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*“It’s a Marathon Not a Race”*  
Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade

By  
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April M. Rand

Submitted to the graduate degree program in the School of Social Welfare and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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*“It’s a Marathon Not a Race”*  
Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade

Chairperson Professor Margaret Severson

Date approved: June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

## Abstract

Few studies provide detailed accounts of the exiting process and the catalysts that influence the movement toward exiting the commercial sex trade. A better understanding of this process is needed to facilitate the design of targeted and effective interventions for persons who have been involved in the commercial sex trade. Consequently, the purpose of this inquiry was to examine the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of social service providers in the exiting process. This dissertation used a feminist framework and qualitative methods to explore the experiences of 19 survivors who were in the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. The social service response was examined through individual and group interviews with 12 social service providers. The themes and findings suggest that exiting is a long and complex process that requires a tremendous amount of internal drive and social support. Moreover the findings indicate that the current social service systems are not meeting the unique needs of this client population. Suggestions for social work practice, policy, and research are presented.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Human Trafficking, Prostitution, and Modern Day Slavery**

Human trafficking is a significant and growing problem in the United States and in the larger global community (ECPAT, 2012). In the United States, human trafficking became a focus in the late 1990s and resulted in the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386) defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transporting, supplying, or obtaining a person for labor or commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of involuntary servitude or slavery” (p. 8). Human Trafficking is described as “a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children” (TVPA, 2000, Sec 102a).

Labor exploitation and sex trafficking are both considered forms of human trafficking and modern day slavery. Labor trafficking can include forced labor, also known as involuntary servitude, and bonded labor which occurs when traffickers unlawfully exploit an initial debt the worker assumed as part of the terms of employment (TVPA, 2000). The TVPA (2000) defines sex trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (p. 8) and a commercial sex act as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by a person” (p. 7). A commercial sex act may include the selling of persons for prostitution, the production of pornography, stripping and nude dancing, or live sex shows (TVPA, 2000). The commercial exchange can involve payment or compensation in the form of money, services, or goods (TVPA, 2000). Any minor, including U.S citizens under the age of 18, who is used in a commercial sex act, is considered a victim of a severe form of trafficking. However, for an adult to be considered a victim of sex trafficking the commercial sex act must be induced by force, fraud, or coercion (TVPA, 2000).

There is a widely held misconception that sex trafficking involves the movement of persons across international or interstate borders (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009), but, under the U.S. definition, transportation or physical movement of a victim does not need to occur in order for a severe form of trafficking to have taken place (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009). Within the context of sex trafficking, the term trafficking applies to the commercial component of the crime or the exchange of payment. Another commonly held misconception regarding sex trafficking in the United States is that the trafficked victims cannot be U.S citizens or legal residents and comes from the assumption that sex trafficking victims are persons who have been illegally transported across international borders (Adelson, 2008; Logan et al., 2009). Although the TVPA was enacted to protect international victims, primarily children, it was not intended to exclude protections for American victims of trafficking (Adelson, 2008). Moreover, the subsequent reauthorizations of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2013 increased the protections available to trafficking victims in the United States through newly authorized victim assistance programs designed to assist U.S victims of trafficking, unaccompanied foreign minors, and adult migrants.

Prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked (Farley & Butler, 2012) and are both considered severe violations of human rights. According to Farley (2004) “prostitution is an institution that systematically discriminates against women, against the young, against the poor, and against ethnically subordinated groups” (p. 117). In most cases prolonged and repeated trauma precedes entry into the commercial sex trade (Clawson et al., 2009; Estes & Weiner, 2002; Farley & Barkan, 1998; Silbert & Pines, 1982). In one of the most influential studies on the link between prior abuse and prostitution, Silbert and Pines (1982) found that 62 percent of prostituted females had been physically abused during childhood and 60 percent were victims of

incest and sexual abuse. Two-third of respondents were abused by a close family member and 70 percent reported that the sexual abuse affected their entrance into prostitution (Silbert & Pines, 1982).

Prostituted women are often unrecognized as victims of sex trafficking even though they are often exposed to coercive, controlling, and violent behavior by the pimps that sell them and the customers that exploit their bodies (Farley et al., 2003). Often the word trafficking is used to separate “innocent” victims from women who “choose” prostitution (Farley, 2006). There is also a common misconception that when a girl turns age 18 she is capable of making a conscious choice to engage in prostitution and the context in which she entered the commercial sex trade is ignored. In a study of 854 people involved in prostitution in nine countries, forty-seven percent reported that they were younger than 18 years of age when they entered the commercial sex trade and spent an average of nine years in the commercial sex trade (Farley, et al., 2003). These findings suggest that once involved, it is difficult to exit the commercial sex trade. Women often feel they have no choice but to remain involved in the commercial sex trade (Kennedy et al., 2007). Vanwesenbeeck (1994) described this choice as “voluntary slavery, a condition which signifies both the appearance of choice and the overwhelming coercions that exist behind that choice” (p. 149).

### **Purpose of Study**

Few studies provide detailed accounts of the exiting process and the catalysts that influence the movement toward exiting the commercial sex trade. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation research is to examine the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of service providers in the exiting process. A better understanding of this process is needed to facilitate the design of targeted and effective

interventions for persons who have been involved in the commercial sex trade. Further, it is important to interview both survivors and service providers to determine what supports need to be in place to help survivors exit from the commercial sex trade. Survivors' appraisals of how service providers and law enforcement officials respond to them and others involved in the commercial sex trade are essential to the evaluation of what works to interrupt involvement in the commercial sex trade and for designing useful strategies and practices for reaching the population at the moment they contemplate exiting.

This study builds on the existing research literature by not limiting the sample to one section of the commercial sex trade (i.e. indoor or street prostitution). It is important to identify if the exiting process and service needs differ depending on participants' characteristics such as age of entry, interactions with social service providers, length of time spent in the commercial sex trade, type of trafficking/prostitution, and supportive services received. To date, the Midwest has not been a focus of inquiry, but from all accounts commercial sexual exploitation in the Midwest is a critical one. Situated at the crossroads of America, where highway and transportation systems make it easier for commercial sexual exploitation to flourish, the Midwest is a key hub in the perpetuation of the commercial sex trade.

### **Relevance to Social Work**

The social work profession has demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable populations such as women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade. As these women and girls become more immersed in the commercial sex trade they are likely to come into contact with social workers in a variety of settings including child protective services, hospitals, mental health centers, substance abuse treatment centers, domestic violence shelters, schools, and the criminal justice system. Although researchers

acknowledge that exiting the commercial sex trade is a long, involved process (for example Benoit & Miller, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Sanders, 2007), few studies are focused solely on this process or examine the role social service providers play or not play in the exiting process. The results of this study provide an opportunity to further refine policy directions and practice strategies in all areas of intervention with survivors of commercial sexual exploitation.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

Chapter Two provides a historical exploration of the social response to prostitution and sex trafficking since the mid-1800s with a focus on the role of social work. Evangelical reform work with women and girls, the White Slavery Scare, the development of policies regulating prostitution, social work and female delinquency, and the prostitutes' rights movement are discussed as forces that inform contemporary social work practice with women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade.

Chapter Three includes an interdisciplinary review of the empirical and theoretical literature on prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work with a focus on the literature related to exiting. This chapter describes the philosophical perspectives on prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work, leading into a discussion of the variations in the commercial sex trade in the United States. This chapter goes on to explore the reasons for entry into the commercial sex trade and outlines the negative consequences such as the long-term physical and mental health issues associated with involvement in the commercial sex trade. Lastly, this chapter narrows the focus to the literature on exiting the commercial sex trade and concludes with an analysis of the state of the current research on exiting.

Chapter Four outlines the feminist perspective that grounds the qualitative research methodology of this study. Basic tenets of feminist methods incorporated into this study are

described. Following this description, the research questions, study design, methods for data collection, and data analysis technique are outlined. Throughout the methodology section the researcher explains how a feminist perspective was infused throughout the research process. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the strategies used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter Five presents the themes and findings from the survivor interviews. In the first section, the participants and I provide some descriptive information about the men and women in the study, followed by an exploration of the reasons for entering the commercial sex trade. The next section presents the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews with the survivors. These themes focus on the process of exiting, challenges faced during this time, and their interactions with social service systems including law enforcement. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the findings from the survivor interviews.

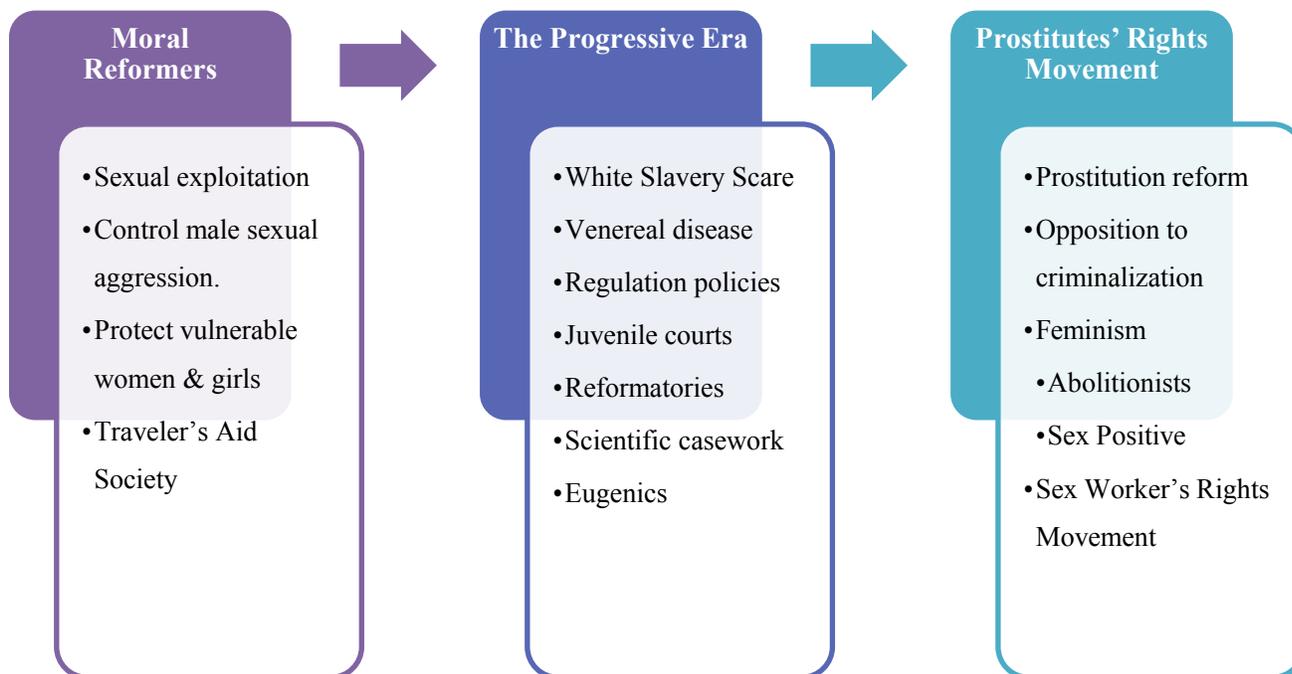
Chapter Six describes the themes from the interviews with social service providers working directly with this population. These themes detail the social service response including critical agency partnerships, services delivered, challenges and limitations, promising practices from the field, and defining and measuring success with this client population. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the findings from the social service provider interviews.

Finally, Chapter Seven details the limitations of the research methodology and presents implications for research and policy and social work practice with women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade.

## CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Social work practice with women and girls who exchange sex for material goods dates back to the beginning of the social work profession in the charitable societies, settlement houses, benevolent societies, and juvenile reformatories. The social issues of prostitution, sex trafficking, and female delinquency are interwoven throughout history, with prostituted women and sexually precocious adolescents being punished alike. This section will begin by providing an overview of the social responses to prostitution and sex trafficking since the mid-1800s (See Figure 1). Examining the social work response to prostitution, sex trafficking, and female delinquency during the birth of the profession is essential to understanding the values and beliefs that shape contemporary policies and social work practice with prostituted and sexually trafficked women and girls.

Figure 1: Historical Perspective



### **Reform Work with Prostituted Women in the Mid-1800s**

Reformers did not “discover” prostitution as a dangerous social problem until the early decades of the nineteenth century, and only then did they begin to mobilize a broad segment of the population against it (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hobson, 1987). Much of the early social work practice with prostitutes took the form of evangelical work in moral reform societies during the mid-1800s. Female moral reformers analyzed prostitution in the broad context of sexual exploitation and recognized that prostitution was rooted in class and gender inequalities (Hobson, 1987). Indeed, evangelical workers and the female moral reformers tended to be from the middle and upper classes (Boyer, 1978; Hobson, 1987). However, they still analyzed prostitution in terms of “women’s lack of protection rather than their lack of equal rights” (Hobson, 1987, p. 49). The Evangelicals perceived prostitution as an issue of demand, rather than supply (Boyer, 1978; Hobson, 1987). Therefore, their main tasks were to control male sexual aggression and to protect women from male sexual aggression (Boyer, 1978; Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987; Messerschmidt, 1987). Consequently, numerous female charitable societies and religious homes for poor or orphaned girls were developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The female moral reformers also advocated for legal remedies and social ostracism for men who violated chastity codes, going as far as to convince men to marry the women they seduced. One of the societies’ most pronounced interventions were publications such as the *Friend of Virtue*, a moral reform journal that warned women of sexually aggressive men, using printed images and story tales (Hobson, 1987). The stories served as cautionary tales that painted men as predators or “wolves in the street” (p. 55) who preyed on unprotected women and girls.

The female moral reformers rejected sexual liberalism, which they believed directly translated into sexual exploitation of women (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hobson, 1987). Although the female reformers linked prostitution to male dominance in economic, political, and social life, they did not see it as their responsibility to fight for equal rights. Rather, they accepted the notion that women had different mental, moral, and sexual natures than men, consequently accepting that men and women had different spheres of influence (Hobson, 1987). The reformers and experts writing about prostitution during the nineteenth century did not recognize the variety of experiences of prostitutes (Hobson, 1987). For examples, reformers in this period argued that non-marital sexual relationships were always a result of sexual exploitation and never an issue of choice or freedom of sexual expression. This is primarily because the voices and perspectives of prostitutes were not sought out by reformers (Hobson, 1987). Thus, the possibility that women may not be victims and may exercise agency in their decision to enter prostitution never occurred to the reformers. Lastly, the reformers viewed prostitutes as a homogenous group, although their social histories indicated distinct variation. For example, Hobson (1987) pointed out that there were differences in the entrance routes of rural women vs. urban-born women, native-born vs. foreign-born, and younger women vs. older women, with younger women being more vulnerable to the coercive side of the sex trade (Hobson, 1987). One of the most significant differences was between native-born and foreign born women (Hobson, 1987). Foreign born prostitutes were more likely to be married, older, and less educated which compelled them to remain in the sex trade longer than native-born prostitutes (Hobson, 1987).

Despite their acknowledgement that prostitution was a result of the imbalance of power between men and women in the economic and political spheres, the evangelicals

chose an individualized treatment approach that held young women accountable by focusing on their innate weaknesses and targeting them for interventions (Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987). This approach fit with the guiding philosophy of the time that held individuals accountable for their own problems and poverty. One of the first interventions developed by Reformers to protect sexual purity was the Travelers' Aid Society (Hobson, 1987; Quirk, 2007). The sole purpose of the Travelers' Aid Society was to intercept women at danger zones in cities (primarily train stations) and steer them to respectable boardinghouses and employment agencies run by benevolent groups (Hobson, 1987; Quirk, 2007). The practice of rescuing women exercised by the evangelical workers laid the basis for other protective strategies and social work practice around prostitution and female delinquency in the reformatories, charity organizations, settlement houses, and contemporary social service programs.

### **The Progressive Era and Regulation 1890-1920**

#### **The White Slavery Scare**

During the Progressive Era there were fears that prostitution was not only growing but that women were being coerced into the commercial sex trade (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Hobson, 1987). The economy of the commercial sex trade was becoming more organized and the division of labor evolved to include proprietors, pimps, madams, runners, collectors, doctors, clothing dealers, and professional bondsmen (Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987; Lubove, 1962). White slavery became an image used to embody the fearful aspects of prostitution and was used to depict commercial sex as a form of slavery where women were coerced into prostitution by an underground network of "traffickers" typically foreign men such as pimps, madams, and proprietors who were organizing the business (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Brysk, 2011;

Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Hobson, 1987; Lobasz, 2009; Lubove, 1962). The term *white slavery* was first used to describe sexual exploitation during the late nineteenth century in England (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Bullough & Bullough, 1987). One of the first publicized exposés on white slavery appeared in 1885, when British journalist William Stead described how he purchased a thirteen-year-old from her parents and then transferred her to a procurer who intended to have her sent to a brothel (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Beer & Joslin, 1999; Hobson, 1987). These narratives created the belief that all prostitution involved the enslavement of young girls and incited a moral panic among reformers in the United States (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Quirk, 2007). Historians have agreed that the White Slavery Scare was not based on documented cases but was fueled by anxiety over urbanization and the influx of women in public spaces (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Doezema, 2000; Lobasz, 2009).

The perceived threat of white slavery led to the development of laws regulating prostitution in 1874, 1881, 1907, and 1910 (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987; Quirk, 2007). One of the earliest laws, the Mann-Elkins Act of 1910, prohibited the importation of any girl or woman for immoral purposes or prostitution between countries or across state lines (Hobson, 1987). By 1920, almost every city in the U.S. had outlawed soliciting and had enacted abatement laws to shut down brothels (Hobson, 1987). Ostensibly, the new laws and investigations of the sex trade were enacted in the name of protecting white women (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Doezema, 2002). In reality, these laws limited young women's independence and placed restrictions on their bodies (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Messerschmidt, 1997). Further, these laws tacitly supported the racism in American culture by focusing attention on the enslavement

of European-American women, even though traffic in women of color, especially Asian women, was more prominent (Beer & Joslin, 1999; Lobasz, 2009; Quirk, 2007).

### **World War I**

With the onset on World War I, the prostitute was no longer seen as a victim of White Slavery, rather she was cast as the number one enemy on the home front (Enloe, 2000; Hobson, 1987). War propaganda constructed the prostitute as diseased and predatory, a woman who “could do more harm than any German fleet of airplanes” (Hobson, 1987, p. 165). The threat posed by prostitutes and sexually promiscuous women was heightened by a national concern with venereal diseases at the time (Bullough & Bullough, 1987; Enloe, 2000; Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987). Suspicion of prostitution was predominantly informed by issues of gender and class. For example, if a woman was found walking unescorted on a street at night and did not look respectable, she was perceived to be a prostitute and therefore a disease carrier (Hobson, 1987). Consequently, women walking unescorted near military bases ran the risk of being labeled a prostitute and subject to arrest (Hobson, 1987).

The fear of prostitutes as carriers of venereal disease created more work for women engaged in rescue and reform work (Doezema, 2000; Doezema, 2002; Hobson, 1987). For example, women engaged in settlement work and other types of community work were recruited to control the spread of venereal disease on the home front. According to Hobson (1987) “they initiated volunteer hostess clubs that offered wholesome entertainment near training campus; they acted as chaperones and servicemen and single women at public dances” (p. 166). The women were also responsible for enforcing federal legislation that mandated the quarantine of civilian venereal disease (Hobson, 1987). Because women were perceived as carriers of venereal disease, federal legislation was primarily targeted towards women (Enloe, 2000; Hobson, 1987). Hobson (1987) describes these policies as some of the most highly discriminatory practices in

the history of American justice. During this time women who were “suspected” as being a prostitute were routinely forced to undergo examinations for venereal disease (Enloe, 2000). A positive test result often resulted in a conviction for a chastity offense and resulted in a placement in prison or in a long-term reformatory run by rescue workers (Hobson, 1987). The next section will examine the role of social work, the creation of reformatories, and the emergence of social casework in addressing female delinquency.

### **Social Work and Female Delinquency**

In the late nineteenth century, social workers strove to establish a professional identity and area of expertise (Trolander, 1987). Schools of social work were established at prestigious colleges and universities, and social workers began to work with professionals from other fields including medicine, education, social science, juvenile protection, and psychology (Kunzel, 1993). The field of juvenile protection was a substantial specialty for Progressive Era social workers. Indeed, the “social reformers” and “caseworkers” played central roles in the regulation of young women’s sexual conduct (Abrams & Curran, 2000).

Female social reformers were active in the child saving movement, which emphasized community responsibility for children and youth during the Progressive Era (Abrams & Curran, 2000). The social reformers joined with the child savers in promoting separate courts and institutions for female juvenile delinquents and placed faith in the juvenile courts to protect and rehabilitate delinquent girls (Abrams & Curran, 2000). Caseworkers embraced a scientific approach that was grounded in the exhaustive assessment of the subjects’ mental, physical, and social functioning (Kunzel, 1993; Lubove, 1965). Working in mental health, casework, and juvenile protection, caseworkers staffed institutions for juvenile delinquents including detention centers, reformatories, and training schools (Kunzel, 1993; Lubove, 1965). The following

sections will examine the role of reformatories and social casework in addressing the issue of female delinquency in the early twentieth century.

### **The Reformatories**

Although the public response to female delinquency emerged in the Victorian era, it was not perceived as a social problem requiring extensive governmental intervention until the Progressive Era (Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). The emergence of adolescence as a distinct developmental time period resulted in the establishment of separate courts for juveniles and the creation of a prolific number of reformatories (Abrams, 2000; Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Messerschmidt, 1987; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Between 1910 and 1920, twenty-three new facilities were opened and existing reformatories were expanded in staff, size, and clientele during this decade (Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). According to Abrams (2000) “as part of the response to the problems associated with “fallen women”, namely venereal disease, illegitimacy, and prostitution, Progressive Era juvenile courts implemented a set of standards and institutions for female delinquents that were markedly different from their male counterparts” (p. 437).

Girl and boy delinquents were treated very differently in court, and the charges brought against them were vastly different. The majority of girls were charged under the broad heading of “immorality”, while boys were often charged with offenses such as stealing (Abrams, 2000; Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 1989; Messerschmidt, 1997; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Studies of the juvenile court records of the Progressive Era reveal that during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 90 percent of convicted female delinquents were classified as moral offenders (Breckinridge & Abbott, 1912/1970; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978; Odem, 1995). To be charged with “immorality,” the girl did not have to engage in intercourse or another mature

sexual act; she had only to show “signs” that she may commit an immoral sexual act in the future (Messerschmidt, 1997; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). These “signs” included staying away from home, associating with persons of dubious character, going to dance houses, coming home late at night, using obscene language, masturbating, and so forth (Abrams, 2000; Abrams & Curran, 2000; Kunzel, 1993; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Differential treatment based on race, ethnicity, and class was prevalent in Progressive Era juvenile justice as well (Abrams & Curran, 2000). Most youth (both male and female) brought through the juvenile justice system were poor, working class, and often recent immigrants (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Breckinridge & Abbott, 1912/1970; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978).

Alleged delinquents who were girls had their private lives investigated in detail, so that judges, probation officers, and social workers could assess the underlying causes of their behavior (Abrams & Curran, 2000). Girls were required to openly discuss their sexual encounters and were often subject to vaginal examinations to prove or disprove their virginity, regardless of the crime (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Messerschmidt, 1987; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978; Odem, 1995). Further, girls were more likely to receive out of home placements, longer periods of probation, and incarceration in reformatories and training schools (Abrams, 2000; Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 1989; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Girls were often incarcerated in reformatories and training schools for several years and were not released until they reached a marriageable age (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978; Odem, 1995). Removal from their natural home was the only way to rehabilitate the female delinquent and protect the other neighborhood youth (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978).

The juvenile courts and reformatories served as an ideal place for the social reformers to instill their ideals about the proper lifestyle for young women (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). The social reformers believed that an education in domesticity would restore the virtue and reputation of delinquent girls (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 1989; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Despite their own defiance of traditional gender codes, the social reformers did not identify with the wayward girls (Abrams, 2000; Abrams & Curran, 2000). Rather, they embodied a more “maternalistic” stance towards addressing female delinquency and upholding morality (Abrams & Curran, 2004; Messerschmidt, 1987).

In their effort to protect young girls from the white slave trade and provide a means of rehabilitating “fallen” women the reformers lost sight of their vision to redistribute the power among men and women. Instead, they created a juvenile justice system that criminalized adolescent female sexuality and reinforced the sexual double standard. As young women tried to take control of their sexuality, “the reformatories offered a warning that society would still not tolerate girls who showed the same interest in sex as boys and reinforced the traditional belief that “normal” girls were sexually impassive (Schlossman & Wallach, 1978, p. 91). Indeed, the causes of women’s economic and sexual exploitation remained unchanged.

### **The Emergence of Scientific Casework**

During the Progressive Era casework emerged as the predominant social work method. In their quest for professional status, caseworkers renounced their predecessors' methods as unscientific and prided themselves on the more analytical and diagnostic work of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Lubove, 1965). The caseworkers actively engaged in clarifying a substantial skill and knowledge base that reflected their professional status (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Lubove, 1965). Recognizing the need for individual assessment and treatment,

caseworkers began to emerge in other occupations including medicine, public schools, and even psychiatry (Lubove, 1965).

The emergence of psychiatry played a significant role in strengthening the social worker's conviction that she offered a distinct and valuable professional service (Lubove, 1965). Psychiatry and social work shared a common interest in the scientific understanding and control of behavior through casework (Lubove, 1965). Much of early psychiatry and psychiatric social work focused on problems of juvenile crime and delinquency (Lubove, 1965). Caseworkers often used female delinquents as research subjects in the quest to gain a better understanding of the root causes of crime and deviance (Freedman, 1981). As their expertise in casework and social problems progressed, caseworkers were frequently employed by reformatories, detention centers, and training schools to rehabilitate female juvenile delinquents (Lubove, 1965; Kunzel, 1993).

Beginning in 1910, feeble-mindedness emerged as a diagnostic category and became an acceptable explanation for juvenile delinquency and other deviant behaviors (Lubove, 1965; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). Caseworkers began to explore feeble-mindedness as an explanation for their client's difficulties. With scientific proof of the connections between intelligence and sexual delinquency, both the caseworkers and social reformers advocated for state intervention to protect feeble-minded girls (Kunzel, 1993; Lubove, 1965; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978). The social reformers and caseworkers contended that feeble-minded girls should be removed from the community and placed in some form of institutional confinement (Lubove, 1965; Schlossman & Wallach, 1978).

The diagnosis of feeble-mindedness occurred in conjunction with the eugenics movement. Both the social reformers and caseworkers endorsed the language, methods, and public policy solutions of eugenics (Kennedy, 2008; Kunzel, 1993). Further, the eugenics movement

influenced social workers' ideas about and practices with female delinquents (Kennedy, 2008). Both the caseworkers and social reformers began to distinguish the inherently degenerate girl who willfully engaged in immoral behavior from the innocent girl who was simply led astray (Kennedy, 2008; Kunzel, 1993). These classifications determined which girls deserved protection in the eyes of the social work profession and furthered the criminalization of adolescent female sexuality during this period. Girls who were deemed degenerate through physical and mental testing by caseworkers were often segregated and permanently institutionalized. In some cases, girls were sterilized at the recommendation of caseworkers (Kunzel, 1993).

Psychiatrists, social workers, and criminologists continued to shape the discourse on prostitution and female sexuality for forty years after World War I (Hobson, 1987). The political and social context of the prostitutions debates from the Progressive Era disappeared and causes of prostitution were linked back to the individual “neurotic”, “frigid” and/or “masochistic” female (Hobson, 1987). This psycho-therapeutic approach remained until the prostitution debate was brought back into the social and political context in the sixties and seventies.

### **The Prostitutes' Rights Movement**

Not until the cultural and social protests of the 1960s and 1970s did prostitution again become an issue of sexual politics or social justice, and many of the conflicts in class and gendered politics that had inhibited change in the past would work against change in the future (Hobson, 1987, p. 199)

Prostitution politics became an important issue within feminist arenas in the late 1960s. The prostitution reform movement rode in on the coattails of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s (Hobson, 1987). The civil rights movement led to an increased awareness of all human rights, and individuals began to protest governmental control on private sexual acts (Hobson, 1987). For the first time, “sexual privacy --- freedom to choose sexual

partners without interference from the state --- became a rationale for prostitution reform” (p. 209). Civil liberties advocates, feminists, and active prostitutes agreed that criminal sanctions discriminated against women and the poor and perpetuated the social stigma associated with prostitutes. Consequently, all were united in opposition to the criminalization of prostitution (Hobson, 1987).

The relationship between feminism and sex work has been contentious (Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Contemporary debates on sex work have largely revolved around two polarizing feminist perspectives that construct sex work as either exploitive or empowering (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Proponents of sex work as exploitive are often labeled as abolitionists, while members of the other group, are frequently labeled as sex positive (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Sloan & Wahab, 2000). Sex positive voices are represented through the sex workers’ rights movement. In 1973, Margo St. James organized the first sex workers’ rights organizations called COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) (Hobson, 1987). Since 1979 COYOTE has also been known as the National Task Force on Prostitution (NTFP). The sex workers’ rights movement was built on three general tenets all of which reflect the self-determination of sex workers. First, members of the movement argue that sex work is a legitimate form of work (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Jenness, 1990; Lobasz, 2009). Second, members do not believe that all sex work is forced; rather sex workers freely choose the occupation (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Jenness, 1990; Lobasz, 2009). Third, members argue that it is a violation of civil rights to deny a woman the opportunity to engage in sex work (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Jenness, 1990). On the contrary, those who support the abolition of sex work, such as Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt (WHISPER) deny that women freely choose prostitution and do not believe that

prostitution should be considered a legitimate form of work (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Hobson, 1987). Abolitionists contend that free choice is impossible in a country “with high rates of child abuse, rape, wife battering, poor female-head households, no equal rights amendment, and inequitable wages” (Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p. 461). Consequently, abolitions deny any distinctions between voluntary and involuntary prostitution and echo the early twentieth century social reformer views of prostitution as a form of sexual slavery (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Hobson, 1987).

### **Conclusion**

Despite different perspectives on prostitution adopted by moral, religious, and social workers since the mid-1800s, almost all of the organized efforts to address prostitution have targeted individual women and their character. The social reformers acknowledge the social forces that led women into prostitution, but continued to portray prostitutes as “weak” and in need of protection, rather than holding the perpetrators accountable. The caseworkers believed their scientific objectivity in diagnosis was advancing the profession and carving out a place for social workers in multiple practice settings. Consequently, the caseworkers scientific labeling of prostitutes and deviants and as victims of feeble-mindedness further stigmatized women involved in the commercial sex trade. Despite their virtuous intentions, both the social reformers and the caseworkers systematically criminalized female sexuality and created a highly gendered system of protection. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century these systems of protection continue to exert social control over certain populations, such as women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade. Women and girls who exchange sex for money are still arrested and systematically criminalized in part due to the early reformers perception that prostituted women are unable to take care of themselves and in need of protection and rehabilitation.

For the first time in history, the prostitutes' rights movement provided a space for sex workers to speak for themselves and educate others, including social workers, about their needs experiences. However, social workers have been greatly influenced by the anti-prostitution voices, rather than the voices of sex workers. Perhaps this is because the arguments of the abolitionist camp are more in line with historical social work perspectives that view prostitutes as victims in need of rescue and reform. Although few social service programs in the US provide specific services to women involved in the commercial sex trade, social workers are likely to come into contact with this population in criminal justice settings, domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, public health agencies, and the child welfare system.

Prostitution and sex trafficking still remain active issues on the national agenda. During the nineties it became clear that the United States was a destination for all forms of human trafficking, including labor trafficking (Chuang, 2010). According to Chuang (2010) "increased numbers of men, women, and children were being trafficked into a wide range of economic sectors, including agriculture, construction, domestic work, and the sex industry" (p. 1660). As a result the United Nations passed the 'Protocol to Suppress, Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children' in December 2000. The U.S. federal government responded by passing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. Both policies make a legal distinction between "forced" and "voluntary" prostitution, although abolitionists still contend that there is no difference between prostitution and sex trafficking (Doezema, 2005). Although the legal definitions of sex trafficking have been set, the debate over the nature of prostitution and the laws and policies that apply to it have yet to be settled. Unfortunately, the debate between abolitionists and sex workers' rights group continue to impede a united effort to meet the needs of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes a review of the empirical and theoretical literature on prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work with a focus on the literature related to exiting. Prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work are complex and interrelated issues that can only be understood through a broad search of the research literature. The following literature review is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing from a number of fields including sociology, gender studies, political science, social work, psychology, and criminology. Due to the limited research on sex trafficking in the United States, the literature on exiting the commercial sex trade relies heavily on the empirical research on prostitution and sex work. Prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work are inextricably linked; therefore this research literature is relevant to the population in this research study.

The first section examines the theoretical differences on prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work, leading into a discussion of the variations in the commercial sex trade in the United States. The second section explores the reasons for entry and identifies factors that heighten the risk of commercial sexual exploitation. The third section details the negative consequences of involvement in the commercial sex trade including violence, victimization, and the long-term physical and mental health issues. The fourth section narrows the focus to the literature on exiting the commercial sex trade and examines the barriers to exiting and characteristics of successful and unsuccessful exits. The final section discusses the current theoretical perspectives on exiting and concludes with an analysis of the state of the current research on exiting.

