

The Prostitution of Women and Girls in Metropolitan Chicago: A Preliminary Prevalence Report

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Executive Summary

The Research

This report represents the first ever research to determine the number of girls and women involved in prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area. It marks the first phase of a project designed to ascertain how many of these girls and women are being affected by problems of violence, abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness in an effort to better help them escape from prostitution and rebuild their lives. Between July 2000 and March 2001 the Center for Impact Research (CIR) collected arrest statistics, conducted interviews with 124 social service providers in a range of fields, and investigated Internet and print source materials advertising prostitution services and online communication of men who solicit women and girls for prostitution to determine a conservative estimate of the prevalence of prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Results

Arrest Data There were a total of **5,651** prostitution-related arrests in the City of Chicago in 1999. This number is not an accurate count of unduplicated individuals but only the number of arrests. The Cook County Sheriff Department's Vice Unit made an additional 661 arrests. Law enforcement officials caution that arrest data do not present an accurate picture of prevalence. Limited resources make more arrests impossible, and, as it is difficult to prove acts of prostitution, other charges may be used such as loitering and possession of drug paraphernalia against women they believed were exchanging sex for money.

Street Prostitution Reports from law enforcement officials and social services providers about the exact locations of street prostitution and the relative numbers of girls and women involved, when combined with arrest data, lead us to calculate that **800-1,000** women and girls are involved in street-level prostitution in any given year in the Chicago metropolitan area. According to social service providers, many of these girls and women are homeless.

Off-Street Prostitution Activities Experts believe that street prostitution accounts for only 20-30% of all prostitution-related activities, and CIR's findings substantiate these reports.

Escort Services Based on an assessment of online and print advertising materials and interviews with law enforcement officials and social service providers, CIR estimates that **1,000-2,000** women are involved in escort service prostitution in Chicago.

Massage Parlors or Spas Based on an assessment of online and print advertising materials and interviews, CIR conservatively estimates that **170** women and girls are involved in prostitution through massage services in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Exotic Dancing On any given day in the Chicago Metropolitan area, **200-425** women and girls are involved in prostitution through exotic dance venues. The number jumps to **625-1275** when we include women and girls who are involved at some time during the year.

Other Activities Prostitution activities occur in day labor assignments, within the context of domestic violence, when intimate partners coerce their partners into prostitution, and within families when young girls are prostituted by family members for drugs and money. Due to the nature of these activities it is impossible to arrive at any accurate estimates of the number of girls and women prostituted in this way.

Sex for Drugs Data obtained from surveys of approximately 60 Chicago area substance abuse treatment programs indicate that 60-100% of their women clients have regularly exchanged sex for drugs or money. When this percentage is applied to females in state-funded drug treatment programs in Cook County, a minimum of **11,500** females are involved in prostitution. Some of this number is duplicated in data for street-level prostitution and some off-street venues, but it well exceeds the estimated amount of all the categories in this report. When the number of women who need but do not receive treatment in metropolitan Chicago is factored in, the number could greatly increase.

Total

CIR finds that a total of **1,800-4,000** girls and women are involved in off and on-street prostitution activities in the Chicago metropolitan area. However, when the number of girls and women who are regularly exchanging sex for drugs (**11,500**) is added to this number, the total rises significantly. Although some of these women are included in earlier estimates, clearly the bulk are not.

Conclusion

At this time we do not know how many of these girls and women are suffering from violence, the effects of violence, and other physical and mental health problems, including homelessness. However, the number of girls and women involved in prostitution activities in metropolitan Chicago is cause for serious concern. We need to learn a great deal more about the lives of these girls and women, their needs for service and support, and assets they bring in reclaiming their lives. In Phase II of this project CIR will interview a sample of these girls and women to obtain more information upon which concerned Chicagoans can act.