

Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Children from Mexico to the United States

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SUMMARY. The historical background of sex trafficking from the United States to Mexico is briefly described. We also summarize two case examples that illustrate the complexity of providing physical and emotional safety, as well as immigration protection to victims of trafficking. We emphasize the importance of understanding the varied cultural contexts in which sexual exploitation, rape, prostitution and trafficking occur. Two agencies: Arte Sana in Dripping Springs, Texas and the Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition in San Diego, California, of-

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fer a range of culturally appropriate services to Latina survivors of sexual assault, sexual exploitation, prostitution, and trafficking.

INTRODUCTION

Prostitution and trafficking are sexual violence that result in economic profit for perpetrators. Other types of gender violence such as incest, rape and wife-beating are hidden and frequently denied but they are not sources of mass revenue. Described by survivors as “paid rape,” prostitution provides buyers (johns, tricks, dates) constant sexual access to women and children. Prostitution and trafficking can take place in massage parlors, strip clubs, escort agencies, lap dance clubs, on the street, in a car or motel, or in a tent set up at the edge of a field being cultivated by migrant workers.

Women are trafficked (moved) by pimps to wherever there is a demand for prostitution, for example military bases, tourist destinations, conventions or migrant communities. The current US trafficking law places the burden of proof on the victim to show evidence of force, fraud or coercion.¹ Since pimps/traffickers move people to wherever they are sold for sex, we think a better definition of trafficking would include movement of people within a country as well as across international borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Trafficking is a direct result of cultural and economic forces which sweep a woman or child into prostitution including not only coercion, manipulation, deception, initial consent, family pressure—but also past or present family and community violence, economic deprivation, racism, and conditions of inequality between the sexes. This broader definition of trafficking is appropriate if governments seek to decrease sex businesses, taking into account the range of forces that channel people into prostitution.

SEX TRAFFICKING FROM MEXICO TO THE UNITED STATES

Mexico-to-United States immigration has been described as the longest-running labor migration in the world (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002). The 7.9 million Mexicans living in the United States comprise 27% of all foreign born persons (Chiquiar & Hanson, 2002). However, restrictions against illegal immigrants, combined with anti-immigrant hostility in the United States, have created an economy that consists of generally undesirable jobs. In addition to exploited labor, this illegal economy includes both prostitution and trafficking.

Non-Latino US men, as well as men from immigrant communities, are customers of prostitutes supplied by Mexican traffickers (Heinzl, 2003). Every day, thousands of male tourists enter Mexico from the United States to purchase women and girls in prostitution.

Of the 50,000 people annually trafficked to the United States, a third are Latin Americans (Richard, 2000). Women and youth seeking work in the USA must rely on labor traffickers (coyotes) to help them cross the border in search of work. Sex traffickers lure poor women and youth with false promises of jobs, sometimes kidnapping those they transport and selling them.

Mexico is both an origination and destination point for trafficking women and children, as well as being a stopover for transportation of people along several trafficking routes (for example, from Brazil or Guatemala to the United States) (Lederer, 2001). Although accurate numbers are impossible to obtain, one report noted that 16,000 girls in Mexico were sexually exploited through networks involving immigrants, military personnel, police, governmental officials, and businessmen (Azaola, 2001). There is great danger of sex trafficking occurs along the Mexican-U.S. border, where unemployment is high and thousands of US citizens cross into Mexico daily for the purpose of buying Mexican youth in prostitution (British Broadcasting Report, 2002; Taino, 1998). Castillo, Gomez & Delgado (1999) estimate that there are 15,000 women in street prostitution in Tijuana with many more working in the city's more than 200 club/brothels.

THE SAN DIEGO TRAFFICKING CORRIDOR

According to health workers interviewed by the first author, trafficking of women and children for prostitution in San Diego is common but is rarely reported to US or Mexican police. Although prostitution/trafficking are in fact human rights violations based on sex, race, and class, they have been prejudicially dismissed as "the problems of illegal immigrants." As a result, trafficking of people across the Mexico/US border has become a lucrative business.