### **Prostitution, Sex Trafficking, and Sex Work**

Human trafficking became a priority on the United States national agenda in the late nineties and resulted in the passing of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The

passage of the TVPA resulted in heated debates between sex work advocates and prostitution abolitionists on whether trafficking encompasses prostitution. This debate is fueled by two distinct theoretical perspectives on prostitution: the empowerment and oppressive paradigms. One of the main distinctions between these paradigms is whether prostitution is viewed as legitimate work or a form of gender based violence (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Weitzer, 2009). A brief description of these two paradigms will be discussed in this section. Following this exploration, the types of commercial sex in the United States will be detailed.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

In the empowerment paradigm, sex work is viewed as legitimate work and as a way for women to achieve economic independence and maintain control over their working conditions (Brysk, 2011; Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Weitzer, 2009). Empowerment theorists argue that engaging in sex work is an expression of agency and has the potential to be an empowering experience (Weitzer, 2009). It is framed as a mutually beneficial transaction between buyer and seller, similar to any other economic transaction (Brysk, 2011; Doezema, 2005; Doezema, 2002; Weitzer, 2009). With respect to sex trafficking, sex work advocates distinguish sex trafficking and prostitution and insist that the label of “sex trafficking” only be applied to cases that include elements of force, fraud, or coercion (Doezema, 2005; Doezema, 2002; Lobasz, 2009). Sex work advocates argue that conflating prostitution and sex trafficking overlooks and constrains the agency of the sex worker (Lobasz, 2009). Abolitionists believe that this perspective ignores the violent and exploitive nature of the commercial sex trade (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Farley & Kelly, 2000; Lobasz, 2009).

The oppressive paradigm holds that prostitution is the sexual exploitation of women and a form of gender-based violence rooted in patriarchy (Farley & Kelly, 2000). This belief applies to all areas of commercial sex including pornography, stripping, and sex work. Abolitionists believe that there is no distinction between “forced” and “voluntary” prostitution (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Farley & Kelly, 2000; Lobasz, 2009). Rather, choice is not possible because prostitution is the result of male dominance and the absence of other meaningful options (Farley & Kelly, 2000; Lobasz, 2009). Abolitionists argue that there is no difference between sex trafficking and prostitution, rather both are considered forms of commercial sexual exploitation (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Farley & Kelly, 2000; Lobasz, 2009). Therefore, anti-trafficking laws are viewed as a strong vehicle for pursuing the abolition of prostitution. Abolitionists have been criticized for ignoring the presence of individual agency and for labeling prostitutes as victims needing to be rescued and rehabilitated (Doezema, 2002; Doezema, 2005; Lobasz, 2009; Weitzer, 2009).

### **Variation in the Commercial Sex Trade**

In the United States there is considerable variation in the commercial sex trade (Weitzer, 2009). One of the most significant divisions in the sex industry is between indoor and outdoor workers (Weitzer, 2009). The term “sex work” is often used to describe indoor prostitution and is commonly associated with the empowerment paradigm. Indoor prostitution is typically more organized and tends to occur in brothels, saunas, massage parlors, and through escort agencies. In contrast the term “prostitute” is most frequently associated with street prostitution and is best characterized by the oppressive paradigm. In street prostitution, customers are solicited on the street. Prostitutes and their customers commonly referred to as “johns” or “tricks” then exchange sex in a secluded location such as a car, alley, or park (Weitzer, 2009).

Although indoor prostitution is not inherently risk free, research suggests that street prostitution is more dangerous (Weitzer, 2009). For example, in a British study of 115 street workers and 125 indoor workers found that street workers were more likely to be beaten, slapped/punched/kicked, raped, threatened with a weapon, or kidnapped (Church, Henderson, Barnard, Hart, 2001). In addition, the street workers reported higher levels of drug use and violence from clients compared to indoor workers (Church et al., 2001).

A third variation of sex work is sex trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000) defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act where such an act is induced by force, fraud, coercion or in which the persons induced to perform the act has not attained 18 years of age” (p. 8). A commercial sex act may include the selling of persons for prostitution, the production of pornography, stripping and nude dancing, or live sex shows (TVPA, 2000). In trafficking cases, a pimp and a trafficker are synonymous. Therefore, women involved in pimp-controlled prostitution are typically considered victims of sex trafficking. The next section will describe the multiple pathways into the commercial sex trade.

### **Entering the Commercial Sex Trade**

Although the focus of this study is on exiting, it is important to understand the different pathways into the commercial sex trade. Minors are among the most vulnerable population for commercial sexual exploitation (Clawson, Dutch, Salomon, & Grace, 2009) with the average age of entry being as early as 14 years old. Adult women, by contrast, enter the trade nearer to age 18 (May, Harocopos & Hough, 2000; Norton-Hawk; Saphira & Herbert, 2004; Silbert & Pines, 1981). The average age that boys and transgender youth enter the sex trade is 11-13 years old (Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008; Estes & Weiner, 2002). Research suggests

that a disproportionate number of the boys involved in the sex trade self-identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender (Estes & Weiner, 2002).

While commonly believed, it is inaccurate to assume that the commercial sex trade only exists in large urban areas and is a phenomenon which only involves minorities. Indeed, anyone can become involved in the commercial sex trade regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status, or geographic location (Boxill & Richardson, 2007; Clawson et al., 2009). The ethnicity of persons involved in the commercial sex trade varies depending on geographic location, but in general, tends to resemble the ethnic makeup of the local community (Boxill & Richardson, 2007; Clawson et al., 2009). Although, specific research conducted on African American women demonstrates that African American women and girls are disproportionately arrested for prostitution (Flowers, 2001).

### **Push and Pull Factors**

The literature describes a combination of “push” and “pull” factors that prompt women to enter the commercial sex trade (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007). Poverty is a common push factor among women involved in the commercial sex trade (Clawson et al., 2009; Farley & Kelly, 2000; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Other push factors include an unstable home life, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, parental substance abuse, and drug addiction (Farley et al., 2003; Norton-Hawk, 2001; Silbert & Pines, 1982; Williams & Folaron, 2003). In one of the most influential studies on the link between prior abuse and prostitution, Silbert and Pines (1982) interviewed 200 juvenile and adult (60% were 16 and under), current and former, prostituted females. The authors found that 62 percent of prostituted females had been physically abused during childhood and 60 percent were victims of incest and sexual abuse. Two-thirds of respondents were abused by a close family member and 70 percent reported that the sexual abuse

affected their entrance into prostitution (Silbert & Pines, 1982). Childhood abuse and neglect is a correlate, not a cause of commercial sexual exploitation. Rather, experiencing childhood sexual abuse appears to be associated with vulnerability for commercial sexual exploitation.

Pull factors, those aspects that attract young people to the commercial sex trade, include a glamorization of the lifestyle (Williamson & Folaron, 2003), feeling in control or empowered (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007), and financial security (Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Several studies note the strong influence social networks play in the process of recruitment and initiation into the commercial sex trade. For example, in a study by Raphael & Shapiro (2002) one-third of respondents indicated that someone in their household regularly exchanged sex for money while they were growing up (42% were their mothers and 40% their sisters). Further, a majority (70%) had friends, boyfriends, or family members encourage them to enter the commercial sex trade (Raphael & Shapiro, 2002). Curtis et al., (2008) found that high percentages of female (46%), male (44%), and transgender (68%) youth reported their friends as being the main source of recruitment into prostitution. In some cases, the youths' friends put them directly in touch with their first customers. Although some youth spoke of financial incentives for entering the sex trade, many noted prostitution as being an integral piece of their social network. For example, some of the youth were pressured by their friends to enter the prostitution market, while others were intrigued by their friends' new lifestyle (Curtis et al., 2008).

### **Homeless, Runaway, and System-Involved Youth**

Youth exiting the foster care system and runaway, homeless, and sheltered youth are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999; Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002; Williams & Frederick, 2009). Nixon et al., (2002) found that 64 percent of the women in their study had been involved with the child

welfare system as children, while 77.8 percent had long-term placements in foster and group homes. In a study by Williams and Frederick (2009) several youth reported that a lack of supportive services for youth exiting the foster care system or leaving dysfunctional home environments forced them to begin exchanging sex for money. Many runaway and homeless youth engage in prostitution as a means of survival (Greene, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999). In a sample of 409 street youth in Los Angeles, 43 percent of the sample reported engaging in survival sex. Of the 43 percent, 82 percent exchanged sex for money, 48 percent for a food or a place to stay, and 22 percent for drugs (Kipke, Unger, O'Connor, Palmer, & LaFrance, 1997). Research reveals that homeless homosexual and bisexual males are more likely to engage in survival sex (Kipke, et al., 1997). Because prostituted runaway and homeless youth do not typically identify as being commercially sexually exploited, these percentages may be under-represented (Estes & Weiner, 2002).

### **The Influence of Pimps and Traffickers**

Researchers estimate that sex traffickers or pimps control about 50 percent of the women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade in the United States (Albanese, 2007; Estes & Weiner, 2002). Traffickers and pimps are most commonly linked to younger girls and runaways who lack housing, food, and clothing (Curtis, Dank, Dombrowski, & Khan, 2008; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Adolescent girls are considered highly susceptible to entrapment in prostitution because of love, debt, addiction, assault, authority, and coercion by pimps (Kennedy, Klein, Bristowe, Cooper, & Yuille, 2007; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Often pimps or traffickers scout bus stations, arcades, group homes, schools, and malls to recruit girls (Albanese, 2007; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002). Kennedy et al., (2007) found that the most desirable form of pimping is to manipulate the young girl into developing an emotional attachment to the

pimp. The girl believes that the pimp is her “boyfriend,” whom she loves, which allows the pimp or trafficker to control, manipulate, and coerce the girl into prostitution (Kennedy et al., 2007).

### **Violence and Victimization in the Commercial Sex Trade**

Once involved in the commercial sex trade, the risk of violence and trauma is significant. Not only do women tend to have histories of victimization, but they also continue to face physical, sexual, and emotional abuse daily by the pimps that own them and the customers that purchase their services (for reviews see, Barnitz, 2001; Farley, Baral, Kiremire, & Sezgin, 1998; Heilemann & Santhiveeran, 2011; Willis & Levy, 2002). The damaging effects prostitution has on women’s mental and physical health are undeniable and are well-documented throughout the research literature. This section will describe the violence, physical health risks, and psychological harms experienced by women involved in the commercial sex trade.

#### **Violence**

Women and girls involved in the commercial sex trade experience significant amounts of violence. Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, and Ursel (2004) explored violence in the lives of girls exploited through prostitution. The authors interviewed 47 women who had been involved in prostitution prior to age 18. Over half of the women reported being subject to violence or threats of violence from pimps while involved in prostitution. More than half of the women reported being assaulted by customers. These assaults included being stabbed or cut, raped, gang raped, raped at gunpoint, forced to engage in degrading sexual acts, choked/strangled, beaten, kidnapped, stalked, held with a gun to head, tied up, tortured, beaten with objects, and run over. Beyond the violence experienced at the hands of their pimps and customers, these women also reported being assaulted by law enforcement officers and being harassed by the general public (Nixon et al., 2004). A mortality survey of more than 1,600 women involved in the commercial

sex trade in the United States noted that “no population of women studied previously has had a percentage of deaths due to murder even approximating those observed in our cohort” (Potterat et al, 2004, p. 783). In this survey, murder accounted for 50 percent of the deaths of women in prostitution (Potterat et al., 2004).

### **Physical Health Risks**

Multiple sexual partners and risky sexual practices place women involved in the commercial sex trade at high risk for contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Nixon et al., 2004). Other medical concerns include reproductive problems and injuries from sexual assaults, physical and neurological problems from physical attacks, addiction, fatigue, and general health issues including respiratory problems and joint pains (Heilemann & Santhiveeran, 2011). High levels of drug use and drug-related health problems are common among women involved in the commercial sex trade and include dental problems Hepatitis B and C, HIV, and serious liver and kidney problems (Heilemann & Santhiveeran, 2011). Violent incidences in the commercial sex trade also result in serious physical injuries such as miscarriages, stitches, paralysis, broken bones, and fractures (Nixon et al., 2004)

### **Psychological Harms**

Involvement in the commercial sex trade often results in lasting psychological harm (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Farley & Kelly, 2000; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Farley and Barkan (1998) interviewed 130 people working as prostitutes in San Francisco. The authors found that 68% of the people interviewed met the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other psychological symptoms and syndromes related to involvement in the commercial sex trade include depression, suicidal thoughts, and strong feelings of shame and

guilt (Heilemann & Santhiveeran, 2011). One study found that prostituted women and teenage girls were 6.8 times more likely to have attempted suicide compared to those not involved in prostitution (Van Brunschot & Brannigan, 2002). Unfortunately, mental health problems continue even after women have successfully exited the commercial sex trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001). Consequently, mental health problems and deep feelings of shame make it difficult for women to exit the commercial sex trade (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007).

### **Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade**

Exiting is a long, complex, and involved process that requires an entire life transformation (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Dalla, 2006; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007). Many of the push and pull factors that draw women into the commercial sex trade unfortunately prevent them from successfully exiting (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007). To date few studies have defined an “exit” using specific parameters such as the length of time one must abstain from the commercial sex trade (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Benoit & Millar (2001) considered a final exit to be a minimum of two years of abstaining from the commercial sex trade. Two years was identified as enough time for the women “to leave behind most aspects of the identity and activities in being a sex worker” (Benoit & Millar, 2001, p. iv). Although the current research provides a strong foundation for understanding the exit process, much still remains unknown. The next section describes the myriad of barriers women face in their journey to exit the commercial sex trade. It is these barriers that served as the impetus behind my continued exploration of the exiting process.

### **Individual Barriers**

Prostituted women encounter a number of individual factors that hinder their ability to exit the commercial sex trade including addiction, low self-worth, mental health issues, and

physical health problems (Farley & Kelly, 2000; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007). According to Benoit and Millar (2001) drug dependency is one the most significant individual barriers to exiting the commercial sex trade. Often drugs are used to numb the pain of past trauma and cope with day to day life in the commercial sex trade. Women are exposed to high levels of violence in the commercial sex trade which often result in lasting mental and physical health problems (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Thus, the combination of prostitution, drug use, and mental illness make it difficult for women to make a clean break and many return to the lifestyle in order to support their drug habit (Benoit & Millar, 2001). Limited education, a lack of job skills, and a criminal record are other individual factors that limit women's ability to gain legitimate employment, thus reinforcing the need to remain in the commercial sex trade (Benoit & Miller, 2001; Edlund & Korn, 2002).

### **Relational Barriers**

Relationships can be complex for women involved in the commercial sex trade. As discussed, some women are forced or coerced into the commercial sex trade by family members, friends, or intimate partners. In some cases, pimps, peers, and family members use manipulation, threats, and violence to keep women from leaving the commercial sex trade (Kennedy et al., 2007) and serve as an underground system of social support which normalizes, encourages, and reinforces prostitution (Kennedy et al., 2007; Nixon et al., 2002). In addition, a number of women involved in the commercial sex trade are estranged from their families either because the women chose to end the relationship (i.e. childhood sexual abuse, family dysfunction) or their families severed ties (i.e. drug addiction, do not want to enable). Thus, they are unable to receive any familial support as they try to exit. Further, the interpersonal shame and stigma prevents women from reaching out to family or seeking help from social service agencies (Benoit &

Millar, 2001). The absence of a strong support network results in feelings of isolation which increases the difficulty of transitioning out of the commercial sex trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001).

### **Structural Barriers**

One of the most significant structural barriers to exiting is poverty (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002). Research in nine countries found that 89 percent of all those engaged in prostitution said they were involved because they had no alternatives for economic survival and no means of escape (Farley et al., 2003). There are limited supportive services for women involved in the commercial sex trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001). Most exiting programs are structured in the form of diversion programs and funded by the criminal justice system (Shdaimah, 2012; Quinn, 2006; Wahab, 2006). Although diversion programs have been hailed as progressive alternatives to more punitive criminal justice approaches to certain crimes, there still remains little empirical evidence that they actually help women exit the commercial sex trade (Quinn, 2006). The limited availability of specialized programs may lead women to seek services from other agencies including substance abuse treatment centers and domestic violence agencies (Golder & Logan, 2007; Logan & Leukefeld, 2000). While helpful, women may feel compelled to reenter the commercial sex trade if these agencies are not able to meet their complex needs at the time they reach out for help (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007).

### **Successful and Unsuccessful Exiting**

Despite numerous barriers to exiting, many women successfully leave the commercial sex trade. Dalla (2006) explored the exiting process among street-level prostituted women and identified several catalysts for exiting the commercial sex trade. One catalyst is “hitting rock bottom,” which includes experiences of violence, losing custody of one’s children, facing

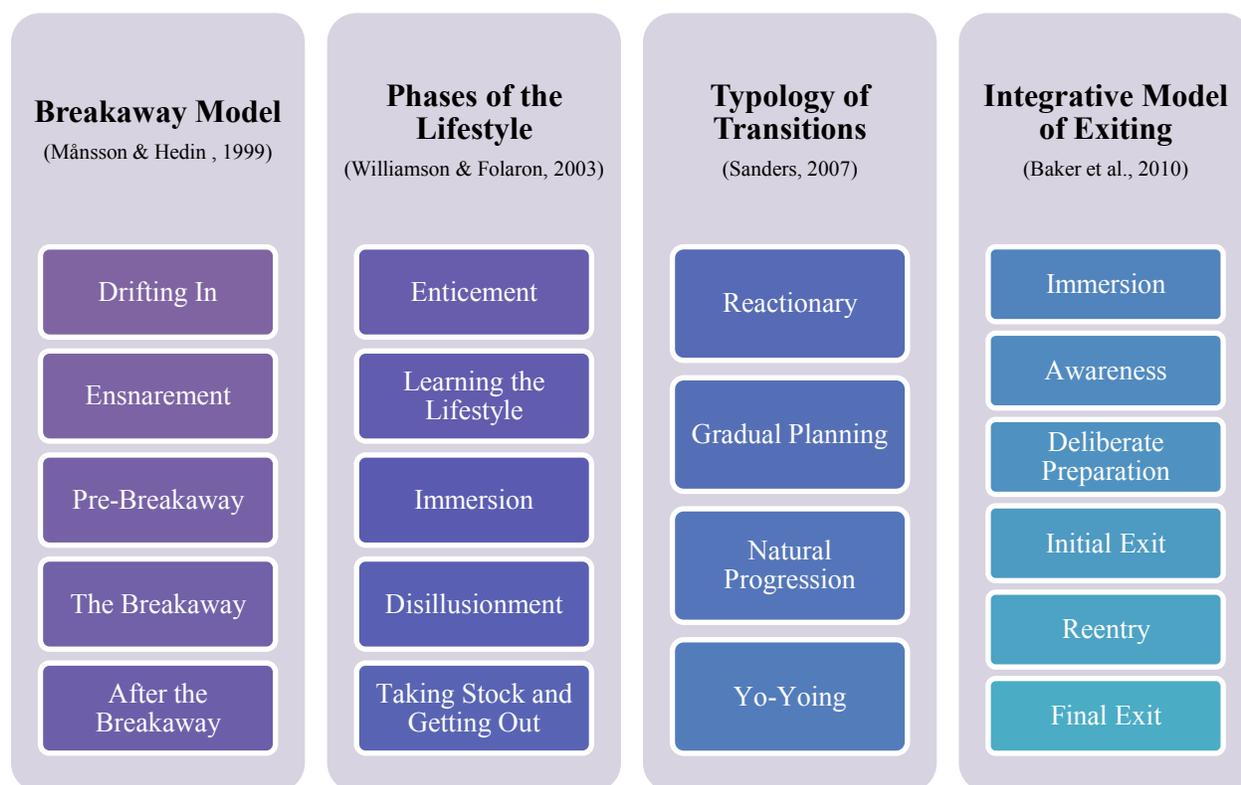
lengthy jail sentences, and the declining profitability of engagement in the commercial sex trade (Dalla, 2006). Dalla (2006) also identified critical formal support services that aided successful exits from the commercial sex trade such as access to counseling, residential treatment, drug treatment, work programs, and safe housing and informal supports including family and partners. The women who exited also noted the importance of distancing themselves from “old playmates”, obtaining employment, and connecting with the church community as part of the exiting process (Dalla, 2006). However, Dalla (2006) remarked that “supportive services were not sufficient to sustain lasting behavioral change: personal commitment was key” (p. 288).

Unfortunately, unsuccessful attempts and reentry into the commercial sex trade are common (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006). In Dalla’s (2006;  $N = 18$ ) study, only 20-25 percent of women successfully exited the commercial sex trade. Dalla (2006) identified several factors that pulled women back into the commercial sex trade, including loss of a relationship, drug addiction, death of a loved one, pressure from old playmates, mental illness, and disengagement from formal support services. In Benoit and Millar’s (2001) study of 200 Canadian sex workers, 70.6 percent of the respondents had exited the sex trade at least once and more than half had exited three or more times. The authors found that respondents who had exited had attempted to exit an average of 5.8 times before making the final break (Benoit & Millar, 2001). In this study respondents pointed to economic necessity as the main motivating factor for reentering the commercial sex trade (Benoit & Millar, 2001). These studies illustrate the “enter, exit, and re-enter” cycle of exiting the commercial sex trade and identify factors that pull women back into the commercial sex trade. Further, these studies identify factors associated with a successful exit and highlight the need for continued exploration of the exiting process.

### **Current Theoretical Perspectives on Exiting**

Researchers have attempted to explain the process women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade. Four models have been proposed to examine the stages or transitions women go through when exiting the commercial sex trade. These models are based on in-depth interviews with women involved in the commercial sex trade and provide a strong foundation for understanding the exiting experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade. Each model accounts for the number of phases women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade. The stages of exiting tend to be similar across models and each describe the individual, relational, and structural factors that influence one's ability to exit. Further, the models emphasize the importance of formal support services in the exiting process. Lastly, most of the models describe the exit-reentry cycle which is common among women involved in the commercial sex trade. The four models (See Figure 2) will be described in more detail in this section.

Figure 2: Models of Exiting



### **Månsson and Hedin's "Breakaway Model"**

Månsson and Hedin's (1999) prostitution "breakaway" model is based on their interviews with 23 Swedish women, most of which had exited the commercial sex trade more than three years prior to the interview. At the time of the interview only a few women had yet to make a complete break from the commercial sex trade. Their "breakaway" model is heavily influenced by the work of Vanwesenbeeck (1994) and Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) who studied the health and risk behavior of women involved in the commercial sex trade in the Netherlands.

Månsson and Hedin's (1999) "breakaway model" is comprised of five stages including *drifting in, ensnarement, pre-breakaway, the breakaway, and after the breakaway*. The authors suggest that most women experience a turning point which prompts them to break away from the commercial sex trade. The turning points (p. 71) are described as "eye-opening events" (i.e. understanding the realities of the lifestyle), "traumatic events" (i.e. violent experiences), or "positive life events (i.e. having a child, finding a job). These experiences are characterized as either "a culmination of a long-term destructive course of events or like a bolt from the blue" (p. 71). In contrast, the authors describe a more "gradual and undramatic" progression out of the commercial sex trade. For example, women may begin to "phase out" of the lifestyle by limiting sexual services, reducing time on the street, or only seeing regular customers (p. 71). The *breakaway* stage either happens quickly or gradually depending on the women's level of immersion in the lifestyle. In the *after the breakaway* stage women struggled with four main issues: working through and understanding the experiences of life in prostitution, dealing with shame, living in a marginal situation, and dealing with intimate and close relationships (p. 72).

Månsson and Hedin (1999) described a combination of structural, relational, and individual factors that influenced the women's ability to break away from the commercial sex

trade. *Structural factors* are defined as “the societal circumstances in which women have found themselves and which have influenced the breakaway and subsequent process of change” including “work, housing, education, welfare benefits, and societal stigma” (p. 73). *Relational factors* include “women’s close relationships and how their social networks have functioned during the process of change” including their “relationships with men, relationships with children, and their professional support network” (p. 74). *Individual factors* include the women’s internal drive and ability to dream of a future outside of the commercial sex trade. Månsson and Hedin (1999) believed that “the ability to hold on to one’s dreams can turn out to be crucial for change and growth” (p. 74). Professional support, individual resilience, and the development of individual coping strategies were the most important factors in Månsson and Hedin’s model.

#### **Williamson and Folaron’s “Phases of the Lifestyle”**

Williamson and Folaron (2003) “phases of the lifestyle” is based on interviews with 21 women from two Midwestern cities, involved (or formerly involved) in the commercial sex trade. Although the study was not focused on exiting, the authors described a five stage entry-to-exit process where one becomes enticed in the life of prostitution, learns the culture of prostitution, and becomes fully immersed in the life or “trusts the game” (p. 279).

Disillusionment with the life occurs after violence, drug addiction arrests, and extensive trauma take their toll. This last stage is described as “taking stock and getting out” (p. 283). In this model it is “the sum of daily hassles, acute traumas, and chronic conditions that precipitate a woman’s decision to exit prostitution” (p. 283). The authors also provided evidence that institutional pressures from law enforcement or child protection services can facilitate an exit from the commercial sex trade. However, the authors noted external pressure is only successful when the women have a personal desire to exit the commercial sex trade.

### **Sanders's "Typology of Transitions"**

Sanders (2007) interviewed 15 women involved in outdoor prostitution (street prostitution) and 15 women involved in indoor prostitution (sauna workers) and identified four pathways or transitions out of the commercial sex trade: *reactionary*, *gradual planning*, *natural progression*, and *yo-yoing*. The *reactionary* exit is the result of a reaction to a significant positive (i.e. new relationship, pregnancy) or negative life event (i.e. violent attack, health crisis). According to Sanders (2007) this route "was not usually permanent as the transition was ill thought out and without a conscious plan of how to earn money" (p. 82). *Gradual planning* occurred over time and resulted in women "putting into place other activities to substitute earnings and develop another career path" (p. 83). Indoor sex workers spoke of financial planning to prepare for a reduction in future earnings and were concerned about their lack of insurance and pensions. Street sex workers described reducing the number of clients and spending less time on the street as a transition out of the commercial sex trade. Phasing out of the life coincided with women seeking supportive services including drug treatment, holistic therapy, housing, and job training. Sanders (2007) noted that housing was "central to starting a new life and removing oneself from the temptations of the street culture, life, and networks (p. 84). *Natural progression* is the third type of exit. In this stage women "often reached a natural point of changed based on a history of failed drug treatments, drifting in and out of the industry, violence, and a chaotic lifestyle.....that leads to a "strong desire for a different lifestyle" (p.85). For outdoor workers the accumulation of negative experiences provided the momentum to exit the commercial sex trade, while indoor workers' exits were "triggered by getting older, the physical and emotional demands of the job, as well as aspirations to do other kinds of work" (p. 87).

The *yo-yo pattern* consists of women “drifting in and out of sex work” (p. 87) and this was present among both indoor and outdoor sex workers. However, the pressures that drew women back into the sex trade were different for both groups. Outdoor workers often reentered due to involvement with the criminal justice system (i.e. paying fines for soliciting offenses) and to support their drug addiction. Indoor workers often exited the sex trade due to “occupational stress and strain” (p. 88), but returned because their exits were not planned and they were unable to make the same kind of money in a “normal” job (p. 88). One of the most important contributions of this model was the connection between individual resilience, structural disadvantages, and the ability to exit. For example, a woman may be ready to exit but a lack of affordable housing or viable employment may restrict her movement out of the commercial sex trade.

### **Baker and Colleagues “*Integrative Model of Exiting*”**

More recently a six-stage exiting model combining two general models (Fuchs & Ebaugh, 1988; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992) and two prostitution-specific models (Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007) was developed to describe the exiting process (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Baker, Dalla, and Williamson's integrative model is comprised of six stages including *immersion*, *awareness* (both visceral and conscious), *deliberate preparation*, *initial exit*, *reentry*, and the *final exit*. In the *immersion* stage women are completely immersed in the commercial sex trade and have no thoughts of exiting. The second stage, *awareness*, is comprised of two types of awareness *visceral* and *conscious*. *Visceral awareness* refers to “the gradual realization that all is not as it used to be” (p. 591), yet women are not able to articulate how they are feeling. *Conscious awareness* occurs when women are able to acknowledge and verbalize their feelings to others (p. 591). In the *deliberate preparation* stage women engage in

help seeking behavior and most likely connect with formal support services. Although women are actively seeking help, the authors note that little, if any behavioral change occurs during this stage (p. 592).

The *initial exit* stage occurs when women are engaged in informal (i.e. moving in with a family member, connecting with sponsor) and formal (i.e. counseling, drug treatment) supportive services (p. 592). For some women this stage may result in a final exit, while others may reenter the commercial sex trade. *Reentry* is characterized by women returning to the commercial sex trade. During this stage women may become fully immersed in the lifestyle, thus regressing back to earlier stages of the exit model. Baker et al. (2010) note that the *final exit* “often occurs after a series of exiting and reentering cycles” (p.593) and suggest that “it is unlikely that a women will reach *final exit* on her first attempt because, once one is immersed, the barriers (i.e. individual, structural, relational, and societal factors) to exit success are extensive at each stage (p. 593)

### **Analysis of the Literature on Exiting**

Research on prostitution and sex trafficking has garnered more attention in the last few years due to the heightened awareness of sex trafficking in the United States. To date, the research literature has primarily focused on experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade and the reasons why they enter and remain in the commercial sex trade. A smaller body of literature is devoted to evaluating interventions and identifying best practices to facilitate a successful exit from the commercial sex trade (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007). The existing qualitative examinations provide deep insight into the lived experiences of women and describe the stages women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade. Researchers agree that exiting requires a number of psychosocial changes and is the result of a complex interplay of structural (i.e., employment), relational (i.e. family, formal supports), societal (shame, stigma) and

individual factors (i.e. internal drive, drug addiction) (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Månsson and Hedin's, 1999; Sanders, 2007). It is clear that the transition out of the commercial sex trade is a long, complex, and involved process that requires support, patience, and holistic interventions (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007).

Although the existing qualitative examinations on exiting provide a strong foundation for understanding the stages women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade, there are still several gaps in our understanding of the exiting process. The current research suggests that exiting requires an entire life transformation and identifies a number of cognitive, structural, relational, and individual changes that need to occur in order to facilitate a final exit. For example, Månsson and Hedin's (1999) model emphasized the importance of internal drive or motivation to exit, while Sanders (2007) stressed that changes must occur at both the individual (i.e. motivation to exit) and structural level (i.e. lack of housing, criminalization) to support an exit. However, it still remains unclear exactly what changes or structures need to be in place for women to successfully exit. For example, does obtaining employment end involvement in the commercial sex trade? What contribution does affordable housing have in the exiting process? How important is motivation to exit and how can motivation be developed and furthered? Are certain formal supports more effective than others and if so, why? Do relationships with social service providers influence the exiting process? And lastly, does the strength of these factors change depending on individual characteristics such as age, length of time in the sex trade, and type of sex trade involvement?

In addition, the existing empirical literature details a myriad number of barriers that prevent women from exiting the sex trade. However, few investigators have focused on the breadth of these barriers at the individual, relational, structural, and societal levels that challenge

a women's exit. For example, most researchers have focused on how individual factors such as drug addiction, readiness to change, and mental health issues influence the exiting process. Existing studies have only briefly explored the structural and societal factors that challenge a woman's exit. Lastly, there is limited research examining how social service providers negotiate these barriers to facilitate a final exit. Issues such as these limit our ability to design targeted and effective interventions to help women successfully exit the commercial sex trade.

The lack of information on the role of social service providers in the exiting process is evident in the research literature. Current research suggests that women come into contact with a number of social service systems including child protective services, hospitals, mental health centers, substance abuse treatment centers, domestic violence shelters, schools, and the criminal justice system. Further, existing models of exiting stress the importance of formalized supports in the exiting process. However, it remains unclear which social service systems are best designed to meet the complex needs of this population. It is clear that women cycle in and out of the commercial sex trade despite contact with social service providers but why some women fail to exit despite making deliberate attempts to seek help is unknown. Women's appraisals of how social service providers and law enforcement officials respond to them and other sexually trafficked/prostituted women are essential to the evaluation of what works to interrupt involvement in the commercial sex trade and for designing useful strategies, practices, and cross-system collaborations for reaching this population at the moment they contemplate exiting.

Finally, the findings of the existing exiting research are predominantly drawn on large samples in other parts of the world including New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Although these studies provide valuable insight into the experiences of women as they try to exit the commercial sex trade, there has been limited focus on this issue in the United

States and importantly, in the Midwest. Situated at the crossroads of America, where highway and transportation systems make it easier for the commercial sex trade to flourish, determining the extent of the problem in the Midwest is critical. New research on exiting is important, especially because of the political shifts in our understanding of prostitution and sex trafficking. An exploration of this issue within the current political and economic context is essential for improving our understanding of the exiting process.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

A feminist perspective of inquiry was used in this study because the topic concerns women and addresses issues of female struggle and equality, the research is primarily reflective of the perspective of women and its significance for women, the research creates knowledge that empowers a disadvantaged group, and I embraced a feminist position that challenges traditional notions of neutrality and scientific objectivity (Devault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2005). The qualitative methods of this study are grounded in the following tenets: the study participants and I are equal partners engaged in a mutual process of learning and knowledge creation (Maguire, 1987; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Sprague, 2005), distance between myself and the participant does not need to be maintained in order to create valid knowledge (Devault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2005), and the participants are treated as the experts on their own lived experiences (Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2005). The methodology chapter is divided into six sections. The first section will detail some of the basic tenets of feminist qualitative methods. Section two outlines the four research questions guiding the research study. Section three presents the research design of the study. In this section I provide a full rationale for the use of a qualitative research design. Section four provides a detailed discussion of the primary data collection methods used including sampling, recruitment, protection of human subjects, interviews as data collection, and the importance of field notes. Section five details the data analysis process of the research. Finally, section six describes the steps taken to enhance the methodological rigor of the study.

### **The Feminist Framework**

Although there is no universal definition of or set of guidelines for what constitutes feminist research, a feminist perspective can certainly be infused into the process of inquiry

(Devault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Maguire, 1987; Harding, 1991; Sprague, 2005). The goal of feminist research is to: (1) create and develop knowledge that is not oppressive, (2) continually develop the feminist critical perspective and question the dominant intellectual tradition, and (3) contribute to women's liberation by producing knowledge for women (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Devault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 2005, Harding & Norberg, 2005; Sprague, 2005). Thus, a feminist perspective was chosen for this study because it offered participants the opportunity to critically reflect on their lived experiences (Harding, 1991; Sprague, 2005) and provided a framework for creating knowledge collaboratively with the participants. The research undertaken here was focused on a gender-related phenomenon and explored issues of power and praxis. Indeed, participatory methods, qualitative research, and feminist research are closely aligned, and the following section outlines the tenets of feminist methods that were utilized in this research study.

