



SURVIVING THE WITCH-HUNT

Battle Notes from Portland's 82nd Avenue, 2007-2010

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degrade

degradation

is not trading sex for money

but it is exchange

of social security number for food

degradation

is not stripping away minidress

but it is not having curtain

covering me in a public shower

degradation

is not faking orgasms on the phone

but it is faking compliance

with the court order

degradation

is not even being raped on the street

but it is the doctor asking me

“why does it bother you if you fuck strangers anyway?”

*Dedicated to D.H.
And anyone who have felt desperate and scared.*

INTRODUCTION

This story starts in September 2007, when City of Portland abolished controversial Drug Free Zone and Prostitution Free Zone. These “zones” authorized police to issue “exclusion” orders for anyone who is suspected of drug- or prostitution-related activity without conviction, and arrest those who violate the orders for criminal trespass.

Because these “zones” unfairly targeted certain groups of people based on their race, class and gender, many people protested DFZ/PFZ over the years. So it was a great news when the City finally recognized them for what they were, violation of our civil rights and liberties, and dropped the whole thing.

Ever since, however, neighbours in the previously PFZ areas—especially along NE/SE 82nd Avenue—complained about the increased level of street prostitution and other crimes they associate with it, and how they made their neighbourhood unsafe (and hurt their property values—which probably had more to do with the subprime lending crisis than with the end of PFZ).

The ensuing hysteria have led to the formation of several neighbourhood groups that either seek reinstatement of PFZ and/or other strategies to contain the prostitution “problem.” Some of these groups are more reasonable than others, but the whole conversation (neighbourhoods, police, city council, media) focused on solutions that center on how police can reduce prostitution. Tension rose high, and hostile, even hateful rhetoric were exchanged.

At the same time, anti-prostitution feminists entered the discussion, arguing that the problem of prostitution should be solved by cracking down on minor sex trafficking and educating johns how prostitution harms women and children to reduce demand for sexual services. They use intellectually dishonest arguments to intentionally conflate prostitution and trafficking, which also led to the increased demand for heavy-handed police intervention to “rescue” women and girls (by arresting and imprisoning them).

This booklet compiles some of my writings during this witch-hunt along Portland’s 82nd Avenue, which is just several blocks away from where I live. Throughout the debate, I have always maintained that the heightened situation on 82nd Avenue is not a law enforcement issue, but a symptom of social and economic injustices in our society.

I also include in this booklet a letter I received from a woman who was charged with the crime of murder for defending herself against an attacker (a pimp who attempted to force her to work for him). Because she was a 19-year old woman who have worked on 82nd Avenue, instead of a 19-year old attending college, she was demonised by our “concerned” neighbours as a merciless killer.

WHAT SOME AREA NEIGHBOURS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE PROSTITUTION "PROBLEM"

Below are some quotes found on the official Montavilla Neighbourhood Association Yahoo! Group. It is an open email list with public archive. Montavilla Neighbourhood includes a large section of NE/SE 82nd Avenue.

"The prostitutes are sooooo obvious in their manner & in their dress. I have lived in the Montavilla area in the same house most of my life & **I know these women are not the normal everyday citizen.** The blatant strollers or those who just hang out on the Avenue has increased to the point of being very, very obvious. **I am not low-class, nor is this neighborhood, but what is allowed to occur here is ghetto behavior.** What the heck is going on?? What in the world can I do to help stop this???" — Barbara

"I don't feel unsafe here or anything, but I agree **this blatant behavior does seem ghetto-ish.** Today I was waiting for the bus by Ya Hala's and a truck pulled up slowly to the curb and this man was just watching me. I ignored him and continued to listen to my iPod, and after a minute or so he slowly drove away. It's probably nothing, but part of me was wondering if he thought *I* was a prostitute? **I don't dress slutty or anything,** but do sport an 'alternative' look sometimes." — Laura

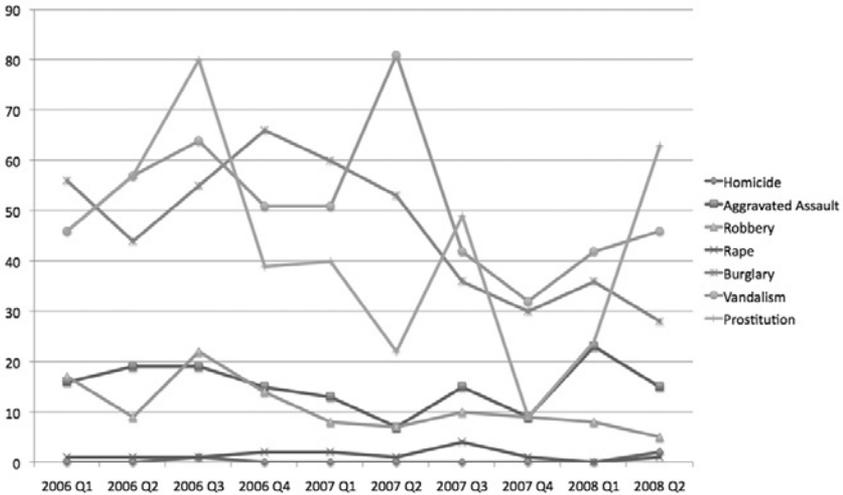
"I have noted that some other communities have successfully reduced prostitution by taking pictures of the John / Hooker hook-up and publishing them in local papers. **I have taken a couple of hook-up pics with my cell phone. Some communities have made posters of these pics. I would like to see a discussion of this issue.** I am immediately concerned that by taking pics, picture takers might be in some jeopardy. **Other issues?**" — Bruce

"We need to address this as a community, now..... **What do you think this is doing to the value of your property?**" — Carol

"I am filled with **neighborhood pride** with the recent neighborhood activism and at how this list serve is being used to inform and discuss. We may not all agree on the best solutions, but the **interest, action and thoughtfulness of everyone involved recently around this issue is inspiring.**" — Bruce

STOP THE SCAPEGOATING OF WOMEN WORKING ON THE 82ND.

The repeal of Prostitution Free Zone (PFZ) may have made prostitution more visible, but **it has not increased violent or property crimes.** In fact, there are less crimes in Montavilla neighborhood than there were when Prostitution Free Zone was in effect. According to Portland Police Bureau statistics, there were 169.86 crimes per month in Montavilla neighborhood between January 2006 to September 2007, when PFZ was eliminated. Since October 2007, the number is 138.67 per month (approx. 18% decline). Other neighborhoods, including MT. Tabor and South Tabor have experienced similar drop.



PFZ harms our most vulnerable neighbors. Rather than stopping prostitution, PFZ displaces and disperses it onto less populated or traveled areas. Women and men working there will be more isolated, and in less familiar turf—which increases the very real and already heightened **risk of violence against them.** It also makes it harder for them to access life-saving and life-sustaining social services that are located in the 82nd area, and for social service agencies to effectively outreach to people who need them the most.

PFZ deprives the civil liberties of people who have not been convicted of any crimes, and it may be unconstitutional. Yes, there is an appeal process, but this being a civil process, you would not have the same rights and guarantees that criminal defendants have, such as the right to an attorney, due process, trial by jury, presumption of innocence, or "beyond reasonable doubt" standard.

