

EXIT: Challenges and Needs of Lebanese and Syrian Women in Prostitution



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The Global
Women's Institute

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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Disclaimer

The views, the interpretation of findings, and the policy recommendations expressed in this report belong solely to Kafa, the author, and the principal investigator, and not necessarily to the American University of Beirut and/or to the George Washington University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Study

This study seeks to understand the risks and the challenges faced by Lebanese and Syrian women in prostitution that are living in Lebanon, including those that have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The study assesses their needs and identify gaps and reforms that aim at protecting and assisting prostituted women, including supporting them escaping prostitution should they wish to do so.

The study adopted a qualitative approach and the results were based on semi-structured interviews with 19 women in prostitution (9 Syrian, 8 Lebanese, 1 Palestinian, and 1 Jordanian) as well as focus group discussions with 13 service providers from local and international organizations operating in Lebanon, and interviews with 27 key informants across relevant ministries, law enforcement authorities, UN agencies, local and international nonprofit organizations.

Key Findings

Prostitution is Another Form of Violence Against Women

The study found that prostitution is associated with violence and vulnerabilities before women enter prostitution, and also during their time in prostitution. Prostitution is a form of male violence which is perpetrated by sex buyers – almost all men – and by pimps and traffickers, against predominately women. Prostitution is also in itself violence as sex buyers impose unwanted sexual acts on women through the force of money.

Prostitution is Not a Choice

Women's entry into prostitution reflect their lack of alternatives for survival. Most of the women in this study entered prostitution either as children or as young adults some as early as 14. They did not make a "choice" to enter prostitution because they wanted to or because they had planned to do so. They were either pimped out or trafficked, or they were groomed by people linked to the sex trade including sex buyers. More than half of women interviewed were pimped by their husbands or sold by husbands to pimps. When not recruited by others, these women were acceding to the abuse and exploitation of prostitution rather making a choice.

I reached a point when I could only give my children fried onions to eat. I reached a point where I could no longer feed my children.

When people see you that vulnerable and alone, they can do to you whatever they want to do.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 62, divorced, 11 children

Violence and Childhood Abuse as Risks Factors

The study highlighted that previous experience of violence and childhood abuse are very common in the lives of prostituted women, and may be considered as risk factors for falling into prostitution. Women have been raped, incested, and subjected to molestation and sexual abuse. They also have been victims of physical abuse, forced and early marriage, and have experienced psychological and emotional abuse largely by male family members or intimate partners.

He [my cousin] molested me. When he did so, I did not realize that it was sexual molestation. I felt something was wrong but could not comprehend it totally...I went back home crying, and hid underneath the bed.

Salwa (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 30, divorced, 3 children

Women in Prostitution Face Multiple Risks

During their time in prostitution, women reported being exposed to multiple risks and abuse that were perpetrated primarily by sex buyers. These risks include physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, theft, threats, unwanted pregnancies, and exposure to drugs, and HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Women also reported being under the constant risk of arrest and sexual assault by law enforcement officers.

I went out with a client, he raped me from behind. He hit me, stole my money, and he penetrated me from behind. I could have died.

Layla (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 36, divorced, 3 children

Circumstances of Entry into Prostitution of the 19 Interviewed Women

11 recruited by pimps and traffickers

7 groomed by people linked to the sex trade

1 driven into prostitution by hunger and poverty

To face these risks, women in prostitution are in a perpetual mode of self-defense. They try to develop strategies to reduce – often vainly – the violence and the harms of prostitution inflicted on them by sex buyers and pimps. The use of alcohol and drugs, as well as feelings of numbness and normalization are just a few coping strategies and tactics detected in the narratives of the women.

Women in Prostitution Face Numerous Challenges and Barriers to Exiting

Women face numerous challenges while in prostitution, many of which act as barriers for them to exit. They reported that the principal barrier for escaping prostitution was their inability to find work. Lack of housing was found to be another major challenge and a push factor into prostitution and a barrier to exiting. More than 80% of the women interviewed in this study were homeless once or more in their lives. Similarly, debt and debt bondage constituted a driver to prostitution and a barrier to exiting. Women reported having been, or currently are, in debt to pay rent and food. Moreover, coercion, violence, and control exerted by traffickers and pimps is a common challenge that could keep women in prostitution for many years. Criminalization of the victims of prostitution and trafficking in Lebanon and the often repeated arrests pose another major challenge for them to exiting. Mental health harms resulting from prostitution, including post-traumatic syndrome diseases (PTSDs), form also a barrier. Almost all of the women reported said they that they felt depressed and/or lonely and some revealed that they attempted to commit suicide. Stigma is an additional obstacle:

Prostitution is destructive for your reputation and it will stigmatize you forever. All the time, wherever you go and whatever you do, you are a hooker. This is the nicest word they tell you. I will never forget this word.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Women in Prostitution Need Multiple, Tailored, and Long Term Support

Prevention measures, legal protection, and assistance for victims are severely lacking or nonexistent for women in prostitution in Lebanon. These women need tailored services and support that enable them, to first overcome the risks and challenges of being in prostitution, and second, to exit. The exit is not linear process or a one-time decision. For some women, exiting prostitution can happen quickly and permanently; but for many, it is a long process during which they may re-enter prostitution multiple times. Women in this study have reported needing multiple forms of support when seeking to exit. These include basic needs – in particular housing and employment – health care, and protection from abuse.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Government of Lebanon

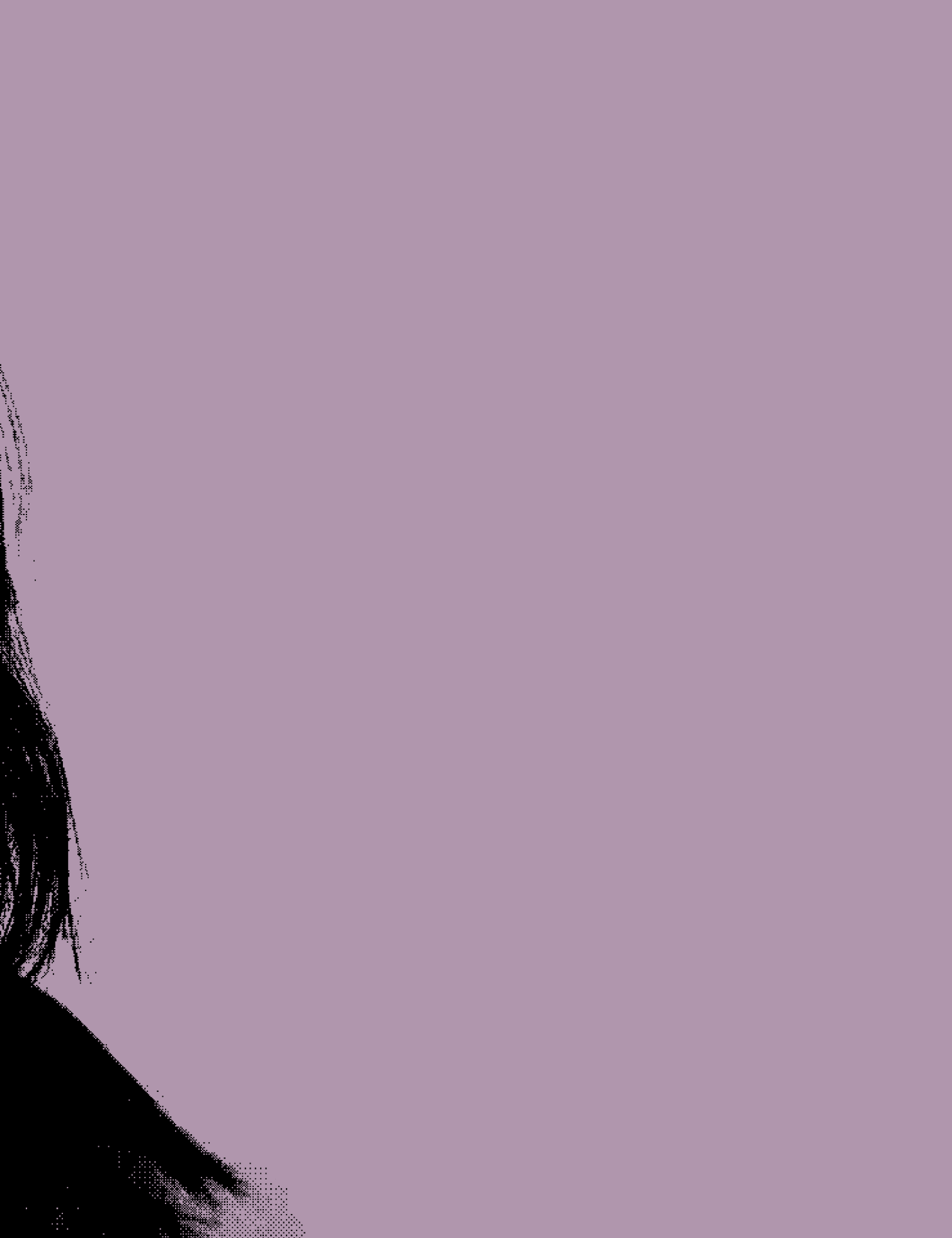
The government of Lebanon must acknowledge that prostitution is a form of male violence against women. The government therefore, needs to repeal all criminal measures that penalize prostituted persons (in particular Article 523 of the Lebanese Penal Code) and offer them support and exit assistance. It also needs to criminalize the act of purchasing sex by introducing appropriate fines and penalties. In parallel, the government needs to strengthen the implementation of the 2011 Anti-Trafficking Law and improve its protection and prevention measures.