Feminist methods are critical for social work research with women involved in the commercial sex trade. In feminist research participants are viewed and treated as experts on their own lives (Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2005). This is particularly important to the research discussed here, considering the population studied has been historically oppressed and denied a voice. Feminist researchers view the purpose of research as a mutual creation of knowledge and reject the notion of maintaining distance between the researcher and the participant (Devault, 1996; Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2009). Feminist researchers place themselves inside the study settings and assume a position as both learners and teachers with the participants. To engage in a mutual relationship with study participants, the researcher must be reflect on her/his own social power and how this might influence the research process (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Sprague, 2005). Given some of the

negative interactions and exploitative relationships between marginalized populations and researchers in the past, I was aware that race and class differences and my non-survivor status might influence the participants' willingness to trust and share their lives with me. Therefore, it was important for me to be reflexive about the extent to which similarities and differences between me and the participants in characteristics such as gender, race, and class influence the nature of the research relationship (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Indeed, I had to be conscious about how my own assumptions and views might influence the analysis and interpretation of the study data.

Feminist research challenges the dominant research paradigm by being openly political, connected, and involved in liberatory actions (Devault, 1996; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Maguire, 1987; Sprague, 2005). The connection between theory and action is known as praxis (Friere, 1970). Praxis is a basic tenet of feminist and action-based research. Through praxis, researchers are challenged to act and make research relevant to the actual lives of the study participants. Although this research was not necessarily designed around a particular action-oriented project, it was constructed in a way to optimize the mutual creation of knowledge that might improve the lives of women involved in the commercial sex trade. The survivor voice is critical in challenging the existing social structure and developing a comprehensive response to meet the needs of this marginalized population. Lastly, my involvement in the movement to end commercial sexual exploitation connected this project to action.

### **Research Questions**

In conceptualizing this research inquiry, four questions emerged to guide the exploration of the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. Although previous qualitative examinations provide a strong foundation for understanding the exiting experiences of women involved in the

commercial sex trade, there remains a lack of information on the role of social service providers and social service systems in the exiting process. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation research is to examine the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and explore the role of social service providers in the exiting process. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What factors influence a survivor's decision to exit the commercial sex trade?
2. How do survivors describe the process of exiting from the commercial sex trade?
3. In what ways do social service providers respond to survivors of commercial sexual exploitation?
4. What is the survivor's appraisal of how social service providers materially and emotionally support them throughout the exiting process?

### **Study Design**

This study used qualitative methods and a feminist perspective to answer the research questions. Although quantitative feminist research exists (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Sprague, 2005), the majority of research that identifies as feminist uses qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are often used to explore topics about which little is known and are particularly suited for pursuing sensitive topics such as prostitution and sex trafficking. Qualitative research takes a person-centered approach to understanding the complex lives of participants in a holistic, on-the-ground manner (Padgett, 2008). Thus, a qualitative design best fits this research study by capturing the "lived experiences" of the participants and providing a detailed description of how social service systems respond to this marginalized population. One of the main themes in qualitative research is context sensitivity (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research allows the researcher to place findings in a social, political, and cultural context. Context sensitivity is

crucial when studying an inherently social and political issue such as prostitution and sex trafficking. Lastly, qualitative research is closely aligned with action and participatory research. The central premise of action research is to counter the negative effects of oppression and social injustice by connecting research to social change. The results of this study provide an opportunity to refine practice strategies and policy directions on behalf of this population.

### **Data Collection**

#### ***Sample***

Purposeful sampling in the Kansas City metropolitan area was used to recruit the sample for this study. A purposeful sampling approach is most often used in qualitative research when the researcher wants to obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). In this study, the sample was drawn from survivors and social service providers located in two agencies that provide direct services to adolescents and adults who are involved in the commercial sex trade.

Criteria for inclusion in this study was informed by the research questions, thus the age of the participant and the status of the participant vis-à-vis their involvement in the commercial sex trade set the broad parameters for inclusion. (1) 18 years or older, (2) exchanged sex for food, money, shelter, housing, etc. and (3) exited, or was in the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. To date no studies have defined an “exit” using specific criteria such as the length of time one must abstain from the commercial sex trade (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Specific parameters delineating a final exit are difficult to define due to individual variability and the exit-reentry cycle that is common with this population (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010). Thus, this study did not use any firm criteria to define an “exit”. Rather, at the start of the interview each participant was asked if they had exited or were thinking about exiting the commercial sex trade.

In contrast to other studies on prostitution, sex trafficking, and sex work, the sampling did not occur based on predefined categories (i.e. street prostitution, indoor prostitution, etc.). Rather, the researcher sought to explore the exiting experiences of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade. The only criterion for the inclusion in the social service provider sample was having direct practice experience with clients who disclosed their personal involvement in the commercial sex trade.

### ***Recruitment***

The two participating agencies were identified as potential informants in fall 2012. Individual meetings were scheduled with each social service provider to discuss the study, develop and inform the study protocol, and refine the interview guide. Consistent with the participatory nature of the study, the social service providers were heavily involved in the development and execution of the research study.

Participant recruitment for the initial interviews occurred between January 2013 and September 2013. To assist in the recruitment of participants the social service providers at each agency distributed a flyer (See Appendix C - Recruitment) that contained initial information about the study. One agency handed out the flyers and briefly explained the study during its weekly support groups. All of the women attending the support group were willing to participate in the study and interviews were conducted on group days to ensure that all of the women were given an equal opportunity to participate. The second agency informed eligible clients about the study and provided me with contact information for clients who were interested in participating in the study interview. In these cases, I contacted the agency's clients by phone, explained the purpose and methods of the study, and conducted the interview in the client's transitional living apartment. All of the survivor participants received a \$10.00 gift card to a fast food restaurant for

their participation in the study interview. In one case a participant did not eat fast food and received a \$10.00 gift card to a local neighborhood market. I went back and forth about the use of an incentive in the study. The survivor's time is valuable and I wanted to be able to demonstrate that I appreciated their participation in the interview. However, I did not want to replicate the exploitive and coercive situations the survivors face in their everyday life. Thus, I sought feedback from the social service providers on what they thought was an appropriate incentive. Together we decided that a \$10.00 gift card was not an exploitive amount and would show the survivors that I value their time and expertise.

Qualitative research typically focuses on studying a small number of information-rich cases, emphasizing depth over breadth (Padgett, 2008). For the current study, I conducted twenty in-depth, individual interviews with survivors of two different organizations. Nineteen of the 20 survivors were recruited from one agency; this disparity in agency affiliation is largely due to the dominance of one of these agencies in that it is an agency that only provides services to men and women involved in the commercial sex trade. The second agency offered a wider array of services, and at the time of the study its caseload included only one client who was eligible for inclusion in the study. Although the sample relied heavily on participants from one agency, the participants described involvement in multiple social service systems outside of the sampled agency. Their involvement is detailed in the findings section of this dissertation.

As to the social service provider sample, I conducted four in-depth, individual interviews and one group interview with eight social service providers affiliated with two different organizations. The group interview format was used in recognition of the difficulty in scheduling eight individual interviews without disrupting client services.

### ***Protection of Human Subjects***

Prior to initiating the study, the study design, anticipated interview schedule, and all informed consent forms were submitted to the University of Kansas's Human Subjects Committee - Lawrence (HSC-L), the University's IRB process. The research application included statements regarding confidentiality and participant informed consent. Approval for this study by HSC-L was granted on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012. (See Appendix A - Human Subject's Application & Approval Letter). The interview data were kept confidential by assigning codes to each individual participant and maintained securely in locked cabinets and secure databases. Digital recordings were erased after they were transcribed. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that at any time during the course of the interview process, their consent to participate could be withdrawn.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study and to preserve confidentiality, the survivor participants were only asked to provide oral consent. This is because the main threat to their confidential participation is the existence of written documentation of their participation in the study, such as would be created by their signing a traditional consent form. At the start of each interview, after review of the research purpose and protocol, and the consent form, the survivor - participant was asked to provide verbal informed consent and social service providers were asked to sign an informed consent form indicating their agreement to participate in the study (See Appendix B - Consent Forms). Information was given at the beginning of the interview that detailed the purpose of the study, who would have access to the data, the type of questions to be asked, the rules surrounding confidentiality, and the participant's right to accept or decline participation without repercussions.

There were some possible risks for participating in the study and these were explained to potential participants. Talking about their experiences in the commercial sex trade or within social service systems, especially if they were negative ones, had the potential to create feelings of discomfort among participants. Additionally, the survivors were informed that they may experience stress as a result of sharing traumatic life experiences with me. The social service providers were informed that sharing difficult practice experiences may cause an emotional reaction. If any participant expressed distress or if they were noticeably uncomfortable with a given topic, the participant had the option to request to go on to a different topic or to stop the interview. In addition, appropriate referrals to local service providers or mental health professionals were provided if needed.

### ***Interviews as Data Collection***

I conducted all of the in-depth interviews required for the current study. The interview is an ideal tool for data collection when one is interested in obtaining a deeper understanding of how participants interpret the world around them, and to “capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 348). Thus, the interview method was particularly appropriate for this study, given that the purpose of the study was to understand not only the process of exiting the commercial sex trade but also the respondent’s perceptions of and experiences within social service systems.

There are several approaches to designing qualitative interviews (Patton, 2002). An informal conversation interview is a main tool of observation field work. This type of interview does not rely on predetermined questions, is less structured, and will result in different data for each person interviewed. The standardized open-ended interview is used when the researcher

intends to minimize variation among respondents. In this format, there is minimal flexibility and an emphasis on consistency across interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher typically prepares an interview guide that provides a framework for the topics that are to be explored with each respondent. According to Patton (2002) an interview guide is used “to keep interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge” (p. 344). Patton (2008) notes that in most studies researchers can combine all three types of interviewing. The combined strategy “offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument’s development” (Patton, 2002, p. 347).

For this study, the semi-structured interview approach was adopted as the primary interviewing technique. However, I also used structured questions to gather demographic and service needs data from each client participant at the conclusion of the interview. A preliminary version of the interview guide was approved by the dissertation committee. To ensure the quality of the interview guide, an initial interview guide was reviewed by my committee chair and methodologist. The survivor interview guide focused on the clients' process of exiting the commercial sex trade, the relational, emotional, and structural challenges they faced during this exiting period, and their perceptions of and experiences with social service systems which purport to serve them. The social service provider interview guide was designed to reveal the ways providers respond to clients who have disclosed individual involvement in the commercial sex trade.

Prior to its implementation, the interview guide was piloted in a group interview with three social service providers employed in a domestic violence agency in the Kansas City

metropolitan area. A domestic violence agency was selected as the pilot location since survivors of domestic violence share similar characteristics with women involved in the commercial sex trade (i.e. histories of victimization & trauma, abusive partners). Also, in some cases sexually trafficked and prostituted women come into contact with domestic violence service providers. Through the pilot interview, I gained valuable feedback on the interview guide, and the providers also gave suggestions on how to effectively interview women who have experienced trauma and victimization. All of the social service providers encouraged me to incorporate tenets of trauma-informed care into the interview process. For example, the providers suggested setting up a safe and comfortable interview space where clients would not feel trapped or panicked. Following pilot testing, the interview guide was reviewed by the social service providers at the two participating agencies. This review allowed the social service providers to suggest the inclusion of additional questions of interest and to help me understand the language and culture of the commercial sex trade. The questions were edited and finalized in collaboration with service providers at both participating agencies. Final versions of both interview guides are included in Appendix D.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the two participating agencies, with the exception of one survivor participant who was interviewed at her apartment. One participant was interviewed in her apartment due to transportation and childcare issues. At the time of the interview, she did not have a car and the interview took place right before she had to pick her children up from school. To ensure she would be able to pick up her children from school on time, we had to conduct the interview in her apartment. Prior to the interview I informed a colleague and my advisor where the interview would be conducted. I also contacted my advisor after the interview to inform her that I had made it home safely. During each face-to-face

interview, the respondent was asked to provide oral consent indicating that he/she understood the nature and purpose of the research, the risks and benefits involved in participating, the steps taken to ensure participants' confidentiality and privacy, and the availability of supportive services should she/he have any emotional reaction after the interview was completed. With each participant's consent, the interviews were digitally recorded. Interviews were generally completed within 60 and 90 minutes. At the outset of the study, participants were notified that follow-up interviews and member checks would be conducted after the interview segment of the research was complete. Throughout the interview process, I maintained field notes to document observations made during the research process and to preserve any early insights for the data analysis.

Upon meeting the each of the survivor-participants (predominantly women) I made it clear that I wanted to hear “their story” and to talk with them about their experiences. While I had prepared an interview guide to help me introduce some of the topics of interest, the women were not required to answer my questions or address my particular concerns. Consistent with a feminist perspective, I approached each interview with the conviction that each participant was the expert in his/her own lives and that a dialogue grounded in their realities would yield rich, meaningful data. Unlike conventional interview techniques that focus on the researcher asking the interviewee questions, I viewed the interviews as an opportunity for both myself and the participants to be active contributors in the creation of knowledge. For example, the women were given the opportunity to ask me questions about my life and experiences throughout the interview. Several of the women asked me questions about my life history and my reasons for wanting to study their lives. Sensitive and personal aspects of both the women’s lives and my life were disclosed during the interviews which led to an expression of a range of emotions including

tears and laughter. Engaging in this mutual and open dialogue not allowed me to not only connect with the women and them with me, but also gave us an opportunity to be reflexive in the dialogue that occurred. This mutuality and reflexivity provided an opportunity to share stories and discuss relevant topics of inquiry that I did not foresee. More importantly, engaging in a more egalitarian relationship minimized the power differential between me and the study participants. Lastly, it created a safe environment where the women felt comfortable sharing information about highly stigmatized behaviors such as the ones queried and revealed in the study.

Throughout the interviews the women thanked me for listening to their stories without judgment. Sharon remarked, “Thank you for not looking at me like I was crazy.” Dana told me that she liked that the focus of the interview was on exiting the life, rather than the dangers of the commercial sex trade. Almost all of the women related that they enjoyed sharing their experiences with me and would be open to participating in future interviews. For some, the interview experience was therapeutic with some women expressing that they wished I was their social worker. In some cases I was the first person who ever asked them to share their story. I believe that the richness of the data gathered can be attributed to the open and trusting relationships that I built with the women throughout the interview process.

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Due to time constraints, the study interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. All of the transcripts were proofread simultaneously while listening to the recorded interviews. I corrected any errors or mistakes made in the transcription. Most of the errors were due to transcriptionist unfamiliarity with the names of social service agencies and the particular language used by participants during

the interview. This process improved the accuracy of the transcripts and served as the first step in the data analysis process.

### ***The Importance of Field Notes***

In employing qualitative methods it is important to be aware of and document the internal processes and thoughts experienced by the researcher (Padgett, 2008). Consequently, I maintained a journal of field notes throughout the research study. The field notes were used to document the research process and as a tool for processing each interview and reflecting on observations made during the research process. After each interview, I documented how I felt about the interview, the mood of the session, inconsistencies in the participant narratives, questions and thoughts I might have for future interviews/analysis, and topics for peer debriefing. The field notes also contained reminders of interesting issues raised during the interview and new insights for future exploration. Lastly, the field notes provided an ongoing opportunity for reflexivity as I documented my biases, thoughts, and feelings throughout the course of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The four research questions were analyzed through well-established, qualitative techniques. For the study analysis a more general qualitative data analysis approach as outlined by Creswell (2013) was used, and is discussed below. It is important to note that the survivor and social service provider data were analyzed separately. Therefore, the stages of the data analysis described in this section were conducted independently for the clients and social service providers. First, the digital recordings were transcribed by an experienced transcriptionist. Following transcription I proofread the transcripts for accuracy while simultaneously listening to the digital recordings. This included reading the transcript inductively, with no deliberate

identification of codes and themes. The transcript files were then entered into Atlas ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data management program and converted into hermeneutic units for analysis. Second, as suggested by Creswell (2013) the researcher obtained a general sense of the data by reading the transcripts in their entirety several times and made notes about potential coding categories and emergent themes.

Next, the data were coded using the qualitative software Atlas ti©. I conducted several rounds of open and focused coding. This data analysis technique utilized both inductive and deductive reasoning to identify, name, categorize, and describe the primary patterns in the data. I defined each of these codes initially, although codes were later modified for the purpose of clarity and refinement. Each of the code definitions, and the modifications were stored in Atlas ti© and were accessible throughout the analysis. Also, as part of the audit trail, I maintained copies of all the iterations of coding which included analytic notes documenting the coding decisions. Further, I consulted with the committee chair and methodologist throughout the coding process. After the codes were finalized, I then read each transcript again, line-by-line, and assigned the respective code or codes. Throughout this process, I wrote memos and took analytic notes in Atlas ti on emerging themes and concepts.

After coding each of the transcripts individually, I reviewed each code category and the data associated with the given code. During this process overlapping codes were identified and in some cases merged into a single code, thereby slightly altering or expanding the definition of the code. At this point a cross-case analysis was conducted to compare patterns across and within cases. I continued to write analytic memos and thoughts on the analytic procedure. The cross-case analysis allowed the identification of themes. Patterns and themes were identified by examining the number of entries per code. Next, related codes were categorized into thematic

families. In this case, the individual codes were considered sub-themes and the families represented the overarching themes that emerged from the data analysis. Placing the codes in thematic families condensed the data into manageable categories. A list of the codes, their definitions, and families are included in Appendix E of this dissertation.

In an effort to ensure inter-rater-reliability, another graduate student was hired and consulted in two stages - during the middle stages of coding and category development and at the end of the data input and coding process, for a final review of codes and categories. Certain codes were changed, limited, and expanded based on her coding and resulting discussions. Her feedback and suggestions were a critical component of the analysis process and were incorporated into the final analysis.

Descriptive data were generated to determine the age of entry into the commercial sex trade, length of involvement in the commercial sex trade, highest level of education, marital status, residence, number of children, and children's residence. Additionally, each survivor-participant completed a questionnaire that identified their individual service needs. The statistical software SPSS was used to store and analyze the descriptive data. Finally, the data were written and presented in the form of themes, sub-themes, and descriptive characteristics and synthesized in the discussion section of the study.

Throughout the analysis process I found myself feeling very protective of the interview material. Because I developed a strong connection with the women and valued their individual experiences it was difficult to turn the stories into chunks of "data". I constantly feared that I would lose the voice of the participant and the complexities of their lives as I broke apart and coded their narratives in the analysis process. At times I feared betraying the women by sharing their deeply personal experiences with a wider audience, despite their consent for me to do so.

Further, I did not want to glamorize or sensationalize their experiences in my dissertation study or in anticipation of future writings. In my initial meetings with the social service providers, they all expressed hostility about how prostitution and sex trafficking are sensationalized in the media and distort the realities of the commercial sex trade. I wanted to be conscious of this pattern of misrepresentation and avoid the further stigmatization of this population in my dissertation and future work.

These concerns were grounded in a heightened awareness of my potential power to exploit the study participants. At times I questioned my own right to these women's stories as a researcher. My motives and intentions were heavily questioned by not only the social service providers, but by the women in the study. Fortunately, I was able to gain the trust of the social service providers, which translated into at least an initial measure of trust with the client population. I also was aware that the women were sharing only the information about their lives that they wanted me to know. Most of the women were excited that their stories were sought and recorded and would be used to help other women involved in the commercial sex trade. As the data were analyzed and the findings of this research emerged, I was diligent in my efforts to ensure the voices and narratives of the women interviewed were accurately represented in the study. I felt that my responsibility as a researcher and a partner to the study participants was to honor and respect the voices of the survivors throughout the writing of the dissertation study.

### **Trustworthiness**

While the criteria for assessing methodological rigor in quantitative research center on validity, reliability, and generalizability, the criteria for qualitative research focus on the issue of trustworthiness (Padgett, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) were at the forefront in developing separate criteria for assessing the methodological rigor of qualitative research. Their proposed

criteria draw direct parallels to quantitative research and include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternatives to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively. The following section provides a detailed description of how each criterion was integrated into the dissertation study.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is the extent to which the researcher's description and interpretations of the data accurately represent the respondent's views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research utilized four techniques proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) to address credibility. First, my prolonged engagement to the topic being studied increased the credibility of the work. Lincoln & Guba (1985) referred to prolonged engagement as "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or respondents, and building trust" (p. 301). Throughout the course of my scholarly career I have focused on improving the lives of women and children who have experienced trauma, violence, and abuse. I have three years of practice experience and was trained as a crisis intervention specialist, engaged in individual and policy level advocacy, and worked as an education and outreach specialist. I also had the opportunity to develop and conduct trainings for law enforcement and social service providers to improve their response to victims of sexual violence. In January 2010, I traveled to India to gain a more global understanding of issues affecting women and girls. During this experience I visited agencies that worked with women and children involved in the commercial sex trade. Through this experience I developed a passion for studying sex trafficking in the United States. I have since served on coalitions, task forces, and working groups focused on addressing domestic sex trafficking. I have developed strong relationships with stakeholders and researchers at the local and national level who are

committed to developing a comprehensive response to addressing sex trafficking in the United States. Academically, I have published an academic article on domestic minor sex trafficking, reviewed academic articles on human trafficking, and mentored students who are interested in this area of social work research. In fall 2013, I was awarded a series of fellowships, including a National Institute of Justice Fellowship, to support my scholarly work on sex trafficking in the United States.

Second, feminist approaches to triangulation strengthen a qualitative study by using multiple and different data sources, methods, investigators, and theories to uncover new knowledge and promote social change for the study participants (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In this study triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple cases and different agency settings to reveal the complexities of exiting the sex commercial sex trade. The use of Atlas ti and the constant comparative method served as a form of analytical triangulation. Lastly, the interview data, codes, and themes were frequently cross-checked between my committee chair, methodologist, and a colleague with practice experience with high-risk populations. Cross-checking the data provides a valuable safeguard against bias in the data analysis.

Third, peer debriefing was used throughout the course of the study. According to Creswell (2013), peer debriefing serves as an “external check of the research process” (p. 251) and is a mechanism for keeping the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, Jewkes et al., (2000) emphasize the importance of having a safe place for the researcher to discuss the impact of the fieldwork on their lives when conducting research on gender-based violence. For the current research study, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with a dissertation committee member who had extensive experience in the field of clinical practice and research with high risk populations. The sessions were used to process the data and the

researcher's interpretations. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, peer debriefing was typically conducted on a weekly basis to allow myself an opportunity for catharsis.

Fourth, member checking refers to checking with study participants to verify the preliminary findings of the study. Member checking is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility (p. 314). Member checking allows the researcher to take the data, analyses, and interpretations back to the original sources of the data so they have the opportunity to assess the credibility and provide feedback on the findings. In the current study, member checking was completed through a group meeting with two of the social service providers to discuss the findings.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) rely on the use of thick descriptions to assist the reader in making decisions regarding the applicability of the findings to his or her setting. Thick description provides a detailed description of the participants and the study settings and according to Patton (2002) "takes the reader into the setting being studied" (p. 437). The current study uses thick descriptions in the form of participant quotes to enable the reader to make decisions regarding transferability.

### ***Dependability and Confirmability***

Dependability refers to the replicability of the study in similar settings and context. Confirmability is achieved by demonstrating that the study's findings are firmly linked to the data, rather than the bias and assumptions of the researcher. In this study dependability and confirmability were achieved through a procedure known as an audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) compare the process of establishing and audit trail to that of a fiscal audit. An audit trail

consists of the researcher's documentation of the data, methods, and decisions made during the research process. The categories of documentation and supporting material for establishing trustworthiness are presented below in Table 1.

The dissertation chair, methodologist, and a colleague conducted an audit for the study. The audit took place throughout the interview process, following the development of the coding guide, and during the final writings of chapters four and five (See Table 1: Audit Trail Components). Additionally, the committee chair, methodologist, and colleague provided peer debriefing during the coding phase of the dissertation, examined the study transcripts, and verified the coding schema. Throughout the course of the study I took extensive field notes, methodological notes, and process notes to track the research process and decisions made regarding the study.

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Table 1: Audit Trail Components

Audit Trail Category	Supporting Material for the Audit Trail
Instrument Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initial interview guide</li> <li>▪ Final Interview guide</li> <li>▪ Field notes from pilot study and meetings with social service providers</li> </ul>
Raw Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Electronic files of recorded interviews</li> <li>▪ Transcripts</li> <li>▪ Field notes/Research journal</li> </ul>
Data Reduction and Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analytic notes on emerging concepts</li> </ul>
Data Reconstruction and Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Methodological notes about development of categories, themes, and relationships between categories.</li> </ul>
Process Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Methodological notes</li> <li>▪ Notes from meetings with committee members</li> </ul>
Intention and Deposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research proposal</li> <li>▪ HSCL application</li> <li>▪ Personal notes</li> </ul>
Findings and Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Total data set</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE EXITING JOURNEY

This chapter presents the themes and findings from the interviews with survivors who are in the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. While one male was interviewed for the dissertation study, these findings primarily relate to the exiting experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade. The in-depth interviews focused on their process of exiting, the relational, emotional, and structural challenges they faced during exiting, and their perceptions of and experiences with social service systems while they made the journey. The first section reports descriptive data on the study sample, followed by an examination of their pathways into the commercial sex trade. The final section focuses on their journey to exit the commercial sex trade and corresponds to the analytic constructs in my research questions. Quotations from the participants are highlighted throughout the chapter to illustrate the themes that emerged from the data. The quotes are reported in a way that remains true to the participants' voice. All names used in this report are pseudonyms, including persons and places referred to by the study participants.

Nearly all of the women expressed gratitude for the chance to talk about their stories and experiences so freely. In some cases I was one of the first people to sit down and listen to their stories without judgment. Most of these dialogues were emotional, and some of the women told their stories through tears, especially when they spoke about their children. Although there were sad moments, the women also demonstrated incredible strength and resilience as they spoke about their journey to exit the commercial sex trade. It became abundantly clear that these women are indeed survivors.

### *Survivor Demographics*

The initial interviews were conducted in spring and summer 2013. A total of nineteen women and one male who had been involved or were currently involved in the commercial sex trade completed an individual interview. One female participant was excluded from the findings because she did not meet the sample criteria. Although this participant had experienced risk factors for entry into the commercial sex trade, it was revealed during the interview that she had never engaged in a commercial sex act. This section details the self-reported demographic characteristics and sex trade history of the study participants (See Table 2).

The study participants were diverse by age, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The ethnicity of the sample was representative of the area in which they were sampled. Eleven of the women identified as White/European American, six women were Black/African American, and two were multiracial. Twelve of the women reported being heterosexual and three identified as bisexual. One participant identified as “other”, and three did not respond to this item on the demographic form.

The participants ranged in age from 19 to 57 years. The education level of the participants ranged from less than high school to completion of a Bachelor’s degree. With the exception of two participants who were still enrolled in high school, none of the participants were enrolled in academic programs at the time of the study. Twelve of the participants had children and were single at the time of the interview. Nine of the participants were living in an apartment or other rental property, four were living in a shelter, and two were homeless. The other four participants were residing in their own home or moving between multiple residences.

Table 2: Survivor Demographics

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>(N=19)</b>
<u>Age</u>	
Median	37
Minimum	19
Maximum	57
<u>Gender (n)</u>	
Female	18
Male	1
<u>Sexual Orientation (n)</u>	
Bisexual	3
Heterosexual	12
Other	1
<u>Ethnicity (n)</u>	
Black/African American	6
Multiracial	2
White/European American	11
<u>Marital Status</u>	
Single	12
Married	2
Separated	2
Relationship	1
Divorced	2
<u>Education (n)</u>	
Less than high school	6
High school diploma or equivalent	7
Some college/no degree	4
Associate's degree	1
Bachelor's degree	1
<u>Number of Children</u>	
Median	1
Range	0-6
<u>Current Residence</u>	
Apartment or other rental property	9
Own home	1
Transitional living	1
Shelter	4
Homeless	2
Multiple Residences	1
Other	1

### *Sex Trade History*

The age of entry into the commercial sex trade ranged from 11 to 48 years of age (See Table 3). Fifteen of the participants entered the sex trade before the age of 25. Six participants entered the sex trade before the age of 18. The participants varied in length of time in the commercial sex trade. One participant had only been involved in the commercial sex trade for a few months, while another participant had been in the commercial sex trade for 34 years. The median length of involvement in the commercial sex trade was 10.5 years.

Sixteen of the participants in the sample identified as “renegades”. This means that the participant did not have a pimp or other person in control of their involvement in the commercial sex trade. Two participants were involved in pimp-controlled prostitution at the time of the interview. However, several of the participants described having pimps or an intimate partner who forced them to prostitute in the past. The sole male study participant identified as an “escort” and was “gay for pay”. The male participant did not identify as homosexual and maintained that he did not engage in intercourse with customers. Rather, he provided companionship to his predominantly male customers. Most of the participants were involved in street prostitution, although some noted using the internet, an escort agency, or employment in the strip clubs to solicit customers.

Fifteen of the participants reported having a serious drug addiction at some point in their lives and used drugs during their involvement in the commercial sex trade. Nine of the participants were still struggling with drug and/or alcohol addiction at the time of the interview. The drug of choice for most of the participants was crack cocaine, though a few of them discussed being addicted to methamphetamines, alcohol, and marijuana. Only four participants said they were not addicted to drugs or alcohol and had never used drugs during their

involvement in the commercial sex trade. Seven of the participants had extensive criminal histories involving prostitution, drug, and assault charges. Twelve of the participants described having mental health issues including depression, panic attacks and anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and suicidal tendencies. Six participants reported physical health problems including sexually transmitted diseases, broken bones, and neurological problems.

Specific parameters delineating a final exit are difficult to define due to individual variability and the exit-reentry cycle that is common with this population (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2003). Thus, this study did not use any firm criteria to define an “exit”. Rather, the participants were asked if they were still involved in the commercial sex trade at the start of the interview. If the participant responded no, they were considered to have exited. Eleven of the women reported that they were no longer involved in the commercial sex trade at the time of the interview. Their reported exits ranged from two weeks to a little over a year at the time of the study interview.

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Table 3: Sex Trade History

	(N=19)
<u>Age of Entry</u>	
Median	19
Minimum	11
Maximum	48
<u>Length of Time in the Sex Trade</u>	
Median	10.5 years
Minimum	3 months
Maximum	34 years
<u>Type of Sex Trade Involvement</u>	
Renegade	16
Escort	1
Pimp-Controlled	2
<u>Drug Addiction (Past or Present)</u>	
Yes	15
No	4
<u>Criminal History</u>	
Yes	7
No	12
<u>Mental Health Problems</u>	
Yes	12
No	7
<u>Physical Health Problems</u>	
Yes	6
No	13
<u>Self-Described as Exited</u>	
Yes	11
No	8
<u>Length of Exit</u>	
Minimum	2 weeks
Maximum	1 year

### **Entry into the Commercial Sex Trade**

It can happen to anyone no matter how careful you are, no matter how protected you think you are. That one thing can happen and you can...there was a poem that a friend of mine wrote one time and I put the ending two lines on it and that said “don’t look down your nose at me or look away in dismay because you could be me tomorrow because I was you yesterday.” It can be that quick. - Rhonda

Although the focus of the study was on exiting, none of the participants hesitated to talk to me about how they became involved in the commercial sex trade. I often began the interview by explaining my reasons for studying the exiting experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade. Following this explanation, I asked the participants how they became involved in the commercial sex trade or “the life” as most participants called it. The participants took the opportunity to provide me with detailed information about the life circumstances that led them to enter the commercial sex trade. This section will describe the multiple pathways the participants took into the commercial sex trade.

#### ***Poverty and Economic Necessity***

Eleven of the participants talked about the role of poverty as a push factor for entering the commercial sex trade. Several of the participants identified losing employment, the lack of jobs, and the need to take care of their families as reasons for entering the commercial sex trade. Kayla explained how the cycle of poverty and generational prostitution forced her to enter the commercial sex trade:

My mom was addicted to crack. So, I got pregnant at 15, and my father said you gotta have an abortion or get out. My mom had just got out of prison. She was there since I was like four. So I went to go live with her, and she taught me. Yeah, because there was like no water, no gas, no nothing. So I was pregnant, and I had to eat. So, I just kind of adapted.

Rhonda spoke about how she used to be a full-time caretaker for her mother. When her mother passed away, she was kicked out of the house. Homeless and out of money, she was forced to begin exchanging sex for money:

So I was more or less homeless because I was her 24 hour caregiver the last seven weeks of her life. I came back from Ohio to do that, and I never really got along with the rest of my family anyway. So as soon as she died it was like okay, we can get rid of Rhonda. We don't need any more help from her. The house went into probate, and I was homeless. It was the middle of winter, and you do what you do.

Lisa explained that she was unable to find a job and was falling behind financially. Desperate for income, she started responding to ads for sexual services:

But, I went through local papers, and I was really trying to find a job. I was trying struggling trying to come up with a resume, where do I apply, how do I make at least this much money? I began falling behind financially, and it was like well this, maybe. So I replied to some different ads that were in the paper and met with a handful of people and eventually ran into someone that I felt relatively comfortable with and decided I'll try this once. I wasn't really excited about it, but then the money was nice. I was able to pay my utility bill. Well then there's another utility bill. That money is tempting regardless of the logic behind it.