When women and children migrate illegally, they are at the mercy of traffickers. Many are raped or murdered in transit. If their families are known to have money, migrants may be held for ransom. Coyotes who transport people across the Mexico/USA border are aware that neither victims nor their families will report these crimes, since the victims themselves would risk felony charges for illegal entry into the United States.

Pimps often work in concert with coyotes. In a scenario of brutal exploitation, coyotes transport victims from Mexico to the United States for a reduced

fee, sexually assaulting and prostituting the women as payment for passage. Instead of being reunited with families across the border, children may be considered saleable by coyotes and may never arrive at their intended destination. Children may be sold to gangs who prostitute them. Their families are then told that they died during the border crossing. Children who are unaccompanied or who have run away from abusive homes are at especially high risk for prostitution/trafficking.

Women and girls are often moved from the Mexico/California border to northern San Diego County, where they are placed in apartments controlled by women pimps hired by the traffickers. Brothels have been identified in communities from San Diego to as far north as Canada. Prostitutes are transported in a sex trafficking corridor that supplies them to the shifting locations of migrant labor communities (sometimes called camps) near Fresno, Barstow, Sacramento, and Seattle. In San Diego, a wide range of commercial sexual exploitation exists, including adult prostitution, child and youth sex tourism, mail order brides, pornography, peonage, and bondage.

Hernandez (2003) investigated the trafficking of Mexican girls to brothels near San Diego. Over a ten-year period, hundreds of girls aged 12 to 18 from rural Mexico were either kidnapped or tricked into US border crossings by traffickers/pimps. Criminal networks in San Diego county control more than 50 brothels and outdoor farm labor sexual exploitation camps. Trafficked girls are sold to migrant farm workers, US tourists, and US military personnel. In one typical case, caves made of reeds served as brothels at the edge of the fields. Many of the girls had even younger children of their own, who were then held as hostages so their mothers would not try to escape. Hundreds of farm workers were transported each day to these sexual slavery camps, where they sexually assaulted girls in prostitution.

A US physician who worked for a clinic that provided health care to migrant workers said, "The first time I went to the camps I didn't vomit only because I had nothing in my stomach. It was truly grotesque and unimaginable." Many of the girls were 9 to 10 years old. On one occasion the physician counted 35 men raping a girl for money during a single hour. When police raided the brothels, they found dozens of empty boxes of condoms, each box having held a thousand condoms (Hernandez, 2003).

Under instruction from her supervisor, the physician worked with the pimps for five years. After she reported the girls' sexual assaults in prostitution the physician was instructed by US officials that prostitution was "not a migrant health concern." Advised by her superiors to work with the pimps, she limited her practice to "prevent[ing] HIV/AIDS and other venereal diseases in the exploited minor girls" (Hernandez, 2003). This tunnel vision regarding the health of those in prostitution is commonly seen in clinics and in AIDS organi-

zations. Although at first glance the public health attention to HIV and STD includes the prostituted woman herself, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that the overarching concern is to decrease the customer's exposure to disease (Farley & Kelly, 2000). The overwhelming health consequences *to the victim* of captivity, terrorization, traumatic psychological stress and violence are officially ignored, as in this case.

CASE EXAMPLE: SOFIA, AGE 15

A child protective officer brought Sofia, a victim of prostitution and trafficking, to the Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition (BSCC). Her sexual abuse did not fit the guidelines for receiving assistance from California Child Protective Services because the abuse had not been perpetrated by a family member, relative or family friend. Furthermore, Child Protective Services declared that they did not have the resources to assist Sofia.

Sofia attended an initial interview with a representative of the BSCC, a representative of the sheriff's department and a child protective service worker. Sofia stated that her pimp had kidnapped her one-year-old son in Mexico. The pimp then forced her to work in the field brothels under threat that her son would be killed if she refused to prostitute. She described seven prostitution camps where women and girls were rotated weekly. Although she was paid, she did not actually keep any of the money. She was prostituted to migrant laborers without condoms, used by 20-30 men in four hour shifts. The sheriff's department intervened when her pimp beat her after Sofia refused to go to one of the field camps.

The first goal was to provide Sofia with safe housing and crisis services. Since there was no emergency housing for minors in San Diego, Sofia was admitted to a battered women's shelter where she remained for six months.