We at **82ndCARES Coalition** believe that the situation on the 82nd Avenue area is **not a law enforcement problem, but that of economic and social justice**. How so? Let's look at what people working on the street are facing: lack of affordable housing, lack of employment opportunities that pay livable wage, lack of childcare for parents who work (which also limits their employment options), lack of treatment services for substance use or for mental health, etc....

These are the fundamental problems we face in our communities, and we cannot police and criminalize our way out of it. On the contrary, **increased policing and criminal prosecution can create additional barriers for people seeking alternatives** to working on the street, since having criminal records prevents one from obtaining "legitimate" jobs.

We need to stop the scapegoating of people working on the street, and come together as a community to begin addressing these pressing issues of economic and social justice.

**FIGHT POVERTY, NOT THE POOR.
EVERYONE DESERVES TO BE SAFE.**



82ndCARES Coalition
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“Reducing the Demand Side” Harms Women. Here’s Why.

Some Portlanders concerned about prostitution on our streets are pushing for the strategy of "reducing the demand side" of prostitution. It means that, instead of going after people engaging in prostitution to make ends meet, criminal justice system would be instructed to pursue johns (clients) who purchase sexual services from them.

The appeal of this approach is obvious: many people understand that women who trade sex for money do so **under dire economic and personal circumstances**, and feel that it would be **unfair to punish them for their predicament**. On the other hand, few people feel any sympathy toward johns: in fact, some may find it deeply satisfying emotionally to have them punished severely.

However, we must seriously consider the full implication of such policy if we are truly concerned about the women who would have to compete for declining demand for their services. We believe, that while the approach to "reduce the demand side" is far preferable to punishing the women for their poverty and lack of options, **it is nonetheless harmful to the safety and health of the women** who work on our streets.

The first obvious consequence of suppressing the "demand side" is that women will have to compete for a smaller pool of johns, **forcing them to do more for less money**. The decline of the demand would give remaining johns greater bargaining power, because it would become easier for them to "take the business elsewhere" (i.e. go find another worker willing to do more for less) if their demands are not completely satisfied. For example, a woman who had always insisted on using a condom might be forced to engage in less safe practices simply to stay competitive.

* <http://82ndCARES.blogspot.com> *

Second, an increased pressure on johns displaces prostitution onto less populated or traveled areas, where they are less likely to be reported to the authorities or caught in a sting. The same environment **makes it more dangerous for the women**, both because it would be less familiar to them, and also because nobody would be around when they call for help.

And finally, the profile of a typical john would change as we make it riskier to buy sex, since not all potential johns respond to the increased risks equally. "Reducing the demand side" approach would **drive out those men who are relatively rational and sensitive to risks, while the reckless and/or impulsive types remain undeterred**. These johns are precisely the ones likely to demand sex without condoms, haggle mercilessly over price or specific acts, or use threats or violence to get what they want.

In short "reducing the demand side" is harmful to women because **it diminishes their bargaining power, forcing them to do more for less money, with more dangerous johns, under less safe environment**. We cannot criminalize our way out of the current situation—we must address this social and economic concern with **solutions that achieve social and economic justice**. We can begin by funding affordable housing, childcare, treatment programs on-demand (instead of many months' wait list), and education and job training programs, instead of more jail beds or police cars.

We at **82ndCARES Coalition** believe that the situation on the 82nd Avenue area is **not a law enforcement problem, but that of economic and social justice**. Find more information on our blog, and let us know what you think.



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The series of articles starting on this page deal with a shocking incident in August 2008 in which a young woman stabbed and killed in self-defense one of the three assailants who attacked her in an attempt to pimp her. She was arrested for “murder,” and the neighbourhood groups seized on the opportunity to paint her as a villain and a threat to the community.

For example, a neighbourhood group posted a “timeline” of events on the 82nd Avenue on its blog, which described this incident in this way: “Known & convicted 19 year old prostitute stabs to death a competing pimp form out of state at 8pm on a neighborhood street—’turf war.” While they claim to want safe neighbourhood, they clearly do not care about the safety for neighbours who are walking the street.

Fortunately, the young woman, D.H., was freed by the grand jury, perhaps because jurors’ prejudice against a Black gang member (the attacker) overpowered their prejudice against a prostitute. I was briefly in contact with her, but she disappeared as soon as she was released from jail (she did not even show up at a separate court date for prostitution charge) and I lost contact. It is perfectly understandable after killing a gang member in front of two of his buddies. I, too, would go into hiding under the circumstance.

SUPPORT D.H., CHARGED WITH MURDER FOR DEFENDING HERSELF ON 82ND AVENUE

August 20, 2008

Yesterday’s *The Oregonian* has an article about the incident that took place on SE 82nd Avenue last week in which a man was stabbed and killed by a woman with a history of prostitution arrests. The article goes:

A young woman who was picked up on prostitution-related charges last Wednesday is now behind bars, accused of fatally stabbing a man she said was trying to get her to work for him as a streetwalker on Southeast 82nd Avenue.

Police say [D.H.], 19, stabbed Christopher Darrell Richardson, 21, once in the chest shortly after 8 p.m. Friday on Southeast 82nd Avenue near Morrison Street. He died later in the evening at a hospital.

[D.H.] told authorities she was carrying a knife for protection because she had been assaulted the previous night. She now faces one count of murder, and was arraigned in Multnomah County Circuit Court on Monday. In [D.H.’s] booking photo, her right eye is black and blue.

Friday night, Richardson flagged down Portland officers after he was stabbed. He was taken to OHSU Hospital, where he died. [D.H.] was at the scene when police arrived. Investigators suspect she may have acted out of self-defense, but a Multnomah County grand jury will decide whether to issue an indictment when it hears the case later in the week. [D.H.] is due back in court Aug. 26.

Investigators say Richardson either was trying to pimp [D.H.], or give her trouble for competing with women he was pimping on the avenue. [D.H.] had been arrested two nights earlier, at 5:50 p.m. Wednesday at Southeast 84th Avenue and Yamhill Street. She was accused of attempted prostitution and prostitution procurement.

Some neighbors quickly declared this incident as yet another reason Prostitution Free Zone should be reinstated immediately. But before citing this incident as a poster child for PFZ, we should take D.H.'s story more seriously. She acted in self-defense against a man who pestered her in attempt to pimp her, a man who was known to carry a concealed weapon illegally and was unafraid to pull it out on others. And she stabbed just once--which clearly shows that she was not the aggressor, and that she only did what it took to protect herself. We should be glad that she was not the one to end up dead, and she certainly should not be charged with murder.

Would PFZ have prevented this incident? Probably not. In fact, displacing someone like D.H. makes them less safe and more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. It also make it much harder for social service agencies to reach out to the people who need it the most.

But there is one thing we can agree with the proponents of PFZ, which is that the current official response to prostitution is indeed inadequate. D.H. was in police custody just a day before the incident, yet nobody assisted her to be safe from the would-be pimp who won't leave her alone. It's very sad that she had to rely on a knife to protect herself because our communities had abandoned her.