### ***Family Dysfunction***

Four participants in the sample experienced family dysfunction as children that acted as a precursor to entering the commercial sex trade. Patrice described how childhood abuse led her to enter the commercial sex trade, "I was in a household where they had a lot of mental abuse and some physical, and I just decided that the streets were better for me, to leave, and prostitution was quick money." Four of the participants talked about how they ran away from home and then became involved in the commercial sex trade. Susan explained how she became involved in the commercial sex trade after leaving an abusive home environment:

Well, because I was a runaway and I didn't have anywhere to go. So, I got off the bus downtown at the bus station, and the first person I met on the street was somebody that was in prostitution. I didn't even know what it was. I was from a small town. I hadn't even seen a building taller than two stories. So it was pretty exciting. Lights and wow and... So, but I met up with some people that were you know, doing what they had to do to get their drugs. I wasn't even on drugs yet. So they gave me some drugs and then there you go. Off and running.

### ***Addiction***

Another group of participants were involved in the commercial sex trade due to their addictions, which typically took hold prior to their entrance into the commercial sex trade.

Rhonda described how her drug habit and homelessness pulled her into the commercial sex trade:

So, I'm walking up and down the street, hungry, no money, no cigarettes, nowhere to lay my head. Somebody pulls over and said are you working? I'm like, okay. Right. I am now. You know, and I've been an addict of one thing or another since I was 12 years old. But I had always supported my drug habit because I had regular jobs. I was a regular civilian. But, when you lose everything all at once, you do what you have to.

Missy explained how she used the commercial sex trade to meet her financial needs and support her drug habit:

My best friend was a prostitute, and I started with crack. I had been an alcoholic and an addict, but my daughter was five years old, and I had went out of town to visit my friend and was smoking crack. She was at school, and I was in one town, and I had went to another town to party with my friends and spent all my money. I didn't have enough gas, so I had to turn a trick to get enough gas to get home and pick her up from school.

### ***Coercion***

Pimps, peers, and family members also were identified as reasons for entering the commercial sex trade. Emily became involved in the commercial sex trade at age eleven after watching her mother get caught up in the cycle of drugs and prostitution. She explained, "When I was like 8, like my whole life she was off and on drugs and prostitution and stuff. So I just really

seen her do it. I wanted to know what was so good about it.” Keisha described how her husband forced her to work at truck stops to support his drug habit, “A lot of times my husband would make me go to truck stops and prostitute and turn dates to get some money so he could buy him some crack and stuff.” Sharon explained how a friend introduced her to the commercial sex trade:

I went out with a friend, and a guy asked her about dating. I never was involved until then. Then he brought up to me. When he brought it up to me I said yeah, how much do I get? He told me what I’m getting. From that day, it just became a routine.

Tiffany shared a similar experience. After being kicked out of her grandma’s house she moved to an area of town known for prostitution. A lack of money and pressure from her peers pulled her into the commercial sex trade:

I moved right down here on [street name], and that’s where it’s kind of like everything is. A whole lot of stuff goes on there you learn a lot just living down there. Yeah, that’s how that happened, just hearing other people like...because I didn't have a job. I ended up losing my job, ended up getting kicked out of school. Basically there was just people in my ear like well you know you ain’t making no money so I have to get jobs you know do this and do that. You know, you won’t get into no trouble for it and all that type stuff.

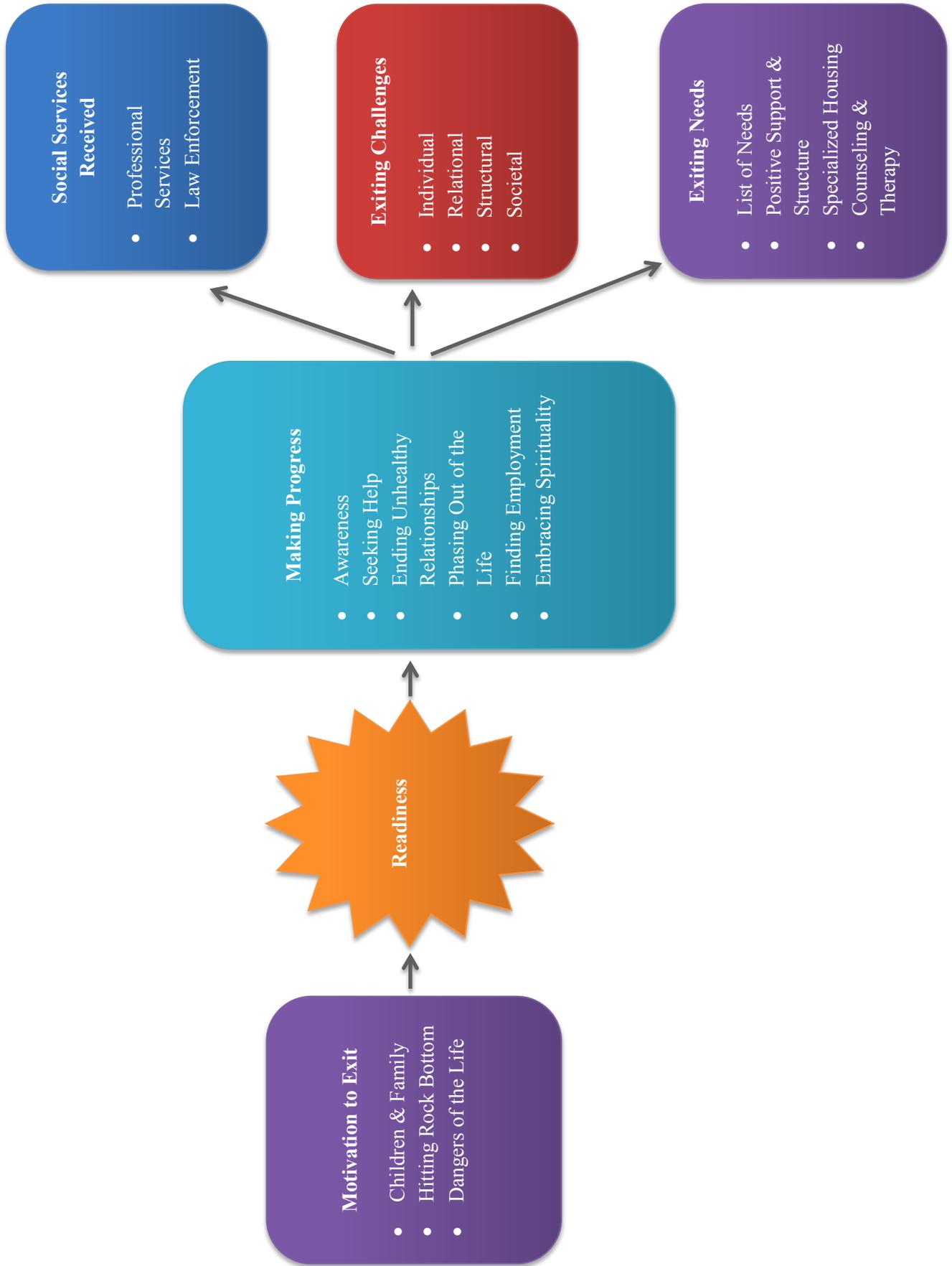
The entrance histories of the sample were not atypical of those reported in other studies, which have identified family dysfunction, running away, addiction, poverty, coercion, and force as reasons for entry (Mayhew & Mossman, 2007; Williamson & Folaron, 2003; Silbert & Pines, 1982). In this study poverty and economic necessity were the strongest factor for entering the commercial sex trade. Without a strong safety net, the participants were forced to enter the commercial sex trade to meet their basic needs and/or provide for their families. Although addiction played a role in some of their entrance histories, it was rarely discussed as the primary reason for entering the commercial sex trade. One of the most surprising findings was that when asked about their entrance into the commercial sex trade, few mentioned physical and sexual

abuse. It is important to note that I did not specifically ask questions about childhood abuse and neglect. Thus, it is possible that the women had histories of trauma, but were uncomfortable sharing their histories of past victimization. Moreover, few women were forced into the commercial sex trade by pimps or traffickers. Rather, peers and family members were more likely to pull women into the commercial sex trade. This finding held especially true for the younger women in the study. Both Emily and Kayla, two of the youngest participants, were pulled into the commercial sex trade by their mothers. Although the entrance histories of the women are not necessarily unique, they do provide the context for understanding their individual journeys to exit the commercial sex trade. The next section will describe the process of exiting the commercial sex trade.

### **Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade**

Exiting the commercial sex trade is a journey with many twists, turns, and challenges. I have constructed a diagram (See Figure 3) to guide the reader as they move through the themes and findings of the study. Each square corresponds to a section of the findings. It is important to note that exiting is not a one-time, linear process. Many of the women made several attempts before making a final break. It is my hope that the diagram will allow the reader to engage with the narratives and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges these women face as they embark on their journey to exit the commercial sex trade.

Figure 3: The Exiting Journey



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### *Exiting is a Process*

It was clear from the narratives that exiting is a process. Several of the participants explained that exiting is “not going to happen overnight” and that it takes time to work through the process of exiting. Char spoke about how it took her years to make a final exit, “It takes years to process your brain. Time in years. It didn't just like boom. It took years of me praying and processing and stopping and preparing, you know. Rerouting my brain.” For Char, it took almost nineteen years to finally break away from the commercial sex trade. Erica noted that she was looking at exiting “as a marathon and not a race” indicating that it is going to take time and concentrated effort to make a final exit. Kayla described her exit as “spiritual progress versus spiritual perfection” and explained that life does not immediately get better once you get clean and exit the life.

I think it's important to know once you stop doing drugs and living that life, life doesn't totally get better. I mean, it just stops the drugs. But like, you know, and they say wait for the blessing to happen you know. It's not going to happen overnight you know. Even though it might, some people do. But it's a continued...it's like spiritual progression versus spiritual perfection. It's a process, not a....you know, it's not perfect. It's just you have to live life on those terms. Everything is not going to be peachy every day but you have to want a better life and you have to make choices and stick with it. Then it will get better.

This finding is consistent with the existing research on exiting that conceptualizes exiting as a process (Baker et al., 2010; Månsson and Hedin, 1999, Sanders, 2007, Williamson & Folaron, 2003). Most of the women used the language of process in their description of their individual journey to exit the commercial sex trade. It is unclear whether they developed this language themselves or if they were using the language of the organizations in which they were receiving services. For example, Kayla was actively involved in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and used spiritual progression to describe her process of exiting.

### Motivation to Exit

- Children & Family
- Hitting Rock Bottom
- Dangers of the Life

### *Motivation to Exit*

The participants described numerous factors and significant events that influenced their decision to begin the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. Three main themes emerged including children and family, hitting rock bottom, and the dangers of the commercial sex trade. These three themes are discussed in more detail in this section.

#### *Children and Family*

Children were reported as one of the most important catalysts that motivated women to exit the commercial sex trade. Most of the women's children were in foster care, residing with a relative, or were adults living on their own. Kayla talked about how having her kids in her life was a factor that influenced her decision to begin the process of exiting. At the time of the interview, Kayla had regained custody of her children and had not seen a “trick” in two weeks. This was the longest she had ever been out of the life:

They took my kids, so it was kind of like I had to if I wanted them in my life. I was struggling even when they weren't with me. And it just came to the point that my kids deserved better. Either I needed to get my shit together or sign the papers to let them go so they could have a good life. I chose to get my shit together.

Erica described how her daughter was her inspiration to finish the court-ordered diversion program. Erica had recently exited the life and was able to visit her daughter on the weekends. She remarked:

Yes, at first I was court-ordered to finish the diversion program, which I finished then. I still have the certificate in a frame in my room that I'm very proud of --- with my daughter's picture in it for the simple fact when I finally decided to take this program seriously, I dedicated this program to her. Because that child has the right to be able to have a sober and sex-industry-life-free mom. So that's why I did it. Same thing with my recovery is yes I'm doing it for me, and a majority of it is for me, but there's also a good majority for my daughter. So that she can eventually know who I am, what I did, and what I did to make sure I could stay in her life as a sober mom.

It is important to note that both Erica and Kayla described strained relationships with the child welfare system. Both of the women were pressured to terminate their parental rights. Thus children can be a catalyst as long as the child welfare system is responsive and respectful of the women's right to regain custody of their children.

Several of the women in the study had adult children. These women spoke of their desire to repair their strained or non-existent relationships with their children. Rhonda described why it was important for her to exit the life and rebuild her relationship with her daughters:

I haven't even spoke to my children in eight years and my oldest daughter doesn't ever want to speak to me again. I never got along with my mother. For 43 years we didn't get along. We couldn't stand to be around each other for more than three days at a time. I don't want my daughter to have those regrets with me that I have with my mother when she died, about not knowing her and saying things that. I just don't want her going through what I went through, whether she wants to be around me or not. I'm 50 years old, I want to make sure that there's time for that to happen.

The women discussed the influence family had on their decision to exit. Dana described how telling her family about her involvement in the sex trade moved her forward in the exiting process. Her family knew she was struggling with drug addiction but was unaware that she was exchanging sex for money. Dana described how disclosing her involvement hurt her mother, "Having to tell my mom that I was prostituting was the hardest thing I had to do. She loves me, but she's real disappointed."

Emily spoke about how she needs to exit in order for her family to stay healthy:

Knowing that my mom {pause} if I want her to be okay I have to be okay myself. I can't be out here still going crazy and expecting her to be okay. And like I don't know, I just, then I want my parents to be okay. And another thing that helps my dad from not drinking is knowing that I'm here and that I'm okay. And I want my {pause} I love my family so I got to get myself together. And my dad's dad is getting older. You know, I got to take care of him. In some years, like 10 more years, and I don't want to have that regret like dang, I didn't do nothing back for them.

### ***Hitting Rock Bottom***

Several women spoke of hitting rock bottom as a catalyst for exiting. Christina described the factors that pushed her to hit rock bottom and finally seek drug and alcohol treatment:

I lost {pause} well, I left {pause} my marriage fell apart. I left. I had relapsed. I lost yet another well-paying job. I tried to kill myself. I flipped my car off a bridge. So, I was left with absolutely nothing. Homeless, severely sick from alcohol, and I checked myself into rehab for the first time at 42.

Susan experienced homelessness, health problems, and a severe physical assault that led her to start the process of exiting:

Well I was completely homeless. I had pneumonia in both of my lungs. I weighed about 98 pounds. I had just gotten beaten real bad. This guy beat me and kicked me in my back and damaged my, not my spinal cord but some sort of thing ---that disc or something. Something that's down there. Kicked me in the back real hard with steel toed boots, and I couldn't walk. So I was almost dead at this point. Almost completely dead. I'll never forget. It was like eight below zero that day I couldn't even move. So that and then that's when I finally started doing the process of recovery and knowing that there was hope and a different way of life.

### ***The Dangers of the Life***

All of the women described how the dangers of the commercial sex trade triggered thoughts of exiting. Missy talked about her fear of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, "AIDS is going around so bad now. I have several girls that I know that have HIV. They have the same tricks I had. That's scary." She also spoke of customers threatening her, "If I find out you ever gave me anything I will kill you. I've been told that many times." Rhonda

talked about violent experiences with customers, “Well I’ve almost been killed five times. Two years ago I was raped. I got picked up and was stabbed twice.” Susan spoke about her fear of dying on the street, “To go out there and die in the cold is just not an option for me anymore. I decided I wanted to live, so I’m going to go ahead and follow through with that.”

At the time of the research interviews a suspected serial killer was targeting women involved in the commercial sex trade. Several of the women spoke of their fear of being murdered. Missy shared how this fear pushed her to exit the life. She had been out of the life and sober for a little over a month.

To be honest it's the man out there killing women. It scares me to death. You know it's like you look at the women you know and thinking back to gosh, I wonder if I've gotten in that truck? You know, I've thought of time where I've gotten scared and jumped out of vehicles. Maybe that was one of them? Or maybe the next time I get in a vehicle I might get in the wrong one.

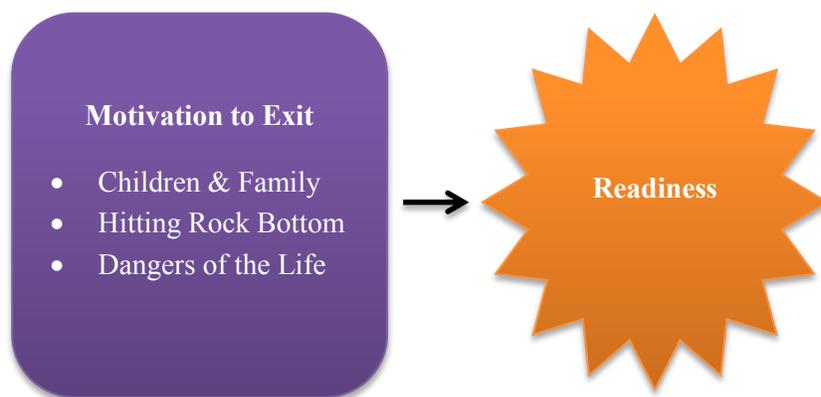
Several of the women spoke of just being tired of the lifestyle and how this motivated them to start the process of exiting. Char explained:

I just got tired of the scene. It was dangerous. It’s nasty. I started thinking about it, started remorsing. I’m like this is just not right and everybody that got a little money can get into me and touch me and it just, I didn’t like it no more.

Others spoke of the challenges of getting older and still being involved in the life. Susan explained how you “age out” of the life, “After you reach a certain age in that sort of lifestyle you’re done. You’re not....your mind is gone. Your body is gone. You know what I mean? Nobody wants someone like that around.”

The women’s motivations to exit are consistent with the existing research on exiting. For example Månsson and Hedin (1999) suggest that most women experience a turning point which prompts them to break away from the commercial sex trade. Moreover Dalla (2006) identified children and family as catalysts for exiting. Although these significant events appeared to move

the participants forward in the exit process, these factors alone did not result in a final exit. Rather, it appeared that these factors may have sparked an internal drive and motivated the participants to seek supportive services.



### *The Importance of Readiness*

Several women expressed the importance of agency and readiness in their decision to exit the commercial sex trade. As Char explained “It doesn’t matter what program you go to or anything, if you’re not ready to stop you’re not going to stop.” It was clear that exiting required an internal desire and motivation to change as Kayla described, “Enough has to be enough. I think you need to see that it does work if you do want it. It is a better life.” Christina explained how she had to make the decision to get sober and move forward in the exiting process, “I mean there was no other option. It was either get sober or die. I had already tried that and it didn’t work. So I tried to get better this time.” Keisha spoke about how her mother had been pressuring her to address her substance abuse issues and exit the commercial sex trade. Although she recognized that her mom was trying to help her, she explained that she wanted to seek help and exit on her own terms:

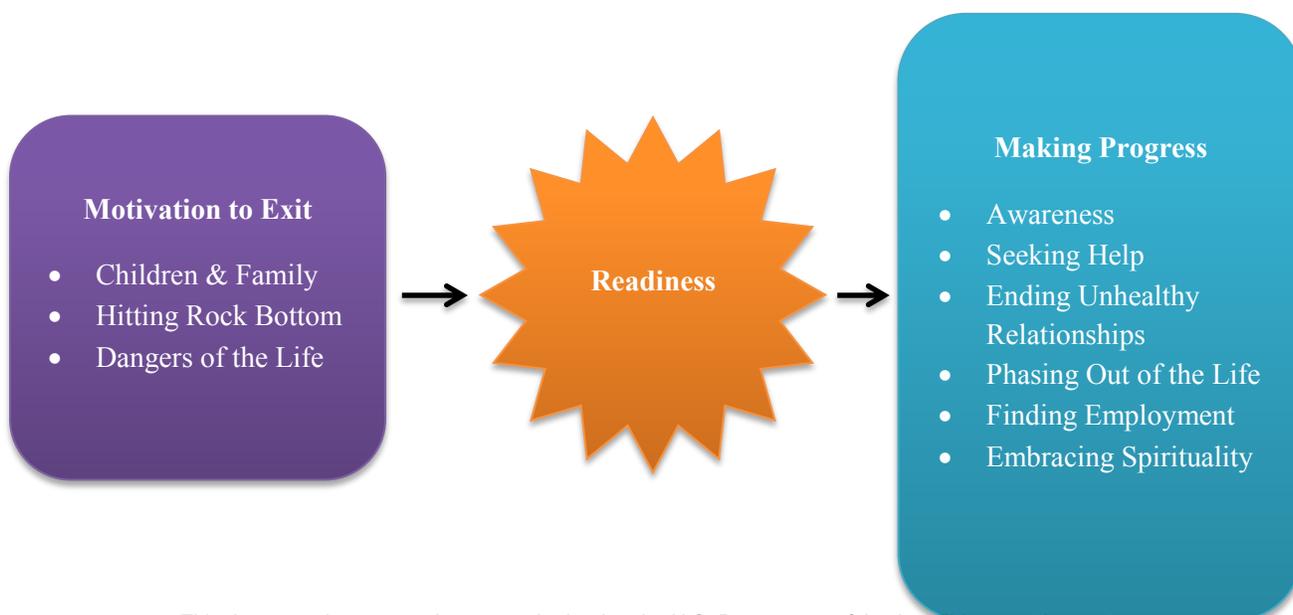
Sometimes the truth hurts, but you got to listen to it you know, if you really want help. There’s times I get mad at my mother for all this, and I tell her. But then again, when I sit back and think about it when I’m by myself I’ll be like she wasn’t doing nothing but just trying to help me. At first I used to think she just picking on me trying to criticize me and

belittle me. But then, when I think about it I'll be like she's just trying to help me. She wants me to do better for myself. But, I want to do better for me, not nobody else. I'm not doing it for my mother or nobody else. I'm doing it because I want to do it. It's time for me to do it for myself.

The level of readiness to change varied across participants with other women feeling more ambivalent towards exiting. Emily described how, despite dangerous encounters with clients and thoughts of exiting, she still remained active in the life:

The condom busted, and he was high, and he was like come on, come on, and I was like oh my God, oh my God, oh my God! But I didn't get nothing, you know, but after that I was like no. And then I was, I was still hardheaded. I was like I'm not going to stop. I'm just going to figure out a way to not let the condom bust again. I'm trying to go around everything just to stay in this life. Like just stay wherever my head wants to be, you know.

Both Dalla (2006) and Månsson & Hedin (1999) acknowledge the power of personal commitment and internal drive in their research on exiting with prostituted women. For these women, readiness appeared to capture their willingness to move forward in the exit process. The narratives suggest that women have to be ready and committed to making a final break and that age may be connected to individual readiness. The narratives suggested that younger women, such as Emily, were more ambivalent towards exiting while the older women were more determined to make the changes necessary to exit the commercial sex trade.



### *Making Progress*

Several of the participants discussed the steps they were taking towards exiting the commercial sex trade. It is important to note that not all participants experienced the changes detailed in this section. Rather, this section provides deeper insight into the different stages experienced by some of the participants as they worked towards through the process of exiting the commercial sex trade.

#### *Awareness*

Several of the women spoke of how they gradually realized that it was time to start the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. This “awareness” was a critical step in the exiting process and often resulted from women hitting rock bottom, losing custody of their children, getting clean, or tiring of the lifestyle. Susan described the moment she realized that all was not as it used to be:

They just want to use you to sell you or get whatever they need. But at the time I thought I was a princess, and I was just....you know everybody wanted me. You know, but little did I know I was just being trampled on and sold for money. I didn't know that. So that was really kind of disturbing when I figured out, you know, okay well once you start getting old, older, as everything progresses, you finally figure out that you were just being used and bought and sold.

Rhonda and Char explained how they began to recognize that there is a better life outside of the commercial sex trade. Although Rhonda was still involved in the commercial sex trade, she remarked, “The more I live a civilian life --- is what I call it --- the more I want a civilian life.”

Char described how she would repeatedly tell herself that there was a life outside of the commercial sex trade:

Actually it took years to process it, but, to process my mind which started it. I kept telling myself there's something better in life than this. This is not my future. So every time I would smoke or prostitute I would keep that in my mind. I'd repeat it in my mind over and over and over and over, and then I guessed my mind finally stuck to it, you know.

And I started looking at the other people and thinking am I going to be 60 years old still trying to work on the street and be hip hop and all, you know. It's just dumb.

Kayla described how getting clean and “not being numb anymore” helped her move forward in the exiting process:

I've been out for about two weeks now. This is the first time I've never had any tricks. It's really hard because now I'm taking the bus, and I have two kids. But since I've gotten clean from drugs, it's just...I'm not numb anymore. So it's just like I'm done with it. Like if I never go through this struggle I'll never be where I need to be. So I have to you know, just go through it.

### ***Seeking Help***

Seeking help and supportive services seemed to be an integral part of the exiting process. Susan noted how drug treatment and mental health court were an important part of her exiting process. She explained "I entered drug court and then I entered the treatment centers. I went to mental health court. And then graduated, graduated. I started graduating everything. I started to grow, grow, grow." Kayla spoke about how Narcotics Anonymous (NA) helped her stay sober and out of the life, "I'm at the point I'm just trying to stay clean and sober. Like I can't really focus on anything else. So that's just my main thing. I go to meetings a lot, daily."

Attending classes at the prostitution-specific agency was also identified as an important step in the exiting process. Dana explained, "I'm in classes, even though I was here before I was court ordered, and then I was court ordered, but I completed it. I'm a graduate of here, but I still come." Monica described how she was seeking legal assistance to help her move forward in the exiting process:

I want to work on my criminal history. I do have a felony for identity theft. I want to work on getting my life completely together, so I can start over, so I can give back. I mean, I've taken a lot out of this life, and I'm ready to give back and help.

### ***Ending Unhealthy Relationships***

Breaking away from an unhealthy relationship was an important step in the process of exiting. Several of the women experienced domestic violence and pressure from their intimate partner to remain in the life. Kayla had been dating an older man who was abusive and addicted to drugs. She described the moment when she decided to end the relationship and move forward in the exiting process:

I was with him since I was 19. Like when I got off the streets he was the only one there for me, so I really fell hard for him. He was like 43, but I loved the fuck out of him. He was very abusive, very crazy. He did drugs. I just stopped talking to him maybe like six months ago I'm guessing. Maybe a little bit more. I think the last time is just...my friend had a wedding, and I was supposed to be a bridesmaid. It was like one of my closest friends. He gave me a black eye and like all this stuff, and I couldn't go to her wedding. I think that was just enough. And he's done so much worse to me. But you know, it was just like...I'm done. Nope, no more.

Sharon had been with her abusive partner for over thirty years. She described the violent experience that resulted in a final exit from the commercial sex trade:

And he done broke both of my arms, my nose, and then now my leg. So that was an opportunity for me to go because it wasn't getting no better. You know, if I kept going, being around him and kept going with him, I'd end up dead.

Erica talked about how ending her abusive relationship helped her leave the street and decrease the amount of time she spent in the life.

The last time my ex had hit me and beat me up and kicked me out of his house, I had realized that I couldn't do it anymore. That was the last straw ---the last time he put his hand on me, that was the last straw. I couldn't do it anymore. I exited that relationship and mostly the avenue. I wasn't completely done. I was still messing with one of my tricks when I had left.

### ***Phasing Out of the Life***

The women described the need to “phase out” of the life. For financial reasons many of the women were not able to make a final exit, and several spoke of having to “prostitute themselves out of the life.” The women described the different ways they were transitioning out

of the life including leaving the street, staying in at night, and distancing themselves from old friends/playmates. Dana explained how she was minimizing her time spent on the street, “I don’t walk the streets as much, but I still have clients that I tend to deal with.” Dana was primarily seeing customers in her apartment. Emily described how she used her favorite television show to keep her indoors at night:

Something that I've just recently started, like Roseanne is my favorite show. And like I can relate to Darlene a lot. And like to keep myself from just wanting to go outside. And like stopping myself, I'll just tell myself like Roseanne is coming on at 7:00, stay in the house, just to have something to keep me in the house instead of going out.

Distancing from old friends/playmates was described as an essential part of the exiting process. The women used the word “playmate” to describe their friends who were still actively involved in the life or other forms of criminal behavior. Erica explained how she had to end a relationship with one of her best friends in order to stay sober and out of the life:

I've learned more about what sobriety really means, which is not just about staying sober. It's about the life that you live and the friends you have. I let a lot of my old friends go. One of my best friends that was my best friends for three years, I had to let her go for the simple fact that she still smoked marijuana and still living the life of crime. So I had to let her go. As much as I hated it, I had to let her go.

Mindy talked about how she is staying away from the life, reconnecting with her daughters, and spending more time with her grandkids.

I'm just trying to better myself every day. I stay positive and stay away from it and staying away from that type of people. Like I said, I would say I've spent a lot more time with the grandkids. I've spent more time with the grandkids in the last six months than I have ever, and it's really been a wonderful thing.

Monica explained how she is trying to start over and rebuild her life. She had recently relocated to Kansas City in an effort to distance herself from the negative influences of friends and family.

Monica remarked:

And at home everyone knows me because I've made so much money. I made significant amounts of money. I have nothing to show for it because I buy shoes, purses, stupid stuff that depreciates. But everyone knows me as what I am capable of doing and so forth. So I came out here just to basically start over.

### ***Finding Employment***

Employment was discussed frequently throughout the interviews as a step women were taking towards exiting the commercial sex trade. Monica explained how obtaining employment was a critical component of her exit, "I'm working. I haven't really worked (in the sex trade) since...I worked here and there since the beginning of the year. The beginning of the year was like my thing. I was like not another year." Lisa reconnected with her family and became involved in their business. Although she did not make as much money, the employment and support of her boyfriend was enough to keep her off the streets. Lisa explained:

I ended up going to my family. My grandmother owned a cleaning business since I was very young. Basically I started working full-time with my family's cleaning business. I wasn't making the same kind of money at all. But, I mean, it was still very manageable, especially with the support of my boyfriend.

Kayla discussed the challenges she faced in maintaining employment. Obtaining employment had given her the motivation and financial security to leave her main trick. However, after a proposition from her manager, she had to leave her job. Kayla explained:

But it's just like I started working. That's another reason why I left him. I told myself as soon as I get a job I'm going to leave him. So that day I got a job I left him. And then last Friday my boss made a proposition. So, it's like.....the odds are against me you know. It's just like no matter how hard I try it's there. But just now I'm at a point where I can't control anyone's actions. I can just control mine. I'm not going to take that. It is very disrespectful, and I took it really hard. I've been really depressed about it, but at the same time it can't get any worse you know. It can only get better from here as long as I choose to stay clean.

### ***Embracing Spirituality***

Almost all of the women described a belief in a higher power and the importance of organized religion in their journey to exit the commercial sex trade. Several of the women were actively involved in their church and faith-based social services. Missy explained how reconnecting with her church was a step towards exiting, "I go to church twice a week. I'm active in my church. I've been with this church for ten years, but I wouldn't go because I felt so ashamed. But my pastor understands. He's always known what I do." Missy was also in the process of obtaining affordable housing through a faith-based program for women who have experienced homelessness, drug addiction, and/or mental illness. Char spoke at length about how her belief in God led her to exit the sex trade. She described how she prayed when she was out on the street and explained that she felt like God put her through this experience in order for her to help other women in the future:

I think that, it might sound strange, I think that God let me go through all that so I can maybe be, in the future, help other people. Because after a while it just went away. Well, what was that about? I waste my whole life, and now I'm just, my mom and me, you know, well actually my momma said, she said he let you go through all that so you can help in the future. You've got to, everything in life happens for a reason. I wish it didn't happen. Sometimes I still would be like oh, I didn't do that. Did I do? Oh, my God I did do that. It's like oh, just don't even think about it.

Erica explained that when she was out on the street she felt like "God didn't love her anymore." She described in detail about how acknowledging a higher power and admitting powerlessness<sup>1</sup> changed her life and moved her forward in the exiting process:

Since I admitted the powerlessness. When I admitted that, and truly admitted it, and meant it, he started showing up and showing out very quickly. Probably within two weeks of me doing that, he had blessed me with a home. I had heard that we me

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Erica was actively involved in Narcotics Anonymous. Admitting powerlessness is the first step in the twelve step process, while surrendering to a higher power is step two. Thus this is likely why Erica chose to use this language as she described her journey to exit the commercial sex trade.

admitting my powerlessness I had heard that my Section 8<sup>2</sup> came in. I was like oh my God are you serious? I had waited years for it. And I started crying because I knew that was the way. I knew that I had done good and this was my reward. He's helped me in so many aspects of my life that it's amazing that he still loves me.

Kayla described a similar journey and spoke about having a spiritual awakening that helped her realize it was time to exit the life:

Well, my childhood you know is just...I mean I started like at 12 doing drugs and stuff. So I mean I've always been a bad kid, always. I'm just so different than I used to be. I had so much hate in my heart. Now it's just like...I've had a spiritual awakening. My journey just kind of happened you know. I've never had no tricks (i.e. customers), like never in my life. And it's so hard. But you know I feel at peace knowing I don't have to lay down for the car outside, which is just material shit. So I feel at peace now. At the same time I worry a lot. But it's what's best.

Although exiting is not a linear process, all of the participants described making significant behavioral changes in order to move forward in the exiting process. In some cases these changes mirrored the exiting models described in the research literature (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007). Still there was significant variation in their journeys to exit the commercial sex trade. As noted above, not all of the women experienced the behavioral changes described in this section. Moreover, some of the women emphasized the role of spirituality in their journey while others did not. These finding suggests that there are likely significant variations that occur in the exit process.

