



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

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May 23, 2001

## **Center for Impact Research**

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The report has been made possible by generous funding from  
the Chicago Foundation for Women, The Girl's Best Friend Foundation,  
and the Michael Reese Health Trust.



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CIR's **PROSTITUTION PROJECT** has researched the prevalence of prostitution in the metropolitan Chicago area. During a second phase of the project, women and girls who are currently involved or have recently exited prostitution will be surveyed to determine their histories and needs. With this information, CIR will advocate for the necessary comprehensive social services and appropriate criminal justice response that would meet the needs of women and girls involved in prostitution and create more opportunities for exiting the prostitution industry.

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# The Prostitution of Women and Girls in Metropolitan Chicago: A Preliminary Prevalence Report from the Center for Impact Research

## 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.

# Introduction

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## *Why research prostitution?*

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Recent research indicates that the majority of girls and women involved in prostitution in the U.S. experience persistent and serious violence at the hands of customers, pimps, and club managers.<sup>1</sup> Researchers have found that the majority of women in their samples have been physically assaulted and raped by pimps as well as customers on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup> Although the bulk of the reports stem from interviews with women involved in street prostitution, emerging research demonstrates similar levels of violence and abuse in off-street activities such as escort services, strip clubs, and massage parlors.<sup>3</sup> Girls and women in prostitution have also been found to be addicted to alcohol and drugs, suffer serious physical and mental health problems, and are frequently homeless. Researchers have found that over three-quarters of their samples of women experience symptoms of serious mental health problems, including posttraumatic stress disorder and depression.<sup>4</sup> Because of these problems, many women are unable to exit prostitution or leave it safely.

Not much is known about the prostitution industry in the United States. Because of enhanced police response as well as ongoing redevelopment of downtown city areas and other communities, experts agree that most prostitution (80-90%) now occurs in off-street venues.<sup>5</sup> The development of the Internet has facilitated this growth in off-street prostitution venues, because this advertising method is largely hidden from public view.<sup>6</sup> On the Internet one can find advertisements for prostitution services as well as chat rooms and archived material in which male customers rate individual services and women, and offer guidance on how to access them without being arrested.

Off-street activities fall within two categories. Some operate legally and visibly in permanent locations, such as strip clubs, with various forms of illegal activity on offer to the customers. Others operate more clandestinely and are incorporated into health spas, saunas, beauty salons, massage parlors, and bars and lounges. Prostitution also occurs in private residences, hotels, warehouses, mobile trailers, and other hidden locations. Some are family-owned, but law enforcement officials believe that the bulk are controlled, financed, or backed by organized crime groups.<sup>7</sup>

Trafficking involves the transport of girls and women from other countries to the U.S. into these off-street venues, or the transportation of U.S. girls and women from location to location within states or among states. Owners and managers are said to move women from place to place to prevent them from establishing contacts who could provide them with assistance, and to escape detection from law enforcement agents.<sup>8</sup>

According to the U.S. government, 50,000 women and children are trafficked each year into the United States, primarily from Latin America, countries of the former Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> Recently the U.S. government and the media have focused on the trafficking of girls and women, leaving U.S. girls and women who participate in the prostitution industry in the shadows.

Informal reports from Chicago social service agencies gave the Center for Impact Research (CIR) a dire picture of the circumstances of many Chicago girls and women involved in the prostitution industry, and the difficulty of serving their complex needs for shelter, health care, long-term drug treatment, mental health counseling, and job training. Members of the Chicago Police Department Vice Squad reported to CIR that women on the streets “were getting younger and sicker.”

CIR wanted to know just how many girls and women were involved in prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area, whether trafficked or not, and where and in what activities. To our knowledge, there has never been a comprehensive report on prostitution for the Chicago metropolitan area. We want also to understand how many of these girls and women are affected by problems of violence and abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness. We need to learn how we might better help these girls and women escape prostitution and rebuild their lives, and, importantly, how we can prevent girls and women from being involved in the prostitution industry in the first place.

As a first step, CIR undertook a research effort to gauge the number of girls and women involved in prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area and the venue of these activities. We define the metropolitan area as Cook County and the surrounding counties of Lake, Kane, DuPage, Will, and McHenry.

Ferretting out clandestine venues of an illegal activity represents a considerable challenge. We caution that despite ten months of research, we still have much to learn about the prostitution industry in metropolitan Chicago. We take care to report data that is totally verifiable, with the result that the numbers we have developed are likely to be extremely conservative and represent an undercount. However, our prevalence figure of 16,000 girls and women regularly engaging in prostitution activities is grounds for immediate concern.

## ***Methodology***

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CIR collected arrest statistics for Chicago and suburban localities, documented court dispositions, and conducted individual interviews with tactical officers from suburban police departments, corrections staff, and law enforcement administration. CIR conducted two focus groups with Chicago Police Department Vice Unit officers.

CIR also conducted individual interviews with 124 social service providers in a range of fields. CIR sought out both survey data and individual reports from agencies about prostitution in the lives of their female clients. A focus group of outreach workers who provide HIV education and recovery options specifically to women involved in street prostitution outlined more locations and estimates of prostitution venues.

Most social services agencies do not include questions about prostitution activities on their intake forms, making it difficult to quantify their observations. Many, however, due to their ongoing contact with their clients, do learn a great deal about their lives and are able to reliably estimate the percentages who regularly are involved in prostitution activities. In these instances we do rely on their reports. Some homeless providers, for example, do have more extended contact with clients than others. To facilitate future studies that might lead to better data, we would recommend that all social services providers dealing with low-income girls and women receive training about prostitution, add questions about prostitution activities to their intake forms, and remain alert to opportunities for self-disclosure throughout the service delivery process.

CIR also interviewed key informants, including girls and women who were still involved in prostitution or had exited, to obtain information about prostitution locations and venues. As most prostitution activity now occurs off-street, much of it can only be identified by key informants, print advertisements, online advertisements, and customer recommendations on the Internet. Therefore, CIR investigated news reports, online and print source materials advertising prostitution services, and online communications of men who solicit girls and women for prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area.

There seemed to us to be virtually no end to the online material, which represented an ever-changing target. In addition, more information could have been gathered had CIR researchers participated in chat room activity as many law enforcement officials do in order to identify off-street locations. However, the number of prostitution venues that we were able to establish was high enough to indicate the presence of a major industry in Chicago.