We will keep an eye on this case, and explore what we can do to support D.H. in her struggle with the criminal justice system. Her next court date is set to August 26th.

GRAND JURY RECOGNISES A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE

August 23, 2008

Grand jury refused to indict D.H. of murder, concluding that she acted in self-defense in the fatal stabbing of a man who tried to force her to work as a prostitute for him. Some details from *The Oregonian*:

[D.H.] told authorities she was carrying a hunting knife for protection because she had been assaulted on Southeast 82nd Avenue two nights earlier by Christopher Darrell Richardson.

Portland police say Richardson, 21, originally from Los Angeles, was involved in a gang, and officers are noticing a nexus between gang activity and street prostitution along Southeast 82nd Avenue.

[...]

[D.H.] told authorities she had sprayed Richardson with mace and ran Aug. 13 after he grabbed her on Southeast 82nd Avenue and tried to get her to work for him.

[D.H.] was charged with attempted prostitution and prostitution procurement that night on Southeast 84th Avenue and Yamhill Street and reported the assault to police.

Two nights later, [D.H.] told police she was sitting on the curb on Southeast Morrison Street, near 82nd Avenue, about 8 p.m. when a car full of people drove by, then suddenly backed up.

According to [D.H.'s] lawyer, Barry Engle, one person in the car shouted at [D.H.], "I'll teach you!" Richardson was among three or four people who got out of the car and approached [D.H.]. She ran but said Richardson grabbed her arm and swung her around. Another man punched her in the back of the head.

[D.H.] told police she then stabbed Richardson once in the chest with her hunting knife. He died at a local hospital later that night.

[...]

Portland police say they're hoping to increase penalties for women and johns who are frequently arrested, and finding ways to connect the women to social services. One idea is to have the courts move the cases out of community court, where they now land, and put the offenders under supervised probation, Golliday said.

Hello Portland Police? D.H. reported her assault on August 13, and all you did was to arrest her? Clearly, something is not working with the current approach to crimes in the 82nd Avenue area, and it's not that the penalties are too light for the women charged with prostitution.

On the next two pages, you will find a letter I received from D.H. while she was still in Multnomah County jail facing the charge of murder.

When I first heard about D.H.'s incident and her arrest, I headed immediately to the (in)Justice Center, which houses Multnomah County jail. I asked the guard to pass on a letter I wrote to her offering sympathy and support (and asking her to add me to the visitor list), but they told me that it had to be hand-written on the specified form or sent via postal service.

Because I wanted to contact her as quickly as possible, knowing that she must be lonely and scared, I copied my letter to the form and had the message delivered.

When she received the message, she wrote me back and added me (and my friend who works at Portland Women's Crisis Line) to her visitor list. But she was released faster (thankfully) than I had anticipated, when the grand jury chose not to indict her.

I was happy that she did not have to face trial, but I did not receive her reply until after she had been released and I lost touch with her. She also did not show up at a separate court date for misdemeanor prostitution charge, which is understandable considering the fact her attacker's two buddies who saw the stabbing could be anywhere.

For two years I kept her letter private because I did not have the permission to share it with other people. But I felt that it was so important that people read her letter and hear her perspective, and I agonised over whether or not to print it in this booklet. In the end, after discussing the issue with several friends, I decided to print most of the letter without using her real name.

I am afraid that, by publishing her letter, I am violating her trust. I mean, I am violating her trust. I am sorry, D.H. Your letter has a great potential to raise the awareness of our community, to put a human face to women struggling to survive in this hostile world, and finally get our community to recognise that we are their neighbours too.

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TIME FOR TRUE COMMUNITY UNITY: PICKING UP USED NEEDLES AND CONDOMS

September 4, 2008

Of all complaints from neighbors, this one appears to be among the most serious ones: how can we get rid of used needles and condoms off our street, where they pose health risks?

Until several years ago, there was an organization named Danzine on SE Burnside, which handed out clean syringes at the storefront in order to reduce HIV and Hepatitis C infections spread through sharing of contaminated needles. Neighbors became concerned that some of these syringes ended up littered on the street after use, which posed a serious health threat.

Danzine responded by sending a crew of volunteers equipped with gears once a week to pick up and safely dispose of any needles, condoms, and other trash laying on the ground in the 12-block area surrounding its storefront. It was an ingenious solution that protected substance users' health as well as everyone else's.

This is a practical, proven strategy to actually make our communities safer--safer from health hazards posed by contaminated materials on the ground. And it is something we could all get behind, regardless of what one thinks about Prostitution Free Zone or any other topics. Anyone else interested in working on this project?

Also: if we care enough about stopping people from littering used syringes, we should consider the fact that many do so because they fear, correctly, that it is legally risky to carry used syringes on them. In fact, severity of the penalty in a drug case may be directly linked to how many syringes one is caught with. Hence, more police crackdowns on drug users can cause more littering, unless the government is prevented from using one's possession of used syringes as an evidence in the court. Just a thought.

THE FUNDAMENTAL POINT: IT'S ABOUT JUSTICE, NOT LAW ENFORCEMENT

September 5, 2008

The fundamental point we disagree with our neighbors who are calling for the reinstatement of Prostitution Free Zone or harsher policing/prosecution of prostitution-related “crimes” is that we do not believe that what’s happening in the 82nd Avenue area is a law enforcement problem. Rather, we believe that it is an issue of social and economic justice.

How so? Well, let’s look at what women (and men, and people of other genders) working on the street are facing: lack of affordable housing, lack of good-paying employment opportunities for less skilled or educated workers, lack of childcare for mothers who work (which also limits their employment options), lack of treatment services for substance use or for mental health, etc.... The list goes on. These are the fundamental problems we face in our communities, and we cannot police and criminalize our way out of it.

And speaking of criminalization: it should be obvious to anyone that having criminal records prevents one from obtaining “legitimate” jobs, even lowly-paid, mundane ones like working for fast-food restaurants, so it creates further burden on women hoping to stop working on the street. Once again, it shows that further criminalization is not the solution, but social and economic justice is.

WHY PROSTITUTION FREE ZONE IS DANGEROUS

September 6, 2008

There are many reasons we believe that the reinstatement of Prostitution Free Zone is a bad idea. But the basic point is that PFZ is dangerous for our most vulnerable neighbors, the women and men who work on the streets. Here are some of the reasons:

- 1) PFZ does not stop prostitution, but displaces it onto less populated or traveled areas. Women and men working there will be more isolated, and in less familiar turf. These factors increases the very real and already heightened risk of violence against them.
- 2) PFZ deprives them of life-saving and life-sustaining social services that are located in the 82nd area. True, “variances” were issued to allow excluded individuals to enter PFZ in order to receive services, but the rules were prohibitively restrictive. In addition, it makes it harder for outreach workers to locate them if they are dispersed away from busy areas.
- 3) When someone violates the exclusion order, she or he will face a criminal trespass charge. It may function to trap someone in prostitution, because each additional criminal record diminishes one’s chance of leaving prostitution and obtaining “legitimate” jobs.
- 4) In case anyone still cares about the constitutional guarantee of civil liberties, PFZ violates our civil liberties. It grants police officers the power to “excluded” someone from large portions of the City before she or he is convicted of any crimes. Yes, there is an appeal process, but this being a civil exclusion you do not have the same rights and guarantees that criminal defendants have, such as the right to an attorney, due process, jury by peers, presumption of innocence, or beyond reasonable doubt standard.