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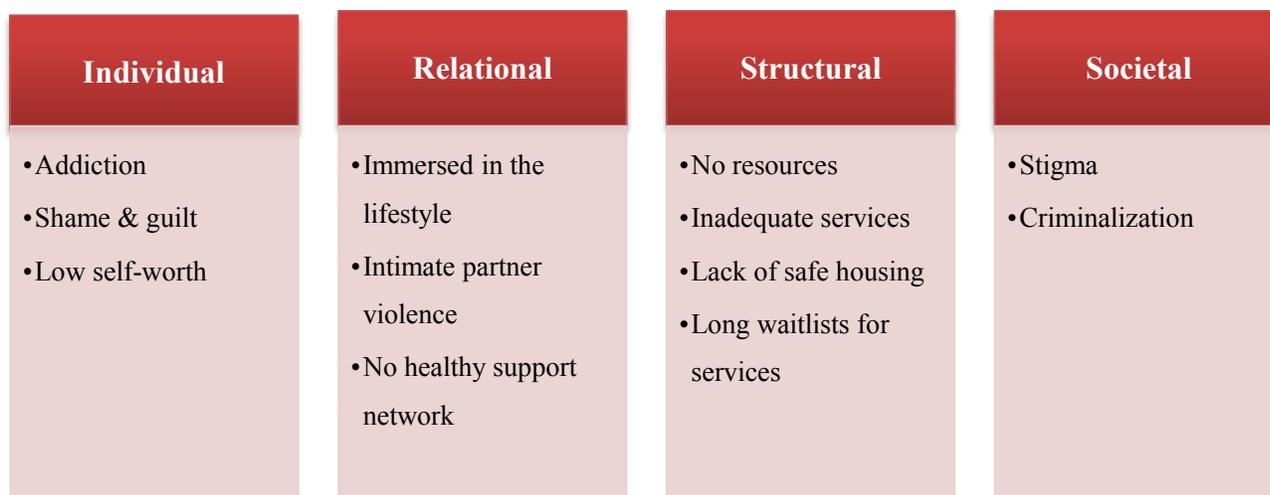
<sup>2</sup> Section 8 provides rental assistance to low-income households in the United States.



### *Exiting Challenges*

The barriers to exiting are vast, and many scholars have described the factors that prevent women and girls from successfully exiting the commercial sex trade. Throughout the interviews, the women described a myriad of individual, relational, structural, and societal barriers that compelled their continued involvement in the commercial sex trade (See Figure 4). These barriers are described in this section.

Figure 4: Barriers to Exiting



#### *Individual Barriers*

**Addiction.** Almost all of the women described how drug and alcohol addiction prevented them from exiting the commercial sex trade. Many spoke of the cycle of prostitution and drug use, as Missy explained, “It seems like whenever I turn that trick, I may not use drugs right away, but eventually I will. It just kind of like eats at you.” Rhonda described this cycle as “A

vicious circle, a catch 22, that you just go round and round and round,” and explained how she used drugs as a coping mechanism to numb the pain of past trauma:

This is really a buffer – dope, prostitution, money. It’s all a buffer. So you don’t feel what’s really fucking you up. And the more sober time you get the more you start feeling. And it’s just...I mean it’s just like a tidal wave of whoosh. What do I do now? I don’t have anything to buffer this with. And it’s just...it’s really crazy. It’s really crazy. It’s scary. You know, at times it’s scarier than being out there because there I know what to expect. I’ve been there. I’ve done that daily. I know the routine. I don’t know...I’ve been an addict since I was 12. I don’t know how to deal with life sober. You know, and it’s scary as hell.

Kayla described how her drug addiction prevented her from seeking help to exit:

I really didn't love myself, and I didn't care about myself back then to even care about a place to go. Which, I think it might help some women that are not into drugs. I know a lot of them out there, and they do it, and they're not getting high. So you know, they need places like that. But for me personally, I didn't care.

***Shame & guilt.*** Several of the women voiced deep feelings of shame and guilt over their involvement in the commercial sex trade. Often these feelings prevented them from accessing the necessary supports to exit the commercial sex trade. Patrice explained how she cannot reconnect with her family until she has exited the life, “I can’t go back until I’m out of the life. I don’t want them to see me, this side of me, this life. I want them to see the person that I was before the life.” Rhonda expressed a large amount of shame and guilt over abandoning her children which made her feel like she did not deserve to be helped:

I keep myself here because I don’t deserve any better than this because I’ve been so hurtful or so disrespectful to people that I love and care about more than anything in the world. That’s why I said I have to learn to forgive myself, whether they forgive me or not. I have to learn how to do that, and at this point I just don’t know how to do it. You have to have your own self-worth you know, your own opinion of being worth a shit to even attempt to get out of it.

Similar to Rhonda, Erica experienced guilt over not being able to parent her daughter. She shared that her daughter called her “Auntie” and was unaware that Erica was actually her mother. This was difficult for Erica, but she understood that she was not ready to parent as she explained:

It makes you wonder, was it all worth it, was it worth giving up your kids for some man? I still ask myself if it was worth giving my daughter to my parents because I would love to be a mother. But I know, I know that I’m not fit to be a mother yet. I’m trying to be.

Kayla discussed how her pride prevented her from accessing supportive services such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Like I tricked myself in to like...you know I had just signed up for TANF, like the money I get. I was so...my pride was so high. I was like I cannot be on welfare. I just cannot, even though I’m getting food stamps. But I don't know. I was just like making excuses. Like I just wasn’t ready I guess. I’m still not ready. But it’s just...I have to...I have to. It’s just one of those things that you have to do. Yeah, because it’s like I don't want to be at the bus stop. You know, and I still feel that way at the bus stop, like I don't fit in, like I’m better than these people, which I’m not.

Although Susan had recently exited the life, she explained how her low self-worth had prevented her from exiting the life in the past.

I thought that’s who I was and that’s how I had to live. I was trash. I was garbage and didn’t deserve to live. But, once I started the process of recovery and that people, they kept motivating me, giving me hope. Because I mean they could tell me that I wasn’t trash but in my mind I was. And I was unforgivable. You know, I couldn’t you know be forgiven for the things that I had done.

### ***Relational Barriers***

***Immersed in the lifestyle.*** For most of the women the violence and daily norms of street life were normalized, and they were unable to envision a life outside of the commercial sex trade, as Kayla explained:

It’s so hard when that’s all you know and it’s just like...everybody is like that’s not normal. This is normal. And because I was just like what the fuck? That is not normal you know. Like working a job...that’s crazy to me. But it’s because it’s a whole ‘nother world out there. People are not as disrespectful. You getting kidnapped is not a normal

thing. I mean it's just...when you're living that life everything else is blurred. You can't see the birds, and you can't notice when grass is green you know?

Being “addicted to the life” was frequently voiced during the interviews. The women spoke of being addicted to the streets, and some compared prostitution to a disease. Emily cried as she described how she became engrained in the lifestyle, “And then I got used to it, and like I would really call myself. I would go out there and say I'm the best ho out here because ho means hustle over everything.” Emily entered the sex trade when she was eleven. Attaching to the identity of “being the best ho” made her feel accepted and like she was good at something. However, over time the use of this language became a defense mechanism for coping with the harsh realities of the lifestyle. In some cases the women were groomed from a young age into the sex trade. Susan explained how her pimp “sold her a dream” and lured her into the sex trade with drugs, cars, and clothes:

When I was younger it was addiction not only to drugs and alcohol but it was cars, jewelry, clothes. Because when people are messing with a young girl or whatever they can really toy with their mind. And make them think they're something they're not, like let's make her thinks she's important you know. When they don't even care.

Often involvement in the sex trade was used to fill an emotional void as Dana explained, “But it's a longing for something. It's something, it's a void that we're trying to replace by being out there in the streets.” The sex trade also provided an environment where women felt accepted or a sense of belonging, as Emily described:

Because when I go outside it's like, especially at night. I be trying to look for like something or expecting somebody like, I like the attention also. Because I want to be accepted. And I would say that and I would like to be called names and I would like that. Like I don't know. Because it made me feel like I was accepted and something.

Lisa described how difficult it was to transition out of the lifestyle. She had been involved in the sex trade for an extended period of time and found it challenging to successfully reintegrate into the community:

There was a chunk of time that I didn't have. I didn't have the routine, the schedule, the patterns of you know getting up at whatever, whatever the routine is---getting up at 7:00 and being at work at this time and I get my lunch break then. That didn't exist.

***Intimate partner violence.*** Intimate partner violence was a consistent theme throughout the women's narratives. The women described how their significant others (i.e. pimp, boyfriend, husband) prevented them from exiting the commercial sex trade. Lisa described how her abusive partner got her kicked out of a transitional living and substance abuse treatment program:

I was getting ready to go to a shelter, and at the time I was going to the shelter I ran into him. I was in an upstairs shelter part. He got out of jail and ended up bugging me. And then it ended up I wasn't coming in at the right time, by being with him, and they put me out.

Emily explained how she needed to stay involved in the life to support her pimp-boyfriend who was an aspiring rapper:

And so it's just always saying I might as well hustle forever or hustle until I'm 35 and have enough money. You know, because I'm not, I wasn't invested in something that's just all blown up like. I was with him and he raps and all this. We were going somewhere. We were really doing something. So it wasn't like for no reason. I mean I worked for a guy before that for no reason.

Erica spoke about how she had to work the street or her boyfriend would beat her, "As long as I could get out there and get the money I could support him and keep him off me."

Keisha's husband was physically and verbally abusive. She spoke about how he would make fun of her for her medical condition and would repeatedly tell her that she would never find anyone else. This abuse forced Keisha to remain in the life, and she was still struggling with alcohol addiction at the time of the interview:

For one thing I was scared of him. And he used to make me think that he was the only one that wanted me. And I really got to be living here. And I felt like if we got high together the closer we would get. But it got worser and worser. And I just ....made up my mind that I'm not going to do it no more. So I went to stay with my mother again for like six months. When I left her house again, I ran back to him. I got back on the same page.

***Not having a healthy support network.*** Several of the women described having no support to exit the commercial sex trade as Patrice explained, “That’s why girls stay in the life so long, because they don’t have the support to get out of the life.” Dana spoke about how difficult it was to find informal support, such as friends and family, outside of the life. “Well the people that I have associated with are all in the life, so it’s like I have no friends. No family.” Char discussed how the negative influence of others inhibits women from exiting the sex trade:

Because when you’re out there, you’re around nobody, everything out there is negative including what people say about you is negative. If you live in a totally negative world, and you never hear anything positive, then you’re never going to get nowhere.

### ***Structural Barriers***

***No resources.*** Almost all of the women spoke about not having the financial resources to exit the life. Patrice explained how women have to prostitute themselves out of the life:

I mean who is going to feed us? Who is going to give us a home? So we have to stay in the life long enough to get out of the life. To get the resources we need to get out of the life. It if it’s not for this agency, like right now she’s going to give me some clothes. If she wasn’t giving me clothes, I’d have to go out there and ho even more to get the clothes.

Lisa described a crisis point where she was unable to pay her bills. She explained that she had nowhere to turn for help and did not even know where she could get the help and resources she needed to stay out of the life:

I got in a position where my utilities were getting shut off, and I couldn’t pay rent. I’m behind in rent. I didn’t know....I didn’t have other tools. I’m sure that they exist and were out there and there were options, but I didn’t know where they were and didn’t have any knowledge of those resources. So I went back to the things that I knew.

***Inadequate services.*** Almost all of the women described challenging experiences with social service systems. Often social service systems hindered rather than supported a successful exit. When asked to identify a safe place to seek help, most women had no response. Of the four women who did respond, only the prostitution specific agency and the hospital were noted as being safe places. Dana described how there is a lack of supportive services for women trying to exit the sex trade, “When it comes to prostitution, it’s like all we have is to go to jail. You know what I’m saying? Go to jail and then that’s all we have.” Char went on to explain how going to jail did not help her exit:

I just go in there and everybody, just like with some of them it’s a reunion. Sometimes you come out worse than you were before. You go in there and you learn bad habits and you come out. It might work for some people but I have not learned, nobody yet in the general prison that came back out that is a better person.

Lisa described how social service agencies are overburdened and do not have the resources to meet her needs. She felt beat down and wanted to give up after contacting multiple agencies and not being able to get the help she really needed:

I mean you can hand someone a sheet with resources on it, but you sit down and start calling and all these people start telling you, no we don’t, we don’t have anything. We don’t have anything...our budgets and you should call these people. It’s frustrating. Then no one answers the phone.

***Lack of safe housing.*** The women spoke about how there is a lack of safe, affordable housing for women trying to exit the sex trade. Not having access to housing was a significant barrier and often forced women to stay in the life as Rhonda described, “I’m still homeless. And as long as I’m homeless and doing what I’m doing, I’m going to be an addict.” Finding a safe place to sleep was a challenge for the women. Emily described how she would tell the hospital she had a mental health problem in order to find a safe place to stay:

The hospital will help you go somewhere. They'll place you, like sometimes, if you tell them like you need some mental help but you really need a place to sleep. Because if you really tell them you need a place to sleep, they really won't listen to you. But if you tell them that you're crazy, then they'll put you somewhere, and then you'll have somewhere to sleep. Then it'll happen way, way fast. If you tell them you're homeless, they'll put you on like a month waiting.

Missy talked about how she was placed at a domestic violence shelter to receive her hepatitis C treatments. The domestic violence shelter had agreed to a long-term housing arrangement for Missy. Without warning the shelter decided to no longer provide housing for women involved in the sex trade. At the time of the interview Missy was unable to receive her treatments, living at the homeless shelter, and on a wait-list for a long-term, housing program:

I was at the domestic violence shelter. The shelter had four beds, and they quit taking us. I was there, was supposed to be there for a year, and all of the sudden they pulled out from underneath me. I move there so that I could do my treatments. And then, after I was there for like a week, they called me in the office and said I had to leave.

Rhonda explained how an altercation at a domestic violence shelter prevented her from staying sober and successfully exiting:

And I came back from dinner one night and I caught my roommate elbow deep. My money in this hand, my purse in this hand, and on my bed. I just grabbed her. I didn't hit her. I said what are you doing? She swung on me, and I snapped. I just beat the bricks off of her. They had me on camera. They've got more cameras than Kodak. So I got kicked out of there for that. And of course....I really do think that I would be sober today if that hadn't happened. I was in the mindset. Three and a half months, and it was the first time I had ever come here for help. But when you get thrown out there and you were trying to do so good and you did everything you were supposed to be doing. And she gets to stay, and I get thrown out. So it was the poor, poor, pitiful me. Give me a crack rock and a pipe you know.

***Long waitlists for services.*** Several of the women spoke of wait-lists for mental health services and unresponsive social service systems as barriers to exiting the life. Lisa described how difficult it was to obtain consistent mental health services:

For me to get my first appointment to get in to see someone was like 90 days. I couldn't get another appointment for another 60 days. Then, when I did get back in they are like we'd like to come in once a week or once every other week. But then there wasn't room. So I couldn't come in once a week or once every other week. It ended up being once every three weeks. Then it ended up being scheduled because of need and then they weren't providing what was needed. You know, was supposed to come in once a week, but I couldn't get in but maybe once a month. I just became very frustrated with that process.

Erica vented her frustration about getting into therapy. She had been trying to obtain therapy for three months with limited success:

I'm still trying to get to the therapy, which is getting very frustrating because I was told like three months ago that I was going to be in therapy. And yet I've not got a call back to tell me when I'm going to start mine. I've been waiting, like I said three months. And just more and more is building up. So I really need the therapy. Like I told my counselor, waiting the way I'm waiting, I know with my therapy if I do not get it soon, later on might not be soon enough.

### ***Societal Barriers***

***Stigma.*** The social stigma of being involved in the commercial sex trade acted as a barrier towards exiting. Patrice discussed how people judge and make assumptions about women involved in the commercial sex trade:

Don't judge us by what you see on TV and don't judgment us because you think prostitutes are dirty. We're cleaner than most people that are out there because we're trying to stay safe and not get AIDS. So we're at the hospital more than normal people. But people judge us and automatically think we're dirty.

Kayla spoke about how the degradation of women involved in the commercial sex trade prevents women from even contemplating exiting:

We don't have a lot of resources. A lot of people degrade us. I know a lot of them have lost their children, and they stay out there until they're 40. And then they're 40, and it's like, well what the fuck, I might as well stay out here for the rest of my life you know.

**Criminalization.** The criminalization of prostitution also acted as a barrier as Monica explained, “You get busted, and then you’ve got to pay these huge fines. Okay well, how do you expect me to pay these fines?” The presence of a criminal record not only limited employment opportunities but access to supportive services.

Missy described how a past drug felony prohibits her from receiving food stamps, “I can’t even get food stamps because I have a drug felony. My drug felony is over ten years old. Am I going to suffer....you know be punished forever?” This barrier forced Missy to continually move in and out of the sex trade to meet her basic needs. Rhonda described the challenges of seeking employment with a criminal record and limited work history:

What am I going to put on a job application for the last 11 years? Customer service? Really? So how I am going to pay the rent? If I wanted to do this voluntarily like I am doing now, there’s no court ordered things to pay for my stuff. So for me to pay the rent, I have to make money somehow. How am I going to make money? If I go back to my old way of making money, I’m going to go back to getting high, which is not going to allow me to be in the treatment to begin with.

Consistent with the existing literature, the women experienced significant barriers to exiting the commercial sex trade (Baker et al., 2010; Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006). Although the women experienced individual barriers such as addiction, it appears that the structural barriers had a stronger influence on the exiting process. In this study the women spoke at length about how structural barriers such as poverty, inadequate services, and an absence of safe housing challenged their ability to make a successful exit. Moreover the structural barriers prevented the women from getting support they needed to address their individual and relational challenges.

#### Social Services Received

- Professional Services
- Law Enforcement

### ***Social Services Received***

Throughout the interviews the participants described extensive involvement with social service systems (See Table 4 - Social Services Received). In most cases the participants were simultaneously involved in a multitude of social services. Most of the sample was court-ordered into a diversion program at a prostitution-specific agency at the time of the interview. The court-ordered participants were required to complete either a one-day or twelve-week program as a condition of their probation. Over half of the sample (57.8%) had received substance abuse services, including drug treatment, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Almost half of the sample (47.3%) had received mental health services. The participants frequented homeless/emergency shelters (31.5%), domestic violence shelters (15.7%), and transitional living programs (10.5%).

Table 4: Social Services Received

	<i>(N=19)</i>	%
Prostitution-Specific Services	19	100.0
Substance Abuse Services	11	57.8
Mental Health Services	9	47.3
Homeless/Emergency Shelter	6	31.5
Domestic Violence Shelter	3	15.7
Transitional Living	2	10.5
Multi-Service Center	2	10.5
Drug Court	2	10.5
Child Welfare	2	10.5
Rape Crisis Center	1	5.2
Mental Health Court	1	5.2

### ***Law Enforcement Involvement***

All of the participants described repeated interactions with law enforcement. In most cases, the participants had more experience with law enforcement than with social service

agencies. The participants identified both positive and negative interactions with law enforcement. Law enforcement appeared to be an integral player in the exiting process, with some officers offering help and support to the participants. The participants' experiences with law enforcement are detailed in this section.

### ***Positive Experiences with Law Enforcement***

Although the majority of women reported having negative interactions with law enforcement, several described instances where law enforcement made them feel safe and in some cases moved them forward in the exiting process. Dana explained how law enforcement officers would routinely check on her to make sure she was doing okay:

And then there's sometimes when you're out on the streets, they just pull you over to just ask your name. I have a couple of them ask me, like I read books a lot when I'm out there, and they'll ask you, what book are you reading today? Or something like that. They just want to know who you are, just if you're going to be out there they want to know.

Missy described a similar experience where law enforcement kept a close eye on the women after one of the women was almost killed by a customer:

There was a killer. We had a guy that almost killed a girl. They actually went out of their way to sit there and watch us and make sure....you know, they followed us and watched us and made sure that we were okay.

Kayla recounted a positive experience with law enforcement after being sexually assaulted by her ex-boyfriend. She described how the detective treated her with respect and did not judge her for being involved in the sex trade:

He was very caring. Like, I was raped by my ex and I was raped anal, and like my nails came off, and like I was throwing up. It was like this really fucking horrible thing that happened in my life. So like the detectives came out of the house, and he remembered me from back then, and he was just like so how have you been? You look a lot better --- because I wasn't on drugs anymore you know. I gained some weight. You know he was just....I'll never forget him because he was just really sweet, really nice, you know respectful like regardless. I know he knew I was a prostitute, but he didn't treat me below anything.

Dana explained how law enforcement officers offered her support and an opportunity to get help instead of going to jail after she was arrested for prostitution:

Actually, when I got involved with the law, to be surprised, it was, what do you want to say, a good experience. I mean usually they are down on you or downgrading you but when I got in trouble with the law they offered me to do a survey or do a statement with a person who was interviewing sex trades. And they offered to take me home afterwards. They didn't take me to jail, but they gave me a court date, and I went to court. So they offered me an opportunity to get myself together and ask me why, you know, why I was out there. Not to shine me or shame me. They didn't shame me. And that's real unusual because a lot of cops put you down.

Christina described how she developed a positive relationship with a law enforcement officer after getting a DWI. She turned to this officer for support when she was ready to address her legal issues after exiting the commercial sex trade:

I had one officer, it was the last DWI, he busted me and it was...I was barely buzzed is what I would call it. I got caught in a parking lot actually. There was some kind of domestic disturbance, and I drove right into the center of it in my dad's car. He had a choice. He could have let me go but he decided not to. He ended up being the person that I turned myself into when I began to clean up all the legal mess. It had been nearly a year later, and I had been sober. He was just very proud, very happy. He was really helpful to me.

### ***Negative Experiences with Law Enforcement***

Most of the women said that they do not trust law enforcement. Patrice explained that she was apprehensive to talk to a detective after she was almost killed by a customer:

None of my experiences with law enforcement have been positive. So that makes you not want to turn to the law when you get raped or something happens because you don't trust them. I've just always been negative because of me being a prostitute, but right now I have to go talk to a detective today or in the next couple of days about the incident that happened to me about me almost getting killed. But I'm skeptical though because I don't trust law enforcement.

Several of the women described being harassed by law enforcement. Missy spoke about how law enforcement would follow her daily movement:

There's some that were pretty harassing. I had one that was pretty mean. He would just stalk me, stop me three or four times a day. I couldn't even walk to a store. I wouldn't even be out there doing that you know. We couldn't even walk to the grocery store. It'd be like I'm not even doing this.

Brian described being propositioned by a law enforcement officer. The officer wanted to work out a long-term arrangement for exchanging sex:

Actually, a gay cop paid me for [oral sex]....and he started actually trying to use this as oh if you do this and if you ever get a ticket I can get it off your record and that bull shit. I'm thinking in my head, whatever just pay me the money. You know what I'm saying?

Char also recounted being solicited by law enforcement officers while on the street:

Some of them would sit down and talk to me. Some of them would just be rude. Some of them would take you on alley rides and give you a pass and let you go and then they stop and they have sex and they go on.

The women talked about how law enforcement degraded women involved in the sex trade. Missy recounted being sexually assaulted by a customer and reporting it to the police, "I had a man that raped me. The police said that I wasn't raped. I just didn't get paid." Sharon described how law enforcement talk down to women in the sex trade, "Some of the law enforcement, they don't even know how to talk to you. They talk to you like you nothing." Kayla described a negative encounter with law enforcement after she had been admitted into hospital after being brutally assaulted by her ex-boyfriend:

I was beat up really bad and they were taking pictures and detectives came and took me like down to the police station, and they put me in an interrogation room. They took my phone and hooked it up to a computer, I guess trying to get like drug dealer's numbers and shit like that. I'm just like what the fuck you know? I've been raped and you know look at my face and you guys just don't give a fuck you know. So after that, I really just started hating the police, and I stopped going to the ER because I was just like fuck that you know? Like when I was telling him what happened he like threw his pen down and was like [groan] and I'm just like are you fucking serious? Like this is your job. Get it together. But of course nobody listens to you because you're just a prostitute.

Sharon talked about how law enforcement does not know how to effectively respond to women involved in the sex trade, “I didn’t feel like they didn’t want to help me, but I feel like they really didn’t know...they had a piece of paper to hand to me, but outside of that they didn’t know. They didn’t know.” Susan explained how she would go to jail “at least 8 to 15 times a year, ever year” and did not get the help she needed until she had been in the life almost 30 years and was placed in mental health court<sup>3</sup>. Rhonda recounted a traumatic experience where police did not respond to her after she had been mugged, assaulted, and thrown out of a car on the avenue:

I got mugged and thrown out of a car. It was about two in the morning. And I had been beat in the face with a bottle, so my face was all cut up. I had on a white shirt. I was red down to here [down entire chest]. I walked out in the middle of the avenue and was going like this [waving arms]. Two cop cars back to back drove around me and kept going.

Consistent with other studies (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Dalla, 2006) the women described accessing services from a multitude of social service settings. Despite this contact, the narratives suggest that women are still unable to obtain the support they need to make a successful exit. Almost all of the women described difficult interactions with law enforcement officers. This finding parallels the work of Benoit & Millar (2001), which found that prostituted women often do not feel supported or respected by law enforcement. Although the women reported some positive interactions with law enforcement, the narratives suggest that the criminalization of women in the sex trade does not help women exit the commercial sex trade.

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<sup>3</sup> Mental health court is a type of court that combines judicial supervision with community mental health treatment and other support services in order to reduce criminal activity and improve the quality of life of the participants.



### ***Exiting Needs***

The participants identified concrete needs that would help them exit the commercial sex trade. Their exiting needs were discussed in the interview, and the participants were asked to fill out a needs checklist (See Table 5 - Exiting Needs) at the conclusion of the interview. The most important need identified by the participants was housing, with 63 percent of the sample identifying it as critical for successfully exiting the commercial sex trade. Over half of the participants identified health care, counseling, and education/training as exiting needs. Other important needs included legal services, registering to work, disability, and drug treatment.

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Table 5: Exiting Needs

	(N=19)	%
Housing	12	63.2
Counseling	11	57.9
Health Care	10	52.6
Education/Training	10	52.6
Legal Services	9	47.4
Register to Work	9	47.4
Disability	9	47.4
Drug Treatment	8	42.1
GED	8	42.1
Resume	8	42.1
STD Treatment	7	36.8
Detox	6	31.6
ID	6	31.6
Birth Certificate	6	31.6
SS Card	5	26.3
Birth Control	4	21.1
Literacy	4	21.1
Childcare	4	21.1

### *Positive Support and Structure*

In the interviews the women discussed the importance of having a positive support network to exit. Dana described why she needed support to exit the life:

You're going to have to build up a network of supportive people just like you built up a network in the life, you know what I'm saying. You just didn't get in the life and have clients. You built up your clientele. So the same way in getting out of the life. You're going to have to build up a network of supportive people like you did the clients when you were in the life.

Other women went on to describe not only support, but the importance of positive people and healthy activities in the exiting process as Char remarked, "You know, you need positivity. You

don't need someone telling you that you're no good or you've failed you know." Emily explained that she needed both structure and positive activities to exit the life:

All women need to be told, you know, something. Sometimes they can't tell themselves that they're worth something. You know? Sometimes they're so depressed, or sometime they, not even tell them but just be around people that, you know, positive things like doing yoga, and, you know, writing and reading and doing like art class with each other and stuff like that? You know? That's what I need to get out. I need to have responsibility also. I need to be like oh, I got to do this in the morning. I need that. I have to have that.

### ***Specialized Housing***

Several of the women identified housing as an exiting need. Dana talked about how she struggled to get the support she needed in traditional shelters or housing programs. She went on to describe why women trying to exit the commercial sex trade need specialized, supportive housing that will meet their complex needs:

We need a housing program where you're there 24/7, you got support all around because, like for me, and I found that when I was living on my own in the middle of the night you know, the streets called out for me. Like you're missing that money. You're missing out on something. Get up and see what's going on, you know what I'm saying? To be in a place like a house specifically for women involved in prostitution, I can get up in the middle of the night, and I can have someone to talk to, like oh, I'm ready to go outside. You know what I'm saying?

### ***Counseling and Therapy***

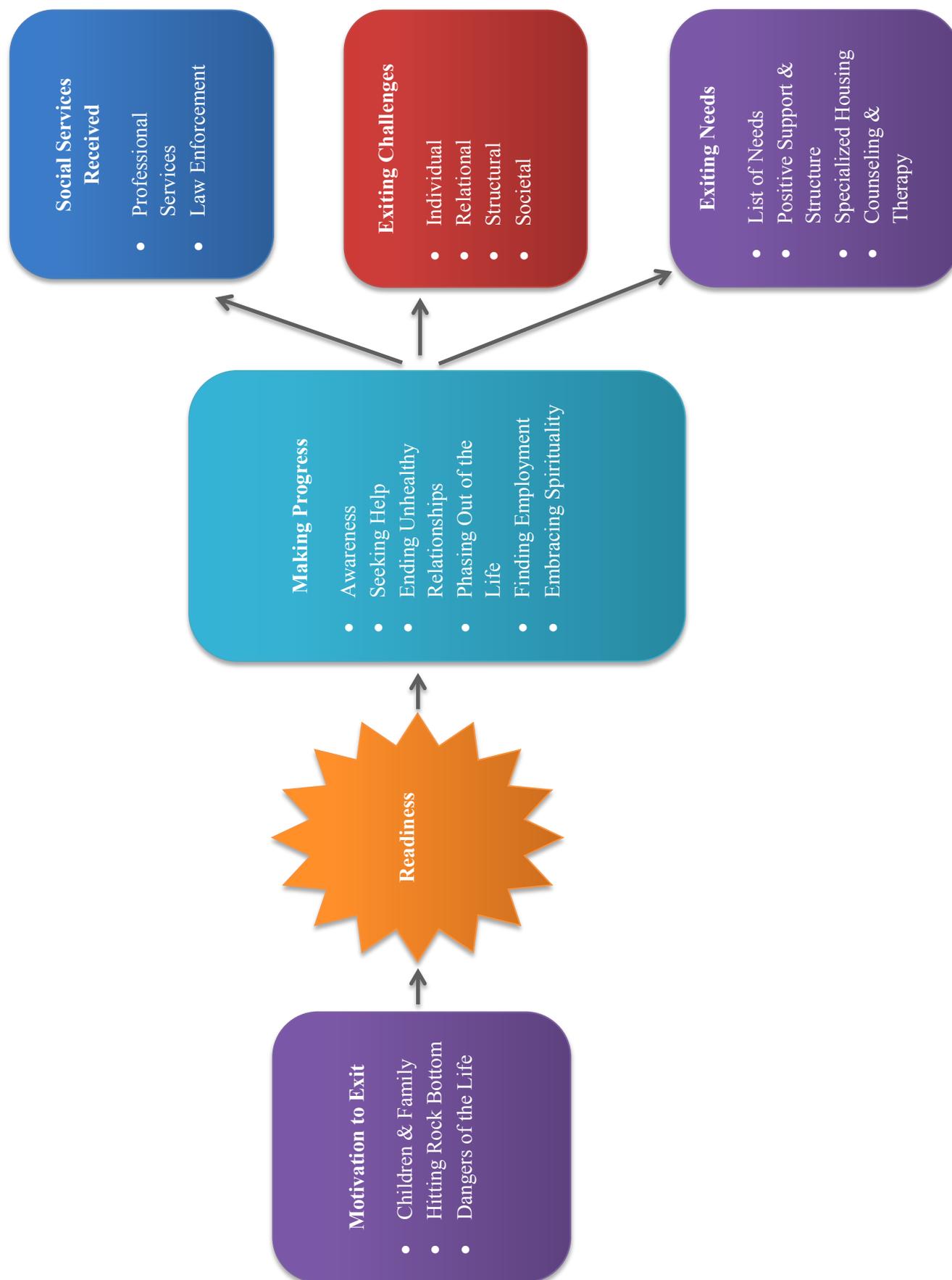
The women also spoke about the need for counseling and therapy as Christina remarked, "Professional counseling and therapy is a must." Lisa talked about how she enjoyed attending support group but mentioned "There needs to be a lot more one-on-one." Rhonda explained why she needed therapy to exit the life, "I have issues. I had issues when I got into this. Now I have even more issues. If I don't deal with the things that got me here, I'm not going to get out of it."

Reminiscent of Dalla's (2006) study the women explained that they need access to counseling, residential treatment, drug treatment, work programs, and housing in order to

successfully exit the commercial sex trade. Moreover the narratives suggest that the women need more services that are specifically for women working through the process of exiting the commercial sex trade.

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Figure 5: The Exiting Journey Revisited



### ***Promising Practices and Strategies***

The participants reported receiving a significant amount of formalized services. In order to understand their experiences with social service agencies and the criminal justice system, the participants were asked to identify any helpful strategies or practices they encountered during these experiences. The participants provided unique insight into how they want to be treated and how service should be structured to meet their complex needs as they work through the exiting process. This section described promising practices and strategies and concludes with exploring the future goals and aspirations of the participants in this study.

#### ***Ability to Share, Process, and Connect***

Almost all of the women described how beneficial it was to share and process their experiences in the commercial sex trade in a safe, comfortable, and non-judgmental setting. The women also stressed the importance of connecting with other women involved in the commercial sex trade, including the staff members at the prostitution-specific agency who are all survivors of the commercial sex trade. Rhonda described why it is important to have survivors on staff at social service agencies that work with women involved in the commercial sex trade:

They listen. They don't just listen, they've been where I've been and where I am. So it's not like a social worker or case manager that knows nothing about sucking dicks for a living. You know. Or sleeping on people's porches or you know anything like that. They've been where I've been. You know, the most important thing is I know they care about me. You know. Nobody else cares about me right now, not even myself. So that means a lot. Yeah because you can't...like I could never imagine what your life is like every day, going to school and doing what you do, because I've never been there. And unless you've been where I'm at, you don't know the really fucked up places your mind will take you.

Sherry explained how she benefits from attending process group at the prostitution specific agency:

Process group, I like that. You know you get a chance to talk about the things you normally wouldn't bring up in conversations or you know what's on your mind, what's eating you and bugging you? Somebody has always probably went through the same thing or worse. So you just feel very comfortable. I like that the best I think. I never talked about any of things in my life to....you know I never had an outlet before. You don't talk about these things with family. You don't talk about these things with colleagues. You just keep it to yourself. It's just more baggage and stuff that you carry that eats you up and that just perpetuates the whole cycle of addiction and what follows that.