The clandestine nature of off-street prostitution activity also makes it difficult to measure prevalence in prostitution activities by race. Nationally, there are differences based on location. In New York City, customers report many more Hispanic and African-American women in prostitution, as compared to San Francisco where Asians predominate. In Minneapolis/St. Paul, the proportions of the racial groups are reported as equal.<sup>10</sup>

In Chicago, law enforcement officials and social services providers reported to CIR that a significant number of women working at massage services are of Asian descent, the majority of women involved in escort services are Caucasian, and that Latina women most often find opportunities to exchange sex for money and other resources in bars and social clubs. As for street prostitution, CIR received reports from law enforcement

officials about street prostitution areas, or strolls, indicating that the racial or ethnic representation of the women involved closely mirrors the population of the community. Overall, they say that African-American women make up the bulk of the women involved in street prostitution in Chicago. With the methodology available to us at this time, we were not able to verify these reports.

For the same reasons, age is also difficult to detect, but the report will present what information we have been able to gather about the involvement of girls, as opposed to women, in the prostitution industry in the Chicago metropolitan area.

## ***Definition of Prostitution***

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In this report CIR uses the most basic definition of prostitution---the exchange of money or something of value, including drugs, or shelter, or other survival needs---for sexual activity. Sexual activity includes vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex, and manipulation of another person's genitals for purposes of sexual arousal. Many girls and women are involved in a prostitution activity, even though, according to law enforcement and social services providers, they may not self-identify as prostituted women. For this reason, in this report we do not merely rely on self-reports of girls and women.

This definition mirrors the legal definition detailed in the Illinois Criminal Statutes. Over 33 municipal and state criminal statutes are directly related to prostitution.

In this report we also explore sexually-oriented businesses such as escort and massage services, and clubs featuring stripping, exotic dancers, or lingerie shows, because women involved in these locations have told CIR that these can also be venues for prostitution in back or upstairs rooms.

CIR also acknowledges that some women and girls are involved consistently throughout the year in exchanging sex for money or resources, and others participate more sporadically. Our estimates are made to account for this variance and are detailed in this report.

There are certainly boys and men, as well as transgendered individuals, exchanging sex for money or resources in the Chicago metropolitan area. However, this report will only deal with girls and women, who at this time make up the majority of those engaged in prostitution. Additional funding may enable us to research the involvement of boys, men, and transgendered individuals at a later date.

In the fall of 2001 we will interview a sample of girls and women in all facets of the prostitution industry in the Chicago metropolitan area, employing survivors of prostitution and current participants as surveyors. We hope that this second report will

serve as a blueprint for improved services for girls and women in prostitution as well as for new approaches for our criminal justice system.

## **Criminal Justice Statistics**

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Our first snapshot of prostitution comes from arrest statistics. We collected data on prostitution-related arrests from the City of Chicago, surrounding suburbs, and the Cook County Sheriff's Office.

In 1999, the Chicago Police Department made a total of 5,651 arrests of females for prostitution-related offenses. The Prostitution and Obscene Matter Unit of the Chicago Police Department made some of these arrests. This unit, under the Vice Control Section of the Organized Crime Division, conducts investigations and sting operations in order to make a solid case for prostitution-related offenses. District-level beat officers made the majority of the arrests.

However, as many women are arrested repeatedly during the year, this statistic is not an accurate count of unduplicated individuals, but rather represents the number of arrests.

Arrest and conviction data from prostitution-related offenses do not present an accurate picture of prevalence. Chicago and suburban police departments and the Cook County Sheriff's Police Department could not provide the number of unduplicated individuals arrested for prostitution-related offenses, only the number of arrests. Law enforcement officers interviewed by CIR repeatedly stated that they were aware of much higher numbers of prostitution offenses. However, limited resources and the necessity to respond to community complaints direct the activities of tactical and beat-level officers elsewhere.

Law enforcement officers in Chicago and suburban areas also stressed that since it was difficult to prove acts of prostitution, they often made use of charges such as loitering, criminal trespass, and drug paraphernalia against women they believed were seeking to exchange sex for money. Therefore, they caution that arrest statistics for prostitution-related offenses did not explain the whole law enforcement knowledge of prostitution activity.

## ***Arrest numbers from Chicago***

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Taking into consideration the limitations of arrest data in uncovering prostitution activity, an analysis of data from the Chicago Police Department reveals significant information.

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### **Age**

**Table 1**  
**Female Prostitution-related Arrests - City of Chicago 1999 - By Age**

12 to 17 years of age	35
18 to 25 years of age	1,064
26 to 39 years of age	3,829
40+ years of age	723

*Data obtained from the Chicago Police Department's Research and Analysis Section.*

The bulk of females arrested for prostitution in the city of Chicago fall within the ages of 18 and 39. In contrast to social service providers, who state that many girls are involved in exchanging sex for money, law enforcement officers in Chicago report finding few female juveniles involved in prostitution.

A few important factors may account for this discrepancy. According to police officers, one fact to consider is the use of "station adjustment" for juveniles. Under station adjustment, a youth officer, without formally charging the juvenile, can decide how she or he might be penalized for the offense, for example, mandating counseling or community service. Arrest data would not include the number of girls who were station-adjusted in this manner.

Another reason for low numbers of youth may be the difference in how juveniles and adults are processed through the criminal justice system. This disparity occurs as girls present themselves as older than they are. An individual who states her age as over 17 (and does not appear to be obviously much younger) will definitely be processed as an adult and most likely be released more quickly than someone who acknowledges her age to be 17 or younger. A juvenile is processed through another system that includes notification of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) or other guardians, a lengthy process that will result in the girls' longer period of detainment.

Experts also believe that juvenile prostitution has been driven underground. A 1998 national report describes how juvenile prostitution in Chicago has become harder to detect due to the efforts of a multi-jurisdictional federal strike force formed to address child prostitution and pornography.<sup>11</sup> The successful activities of the strike force, they believe, have made juvenile prostitution largely invisible. Juvenile prostitution often begins when individuals offer survival resources to runaway youth in exchange for sex, or use money or gifts to sexually exploit a child in private. These activities do not fit into what law enforcement officers usually seek out when investigating prostitution activity.