Coordinated case management was crucial in order to assist Sofia, as it often is with members of marginalized populations who do not have comfortable access to social, medical and legal services. With the battered women's shelter and the BSCC functioning as advocates, Sofia's needs were addressed by more than twenty agencies, including:

- Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition (victim advocacy and coordination of services)
- Battered Women's Shelter (housing, group counseling, case management)
- San Diego Sheriff's Department (investigation of the crime)
- Planned Parenthood (gynecological care)

- Community Health Clinic (other medical treatment and lab tests)
- Catholic Charities (certified victim's needs, vaccinations, management of funds through Office of Refugee Resettlement, Health and Human Services)
- Mexican Judicial Federal Police (legal charges in Mexico, assistance in rescue of the baby)
- DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia: Mexican Social Services) (investigation of victim's family, rescue and shelter for Sofia's child)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (investigation, administration of Office of Victim Services funding)
- Immigration and Naturalization Service (investigation, legal documentation provided to victim)
- Mexican Consulate Minor Protection (supervision of victim's rights, investigation and retrieval of Sofia's child)
- Pre-trial Services (legal advice, case monitoring, payment for psychological evaluation, supervision of court appearances)
- Criminal attorney
- Immigration attorney (functioned as legal guardian, coordinated T-Visa application and humanitarian visa application)
- US Attorney (prosecution of traffickers)
- Services for Youth (shelter and case management)
- Psychologist (evaluation)
- Children's Hospital (trauma counseling)
- Human Rights Mexico (public denunciation of the crime)
- Group home in Georgia (placement of Sofia's rescued child)
- Juvenile Justice system in Georgia (victim became ward of the court).

Because it was physically unsafe to remain in San Diego, Sofia was moved out of California, and services for her were managed by another state's social service agency, along with continued coordination of services by BSCC. Her child was rescued, and Sofia was given a US visa for victims of trafficking.

CASE EXAMPLE: GUADALUPE, AGE 12

In an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) exit interview during the process of deportation to Mexico, this transgender youth stated that she had been trafficked into the United States for the purpose of prostitution by a criminal gang that operated in her home town in Mexico. They had transported her to a number of cities on both US coasts, selling her on the gay/transgender prostitution circuit. In the INS interview where she was identified as a boy, she

reported extensive family violence and abandonment at a young age by her father, at which time her mother permitted (and probably took in money from) the child's prostitution. Although it was not known whether she had been sexually assaulted by family and neighbors, her prostitution was child sexual abuse. The US Justice Department and DIF (Mexican Social Services) determined that Guadalupe should remain in the United States pending further investigation of her home environment. As with Sofia, many agencies in both the United States and Mexico were involved and the BSCC functioned as an advocate and coordinator of services for the child.

Guadalupe was traumatized as a preadolescent by a homophobic social environment in which she was surrounded with contempt and physical violence, including rape. Gender roles are narrowly defined in Mexico, and when a boy is perceived as feminine (derisively called *joto* or *maricon*), he is loathed, socially shunned and often banned from family events such as weddings, funerals, and holiday gatherings.

There is confusion regarding the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity in both Mexico and the United States. Because those who identify as transgender often do not hide their birth gender, they are stigmatized not only by homophobia, but also by prejudice within gay communities against those who do not "pass" as sufficiently masculine.² In addition to being gay, Guadalupe openly expressed her identity as female, which resulted not only in social stigma but escalated to contempt and physical violence. This violence is sometimes extended even to the family of the transgender person (Lostaunau, 2003).

Homelessness may be a consequence of family violence including homophobia. Transgender adolescents prostitute for food and shelter and also as a way to send money home to families. At an emergency shelter Guadalupe was retraumatized by other children's prejudice toward gay and transgendered youth. The humiliation and social isolation were intolerable and she ran away from the shelter.

Shortly afterward the US border patrol arrested Guadalupe as an undocumented minor, identifying her this time as a girl, unaware that she had been previously trafficked and prostituted. Guadalupe was placed in custody of Child Protective Services and deported to Mexico. At that point her history of trauma, neglect, abuse, and trafficking was discovered. Out of concern for the child's safety Guadalupe was returned to the United States. There she was taken to a specialized facility where she received support for both her sexual orientation and gender identity.