Dana talked about how the support group at the prostitution-specific agency allows her to bond and connect with other women who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade:

You get to build a bond with other girls. Because you know, when you're out there, the first thing that comes to mind is you feel so alone, like you're the only one. You know, you might see other girls on the street but you don't relate to them. You know what I'm saying? You think of them as taking away from your money. You know what I'm saying. You're competitive. You know what I'm saying? When we get in these rooms, we get to see how much alike we are. We get to build bonds with each other and focus on helping each other by we call each other now. We talk to each other outside of here some.

Missy expressed similar feelings about the benefits of process group, "The processing, being able to talk about your feelings and stuff and seeing that other people feel the same way. You're not....you know, other people are the same. It's not like you're alone." Emily emphasized the importance of connecting with positive people who are off the street, "Because it's a lot of girls with the same energy and similar backgrounds who can relate in a way that, in a positive way, rather than, you know still being out there."

Kayla emphasized the importance of connecting with other women who are in the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. She spoke about attending group at the prostitution-specific agency in the past, but she described how it was difficult to connect with the other women who did not seem to be ready to exit. She suggested that it would be helpful to have a

support group for women who have successfully exited the commercial sex trade and went on to describe what this group should look like:

They need people that's already been out. Like I know, the prostitution-specific agency for a long time I was going. I was the only one not getting high you know, in the room. Like there's so many women, and I was the youngest one, and I was the only one that was trying to get my life together. I just feel like if there's more people that they had seen successfully got out but not working there, but like you know. And I was also think like, like kind of an AA meeting like for prostitution because there is...I am really struggling right now and I feel like I wish I could go to a meeting about prostitution that just like....with people who have exited. Not with people who are [still in the life].....In recovery like 24 hours clean you know, like 24 hours they haven't had a trick. I think that would be really helpful.

Susan explained how process group allowed her to use her testimony to help other women exit the life and process her experiences in a healthy, meaningful way:

Because I can take my lifestyle and history of my testimony and come here and turn it into an asset to other women. You know, because they're...you know somebody off the corner is not going to want it. They don't care about you. They really don't care. I'm telling you. So but, this place gave me an opportunity to utilize my history. And my testimony. That's why I like coming here. I like AA and NA, but there's still issues I need to address as far as prostitution, being bought and sold, tossed away like a dirty shoe. I need to put that out there a little bit and process it and work on it a little bit so I can become healthier in my mind and spirit you know?

Sharon explained how hearing other women's stories deterred her from reentering the life:

Because everybody, we all have the same problem. Some want to continue, but me, myself I choose not to. I listen to other people's story, and it makes me really don't want to go out. So now, that kind of detours me. I try to tell other people, there's a better life than this.

Susan described how she reconnected with the prostitution-specific agency after her apartment burned down. She lost everything she owned, including her sobriety, in the fire. Susan explained that reconnecting with the women at the prostitution-specific agency was the only way she was going to be able to stay sober and out of the life:

Well, I have to be completely honest with you, for me, I have to constantly stay reminded that I am who I am and I do have to recover from my past. See once you get in your home and things get comfortable and you're clean you start to disconnect. Well, I'm not going to go tonight. I don't want to call her. Oh, I'm just so tired of those...you know, like that you disconnect. And then, the next thing you know in your mind is that just a little bit is not going to hurt.

Christina also spoke about how connecting with the women at the prostitution-specific agency prevented her from relapsing and reentering the life:

I can't say enough good things about the prostitution-specific agency. They saved me from going back out. It wouldn't have been the way I did it before. This time it would have been you know, horrible, dangerous, and I don't think I would have made it. I think that would have...if I hadn't come here and gotten involved, I would have quickly feel right back into my addictions and probably wouldn't be here right now. It goes fast when you go back.

### ***No Judgment***

Throughout the interviews the women described the importance of non-judgmental social service systems. Often times the fear of being judged for their involvement in the sex trade prevented women from seeking supportive services. Patrice explained why she stays connected with the women at the prostitution-specific agency, "They don't judge you. Other places look at you like oh, she's a prostitute." Missy also described why the prostitution-specific agency's non-judgmental approach is helpful for women trying to exit the commercial sex trade. She spoke about how other social service settings, such as the health department, have judged her in the past:

It helps to have people that understand that you don't have to worry. You can come here, and you don't have to worry about them looking down on you because they don't look down. Nobody here looks down on you. If you go to the health department, they look down. You know, they look more down on you. Or the doctor's office, you know some doctor's offices I've went in there and said hey look, I'm a prostitute, and they oh! you know. Some doctor's offices are like, oh well I'm glad you're honest with us. And some of them just kind of...the nurses will be nasty you know. So you just have to be careful about who you're sharing it with.

### ***Consistent Support***

The women emphasized the importance of consistent support throughout the exiting process. Kayla spoke about how much it meant to have her social service team support her while she was in jail, “When I was in jail like everybody came to see me --- my DFS worker, my caseworker, the staff from the prostitution-specific agency. Everybody came to see me. I’m just like ‘I’m in orange. Don’t look at me.’ But I have a lot of support.” Dana explained how meeting with her therapist on a weekly basis keeps her healthy and focused on exiting the life:

Because a lot of times we don’t know why we self-medicate. Well, for me, I didn’t know why I self-medicated myself so much. Why I looked to stay numb and everything and there was a reason that I had a chemical imbalance. Starting the medicines has been helping and having somebody to talk to. Like I told them, I talk to my therapist on a weekly basis. If she goes, if I go a month without speaking to her I’m off balance. So she allows me to talk to her every week.

Char explained how her family was a constant source of support when she was working through the process of exiting the commercial sex trade:

My mom never gave up on me. She never gave up on me. She was wanting to help me when I was, slipped, even doesn’t matter. When I was messed up or whatever, she would still put that thought in my mind. This is not your future, and we’re waiting for you. She never downed me. She never called me a crackhead. She never called me a whore. She never did none of that. All she did was encourage me.

Keisha spoke about how she feels supported when she is around her friends and mother:

I am faithful to church, but I need to really get into church – don’t go there and just play church. You got to really get into the word. I might understand, but I can’t really get into the word around this man because he’s negative. He belittles me a lot. So I just puts down my Bible, and I just walk around to my friend house and you know. Or I call my mother and she’ll come get me if she ain’t at therapy. I help her clean up or something you know because her feet’s bad too. I just feel so good when I’m away because my mind be open. I can think when I’m around positive people.

Mindy described how the emotional and financial support of her daughters has helped her stay out of the commercial sex trade:

My daughters are a huge part of my life. And I go to them, and we, you know, we talk as mother and daughter, we talk as friends, and they've helped me a lot. And I was honest with my daughters. I have twin daughters, and I told them. It took me a lot to break down and tell them what happened. And they were very, very supportive. You know, they could have just turned their back and said I don't want that kind of person around my kids, but I had to show them and share with them you know so they would allow me to be there. And be positive for me. One of them kind of helps me a little bit financially here and there because she knows that's why I went that way. So I mean she doesn't just give me money. But you know if I'm struggling I know that I can call and say that I really need my water bill paid. Can you help me? And she'll pay it for me. Or she'll help me think of ways I could make positive money.

### ***Enhance Self-Worth***

The women noted that enhancing self-worth is critical for women involved in the commercial sex trade. Susan explained why a focus on self-worth is so important and described how she would help women trying to exit the sex trade.

To exit the life you have to let the person know that they are worth something. Because prostitution makes you feel low, low, low. I mean, selling yourself. Come on. I would give them hope and let them know that they are worth having around and they're an asset to life and to our community and to their homes and they're not garbage.

Erica described how she has changed her lifestyle and built more self-esteem through the program at the prostitution-specific agency:

This place has helped me with my self-esteem. It has helped me with, I guess you could say...it has helped me more than just my self-esteem. It's helped my personality. It's helped me to change my lifestyle, change my actions. My mental state has changed. I used to feel like I was nothing but a common whore. That's all I would be. Now, I think of myself as a young lady that's just trying to make her way.

Mindy explained how the program at the prostitution-specific agency has helped her stay positive and focused on her own personal growth:

It has helped me stay positive. To think of me as a queen. I mean, I always call my granddaughters princesses and I have to remember I'm a queen and I'm okay with that. You know, because you live...as a woman, we live our lives so much for everybody else. And I'm living it for me now.

### *Understanding the “Why”*

Throughout the study the women spoke about how social service providers and law enforcement officers need to understand why women enter the commercial sex trade. The women provided examples where social service providers took time to understand the root causes of their entry into the commercial sex trade and explained how this moved them forward in the exiting process. Dana explained how the prostitution-specific agency and the mental health center are helping her work through her past trauma:

I’m understanding myself more with them. You know, I’m not like a number or just a client. I’m understanding what I’m about, what’s going on, what’s happened in my past to make me do what I do. Just understand myself a little bit more and I get that support at the prostitution-specific agency and the mental health center.

Christina described how important it is for social service providers to look beyond the surface and take time to really understand why women become involved in the commercial sex trade:

There’s generally, behind everything there is a real, huge root cause between all of it, you know underneath it. That’s where you’ve got to start if you’re ever going to get over it, recover, change, or get out. There’s something in there that happened. You can’t change it but you can get around it and grow it, you know accept it and do what you’re going to do with it. You’ve got to grow up and move on. That’s the biggest thing. I think the only way is through professional help.

Kayla recalled how the drug commissioner was “like a second mom to her” and took the time to really understand her life history:

And Commissioner she is awesome. Like she’s like a second mom to me. You know, she’s really awesome. She knows about my mom and my past and my history. She does everything in her power for me to get it together. You know like, there times that she’s cried you know.

### *Comprehensive Services*

Kayla explained how drug court provided comprehensive services and the support she needed to successfully exit the commercial sex trade:

Drug court is awesome because they believe in you when you don't. Like, my judge has went off on me so bad, but she really cares. Drug court paid for a lot of things. They paid for treatment. They paid for childcare. They paid...I mean they have you do therapy. They have the kids in therapy. They provide bus passes. I got a voucher for clothing for my kids. I mean they just do a lot of things, and they're very supportive as long as you're doing what you're supposed to be doing. Like, everything goes good and it's just really been a helpful things, which is crazy to say. I used to hate it with a passion. I swear. I was just like...but I can't get high with you guys because I have to drop for...because they do random drops every week. But you know now that I think about it, like it blessed and like it saved my life.

### ***Second Chances***

The women stressed the importance of second chances with social service agencies. Missy recounted how she had “the door shut in [her] face” when she tried to seek help after relapsing. She went on to describe why it is important for social service agencies to understand the cycle of prostitution and drug use and not give up on women who are working through process of exiting:

I'm going to say this. There was an organization that's like this one. I continued to relapse. Whenever I would relapse I would never use their services because I didn't feel like I deserved them. Don't ever give up on that person. No matter how many times they go back out there and come back, let them come back because you never know when that's going to be the time that's going to take.

Char shared similar advice for social service professionals:

You need to give them a chance. Not as soon as they mess up just throw them back to the curb but give them a chance and encouraging them, you know, when they fall as instead of putting them down and making them feel like they're more of a failure, to pick them up, and give them multiple chances.

### ***Looking Towards the Future***

Several of the women concluded the interview by talking about their future goals and aspirations. Tiffany spoke about how loves working with kids and wants to teach special education. Monica wanted to start a job training program for women trying to exit the

commercial sex trade. Kayla described how she wanted to save money and eventually open a transitional living program for women and girls:

And, eventually...and then I want to start like a cleaning business and just save up money and then start going to auctions and buying cars and then flipping them. And then eventually start buying like foreclosed homes and flipping those. Eventually I can get one for like transitional living. You know, but that's my goals later on. But, right now I just need to get a job. It doesn't matter.

Emily talked about how she wanted to pursue a career working with animals:

I really want to be a veterinarian or work with animals, because I'm a big animal lover. Because animals can be your best friends forever and never turn their back on you. I wanted that my whole life, since I was little I wanted to be a veterinarian. If I can't be a veterinarian I'd be an assistant or a groomer or something because I don't know. That's my dream.

Char described how she wanted to use her experience to help others in the future:

I think after five years, which I know that I will make it, that I'm going to try to go into counseling, you know, but they told me that I have to wait five years being straight before I go into like talking to, talking in class, like in rehabs and counseling or sponsoring people.

Christina wanted to either get back into the medical field or reopen her hair and beauty business:

Most of my jobs skills are either in health or beauty. So you know it could be the medical field. Maybe when I become re-established I could pick up some side work and maybe open my business back up. But, I'm in no hurry. I do nails, makeup, spray tanning, tattoo cover up -- a lot of air brush work. I'd say specialty beauty. I had a shop at my house.

### ***Discussion and Significance of Findings***

The purpose of this study was to explore the exit process among women attempting to leave the "life" and examine the influence of social service systems on the exiting process. In particular, this study focused on identifying key factors or experiences that either facilitate or challenge exit success. Existing models of exiting suggest that prostituted and sexually trafficked women are in dire need of formal supportive services (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Månsson & Hedin, 1999; Sanders, 2007). In order to be effective, programs and interventions

must be able to meet the unique needs of this population. Thus, this investigation was designed to reveal what survivors need to exit and to identify promising practices and strategies that support a successful exit. This section will provide a discussion of the common themes and findings that emerged from the interviews with the survivors.

### ***Connecting Entrance to Exit***

Although the focus was on exiting, it is still important to continue to deepen our understanding of the reasons for entering the commercial sex trade. In this study, poverty and economic necessity emerged as an influential theme for all of the participants. Pimps or traffickers were rarely discussed as reasons behind their entrance. This finding suggests that exiting the commercial sex trade relies heavily on the ability to legally support oneself. Thus, employable skills and job training need to be components of an ideal intervention program.

Most of the women entered the sex trade as adolescents, which indicates a need to develop programs, policies, and interventions aimed at preventing women and children from entering the commercial sex trade. One potential avenue for continued exploration would be to identify protective factors that buffer the negative effects of specific risk factors such as poverty and family dysfunction. The identification of protective factors would facilitate the development of preventative programming for certain populations, such as high risk youth, who are increasingly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation.

### ***A Model of Exiting?***

Exiting is a long and complex, non-linear process. Although other models aim to represent the exit process (Baker, Dalla, & Williamson, 2010; Månsson and Hedin; Sanders, 2007), it still highly doubtful that one model can adequately address the unique components of exiting the commercial sex trade. Is it necessary to have a model of exiting? This study revealed

that no two exiting journeys are the same. Moreover, exiting appears to be an ongoing journey that pushes the limits of a six stage model (Baker et al., 2010). Instead of focusing on creating a framework or model of exiting, it may be more beneficial to listen to what these women have to say about their lives and respond to their needs as they dictate them. This would provide a unique opportunity to find ways to help them improve (however defined) their lives within the context of their lived experiences and their current circumstances.

### ***Readiness to Exit***

A strong connection exists between readiness and exit success. Both Dalla (2006) and Månsson & Hedin (1999) acknowledge the power of personal commitment and internal drive in their research on exiting with prostituted women. However, I believe that the concept of readiness more adequately captures the women's willingness to move forward in the exit process.

As I read through the survivor narratives I detect different levels of readiness to exit. For example, I noticed that the younger women expressed more ambivalence towards exiting, while the older women articulated a stronger desire to make a final break. This variation likely exists because the younger women are still able to make a significant profit, while the older women are beginning to age out of the lifestyle. Thus, it is important to consider individual readiness when developing intervention programs for women involved in the commercial sex trade. More importantly, programs should accommodate women who are not ready to exit or who must remain in the commercial sex trade to meet their basic needs, support their families, or to avoid physical harm, but have real social service needs. Social service programs need to understand that few women will make a successful exit on their first attempt. As noted by the women, programs need to give women a number of opportunities to make the final break.

### ***Strength and Resilience***

One of the most revealing findings is the level of resilience among the women. It is clear that these women have hopes and dreams of lives beyond the commercial sex trade. Contrary to other literature (Farley et al., 2003), none of the women identified themselves as victims. Although their life circumstances were oppressive, the women possessed agency which allowed them to exercise some power in the context of their work and their personal lives. Several of the women noted that having control was a positive aspect of being in the commercial sex trade. As Patrice noted, “in prostitution you don’t have to answer to nobody”. It is important to note that women who were under the control of a pimp or abusive intimate partner did not exercise this type of control or agency.

All of the women expressed a desire to pursue opportunities outside of the commercial sex trade. The women wanted to be veterinarians, beauticians, and teachers. Even more inspiring to me, several of the women wanted to use their experiences to help others. This points to the need for social service organizations to respect the agency of the women and develop and provide services that focus on developing the women’s strengths and abilities, rather than focusing on their problems, deficits, or victimhood.

### ***Maternal Love***

One of the most powerful themes of the narratives recorded is the love the women consistently expressed for their children and the profound sense of shame and guilt they struggled with when they talked of the impact of their actions on their children. Most of these women have complicated relationships with their own mothers and do not want to replicate this relationship with their own children. As a social worker myself, one of the most disheartening findings of this study is that the women often felt betrayed by the child welfare system. The

women spoke about unresponsive caseworkers and pressure to terminate their parental rights. This is likely due to the negative stereotypes and prejudices against women involved in the commercial sex trade. At the same time, the women's concerns for their children suggest that children are a strong catalyst for exiting the commercial sex trade. This provides an important reminder that, in service of the whole family, child welfare workers are critical responders to women who want to regain custody of their children, and the power of their empathy and generosity with tangible resources cannot be underestimated

### ***The Spiritual***

For some women, spirituality plays a strong role in the exit process. Only one other known study (Dalla, 2006) addresses the concept of spirituality among prostituted women. I had not anticipated the spontaneous expressions of a strong belief in a “higher power”, and the importance to these women of spirituality in their exiting journey. Not only did women describe praying on the street, they appeared to find a sense of solace in their belief in a higher power. The women also described reconnecting with the church community as a step towards exiting. For women who did not have strong forms of social support, their relationship with the church was especially important. It is worth contemplating how a belief in a higher power gives some women the inner strength work through the challenges of exiting the commercial sex trade. Thus, the door is wide open for future exploration of the role of spirituality and religion in the exit process.

### ***The Criminal Justice System***

The criminal justice system is an integral player in the exiting process. Law enforcement officers are often a main point of contact and support for women involved in the commercial sex trade. It was difficult to hear the negative experiences women had with law enforcement. Several

of the women described experiences of being propositioned, degraded, and harassed by law enforcement officers. Although there were certainly more negative experiences, the women also described having some positive interactions with law enforcement. For example, several of the women explained how law enforcement officers kept a watchful eye and built relationships with the women on the street. The women also described scenarios where law enforcement treated them with respect and without judgment. In some cases, law enforcement even connected the women to resources in support of exiting the commercial sex trade.

Thus, it is important to consider the role of law enforcement when designing exiting interventions for these women. More importantly, these narratives indicate the need to improve the law enforcement response to women involved in the commercial sex trade. These women cannot continue to be further stigmatized by the social service systems purported to help them.

### ***Significant Service Gaps***

One of the distinguishing features of this research is that most of the women were not under the control of a pimp or trafficker. It is the power of a combination of structural factors including poverty, inadequate social services, and an absence of safe housing, that compel women's continued involvement in the commercial sex trade. It is clear from the narratives that the current social service systems are not meeting the complex needs of these women. Although the women describe extensive involvement in social service systems, most are still unable to make a final exit. It is important to note that this may be related to the difficulty of disclosing one's involvement in the commercial sex trade and the stigma associated with receiving supportive services in the aftermath of that disclosure.

A significant gap in services is the shortage of safe housing for women who want to exit the commercial sex trade. The women frequented domestic violence shelters and homeless

shelters for housing services, but extensive waitlists and a limited number of beds often cause the women to remain homeless or on the street. Even more challenging, some agencies will not accept prostituted women into services because they do not fit within the mission of the agency. The women also described instances where services have been discontinued because the agency abruptly decided to no longer provide services to women in the commercial sex trade. With limited access to safe housing and consistent supportive services, many women are left to prostitute themselves out of the commercial sex trade.

### ***Comprehensive Services***

Consistent with existing literature (Dalla, 2006; Mayhew & Mossman, 2007), the findings reveal that women need a wide range of services in order to exit the commercial sex trade. One of the strongest themes to emerge from the data is the importance of survivor-centered services. It was clear from the narratives that the ability to share stories, process experiences, and connect with other survivors in a non-judgmental setting is viewed as being critical for exit success. There is also a need for professional mental health services among prostituted women. It is important to point out that I did not initiate discussion of one's mental health status with any of the participants. Sixty-three percent of the women interviewed spontaneously mentioned having experience with a diagnosable mental illness. Thus, mental health services must be accessible to these women as they work through the process of exiting the commercial sex trade.

The findings demonstrate that women need comprehensive services in order to successfully exit. Programs such as Drug Court and Mental Health Court appeared to be particularly useful in helping women successfully exit the commercial sex trade. For example, Kayla made significant progress towards exiting after she entered Drug Court and received a wide array of social service support. Susan did not make her final break until she entered Mental

Health Court and finally received the mental health care and housing support she desperately needed. It is incredible to see the progress that can be made when women receive comprehensive services designed to meet their individual needs. Thus, long-term services that include a combination of health/mental health treatment, drug treatment, and housing support should be readily available to all women at the moment they contemplate exiting.

### *Conclusion*

Justice-system based diversion programs that provide a limited scope of services cannot be the sole solution to addressing the needs of women in the commercial sex trade. Innovative services that are supportive, strengths based, and responsive to the complex needs of these women must be developed. I now realize that when I entered into this research my ideas about social services were limited and my vision of what are helpful social services was equally so. Hearing the narratives of those involved in commercial sexual exploitation opened my eyes to a reality I did not know existed. This is the reality of men and women working the streets and living in fear of a serial killer; the reality of the sexually exploited who are assaulted by their clients or sexually harassed by law enforcement; and the reality of people who have tangible and intangible needs that most people who are not survivors cannot imagine. These are health needs, safety needs, financial needs; parenting struggles, losses of friends and family, falls from grace. While the women suggested that it would be beneficial to have a housing program designed specifically for women involved in the commercial sex trade, their stories revealed that housing is the proxy for an environment that can address a myriad of needs. Thus housing would allow them to connect with other survivors, and it would serve as a safe place for women to have the complexities of their lives understood, even if not resolved, as they make movement toward a

successful exit. It seems time to listen to the voices of survivors and finally make the changes needed to support these women as they embark on their journey to exit the commercial sex trade.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE SOCIAL SERVICE RESPONSE

This chapter reports the findings from the interviews with twelve social service providers who are on the front lines of providing supportive services to victims of domestic sex trafficking. One agency is a survivor-run organization that provides direct services to adults who have experienced involvement in the commercial sex trade. Many of the women in this program are court-ordered into a twelve week diversion program. The second agency provides direct services to youth, ages 16-21, who are homeless or living in out-of-home care. Many of the youth in this program are system-involved or homeless youth. While many of the services providers interviewed recognized that males and transgender youth are victims of domestic sex trafficking, these findings primarily relate to the service delivery process for women and girls. The findings of the interviews centered around five themes: critical agency partnerships, services delivered, challenges and limitations to serving this population, promising practices from the field, and defining success. These themes are described in this section.

### *Critical Agency Partnerships*

The social service providers noted several methods for getting clients involved in services including agency/court referrals, crisis line, street outreach, jail outreach, and word-of-mouth. Agency workers stressed the importance of agency partnerships in addressing the needs of sexually trafficked and prostituted women and children. The social service providers described their partnerships with almost 20 agencies including mental health centers, the criminal justice system, transitional housing programs, domestic violence shelters, the health department, drug treatment centers, homeless shelters, faith-based agencies, multi-service agencies, employment programs, and food pantries. One service provider described how they partner with a specialized youth program through a local mental health center:

The program is specifically for youth up until the age of 21 or 18 - it depends on where they are mentally. They are just very competent. They have a good competency about sexual exploitation and working with it. In the med evaluations I've sat in and stuff, you know they want to get to know those clients to go through that. They just have a great rapport.

The service providers went on to explain the different ways they partner with the criminal justice system to meet the needs of their sexually trafficked and prostituted women and girls. One service provider spoke highly of the mental health officers who are specifically trained to respond to this client population:

I've had some good run ins with the police officers because I don't remember what it is called, but now they have mental health officers specifically trained. And that works really well with our trafficked youth also. It's the exact same kind of approach, being sensitive to the situation and understanding. So, I've had some good run ins. I haven't had any bad ones yet.

One service provider described an incident where a detective called her after identifying a victim of human trafficking to seek advice:

A couple of weeks ago, I got a call from a detective and she's like hey. This is unofficial. And I was like okay. I'm like why is the Sheriff's Department calling me. She's like I found this girl. She's a runaway youth. She was being housed with a sex offender who is housing other runaway youths, and they're being prostituted. I was like oh, my God. She's like can you help? I'm like oh, my God. I'm really excited that you called. That you cared more about the victim, and you're not even talking about this guy. You just want to help the girls and that's fantastic. So there are people in the system that really want it to work better.

### *Services Delivered*

The social service providers described a multitude of services offered to sexually trafficked and prostituted women and girls. One of the most critical services was street and jail outreach. A provider would go out in a van and reach out to women and girls who are still on the street. The women and girls are given pre-stuffed purses that contain toiletries, a slip of paper with the crisis line number, and a "bad trick list". A bad trick list is a piece of paper that

provides descriptions of the appearance and vehicles of customers who seemed dangerous. For jail outreach, a provider would connect with women in jail and inform them about their services.

One service provider described the importance of street outreach:

It's an effective way to let them know that somebody cares and we've been there. We know what you're going through. A lot of places, when they hear you're a prostitute they're like we, thinking like you're a germ or something, a disease. I think it's really helpful to know that we're here, we care, and that somewhere in your mind it will click...if they get in a crisis situation they'll be able to relay oh, we can go there to get help you know. We give them bands where we have our crisis line number on there. So it helps.

One of the most central services offered by the programs was case management. Each client is paired with a case manager who supports them through the complexity of their life situation and connects them with supportive services. The providers stressed the importance of meeting their client's basic needs. These needs may include a shower, food, clean clothes, and a safe place to stay. Safe, affordable housing was one of the most pressing needs for most of their clients. The providers explained that adult clients are often referred to domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, or put on wait-lists for a long-term housing program. At the time of the interviews, there were no specialized housing programs for adult women who are trying to transition out of the commercial sex trade. The youth clients (under the age of 21) were often placed in transitional living programs for at-risk youth.

Although the programs were not able to directly provide mental health treatment, they did refer to a number of mental health centers or drug treatment facilities for counseling, therapy, and psychiatric services. One provider explained that they provide weekly groups to support women and girls who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade. The weekly groups focused on processing trauma, boundaries, healthy relationships, risk reduction, relapse prevention, exit planning, and addressing shame and guilt. As described by one provider, "The weekly groups

allow women to come together and get rid of some of their emotional baggage.” Given the physical health needs of this population, the programs provided medical screening for STDs, pregnancy, and other health-related problems, often through local medical providers who are able to provide affordable care and are sensitive to the needs of this population.

The service providers stressed the importance of integrating life skills, job training, and other educational programming as part of the treatment plan for their clients. The case managers described how they worked with their clients to obtain employment or job training. In some cases, the youth clients were required to attend independent living classes that focused on budgeting, resume writing, money management, and maintaining housing, etc. For the adult women the focus was on enrolling in GED classes, vocational training, college classes, or job training.

### ***Challenges and Limitations to Serving this Population***

The social service providers working with this client population acknowledged several challenges and limitations to effectively meeting the needs of sexually trafficked and prostituted clients. The overarching challenges and limitations are described in this section.

#### ***Lack of Understanding of Domestic Sex Trafficking***

A significant challenge reported by the providers was the lack of knowledge and understanding of domestic sex trafficking. Specifically, many providers explained that the relationship between sex trafficking and prostitution was not well understood by law enforcement, other agencies, and the general public. This theme was especially salient for the survivor-run organization that provides services to adult women. The providers expressed frustration that prostitution is still described as a “choice” and distinguished from sex trafficking. They argued that prostitution and sex trafficking are both forms of commercial sexual

exploitation and cannot exist independently of one another. Separating prostitution from sex trafficking not only further stigmatized this population, but it influenced the ability to provide appropriate services to meet the needs of this population.

### ***No Survivor Voice***

The absence of survivors' voices in the anti-trafficking movement was reported as a barrier to meeting the needs of victims of domestic sex trafficking. The providers described how survivors are often not included in the development of policies and practices for this population, which makes it challenging to design effective strategies for meeting the needs of this complex population.

Another challenge is the rapid development of anti-trafficking organizations in communities where there are existing agencies already working with this client population. One provider described the harm caused when people do not support existing agencies and start programs that do not directly benefit victims of domestic sex trafficking:

When other organizations just pop up and start trying to do stuff without really knowing what they're doing and not providing any type of direct services to the clients it's harmful to them. They're pulling funding away from victims when they do that. People are killing these women. Like they're dying on the street. So when other organizations are out there saying that they're helping, saying that they're doing something and they're not, it's very aggravating. They don't realize the harm that they're doing. Most of them come from a place where....they're trying to do good. It's just they're going about it the wrong way.

### ***Difficulty Identifying Victims***

The hidden nature of the crime and the absence of standard protocols for identifying victims coming in to contact with social services agencies were problematic. One of the greatest challenges reported by providers working with the youth population was that clients do not view themselves as victims. One provider explained that most of her clients do not identify as victims of trafficking because of how prostitution and trafficking are represented in the media:

I think about kids that end up being trafficked and not considering themselves victims of trafficking or even considering themselves part of the lifestyle because they define you know trafficking and prostitution based upon like movies and TV. They think they don't look like a prostitute. They think, well having sex with you because I am hungry, that's not the same thing.

Another provider described how the glamorization of prostitution makes it difficult for clients to see themselves as victims:

Well one of my clients, she is pretty low functioning to where...she just says that she's an escort. Well, I don't know if she even really knows the meaning between one or the other. It's more glamorous. She's been arrested multiple times. She's a mess. But again, she was in the foster care system since she was two.

### ***Laws and Policies***

All of the providers described laws and policies that were not effective in addressing the issue of domestic sex trafficking. Several of the providers discussed the shortcomings of the Trafficking Victims Protection (TVPA). For example, the providers expressed frustration that the women had to prove that they were forced or coerced into the commercial sex trade in order to be considered a victim of trafficking. They were also disappointed that once a girl turns 18 she is no longer automatically considered a victim of sex trafficking. One provider explained why all women should be considered victims of trafficking and offered supportive services:

I feel as though simply crossing the line from 17 to 18 doesn't make you anything less of a victim. It has not changed your situation. So I feel like they should just be identifying them all as victims. If you find someone out on the street selling their body, there's a reason they're doing it and it doesn't matter if they're a high class call girl or not. No one really, really wants to do it.

Another provider stated that the criminalization of prostitution acts as a barrier towards exiting. She explained how an accumulation of prostitution charges can turn into a felony which then prevents women from accessing certain supportive services. The providers also expressed disappointment in the lack of funding for American victims and described how access to services is often contingent upon cooperation in the prosecution. The provider remarked, "I also don't

enjoy the fact that American victims are vastly ignored and not funded. They need support services as well. I don't get why they have to provide a prosecution case in order to be taken care of.”

### *Inadequate Services*

Across the board, it was clear that the services being offered to this population inadequate in number and focus. One of the most significant gaps in services for this population was housing for adult women who wanted to exit the commercial sex trade. The transitional living programs that were available to adult women often required rent payments and staff were not trained to serve this population. One provider expressed her frustration with the lack of services for adult victims of domestic sex trafficking:

There's nothing really dedicated to these victims. I mean there's 162 beds across the U.S. dedicated to women that are American victims. That's crazy. How many prostitutes are in the U.S.? There are 162 beds? Period? That doesn't make sense. They're just so underserved. I don't know. They're just so vulnerable.

The lack of a residential housing program forced one agency to spend a significant amount of time picking up clients for services. Their clients were dispersed all over town, and many did not have a reliable form of transportation. The provider remarked, “We spend almost an hour picking everybody up, that's time we could spend helping them. If they were all in one place, it would be so much easier.” One provider explained that they will not make meaningful progress or see many successful exits until they have a residential program that is able to meet the complex needs of their clients:

We don't go real deep because you know we don't want them leaving out to go back to their circumstances, back to the war zone, with big, open, gaping wounds. So, until we can provide that safe place for that process to happen, they're really kind of...what we do is just try to build relationships and offer them friendship and to meet some of their basic human needs.

The providers described how difficult it is to get their clients connected with services outside of the agency. Outside agencies often have long waiting lists and are not responsive to the complex needs of this population. Also, the providers reported that most clients do not have insurance, which prevents them from accessing critical services such as mental health care. One provider reported that most social service programs are not designed for this client population and create policies and procedures that set her clients up to fail. She explained,

A lot of women come out of treatment, and most of the treatment centers find a resource where they'll pay like the first month of rent or two weeks of rent, and then you've got to get in there and get on the ball and go find you some kind of job. The women won't do that. It is hard. It is hard when you're just trying to keep yourself clean off of drugs and alcohol. It's hard to...you know, you try to keep clean, go to meetings...because there are so many stipulations in these transitional living houses. So, it's hard. But you've got to...when you come out you've got to be ready to get on the ball and do what you need to do because it's like ticking. But it's hard. It's just too much at once. It's too much at once, and it makes a lot on the table. Then the women are done and go back out.

The lack of preventative services for high risk populations is another challenge. One provider explained that there are no programs or services in place to prevent commercial sexual exploitation. She reported how youth at risk of sexual exploitation go unnoticed until they actually become victims. The educational system also acts as a barrier for this client population, especially those who have been in and out of the foster care system. Without an education it is difficult for trafficked youth to successfully transition out of the commercial sex trade.

The foster care kids they jump from placement to placement to placement. So they are constantly losing credits. So that's an issue. Because, then when they come to us and they're 18 years old, they might have three or four credits. So there is no way to graduate in their class and with all the budget cuts there is not a lot of alternative school settings for them.