Recommendations for UN Agencies and International Organizations

Relevant international organizations and UN agencies need to recognize prostitution as a form of violence against women and include it in their agenda and among their list of programmatic priorities. They need to allocate more funding for exit programs and support services for women who are prostituted and/or trafficked, and support prostitution prevention and advocacy initiatives. UN agencies in particular, need to respect UN agreed language and stance about prostitution which is defined by international human rights law as “incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person.”

Recommendations for Service Providers

Prostitution, long term tailored support, and exit programs for prostituted and trafficked persons need to be part of the services offered to victims of gender-based and sexual violence. Service providers in contact with prostituted women need to be knowledgeable about the multifaceted aspects of prostitution and its linkages with other forms violence against women and girls. They need to be trained on delivering trauma informed care. Services need to be offered to all women in prostitution unconditionally, and not only to those who wish to exit. Service providers need to help women understand the links between prostitution and violence so that they do not blame themselves for their own victimization. Finally, service providers need to offer support with the objective of serving women in their quest to regain power over their lives.



CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Context of the Study

In the late 1970's, Lebanon moved from a country that legalized prostitution – according to the 1931 Law on Safeguarding Public Health from Prostitution – to a country where prostitution became nominally prohibited. However, and despite prohibition, it is estimated that several thousand women are involved in the sex trade in Lebanon, many of them are trafficked¹ and many are migrants or refugees.

The Lebanese law penalizes prostituted persons thus adding to the harms they have already suffered in the sex trade. The law also falls short at protecting them, including victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (henceforth referred to as trafficking) who are mostly women and girls. Prostituted women are generally treated as criminals and receive little to no protection from the government, which fails to acknowledge the violence and exploitation inherent to prostitution and accompanying trafficking.

The “super-nightclubs”² sector is a major platform for prostitution activities in Lebanon. Over the past two decades, the super-nightclub owners and pimps who control this sector have recruited tens of thousands of migrant women into prostitution, primarily women from Eastern European countries. Women enter Lebanon via the “Artist Visa”, a special visa and residence scheme regulated by the Directorate of General Security (DGS)³ that channels women into prostitution under the guise of entertainers or dancers. The artist visa scheme is associated with discriminatory DGS regulations and exploitive practices by club owners that together result in withholding the passports and wages of the artists, placing them under debt bondage, restricting their movement, and putting them in immediate jeopardy to physical and sexual assault.⁴ Records of the DGS indicate that 5,343⁵ women entered Lebanon between 2016 and 2018 under the artist visa scheme (a yearly average of 1,781) and were employed by super-nightclubs.

The number of women involved in street prostitution, temporary brothels, massagers parlors, and cell phone prostitution,⁶ is estimated to be larger than super-nightclub prostitution.⁷ These types of prostitution include Lebanese women and also women from other nationalities, especially Syrian women who are among those most vulnerable to being harmed by the sex trade.

The Syrian war heavily impacted Syrian women and children. Since the start of the war in 2011, approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees escaped to Lebanon,⁸ 81% of whom were women and children.⁹ The vulnerability of Syrian women and girls to sexual exploitation was exacerbated by protracted displacement, declining emergency response funds, and restrictions on refugees' legal status in Lebanon. Humanitarian organizations and reports issued by the

1 Sigma Huda, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights aspects of the victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Mission to Lebanon (7 to 16 February 2005), 2006.

2 “Super nightclubs” are similar to cabaret and strip clubs. Only men are allowed to enter these clubs where they are offered migrant women presented as artists, or entertainers or dancers. These women are prostituted by the owners/pimps of the super nightclubs.

3 The DGS (Directorate of the General Security) is the Lebanese immigration authority.

4 United States Department of State, 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, USA, July 2015, p. 219.

5 Records communicated to Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation by the Directorate of General Security, Lebanon, July 2019.

6 Known as “delivery prostitution” in Lebanon.

7 A 2019 study by Connecting Research to Development (CRD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the National AIDS Program (NAP), An Integrated Bio-Behavioral Surveillance Study among Men Who Have Sex with Men and Commercial Sex Workers, estimated that there were approximately 4,200 persons in prostitution in Lebanon in 2018. Deducting the number of incoming Artists - estimated at 1,700 in 2018, the number of prostituted persons outside the super nightclub sector stands around 2,500.

International Rescue Committee, Caritas, Freedom Fund, and Harvard University note that prostitution, “survival sex”,¹⁰ sexual exploitation, and trafficking are observed among Syrian refugee women inside and outside of the settlement camps.¹¹ One report mentions that Syrian women inside refugee camps in Lebanon engage in prostitution “to ensure survival and residency within the internal settlements that are ruled by the Shawish - the “leader” of the camp and the most powerful decision maker.”¹² Consecutive Trafficking In Persons (TIP) reports by the US State Department indicate that Syrian women are being trafficked to Lebanon for prostitution, in some cases via the camouflage of marriage or through fraudulent promises of work.¹³

Police records show that Syrian women may be trapped in prostitution much more frequently than women from other nationalities. In 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, Syrian women comprised consecutively 63%, 50%, 63%, and 50% of the total number of women arrested by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) for engaging in prostitution activities.¹⁴ This reflects an increase from the number of Syrian women arrested by the ISF for engaging in prostitution between 2002 and 2011, during which time the share of Syrians averaged 30%.¹⁵ The numbers of Syrian women arrested for prostitution and transferred to the DGS detention center for charges related to their residency, have also increased over the years since the start of the Syrian crisis. As shown in the table below, the number of arrested Syrian women followed an upward trend since 2011. The figure decreased in 2016, largely due to unmasking by Lebanese authorities of the “Chez Maurice” trafficking network. The traffickers had imprisoned 75 Syrian women inside two hotels 20 kilometers north of Beirut, between several months and several years. The women were threatened, beaten, and tortured by their traffickers, and coerced to serve sex buyers more than 10 times every day.¹⁶ The authorities justifiably declared that these women were victims, and thus none of them were detained.

Women in Prostitution Arrested by the Directorate of General Security between 2011 and 2018

	Women who are arrested for prostitution and detained at the DGS	
	Number of all nationalities	Number & percentage of Syrian women
2011	147 (100%)	44 (30%)
2012	109 (100%)	39 (36%)
2013	115 (100%)	79 (69%)
2014	116 (100%)	65 (56%)
2015	244 (100%)	189 (77%)
2016	355 (100%)	154 (43%)
2017	245 (100%)	143 (58%)
2018	289 (100%)	164 (57%)

Source: Directorate of General Security, Lebanon, July 2019

⁸ The Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update).

⁹ Nasser Yassin, 101 facts and figures on the Syrian refugee crisis, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2019, p.20.

¹⁰ Some of these reports describe the exchange of sex acts for food and shelter as «survival sex» which we note is just one of the many words that minimize or even disappear the harms of prostitution per se. There are many other such terms that encourage the witness to minimize the harm, such as the commonly used term sex work which names prostitution as work rather than a form of violent abuse. These terms will be discussed in more details in chapters 7 and 8.

¹¹ See Olivier Peyroux, Trafficking in Human Beings in Conflict and Post-Conflicts Situation, Caritas, June 2015. p. ; International Rescue Committee, Syrian Women & Girls: Fleeing death, facing ongoing threats and humiliation (A gender-based violence rapid assessment), August 2012, pp. 3 and 7; Susan Bartels, Kathleen Hamill, Running out of Time, Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University, August 2014, pp. 42-44; Katharine Jones, Struggling to Survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, The Freedom Fund, 2016, p.12; Lorraine Charles and Kate Denman, Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: the Plight of Women and Children, Journal of International Women's Studies, 2013, 14(5), pp. 96-111.

¹² CRD, IOM, and NAP, id., p.19.

¹³ Section on Lebanon in the United States Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report, 2019, 2017, and 2015, USA.

¹⁴ Records provided to Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation by the Anti-Trafficking and Protection of the Morals Bureau, Internal Security Forces (ISF), July 2019.