Although law enforcement officers conduct some investigation into off-street prostitution, the vast majority of arrests are for street-level exchanges of sex for money or drugs. Social service providers told CIR they believe that large numbers of older women arrested for prostitution may be an overrepresentation of how many older women are in the prostitution industry as a whole. Older women may have fewer opportunities in off-street prostitution venues and more long-term drug addiction problems that lead to increased vulnerability to arrest in street-level venues.

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**Race**

**Table 2**  
**Female Prostitution-related Arrests - City of Chicago 1999 - By Race**

Description	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Island	Black	White	Hispanic	Unknown	Total
Pedestrian Solicit Ride on Roadway	2	2	467	277	38	0	<b>786</b>
Prostitution	3	8	2,654	620	241	0	<b>3,526</b>
Soliciting for a Prostitute	0	3	148	29	14	1	<b>195</b>
Pandering	0	0	0	3	0	0	<b>3</b>
Keeping a Place of Prostitution	0	0	1	2	0	0	<b>3</b>
Patronize Prostitute	0	0	4	1	1	0	<b>6</b>
Pimping	0	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Solicitation – Prostitution	0	0	161	23	7	2	<b>193</b>
House of Ill Fame	0	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Lewdness	0	0	4	0	2	0	<b>6</b>
Revocation of License	0	0	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
Soliciting – Public Morals	0	0	19	8	4	0	<b>31</b>
Soliciting for Prostitution	0	0	746	114	30	0	<b>890</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4,211</b>	<b>1,082</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5,651</b>

*Data obtained from the Chicago Police Department's Research and Analysis Section.*

African-American women and girls are disproportionately represented in prostitution-related arrests in the City of Chicago. The Chicago Police Department comments that due to lack of personnel and scant undercover resources, most prostitution arrests are driven by community complaints, most often made in neighborhoods in which prostitution is the

most visible on the street. City law enforcement officers also stress that arrests will be most often made in those neighborhoods in which there is a great deal of “hanging out” or street activity. It is also likely that African-American women may represent the majority of women involved in street-level prostitution in Chicago.

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## Top Ten Beats

**Table 3**  
**Top Ten Beats in the City of Chicago –**  
**Prostitution-Related Arrests of Females in 1999**

1. 0224 (47 <sup>th</sup> to 51 <sup>st</sup> , King Dr. to Michigan)	245
2. 1433 (Wood to Chicago River, Armitage to Division)	207
3. 0214 (39 <sup>th</sup> to 43 <sup>rd</sup> , Calumet to Dan Ryan)	164
4. 1331 (Kedzie to Rockwell, Madison to Kinzie)	164
5. 1332 (Rockwell to Damen, Madison to Kinzie)	155
6. 1113 (Cicero to Kildare, Roosevelt to Jackson)	141
7. 0221 (43 <sup>rd</sup> to 47 <sup>th</sup> , Prairie to Dan Ryan)	132
8. 0222 (43 <sup>rd</sup> to 47 <sup>th</sup> , Cottage Grove to Prairie)	131
9. 1434 (Rockwell to Wood, Armitage to North)	130
10. 2533 (Laramie to Kostner, Division to Armitage)	125

*Data obtained from the Chicago Police Department’s Research and Analysis Section.*

Every district in the city of Chicago made arrests for prostitution-related offenses in 1999. Ten beats, listed above, however, accounted for 28% of all the arrests of females citywide. These areas confirm reports CIR received from law enforcement officers and service providers about significant locations of street prostitution.

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## ***Suburbs: Not just an urban problem***

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CIR requested prostitution-related arrest data from 120 suburban Cook community police departments. Seventy-six departments (63%) responded to our requests. Of these who complied, 88% reported no arrests for prostitution. Of the 12% who did make prostitution-related arrests, the number varied from one to 16 arrests in 1999 in communities as varied as Schaumburg, Chicago Heights, and Franklin Park.

Tactical officers believed that some neighboring communities had more prostitution activity, but those communities did not respond to our repeated requests for data (including Cicero, Harvey, and Stone Park).

Many suburban law enforcement officers stated they made no prostitution arrests because when they are learn of a prostitution problem, they pass on the information and rely on the Cook County Sheriff's Police Department and its Vice Unit to investigate and make arrests.

The Vice Unit of the Cook County Sheriff's Police Department functions much like the Chicago Police Department's Prostitution and Obscene Matter Unit, investigating prostitution activity and setting up sting operations to record agreements to exchange sex for money – something for which most police officers do not have the resources and expertise to handle.

During 1999 the Cook County Sheriffs Police Department's Vice Unit made a total of 661 arrests of females for prostitution-related offenses in Cook County including prostitution, public indecency, soliciting rides in the roadway, soliciting for a prostitute, and keeper of a place of prostitution.

### ***After the arrest***

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The majority of prostitution offenses are misdemeanors (crimes that are subject to less than a year in jail). Most women are released without bond and are given a date to appear in court. Others are required to post a small cash bond. Women who do not have the cash for a bond or have longer criminal histories may be held for trial.

The Cook County Sheriff's Department, Office of Women's Justice Services, reports that approximately 9% of women detained at the Cook County Jail are waiting for court or serving county time on prostitution charges. In comparison, 39% of women are detained for drug possession-related charges and 25% on property crimes such as retail theft. The Office of Women's Justice Services told CIR that many women detained for drug possession may also have been involved in exchanging sex for money, drugs or survival needs.

Data from the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County for the years of 1999 and 2000 combined, shows that 1,326 women were sentenced to serve time for prostitution offenses at the Cook County Jail or Illinois Department of Corrections. The bulk of these cases come from courts in District 1 (Chicago) and District 4 (Maywood). However, many more women's cases did not proceed in the courts on the merits – 4,290 – for a number of reasons, mostly because of the non-appearance of women charged with the offense.

# **Beyond Criminal Justice Information**

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Criminal justice statistics do not tell the whole story about prostitution. Service providers, including women formerly involved in prostitution, and law enforcement officials reported to CIR that arrests represent only a fraction of the prostitution activity in the Chicago metropolitan area.

From our research it is now apparent that arrest data are an extremely superficial indication of the depth and character of prostitution activity in Chicago. Through interviews with law enforcement officers and service providers in a range of fields, including prostitution intervention and recovery, HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention, substance abuse treatment, homeless services, and youth services, we sought a more detailed and comprehensive description of prostitution in the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs.