LETTER TO THE OREGONIAN: NOT ALL NEIGHBOURS SUPPORT CRACKDOWN

The Oregonian

Letter to the Editor
August 22, 2008

Don't count me among the 82nd Avenue neighbors who are asking cops to "clean up" the area. ("Woman charged in killing on 82nd," Aug. 19)

The termination of the Prostitution-Free Zone may have made prostitution more visible, but it did not increase the level of crime overall in our neighborhoods, according to Portland Police Bureau statistics.

Prostitution-free zones only displace prostitution, making those caught up in it more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. They also make it hard to provide social services to those who need it most.

Before citing the killing of Christopher Darrell Richardson as an argument for prostitution-free zones, we should take D.H.' story more seriously. She [may have been] defending herself against a man who tried to forcibly pimp her—Richardson, a man known to illegally carry a concealed weapon and who was willing to use it. We should be glad that D.H. survived, and she certainly should not be charged with murder.

EMI KOYAMA
82ndCARES Coalition
Southeast Portland

STOP THE CAMPAIGN OF FEAR AND INTIMIDATION ON THE 82ND AVENUE

September 27, 2008

Portland Mercury's Sarah Mirk writes about the incident where two 82nd Avenue area residents taking pictures of alleged prostitutes were maced by them. As Mirk correctly points out, there is no proof that the alleged prostitutes were engaging in any illegal activity, and they may be simply responding to the creepy photo-takers stalking them.

Regardless of what one thinks about the prevalence of prostitution on the street, Portland Police Bureau strongly discourages vigilantism. We join them in asking area residents to stop the campaign of fear and intimidation against women on our street, and work toward building compassionate and just responses to prostitution on the street. Some may think that it is a good idea to drive away alleged prostitutes by harassment, but it would only push them to areas they will become more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

THE CITY NEEDS TO HEAR YOU.

Residents of 82nd Avenue area and city leaders are holding a **community forum** to discuss the "problem" of prostitution. Some people are calling for the "Prostitution Free Zone," which will allow police officers to remove and keep out from the area anyone who is suspected of prostitution-related activities. Others are calling for more police crackdowns and harsher punishments. We think that these are bad ideas.

That is why your neighbors and political leaders **need to hear your voice**. If you live or work near 82nd Avenue, you are part of our communities and your opinions matter. Regardless of whether you are housed or not. Regardless of what you do for a living.

We are a group of area residents and friends who oppose the ongoing scapegoating of women (and men) who are working on the street. We believe that the situation on 82nd Avenue is not a problem of law enforcement, but that of **economic and social justice**. And we believe that the City needs to hear from you.

Please join us at:

Monday, September 15
6:00-8:30pm
Vestal Elementary School
161 NE 82nd Avenue

YOUR OPINION COUNTS. YOUR WELL-BEING MATTERS.



82ndCARES Coalition
email: 82ndCARES@gmail.com
blog: 82ndCARES.blogspot.com



>>>> PRIORITY REASONS AS TO WHY THE PFZ SHOULD BE REINSTATED (UNDER EMERGENCY STATUS):

- >>1. The research that the Mayor cited when lifting the ordinance did not even mention prostitution in the entire 18 pg doc it was lumped with the issues surrounding the DFZ <http://www.portlandonline.com/mayor/index.cfm?a=169712&c=46244>
- >>2. According to the Neighborhood Response TEAM (NRT) back on 7/23/08- calls regarding prostitution have quadrupled since last year this time. Cause & Effect - Zone is gone = crime has grown considerably & formed deep roots
- >>3. We the citizens around 82nd Ave are having our safety compromised each & every day (read our blog to hear comments from your neighbors: how neighborhood women are now being harassed, neighborhood young girls are being propositioned in daylight by johns that circle and speed through our streets.
- >>4. Crime from all over is now coming to 82nd Ave – it is well documented that the women are being trafficked from Seattle, LA and beyond to work on the avenue due to our lax laws. In addition, johns from all over the State & WA state are coming to our neighborhoods – we have taken on both States' issues..
- >>5. Until the city's "real solutions" are in effect & working, we need to immediately stem the crime that has taken over our communities to bring back the safety & livability of the neighborhoods & their residents.

As of today, Thursday Sept. 10, 2008, it has been **345 days since our City Leaders abandoned the PFZ.**

Since that time we as a community, several neighborhoods that all border and radiate outward from 82nd Avenue, have had to become better educated on the many layers to the crime of prostitution and specifically to the misconceptions regarding the Prostitution Free Zone Ordinance (PFZ). We recognize & so does Chief Rosie Sizer and her officers that are out there everyday, that the PFZ is one vital tool that needs to be added back, in addition to the proposal we will be presented with today. The PFZ is a critical tool that stops the crime from forming major roots & taking over our neighborhoods.

Unfortunately that is exactly what has happened to our neighborhoods, in a very short time since the PFZ was left to sunset nearly 1 year ago (September 30, 2007). Organized crime has blatantly moved in and his turning our streets into their turf war. Since the PFZ was lifted the safety of our community, our families, especially our neighborhood women and young girls – all have been severely affected.

Prostitution Free Zones do not solve the problem of prostitution. Nor are they suppose to, they do help citizens reclaim their neighborhoods, however, and that in itself is a solution to the problems plaguing many in our city. If making an area safer and more livable isn't the purpose of these ordinances, we don't know what is. If years of experience and statistics aren't showing that this ordinance helped to keep this problem in check in areas where they'd otherwise run rampant, we all know to well that this is true, since we as residents are currently in the crossfire of this new turf war because the zone is simply now gone.

We eagerly wait to hear about the City's new proposal and we hope that it provides viable options for these women, we also hope at the heart of the City's plan is targeted and consistent enforcement & judicial action against "the demand" - the johns.

The goal of these zones is to do the next best thing to rehabilitation of the offender, which is rehabilitation of the area. If these people are going to choose to engage in these activities, they're going to do it somewhere. But, where their actions so adversely affect innocent people, at least they can be discouraged from engaging in them in open and public areas. "The PFZ didn't rid the city of the world's oldest profession. It didn't address, or pretend to address, the root causes of the problem. It did, however, alleviate the distress, blight and violence that goes hand in hand with the crime." _ The Oregonian, Aug, 22, 2008

Montavilla In Action has 2 very important upcoming events (please see attached press release):

- **March to Take Back Our Streets - Reclaim 82nd Ave** – Sat. September 20, 2008 @11am (details on attached flyer)
- **Presentation of our Petition to Reinstate the Prostitution Free Zone to City Council** – to commemorate with the 1 year anniversary of the PFZ's abandonment. (details on press release).