Angry that her child was out of her control, Guadalupe's mother filed a complaint against DIF (Mexican Social Services) with the Mexican Human

Rights Commission demanding the return of her son. Guadalupe was emotionally blackmailed into silence by her mother and she denied her history of neglect, violence, and prostitution. Bowing to political and legal pressure, US and Mexican law enforcement agencies permitted Guadalupe to be returned to her mother in Mexico. Subsequent reports from DIF noted that Guadalupe did not attend school. Instead, she worked in a restaurant at her mother's request, supporting the family.

DIF again filed a complaint against the mother. In the meantime, Guadalupe ran away from her mother's home to a large city in Mexico. At age 12, she obtained identification that listed her age as 18. She is currently working in a strip club as a female table dancer, which almost always involves prostitution (Farley, Cotton, Lynne, Zumbek, Spiwak, Reyes, Alvarez, & Sezgin, 2003). The fetishized sexuality in strip club prostitution may have provided a social niche that Guadalupe failed to find elsewhere. BSCC monitored Guadalupe's status via messages from other street children. BSCC staff felt that it would further harm the child to offer her services that would not adequately address her complex needs. Treatment for Guadalupe should necessarily include: long term housing, medical care, safety planning to protect her from violence by pimps, addiction treatment, and vocational training. Psychotherapy would address childhood trauma, prostitution/trafficking trauma, and at the same time address race and cultural prejudice, traumatic homophobia, prejudice against transgender persons, and repeated betrayals by social and legal systems, as well as betrayals by friends and family. Peer support should be an integral part of the healing process (Hotaling, Burris, Johnson, Bird, & Melbye, 2003; Rabinovitch, 2003).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MEXICAN AND LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION

Most women in prostitution in Mexico come from rural areas, having survived extreme poverty, family violence, and often leaving abusive homes to migrate to cities (Castillo, Gomez, & Delgado, 1999). A conservative estimate of the prevalence of trafficking is that 100,000 women are moved across Latin American states' borders annually for the purpose of prostitution (Kovaleski, 2000; Maki & Park, 2000).

For centuries, religious and legal institutions in Mexico and across Latin America have reinforced male supremacy. Fueled by belief in the subordination of women, the Spanish conquest of the peoples of Latin America included

the colonization of indigenous women. These attitudes toward women persist as for example in Mexico's granting women the right to vote only as recently as 1953 (Jordan, 2002). Across Latin America, 20% to 40% of women are raped each year (Casteneda, 2000), yet rape is often treated as a lesser crime than stealing a cow, with only 1% of rapes resulting in criminal charges (Jordan, 2002).³ In some Mexican states, a girl who brings charges of rape against an adult is required to first prove her chastity. Kidnapping and rape are accepted methods of obtaining marital partners in some regions (Jordan, 2002).

Prostitution occurs throughout Latin America (as elsewhere) in contexts of brutal poverty and family violence. A girl's first "sexual" experience is often sexual abuse by an adult family member, co-worker or acquaintance (UNICEF, 1999). Sexual and physical abuse in their homes often lead children to run away, with homelessness documented as a risk factor for prostitution of both children and adults (Tyler, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 2000). According to one estimate, 16,000 children are prostituted in Mexico (Azaola, 2001). Approximately 135,000 Mexican children have been kidnapped and were presumed to have been trafficked into illegal adoption, prostitution, and pornography from 2000-2002 (Hadden, 2002).

Mexican federal law prohibits procuring, thus making prostitution technically illegal. However, most states have legalized and regulated prostitution in *zonas de tolerancia* (red light districts) (Gonzalez de la Vega, 1968).

The sexual exploitation faced by women and girls worsens considerably during national and regional conflict. For example, the conflict between the Mayan people and the Mexican state (also called the Zapatista uprising) involved widespread rape and prostitution of indigenous women and girls by the Mexican Army (SIPAZ, 1999).⁴ Throughout the 1980s thousands of indigenous and other poor, mostly rural women were raped and many were murdered in Central American civil wars (Harbury, 1997). During the civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, women were sexually assaulted by army personnel and civil police. Following these assaults, the women themselves as well as their families viewed them as *mujeres marcadas* (dirty, tainted, or ruined). As a result, women migrated not only to escape conditions of war, but also to escape family shame.