A significant challenge we faced in collecting information on prostitution is that many service providers do not ask questions in regard to the exchange of sex for money or resources. Some providers are truly unaware of the possibility while others acknowledge they work with large numbers of women and girls who occasionally or regularly depend on income from prostitution, but intake forms rarely include questions to quantify this number. In some cases, a question only determined if someone self-identified the activity as prostitution. In the case of HIV prevention workers, providers reported they only asked questions about sex for money exchanges if they had received funding to do so.

We had to seek out information by using additional, more unconventional means that would not compromise safety. One key source was materials published in print format and on the Internet with detailed descriptions of street-level and off-street venues for prostitution.

We located significant information in many categories that can be assessed for prostitution: street-level, escort services, clubs and bars, massage parlors, exotic dancing, prostitution organized by family members, day labor agencies, trafficking, and the sex for drug trade. It is also important to note that there may be overlap among venues; some girls and women may be concurrently involved in more than one activity, or may progress from one to another.

# Street-level prostitution

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In this section we integrate data from interviews with service providers, from women formerly involved in prostitution and law enforcement officials to present a more detailed picture of the amount of street-level prostitution in the City of Chicago and surrounding suburbs.

Despite the fact that researchers across the country note that street-level prostitution in urban and suburban areas accounts for no more than 10 to 20% of the total prostitution activity in an area, we received some of the most richly detailed information about this category.<sup>12</sup>

Different factors affect how many women and girls are engaging in street-level prostitution over the course of a year. Women are susceptible to arrest for any number of offenses, such as drug possession, that can result in incarceration. Other women are released. Some women lose jobs, other income, or benefits and rely temporarily on street prostitution for income. Some women never have engaged in street prostitution on a daily basis. They may be involved consistently, but not everyday. Some turn to street prostitution but leave within days, weeks, or months.

Based on information from outreach workers and law enforcement officials, CIR estimates that between 400 to 500 women and girls are involved in street-level prostitution in the Chicago metropolitan area can be identified on any given day. At least 800 to 1000 women and girls are involved for some length of time in street-level prostitution throughout the year.

## ***Locations reported for street-level prostitution***

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Law enforcement officials, social service providers, and women involved in prostitution easily identified areas within the city limits of Chicago and some suburban localities where women and girls solicited individuals for prostitution on the street, and supplied approximate numbers.

### **On the North Side of Chicago:**

- Howard Street near the Red Line el station
- Morse Street from Sheridan to Ashland
- Sheridan from Foster to Montrose
- Broadway the entire stretch from Devon to downtown
- Wilson Ave, Lawrence and Leland from Sheridan to Clark

- Diversey near Lathrop Homes Public Housing
- Clybourn from Damen to Division
- Armitage from Pulaski to Damen
- North Avenue from Kingsbury to Humboldt Park

**On the West Side of Chicago:**

- Madison Avenue from Cicero to Ashland
- Roosevelt from Cicero to Western
- Cicero from Belmont to 47<sup>th</sup>

**On the South Side of Chicago:**

- 119<sup>th</sup> from Michigan to Halsted
- 103<sup>rd</sup> from Michigan to Halsted
- Cottage Grove from 87<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup>
- Exchange from 75<sup>th</sup> to 79<sup>th</sup>
- 63<sup>rd</sup> from Ashland to Western
- 63<sup>rd</sup> from State to Cottage Grove
- 51<sup>st</sup> from Halsted to Ashland
- 47<sup>th</sup> from Pulaski to Damen
- Prairie and Indiana from 47<sup>th</sup> to 63<sup>rd</sup>
- 39<sup>th</sup>/Pershing between State and Cottage Grove

**In suburban areas:**

- Mannheim Road from Grand to Lake Street
- Harvey on 159<sup>th</sup> Street
- Chicago Avenue and other streets in Chicago Heights
- Calumet City near or on State Line Road

Some of these areas have been known as locations of street-level prostitution for years, if not decades. With police or community pressure the areas change a little and move temporarily in another direction. But they remain largely consistent. With a few exceptions, most areas are located in neighborhoods with a high prevalence of low-income households.

Street-level prostitution also may be found off the major thoroughfares when women and girls seek to avoid police and find men cruising around the area. People often locate a quieter, more secretive location to complete the sexual activity. Key informants told CIR that alleyways, residential streets, abandoned buildings, parks, and the areas behind large stores are all locations where prostitution activities occur.

Throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, outreach workers report that truck stops along the Interstate highways are also known to have five to six women engaged in prostitution at each stop.

Although these areas are particularly known and can be identified as a “stroll” – a street area recognized for prostitution activity –street-level prostitution can and does occur in every area of the city, according to law enforcement officials and women who have traded sex for money or other resources.

### ***Characteristics of street prostitution***

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Law enforcement officers and service providers report that most women were raised and live in the same area in which they have become involved in street-level prostitution. Some women and girls do go to other areas of town in search of higher numbers of men who are willing to pay for sex, or to avoid increased police presence in another area. Some women and girls are originally from nearby states such as Wisconsin and Indiana. A former Vice Unit Lieutenant reported that in 1999 she became aware of girls being brought from as far away as Florida to work the stroll on Cicero Avenue.

Although it may appear to people that street-level prostitution varies based on weather, in reality it does not. Law enforcement officers and service providers report that in low-income communities the same number of women and girls find men on the street willing to pay for sex no matter what the weather or time of year. They might try to stay off the streets when it is extremely hot or cold and come out for shorter periods of time. But the need for money, drugs, or resources still exists.

According to all the law enforcement officers CIR interviewed for this study, the amount of street-level prostitution does decrease at the beginning of the month when some women and girls may have access to public aid benefits.

### ***Pimp control of street-level prostitution?***

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CIR received conflicting information about the level of control of strolls by pimps or gangs. Pimping is defined in the criminal statutes as receiving money from another person knowing that it was made in whole or in part through prostitution.

Historically, law enforcement and communities generally understood street-level prostitution to be controlled by pimps. Most law enforcement officials interviewed for this study believe that few pimps still exist. Instead they state that women have occasionally abusive relationships with people who could be more accurately characterized as hustling partners. Both partners find a way to survive on the streets using whatever methods are available to them such as theft, prostitution, or small time drug dealing.

