



Myths about human trafficking in Israel - המטה למאבק בסחר בנשים ובזנות

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Myth: These women make good money. I wouldn't mind having that kind of income!

Fact: **Trafficking is modern slavery.** The only money makers are the traffickers and pimps.

During their first months of "work", most trafficking victims earn nothing. All profits are passed along to the pimp and trafficker, to repay the cost of their "purchase". Often the initial debt is enhanced and increased immeasurably as the pimps impose fines on these women for perceived "misbehavior". The debt is ever-growing and often impossible to repay. This well-known enslavement tactic is called debt bondage.

Even after they succeed in repaying this debt, women receive only 20 NIS on average per client, while their pimps take in between 100-600 NIS. The trafficking victim is defenseless and vulnerable in her "work place" – she is forced to work through sickness and while menstruating, weekends, and holidays. She "services" 10-15 clients per day, working 14-18 hour days, 7 days a week. 13% of women reported in a comprehensive 2003 study that they received no payment whatsoever.

Myth: She knew exactly what she was coming for, what right does she have to complain now?

Fact: **The majority of trafficking victims did not work as**

prostitutes in their home countries. While many women were aware they would be working in prostitution in Israel, they did not and could not imagine the conditions under which they would be held.

Some of these women are told that they will work as house cleaners, baby sitters or aids for the elderly, while others knew they would be involved in prostitution. However, even a woman who knows she will be working as a prostitute is deceived: she is promised huge earnings in a short time, told she will be free to come and go as she pleases, responsible for her own work schedule. But instead the dream becomes a nightmare: she finds herself alone in a foreign country, financially bound to pimps and traffickers, enslaved and trapped with no rights, a victim of daily threats and violence.

No one would consent to becoming a slave of their own free will. Victims will sometimes “consent” to the initial stage of trafficking because they were misled or deceived by traffickers; other times abject poverty or psychological coercion leads victims to consent. Any “consent”, however, is not really voluntary. That’s why countries around the world, including Israel, have agreed that “consent” of the victim does not justify the traffickers’ actions.

Myth: She can get up and leave whenever she wants.

Fact: **The trafficking victim cannot say no.**

Victims are often physically caged in brothels with guards there to prevent their escape. Most victims have been forbidden to leave by their pimps and traffickers – dangerous criminals who threaten the lives of the victims and their families. Victims also feel that they have nowhere to turn. Most believe that they will be prosecuted as

illegal aliens and put in prison if they turn to the police.

The vast majority of women in prostitution do not want to be there. The average age of women entering prostitution globally is 13. Few seek it out or choose it, and most are desperate to leave it. A 2003 study in the scientific Journal of Trauma Practice found that 89 percent of women in prostitution want to escape prostitution.

“I tried to refuse, asked them to leave me alone, and they said: the word ‘no’ does not exist for you. You are now a walking corpse, you are like our slave – if you refuse, you will die very young, you will not return home. Understand, if you want to live you must work for us”.

— Yelena, from Belarus.

Myth: Trafficking only happens in the seediest of places. The brothels I know would never exploit women that way.

***Fact:* The overwhelming majority of prostitutes in Israel, including those involved in “escort services” and the pornography industry, are trafficking victims.**

It is estimated that over 80% of the women involved in the sex industry in Israel are victims of human trafficking. Hundreds of thousands of women and children are exploited in prostitution around the world each year. They are objectified, treated as cheap labor lacking any dignity or rights. This form of modern slavery is found in every corner of the world. Sadly, Israel is no exception.

Myth: Trafficking victims like it here so much, that they sometimes return even after they've been deported.

***Fact:* Trafficking victims suffer unspeakable harm and irreparable emotional injury. Nearly all victims suffer from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the daily**

abuse they experience.

Trafficking victims are cruelly exploited, raped, beaten and even starved. It is therefore perhaps surprising that some women do in fact return to the cycle of trafficking after they've been deported. Studies have shown that there are two basic reasons for this behavior: (1) they feel that they have no other options (2) they are suffering from Complex Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Women who return to their home countries after being exploited as sex slaves often find that they are shunned by family and friends. They are unwelcome by people who feel disgraced by these women, thus adding severe insult to unspeakable injury. These women become easy bait for criminals who exploit their weakness and send them back into the world of trafficking and sex slavery. Nearly all trafficking victims suffer from Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As a result of the daily trauma inflicted on them, victims focus on the need to survive in horrendous conditions, therefore "disconnecting" – their inner emotional world becomes disassociated from their daily reality and behavior. The brutal trauma they experienced causes them to internalize their role as victim of abuse. The outcome is often a severe lack of self-confidence, loss of trust, low self esteem, and a desire to inflict self-punishment. They have recurring nightmares, emotional distress, memory loss, sleeping and eating disorders, depression and suicidal tendencies. Without proper medical and psychological help, some of the trafficking victims find themselves trapped again and again in the cycle of trafficking.