¹⁵ Records provided to Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation by Bureau of Anti-Trafficking and Protection of the Morals Bureau (previously the Bureau of Vice and Morals Protection), Internal Security Forces (ISF), 2011.

¹⁶ For more details see The Guardian article: Kareem Shaheen, Dozens of Syrians forced into sexual slavery in derelict Lebanese house, April 30, 2016.

Despite the fact that many women are trapped in prostitution (and even more are at high risk for prostitution), nonetheless specialized programs and services in Lebanon are largely nonexistent. Service programs for victims of different types of “sexual and gender-based violence”¹⁷ (SGBV) exist in Lebanon (such as domestic violence, child sexual abuse, rape, and early/forced marriage), however prostitution and trafficking are not priorities among SGBV service providers. The lack of dedicated support programs coupled with the criminalization of prostituted persons leave women in prostitution and trafficking victims without any meaningful assistance and redress. These legal and service deficiencies prevent victims, in the event that they want to, from escaping prostitution.

1.2 Study Questions, Objectives, and Guiding Framework

This study assesses the needs of women in prostitution in Lebanon, with a particular focus on Syrian women. It aims to better identify how women in prostitution, including victims of trafficking, can be adequately supported, and in particular, how they can be supported in escaping prostitution, should they wish to do so. The study examines factors that contribute to women’s entry into prostitution, the risks they face, and the individual and systemic challenges that are obstacles to exiting prostitution.

13 Ultimately, this research study intends to inform programming of the Lebanese government and international and local organizations working on gender issues to address the needs of prostituted and trafficked women, including the design of effective services and exit programs. The report aims to inform law and policy makers about needed reforms to comprehensively address prostitution and trafficking.

The study builds on Kafa’s previous and ongoing efforts to support prostituted women and to bring change to existing policies, laws, and mentalities. Kafa conducted the first study in the Arab region on sex buyers with the aim of learning about their perceptions about women in prostitution and their motivations and justifications for buying sex.¹⁸ Kafa also produced the first training handbook for educating youth in general, and men and boys in particular, about prostitution and sex trafficking. The handbook encourages men and boys not to normalize prostitution and educates them about the ways that sex purchase contributes to sexual exploitation.¹⁹ Over the past several years, Kafa has provided relevant services to hundreds of women in prostitution. These include operating a 24/7 shelter for prostituted women and an outreach program for incarcerated women who were arrested for prostitution-related charges. Kafa also engages in public awareness programs about the realities of prostitution and the oppressive social structures that lead to and perpetuate prostitution and sexual exploitation. Additionally, Kafa has increased the capacity of hundreds of law enforcement officers to address the challenge of systems of prostitution, including educating officers about the basic

¹⁷ SGBV is terminology used by the UN and other international organizations working on gender programming in Lebanon, including programs aimed at assisting Syrian refugees.

¹⁸ Ghada Jabbour, *Exploring The Demand For Prostitution: What Male Buyers Say About Their Motives, Practices, And Perceptions*, Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation, 2014.

¹⁹ Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation, *Training handbook on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking (in Arabic)*, 2019.

principles of human rights-based and victim-centered investigations with victims of prostitution and trafficking. Kafa has provided educational seminars to hundreds of frontline and humanitarian workers on this issue. Moreover, Kafa continues to advocate for an abolitionist policy and legal framework that decriminalizes persons in prostitution, provides them with protection and exit support, and shifts the criminal burden to all profiteers of prostitution, including pimps, facilitators, traffickers, and sex buyers.²⁰

Kafa's work with prostituted women and advocacy on their behalf over the years has helped articulate a policy position on prostitution which guided this study. This position is centered around the following core beliefs:

Prostitution is a gendered system where women and girls comprise the vast majority of persons bought into prostitution, and where sex buyers are almost exclusively men. The gender dynamics in the prostitution transaction are deeply unequal with those who hold power, entitled attitudes, finances, and the right to make a choice on the one hand, and the person who needs food, shelter, and cash for their own and their family's survival, on the other hand.

Prostitution is at the intersection of different forms of inequalities; it recruits the most vulnerable, the poorest, and the most marginalized women in society.

Prostitution is a practice that is often socially normalized and is wrongly presented as “inevitable” and a “necessity” to satisfy the biological needs and sexuality of men. Or it is presented as a “profession”, a “choice”, or even a platform of empowerment for women. Prostitution is falsely presented as an equal and regular transaction between consenting adults, while in reality it is a form of domination over and exploitation of the vulnerability of prostituted persons.

Prostitution is a form of violence against women. It comes with a great deal of sexual, physical, and emotional violence and it has short and long-term harmful impacts on the lives of prostituted persons. A number of international human rights law instruments have recognized prostitution as incompatible with human dignity²¹, and as a human rights violation, and consequently have prohibited the exploitation of the prostitution of others (including procuring, pimping, and managing brothels).²²

Prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation are interlinked. Prostitution is the end point or goal of trafficking, and the vast majority of prostituted persons are or have been under the control of a pimp and/or trafficker. According to estimates from eighteen sources, on average 84% of adult women in prostitution are pimped or trafficked.²³ Both trafficking and prostitution target the same women, who later are sold to and bought by the same sex buyers. Repeated acts of being bought by sex buyers have similar impacts on women in prostitution and trafficked women. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (2004-2008) illustrates well this connection between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation: “[F]or the most part, prostitution as actually practiced

²⁰ This legal approach is also known as the Swedish or Nordic or Abolitionist or Equality Model, or Sex Buyers Law, and was first introduced by Sweden in 1999 (Law That Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services of January 1, 1999).

²¹ Preamble to the United Nations Convention, Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949: “Whereas prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person...”

²² Grégoire Théry, Prostitution under International Human Rights Law: An Analysis of States' Obligations and the Best Ways to Implement Them, Coalition for Abolishing Prostitution International, February 2016.

²³ Melissa Farley, Kenneth Franzblau, and M. Alexis Kennedy, Online Prostitution and Trafficking, 77 (3), Albany Law Review 1039-1094, 2014.

in the world usually does satisfy the elements of trafficking. It is rare that one finds a case in which the path to prostitution and/or a person's experiences within prostitution do not involve, at the very least, an abuse of power and/or an abuse of vulnerability. Power and vulnerability in this context must be understood to include power disparities based on gender, race, ethnicity and poverty. Put simply, the road to prostitution and life within "the life" is rarely one marked by empowerment or adequate options."²⁴

²⁴ Sigma Huda, Integration of the Human Rights of Women and a Gender Perspective: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Aspects of the Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2006, para. 42.

Terms Used in this Report and what is Meant by them

Prostitution (the act of or the practice of) refers to the act of giving payment for sexual access to a person, in lieu of obtaining full and free consent to engage in a sexual act, whether payment is done through offering money, shelter, food, or other items. This definition makes visible the key role of sex buyers in the system and rejects definitions that focus on the idea that women or persons would be "selling sex".

Prostitution also refers to a system (**the system of prostitution**) that allows, normalizes, and organizes the purchase of sexual acts from persons (typically women and girls) by sex buyers (who are almost exclusively men). This term includes pimps, traffickers, sex buyers, prostituted persons, and the whole society.

The **prostitution industry** includes all forms of prostitution (including pornography which is filmed prostitution) and is the commercialization of the prostitution of a vast number of women and girls. It includes those who exploit and benefit from the commercialization of prostituted persons, but also the laws and policies that regulate it and allow states to be complicit with and benefit from this industry.

"Prostituted women" and **"women in prostitution"** are used to highlight the fact that they are the victims of a system, the system of prostitution. They are victims of predators in this system who benefit from the prostitution of others (pimps, traffickers, and sex buyers) and of the whole system that exists to exploit them. This terminology does not label women according to what harmed them ("prostitutes") and avoids presenting prostitution as the main trait that defines them.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The data for this qualitative study was collected over a period of four months (from May through July 2019 and in October 2019). The study used semi-structured interviews with women in prostitution, interviews and focus group discussions with a range of practitioners and other professionals with direct knowledge of, and/or direct contact with women in prostitution, and an online survey with SGBV service providers.

The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the American University of Beirut (AUB). The protocol was based on guidelines published by the World Health Organization, the Global Women's Institute, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.²⁵

Fifty-nine participants were interviewed out of which 19 women who were currently or previously in prostitution (the target group of this study). In addition, the research team interviewed 27 key informants across relevant ministries, law enforcement authorities, UN agencies, local and international nonprofit organizations, and 13 focus group discussion participants from local and international SGBV service providers operating in Lebanon.

2.1 Recruitment of Participants and Sample

Women in prostitution are a vulnerable and hard-to-reach population. They are involved in a dangerous and taboo sector and are often controlled by others. Given the difficulty in reaching this population, the research team recruited and interviewed women at female prisons where they were serving sentences for engaging in prostitution activities. The research team also obtained referrals by two nonprofit organizations providing services to women in prostitution. The interviews were conducted at the offices of these organizations. The interview sites shielded women from possible interference by sex buyers, pimps and traffickers, and reduced risks of participating in the study.