In contrast, service providers are aware of individuals who both self-identify as pimps and those who carry out the actions of a pimp in neighborhoods across the city. Providers who have served teen girls indicate they have worked with girls who have been prostituted by pimps, as well as girls who continue to be approached in street-level venues by individuals who attempt to persuade or coerce them into street-level prostitution.

Service providers also report that gang members who control illicit street-level activity such as drug dealing in many areas also expect to receive a percentage of prostitution income made on the street, if only in the form of sexual access to women or girls.

In the second phase of this project, CIR hopes to determine more conclusively whether women and girls are involved with individuals who profit from or coerce prostitution.

### ***Youth “Survival Sex”***

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Youth service providers described to CIR how homeless youth engage in “survival sex”-- exchanging sexual activity for necessities such as food, a place to stay for the night, or clothes. They report that the majority of girls who runaway or are on their own for any length of time exchange sex for money or resources. Few girls are open about it because they want to avoid stigma and blame.

A recent national study, which also did research in Chicago, determined that 55 percent of homeless runaway youth engage in prostitution for money or survival needs and another 20 percent of youth who are housed in shelters.<sup>13</sup>

Chicago service providers told CIR that they agree with national research that finds that older men approach girls on the street and places where youth hang out and offer basic needs in exchange for sex. Sometimes this takes place while they stay at the man’s residence. Girls may also get involved in other forms of prostitution such as escort services or soliciting men in clubs or outside bars.

Hundreds of youth in the care of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) run away on a regular basis. Eight hundred and sixty-three youth from Cook County were recorded as currently having run away from their placement in a DCFS report dated February 28, 2001.<sup>14</sup> DCFS workers say that girls are just as likely to run away as boys are.

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless told CIR that 4,000 minors were homeless in Chicago as of 1985.<sup>15</sup> Based on reports from service providers, the Coalition for the Homeless told CIR that this number is higher now, and girls make up approximately half.

The Coalition is planning a new effort to determine the prevalence of homelessness of children and young people.

Although youth involvement in prostitution for survival needs has been studied and is recognized, adult women exchanging sex for money or survival resources has not generally been considered when discussing prostitution in Chicago. CIR interviews with homeless service providers such as Deborah's Place, Sarah's Circle, Interfaith Council for the Homeless, and Sousa Shelter all revealed how homeless adult women with whom they work often rely on prostitution for survival needs and occasionally for drugs.

The Metropolitan Planning Council's 1999 research estimates that between 113,000 and 166,000 people are homeless sometime during any given year within the City of Chicago.<sup>16</sup> Single women and families with children, often headed by females, comprise 60% of that number. Closer study may help us understand how prostitution functions in the lives of adult homeless women as well.

### **Connections of street-level prostitution to off-street prostitution**

Service providers state that low-cost motels across the Chicago area and suburbs are a refuge for low-income women who cannot afford regular housing but who can manage weekly rates. Law enforcement officers and service providers reported motels along Cicero Avenue, 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, and Mannheim Road as sites for prostitution. These same areas are identified for street-level prostitution.

Many of the same motels offer "nap rates" in which individuals can pay for a room for three or four hours. Certainly some of these rooms may be used for other secretive activities such as affairs; however, hourly rates are strongly associated with prostitution activity.

Outreach workers describe finding large numbers of women and girls who at certain points might turn to street prostitution in single-room occupancy (SRO) housing and rooming houses on the southside and westside of Chicago. At other times the same women can exchange sex for money, drugs, or survival needs without ever having to leave the building. An outreach worker on the southside of Chicago reported that a great deal of prostitution activity takes place within SROs and rooming houses as women and girls locate men among those whom they know from the neighborhood or who are in the building seeking drugs. Service providers also report that prostitution activities regularly occur in CHA senior housing, with four to five women and girls in each CHA senior building providing some male residents with companionship, assistance with errands, and sex in exchange for a place to stay and small amount of money.

Based on detailed reports from law enforcement officials and community groups, we estimate that 800-1000 women and girls are involved in street-level prostitution in any given year in the Chicago metropolitan area.

## **Off-street prostitution**

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Despite the focus from community groups and law enforcement officials on obvious street-level prostitution, national researchers estimate off-street prostitution accounts for at least 80% of urban and suburban-area prostitution activity. Off-street prostitution includes escort services, clubs and bars, massage parlors, exotic dancing, and pimping by family members or intimate partners.

Through assessment of online and print advertisements, and interviews with law enforcement officials and service providers, including women who were involved in prostitution, CIR has established a rough estimate of the number of women and girls involved in off-street prostitution, and can provide a preliminary overview of some of the off-street prostitution activity in the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

For the most part, our methodology did not give us the opportunity to determine age, race, or differences by area; all our key informants, however, stated that the activities span all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and areas of the city and suburbs.

### ***Escort Services***

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Escort services and individual escorts purport to offer a different level of service than street-level prostitution. The cost is much higher (often \$150 to \$500 an hour in addition to the cost of the hotel room) and the expectation is that the women and girls involved will be more physically attractive and not apparently addicted to drugs or scarred from experiences on the streets. Some escort services offer an “in-call” location such as apartment or condominium with rooms.

At one time, a difference between full-service and partial-service escorting existed to describe those who would engage in sexual activity and those who would only encourage the individual to masturbate, but this latter role seems to have been replaced by some private dancers and private lingerie shows. Based on our review of advertisements, the term escort service has become synonymous with prostitution.

CIR was able to locate 50 current escort services that regularly advertise in published materials in Chicago. According to law enforcement officials and women formerly involved in prostitution, approximately five to 20 women and girls work for each service at any given time, accounting for approximately 250 to 1000 women and girls.

Law enforcement officers, service providers, and women who have been involved in escort prostitution stressed that some escort services are simply an individual with a cell phone who has no more than a few women and girls to offer men seeking to pay for sex. Pagers, cell phones, and easily created websites have opened up opportunities to those who might have otherwise had to rely on soliciting men in bars, clubs, or on the street.