MUJERES DECENTES: THE INTERNALIZATION OF MALE SUPREMACY IN LATIN AMERICA

While Olmec gender roles are considered to have been nonhierarchical and even "fluid" two thousand years ago (Joyce, 2000), sexist beliefs in female in-

feriority have affected all people in Mexico today, including indigenous people. In many Latino cultures, the influence of the Catholic Church controls women's and girls' lives through dogma that controls sexuality and reproduction. Just as Franciscan Catholics urged Nahua parents to instruct daughters not to go out in public, not to laugh, not to enjoy themselves, not to look or smile at men—Latina girls today are warned about the disastrous consequences of being a 'bad' girl (Overmyer-Velazquez, 1998).

Mexican and other Latin American men generally assume the right to sexually exploit any female. A consequence of this attitude has been a deliberate lack of educational opportunity for women that has increased their dependence on men. If domestic violence precipitates escape from a marriage or if they are abandoned by men, women and girls become vulnerable to further sexual exploitation, including prostitution.

According to Latina participants of Arte Sana workshops (see below) *dichos* (popular sayings) are passed down through generations, delivering the message that girls are worth less than boys. When daughters are born it is still common to hear them referred to as *carne para los gallotes* (meat for the roosters). For the girl, being labeled as meat will affect everything in her life; her mother's duty will be to protect her daughter from the inevitable dangers that her gender poses until she leaves home, hopefully 'in tact.' The Mexican saying *tengo suerte que me ha durado* (I am lucky that she has lasted) reflects a mother's intention to both preserve her daughter's virginity and to prevent pregnancy before marriage. The sexist assumptions are that a sexually active woman is invariably promiscuous and thus damaged. Once damaged, the concept of rape does not apply to her (Domecq, 1992, Zarate, 2002a).

A sexually active woman may be referred to as a "eaten bread," *piruja* (whore) or *cancha reglamentaria* (regulation soccer field) upon which many have "played" or "scored." So extreme is the pressure to remain a virgin that there have even been attempts to medically restore virginity. In Northern Mexico for the past 30 years, a physician conducted plastic surgery to restore Latinas' ruptured hymens. Advertising her services *para reparar la virginidad* with hymenoplasty, women were guaranteed to bleed after the hymen was ruptured (Gonzalez-Lopez, in press).

Shame is a common reaction to sexual assault, including the sexual violence of prostitution and trafficking. Survivors may see themselves as damaged, unworthy of marriage, and as bringing shame to their families. Shame limits the victim's capacity to acknowledge the responsibility of the perpetrator/s. Sexual assault survivors often feel that they failed to sufficiently resist. They may feel especially responsible for sexual violence if they were pressured by poverty or previous abuse to "consent" to a work agreement which in-

cluded illegal border crossing or smuggling even if they were deceived about what the 'work' really was.

It has been estimated that 80% of Mexican women in prostitution are mothers (Ojeda, 1994). In spite of their exhaustion and in spite of the physical and verbal violence in prostitution, they maintain a separate life which includes family and children, and in which the prostitution, for the most part, remains secret (Castillo, Gomez, & Delgado, 1999). A lengthy history of patriarchal domination, cultural influences and the resulting internalization of oppressive moral codes may hinder immigrant women (and all women) from reporting sexual assault and prevent them from seeking protection from pimps and traffickers. This silence results from shame about having been sexually harmed. The emphasis on virginity before marriage may compound the emotional pain suffered by a Latina victim of sexual exploitation, rape, or prostitution. Family and community may collude with the victim's self-blame if they view her as damaged or responsible for her own victimization.