Prior to conducting interviews with women in prison, the researchers secured approval from the judiciary and the ministry of interior to access the prisons and met with the director of the prisons and the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) operating inside the prison to explain the study's objectives and protocol.

In total, 33 women were recruited to participate in this study, 24 of which were interviewed. Of these 24 interviews, 19 interviews were completed and five interviews were disqualified because the

²⁵ Cathy Zimmerman, *Who Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women*, 2003; The Global Women's Institute, *Gender-Based Violence Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation with Refugee and Conflict-Affected Populations*, 2017; Mary Ellsberg, and Lory Heise, *Researching violence against women: A practical guide for researchers and activists*, World Health Organization, 2005; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Toolkit to combat trafficking in persons*, 2008, p.292.

respondents stated – shortly after giving their consent – that they were never involved in prostitution. The 19 interviewees included five incarcerated women interviewed at the prisons of Baabda, Verdun, and Tripoli, and 14 women interviewed at the offices of Dar al Amal²⁶ and Kafa – the two local organizations that helped the research team recruit women in prostitution.

Response Rate of Women in Prostitution

	Women recruited	Interviews conducted	Interviews completed
Inside Baabda, Verdun, and Tripoli prisons	14	5	4
Outside prisons through NGOs referrals	19	19	15
Total women interviewed	33	24	19

Two versions of a semi-structured interview guide were developed. One version was designed exclusively for interviews in prison and included questions related to women’s arrest and period of incarceration. Both interviews included closed and open-ended questions divided into the following five content areas: Profile and background of the women; their circumstances of entry into prostitution; the risks and challenges they faced; their needs; and their perceptions towards society, themselves, and others.

Key Informants (KI) interviews were conducted with major actors in Lebanon who are knowledgeable about the topic and interact with women in prostitution and victims of sexual exploitation, including Syrian women refugees. Twenty-seven KI interviews²⁷ were conducted with senior officials and staff in Lebanese ministries, UN agencies, and local and international organizations operating in Lebanon. Interviews with KI covered their work in relation to prostitution and trafficking, assessed their views about protection and prevention efforts in Lebanon, and solicited their opinions about the needs of prostituted women, especially Syrian refugee women.

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with 13 senior staff at international and local NGOs that provide services to SGBV survivors, including Syrian refugees.²⁸ The FGDs, which lasted about 1.5 hours, queried participants’ observations regarding the extent to which prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation exist, especially among Syrian women refugees. The FGDs also solicited the participants’ views regarding what they saw as typical trafficked women and challenges they faced. Participants were asked about the gaps in the protection programs and services in Lebanon, and the best models of intervention and services that should to be offered to women in prostitution.

The 23-item online survey was implemented with the online tool LimeSurvey. The survey was disseminated to approximately 35 NGOs

²⁶ Dar al Amal is one of the oldest grass-roots organizations supporting women in prostitution in Lebanon. More information about Dar al Amal is found on their website: <http://www.dar-alamal.org/>.

²⁷ Refer to Annex 1 for a list of Key Informants’ interviews.

²⁸ Refer to Annex 2 for a list of FGDs’ participants.

that are part the United Nations Sexual and Gender-based Violence Taskforce listserve. The survey sought to map existing services provided by SGBV service providers in Lebanon who serve both Syrian refugees and local communities.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic except for a small number of KI interviews, which were in English. Interviews were recorded when participants consented; more precisely recorded interviews were conducted with seven women in prostitution who were not serving a prison sentence, 10 KIs, and participants of two focus groups. Data was coded, entered and analyzed using Dedoose, a software that supports qualitative data entry in both English and Arabic.

2.2 Ethical Considerations

Given the risks women in prostitution could face because of their participation in the study, and given the vulnerability of incarcerated people, the research team took several precautions, which are outlined in the following paragraphs, to protect women.

The research team conducted a two-step process for recruiting women in prison. First, the team held voluntary group information sessions with women incarcerated for prostitution. After that, a 48-hour reflection period was granted before the team went back to prison to interview participants who volunteered. At Dar al Amal and Kafa, social workers or psychologists informed potential interviewees about the objectives of the research several days before the interview, thereby allowing participants more reflection time about their decision to participate in the study.

Interviewees provided informed consent and the research team stressed the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, the anonymity of the women, and the confidentiality of the information revealed. The research team did not collect the full names or other identifying information from interviewees, and used pseudonyms in this report. The team specifically advised women to refrain from participating in the study if they felt that their participation would endanger them in any way, for example, from pimps. Women were asked to notify the team if they experience any negative emotions, distress, or feel uncomfortable following the interview. Psycho-social support was made available either through Kafa's psychologist who accompanied the team to the prisons, or via the on-call psychologist available on site at Kafa and Dar al Amal.

Interviews conducted in the prisons occurred after visiting hours and took place in a relatively private space. Finally, recorded interviews were deleted after they were transcribed and all data collected was stored in a safe place that could only be accessed by the research team.

2.3 Challenges and Limitations

The research team expected to interview a greater number of incarcerated women for prostitution related charges. However, other than those interviewed, no new women with these charges were incarcerated during the study period.²⁹ Since the study does not deal with detention conditions or criminal justice issues per se, the findings remain valid. Moreover, the experiences, attitudes, and views of women inside or outside of prison were similar. Also, most of the women interviewed outside prison had been previously incarcerated. While this research provides valuable information on the experience of prostituted women in Lebanon including the experiences of Syrian women, it does not claim that the responses are representative of all women in prostitution in Lebanon. Since the study's intended focus is on Syrian women, it did not cover women employed in super night-clubs' prostitution – which according to the current legal system, cannot be Syrian. These women recruited via the artist visa scheme, are isolated in government-designated hotels and they are inaccessible to the research team for interviews.

The participation rate of the online survey was low despite the fact that the deadline was extended twice and reminders were communicated to encourage additional responses. The survey was accessed 61 times, but only 13 questionnaires were initiated. Out of these 13, only seven were completed, of which five were completed by staff from the same organization. Because the online survey data was obviously non-representative and the number of participants was so small, the survey's results were not included in the analysis. One reason that may have dissuaded organizations from filling the survey is because the questions focused on prostitution and trafficking related services which they do not usually provide.

Despite these limitations, the study collected sufficient data to permit conclusions regarding the current needs of women in prostitution, the risks and challenges they face, and the gaps in services and support available to them. These findings intend to offer guidance to advocacy and service programming for local and international organizations, as well as for the Lebanese government.

²⁹ The police stopped arresting women throughout the duration of the study given that the central detention center was being remodeled.

This study was funded through a capacity sharing project of the Global Women's Institute (GWI) at the George Washington University. GWI aligns with women's rights organizations and GBV service providers to support locally-led, practitioner-informed GBV research, monitoring and evaluation in humanitarian settings. In 2018, Kafa staff attended a capacity sharing workshop held by GWI and the Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at Lebanese American University, focused on best practices for research and evaluation of GBV programs organized around an associated manual and toolkit.³⁰ The workshop participants identified the need to safely gathering data on trafficking and prostitution to better meet their needs was one of the learning gaps. After a competitive call for concepts, Kafa's proposal was selected for funding, as well as dedicated technical accompaniment and support from GWI throughout the research process.

³⁰ The Global Women's Institute, Gender-Based Violence Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation with Refugee and Conflict-Affected Populations, 2017.

CHAPTER THREE: PROSTITUTION UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND LEBANESE LAWS

3.1 States Obligations under International Human Rights Law

International human rights law considers prostitution as incompatible with human dignity, and prohibits the “exploitation of prostitution of others”, meaning profiting from the prostitution of another person.

The 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others states in its preamble that “... prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person...”.³¹ The 1949 Convention calls for suppressing the prostitution of others, and calls upon states to punish the person who:

- “Procures, entices or leads away, for purposes of prostitution, another person, even with the consent of that person. (article 1)
- “Exploits the prostitution of another person, even with the consent of that person.” (article 1)
- “Keeps or manages, or knowingly finances or takes part in the financing of a brothel.” (article 2)
- “Knowingly lets or rents a building or other place or any part thereof for the purpose of the prostitution of others.” (article 2)

Along the same line, article 6 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires States to “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.”³² This includes among other activities, the suppression of pimping, procuring, and running of brothels as set by the aforementioned 1949 UN Convention.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UNTOC (hereafter “UN Trafficking Protocol”), adopted in 2000, addresses the exploitation of prostitution of others in the context of human trafficking.³³ Article 3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol reads:

- (a) «Trafficking in persons» shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction,

31 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

32 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

33 The Protocol is supplementary to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which Lebanon signed in 2001.

of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered «trafficking in persons» even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) «Child» shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.”

