

Prostitution and Migration: Issues and Approaches

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Summary of Network presentation, Calcutta, March 1998

I. Migration Issues:

Sex work often (almost always) involves migration - moving away from the family, the village or home town. and going to the city, even to another country. Some reasons for migration include:

- escape from sexual abuse and/or physical abuse
- escape from oppressive family obligations
- escape from a forced marriage
- search for work
- to be free

Women who leave their home - who migrate - go against the traditional female role: submission to the exploitation of their services and labour, often enforced by violence. They are often punished for this (political) act by further marginalisation, and stigmatisation as “fallen” “prostitute” women without respect or rights or as “victims” without autonomy or rights.

While the number of women wishing to migrate has grown, opportunities for international migration, especially to Western countries, has decreased. Yet, despite this official effort to block migration, there has been a massive increase in the demand in Europe for private domestic service (care of children and older people), filled mostly by immigrant women without legal status.

The other profession open to migrant women is prostitution. According to the IOM, the majority of sex workers in many sections of the sex industry in the European Union are migrant women (75% of street prostitutes in Germany; 80% of street prostitutes customer in Milan, Italy; at least 50% of prostitution in Dutch cities). This is supported both by the strong demand for sexual services, especially with non-local women, and by an elaborate third-party network to “facilitate” migration.

These women are extremely vulnerable to abuse (both by traffickers and by police control and state punishment) because current alien policies and attitudes disregard the civil and political rights of migrant women working in the informal labour sector of domestic work and prostitution.

We must demand that:

- those labeled 'whores' [sex workers], whether by work or otherwise, must be included in the rights demanded for every woman, as for every citizen.
- asylum should be granted to persons persecuted as women, whether in submission or transgression of discriminatory gender roles
- foreign women should be granted equal workers' benefits, rights and protection as the national residents, including the occupation of prostitution.

II. Approaches / Strategies: A Model for Analysis of One's Own / Other's Positions and Strategies

1. Approaches are based on one's perception/definition of the issue or problem, which in turn arises from the analytical framework applied. (Below 4 approaches are offered.)

2. Within each approach, 2 strategy "modes" can be employed, depending on one's point of view or (political) position on the issue. Below are outlined these two strategies.

3. The questions to then ask are:

- a. What are the (possible) consequences of each strategy/action?
- b. Whose interests are being served?

Strategy Modes:

A. Repressive: aimed at

- *Suppressing "undesirable" or "dangerous" behaviour
- *Controlling the situation

*Punishing the wrong-doer

B. Empowering: aimed at

*Enhancing, restoring rights of those affected

*Supporting, assisting

*Enabling, facilitating

*Increasing autonomy

*Self-determination / Self-representation

Following is an application of the above 3 steps to Approach #1:

Approach #1 The problem is a moral one - prostitution itself is the problem.

Repressive mode:

*Suppress prostitution

*Deny any agency to women

*Criminalise all those involved - carry out raids on brothels

*Pass anti-prostitution (“anti-trafficking”) laws

*Carry out rescue and rehabilitation programmes

What are Possible Consequences?

-isolation, stigmatisation, marginalisation of women

-greater dependence on third-party “protectors”

-greater risk of violence and abuse

-encourages corruption and abuse by law-enforcers

Whose Interests Are Served?

Empowering Mode:

*Understand and accept sex work as legitimate occupation

*Recognise the agency of women and girls

*Strengthen political and civil rights of those in sex work

*Increase range of choices by increasing access to resources, training, jobs

*Mobilise and organise for self-representation and participation at all levels -
policy formation, working conditions, social environment, etc.

What are Possible Consequences?

- +Growth of self-esteem
- +Increase of autonomy
- +Safer and better working conditions
- +Participation in community / society

Whose Interests Are Served?

Similar analyses can be made for the further 3 approaches:

Approach #2: The problem is the involvement of organised crime in prostitution.

Approach #3: The problem is (illegal) migration.

Approach #4: The problem is one of work opportunities: migrant workers flooding the labour market and aggravating the unemployment problems, creating social problems.