***THE NEED FOR COMPETENT BILINGUAL
AND MULTICULTURAL SERVICES
FOR PROSTITUTED/TRAFFICKED WOMEN AND CHILDREN***

As the diversity of the United States grows, so do the needs of sexual assault survivors for culturally appropriate treatment, including services for those who are victims of sex trafficking (Rodriguez & O'Donnell, 1995). Undocumented immigrant women tend to avoid seeking social services for fear of being reported to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Once involved in the sex trade, immigrant victims may not attempt to escape for fear of violence or even torture by pimps/traffickers, as well as for fear that traffickers will harm relatives.

Culturally appropriate services are especially important for Latina survivors of prostitution, trafficking and other sexual violence. Not only language, but country and regional nuances need to be addressed in order to meet the needs of Latin American victims of all forms of sexual exploitation. Limited English language skills restricts access to information about rights, services and options, thus increasing a feeling of dependency.

A lack of translators, lack of bicultural/bilingual professionals, and lack of reading materials in the client's native language all pose barriers for victims of sexual exploitation. At some battered women's shelters, for example, other Latina survivors or residents have been inappropriately asked to interpret, just because they happened to be in the agency at the time. The use of resident interpreters may cause embarrassment and silence when sexual violence is ad-

dressed. Rather than sharing personal or shameful information with shelter roommates or worse yet–bilingual child residents—a survivor may simply choose not to discuss her sexual exploitation (Zarate, 2002b).

While some Spanish language materials are better than none, the message is lost or distorted when dialect, differences in attitude/awareness of sexual exploitation and class differences are ignored. Materials offered to survivors must take into account race discrimination, socioeconomic segregation, Spanish language limitations, and immigrant women's lack of knowledge about US laws. If a victim does not define her experience as abusive, no matter how adverse her experience, she will not seek help from violence prevention programs. Furthermore, the very label 'victim' may exacerbate her feelings of shame and self-blame. Culturally sensitive screening that incorporates a range of references to sexual abuse can be helpful in reframing the abuse and shifting the responsibility to the perpetrator/s. The phrases *me abusaron* (they abused me), *me faltó el respeto* (he disrespected me), *me obligaron a salir con otros* (they made me go out with others) are some of the many ways that Latinas may refer to sexual assault and sexual exploitation.

We briefly describe two agencies which offer very different services to Latin American victims of sexual violence.

Arte Sana (Art Heals)

Arte Sana, based in Dripping Springs and Austin, Texas, offers programs that empower survivors of sex and race-based violence including prostitution and trafficking, through the arts, popular culture, community education, and professional training. Founded by the second author, Arte Sana utilizes the arts and *educacion popular* to address issues that are culturally taboo for Latinas such as sexual assault. Arte Sana addresses the lack of specific information for Latinas via Spanish language materials (such as a bilingual website www.arte-sana.com) and professional training regarding cultural competence and prevention of violence against women to other agencies in the United States and Mexico. The agency promotes collaborations for cyber resource sharing and the development of ongoing theme-based art exhibits in galleries, such as the *Corazón Lastimado* (Healing the Wounded Heart) sexual assault survivor art exhibit.

Survivors of rape, sexual exploitation, prostitution, or trafficking may find themselves in an abusive intimate partner relationship. At her first contact with a battered women's shelter or other women's services, she may not reveal the extent of her experience of sexual exploitation. Maria exemplifies the critical importance of culturally relevant education for Latina survivors of intimate partner violence, including prostitution and trafficking.

Maria graduated from a program that addressed issues ranging from finances to assertiveness. Only after attending an additional psycho-educational presentation on sexual assault and the needs of survivors was she able to define her experience as sexual assault. At the program's graduation Maria expressed her appreciation for the session on sexual assault and wanted to know if she could address that issue in her life. Two years previously she had been raped as "additional payment" by the man who smuggled her across the Mexico/US border. Maria's question *hay ayuda para este tipo de problema?* (Is there help for this type of problem?) arose only after she was offered a culturally relevant vehicle to address her shame, self-blame, and lack of sexual autonomy.

Arte Sana utilizes popular songs to promote gender equality, positive relationships, and sexual autonomy. By deconstructing popular songs, *platicas* (heart-to-heart talks) expose the narrowly defined subordinate roles for women that exist in many Latino cultures. For example, the song *Taco Placero* describes sexual relationships as food, one being a full course, while the other is cheap and quick. In contrast, the song *Invítame a Pecar* (Invite Me to Sin), questions the notion of sex as sinful and promotes female sexual autonomy as in the song's line: *invítame o te invito* (invite me or I will invite you). The Arte Sana support groups expose the sexism in songs that promote the notion of *mala mujer* (woman as intrinsically evil).

The Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition—A Collaborative Service Agency for Provision of All Forms of Assistance to Trafficking Victims

At a homeless shelter in San Diego county, the first author observed that 90% of the clients seeking services were Mexican or Mexican-American women and girls who had been raped or coerced into survival sex with gangs after becoming homeless. Some were legal and some were undocumented immigrants, but many of these young women were involved in prostitution.

Although local medical clinics and specialized services for adolescents were aware of their clients' prostitution and trafficking, abuse reports were not filed. This may have resulted from a differentiation between "good" child abuse victims (stranger abductions) and "bad" child abuse victims (those prostituted or trafficked). In 2001, the local sheriff and other county agencies did not have resources to work with trafficking victims. UNICEF, the first author, and Mexican Social Services together arrived at a strategic plan for service provision and prevention of prostitution/trafficking in a southern California trafficking corridor.

The Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition (BSCC) was initially composed of a legal task force led by the local US Attorney's office, an education task force comprising University of San Diego and United Nations/San Diego, a communications task force composed of media, and a health task force with public health agencies. Goals of BSCC are to identify prostituted/trafficked children and adolescents, to establish liaisons between border regions, and to analyze the regional extent of trafficking in order to establish a network of services aimed at stopping trafficking. The BSCC encourages the involvement of human rights advocates, consulates, criminal justice and social services agencies on both sides of the border. Bilateral approaches to prostitution and trafficking have been implemented in other regions, such as Sweden and Finland.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT IS CRITICAL

Assessment of the mental and physical health status of transnationally trafficked women and girls is similar to evaluation of the needs of domestically trafficked (prostituted) women. The following must be evaluated: immediate physical safety, housing, legal or immigration status, physical injury, chronic illness or disability, malnutrition, acuity of psychological distress, access to social services, access to nonexploitive social support, literacy, education, job skills, and level of awareness of human rights.

Once the survivor of prostitution/trafficking is removed from immediate danger, crisis intervention is necessary. Effective intervention depends on establishing rapport and on acknowledging the victim's strengths. A supportive relationship with the provider of crisis services will help the victim cope with the stress of meeting with INS and law enforcement. Service providers must become educated about the systematic methods of brainwashing, indoctrination and control that are used against trafficked/prostituted women. In order to assist in prosecuting pimps and traffickers, women must be protected from physical danger. However, they are rarely offered sufficient protection. Pimps often threaten them with death and have told women that they can be arrested at any moment because they lack legal documents. As in the case of Sofia, pimps threaten to kill her family at home if she discloses criminal activity. In order to survive, the victim has had to comply with all of the trafficker's demands.

It is difficult to establish trust with victims of trafficking. Because of repeated betrayals by pimps, family, police, and government officials, many victims do not trust institutions such as the INS, other law enforcement and social service agencies. Informational errors during initial contacts with victims or in

basic language interpretation have confused the police and resulted in failures to prosecute pimps and traffickers.

Because young women are without resources, and because they are paid more for not using condoms, STDs are the rule rather than the exception. In addition to hepatitis C and HIV, poverty-related diseases such as tuberculosis are common but rarely assessed in medical examinations of prostituted/trafficked girls. Sensitively delivered sex education should be standard practice when working with survivors of prostitution and trafficking. It should not be assumed that because women or adolescents are performing sex acts, they therefore understand STD and pregnancy prevention (Freed, 2003). Those who have received education about sex and STDs may later become sources of information, referral and support for others.

Trafficking and prostitution survivors experience multiple layers of trauma. The healing process is lengthy since survivors suffer psychological damage from captivity, terrorization, physical violence, and brainwashing and in many cases a long history of family and community violence (Stark & Hodgson, 2003; Farley et al., 2003). Survivors often feel indebted to pimps/traffickers for not killing them, in a psychological dynamic which has been described as the Stockholm Syndrome (Graham, 1994). Drug/alcohol detoxification and mood stabilization require medical management. Dissociative disorders are common, since hiding or forgetting one's real self makes it possible to survive atrocities (Ross, Farley, & Schwartz, 2003).