Contact: Ph: 971.221.4718 Ph: 971.998.5667 Fax: 503.258.0417
Email: MontavillaInAction@gmail.com **Blog/website:** <http://www.MontavillaInAction.blogspot.com>

Petition to Reinstate the Prostitution Free Zone

<p>Petition summary and background</p>	<p>On September 26, 2007 Mayor Tom Potter & the City Of Portland allowed Portland's Drug Free Zone and Prostitution Free Zone ordinances to sunset after determining both laws have not been effective in eliminating the drug addiction that drives these crimes. However all of the data & research that was conducted to come to this conclusion was centered only around the disparity in how the Drug Free Zone law had been enforced no research was conducted focusing on the effectiveness of the Prostitution Free Zone and it was lifted in conjunction with the Drug Free Zone. Since that time we the neighbors & residents that border 82nd Avenue have seen an extreme increase in blatant prostitution in our neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Response Team stated that calls regarding prostitution to the non emergency number have quadrupled since last year. Please help us reinstate the Prostitution Free Zone which was a tool that helped our police department, foot patrols and residents keep their neighborhoods free from this illegal activity and safe.</p>			
<p>Action petitioned for</p>	<p>We, the undersigned residents of the City of Portland, declare that the livability and safety of our community has deteriorated to such a level that we request the full attention of the city commissioners and mayor. We consider this an emergency situation due to the great escalation of criminal activity, i.e. prostitution and drug dealing, on 82nd Ave of Roses that is encroaching well into our neighborhoods to either side of 82nd Ave, into our schools yards and parks. Our neighborhoods, Montavilla and Mt Tabor and beyond, consisting of homes, schools, churches and businesses, is being degraded by this criminal activity. We strongly request the enforcement of the current city codes and creation of a new ordinance similar to the Drug Free/Prostitution Free Zone that was previously used by our Portland Police Department.</p>			
<p>Printed Name</p>	<p>Signature</p>	<p>Address</p>	<p>Comment</p>	<p>Date</p>

In June 2009, I started a weekly “hospitality space” on 82nd Avenue for any woman who wants a safe place to relax, eat meal, drink coffee and tea, chat, and play zigsaw puzzles. My vision for the space was to build a base for community organising, rather than just a social service or charity. I wanted to use the space to spread information about community resources and opportunities as well as to gather information about what is going on on the streets and what the women need.

The space was closed after several months because I had underestimated the amount of time, energy, and resources needed to keep it going. Also, I was unemployed (and I had been for a long time) when I started the space, but I got a job and could not keep up with what was required. I wish I had started with more resources and more help from other people.

That said, the fliers I made for the space is on the next page as a tribute to the hospitality space that could have been and to all the women who took part in the space.

A NEW RESOURCE FOR WOMEN NEAR 82ND AVENUE...

82nd/Foster hospitality space *for women*

82nd/Foster Hospitality Space for Women provides hot food, coffee, sweets, information and other resources for women living and working in the 82nd Avenue area (or elsewhere) in a compassionate, non-judgmental setting.

We are not an “agency,” but a group of area residents and friends, many of whom have first-hand experiences with homelessness, addiction and sex trade.

Please come join us for our GRAND OPENING on Sunday, June 7th between 7-9pm at 7958 SE Foster Rd. We will celebrate our opening with **chocolate truffles!**

82nd/Foster Hospitality Space for Women

Open **Sundays between 7-9pm** starting June

Location: **7958 SE Foster Rd.** (bus #10, 14, 72)



email: 82ndCARES@gmail.com

In response to the overwhelming public outcry over the perceived increase of prostitution on 82nd Avenue, City of Portland created New Options for Women program through the Police Department and formed a citizen's advisory committee on prostitution on 82nd Avenue in December 2008.

I attended the advisory committee's meetings, which was held at the police station, but no matter how many times I tried to get myself included in its email list to receive updates and meeting announcements, they would not let me join (and I gave three different email addresses at three different times). Members of the committee repeatedly accused me of supporting pimps and rapists when I speak out for myself and for other women, and shut me out of the discussion ("We don't have the time to discuss right now, so let's just take a vote.")

When the committee came close to finalising its report to the City Council, I was deeply concerned about the content of the report. I got together with members of 82ndCARES Coalition, Hospitality Space for Women, and Sex Worker Outreach Project (which operates from Portland Women's Crisis Line and coordinates various social service agencies' outreach with women in the sex industry) to propose an alternative to the advisory committee's report (but since we didn't want to come across as oppositional, we framed everything as friendly amendments and additions to the official report). Members of SWOC presented our proposals at the City Council on December 9, 2009.

SUGGESTED PRINCIPLES FOR THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH PROSTITUTION

We are a group of 82nd Avenue area residents and allies from all over the City who came together to promote socially and economically just solutions to the problems resulting in and arising from street prostitution in the area surrounding 82nd Avenue and elsewhere.

Many of us come from social work and/or public health backgrounds, bringing together knowledge and experiences from many social service agencies that directly serve the population. Some of us also come from personal history in prostitution and other sex work. We are united in our commitment to end violence against and exploitation of women, men and children within the sex industry and beyond.

As the City considers funding priorities for addressing the issue of prostitution in the coming year, we would like to present a list of principles that should be incorporated into any comprehensive plan:

1. Help women escape poverty and homelessness, not merely prostitution.
2. Employ housing first model; unbundle housing from other services.
3. Provide alternate routes for services beside police.
4. Commission qualified outside professionals to evaluate services.

Let us explain in detail below.

1. Help women escape poverty and homelessness, not merely prostitution.

The goal of law enforcement may be to stop illegal behaviors and replace it with legal ones, but the scope of City's approach to prostitution needs to be much broader. We recognize that prostitution is sometimes the least bad option available to women when their choices are severely constrained by poverty, homelessness, addiction, lack of educational and occupational opportunities, sexism, etc. As then-Mayor Tom Potter stated at a press conference in 2008, the City must address the root causes of prostitution on the 82nd Avenue, which are all of the above.

In the absence of additional assistance and services that address these root problems, cracking down on prostitution would only cause many of the women to be further impoverished, forcing them to continue engaging in prostitution under less safe areas and conditions.

Success of any intervention must be judged not by how much it reduces prostitution, but how much it helps women out of poverty, homelessness, and other problems associated with it. To ensure that the programs will be evaluated along this line, any funding from the City of Portland should clearly state that the goal is to confront these "root causes."

2. Employ housing first model—unbundle housing from other services.

Housing is often considered a primary need for women working in prostitution, and it is essential if we are to assist women who wish to leave the sex industry (or abusive pimp, partner, etc.). While some women may benefit from extra support and security afforded by a transitional facility, we support the use of housing first approach in collaboration with existing housing advocacy organizations for most women.

Housing first, also known as rapid re-housing, is an innovation within homeless advocacy that seeks to quickly place recently or chronically homeless persons and families in their own permanent housing in the community instead of keeping them in centralized “transitional” housing that they must vacate after the program period. This eliminates the stigma of living in a shelter or transitional housing, provides the stability necessary to address personal issues, and builds sense of autonomy and independence.

Many homeless people experience multiple problems, such as mental illness, addiction, psychological trauma from abuse, and HIV/AIDS. Traditional service providers try to address these issues while they are in shelters or transitional housing, but their effectiveness is limited by the hardship of their living circumstances. Housing first model seeks to establish stability to people’s lives through housing, so that other issues can receive adequate attention once individuals are secure in their own place. Women in the process of leaving prostitution can also be supported by a combination of a housing first program and a series of other services arranged with the help of the caseworker.