Similar to the 1949 Convention, the UN Trafficking Protocol clearly states that consent of the victim is irrelevant if any of the aforementioned means is used. In other words, a person’s awareness of being recruited into prostitution does not exclude that he/she could be a victim of trafficking. Also, similar to 1949 Convention, the UN Trafficking Protocol defines “exploitation of the prostitution of others” as referring to profiting from the prostitution of another person.³⁴

Under the UN Trafficking Protocol, States are required, among other things, to: criminalize human trafficking; provide protection and assistance to victims; protect the privacy and identity of victims in legal proceedings; implement measures to provide for the recovery of victims, and; establish policies and programs to prevent human trafficking.

One of the preventive measures the Protocol stipulates is the need to address the root causes of human trafficking by addressing the demand for it; Article 9 (5) reads:

“States Parties shall adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking.”

Within the UN system, policy measures taken by then UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan in 2003, to limit and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel, reflect the understanding that prostitution is incompatible with the dignity of the person, and the necessity of prohibiting sexual exploitation and the exploitation of the prostitution of women. These measures explicitly forbid UN personnel and partners from any “exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating,

³⁴ UNODC, Issue paper on the concept of “exploitation” in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, 2015.

degrading or exploitative behaviour”³⁵, and define sexual exploitation as “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”³⁶ Also, the UN Office responsible for investigating staff misconduct has stated that “engaging in sex with prostitutes” is an example of sexual exploitation.³⁷

3.2 Prostitution under Lebanon's Domestic Laws and Regulations

While Lebanon has not ratified the aforementioned 1949 Convention, it has ratified a number of international instruments that prohibit sexual exploitation and trafficking for sexual exploitation, which supersede domestic laws.³⁸ Among the most important of which are CEDAW (accessed in 1997), and the UN Trafficking Protocol (ratified in 2005).

However, Lebanon does not adhere to its international obligations with regards to combating sexual exploitation and protecting affected persons. This section describes the laws and regulations related to prostitution in Lebanon and highlights its gaps and its contradictions with international law. Chapter Seven will address the lack of law enforcement in Lebanon with regards to trafficking and the Lebanese government’s failure to effectively protect victims and take preventive measures to curb trafficking.

During the late 1970s, as Lebanon entered a civil war in 1975, the Lebanese government stopped regulating prostitution according to the 1931 Law on Safeguarding Public Health from Prostitution.³⁹ Brothel licenses were no longer issued. Thereafter, Lebanon gradually moved to a legal framework where all forms of prostitution are de facto prohibited. As a result, article 523 of the chapter “On Incitement to Debauchery and Opposing Public Manner and Morality” of the Penal Code,⁴⁰ which prohibits «unregulated» or «clandestine» prostitution, became the prevailing law. The article stipulates that any person who practices (at that time “secretive”) prostitution shall be sentenced to one month to one year imprisonment and a fine ranging from the minimum wage to three times the minimum wage, and that the same punishment is to be applied to any person who facilitates prostitution. In effect, the person who is exploited in prostitution and persons who profit from that person's exploitation are considered to be equal partners in committing a morally criminal offense, irrespective of the extreme power differential that exists between the two parties. This constitutes a clear contradiction with international law, which calls for the protection of exploited persons and punishment of persons who exploit the prostitution of others.

Articles 524, 525, 526, and 527 of the Lebanese Penal Code penalize the acts of luring, coercing a person into prostitution, and living off the

³⁵ Secretary-General’s Bulletin: Special Measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2003/13, 9 October 2003, Section 3.

³⁶ *Idem*, section 1.

³⁷ UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2008.

³⁸ UNDP, UNFPA, *Gender-Related Laws, Policies and Practices in Lebanon*, Beirut, Lebanon, 2018, p.9-10.

³⁹ The Law on Safeguarding Public Health from Prostitution has been in effect since 1931 when Lebanon was under the French mandate. It was aimed at serving the interests of the French military. Its primary objective was to control diseases and keep prostitution invisible and isolated from the outside world. Although not currently applied by law enforcement authorities and by the judiciary, this law still on the books and should be removed.

⁴⁰ The Lebanese penal code was introduced through Legislative Decree No. 340, issued on 1 March 1943. Articles related to prostitution are listed in Section 1 (On Incitement to Debauchery) of Chapter 2 “On Incitement to Debauchery and Opposing Public Manner and Morality” of the Penal Code.

earnings of the prostitution of others. The penalties related to these articles range from one month to two years of imprisonment, and can be increased in case the offense occurs within a family. The purchase of sex acts is not mentioned anywhere in the Penal Code, thus making it legal to purchase sexual access to persons in Lebanon.

Despite the prohibition of prostitution in Lebanon, the government, and particularly the DGS, implicitly allow prostitution to occur through its regulation of the very lucrative “Artist Visa” scheme and super-nightclubs. Large numbers of migrant women are recruited by traffickers who use the artist visa scheme. Under these regulations, women’s freedom of movement is restricted, their right to withdraw from the deceptive contract is denied, and they are required to pay back super-nightclub owners the costs of their recruitment which is memorialized in a three-way contract between trafficking victim/artists, their traffickers and the DGS. This visa scheme and its accompanying regulations enable violent and abusive practices, including debt bondage, pimping, and trafficking. Not only is the Lebanese government failing to protect women who enter the country under this visa system, but the Government is actively violating women’s fundamental human rights by making them even more vulnerable to their traffickers. This artiste visa scheme and corresponding regulations are in clear contradiction with Lebanon’s anti-trafficking law.

In 2011, Lebanon passed Law No. 164 on the “Punishment for the Crime of Trafficking in Persons” (referred to as the Anti-Trafficking Law),⁴¹ which criminalized human trafficking. The law includes a definition of human trafficking in accordance with that of the UN Trafficking Protocol. According to Article 586 of the Lebanese Penal Code, human trafficking is defined as:

“luring, transporting, receiving, detaining, or finding shelter for a person by using force or threatening to use force against someone who is subject to one’s power; by kidnapping or deceiving another person; by using one’s power against another person or exploiting that person’s vulnerability; by giving or receiving sums of money or benefits; and by utilizing such methods against another person who is subject to perpetrator’s authority for the purpose of exploiting said other person or facilitating his exploitation by others.”
(article 586.1 of Lebanese Penal Code)

The same article states that “[t]he consent of a victim shall be given no consideration in case any of the methods shown in this Article are utilized.”

The penalties for human trafficking imposed by the Anti-Trafficking Law are among the harshest punishments stipulated in Lebanese criminal law. Depending on the circumstances of the case, traffickers could face imprisonment of five and up to 15 years.

While the adoption of the Anti-Trafficking Law in Lebanon is a step

forward in addressing the crime of trafficking, the law has many loopholes that limit its effective implementation. When adopted in 2011, the old laws which contradict the new law had not been revoked. This resulted in ambiguity, contradictions, and a lack of victim protection. In particular, while the Anti-Trafficking Law recognizes and punishes the exploitation of prostitution of others and considers sexually exploited persons to be victims, article 523 of the Penal Code criminalizes persons in prostitution and sets the same penalty as the one given to those who benefit from the prostitution of others, that is, their exploiters.

The same contradiction exists with regard to pimping. Pimping is criminalized under article 523 as a prostitution-related act (“facilitation”) and is lightly punished by up to one year of imprisonment. Pimping is also criminalized under the Anti-Trafficking Law when it fulfills the three elements (acts, means, and purpose) of the crime of human trafficking and carries a minimum of five years imprisonment. Also, the Artist Visa Scheme and the 1931 Law on Safeguarding Public Health from Prostitution which both regulate prostitution (and therefore pimping), were not revoked when the Anti-Trafficking Law was adopted.

Moreover, the Anti-Trafficking Law has several gaps in relation to the protection of victims, resulting in weak protection and weak support for victims. In particular, the victim must prove that she was “compelled” to participate in or commit these violations, in order to be recognized as a victim of trafficking, and thus, be granted amnesty from punishment for breaking the law as a result of being trafficked (for instance violating the law or conditions of residency/work permit, for using drugs, and for being in prostitution).⁴²

⁴¹ Law No. 164 on the Punishment for the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, Official Gazette (Al-Jarida al-Rasmiyah), Number 40, 9 January 2011, page 3267.

⁴² Article 586.8 of the Lebanese Anti-trafficking Law reads: “A victim who proves that he was compelled to commit acts that are punishable by law or that he was compelled to violate the terms of [his] residency or work [permit] shall be given amnesty from punishment...”