Trafficked women and girls have lived in a world of verbal abuse, lies, and physical danger, making adversarial law enforcement efforts an additional threat to their survival. Additional fear and mistrust is generated when women are sent to detention centers or locked medical facilities. Above all, the survivor's dignity must be preserved, and her legal rights must not be violated, especially if she is held as a material witness. An advocate should always be present to support her. Most victims will need to consult with both criminal and immigration attorneys. They may be vulnerable to a number of criminal charges such as illegally entering a country (a felony), prostitution (a misdemeanor), possession of false identification (a felony), or pandering (a misdemeanor). Ideally the local consulate of the victim's country of origin will assist in protecting the victim's rights. Collaboration with the criminal justice system of the victim's country of origin may be needed to investigate a trafficking case.

CONCLUSION

Women and children in Mexico and Latin America are profoundly harmed by the convergence of traditional and modern forms of sexual exploitation. Sex in-

equality, poverty, lack of educational opportunity, racism, rural-to-urban migration, state governments which protect the rich, tourism, and other structural social factors contribute to the harms of prostitution and trafficking. The expectation across cultures that women must always be sexually available to men leaves women vulnerable to the organized sexual exploitation of prostitution and trafficking. In order to gain control, traffickers and pimps exploit existing views of women as subordinate to men. Traffickers calculatedly reinforce the vulnerabilities of victims who have been neglected, abandoned or previously sexually abused. Traffickers lie to victims about their immigration status.

Exploitive working conditions in border factories place women and girls in extremely vulnerable positions, away from their home communities and vulnerable to sexual exploitation, including prostitution and trafficking. Sex businesses are the largest sector of employment for women who have lost jobs as a result of globalization.⁵ Pimps and traffickers take advantage of the subordinate status of women and girls in both the United States and Mexico by exploiting sexist and racist stereotypes of women as property, commodities, servants, and sexual objects (Hernandez, 2001). Traffickers also take advantage of institutional inexperience regarding trafficking by criminal justice, health care, and social services within Latin America and the United States.

Trafficked women experience vulnerability, lack of resources, fears, and lack of control of their own lives that follow patterns similar to those of battered women (Stark & Hodgson, 2003). Additionally, trafficked/prostituted women have been uprooted from their home communities and are often in legal jeopardy due to their immigration status. Until special shelters for trafficking/prostitution survivors are available, battered women's shelters should be used for housing and safety.

Resources to assist victims of domestic and international trafficking must be tailored to meet the needs of people who are culturally and ethnically diverse and whose experiences of harm may differ. Although we are here addressing trafficking between Mexico and the United States, much of what is discussed is relevant to trafficking for prostitution between any sending and receiving country and also between sending and receiving communities within the same country. Meeting the challenge of serving survivors of prostitution and trafficking will require multicultural education regarding the complex issues involved, development of specialized treatment protocols for victims and collaboration across agencies, disciplines and borders.

NOTES

1. The United States defined trafficking in 2000 as occurring when "a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of

force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery." US Dept of State, July 2001 Trafficking in Persons Report <<http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/tiprpt/2001/index.cfm>>.

2. Many Mexican gay men are married, even if they are not bisexual, to hide their sexual orientation and to protect themselves from intense homophobia.

3. See also Anderson, this volume, regarding similar attitudes toward rape of prostitutes under US law.

4. One Guatemalan official commented that given the mass rapes of Mayan girls by military personnel, it would be difficult to find a girl of 11 to 15 who had not been raped (Rich, 1996). See also Farley et al. (2003) (in this volume) for a description of the effect of Colombia's civil war on women generally, and women and girls in prostitution.

5. The international trafficking of human beings, especially prostituted women, is the world's third largest area of organized crime, and a business that produces \$7 billion annually. Greater illegal profits are found only in the drugs and arms trades, according to data from the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP), released during the International Seminar on Trafficking in Human Beings, in the Brazilian capital. (Osava, 2000).

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