Some people may find the idea of residential treatment centers, in which women can access support groups, case management, addiction treatment, etc. at the place they live, appealing. One advantage of such plan is that it offers built-in opportunities where women who have a history of prostitution can meet and support each other. But forcing them to live together and share living quarters at some centralized location in order to receive that support is likely to be a mistake. Without a private housing to go home to, participants would not feel inclined to take the risk and disclose personal stories and feelings among their peers.

In addition, women who drop out from the program for any number of reasons at a residential treatment facility would also lose their housing. Housing first approach gives women greater protection from this problem. If we believe that housing is a basic human right, we should not be threatening to withdraw it in order to coerce compliance with the treatment program. Nor should we need to, if the programs actually offer something that women benefit from.

Locally, homeless advocacy organizations such as Transition Projects Inc. as well as Volunteers of America’s domestic violence program (Home Free) incorporate some forms of housing first model as part of their respective programs. We should make use of their experiences and expertise in providing assistance with housing, as we develop specific services and resources for women who are in the process of leaving prostitution.

3. Provide alternate routes for services beside police.

In 2009, the City of Portland funded the New Options for Women program at LifeWorks, which provides case management and other services to women who have a history of working on 82nd Avenue and surrounding areas. In order to receive services at New Options for Women, a woman must be approved by the Prostitution Coordination Team, which is made up from police officers, district attorney's office reps, and staff from LifeWorks.

While women can theoretically enter the program without being "referred" by the police, the experience of people working at other social service agencies has been that women requesting services in order to get out of prostitution are turned down by the Prostitution Coordination Team, because they do not meet the specific criteria the police deems relevant. In the meantime, many women go into the New Options for Women under the threat of arrest and imprisonment, and then drop out from the program at a high rate.

In short, the City is funding many unwilling women to enter into the program that they do not genuinely want (but prefer over going to jail), and turning away many women willing and ready to change their lives if someone could offer some assistance. This is wasteful, not to mention inhumane.

In order for the New Options for Women and its participants to succeed, the program staff should be given greater authority to decide whom to admit into the program and what services they provide without deferring to the police bureau or the district attorney's office. Other social service agencies, such as agencies working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence, should be allowed a greater role in referring women seeking services to the New Options for Women.

4. Commission qualified outside professionals to evaluate services.

When the City of Portland quickly assembled its response to the heightened public outcry about prostitution on the 82nd Avenue in late 2008, the funding was only for one year and there was no built-in mechanism for evaluating the impact or effectiveness of services it funded. This needs to change. Citizens of Portland have the right to know that their taxes are being spent wisely, and moreover, we must make sure that our programs are actually helping women escape poverty, homelessness and other root causes that contribute to the situation on the 82nd Avenue.

It is our understanding that Regional Research Institute at Portland State University has stepped up and expressed an interest in taking on this important project. We support their involvement, and urge the City to commission a robust evaluation of its effort to help women working on 82nd Avenue and elsewhere in the city.

ADDRESSING CRAIGSLIST'S TRAFFICKING PROBLEM

June 26, 2010

This past week, someone from a national organization working to end violence against women contacted me and asked for my view about addressing the problem of sex trafficking on Craigslist. The inquiry is related to the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women's planned protest at the headquarters of Craigslist, which is calling for Craigslist to prohibit classified ads for adult services. Below is an excerpt from my response.

* * *

I think I already wrote my basic thoughts about this topic in the previous email, but here are some details:

1. Craigslist is not the problem. It appears to be doing whatever it can do to fight trafficking on its site, such as

- requiring confirmation by phone before an ad is posted—this ensures that whoever posted the ad can be tracked down if needed
- requiring payment by credit card, which provides further mechanism to track down
- manually reviewing every single ad that is posted for signs of trafficking or child sexual exploitation
- providing a directory of agencies to report suspected trafficking to
- cooperating with the law enforcement, providing them with tools and information needed for conducting investigations

2. There are many alternatives to Craigslist where sex workers and their pimps/managers/traffickers can advertise. Because Craigslist is a company that does business with the general public, it is in their best interest to work with non-profit organizations and law enforcement to combat trafficking in order to protect its public image. Operators of websites that specifically cater to the sex industry do not have the same incentive.

3. Adult service ads are a big part of Craigslist's bottom line, as they are to alternative weeklies and other traditional media. But they do not necessarily depend on human trafficking. There is no evidence that human trafficking is a substantial problem at Craigslist, or any more of a problem than in any other media outlets (and Craigslist does more to address the problem of trafficking than any other classified services).

4. Many women use Craigslist to advertise their services because it is a relatively safe and cheap way to do so without a pimp, management, or large start-up cost (e.g. advertising in alternative newspapers). Cracking down on Craigslist harms many of these women by taking away opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and autonomy.

5. I did a LexisNexis research for reports about trafficking on Craigslist, and I found that vast majority of examples involved minors being recruited into prostitution. I'm trying to figure out how these pimps got caught, because that might give us an idea about how to identify sexual exploitation of minors, but there isn't enough information in most newspaper articles.

That said, some incidences were uncovered because the ads hinted at trafficking (e.g. an ad offering "sex slave" for sale—which should never have passed Craigslist's manual review and should have been reported immediately); while some others appear to have been intervened because the girl pictured in the ad looked too young.

I think that we should work with Craigslist to improve mechanisms to identify ads that share characteristics similar to other ads that have been identified as involving child sexual exploitation or trafficking. Craigslist is a technology company, and I'm sure that they can do better in this regard, utilising data mining technologies to distinguish between a woman posting an ad for herself or someone posting an ad on her behalf with her consent, versus someone forcing her to work. (Other industries such as banking and airlines use similar technologies to identify potentially fraudulent financial transactions or suspected terrorist activities.)

6. I also would like Craigslist to cooperate with projects such as Portland Bad Date Line, with which I am tangentially involved. Portland Bad Date Line collects reports about "bad dates," that are johns who act violently or abusively, or announcing being HIV+ after insisting on and having unprotected sex, or pimps who chase the women in an effort to get the women to work for them, etc. and distribute this information to women (and others) working in the sex industry so that they can take further precautions.

Craigslist could post this sort of information for each region prominently in adult services section, which would provide information women can use to be safer while working, while at the same time warning potential "bad dates" that their information would be shared if they act out. Craigslist should also post information for women seeking help more prominently, although it is questionable whether or not women who are trafficked would actually see the site.

Let's get Craigslist involved. I have other ideas that I want to bring up with Craigslist if we can get their ears.

7. I feel that what I've written above makes sense, and it is the rational and sensible approach to addressing the problem of trafficking. But I do not feel that many U.S.-based "anti-trafficking" groups are serious: they are simply using it as a cover to attack prostitution and the sex industry, and have little regard for how their actions might impact the people they are claiming to protect.