CHAPTER FOUR: PROFILE AND BACKGROUND OF WOMEN

4.1 Socio-Demographics

Most of the 19 interviewed women were middle-aged with an average age of 38 years. The youngest was 26 and the oldest was 62. All the women who were interviewed were of Arab nationality. The majority were Syrian (9) and Lebanese (8); one was Palestinian and one was Jordanian. Among the 11 non-Lebanese, most did not have a form of legal residency in Lebanon with the exception of the Palestinian woman and three Syrian women. The Palestinian had a passport issued by the Palestinian authorities and the three Syrians attained regular status through marriage or Lebanese family members. The remaining six Syrian women were in irregular status or had an expired residency.

Most of the Syrian women interviewed disclosed that they had entered Lebanon before the Syrian crisis erupted and had traveled back and forth between the two countries. The reasons for these transitions included marriage to a Lebanese citizen, running away from their families, life circumstances, or looking for better opportunities in Lebanon. Three out of the nine Syrian women came to Lebanon as the result of the Syrian crisis.

All of the interviewed women were currently or previously married. Ten of whom were married more than once, and five of whom were married three or more times. At the time of the interview, 11 out of the 19 were married, five were divorced, and three were widowed. Sixteen out of 19 women stated that they had dependent children.⁴³

The majority of interviewees achieved only an elementary education with few having attended middle school. One woman stated she never went to school while on the other hand, two others pursued advanced medical studies.

At the time of the interview, 11 of the 19 interviewed women were involved in prostitution on a regular basis, most of them on a daily basis and others on a weekly basis. While 8 women stated at the start of the interview that they had exited prostitution, the follow-up discussions revealed that they were still occasionally prostituting. These women spoke in the present tense when they discussed their involvement in prostitution, and/or referred to exiting as part of their future plan. The women may have felt ashamed, and therefore reluctant to provide this information, but after they became comfortable with the interviewer, they shared details indicating that they had not fully exited prostitution.

The women in this study were involved in indoor and outdoor prostitution or both. Most stated being involved in street prostitution, but also in prostitution in bars and ad-hoc brothels.

⁴³ The number of children per woman ranged from 1 to 11, with an average of 3.5.

4.2 Previous Experiences of Violence and Childhood Abuse

Childhood abuse is very common in the lives of prostituted women. Research and testimonies of survivors have shown that childhood abuse, neglect, and other traumatic events precede the engagement of a person in prostitution, and may be considered as risk factors for falling into prostitution. One study that surveyed 854 people in nine countries - who were at the time or had previously been involved in prostitution - found that 63% were sexually abused as children and 59% were beaten by a caregiver to the point of injury.⁴⁴ Another study of 109 current or previously prostituted women in Quebec, Canada, found that 61% had suffered violence during childhood, and in particular, 38% had suffered incest as children.⁴⁵ A third study of 114 prostituted women in the United Kingdom showed that 72% had experienced some form of childhood violence.⁴⁶

This study's findings are consistent with the aforementioned findings. The large majority of women interviewed disclosed being subjected to one or more forms of violence during childhood, perpetrated largely by the male family members or by male intimate partners.

Out of the 19 women interviewed, six disclosed that they were raped as children by family members, or intimate partners, or by strangers. The rapist was the father in two cases, the fiancé in another case, and a male stranger in three other cases. Moreover, four women stated that they were sexually harassed and/or molested by sometimes more than one family members during childhood. In these four women's cases, the abusers were the father, the step-father, the uncle, the cousin, and/or the brother.

One woman revealed that her father repeatedly raped her when she was nine years old:

When I was young, I had many problems at home, and I ended up leaving... I left home at the age of 15 years... There was severe sexual violence taking place. I mean he...he, my father, what he did... what he did with his daughter. This is your daughter, she is not ... she is not a stranger. You know, I was a kid... I was 9 years old when I was at boarding school. And at this time, I left boarding school, the time when those things started to happen. I could not bear the situation. It is a very difficult situation when someone like your father does that to you. I was disgusted. I hated my life, and I told myself better spare my siblings. I sacrificed myself for the sake of my siblings, and to keep things quiet... No one would have believed me... I tried [asking for help] but I couldn't. I did not know what to say, you know. Once, when my father came while I was sleeping, I felt a weight on me, I looked up, and I couldn't say a word, I could not open my mouth. My tongue was tied. What could I do, I was immobilized, I could not do any move. After that, I felt that I needed to leave the house. It became an obsession, I could not stay a minute at home, leaving the house was the only solution.

Salwa (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 30, divorced, 3 children

⁴⁴ Melissa Farley, Ann Cotton, Jacqueline Lynne, Sybille Zumbeck, Frida Spiwak, Maria Reyes, Dinorah Alvarez, & Ufuk Sezgin, Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress, ed. M. Farley, New York: Routledge, 2004, p.42.

⁴⁵ Concertation des Luttres contre l'Exploitation Sexuelle (CLES), Pour s'en sortir: mieux connaître les réalités, être soutenues et avoir des alternatives, (in French) June 2015, p.10.

⁴⁶ Julie Bindel, Laura Brown, Helen Easton, Roger Matthews, & Lisa Reynolds, Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution, Eaves and London South Bank University (LSBU), 2012, p.8.

Salwa was also molested as a child by her cousin:

He molested me. When he did so, I did not realize that it was sexual molestation. I felt something was wrong but could not comprehend it totally...I went back home crying, and hid underneath the bed.

Women subjected to incest and sexual abuse within their families often do not report the abuse. And when they do, or when it is observed by someone else, no action is taken against the abuser and the women are effectively silenced. One woman whose brother frequently molested her, spoke of what happened to her after reporting incest:

My brother used to molest me. I was in the 3rd grade, and I was around 10-11-12 years old. Mom saw us once, but she stood with him not with me. I hated them to the point that I took revenge on myself and started using drugs... When I was young, around 13-14 years old, I sought help from the Lijan el Sha'bieh⁴⁷. I tried to tell them what my brother was doing to me. But my mother's brother-in-law was part of the team there. He slapped me on the face and told me how could I say such things about my brother. They treated me as if I am the one guilty and not the victim. They took me back home. I now trust nobody.

Rania (pseudonym), Palestinian woman, age 26, married

Women spoke about experiencing physical violence perpetrated primarily by family members. One woman recounted that men in her family joined forces to assault her:

[I was subjected to] violence by my brothers, brother-in-law, and father. He [my father] and my brother-in-law put chains around my feet. He would not let me see a friend. I ended-up hating my parents. I was depressed.

Amina (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 36, married, 4 children

Another woman had scars where her father stabbed her. She said:

My father beat me... You would be saddened if I show you my body. I carry still the scars on my body, look, this scar on my neck is from when my father stabbed me... because he saw me smoking a cigarette. My family is very conservative, if a girl smokes, they would cut her head. I was 10 years old and I was holding a cigarette in my hand and talking to a boy, our neighbor. My father saw me... He wouldn't tolerate any mistake. Then I ran away from home and came to Lebanon.

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 31, widowed, 3 children

Many of the Syrian women spoke of the emotional violence and discrimination they and other girls faced in their communities. These discriminatory practices were linked to the widespread belief in some communities that girls are meant to stay at home and eventually get married, that they "belong to" either their families or their husbands, and that education for girls is not important. One Syrian woman succinctly summarizes this situation:

⁴⁷ The Lijan el Sha'bia are the local authorities in Palestinian camps.

In Syria, women are not allowed to work, they only belong at home.
Nadia (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 30, widowed, 3 children

Another woman explained:

It is my parents' belief that girls shouldn't continue their studies... This is normal, what could a 13 year-old girl say in that old fashioned context? She can only say "yes" to her father.
Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 37, divorced, 5 children

Forced and early marriage was common in women's descriptions of abusive practices used against them. More than half of the women interviewed (10 out of 19) were married before the age of 18, including one woman who was married as early as 12 and five others who were married between the age of 13 and 15 years. One woman for instance was forced to marry by her greed-motivated parents:

I was 13 years old. My parents removed me from school while I was in Grade 8. He had good money, and my father felt greedy. I did not know him.
Samira (pseudonym), Syrian

Others were forced to marry because of homelessness, seeking protection through marriage. One woman recounted that at the age of 15 she decided to marry a much older man to have some security:

I did not love him because he was old, quite old. But I told myself that's ok, even though he's old, I need to have some security, I need to take care of myself... I was a child, and he was very old. But he was... good to me.
Salwa (pseudonym), Lebanese

The early and forced marriages of the Syrian women took place before 2011. Thus, they are not linked to the conflict and the refugee crisis that followed. While child marriage is dramatically on the rise among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it is an accepted practice that existed prior to the Syrian crisis in 2011.⁴⁸ It is important to note that early and forced marriage is not limited to the Syrian community. An additional six women from other nationalities also shared their experiences with early and/or forced marriage (four Lebanese, a Palestinian, and a Jordanian). The fact that the majority of the women interviewed suffered early and forced marriages indicates that these practices are rooted in gender and socio-economic inequalities, which are exacerbated by humanitarian crises.