Published advertisements in Chicago seem almost exclusively directed to white businessmen visiting from other cities. In communities of color across the metropolitan area, telephone numbers for escort services, including in call locations catering to those communities, are passed to men from other men and by the owners of the services. Sometimes these telephone numbers may be published in the Ameritech Chicago Yellow Pages.

Based on reports from law enforcement officials and service providers who work with women and girls involved in prostitution, at least another 100 of these underground services that solicit local men utilize about five women or girls each, for a total of about 500 women and girls.

CIR located an additional 250 individual unduplicated advertisements for female escorts on the Internet and in The Reader, a free weekly independent newspaper distributed across metropolitan Chicago. These advertisements purported to be by independent operators, and would account for another 250 women. Law enforcement officers state they cannot find an end to the numbers of advertisements for individual women on the Internet.

Current websites, such as www.bigdoggie.com (last accessed March 2001), facilitate communication among men about where to locate escort prostitution and rate the women on appearance, willingness to engage in the desired sexual activities, cost, and attitude. Sites that are no longer active but archived on the Internet, such as the World Sex Guide, received a great deal of media attention, and law enforcement officers regularly referred to the site to check out the latest reports. Some of the reports may be exaggerated. However the candidness of the men--- who believe they can communicate without fear of

arrest or reproach on the sites--- can be useful to researchers and law enforcement officials.

Advertisements for escort services can be found in mainstream publications such as the Ameritech Yellow Pages and The Reader. The 1999 Ameritech Chicago Consumer Yellow Pages listed 256 escort services such as this one:

*“Amy’s Playtime Escorts, Female Escorts, Appointments - 24 hours, Outside Calls Available, Ask About Our Website, 312-437-XXXX”*

In 2000, Ameritech deleted the escort section and many services appeared in the Entertainment – Adult section.

*Amy’s Playtime Entertainment, Beautiful Female Entertainers available for any & all occasions, When It’s Time to Play, Come Play with Us! Last Minute..No Groups, 312-437-XXXX” (same number)*

In the 2001 Ameritech Yellow Pages the category “escort services” re-appears. Full-page color advertisements also re-appeared. A total of 33 services advertised in this section.

The advertisements are more explicit in specialized “adult entertainment” publications such as The Gentleman’s Pages and Chicago After Dark found in adult video and gift stores and on Internet websites. Forty services advertised in the December 2000 issue of Chicago After Dark, some with full-page advertisements.

*“Sure Thing Escorts...We’re Here To Please, Not To Tease! Full Service! Full Pleasure! In-calls, Out-Calls, Massage, Asian, African American, Latin, Any way you like it! \$300-\$500 Hour – No Records Kept, Do it now...call 24 hours 847-767-XXXX, 630-272-XXXX”*

Although escort services and individuals offering escorting advertise in publications such as The Reader and Ameritech Chicago Yellow Pages, most involve prostitution activities that are definitely illegal under Illinois law. In fact, law enforcement officials told CIR that they regularly use these materials to locate individuals to arrest in sting operations, and when asked by CIR, could not cite a single escort service that they believed was operating legally.

Despite the fact that escort services in Chicago all claim to only employ women over the age of 18, youth service providers informed CIR that they have encountered girls as young as 15 years old who were involved in escort services.

Considering these collected advertisements and reports from law enforcement officials, CIR estimates that escort service prostitution accounts for at least 1000 to 2000 women and girls involved in prostitution in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. This remains a conservative estimate because the Internet contains an unending and changing source of advertisements for escort services.

### ***Clubs, bars and events***

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Law enforcement officials and service providers who work with women and girls involved in prostitution believe that a great deal of prostitution occurs through connections at clubs, bars and sporting or business events such as conventions. CIR received a few reports of clubs and bars that community residents identified as venues for prostitution activity.

In particular, numerous law enforcement officers and HIV prevention workers pointed out that prostitution by Latina women was most often based in local bars.

Law enforcement officials report that a large amount of prostitution takes place at privately organized parties, advertised discretely through flyers or word of mouth. For this reason CIR could locate few specifics. This is an area that requires much more investigation.

### ***Massage parlors or spas***

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Municipal ordinances created in Chicago and many suburban Cook County communities attempt to prevent locations offering sexual services from posing as legal massage therapy services. As a result, law enforcement officers report that the number of these businesses has clearly been reduced in recent years.

However, Chicago and suburban police officers tell CIR that they realize that massage services can be a front for prostitution. Their legality becomes clear based upon where

and how the services advertise. For example in “adult entertainment” guide Chicago After Dark’s December 2000 issue:

*Platinum Massage ... let us relax you completely... Fully nude! Full Body – Completely Satisfied! ... No Hidden Fees... Try our new VIP massage... Convenient incall location for City & Suburbs... \$150 full hour ... \$100 ½ hour special... 708-366-XXXX or 708-363-XXXX.*

These services do not advertise any affiliation with a professional organization or specialized training. The choice of an *adult entertainment* publication offering sexual services throughout the guide is a more revealing decision. In addition, 24-hour massage services are highly suspect.

Seven massage services advertised in the December 2000 issue of Chicago After Dark and another eight escort services or individuals offering escorting also provide “massage rates.” A massage rate can refer to hand manipulation of genitals or permitting masturbation by clients, whereas escorting implies penetrative sex.

The Cook County Sheriff’s Police Department periodically makes arrests of suburban massage service locations. Another service advertised in the December 2000 issue of Chicago After Dark, Golden Touch Massage, was raided by the Cook County Sheriff’s Police Department in late November 2000 after a 10-week investigation. According to police reports, the service operated out of three apartment locations in Glenview and Des Plaines. Women offered sexual acts in exchange for an extra \$30 to \$75 in addition to massages performed in the nude for \$100 to \$150 each.

The owner also offered a job to an undercover female officer applying for employment and detailed the illegal activity in the business. He fled to another state upon arrest.

Massage services offering sex for money exchanges can be located in the Ameritech Chicago Yellow Pages in Adult Entertainment sections and Massage Services, on the bottom of the sports pages of the Sun-Times newspaper, and through advertisements in The Reader. Some services consist merely of individuals operating out their home. Some are services that operate similar to escort services with a pager or cell phone.