Case in point: the campaign to "end the demand" is absurd. Economics 101 suggests that if the demand for sexual services were to decrease, it would push the price of such services down. But supply is downwardly inelastic, since many women work in the sex industry because they do not have other viable economic opportunities, and the price has to go down quite a bit before another option—such as working as janitors and maids—become more viable compared to prostitution. That is, supply will not go down as much as demand does, and the end result is that more workers would be competing for fewer johns. It would not only mean less income for the women and their families, but it would also force women to make more risky choices—such as having unprotected sex.

Further, not all johns are equally predatory or unsafe to the women. Campaign to "end the demand" would mostly drive away johns who are risk-averse (i.e. those who do not like to take risks), while it would not affect thrill-seeking, risk-insensitive johns. But these thrill-seeking, risk-insensitive types are the ones that present more health and physical risks to those working in the sex industry. In other words, such campaign directly and indirectly harm the women working in the sex industry.

Here, the intentional conflation of trafficking and prostitution by the U.S. "anti-trafficking" movement constitutes a real problem: trafficking involves force, deception, or threats, which should be immediately intervened and victims rescued; advocating for the women working in the sex industry requires a much more nuanced and multi-faceted approach (such as creating viable economic opportunities and promoting economic and social justice). The campaigns to "end the demand" or to shut down Craigslist's adult services section are most likely ineffective at actually addressing the issue of trafficking, and extremely harmful to the women who are working in the sex industry. And yet, by conflating the two, the U.S. "anti-trafficking" movement hijacks the discourse surrounding the sex industry, making it difficult for those of us working to advocate for women who are working in it.

Another example of irrationality: reports after reports claim that the average age of entry into prostitution is around age 13, usually citing Department of Justice or FBI as the source. If average is 13, that would suggest that there are equal number of 6-year olds and 20-year olds entering prostitution (assuming normal distribution), and that is obviously untrue. It is shocking to encounter someone who had become involved in prostitution at age 13 or younger, but this is definitely an exception, not the norm.

The "statistics" actually comes from a survey of minors who had an encounter with social services, and as such does not include any adults. If you only study minors who are in prostitution, of course the average age of entry is below 18—but it has nothing to do with the average age of entry in general. Consider this:

if you only studied people who died as a minor, the average age of death would be something like 13—but that doesn't mean that the average life expectancy is 13.

So is 13 the typical age of entry for those who became involved in prostitution as a minor? The answer is no. Because the research cuts off at age 18, someone who started at 13 has five times more chance to be included in the study compared to someone who barely started at 17, making the early starters five times more represented in the study. I don't have access to the original data sets to figure out the actual average, but I suspect that it is closer to 17—and this is only the average for those who were involved as a minor.

The truth is that none of us know the actual average age of entry, but I feel that the U.S. “anti-trafficking” movement is cynically publicising the demonstrably false claim (“the average age of entry is 13”) in order to equate prostitution with trafficking of minors, distorting the public perception of the issue and harming many women who are impacted by the anti-prostitution measures they promote.

I would also add a historical observation: in the past, the U.S. “anti-trafficking” movement have come and gone along with the anti-immigration sentiment in the nation, as exemplified by the “white slavery” panic that coincided with the historical period between Chinese Exclusion Act and Alien and Sedition Acts. The “white slavery” panic did not improve lives of women (including many immigrant women) who were working in the sex industry, but instead functioned as a springboard for repressive policies that target marginalized communities. I fear that the current “anti-trafficking” fervour, coinciding perfectly with the heightened anti-immigration sentiment, is moving along the similar trajectory, and I hope that we can redirect the movement so that it can actually offer safety and freedom for victims without causing harms on others.

MYTH DEBUNKED: THE AVERAGE AGE OF ENTRY INTO PROSTITUTION IS NOT 13

July 13, 2010

Over the last several years, I have been trying to correct the inaccurate notion that the “average age of entry into prostitution is 13” wherever I see it, but it is becoming increasingly overwhelming. This figure is in newspapers, official reports from City of Portland, and many websites and pamphlets claiming to confront sex trafficking (but often conflate prostitution with trafficking, and take anti-prostitution stances that are actually harmful to women). When I contact them to correct the errors, they either don’t understand what I am explaining or just plain don’t care. I’ve also been accused of being a pimp, pervert, pedophile, and other unpopular beings, simply because I challenge the falsehoods.

Here is the latest example, found on *The Oregonian* on July 3, 2010. Columnist Eliabeth Hovde writes:

Boys and girls are being lured or forced into what they call “the life” at younger and younger ages. [...] The U.S. Justice Department believes that the average age of entry into prostitution is 13 and that 100,000 children are used for commercial sex each year in this land of the free.

Department of Justice does state this figure in its website:

Although comprehensive research to document the number of children engaged in prostitution in the United States is lacking, it is estimated that about 293,000 American youth are currently at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Richard J. Estes and Neil Alan Weiner, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S, Canada and Mexico, University of Pennsylvania, Executive Summary at 11-12 (2001)

This led me to find the University of Pennsylvania study titled “The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children In the U. S., Canada and Mexico,” which states:

The age range of entry into prostitution for the boys, including gay and transgender boys, was somewhat younger than that of the girls, i.e., 11-13 years vs. 12-14 years, respectively.

But as the title suggests, this study only surveys minors (“children”), which means it does not include anyone who entered into prostitution at age 18 or over, or those who entered as a minor but has since aged out. Imagine conducting a research on those who died as minors: the average age of death would be somewhere near 10-12, but it would be ridiculous to claim that the average life expectancy for the general population is 10-12. Similarly, the “average age of entry” among youth who were studied does not tell us anything about the actual average age of entry for everyone who is in or has been in prostitution.

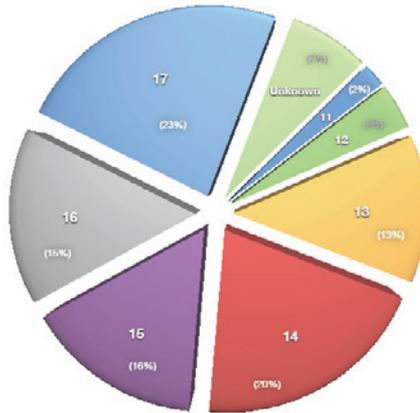
That’s not all. For the sake of discussion, let’s pretend that in a small town, six minors enter into prostitution each year, one individual each for ages 12-17. That means that there is one 12 year old, one 13 year old, one 14 year old, and so on. The average age of entry in this hypothetical town is the average of these six individuals, which is $(12+13+14+15+16+17)/6 = 14.5$.

But when researchers arrive in this town, they don’t just survey these six minors: they will also survey others who have started prostitution in the years past. So for any given year when the research is conducted, there are one 12 year old (who entered at 12), two 13 year olds (entered at 12 and 13), three 14 year olds (entered at 12, 13, and 14), and so on. The average among all of these youth will be: $(12+(12+13)+(12+13+14)+(12+13+14+15)+(12+13+14+15+16)+(12+13+14+15+16+17))/21 = 13.7$ —which is almost one year younger than the actual average age of entry.