Myth: There is no great risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases when sleeping with prostitutes. Besides, I used a condom.

Fact: **Men who visit brothels and solicit call girls expose themselves to tremendous public health risks.** They are likely to contract diseases and transmit them to their wives or girlfriends. Trafficking victims are forced to sleep with between 10-15 clients a day on average, 7 days a week. Often women are required to have sex without any contraceptives, according to the client's wishes. Women who work in prostitution are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases daily.

There have also been reported cases of trafficking victims who contracted tuberculosis as a result of the unsanitary conditions in which they were held. Tuberculosis is a deadly and infectious disease transmitted by air.

Who is endangered? Trafficking victims, clients and their wives and girlfriends.

Myth: Only lonely and unsatisfied men visit these brothels.

Fact: **Clients come from all walks of life.**

Clients of trafficking victims represent a cross-section of Israeli society. Men from all backgrounds, ethnicities and ages exploit trafficking victims every single day. Many clients are married with children. Prominent clientele are bachelor parties and even young boys, receiving a Bar Mitzva present from their father! Most clients are not aware that the women are trafficking victims and believe they are engaged in prostitution of their own free will. In reality, the overwhelming majority of women working in prostitution are victims of sexual slavery.

It is estimated that there are 1 million visits to brothels in Israel, every month. That means 12,000,000 visits a year! In such a small country, can you be certain you don't know any of these men??

For more information about clients, read the report on Clients in Israel published by the Hotline for Migrant Workers and the Hebrew University Clinic on Human Trafficking in the Reports section of the website

Myth: Every "real" man visits a brothel once in a while. It even improves relationships.

Fact: Purchasing sexual services has a negative effect on other relationships.

Men who visit Israeli brothels are likely to be exploiting victims of human trafficking without knowing it. Does being a "real" man mean abusing another human being?

These women smile because otherwise they will be punished by their pimps. But after the clients leave, they are left with the pain and humiliation of the sexual abuse they have suffered.

Prof. Sven-Axel Mansson: "Men who buy sexual services develop greater difficulties in holding normal relationships with women. In addition, there are more divorces and break-ups among men who purchase sexual favors. ...prostitution does not solve the men's problems, on the contrary – it increases their fear of developing normal relationships with women. Among couples, it serves to mask the man's true needs and even more so those of his wife, since turning to a prostitute comes instead of dialogue."

Myth: Israel takes all necessary measures to combat this phenomenon.

Fact: There is no doubt that there are those in the Police, Prosecutors' office, Knesset and the Courts who make an effort to solve the problem. But is it enough?

- The 2005 US State Department Report on Human Trafficking rated Israel among countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.
- Israel is constantly fighting for its security but its southern border with Egypt is permeable and women are smuggled through the Sinai every night. Is this how the IDF protects our borders?
- The problem of Human Trafficking is not ranked high enough on the national agenda. Insufficient resources are allocated towards eradicating the phenomenon. This is despite the fact that trafficking is directly linked to organized crime; it is a form of societal terrorism which goes unnoticed as it infiltrates our homes and streets through the Southern border.
- In a 2003 study, 44% of the victims interviewed testified that policemen were among their clients in the brothels, 13% talked about friendly relations between cops and pimps, 3 women even reported seeing monies transferred from pimps to policemen. The police know the whereabouts of most brothels, escort services and discrete apartments and have the legal power to close them down – but “business” goes on as usual.
- Despite the recent passing of a penal law sentencing traffickers to a maximum of 16 years imprisonment, many cases are settled in plea bargains and lenient sentences.
- The State of Israel considers trafficking victims illegal aliens and is focused mainly on their deportation rather than on taking responsibility for their emotional well being and legal care. Is this the sort of moral example our Jewish State wishes to set when relating to its “ger” (stranger in the land)?

Myth: There is nothing that I can do about it.

Fact: Everyone has the power to help stop this atrocity.

One of the most important ways you can help is to educate others. The sex industry grows in response to demand. If people refuse to be “consumers” of sexual exploitation, less trafficking victims will be “imported” and exploited. By educating others about the exploitation going on at brothels in the country, you can help eliminate the demand for these “services”.

Never underestimate your potential to make a positive change. It is

our responsibility to stop this atrocity.