⁴⁸ See the webpage dedicated on the Syrian Arab Republic on the website "Girls Not Brides", <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas/syrian-arab-republic>, last accessed March 13, 2020. See also UN Women, Inter-agency assessment Gender-based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian refugees in Jordan, with a focus on Early Marriage, 2013, p.29.

4.3 Pimped, Trafficked, and Groomed: Circumstances of Women’s Entry into Prostitution

Most of the women in this study entered prostitution either as children or as young adults. Six of them entered before the age of 18, some as early as 14. Four of them entered prostitution when they were between the ages of 18 and 20 years old.

Almost all interviewed women did not make a “choice” to enter prostitution because they wanted to or because they had planned to do so. They were either pimped out or trafficked, or they were groomed by people linked to the sex trade. Only one woman entered prostitution because of hunger, poverty, and her lack of shelter.

Eleven out of the 19 women interviewed (58%) were recruited directly into prostitution through being pimped out or trafficked. Five out of these 11 women were pimped by their husbands or sold by husbands to pimps. The story of one woman is illustrative. At the age of 15, her husband coerced her to sleep with his friend. The husband then blackmailed his wife and sold her to a pimp while she was in prison for prostitution:

He got \$1,500 from his friend and he let him sleep in my bed. This is how it was the first time. He filmed me and threatened that he would show the movie to my parents. He filmed me during the act and how [the friend] opened my legs. All this on my own bed, in my own house. What can you expect from me. Thankfully I am still alive. When I married him, I was a human being, then he dumped me like trash... then he and [another friend of husband] framed me and sent me to Hbeich police [detention center] for prostitution charges. He sold me and got paid money by a Saudi man. He got \$25,000 while I was still at Hbeish. He sold me while I wasn’t aware of anything.

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian

Husbands of women in this study employed blackmail, threats, and physical coercion to force their wives to sleep with the husband’s friends. This was a means of recruiting women into prostitution and/or keeping them in prostitution. Three out of the 19 women interviewed for this study, described their husbands’ use of these coercive tactics. One woman explained how her husband used violence to force her into prostitution, obtaining money from her prostitution and preventing her escape:

He was working for someone in a restaurant. He took me to the restaurant and left. The owner of the restaurant hit me. He hit me with a whiskey bottle while I was pregnant. He [my husband] did not sell me to this man. He got half of the money. He took me back to Syria afterwards so I can deliver. Then he brought me back... My husband kept forcing me to work in Lebanon for two and half or three years. It was full of beatings, humiliation, and torture.

Samar (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 38, married, 1 child

Six out of the 11 women pimped out in this study were directly recruited by non-intimate partners and pimped via violence, deception, fraud, and abuse of their vulnerability. One interviewee stated that her friend told her about a cleaning job at a house. When she arrived at the house, she found that there were several men inside. They offered her alcohol until she became drunk and then raped her. Another woman was kidnapped by a stranger who held her captive and then later acted as her pimp. An additional four women interviewed were pimped-out by friends, who offered to help them out of poverty. One woman recounts how she entered prostitution:

My neighbor told me to go with her to meet some guys and that they would give me money. I did not know what she meant at the time. She told me you go out with this guy, you have sex with him and you take money for it. We ran out of gas for the stove at the house, and my children were without any food. You see, kids have no patience. I was 18-19 years old at that time... She taught me what to do. And whenever a guy asks for a nice girl, she would send him to me. She was not the only one to use me for their financial gain. I was not strong enough, I just wanted to feed my children. I reached a point when I could only give my children fried onions to eat. I reached a point where I could no longer feed my children. When people see you that vulnerable and alone, they can do to you whatever they want to do.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 62, divorced, 11 children

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When life circumstances are very dire, and when women and children are hungry, recruitment into prostitution does not need to be through force, coercion, or deception. Poverty and homelessness make it an easy task for pimps, traffickers, and persons linked to the sex trade to exploit women's extreme vulnerability and poverty.

Seven out of the 19 women (37%) were groomed into prostitution by people who are linked to the sex trade. Four out of these seven women were groomed by other women in the sex trade who used friendship and camaraderie to encourage women to enter prostitution. One woman explained how she entered prostitution when she was still a child:

My friend hosted me and taught me. I was 15 at that time. I had my first marriage at the age of 14... [She told me] to stand on the street, to watch, to take money at the beginning. [She told me it is] better have older clients than younger ones, and when I do the sex act, to have on me a condom. She also told me to watch out as he could have a gun on him.

Nabila (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 40, divorced, 3 children

The remaining 3 women were also introduced to prostitution by others. Two of the women first entered prostitution as children, aged 15 or 16. They were cleaning houses when a sex buyer offered them a large sum of money in exchange for sexual acts, exploiting their youth and their poverty. They then continued in prostitution. The third woman's husband forced her to have sex with his friend. This rape incident paved the way for her entry in prostitution.

Out of the 19 women interviewed, only one woman explained that it was extreme poverty that directly drove her into prostitution. She said:

[I entered prostitution] when my husband was incarcerated. I had on me LBP 12,000... I was about to become [homeless]... I was not able to pay the rent after my husband got incarcerated. The landlady deposited a complaint, and the judge decided that I should leave the house and pay outstanding rent... After my husband got incarcerated, I asked his brothers to help me out. I reached out to them, one left me LBP 2,000, the other LBP 5,000, and the others didn't provide me with any money. I felt like a beggar... [Now] I live with my sister. She is sick and only works 3 days per week. I help her with the daily expenses and the rent. The rent alone costs \$400... Children have many expenses. I need LBP 50,000 per week for daily expenses. I need to pay rent and for food and the needs of the children.

Aseel (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 43, married, three children

These women's descriptions of entry into prostitution reflect their lack of alternatives for survival. Conditioned to abuse by childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, suffering dire economic conditions, and exploited by pimps and traffickers, prostitution was the result of a lack of choice rather than a choice made freely among reasonable alternatives. When not recruited by others, these women are acceding to the abuse and exploitation of prostitution rather than making a choice. As one woman poignantly explained to an interviewer:

I open my legs to feed my children.

Nadia (pseudonym), Syrian

Circumstances of Entry into Prostitution of the 19 Interviewed Women

11 recruited by pimps and traffickers

7 groomed by people linked to the sex trade

1 driven into prostitution by hunger and poverty

"Sometimes I tell the client: stop, stop, I feel like I need to vomit. And I tell him that I need to go to the toilet, because I cannot stop myself from vomiting. I discovered these techniques with time. When I do that, sometimes the client pays, and sometimes he does not."

CHAPTER FIVE: RISKS FACED BY WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION AND THEIR STRATEGIES TO LIMIT HARM

Prostitution poses immediate and long-term risks to the women involved in it, which has been documented at length and backed by scientific evidence.⁴⁹ This study validates these findings. When asked about the risks of prostitution, all of the women interviewed reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse during their time in prostitution, which were perpetrated primarily by sex buyers. Women described physical violence, sexual assault, rape, kidnapping, being filmed during the sex act and then blackmailed, theft, emotional abuse, threats to use violence or to report women to the police, death threats, unwanted pregnancies, and possible exposure to HIV/AIDS and other STDs and drugs as possible risks. Women also spoke of the constant risk of arrest and sexual assault by law enforcement officers. Interestingly, and with the exception of one, the women did not spontaneously associate pimps with risks, despite the fact that most women had been pimped out and exploited. This omission will be examined more closely in Chapter Six on the challenges to exiting prostitution.

⁴⁹ Sandra Norak, *Loss of Self in Dissociation in Prostitution; Recovery of Self in Connection to Horses: A Survivor's Journey, Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 4: Iss. 4, Article 6, 2020.

5.1 Theft and Threats by Sex Buyers

The most common abuse described by interviewees was theft by sex buyers, which was in all cases accompanied by violence (14 out of the 19 women interviewed –74%– mentioned theft). Women described either not being paid by the sex buyer or forced to give back the money after the prostitution act. The following testimonies illustrate incidents of violence and theft:

I went out with a client, he raped me from behind. He hit me, stole my money, and he penetrated me from behind. I could have died.
Layla (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 36, divorced, 3 children

Once a guy from [name of a place] took me in his car, hit me, took my money, threw me [in the street] naked. I had only my panties. He told me to go home.
Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese

Women face a lot of risks, a client could take her into a no man's land, take her money, and throw her on the street, I had three clients who pointed guns at me.