This discrepancy is caused by limiting the research subject to minors. Those who entered into prostitution at age 12 has six years in which he or she might be surveyed (at ages 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, or 17), while those who entered at 17 has only one year, which artificially inflates the proportion of research participants who entered early. In short, we cannot know the actual “average age of entry” by simply averaging the age of entry reported by research participants.

Case in point. Below is a chart and table found in “The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking,” produced by Shared Hope International, an anti-trafficking group.

Average Age of Entry into Prostitution



AGE	# OF VICTIMS
11	2
12	4
13	13
14	21
15	16
16	16
17	24
Unknown	7

*The total # of victims surveyed is 103

This chart is based on Shared Hope International's 10-city study on minor sex trafficking. In the same page where this chart appears, Shared Hope founder Linda Smith states "The average age that a pimp recruits a girl into prostitution is 12 to 14 years old." But interestingly, the chart does not support this statement: the average of all responses represented in the chart/table is 14.64, which is higher than Smith's "12 to 14" figure. Plus, simply averaging all the responses is not enough, for the reason I pointed out above. So when we adjust the numbers to compensate for the over-representation of those who entered early, the re-calculated "average of entry" turns out to be almost 16 (15.96).

This calculation is rudimentary and at best an approximation, since we don't have access to the complete data or truly representative sample. But I suspect that it is much closer to reality than 13, which is what journalists, politicians, and many anti-trafficking activists claim.

There is also an element of common sense here. Assuming normal distribution (bell curve), the average of 13 implies that for every 20 year olds entering prostitution, there are equal number of 6 year olds doing the same. That, common sense should say, cannot possibly be true. The alternative is that the distribution isn't normally distributed, but heavily clustered around 10-12 year olds to balance everyone who enters into prostitution 16 or older. This again is implausible, as we simply do not find that many 10-12 year olds in prostitution, at least in the United States. The only logical conclusion is that the average age is not anywhere near 13, but is much closer to 18.

That doesn't diminish the fact that some very young children are victimized, and we should do something about it. But it is not trivial if the average age of entry is 13 or 16 or even 18, because it drastically changes what social policies we must enact to combat forced prostitution and trafficking. I feel that many journalists, politicians, and anti-trafficking activists use the lower figure merely for the shock value, to arouse strong emotional reaction toward the issue, but they are acting irresponsibly when they distort reality. We need to understand reality as they are and craft rational and sensible responses to the problem, rather than indulging ourselves in panicked frenzy.

CITY AND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CONTINUE TO BROADCAST SMOOTH LIES THAT COMFORT CITIZENS

July 23, 2010

This past Wednesday, I attended the afternoon session of Portland City Council to hear its report on human trafficking—or rather, domestic minor trafficking (only one speaker, someone from Catholic Charities, spoke about a different form of human trafficking, that is the exploitation of migrant workers in labour trafficking).

I knew what I was getting myself into, but it was still painful to sit through such entourage of willful ignorance disguised as genuine concern for children being forced to engage in prostitution.

As I had expected, Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, Multnomah County Commissioners Diane McKeel, and others invoked the nonsensical and debunked claim that “the average age of entry into prostitution is 13,” as if they are utterly ignorant about what “average” means.

Commissioner Saltzman stressed several times throughout the session that these very young girls eventually become adult women, implying that prostitution in our society is all about child abuse and its prolonged consequences, because most adults engaging in prostitution started out at very young age when they should have been in elementary and middle schools.

Somehow, they seem to think it is much easier to believe in this nonsense rather than facing the reality that, for the most part, it is a product of poverty, homelessness, welfare reform, unjust immigration law, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other economic and social injustices. Once they define all prostitutes as child abuse victims who must be “rescued”—from prostitution, but not necessarily from poverty and other injustices—by arresting and jailing them.

By intentionally conflating prostitution and child abuse, they frame the issue of prostitution as a simple law enforcement problem. While it is unsettling to think that so many young children are being trafficked (nevermind the fact most child sexual abuse happens in homes, churches, and schools), it is somehow easier to digest than a more nuanced and politicised view that calls for across-the-board social and economic justice agenda.

This willful ignorance of reality closely mirrors many Americans’ support for the War on Terror in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Instead of untangling resentment and frustration the West has built up all over the world through centuries of violence and exploitation, many people rushed to accept the clearly nonsensical explanation that “they hate us because they hate freedom” because it was much more palatable.

It is not entirely accurate to say that Bush administration lied to the people about the weapons of mass destruction, links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda, domestic wiretapping, torture in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. If anyone actually cared to exercise common sense and reason, the truth was always apparent. But too many Americans were invested in believing the obvious lies. In other words, people were not fooled or deceived by the Bush administration; rather, people actively sought out smooth lies that comfort them, and the Bush administration bottle-fed them to us. I feel that Commissioners' and their supporters' response to trafficking/prostitution is similar to that.

Commissioner McKeel also stated that “basic economic theory” holds that reducing demand (for sexual services, some of which may involve trafficking) lead to lower supply. But she is neglecting the fact that a sudden reduction of demand diminishes bargaining power of the seller, forcing many women to work under even worse conditions for less money.

County is planning to start “john school,” which “educates” johns arrested in prostitution sweeps about the harms of prostitution on women and girls in order to get their cooperation to reduce the demand. But this, too, will put women and girls at more danger than they currently are.

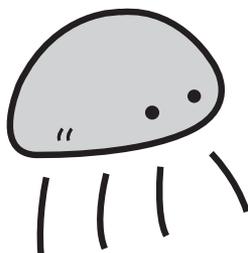
Let's imagine that there are two types of johns. The first group consists of men who are generally respectful of women but don't realise that prostitution is so harmful. “John school” will likely make them stop going to prostitutes. The second group consists of men who are selfish and thrill-seeking, and do not care about how their actions affect women. “John school” probably has no effect on them.

In other words, “john school,” if it is effective at all, will drastically change the composition of johns who frequent prostitutes, on top of reducing the amount of money women can make. How is this going to make women and girls safer?

Not that I am concerned about “john school,” though—studies have shown beyond reasonable doubt that it has no impact whatsoever. I just wish they don't spend any money on it and put the money toward housing assistance for the women or something like that.

the difference

when i was little he gave me a silver ring, he said this is between you and me if they saw it they will take it away so i kept it hidden like my sore throat and the sense that there was something poisonous, something unthinkable and unnameable in me that might come out if i don't keep my mouth shut. years later long after i had lost the silver ring and was taken to a pretty wooden house in a police car and i ran i sat next to a dumpster on turke street counting dollar bills and waiting for someone to come by or something to happen with semen drying on my hair like a message like a reminder that they knew who i was - whatever i was. or like the silver ring that cannot be spoken about, like power is in the act of manipulation whichever side you find yourself on or whether or not you even know. come to think 'bout it i've never felt as used and dirty as when i heard how used and dirty i must have been, like i'm a pawn of someone else's theory about me like i fail every fucking test they took my silver ring away the only thing that was warm, special, and powerful in all the world. i look at myself in the eye in the mirror trying to see through the reflection because there is something inside me waiting to explode, because every power i've had i swallowed with pain and every pain i've had kept me fighting back, because i've seen the best and the worst of what goes around here and i think, i know, the difference.



www.eminism.org