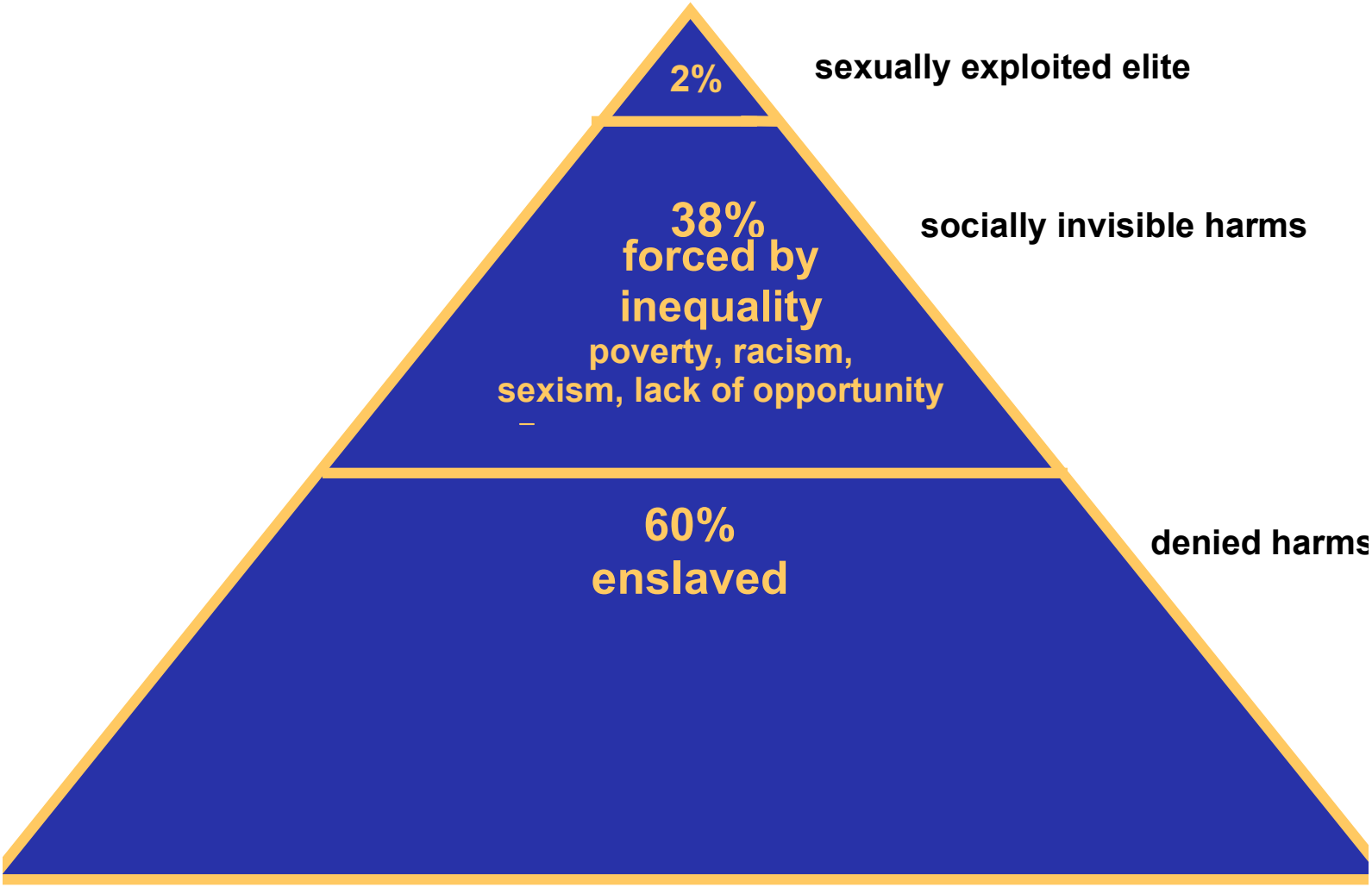
Prostitution's Hierarchy of Coercion



There is a pyramid-like hierarchy in prostitution. At the top are a very few women - only about 2% of all those in prostitution - who service a few men for a lot of money in a short period of time in their lives - and then they get out, or are bought by one man who supports them.

In the middle section of the pyramid are women who need the money, who have had the option of sexual exploitation as a survival mechanism made very real to them by a history of incest or childhood sexual abuse, and who may face an emergency situation such as escaping a violent partner, losing a job, or having children with special needs. These are about 38% of all those in prostitution.

The farther you descend in the hierarchy, the greater the numbers of women in prostitution, and the less meaningful any discussion of choice is for them. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the largest number of women in prostitution, about 60%. These are the poorest people in prostitution. They have enormously restricted life choices. Many of these women have been physically coerced into prostitution.

Sources are from a large number of peer-reviewed scientific studies, from agencies who offer direct services to those in prostitution and to those who seek to escape it, and from policy experts.

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