According to law enforcement officers, massage services operating outside the law and offering sex for money frequently change locations. Based on advertisements, we can determine that at least 15 unduplicated massage services are operating consistently with approximately five women each. Another 15 services are advertised in a more discrete manner. Additionally, at least another 20 individuals advertise in locations such as The Reader at any given time. CIR estimates the total involved in massage as prostitution as 170. However, law enforcement sources report that many more massage services can be located through Internet chat rooms.

Although women and girls may not exchange sex for money all the time in massage parlors, we can conclude from reports by service providers and law enforcement officials that they will do so at some points and with certain clients.

Law enforcement officials told CIR they believe that a significant number of women working at massage services are of Asian descent – particularly Korean and Chinese women.

Service providers and law enforcement officials told CIR that the Chinatown area in Chicago may be a significant location for undocumented Chinese women who have been placed in massage parlors offering sex for money. Reportedly, these locations advertise openly in Mandarin language newspapers.

Based on local advertisements and reports from law enforcement officials and social services providers, CIR conservatively estimates that in any given year 170 women and girls are involved in prostitution through massage services in the Chicago metropolitan area.

## ***Exotic Dancing***

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Dancing or exotic dancing is the common term for what communities might also refer to as stripping or nude cabarets. Clubs featuring women who perform in the nude or minimally-clothed are part of the accepted sexually-oriented businesses in the community. The clubs are advertised as a harmless form of entirely legal entertainment.

However, in February 1999, the Cook County Sheriff's Police Department's Vice Unit raided The Skybox Gentleman's Club in Harvey after a two-month investigation. Thirty-nine women were taken into custody, 15 of whom were charged with prostitution or public indecency and two more with keeper of a place of prostitution. None of the 75 male patrons were arrested.

In February 2000, the Lake County Sheriff's Department raided another club, Dancer's, in Palatine and made arrests for prostitution. The Department also has made arrests at the Cherry Club on Mannheim Road and Arnie's in Harvey for prostitution activity.

CIR located 25 different clubs offering nightly shows of women who might perform as exotic dancers in bikinis, lingerie, or in the nude. In Chicago and in most suburban

communities, nude dancing is only permitted if a club does not serve alcohol. CIR found at least another 27 clubs or bars that feature dancers occasionally for special events. One key informant who has worked at several Chicago area clubs refers to exotic dancing as a “gateway drug” to prostitution, and told CIR that “it’s so easy for the line to become blurred.” In some cases women told CIR that when working at the clubs they soon realize they cannot make much money unless they exchange sex in the back rooms and outside dates with customers. According to our key informants--- former participants in this part of the industry--- prostitution activities in these clubs conform to three basic patterns.

- Close contact between dancers and customers on the floor is permitted, tolerated, or encouraged in some clubs where dancers may be asking customers at each table if they are interested in a “table dance.” A table dance includes dancing in front of the customer for the duration of a song and taking off some or all clothing – depending on the club. Dancers report that men expose themselves or attempt to touch the dancer more in these situations compared to clubs where dancers are on stage at a distance.
- VIP rooms, champagne rooms, and other private and semi-private rooms are known to be locations where high-tipping customers are able to request more sexual activity. Sometimes the activity does not cross the line of illegal behavior in the case of a customer masturbating while a dancer is at a distance. The legality becomes an issue during so-called “lap dances,” when a dancer straddles a seated customer and may be rubbing her body against a customer’s genitals for sexual arousal.
- Some women who work at clubs are reported to seek out “sugar daddy” relationships with customers who appear to have more money. This practice combines affection and money in an inseparable connection, blurring the lines between prostitution and dating.

Based on reports from law enforcement officials, service providers, and women who have worked at area clubs, CIR estimates that 25 to 50% of women working as exotic dancers regularly or on occasion exchange sex for money or other articles of value.

As mentioned earlier, 25 clubs in Chicago and surrounding suburban areas regularly feature exotic dancers. These clubs employ dancers on a contract basis and approximately 50 to 100 women work at 15 of the clubs. A remaining 10 clubs are smaller venues and may only have 10-20 women working.

However, it is important to note that, based on reports of women who have worked as dancers, turnover is high in clubs featuring exotic dancers. Therefore the approximate 850 to 1700 women who may work at clubs in the Chicago metropolitan area may be many times that number, especially when women who work for shorter periods of time or who move on to other jobs or venues are included.

Another 25 clubs appear to feature exotic dancers occasionally and these clubs contract services that are similar to escort services; they also feature private dancing, lingerie shows, and adult entertainers, basically taking the club experience into a private setting. Again, many of the dancers do not exchange sexual activity for money, but the setting and expectation suggest that a significant percentage of the women do. Many of the same women who are involved in out-call massage and escort services may duplicate the numbers here.

A few independent services exist that advertise “adult entertainment” in the form of private dancing or lingerie shows, but we were unable to make an accurate assessment of those that have not already been included in other estimates.

Based on advertisements and reports from law enforcement officials, CIR finds that 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 to 1275 when we include women and girls who are involved at some time during the year.

### ***Prostituted by family members***

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- **Girls**

It is difficult to arrive at accurate estimates of the number of girls who are prostituted by family members.

A number of service providers and women formerly involved in prostitution described how adult women who are addicted to drugs can lose their ability to make enough money to support a drug habit or basic needs. Males who regularly pay for sex are sometimes more willing to pay higher amounts to have sex with a child.

Social service providers gave CIR a few reports of girls as young as six being prostituted by family members. A teacher working with children near Altgeld Gardens on the far

southside talked of girls who were made to have sex with adult males to provide rent money and more drugs for their parents.

Last summer a west suburban mother was convicted of offering her 13-year-old daughter for sex to an undercover police officer in a Downers Grove hotel for a large sum of money.

- **Prostitution as a part of domestic violence**

Intake procedures at domestic violence agencies in Chicago do not track how many women and teen girls involved in prostitution seek assistance to leave abusive partners. However, staff of domestic violence agencies in areas as varied as South Suburban LaGrange, Humboldt Park, Evanston, and the far South Side of Chicago report that women who have histories of involvement in prostitution make use of their services to escape violent relationships, and in some cases, to exit prostitution. In individual and group counseling at these agencies, women often discuss exchanging sex for money or resources as a source of income in low-income areas and sex for drug exchanges.

