people with emotional problems. These are usually young people who burden themselves with guilt, and deal with abuse or other problems by turning them inward against oneself, instead of

reacting outwardly. "Quiet" girls constitute a high-risk group, according to some sources.

A programme of prevention that was directed to youthful prostitutes in Oslo found that there are as many myths and prejudices about prostitution among them as among the general population. Among other things, the young prostitutes have preconceptions about the characteristics of a person who sells sexual services. They do not regard themselves as prostitutes, and do not use that word in reference to themselves. When the concept was formulated in other terms during discussions– for example, "to get things in exchange for sex. . . be asked by adults to follow them home. . . have sex in exchange for drugs"– the youths were more willing to tell of their experiences (Misje & Matre, 2002).

Preventive measures have two main components: the basic tasks of helping young people to strengthen their self-esteem, improve their ability to cope with difficulties, deal with relationships, etc.; and being on the watch for, detecting early, and supporting young people who show signs of emotional difficulties.

When young people show signs of self-harmful behaviour and eating disorders, it is important to be aware that prostitution may also be included in a general pattern of self-destructive behaviour. It is a question of confronting the problem, posing relevant questions, and discussing any involvement in prostitution. Youth health clinics can play an important role in this regard.

## Measures for women with impaired mental or physical function

Our informants are agreed that there are intellectually impaired and emotionally disturbed women involved in street prostitution. These women may not be entirely aware or capable of understanding that they are being exploited. Furthermore, social services and voluntary personnel in outreach programmes may experience difficulty in making contact with these women, many of whom emphatically reject such contacts.

These women may have numerous problems. One priority is to prevent them from becoming homeless, which can be a prelude to prostitution. It is necessary for those who encounter these women in professional contexts to become more aware that they comprise a category in which prostitution is known to occur. This in turn requires co-operation between social, psychiatric and rehabilitative services.

## Support for women with problems of substance abuse

Prostitution can be a consequence of a drug habit that has to be financed, and in some cases may be a gateway to substance abuse.

Prostitution is yet another reason to prevent young women from starting to use drugs or switching to more serious forms of substance abuse. It is important to identify individuals at risk, and to offer help and support when a crisis arises; this includes help in leaving violent relationships, and treat-

ment for substance abuse with a focus on the particular needs and problems of addicted women. Often, it is a romantic relationship that leads to substance abuse and to eventual relapses.

Treatment programmes for women with problems of substance abuse often focus on the actual abuse, and perhaps also on dealing with childhood experiences of sexual and other abuse. The additional abuse and painful emotional experiences associated with prostitution, on the other hand, are seldom discussed or resolved. But research and practical experience with treatment programmes directed to former prostitutes indicate that such issues need to be dealt with in order for the women to make progress and also to reduce the risk of relapse into both prostitution and substance abuse (Hedin & Månsson, 1998).

Both time and opportunity are needed to process experiences relating to substance abuse and to prostitution, including its consequences for self-esteem and personal identity.

Further, according to our informants, residing at a treatment centre may in itself constitute a problem for women engaged in prostitution. In treatment centres with a mixture of both men and women, the problems in relation to men of women engaged in prostitution may be expressed in the form of aggression; alternatively, they may sell sexual services during the treatment period.

Today, there are not very many treatment centres solely for women. But according to informants with relevant work experience, women-only treatment centres are preferable for most women currently or formerly engaged in prostitution. Many of them feel less threatened in such facilities, where it is easier to address such problems as prostitution, rape and physical abuse (Weiner, 1996). Even there, however, problems can arise; many former prostitutes have difficulty relating to other women, since relationships between them have previously been characterized by competition (Weitzer, 2000).

## Taboos, knowledge, attitudes

From the interview data, it is apparent that it is not uncommon for women engaged in prostitution to have contacts with social or psychiatric services for many years without their prostitution activities becoming known to the authorities. There are also cases of authorities having great difficulty in dealing with the situation on those occasions when women have related that they sold sex.

What is it about prostitution that arouses such strong emotions? According to Pro Sentret in Oslo, it is explained first and foremost by the fact that it has to do with human relations, our sexuality, and the conceptual frameworks within which we interpret human sexuality. All this, in turn, is related to our dreams and longings, our sexual identity, and our desire for love and intimacy.

Most of our informants reveal by their verbal and non-verbal expressions what an emotionally charged issue prostitution is— not only among the general public, but to at least the same degree among public officials. In the experience of one informant, social workers often become disconcerted when they learn that a woman has prostituted herself. They do not know how to

react to that information and feel that it is difficult to handle. Some professional counsellors are reported to become utterly confused when confronted with the fact of a client's prostitution.

A couple of informants believe that there are two explanations for this:

- The first is that prostitution is inextricably linked with sexuality, and is therefore a private matter which professionals feel they should not delve into.
- The second explanation is lack of knowledge about prostitution. One does not know how to pose questions about it or its effects on the individual. Even professionals are strongly influenced by societal attitudes toward prostitution: "It is disgusting to sell one's body."

Margaretha Järvinen approaches this taboo and emotional charge via the concept of labelling. She suggests that a prostitute's identity is linked to a labelling process resulting from societal attitudes toward the sex trade. According to a classic theory of interaction and control, being labelled is one of the most important factors in the development of a deviant identity. A woman who is defined as a "prostitute" by her immediate surroundings or public officials is subjected to a massive and often fateful labelling process.

The distinction between "private and honourable" women ("madonnas") on the one hand, and "public and depraved" women ("whores") on the other, is still a very important dividing line in our society. Järvinen that the role of prostitute overshadows all other roles that a woman may occupy (Järvinen, 1990).

The role of prostitute and the stigma of being a whore is also mentioned by several of our informants. One says that "former prostitute" is regarded as a sort of personal trait that women thus labelled can never be rid of. In their contacts with other people, therefore, women engaged in prostitution experience great anxiety that their secret will emerge and they will always be identified with the role of prostitute.

Östergren (2003) also mentions the idea that the "whore" stigma is infectious— that those who associate publicly with such persons may themselves become targets of suspicion.

The problem has been expressed as follows by Pro Sentret in Oslo: In order to respect and understand the seller of sex, it is necessary to focus on what we have in common. But that means placing the prostitute on an equal footing with ourselves— and do we really have the strength to do that? (Pro Sentret, 2002)

Some of our informants have themselves experienced this anxiety. One used the expression, "There are limits to sisterhood". In other words, even women who regard themselves as radical can have prejudices about women engaged in prostitution.

Prostitution would thus appear to be an issue that is difficult to handle, even for those who in their professional roles are used to dealing with difficult and sensitive matters. In order to identify and support men and women who want to extricate themselves from prostitution, it is therefore necessary for personnel in social, psychiatric, youth health and other services to

openly confront the phenomenon of prostitution and to discuss it with men and women who buy and sell sex. Since as it is an emotionally charged issue, it can be useful to discuss and reflect upon one's own attitudes and values regarding it.

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