### ***Client Readiness***

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for service providers is helping their clients break away from the commercial sex trade. In some cases, the sex trade is the only life their clients

know, as one provider remarked, “It is kind of learned behavior. One of my girls, her mother was a former prostitute. So, that’s what she grew up knowing.” Another provider explained how the violence of the sex trade becomes normalized and that fear alone is not enough for clients to make a final exit from the commercial sex trade:

I think violence just becomes an everyday occurrence. I mean that is fear, but sometimes it’s just...it’s their every day. It goes...it’s like with the job. You know, it’s like people who go to work every day and you know always get....you know, I mean it’s just an everyday. I don’t think there’s fear associated with that. I think there’s fear of always being killed. I think that’s one of the biggest reasons like they try to get into programs and try to get out. But, it’s not enough to get them out, out. I think of one of my clients. She was a transsexual. She was missing fingers. She said that her pimp cut her fingers off. I think with her, she was just immune to it. I mean she was just accustomed to it. It was pure survival for her.

The providers noted that a majority of their clients are not ready to exit the life and bounce in and out of services. In some cases, the clients are just “going through the motions” until they can find a way to get back into the life as one provider explained:

We kept this client busy morning to night. Whether it was meeting with one of us or going to individual therapy or going to drug therapy or sitting through groups every single night. One day when we were driving she was like this is going through the motions. Do you know how many times you people have made me sit in groups? She’s like you can sit me in a group all day long. She goes, it usually doesn’t matter. Or, I’m going to find somebody that’s going to help me hook up with a different pimp. She was like, this stuff is stupid. And until when we start asking like what can be different? What would help you? She was like no one can help me. Like they are so helpless and hopeless.

One provider expressed that she felt like her clients are addicted to the lifestyle. She explained that it is hard to help her clients see a life outside of the commercial sex trade when they are so engrained in the lifestyle:

It’s like an addiction. It is. It’s just like an addiction. It’s an addiction to the lifestyle. Addiction to the security. Addiction to the feeling of wantedness. I mean, you know and some of them will even say I’m a sex addict or you know this, this, and this. Which, I don’t think that’s true. I think they’ve just been told to embrace that part. Like, you like

this. But I just think it's like an addiction and until we can find out how to rehab that addiction, there's not a whole lot we can do other than just try to embrace them.

The providers reported that it is a challenge to keep clients in services. In most cases, clients do not stay in services long enough to develop trusting relationships or make meaningful progress.

One provider explained that she could not even get her court-ordered women to attend the required weekly groups.

I don't see the same women. There's a big turnover. It's like some days I get frustrated. It's like a joke. Even the court-ordered don't come like they are supposed to. The program is serious, but I can't do it. I just keep regoing over stuff. One week I can start it and there might be four women there. The next week none of them ain't there. I can't do it.

### *Safety Concerns*

The issue of safety for the staff and the clients themselves was expressed across programs. One challenge is the flight risk that clients pose for the programs working with them. Clients are easily lured back into the lifestyle by drugs and material goods, as one provider explained:

When you're put into a situation where you're safe and you're out of the lifestyle, you don't have access to drugs, and you don't have a fancy cell phone. You don't have all of these things. So despite, the fact that we have so much to offer her, if somebody comes up and says hey, do you want a cell phone? Here you go. All I need is this. That's all they need. I mean, that was the first thing that got this young girl. This guy was like hey, let me get you a cell phone and that's all it took.

Another provider spoke about how difficult it is to monitor and ensure the safety of the sexually exploited youth in their independent living program. The providers explained that the purpose of independent living is for the youth to take control of their lives and work towards independence. However, they realized that some of the youth are still actively involved in the commercial sex trade and compromising their safety:

I mean we can like keep them safe while they're in our building, but it's independent living too. This is kind of a thing we struggled with her. It's like well, this is independent living. So we are kind of encouraging her to go out and try to do things that you know, young ladies her age do --- go to school, finish school. But, that's not what they are doing....I don't know. It's just really difficult.

The providers described situations where their own safety was compromised. One provider shared an experience where she witnessed a violent attack while relocating a client who was receiving death threats after hot lining a friend who was still involved in the life:

I'll never forget. I had a youth who was watching the kids of another girl in our program. And the youth, was really seeing the neglect, the abuse, the girl was tricking right in front of her kids --- having sex with random people. So myself and this girl were hot lining --- hotline after hotline. I mean, it took nine hotlines for these kids to get picked up. But, they got wind that my girl was hot lining and I was there moving her. They said they were going to kill her, so we were moving her out. These people show up. We had some boys kind of helping us move. I have never been so scared. I witnessed these guys beat the shit out of these boys right in front of me. I have never been so scared. So, I can only imagine what my girl was experiencing on a regular basis.

Another provider shared that she still experiences symptoms of secondary trauma after discovering her client's unconscious body in a closet, "I went over to do an apartment check and she was in her closet, butt naked, unconscious pretty much. I thought she was dead. It was extremely traumatizing. And it's a trigger going into that apartment still to this day."

### ***Responding to Challenges: Promising Practices from the Field***

The following are promising components or elements of services identified by social service providers working directly with sexually trafficked and prostituted clients. While there is no published empirical evidence validating the effectiveness of these practices and strategies, this information can still serve as a guide in future program development and to help other agencies tailor their existing programs to better meet the needs of this population.

#### ***Survivor-Centered Services***

Across programs, providers agreed on the need for survivor-centered services and stressed the importance of connecting clients with survivor-run organizations designed to meet the unique needs of this client population. Survivor-run organizations allow women to connect with other survivors and receive supportive services in a safe, non-judgmental setting. One provider explained how being a survivor-run organization is critical to having success with clients:

I think the fact that we are survivor-run is extremely helpful. We come from a position of understanding, and at the same time, we can provide an example of how there is a way out and you can lead a normal life afterwards. So I think that is critical to our relationship with the clients.

### ***The Importance of Relationships***

All of the providers emphasized the importance of building safe, trusting relationships with their clients and discussed how they create a non-judgmental environment where clients feel safe disclosing their involvement in the commercial sex trade. The providers explained that their clients often feel like they are going to be automatically judged if they reveal their involvement in the sex trade. In some cases the fear of judgment compels clients to run away or discontinue services. One provider described how she built a trusting, non-judgmental relationship with a transgender client on her caseload:

I establish a relationship and reassure them that their necessities are going to be met, that goes a long way. I had a young lady, well transgendered female on my case load---never had a social security card, state ID.....And, just showing that I was there for her and that no matter what she did she could always come back to me and talk to me and I would never judger her, that went a long ways.

Another provider explained that they do not judge their clients and enter the helping relationship with an understanding that some of their clients still need to be in the commercial sex trade in order to support themselves and their families:

We don't judge them at all. You know, I mean we understand that, even if they're coming here a lot of these women are going to have to continue to prostitute because they have to support themselves. They have to eat. All that we can do is help them recognize ways of furthering along in their recovery. And that's part of it - is teaching them they have to do it themselves. I mean we can be there in support of them, but we can't force or it otherwise it's never going to work.

Lastly, a provider described how his clients will often come back after leaving services because they have developed a positive relationship with the agency:

Even when they leave and they know that we are the people that they can call and come back and visit. If they need a hot meal, if they need anything, we will give it. Is that them taking advantage of us? No, I don't think so. I think it's because we've done our job and they feel safe around us.

### ***Time to Heal***

There was universal agreement among providers that a successful exit cannot be achieved without long-term care. All of the providers agreed on the need for supportive services that allow their clients time to heal from their trauma and victimization. As one provider noted, "I can't say enough that these women need more time to just sit still", and described why long-term care is a critical for this client population:

They need to have basic services and they need therapy. They need a lot of it. And there's so many places, even drug rehab, where it's 30 days and then you're gone. How is that really going to help you? It needs to be long-term. I would say at least nine months of residential care. I would even push for a year and half to two years. I think that as soon as they are picked up for prostituting, it shouldn't be oh, you're going to jail. It should be okay, we're going to take you over here to this facility. You're going to get some services. You're going to have a place to stay. You're going to have food to eat. Guess what, you don't have to worry about that for a while. And so they'll finally get a chance to feel safe, to feel protected and know that there are people around them who understand where they've been.

Although the providers agreed that their clients need structure and accountability, they also emphasized the need to be patient with this client population. One provider described how her clients become overwhelmed if she offered too many services or imposed a rigid structure:

I noticed that if I tried too much, if I'm like oh, here's this service and here's this service and I need you to check in with me every other day, that's like the worst thing you can do with my older clients. They just want to know you're there and they want to know you're going to check on them and that you have expectations.

### ***Ensuring Safety***

The issue of safety was expressed across programs. Staff of both programs recognized that exiting is a process and spoke about taking a risk-reduction approach with their clients. One provider explained that she maintains realistic expectations and develops a case plan based on where her clients are at in the exiting process:

I can't expect them to just stop overnight. I can't expect them to lose that security they have. I have one girl you know, she calls him boyfriend. She's really good at keeping it a secret or just kind of telling me later about it. But her biggest thing is she wants money for food. She hoards because she knows what it was to be homeless. She's like this is more important to me than the fact that I'm selling myself. I can't deny that. I say, okay, so how can we be safe doing it? Let's come up with a safety plan. You know, just how can...sadly, how can we make this a little bit safer for you or maybe just ease them out.

Another provider described how they take an empowerment approach in their work with women who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade:

We don't force them to do anything. If they come and they talk about something, we don't tell them that they have to report anything. We suggest that they do so just as a way of saying I'm not going to stand for this, as a way of building self-worth and self-esteem. And on top of that, it lets them know what they're doing could be protecting somebody else. Like if they report a bad trick. And even if it doesn't get to the police, we have a report that we can hand out to other girls.

Lastly, the providers stressed the importance of creating a safe living environment for their client population. One provider explained how they will move clients to a different apartment if their safety is compromised:

I think another thing we do to build trust is a structure for safety. Like when we move kids. We've done that quite a few times with this population. I think by us doing that it shows them that we're serious about their safety and not giving up on them.

### ***Focus on Children***

Several of the providers spoke about children being a motivating factor for women to exit the commercial sex trade. One provider explained how her client was motivated to exit in order to regain custody of her children:

One of the things that resonates with me is just how motivating kids can be for these women that get into the life. I mean with one of my clients...I think she'd be dead if she didn't have her kids. It like saved her. She is a girl that's been with us off and on for three years. The first time she was with us she had custody of her kids. And then she left, she decided to leave the program and then her kids got removed from her custody. I guess probably for neglect. And then she came back into our program and now she finally just got her kids back like three weeks maybe. This is a girl that her own mother prostituted her out. So I just think that can be really motivating. I know with my girl, she loves her kids more than anything.

Another provider talked about how having a child can open doors for supportive services that move women forward in the exiting process:

I think one thing that's been helpful is with the ones that I have seen that have been able to elevate without any type of exterior or you know safety net has been they've had a child. I've seen it with several of the clients that I worked with early on that, that child provided some door openings for services that allowed them to utilize those services, which helped them move forward to get out of prostitution.

### *Defining Success*

The providers were asked to define what "success" looked like with this population. The providers agreed that success can take many forms and may look different for each client. A success could include showing up to services, finishing a required program, reducing time on the street, ending an unhealthy relationship, building a trusting relationship with a staff member, gaining employment, or obtaining their own apartment. One provider emphasized how even the little successes, like learning something new, are critical for this population, "It's the little celebrations. I love when we do arts and crafts here because their eyes light up and they're like I can't believe I made this. Look at mine. So, even those you know - just learning something

new.” Another provider explained why they it is important to promote and celebrate success with this client population:

We give opportunities for people to succeed with something, something that’s kind of pro-social whether it’s school, work, or independent living skills, that kind of stuff. So giving those opportunities but also just kind of pointing out...because I don’t think our clients know when they’re doing things that are, I don’t know, positive I guess. So, pointing that stuff out and kind of cheering them on is a bit helpful.

### ***Discussion and Significance of Findings***

The goal of this investigation was to explore how social service providers materially and emotionally support survivors as they work through the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. It is clear that social service systems play a strong role in the exit process. The narratives of the social service providers suggest that they face significant challenges when responding to the needs of this client population. The interviews reveal promising practices and strategies used by social service providers as they overcome these challenges to support their clients throughout the exit process. This section will provide a discussion of the common themes and findings that emerged from the interviews with the social service providers.

### ***Agency Partnerships***

The findings indicate that agency partnerships are critical for meeting the needs of prostituted and sexually trafficked clients. The providers refer out to a number of agencies including mental health centers, the criminal justice system, transitional housing programs, domestic violence shelters, the health department, drug treatment centers, homeless shelters, faith-based agencies, multi-service agencies, employment programs, and food pantries. This finding suggests that a successful exit requires a wide array of social service support.

Although agency partnerships are helpful, the providers agree that it can be difficult to get their clients connected with services outside of the agency. In some cases, outside agencies

have long waiting lists or are not responsive to the complex needs of this population. Transitional housing programs were noted as being particularly problematic for adult women. The programs often require women to immediately obtain employment and contribute to the rent payment within thirty-days. For most women, the pressure is overwhelming and many end up returning to the commercial sex trade out of frustration. It is difficult for providers to support a successful exit when the current social service system is not designed to meet the unique needs of this population.

### ***Fostering Readiness***

One of the greatest challenges for service providers is helping their clients break free from the pull of the commercial sex trade. The providers noted that it can be difficult to engage this population in services. Clients often cycle in and out of services and are often pulled back into the commercial sex trade. In some cases clients do not stay in services long enough to develop trusting relationships or make any meaningful progress towards exiting. Although the providers understand that exiting it is a process, the lack of client readiness makes it increasingly difficult to support a successful exit. This finding indicates the need to identify practices and strategies for increasing readiness among this client population.

### ***Secondary Trauma***

One of the most interesting findings was that several providers spoke about how they have experienced unsafe situations and secondary trauma in their work with this client population. Rarely does the literature on prostitution and trafficking focus on the need of providers working directly with this population. This finding indicates a need for increased training and awareness on the impact of secondary trauma on providers working with this

population. Moreover, future research should seek to identify practices and strategies for reducing secondary trauma among providers who work with this client population.

### ***Inadequate Services***

The providers agree that the services for this population are inadequate in number and focus. The limited number of services specifically for persons involved in the commercial sex trade makes it increasingly difficult for providers to foster readiness among this population. For example, only one agency in Kansas City provides specialized services for persons involved in the commercial sex trade. Although this agency is able to provide basic services such as case management, support groups and crisis services, it does not have the funds or space to meet the housing needs of these women. The absence of safe housing or a residential program forces the agency to take a risk reduction approach with these women. Thus a successful exit relies on the ability to secure safe housing and supportive services that are designed to meet the complex needs of this client population.

### ***Overcoming Stigma***

One of the most significant challenges to developing comprehensive services for this population is the stigma associated with women involved in the commercial sex trade. The rise of the anti-trafficking movement has generated a heated debate around who is considered a victim of trafficking. Moreover, trafficking policies have dictated the focus of supportive services. However, as seen in this study, adult women are often left out of the conversation. Although pimps or traffickers were rarely discussed as the driving force behind the women's exploitation the providers noted that the women are still stuck in oppressive situations. More importantly, the providers and the survivors both agree that this population needs help to successfully exit the commercial sex trade. When policies and programs overemphasize the pimp

narrative they distort the reality of the commercial sex trade and simplify the difficult and complex realities of persons involved in the sex trade. Moreover, when certain groups are systematically criminalized while others are provided services this further stigmatizes an already marginalized group of women. It was clear from both the provider and survivor narratives that these women do not want to be involved in the commercial sex trade. Thus it is time to refocus our policies and programs to meet the needs of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade.

### **Conclusion**

Faced with significant challenges, the providers still found ways to support their clients throughout the exit process. It became abundantly clear that these providers are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of their clients. One of the most distinguishing features of the providers is that they understand the needs of this client population; even though they are often faced with insurmountable challenges, they still find ways to make sure they meet the needs of their clients.. They listen to their clients and build trusting relationships. They never judge their clients and approach their work with the understanding that exiting is indeed a process. Most importantly, they never turn a client away from services. Their stories and experiences serve as a strong foundation for creating a service delivery system that is responsive and sensitive to the unique needs of this client population.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION

*Methodological Limitations*

Several limitations, particularly in relation to sample representation, must be kept in mind when interpreting the results. First, this study relied on two agencies for recruiting the sample. The final sample was almost entirely comprised of men and women referred by one social service agency. At the time the interviews took place, only one agency in the Kansas City area provided prostitution-specific services to men and women involved in the commercial sex trade. Thus, exposure to a different agency may have impacted the experiences and altered the narratives of the study participants. Most of the participants in the sample are female and were not under the control of a pimp or trafficker when interviewed, and so may differ substantially from others involved in the commercial sex trade who have differed gender identities and who are controlled by someone else. Relatedly, the social service providers spoke primarily about their experiences working with female clients. The data and analysis presented should therefore be interpreted within the context of the specific descriptive and agency characteristics. Generalizations to men and women working in other contexts (sex trafficking, indoor prostitution) and in other urban areas, must be made with caution. The specific needs of prostituted men and women may substantially differ based on gender and the type of prostitution in which each is involved.

This investigation is also limited by its sample generation. In order to gain the trust of the participants, the agencies introduced the study to the participants and set up the interviews. Thus this increases the potential for gatekeeping. Consequently, selection bias is inherent in the sample's composition. Future investigations with larger samples recruited from a range of sources would provide valuable contributions to the study of the commercial sex trade and in

turn, lend knowledge to help inform the development of more effective practice and intervention efforts.

Finally, an unanticipated disruption in the delivery of services resulted in my only being able to interview each participant once. Although the initial research design included follow-up interviews, the sole agency that provided services to prostituted women in the Kansas City metropolitan region stopped doing so shortly after I completed the initial interviews.

Unfortunately, this closure was abrupt and I was not notified of it until I scheduled member checks with the social service providers to go over the initial findings and talk about scheduling follow-up interviews. The client-survivors that I had interviewed who were served by this agency were not asked for personal contact information, thus I was unable to contact them for follow-up interviews. Despite the richness of the data obtained, whatever changes in beliefs, attitudes, or interpretations of their exiting experiences that might have occurred and been recorded in follow-up interviews were not captured.

The reader should keep in mind that, although the participants have a tendency to generalize from their particular experience to all helping professionals or social service systems, there were indeed different categories of social services involvement. Represented in this study are experiences with case managers, law enforcement, drug dependency workers, clinical social workers, domestic violence and rape crisis workers, child welfare workers, and staff at the homeless shelters. It is also important to note that most of the women spoke at length about their experiences with staff at the prostitution-specific agency. This is likely because the women were actively receiving services at this agency at the time of the interview. Still the findings are applicable to a wide range of social service settings that are likely to encounter women involved in the commercial sex trade. It is important to avoid the assumption that these women's

experiences are representative of all prostituted women's encounters with helping professionals and social service systems. It is likely that there are a wide range of experiences with social service systems that are not represented in this study.

### ***Implications for Research***

Future research endeavors should explore an even wider range of experiences from a larger sample. The participants in this sample were primarily women and not under the control of a pimp or trafficker. Thus future studies should include a more diverse sample to capture the exiting experiences of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade. For example, the voices of men, transgender persons, and those involved in pimp-controlled prostitution should be elicited. Explorations such as these would allow us to develop a more inclusive approach to meeting the needs of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade.

One of the limitations of this study is its cross-sectional nature. Although I planned to conduct follow-up interviews, the closure of my primary participating agency made it impossible to locate participants for follow-up interviews. Thus, future studies that utilize a longitudinal design are warranted. A longitudinal study would allow the researcher to examine change in beliefs, attitudes, or interpretations of their exiting experiences over time, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of the exit process.

This study identified certain factors that motivated women to exit the commercial sex trade. One of the most important factors was children. Future studies should take a closer look at how motherhood and custody issues influence the exiting process. It may also be important to examine the relationships between child welfare workers and women involved in the commercial sex trade. Also, individual readiness seemed to be an important factor in the exiting process and readiness may be tied to parenting status as well. Thus, the development of an assessment tool to

evaluate readiness among women involved in the commercial sex trade should be considered. Assessment tools could be used in multiple settings to tailor interventions to match the individual readiness of the client.

Spirituality was another area that warrants additional exploration. Almost all of the women emphasized the role of spirituality in the exit process. Thus, the door is wide open for future studies to explore the role of spirituality and religion in the exit process; and in the surviving process as well. In the end, what can be said about the people interviewed for this study is that they are survivors. How they have survived deserves more inquiry.

Future studies should continue to examine service utilization among women involved in the commercial sex trade. This study demonstrated that women are involved in a multitude of social service settings. Thus, it is important to do an in-depth exploration of all of the social service systems working with this population to identify promising practices and strategies for meeting the complex needs of these women. Programs using a survivor-centered approach in their work with women involved in the commercial sex trade are especially important to identify as are their practice frameworks relied on to guide the provision of specialized services to women involved in the commercial sex trade.

There remains a dearth of empirical research on best practices for working with women involved in the commercial sex trade. This study identified promising practices and strategies for working with women involved in the commercial sex trade. Future studies need to expand this work by conducting a more formal evaluation of programs and interventions focused on helping women exit the commercial sex trade. Studies such as these would not only contribute to the evidence base but would also improve the offerings of current programs and the services focused on helping women exit the commercial sex trade.

Finally, future research should incorporate more participatory methods. In this study the service providers were involved in both the development and execution of the study and reviewed and provided feedback on the study findings. This was especially important since the agency staff revealed having felt exploited by researchers and other investigatory community members in the past. With the heightened interest in sex trafficking outsiders are seemingly exploiting the agency for information and survivor stories. As researchers it is important that we avoid replicating this exploitive behavior. Most importantly, we need to continue to conduct research that is carefully grounded in the actual experiences of survivors and not sensationalize their narratives. Engaging in participatory methods where participants are actively involved in each stage of the research process will work as a safeguard towards exploiting and/or sensationalizing the lived experiences of the women.

### *Implications for Practice and Policy*

This study suggests that there are many areas in which social workers can use their skills and education to benefit women involved in the commercial sex trade. Social work practitioners must strive to strengthen the existing programs that already provide services to women involved in the commercial sex trade, and that must occur based on information sought from the survivors themselves. This study found that women come into contact with a multitude of social service agencies including mental health centers, the criminal justice system, child welfare agencies, drug treatment centers, domestic violence shelters, hospitals, and homeless shelters. Despite these many service contacts, many of the women are still unable to make a final break. Perhaps this is in part due to the women's expressed frustration and powerlessness in dealing with these systems. System responses geared toward making services more accessible and responsive to the needs of women involved in the commercial sex trade are critical.

One way to improve the systemic response to commercial sexual exploitation is to increase awareness of the needs and experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade. Development of educational programs and trainings that challenge existing negative stereotypes, myths, and prejudices against women involved in the commercial sex trade would undoubtedly increase sensitivity and responsiveness towards these persons. Also, it may be beneficial to include survivors in the development and implementation of educational and training programs. This would allow agencies to build relationships with survivors and develop programming that is grounded in the lived experiences of women in the commercial sex trade.

Social workers need to partner with survivor leaders to develop comprehensive and specialized programs. Survivor leaders are in the unique position to understand the lived experiences of these women. Thus, it is essential that they are consulted when developing programs and policies for this population. The findings indicate the survivor-centered services are critical for exit success. The ability to share, process, and connect with other survivors was identified as one of the most helpful components of the service experiences. Agencies may benefit from having survivors on staff as service providers or mentors. Moreover, programs need to be long term and include a combination of health/mental health services, drug treatment, housing support, and job training. This finding indicates that social workers must advocate for more comprehensive services for this population.

Exiting is a long, complex, and involved process. Providers must know that it may take several attempts for women to make a successful exit. For example, Benoit and Millar (2001) found it took women almost six tries before make a final break. This study suggests that women need to be able to exit on their own terms, when they are ready. In some cases women may never seek help, work with a social work professional, or be ready to exit. Although social workers can

attempt to foster readiness among this population, it is ultimately up to the women to make the decision to exit. More importantly, providers must be willing to accept that some women may need to remain in the commercial sex trade in order to survive, support their families, and/or avoid physical harm. Thus, programs should accommodate women who are not ready to exit or must remain in the commercial sex trade but have social service needs.

It is important for social workers to acknowledge the varied experiences of women involved in the commercial sex trade. It is harmful to assume that all women are victims and/or share similar realities. By labeling all women involved in the sex trade as victims, we obscure our ability to see these persons as experts on their own lives. Thus, it is of critical importance that social workers listen to what these women have to say about their lives and listen for the context of their lived experiences.

Social workers should use a strengths perspective to explore and validate the agency and self-determination of women involved in the commercial sex trade. The findings indicate that these women have hopes and dreams beyond the commercial sex trade. We need to create programs that build upon the strengths of these women, programs that might include life skills and job training or enrolling the women in GED or college courses. Partnerships with employers who are willing to hire women with a limited work history or criminal background are important to forge since a successful exit rests on the ability to legally support oneself.

Lastly, advocacy is critical to changing the systemic response to prostitution. Policies that prosecute women involved in the commercial sex trade must be reexamined and actively resisted. Programs that force women to accept social services to avoid fines or arrest should also be rethought. It is clear from this study that the criminalization of women in the sex trade does not help them meet their needs. It only further stigmatizes an already marginalized group of

women who are trying to do what they need to do to survive. Social workers should not remain idle as certain groups of women are systematically criminalized while others are offered supportive services.

### ***Conclusion***

This study confirms that exiting is a long, complex, and involved process that requires a tremendous amount of internal drive and support. The women and one male in this study experienced significant barriers to exiting the commercial sex trade. It is evident that the current social service structure is not designed to meet the complex needs of these persons. This study provides an opportunity to further rethink and refine policy directions and practice strategies in all areas of intervention with persons involved in the commercial sex trade - and to do so with the participation of the persons involved. More importantly, this study demonstrates that those involved want to be treated as human beings worthy of dignity and respect, and have access to specialized services that will meet their complex needs. Putting our philosophical framework aside and uniting to develop a multidimensional approach to meeting the needs of all persons involved in the commercial sex trade will move us closer to finally achieving social and economic justice for this marginalized population.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Human Subject's Application and Approval Letter

4/2010

 HSCL # \_\_\_\_\_  
 (to be assigned)

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS  
 Human Subjects Committee Lawrence  
 Application for Project Approval

1. Name of Investigator(s) April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate
  2. Department Affiliation School of Social Welfare
  3. Campus or Home Mailing Address: 1545 Lilac Lane, Room 2B, Lawrence, KS 66044
    - a. Email address: arand24@ku.edu
    - Phone Number(s): (a) Campus: 864-9283 (b) Home 785-550-5594
  5. Name of Faculty Member Responsible for Project: Professor Margaret Severson
- HSCL must receive faculty approval via email notification or hard copy signature before a student application may be processed.**

- a. Email address of Faculty Member: mseverson@ku.edu
6. Type of investigator and nature of activity. (Check appropriate categories)

- Faculty or staff of University of Kansas  
 Project to be submitted for extramural funding; Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

KU/KUCR project number: \_\_\_\_\_

**(HSCL must compare all protocols in grant applications with the protocols in the corresponding HSCL application)**

- Project to be submitted for intramural funding; Source: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Project unfunded  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Student at University of Kansas:  Graduate  Undergraduate  Special  
 Class project (number & title of class): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Independent study (name of faculty supervisor): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Investigators not from the Lawrence campus but using subjects obtained through the University of Kansas  
 Activity to be registered with clinical trials.gov (when registered, notify HSCL of registration number)

7.a. Title of investigation: Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade: An Exploratory Study

7.b. Title of sponsored project, if different from above: NA

8. Individuals other than faculty, staff, or students at Kansas University.

Please identify investigators and research group:

None

9. Certifications: By submitting this application via email or hard copy I am certifying that I have read, understand, and will comply with the policies and procedures of the University of Kansas regarding human subjects in research. I subscribe to the standards and will adhere to the policies and procedures of the HSCL, and I am familiar with the published guidelines for the ethical treatment of subjects associated with my particular field of study. I also certify that I have verified and disclosed any potential conflict of interest between myself and/or my team members and the project sponsor (if applicable). Type or write name(s) in the signature lines below depending on your electronic or hard copy submission.

Date: 9/26/12

Date: 9/27/12

 Signature: April M. Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
 First Investigator

 Signature: Professor Margaret Severson  
 Faculty Supervisor

 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second Investigator

 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third Investigator

First Investigator: April M. Rand

Project Title: Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade: An Exploratory Study

10. Please answer "Yes" or "No" for the following questions about the proposed research activity. (Provide details about questions checked "Yes" on the last page of the application.)

Does the research involve:

no a. drugs or other controlled substances?

yes b. payment of subjects for participation?

yes c. access to subjects through a cooperating institution (other than KU)?

no d. substances taken internally by or applied externally to the subjects?

no e. mechanical or electrical devices (e.g., electrodes) applied to the subjects?

no f. collection of fluids (e.g., blood, urine, etc.) or tissues from subjects or exposure of subjects to hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiation, etc.)?

Environment Health & Safety (EHS) Approval number (required):

yes g. subjects experiencing stress (physiological or psychological)?

no h. omission of information concerning any aspect of purposes or procedures (misleading or withheld information)?

no i. deception of subjects (active misinformation or false feedback provided)?

no j. subjects who could be judged to have limited freedom of consent (e.g., minors, developmentally delayed persons, or those institutionalized)?

yes k. any procedure or activities that might place the subjects at risk (psychological, physical, or social)?

yes l. use of  participant observation  interviews,  focus groups,  questionnaires,  audio or  video recordings? (check all that apply)

no m. data collection over a period greater than one year?

yes n. indicate the consent procedure(s) to be used  signed,  oral,  information statement,  parent/guardian,  assent procedure for minors or the cognitively impaired (Check all that apply) Note: HSCL makes the final determination on waiver of a signed consent form or consent. Justification must be provided for waiver of signed consent form or consent.

no o. indicate the type of data you will be acquiring in this project  private health information,  academic records,  social security information,  KU ID number

no p. other data that may increase participant risk (46.101 (b) (2) (ii) in the areas listed  criminal  civil,  financial,  employment,  reputation

11. If any of the key personnel or research team members of this project have a financial interest\* in a project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to the project, the individual and the relationship must be disclosed.

Neither I nor any member of the research team has a financial interest in the project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to this project.

I am disclosing the following financial interest(s)\*\* :

Name of Individual	Role on Project	Financial Interest Entity

\* An individual's financial interests include those of the individual, his or her spouse, dependent children, and other members of the personal household (i.e., ownership, compensation received or anticipated, a position of officer or director, or receipt of fees or commissions).

\*\* If this financial interest has not already been disclosed on a Conflict of Interest report, an ad hoc disclosure via the Conflict of Interest reporting form may also be required. Direct inquiries to [coi@ku.edu](mailto:coi@ku.edu). COI resource information is also available at the following link: <http://www.rcr.ku.edu/coi/index.shtml>

Additional COI Notes:

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Complete the following questions on this page. Please do not use continuation sheets.

12. Approximate number of subjects to be involved in the research: 35

13. Project Purpose(s):

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine the process young adults undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of service providers throughout the exiting process. The research questions guiding this study are (1) What factors influence a young adult's decision to exit the commercial sex trade, (2) How do young adults describe the process of exiting from the commercial sex trade, (3) In what ways do service providers respond to commercially sexually exploited young adults and (4) What is the young adult's appraisal of how service providers materially and emotionally support them throughout the exiting process?

14. Describe the proposed subjects (age, sex, race, or other special characteristics). If there is a physical or mental health condition that characterizes the subjects to be included in the study, please indicate this here as well.

The proposed subjects for this study will include young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 (male, female, or transgender), of any ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic background, who have exited from the commercial sex trade. The subjects will be receiving services from two agencies that provide specialized services to commercially sexually exploited young adults. Only young adults who are authorized to live in the United States will be included in the study. Social service providers who work directly with the study population will also be included in the study.

15. Describe how the subjects are to be selected. Please indicate how you will gain access to, and recruit these subjects for participation in the project. That is, will you recruit participants through word-of-mouth, fliers or poster, newspaper ads, public or private membership or employee lists, etc. Drawings/raffles are not permitted for payment or recruiting. (If subjects are to be recruited from a cooperating institution, such as a clinic or other service organization be aware that subjects' names and other private information, such as medical diagnosis, may not be obtained without the subjects' written permission.)

Agency administrators from the two participating social service agencies will help identify and recruit young adults and service providers for the study. The administrator will briefly describe the study and offer the opportunity to participate in the study to each potential participant

16. Single page abstract of the proposed procedures in the project – consent to the post-project security measures. (The abstract should be a succinct overview of the project without jargon, unexplained abbreviations, or technical terminology. Here is where you must provide details about Yes answers to items under question 10.a through 10.p of the application: drugs, cooperating institutions, medical information requested, security measures and post-project plans for tapes, questionnaires, surveys, and other data, and detailed debriefing procedures for deception projects.)