Less frequently but no less significantly, women speak about partners who coerce them to prostitute through violence and threats of violence. One Chicago domestic violence provider recalled a woman whose husband owed several hundred dollars to an acquaintance and made an arrangement to pay the debt by offering him sex with his wife. When the woman initially refused, he beat her. A legal advocate with a domestic violence agency explained that abusive partners also use knowledge of women's participation in prostitution to control them through threats to tell family members, law enforcement officers, or child protection authorities.

Until domestic violence agencies begin tracking incidents more consistently, estimates of the amount of prostitution activity that stems from intimate relationships will not be possible.

### ***Day labor connections***

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Day labor agencies operate in many low-income areas of the city, sending out individuals on assignments such as construction, factory work, food service, and cleaning for a daily paycheck. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless Day Labor Organizing Project has collected reports of women and teen girls being told that they were expected to have sex as part of day labor assignments.

Some women report being sent out on jobs such as catering assignments, only to find that employers expected or demanded that they take part in sexual acts with the employer or other individuals. Other women and girls report that day labor agencies select a few younger women and teen girls based on appearance and send them exclusively to bars or other locations to work as exotic dancers or in prostitution.

Organizers with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless continue to investigate how day labor agencies may be involved in prostitution, and are collecting testimony from women and girls who have been sexually exploited in day labor. Additional evidence is needed in order to reach an estimate of how many girls and women are currently involved or have been involved over the course of a year.

## ***Trafficking***

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The U.S. State Dept. estimates at least 45,000 to 50,000 women and children are trafficked to the U.S. from other countries by small crime rings and criminal networks.<sup>17</sup> Local and national law enforcement and State Department officials told CIR that they hesitate to quantify the number of women and girls who might be victims of trafficking in Chicago. However one State Department official stated the Chicago area had the characteristics that would make it “very attractive to traffickers,” – an international airport and large immigrant communities.

Organized trafficking networks operate escort services or make use of services already in place. Law enforcement officials also believe that massage parlors are a significant location for girls and women who are being trafficked. According to national law enforcement officials, some prostitution networks operate nationwide, sending women and girls to areas when and where a high demand exists for prostitution – such as conventions and sporting events.

In 1999 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) uncovered a prostitution ring based in Minnesota operating in the entire Midwest, including Illinois. Seventeen indictments of members of the Evans family documented how members of the family coerced and profited from prostituting over 50 women and girls as young as 14 years old. The girls and women were required to keep in contact with cell phones, record every transaction in notebooks, and return all money made.

# A Common Theme in Investigating Prostitution

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## *Sex for drug trade*

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Data obtained from approximately 60 Chicago area substance abuse treatment programs provide the most startling numbers of women and girls involved in prostitution.

Treatment centers funded and licensed by the Illinois Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (OASA) provided substance abuse treatment to 24,618 women statewide in FY 2000. Of these, 19,151 were in Cook County.<sup>18</sup>

CIR interviews with 60 publicly-funded substance abuse treatment providers in the city and suburban Chicago reveal that 60 to 100% of female clients self-disclose having regularly exchanged sex for drugs or money. Treatment staff providing direct services for substance abuse acknowledge that many women do not disclose involvement in prostitution during initial intake procedures, but instead speak of their experiences in group or individual counseling. Every service provider with whom CIR spoke reported that it believed that the number of women and girls involved in exchanging sex for money or other resources was higher than the numbers suggested in self-reports, because the shame and stigma associated with women and girls' participation in prostitution prevent many girls and women from disclosing their involvement.

Service providers consistently stated that more than half of the women do not name the act of exchanging sex for money, drugs, or survival as prostitution, but rather state it is how most or all 'women get by in life.' To address the issue in support groups, one treatment provider refers to the activity as "dating for dollars."

Treatment professionals recognize the reality of prostitution in the lives of female clients. One provider stated, "Most of the women have not had any other skills for making money except prostitution." Women's experiences with prostitution may vary with the seriousness and length of their addiction. Service providers report that a low-income woman who uses drugs on a daily basis will most likely exchange sex to obtain that drug on a daily basis. Someone who uses less frequently may rely less on prostitution.

Research studies vary in determining the onset of addiction and involvement in prostitution. Researchers find that some women become addicted and then turn to prostitution to support that habit, while other women use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate to deal with resulting trauma of prostitution.<sup>19</sup> CIR interviewed service providers who have seen clients who match both findings.

If 60% of women receiving treatment in publicly-funded drug centers regularly turn to prostitution, then 11,491 of these clients would have reported involvement in prostitution in Cook County in FY 2000.

Not all women addicted to alcohol and drugs avail themselves of treatment. According to the state of Illinois, less than ten percent of Illinois residents who are estimated to need treatment actually receive it and five to seven percent of Illinois' total population has addiction problems that could benefit from treatment.<sup>20</sup> We do not know, of course, how many of these persons needing treatment are low-income women who might need to turn to prostitution in order to buy drugs. The small percentage of individuals in treatment means, however, that our approximate figure of 11,491 is likely to be a serious undercount.

Considering this number and employing minimal observation, it becomes clear that the vast majority of exchanges of sex for money or other items of value take place off the street, and as a result, are difficult to detect.

## Conclusion

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As a result of our research, we find that between 400 and 1000 girls and women are involved in on-street prostitution activities and nearly 1400 to 4000 off-street, for a total of 1,800 to 4,000 girls and women. When, however, we begin to deal with the number of females who are regularly exchanging sex for drugs that we have obtained from substance abuse providers the total number rises significantly, to a minimum total of 16,000 women and girls.

Considering the exchange of sex for drugs, our total estimate is at least 16,000 women and girls involved in prostitution activities in the Chicago metropolitan area during any given year, and most likely substantially greater.

With greater awareness and more consistent data collection efforts, we may be able to determine with far more certainty the numbers of women and girls involved in exchanging sex for money and other items of value with far more certainty.

We do not know how many of these 16,000+ women are suffering from violence and the effects of violence and other physical and mental health problems, as well as

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.

## Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Farley and Kelly, 42.

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<sup>6</sup> Donna M. Hughes, "Pimps and Predators on the Internet: Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children," (report, Providence, Rhode Island, 1999), 6. This report is available at [www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw).

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<sup>11</sup> Debra Whitcomb and Julie Eastin, "Joining Forces Against Child Sexual Exploitation: Models for a Multijurisdictional Team Approach," (report, Newton, MA, 1998), 16.

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