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine the process young adults undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of service providers throughout the exiting process. The proposed subjects will be young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who have exited from the commercial sex trade. The subjects will be receiving services from two agencies that provide specialized services to commercially sexually exploited young adults. Social service providers who work directly with the study population will also be included in the study. Agency administrators from the two participating social service agencies will help identify and recruit young adults and service providers for the study. (B) All participating young adults will receive a \$10 gift card to reimburse for their time per interview. Service providers will not receive payment for participation. The data collection procedures are as follows: (1) A series of individual and group interviews with staff members at each study site will be conducted. (2) A series of individual, open-ended interviews with staff members at each study site will be conducted. An in-depth semi-structured interview schedule will be used to guide the interviews with the young adults and service providers. The primary investigator will conduct all study interviews. With prior permission, each interview will be digitally-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to the sensitive nature of the study and to preserve confidentiality, the young adults will only be required to provide oral consent. This is because the main threat to their confidential participation would be the existence of written documentation of their participation in the study, such as would be created by their signing a traditional informed consent form. Before asking for the participant's consent, I will explain the purpose of the study, who will see the results, the type of questions to be asked, the rules surrounding confidentiality, and the participant's right to refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time. The participants will be free to accept or decline participation without repercussions and will still receive payment for their time if they choose not to participate or withdraw from the study. There are some possible risks for participating in this study. (K) For the young adults, taking about their experiences in the commercial sex trade or within social service systems, especially if they were negative ones, may make the participant feel uncomfortable or upset. (G) Additionally, the young adults may experience stress as a result of sharing traumatic life experiences with the researcher. (K) For the service providers sharing their experiences working with the study population may cause emotional reactions. If any participant expresses distress or if I notice they are feeling uncomfortable with a given topic, I will ask the participant if they would rather go on to a different topic or stop the interview. Additionally, I will offer to arrange for an immediate emergency referral to a crisis counselor if necessary. All information gathered will remain confidential and will be maintained securely by the primary investigator by assigning codes to participants, and using securely locked cabinets and secure databases.



### APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

December 20, 2013

April Rand  
arand24@ku.edu

Dear April Rand:

On 12/20/2013, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Modification
Title of Study:	Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade: An Exploratory Study
Investigator:	April Rand
IRB ID:	20417          MOD00001424
Funding:	Name: National Institute of Justice, Grant Office ID: FED0071353, Funding Source ID: 2013-IJ-CX-0014

The IRB approved the study from 12/20/2013 to 10/7/2014.

1. Before 10/7/2014 submit a Continuing Review request and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.
2. Any significant change to the protocol requires a modification approval prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 10/7/2014 approval of this protocol expires on that date.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:  
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA  
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

## Appendix B: Consent Forms



School of Social Welfare

### Oral Informed Consent - Clients

As a doctoral student in the University of Kansas's School of Social Welfare I am conducting a research project about the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade. I would like to interview you to understand your experience in exiting and/or trying to exit the commercial sex trade. Your participation is expected to take a little over one hour and there may be an opportunity to participate in an additional interview in the following months. In appreciation for your participation in the research study, you will receive a \$10.00 gift card per interview in reimbursement for your participation. Investigators may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

There are some possible risks from participating in this study. Talking about some of your experiences in the commercial sex trade or within social service systems, especially if they were negative ones, may make you feel uncomfortable or upset. If at any point you feel uncomfortable with a given topic or question you may request we move on to a different topic or terminate the interview. If needed, I can provide you with referral information to specific agencies that provide support to adults who are in the process of exiting the commercial sex trade. Although participation may not benefit you directly, the information obtained from the study will help me and others gain a better understanding of how to help people exit the commercial sex trade. To assure complete confidentiality your name will not be associated with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written and specific permission. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Recording is not required to participate. You may stop recording at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by me. Only I and my faculty supervisor will have access to recordings which will be stored in locked cabinets and secured databases. The digital recordings will be erased after they are transcribed. No identities will be used in any reports or on the transcriptions or in any publications resulting from this study.

There are no adverse consequences if you choose not to participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or to withdraw at any point in this study. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study you will still receive a \$10.00 gift card to reimburse you for your time. Participation in this study will in no way affect any services that you already receive or might receive in the future.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me or my faculty supervisor, Professor Margaret Severson at the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

This study is supported by National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funds, 2013-IJ-CX-0014, and the data will be archived.

#### Researcher Contact Information

April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
School of Social Welfare  
1545 Lilac Lane  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-9283

Professor Margaret Severson  
School of Social Welfare  
1545 Lilac Lane  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-8952



## Written Informed Consent - Service Providers

### STUDY

Exiting the Commercial Sex Trade: An Exploratory Study

### INTRODUCTION

The School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in the study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with your employer, other service providers, or with the University of Kansas.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of service providers throughout the exiting process. This project seeks to understand the factors that influence a person's decision to exit the commercial sex trade and describe the process men and women go through as they try to exit. Additionally, this project aims to identify the different ways service providers respond to men and women who have been involved in the commercial sex trade and determine what men and women need to exit the commercial sex trade.

### PROCEDURES

If you choose to participate in the study, you will participate in an individual or group interview with a researcher from the University of Kansas. The interview will be informal and take approximately one hour or less. The interview will focus on your work with men and women who have been involved in the commercial sex trade. The interview will focus on the service process and the challenges you have experienced in your work with this population. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The digital recordings will be erased after they are transcribed. All information gathered will remain confidential and will be maintained securely by the researcher by using locked cabinets and secure databases.

### RISKS

There are some possible risks from participating in the study. Sharing your experiences of working with the study population may cause emotional reactions. If at any point you feel uncomfortable during the

interview with a given topic or question please let the interviewer know so that options for completing or terminating the interview can be explored.

#### BENEFITS

Although I cannot promise any direct benefits to you, your participation in this study has the potential to improve services for people who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade. My hope is that the information you provide will help expand our understanding on how to effectively work with victims of commercial sexual exploitation throughout the exiting process and also identify the barriers and challenges to working with this population. It is this information that will provide a strong foundation for improving services to people who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade.

#### PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Payment will not be provided for your participation in this study.

#### PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study number or pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared with others unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission for the researcher to share this information with a specific person or persons. Permission granted on this date to use and disclose information remains in effect indefinitely, or until your consent is withdrawn. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

#### REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any program or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

#### CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to:

April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
University of Kansas School of Social Welfare  
Lawrence, KS 66044  
arand24@ku.edu

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researcher will stop collecting information about you. However, the researcher may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researchers listed at the end of this consent form.

## FUNDING

This study is supported by National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funds, 2013-IJ-CX-0014, and the data will be archived.

## PARTICIPATION CERTIFICATION

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature

## Researcher Contact Information

April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
 School of Social Welfare  
 1545 Lilac Lane  
 University of Kansas  
 Lawrence, KS 66045  
 (785) 864-9283

Professor Margaret Severson  
 School of Social Welfare  
 1545 Lilac Lane  
 University of Kansas  
 Lawrence, KS 66045  
 (785) 864-8952

## Appendix C: Recruitment Letters



School of Social Welfare

January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

To: Clients at (insert agency)

I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare. I am conducting a research project about the process men and women undergo when exiting the life. I am interested in interviewing men and women who became involved, voluntarily or not, in the life and who have since left it or are working on leaving it. If you have ever traded sex for food, money, shelter, or anything else you are invited to participate in this study. Your participation will probably take a little over one hour and there may be an opportunity for you to participate in an additional interview in the following months. In appreciation for your participation in the research study, you will receive a \$10.00 gift card for each interview. Whether you participate or not in this study will not have an effect on the services you now receive or want to receive.

Being in this study means spending some time talking about your life including how you exited the life, challenges you faced during this leaving process, and your experiences with social service providers. To protect your privacy all information you talk about in the interview will be kept confidential. The information you provide may help social service providers and other helping professionals gain a better understanding of how to help people exit the life. The hope is to be able to provide better services to people at risk of becoming involved in the life, to people currently involved, and to people wanting to exit or who have already exited. Benefits to you include knowing that by your participation, you may be helping other people involved or who may become involved in the life in the future.

If you would like to assist me in developing this research by sharing your experience or if you have any further questions my contact information is included below.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
School of Social Welfare  
University of Kansas  
(785) 864-9283



School of Social Welfare

January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

To: Staff at (insert agency)

I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare. I am interested in recruiting service providers for my dissertation study. The purpose of my study is to examine the process men and women undergo when exiting the commercial sex trade and to explore the role of service providers throughout the exiting process. This project seeks to understand the factors that influence a person's decision to exit the commercial sex trade and describe the process men and women go through as they try to exit. Additionally, this project aims to identify the different ways service providers respond to men and women who have been involved in the commercial sex trade and determine what men and women need to exit the commercial sex trade.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual or group interview. The interview will be informal and take approximately one hour or less. The interview will focus on your work with men and/or women who have been involved in the commercial sex trade and on the service process and the challenges and successes you have experienced in your work with this population. All information gathered in these interviews will remain confidential and maintained securely.

Although I cannot promise any direct benefits to you, your participation in this study has the potential to improve services for people who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade. My hope is that the information you provide will help expand our understanding on how to effectively work with victims of commercial sexual exploitation throughout the exiting process and also identify the barriers and challenges to working with this population. It is this information that will provide a strong foundation for improving services to men and women who are trying to exit the commercial sex trade.

If you are interested in participating or have any further questions my contact information is included below.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

April Rand, MSW, PhD Candidate  
(785) 864-9283  
[arand24@ku.edu](mailto:arand24@ku.edu)

## Appendix D: Interview Guide

### Working Interview Guide – Survivor Form

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1. At what age did you enter the life?
2. How long have you been in the life?
3. What or who got you into the life?
4. What are some of the positives of being in the life?
5. What are some of the negatives of being in the life?
6. When did you begin to think about exiting the life?
7. Why did you decide to exit from the life?
  - a. **Why did you decide to try to exit from the life?**
8. Can you describe how you exited from the life?
  - a. **Can you describe the steps you are taking to exit the life?**
9. Did anyone help you when you tried to exit? If yes, how did they help you?
  - a. **Is anyone helping you try to exit? Can you describe how they are helping you?**
10. Did you experience any challenges when you tried to exit? If yes, can you describe those challenges?
  - a. **Are you experiencing any challenges as you try to exit? If yes, can you describe those challenges?**
11. When you were in the life did you think you needed help to exit?
  - a. Did you know there was help available for people trying to exit the life?
  - b. **Do you know there is help available for people trying to exit the life?**
    - i. If yes, how did you know help was available?
    - ii. If no, what could be done to better inform people of the help that is available?
12. When you were involved in the life and needed help, where did you go?
  - a. **When you need help, where do you go?**
    - i. Can you talk about why you went to [insert place] for help?
13. Have you ever had any experiences with law enforcement?

- a. Can you describe a specific experience with law enforcement?
14. Have you ever had any experiences with social workers, religious groups, or other helping professionals?
- a. Can you describe a specific experience with [insert professional]?
15. Were any social workers, religious groups, or other helping professionals more helpful than others?
- a. Can you describe why they were more helpful?
  - b. Did you talk to any of these social workers, religious groups, or other helping professionals about your involvement in the life?
    - i. Can you describe a specific experience?
16. What services have you received from social service agencies?
- a. Were certain services more helpful than others?
  - b. Can you describe why certain services were more helpful?
17. What do you think people need in order to exit the life?
18. Will you tell me whether you need any of the following items in order to exit the life?
19. What advice would you give social workers, religious groups, and other helping professionals who are trying to help people exit from the life?
20. Is there anything that I have not asked you that you think is important for me to know?

Working Interview Guide – Service Provider Form

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1. How do individuals who have been involved in the commercial trade find out about your services?
  - a. Does your agency do any street outreach or screening to identify individuals who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation?
  - b. How does this population get into services with your agency?
2. Can you describe how you work with individuals as they try to exit from the commercial sex trade?
  - a. What services do you provide?
  - b. Do these services change based on where the person is at in the exiting process?
3. Do you collaborate with any other agencies in your work with this population?
4. Are there any specific strategies or practices that have been useful in working with this population?
  - a. Can you describe why certain strategies or practices are useful?
5. Are there any specific strategies or practices that have not been useful in working with this population?
  - a. Can you describe why certain strategies or practices are not useful?
6. Do you experience any barriers or challenges in your work with this population?
  - a. If yes, can you describe those challenges or barriers?
7. Do you experience any barriers or challenges with other organizations/agencies?
  - a. If yes, can you describe those challenges or barriers?
8. How do mandatory reporting laws or other laws/policies influence your work with this population?
  - a. Can you provide an example?
9. Is there anything that I have not asked you about your work with this population that you think is important for me to know?

### Appendix E: Codebook

Code	Code Definition
Access - Crisis line	Service providers talk about how women use the crisis line to get into services.
Access - Outreach	Service providers state that clients get connected to services through outreach.
Access - Speaker	Service providers talk about how clients may find out about services through a speaking engagement.
Access - Word of mouth	Service providers talk about "word of mouth" as a way clients get connected with services.
Access- Referral	Service providers get referrals from outside agencies.
Access to Exiting Services - Brochure	Participant gained access to exiting services through a brochure.
Access to Exiting Services - Court ordered	Participant was court ordered into exiting services.
Access to Exiting Services - Internet	Participant found out about services via the internet.
Access to Exiting Services - Outreach	Participant gained access to exiting services through outreach.
Access to Exiting Services - Peer	Participant gained access to exiting services through a peer.
Agency Partnership	Service providers talk about partnering with other agencies to meet the needs of population.
Challenge - Access to services	Service providers talk about how it can be difficult to get clients access to services.
Challenge - Building trust	Service providers talk about how difficult it can be to build trust with clients, especially those who are manipulative, pathological liars, etc.
Challenge - Child Protection Agencies	Service providers talk about CPS discontinuing services with clients, not responding to hotlines, etc. as a challenge.
Challenge - Complex needs	Service providers talk about the complexity of this population as a challenge.
Challenge - Cost of transitional housing	Service providers talk about how the cost of transitional housing is a challenge.
Challenge - Educational system	Service providers talk about the educational system as a challenge to their work with this population. They talk about youth not having credits, unsafe schools, no alternative schools, etc.
Challenge - Engagement in services	Service providers talk about how difficult it is to keep kids in services, especially runaway/homeless youth.
Challenge - Glamorization	Service providers talk about the glamorization of prostitution as a challenge to really working with this population.
Challenge - How to help	Service providers talk about not really knowing how to effectively work with this population and meet their individual needs.
Challenge - Immersion in the lifestyle	Service providers talk about how difficult it is for clients to transition out of the life.
Challenge - Knowledge of laws/policies	Service providers talk about a lack of knowledge around laws/policies affecting their populations as a challenge.
Challenge - Lack of housing	Service providers talk about the lack of housing as a challenge to working with this population.

Challenge - Law enforcement	Service providers talk about how law enforcement is not very responsive or understanding to the needs of this population.
Challenge - Laws/Policy	Service providers talk about how laws and policies present a challenge to working with this population.
Challenge - Location	Service providers talk about how the location of services is a challenge.
Challenge - Lying	Service providers talk about how client's lying makes their work challenging.
Challenge - No funding	Service providers talk about the lack of funding for this population.
Challenge - No insurance	Service providers talk about how a lack of insurance is a barrier.
Challenge - No preventative services	Service providers talk about how there are no preventative services for youth at risk of being commercially sexually exploited.
Challenge - No screening	Agency does not screen or have questions on assessment related to sex trafficking, prostitution, CSE, etc.
Challenge - No services	Service providers talk about how there are really no service for this population.
Challenge - No support system	Service providers talk about how clients have no support system and that is a challenge.
Challenge - Not a victim	Service providers talk about how clients do not see themselves as a victim of trafficking, prostitute, etc. and this can be a challenge because they think what they are doing is normal or survival.
Challenge - Other "HT" agencies/No survivor voice	Service providers talk about how anti-trafficking agencies are popping up and taking funding away from existing agencies and not actually working with victims.
Challenge - Readiness	Service providers talk about how clients are not ready to change, going through the motions, etc. as a barrier.
Challenge - Running away	Service providers talk about how clients often run away or go missing as a barrier.
Challenge - Secondary trauma	Service providers talk about experiencing secondary trauma from witnessing violence, hearing about violence, being in dangerous situations with clients, etc.
Challenge - Sensitive	Service providers talk about how clients are extremely sensitive to criticism and that is a challenge.
Challenge - Stigma	Service providers talk about how stigma influences their work with this population. For example, not being able to get housing due to the community's perception of women involved in the commercial sex trade.
Challenge - Tracking clients	Service providers talk about how difficult it is to track clients.
Challenge - Trauma	Service providers talk about the challenges of working with a traumatized population.
Challenge - Triggers	Service providers talk about how everything is a trigger for this population and how this can be a barrier to working with them.
Characteristics - Age of entry	Age participant entered the life
Characteristics - Exited the life	Participant has exited the life.
Characteristics - Hustled	Participant identifies as a hustler rather than a prostitute.
Characteristics - Internet prostitution	Participant has been involved in online prostitution (i.e. backpage).

Characteristics - Length of exit	Length of time participant has been out of the life.
Characteristics - Length of time in the life	Length of time participant spent in the life, or current ongoing length of time in the life.
Characteristics - Pimp-controlled prostitution	Participant is involved in pimp-controlled prostitution. Pimp can be rapper, boyfriend, partner, husband, etc.
Characteristics - Renegade	Participant does not have a pimp, trafficker, or boyfriend forcing them into the life. Participant is on their own.
Characteristics - Still in the life	Participant is still actively involved in the life
Characteristics - Street Prostitution	Participant engages in street prostitution.
Characteristics - Strip club	Participant talks about working at the strip club.
Characteristics - Tempted by the life	Participant is feeling tempted to reenter the life.
Death	Participant mentions death in relation to being killed or losing someone close to them.
Defining success	Service providers talk about how they define success for this population.
Entrance - Addiction	Participant entered the life due to addiction/drug use.
Entrance - Family dysfunction	Participant identifies family dysfunction, familial abuse, etc. as reasons for entering the life.
Entrance - Financial/money	Participant entered due to financial reasons, quick money, lack of options etc.
Entrance - Husband	Participant talks about how her husband forced her into prostitution.
Entrance - Material goods	Participant entered the life for material goods (i.e. clothes, cars).
Entrance - Mother	Participant entered the life because her mother was also actively involved in the life.
Entrance - Peers	Participant entered because other peers were involved in the life.
Entrance - Pimp	A pimp was involved in the participant's entry into the life.
Entrance - Runaway	Participant entered after running away from home.
Entrance - Strip club	Participant entered the life through working at a strip club.
Entrance - Thrill of the lifestyle	Participant entered because she was intrigued by the lifestyle.
Entrance - Traumatic Event	Participant entered the life after a traumatic event.
Exiting Challenge - Addiction	Participant discloses drug & alcohol addiction as a barrier to exiting the life.
Exiting Challenge - Criminal record	Participant talks about how her criminal record prevents her from gaining employment and exiting the life.
Exiting Challenge - Housing	Participant identified obtaining housing, finding a safe place to go, maintaining housing, or losing their home as a barrier to exiting the life.
Exiting Challenge - ID	Participant talks about not having an ID as a barrier to exiting the life.
Exiting Challenge - Immersion in the life	Participant talks about immersion in the lifestyle as a barrier towards exiting (i.e. acceptance, peer groups, all they know, etc.)
Exiting Challenge - Loss of healthcare	Participant talks about losing healthcare (Medicaid) as a challenge of exiting.
Exiting Challenge - No coping skills	Participant talks about the inability to cope (in a healthy way) as a challenge to exiting the life.

Exiting Challenge - No resources	Participant talks about not having the resources to exit the life. For example, some participants may talk about having to prostitute themselves out of the life. Resources can include money, material goods, etc.
Exiting Challenge - No support	Participant talks about not having any support to exit the life. Support can be peers, family, social service providers, etc.
Exiting Challenge - Pimp, boyfriend, partner	Participant talks about how a pimp/boyfriend/rapper/intimate partner is a pressure to stay in the life.
Exiting Challenge - Pride	Participant talks about their pride as a barrier to exiting.
Exiting Challenge - Social Service Systems	Participant feels like social service settings are not meeting their needs, not helping them effectively, or are inaccessible. Participants may talk about frustration with agency policies, having assistance cut off, not qualifying for services, being unaware that supportive services exist, etc.
Exiting Challenge - Trusting others	Participant talks about the inability to trust people, especially social service providers. This lack of trust prevents her from seeking help or disclosing her experience to other people.
Exiting is a process	Participants talk about how exiting is a process.
Exiting Need - Accessible services	Participant identifies accessible services as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Counseling/Therapy	Participant identifies counseling as an exit need.
Exiting Need - Disability	Participant identifies qualifying for disability as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Drug Treatment	Participant identifies drug treatment as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Employment/Job training	Participant identifies employment/job training as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Income	Participant identifies income as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Medication	Participant identifies medication an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Positive people & activities	Participant identifies positive people/positive activities as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Safe Housing	Participant identifies housing as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Stability	Participant identified stability as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Structure	Participant identifies structure as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Support	Participant identifies constant support, family/peer support, support network, etc. as an exiting need.
Exiting Need - Prostitution-Specific Agency	Participant identifies prostitution-specific agency as an exiting need.
Exiting Support - Advocate at DV Shelter	Participant identifies an advocate at the DV shelter as supportive through the exiting process.
Exiting Support - Church	Participant talks about their church as supporting them as they try to exit the life.
Exiting Support- Family	Participant identifies family as an exiting support.
Foster Care	Service providers identify youth in foster care as high risk for commercial sexual exploitation.
Generational Prostitution	Participant talks about generational prostitution (i.e. mom, grandma involved in the life).
Harmful Practice - Dependence	Service providers talk about how you should avoid making the women dependent on you. They feel it replicates the "pimp" situation.
Harmful Practice - Forced into faith based activities	Service providers talk about clients being forced into faith based activities

	as not helpful.
Harmful Practice - Judging	Service providers talk about how you have to be careful not to judge or push clients too far.
Harmful Practice - Negative treatment by law enforcement	Service providers talk about how clients are treated negatively by law enforcement.
Harmful Practice - Too much at once	Service providers talk about how clients will become overwhelmed or disengaged if you move too quickly. For example, offering them tons of services, expecting a lot out of them right away, etc.
Harmful Practice- Unethical practices	Service providers talk about unethical practices by other agencies.
Helpful - Ability to share, process, & connect	Participant talks about the ability to share, process, & connect with other survivors as a helpful component of the service experience.
Helpful - Access to resources	Participant talks about agencies providing access to resources (food, clothes, shelter, utility assistance) as helpful components of the service experience.
Helpful - Advocacy	Participant talks about staff advocating or giving survivors a voice as helpful part of the service delivery process.
Helpful - Affordable care	Participant identifies affordable health/mental health care as a helpful service/resource.
Helpful - Comprehensive services	Participant talks about receiving comprehensive services (housing, childcare, therapy, case coordination, etc.) has being helpful.
Helpful - Consistent Support	Participant identifies having consistent support as a helpful part of the service experience.
Helpful - Enhancing self-worth	Participant identifies a focus on enhancing self-worth, independence from men, self-acceptance, empowerment, etc. as a helpful component of the service experience.
Helpful - Humanize	Participant identifies being treated as a human as a helpful part of the service delivery experience.
Helpful - Individual work	Participant talks about how groups are not always effective due to disruptive group members or members who are not taking the program seriously.
Helpful - No judgment	Participant talks about "not being judged" or "having an open mind" as an important part of the service experience.
Helpful - Not Enabling	Participant talks about how service providers, family, etc. should not enable the women.
Helpful - Positivity	Participant identifies positivity as a helpful part of the service delivery experience.
Helpful - Reach out to young girls	Participant identifies reaching out to young girls as a helpful strategy to prevent girls from entering the life.
Helpful - Second chances	Participant talks about how women need second chances in order to successfully exit.
Helpful - Trusting relationships	Participant talks about the importance of building trust with social service providers.
Helpful - Understand triggers	Participant talks about how service providers need to understand the triggers that may cause women to reenter the life.

Helpful - Understanding the "why"	Participant want social service providers to really listen and understand why the women are involved in the commercial sex trade/addicted to drugs or why women exhibit certain behaviors.
Helpful - Understanding the reality of the sex trade	Participant talks about being straight up and honest with women and girls about the reality of the sex trade as helpful and needed when trying to get them to start the exiting process.
Helpful- Not phony	Participant talks about how "not being phony" is a helpful part of their social service experience.
Helpful Practice - 100 dreams	Service providers talk about the 100 dreams worksheet as a helpful practice.
Helpful Practice - Connect with survivors	Service providers talk about the importance of referring clients to a survivor-run agency for support.
Helpful Practice - Engagement in services	Service providers talk about the importance of being engaged in multiple services with this population.
Helpful Practice - Enhancing self-worth	Service providers talk about how you need to be careful about how you talk to clients and always focus on enhancing their self-worth.
Helpful Practice - Finding something to live for	Service providers talk about clients needing to find something to live for in order to move forward in their exit.
Helpful Practice - No judgment	Service providers talk about the importance of not judging clients, giving second chances, etc.
Helpful Practice - Opportunities for success	Service providers talk about the importance of giving clients opportunities for success.
Helpful Practice - Positive people	Service providers emphasize that clients need to connect with positive people for support.
Helpful Practice - Relationship building	Service providers talk about the importance of building positive relationships with clients.
Helpful Practice - Safety & Risk-Reduction	Service providers talk about how they do not force clients to do anything (i.e. report to police, etc.), focus on risk reduction, and take steps to ensure their client's safety.
Helpful Practice - Speakers	Service providers talk about bringing speakers to group.
Helpful Practice - Structure	Service providers talk about the importance of structure.
Helpful Practice- Focusing on children	Service providers talk about how they use client's children as a strategy to engage them in services.
Law Enforcement - Negative Experience	Participant describes a negative experience with law enforcement/criminal justice system.
Law Enforcement - Positive Experience	Participant describes a positive experience with law enforcement/criminal justice system.
Maintenance - Avoiding arrest	Participant talks about ways they avoided being arrested in the life.
Maintenance - Control	Participant talks about controlling clients, being street smart, etc.
Maintenance - Defense mechanism	A defense mechanism is often used by participants to justify staying in the life. For example, they may talk about how being in the life makes them feel bad, but in the next sentence say they don't care what other people think about them.
Maintenance - Fear	Participant talks about how "fear" is an important part of surviving and staying in the life.

Maintenance - Selecting clients	Participant will talk about how they select clients. Client selection is often used to minimize danger. For example, a lot of the women will not go with black men.
Mental Health - Mental breakdown	Participant describes having a mental breakdown.
Mental Health - ADD	Participant discloses that she has ADD
Mental Health - Alcoholism	Participant struggles with alcoholism.
Mental Health - Bipolar	Participant disclosed being bipolar.
Mental Health - Depression	Participant identifies depression.
Mental Health - Dissociative disorder	Participant disclosed having dissociative disorder.
Mental Health - Panic attacks & anxiety	Participant disclosed experiencing panic attacks and anxiety.
Mental Health - PTSD	Participant discloses PTSD.
Mental Health - Shopping addiction	Participant describes having a shopping addiction.
Mental Health - Suicide attempt	Participant disclosed a past suicide attempt.
Motivation to exit - Children	Participant talks about her children as a motivation for exiting the life.
Motivation to exit - Criminal record	Participant talks about not wanting a criminal record as motivation to exit.
Motivation to exit - Dangerous lifestyle	Participant identified the dangers of the life as motivation to exit.
Motivation to exit - Family	Participant talks about their family, significant other, etc. as a catalyst for exiting the life.
Motivation to exit - Hitting rock bottom	Participant hit rock bottom which was motivation to exit.
Motivation to exit - Loss of self	Participant talks about their "loss of self" as motivation for trying to exit the life.
Motivation to exit - Not profitable	Participant talks about how drugs and pimps have changed the game. For example, women will take less money for sexual acts out of desperation for drugs, or pimps will take a cut of their money.
Motivation to exit - Tired of different men	Participant talks about being "tired of different men" as a catalyst for trying to exit the life.
Multiple-Identity	Participant will talk about past jobs, identities, and life outside of the commercial sex trade.
Negatives - Addiction	Participant identifies addiction (drugs, alcohol, etc.) as a negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Arrested	Participant identifies being arrested as a negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Dangerous	Participant talks about the dangers of the life as negative for staying in the life.
Negatives - Homelessness	Participant identifies homelessness as a negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Loss of self	Participant talks about a "loss of self" as being a negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Loss of self-esteem	Participant talks about losing their self-esteem as being a negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Misuse of money	Participant talks about the misuse of money as negative of being in the life.
Negatives - Rape	Participant talks about rape as a negative of staying in the life.
Negatives - STDs	Participant identifies STDs/HIV/AIDS as a negative of being in the life.

Negatives - Suicidal thoughts	Participant talks about wanting to hurt themselves or others as a result of being in the life.
Physical Health - Broken bones	Participant discloses that she has had bones broken.
Physical Health - Fractured foot	Participant has a fractured foot.
Physical Health - Hepatitis C	Participant disclosed being infected with hepatitis C
Physical Health - HIV	Participant discloses having HIV
Physical Health - Migraines	Participant has migraines.
Physical Health - Seizures	Participant has seizures.
Physical Health - STD	Participant discloses STD.
Physical Health - Stroke	Participant discloses having a stroke.
Pimp-controlled prostitution	Service providers talk about pimps.
Positive - Stay home with family	Participant talks about being able to spend more time with his family as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Attention	Participant identifies positive attention as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Avoid violence	Participant identifies avoiding violence (from pimp/intimate partner) as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Control	Having control over one's life is a positive of being in the life
Positives - Drugs	Participant identifies drugs as being a positive of the life.
Positives - Emotional bond	Participant talks about an emotional bond with customers as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Lesser penalties	Participant identified lesser penalties (in comparison to drug offenses) as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Material goods	Participant talks about receiving material goods as a positive of being in the life.
Positives - Money	Participants identify quick money, financial security as positives of being in the life.
Positives - No drug test	Not having to take a drug test is a positive of being in the life
Positives - Respect	Participant talks about being respected as a positive for being in the life.
Prostitution is an addiction	Service providers talk about prostitution as an addiction.
Readiness	Participant talks about needing to be ready to exit, needing to make the decision exit, etc.
Relapse - Abusive partner	Participant talks about going back and forth between an abusive partner while trying to exit the life.
Relapse - Difficult to transition	Participant relapses because she finds it difficult to transition into the "real world".
Relapse - Disconnection	Participant talks about how disconnecting from services, support networks can push you back into drugs and prostitution.
Relapse - End of relationship	The loss of a relationship causes a relapse into the life.
Relapse - Feeling alone	Participant talks about feeling alone outside of the life.
Relapse - Financial	Relapse is due to financial problems.
Relapse - Job loss	Participant relapsed into the life due to job loss.
Relapse - Lack of options	Participant relapses into the life due to a lack of options.

Relapse - Traumatic event	Participant describes a traumatic event that caused a relapse (relapse can be either drug/alcohol, prostitution, or combination).
Resilience	Participant describes resilience. For example, learning and growing from a terrible experience, future plans, finding other forms of acceptance, positive self-assessment, etc.
Safe Place - E.R.	Participant identifies the E.R. as a safe place to go.
Safe Place - Family	Participant identifies family as a safe place to go.
Safe Place - Prostitution Specific Agency	Participant identifies prostitution specific agency as a safe place to go.
Self-Disclosure	Service providers talk about how clients often disclose involvement in commercial sex trade, survival sex, etc.
Services - Advocacy	Service providers talk about providing advocacy services (i.e. court, hospital).
Services - Case management	Service providers talk about providing case management services (i.e. connecting with services).
Services - Crisis line	Service providers talk about the crisis line they provide.
Services - Drop-in center	Service providers talk about providing a drop-in center.
Services - Emergency services	Service provider talks about how they provide emergency services.
Services - Exit planning	Service providers talk about how they work on exit planning.
Services - Housing program	Service providers talk about the housing program for sexually exploited youth.
Services - Independent living classes	Service providers talk about providing independent living classes.
Services - Jail outreach	Service providers talk about providing jail outreach.
Services - Recovery support	Service providers talk about how they provide substance abuse recovery support.
Services - Relapse prevention	Service providers talk about providing relapse prevention services.
Services - Risk reduction planning	Service providers talk about providing services focused on risk-reduction planning.
Services - Street Outreach	Service provider talks about the outreach services they provide.
Services - Support Group	Service providers talk about providing support groups.
Services - Trauma work	Service providers talk about how they do basic trauma work with this population.
Shame & Guilt	Participant talks about overcoming shame as a challenge to exiting the life.
SP Exiting is a process	Service providers talk about exiting as a process.
SP Exiting Need - Job Training/Educational programs	Service providers talk about how women need job training or educational programming based on their needs.
SP Exiting Need - Long-term care	Service providers talk about how women need long-term, intensive, stable care in order to exit.
SP Exiting Need - Stable housing	Service providers talk about how stable housing is an exiting need.
Spirituality	Participant talks about god, religion, higher power, etc.
SS Involvement - Housing/shelter programs	Participant received transitional living, housing, or shelter services.
SS Involvement - Mental health	Participant is receiving mental health services.
SS Involvement - Other	Participant mentions receiving services or support at other social service

	settings. For example, Hope and Faith.
SS Involvement - Substance abuse services	Participant is involved in a form of drug/substance abuse treatment.
SS Involvement - Prostitution-specific agency	Participant talks about the prostitution specific agency as a way to exit the life.
Steps to Exit - Awareness	Participant talks about being more aware of the dangers of the lifestyle, the realities of the lifestyle, and wanting a better future as a step towards exiting.
Steps to Exit - Connecting with positive people	Participant identifies connecting with positive people as a step towards exiting.
Steps to Exit - Employment	Participant identifies finding and maintaining employment as a step towards exiting.
Steps to Exit - Ending an abusive relationship	Participant talks about how ending an abusive relationship was an important part of the exiting process.
Steps to Exit - Going back to school	Participant talks about starting school as a step towards exiting.
Steps to Exit - Obtaining financial Security	Participant identifies obtaining financial security as a step towards exiting.
Steps to Exit - Phasing out of the life	Participants talks about "phasing out of the life". This can include not working the streets, decreasing clients, distancing from friends/family still involved in the life, etc.
Steps to Exit - Seeking Help	Participants are seeking help as a step towards exiting. They identify entering drug treatment, mental health treatment, enrolling in housing programs, attending prostitution-specific classes, attending church, obtaining legal assistance, etc. as steps towards exiting.
Stigma	Participant talks about the stigma of prostitution.
Violence	Participant talks about experiencing violence in the commercial sex trade.