Nadine (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 30, divorced, 1 child

More than one interviewee spoke about sex buyers “disposing” of them after having sex, as one woman explains:

A lot! Women face a lot [of risks], a lot. For example, a client might tell you that he will do only what you agree to do and to come with him in the car. So, you agree go with him in the car. But once you are at the hotel and after he finishes [the sex act], he tells you to give him all the money you have on you. There are clients who point a gun at your head. Some of them would kill you. Others take you and leave you in a remote area even though you had agreed with him to go to a hotel. He [the client] would change directions, take you somewhere far, and steal all your belongings. He throws you away and continues on his way. Women face a lot of challenges, a lot. More than you can imagine.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian

35 These incidents of violence and theft are common because many sex buyers fail to see the humanity of women in prostitution. Sex buyers consider prostituted women to be sub-human, as having much lower value than other women. In a study of 55 male sex buyers in Lebanon, approximately a third of those interviewed held the view that women in prostitution are “commodities”.⁵⁰ The majority of those interviewed used pejorative words to describe women in prostitution; some compared women to a “public toilet”, or as being “the trash of the society”, “the garbage of women” or similar to “a product; once you are done with it, you throw it and walk away.”

Some of the women interviewed associated the act of theft with rape. They reported going through the sex act solely to receive money, and nothing else. When women did not receive the payment, it became in their view, an act of rape.

Money is an essential element for both women and sex buyers in the prostitution transaction. Money is used by the sex buyer as a coercive means to obtain consent, and as a way to control and dominate women. Eighty percent of male sex buyers interviewed in the sex buyers' study in Lebanon believed that “when a man pays money for a sexual act, the woman in prostitution must answer to all his wishes and desires.”⁵¹ Sex buyers' sense of ownership of women in prostitution is in fact reinforced by their payment of money. As one sex buyer said:

She is my property, wasn't she paid money? Doesn't she work [in prostitution]? She has to accept whatever I ask of her.

Male sex buyer, 19 year-old single student⁵²

⁵⁰ Ghada Jabbour, Id., p. 48.

⁵¹ Idem, p. 51.

⁵² Idem.

5.2 Physical and Sexual Violence by Sex Buyers

The majority of women interviewed in this study reported being physically and sexually assaulted by sex buyers. Twelve experienced hair pulling, shoving, being tied up, biting, scratching, severe beating, stabbing, and kidnapping or attempted kidnapping. Moreover, nine out of the 19 women interviewed stated that sex buyers threatened to kill them with guns or knives. Women also reported that sex buyers sexually assaulted them. Six interviewees stated that they were ‘raped’, others stated ‘being compelled’ or ‘forced’ to do sexual acts they did not want to do. For example, Hadil (pseudonym), a 30 year-old Syrian woman, explained that she was frequently beaten by sex buyers because they wanted to anally rape her. Two women described experiencing severe forms of physical and sexual violence as told in the testimonies below:

I was kidnapped by one man; he dumped me in the trunk of the car. He did so because I was sitting in a coffee shop [he approached me] and asked me if I wanted to go out with him. I refused because I had heard that he was an evil person. So, he took me by force and threw me in the car. I was covered in blood.

Nadine (pseudonym), Syrian

I was assaulted several times. Once a man took me to his house. He paid me 100,000 liras. I was in my forties. I went to his house in the South, expecting that we’ll be alone. But then two other men showed up. He told me that I had to have sex with them. First, he said with the two of them, and he told me if I didn’t obey, they would beat me up. They started beating me. I did what they wanted. I don’t know how I got back home. He just threw me somewhere; I didn’t know where I was. I was covered with bruises.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese

Sexual violence does not only take the shape of an assault. Pornography was another type of sexual violence perpetrated against women. Seven of the interviewees (37%) mentioned that their picture or a video of them performing sexual acts was taken by sex buyers and pimps. Five of these women said that the photos and/or videos were taken against their will and were used to blackmail them, including by pimps to maintain control over them.

The women described having to endure lengthy sexual intercourse with sex buyers who were under the influence of drugs that delayed ejaculation. Sirine, a Syrian woman who was pimped by her husband and others, explained:

The most difficult thing is when the client is on drugs. When I was beaten up and hospitalized, it was because of a client who was under the influence of drugs. [A client on drugs] becomes sexually cold, it takes him longer to come. You become tired and impatient because you have other clients you need to go to, and he becomes violent.

Sirine (pseudonym), Syrian woman, age 32, married, 3 children

Along the same lines, another interviewee explained what could sex buyers under the influence of drugs do to a woman in prostitution:

[A sex buyer] ask her for things to do things she does not want to do, he would force her, and he would take a longer time to finish. He would ruin her life... she would only want salvation, she will get very tired of being there for 2, 3, or 4 hours. Some buyers would threaten her: 'if you do not do what I want, I will not give you the money.' She would feel trapped and so she does what she has to do. But when under the influence of the drugs, he would feel nothing, he will be numb. She has to sweet talk him.

Rouba (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 53, divorced, 1 child

Women also spoke about the agony of being asked to show pleasure and enjoyment during sex. For Maya and Nadia, catering to men's fantasies was difficult. They shared:

The most difficult situation is when the client has psychological issues, 'do this' and 'don't do that'. He thinks that he's more important than the rest of the world. [He says] 'close your eyes, and think of me' and he comes down to lick and bite, and he takes his time, more than the ten minutes, and you have to keep talking to him while you lay under him on the bed.

Nadia (pseudonym), Syrian

He tells me to enjoy having sex with him. But how can I enjoy it? He tells me either I enjoy it or he doesn't give me any money. So, I start acting to show that I am experiencing pleasure. What's important is to get my money and leave him. Otherwise, he [the client] will use force to get what he wants, even for acts that I do not wish to perform.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese

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5.3 Arrest and Assault by Authorities

Over a third of the interviewed women (7 out of 19 women) described having been abused and raped by law enforcement officers, more particularly police, immigration, military, and municipality officers. Women also spoke about being under the constant risk of getting arrested, which resulted in them living in fear and anxiety. One woman explained:

I fear the authorities more than diseases [referring to HIV/AIDs].

Sirine (pseudonym), Syrian

Law enforcement agencies often use undercover officers to arrest women. One woman described what happened to her when she encountered an undercover agent:

One time I was arrested, I thought he was a client, he turned out to be an agent. I stayed one month in prison.

Nabila (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 40, divorced, 3 children

This omnipresent risk of arrest is used by sex buyers to control and dominate women as illustrated below:

An armed client would have sex with the woman, then he would point his gun at her and would take what she earned that day and what he had paid her. And he would threaten her that he'll bring her Hbeish police. Why? Because the law lets him go free, it is the woman who is scared. They should arrest him.

Rouba (pseudonym), Lebanese woman, age 53, divorced, 1 child

In summary, women in prostitution are at risk and suffer from horrific physical and psychological harms. They are subject to many forms of violence by sex buyers. Contrary to the myth that prostitution is “easy money”, it is not, even if it can quickly generate cash for survival needs. Money earned through prostitution is always associated with violence and abuse, which is intrinsic to the very unequal nature of the prostitution transaction. Sex buyers, who are almost exclusively men, dominate women in prostitution and abuse their vulnerability. In fact, the purchase act is in itself a form of violence, as it imposes sex through the force of money. It is only the urgent need of cash that cause women to give in to unwanted sex acts. The cash appears to function as camouflage for rape. Indeed, survivors have described the sex acts of prostitution as “paid rape.”⁵³

5.4 Women’s Self-Defense and Strategies to Limit Harm

Prostituted women are in a constant mode of self-defense. As one US prostitution survivor and activist wrote:

There are thousands of books and classes that provide women with information on self-defense and rape ‘avoidance’ strategies. Some of the basic lessons they teach us are not to walk alone at night on dark deserted streets, not to get into cars with strange men, not to pick up guys in a bar, not to even let a delivery man into your home when you’re by yourself. Yet this is what the ‘job’ of prostitution requires; that women put themselves in jeopardy every time they turn a trick. And then we ask, ‘How do you prevent it from leading to danger?’ The answer is, you can’t. Count the bodies.⁵⁴

This sentiment was also expressed by the interviewed women. When asked whether women in prostitution can protect themselves from the risks of prostitution, many interviewees answered that they simply cannot. Some women explained:

⁵³ Mariangela Mianiti, Prostitution is paid rape, and men know it, (interview with the prostitution survivor Rachel Moran), *Il Manifesto*, October 11, 2017.

⁵⁴ Evalina Giobbe, *The Vox Fights*, *Vox* (Winter), 1991, p.34, cited in Melissa Farley, *Risks of Prostitution: When the Person is the Product*, id.

No, there is none [referring to protection]. When you are with him in the room, with someone you don't know, how can you protect yourself?
Zahra (pseudonym), Jordanian woman, age 47, divorced, 5 kids

It is difficult for her to protect herself, because she doesn't know if the client is good or not.

Nadine, Syrian

She cannot protect herself. She is weaker than a man. She cannot hit him; she can't hit him like he hit her.

Layla, Lebanese

A few other women responded that in order to protect themselves from these risks, women need to escape prostitution entirely and stay home, walk away from it, get married, or find a job.

Women have to suffer the consequences of being in prostitution alone, including attempting to protect themselves from constant abuse and violence. This is even more the case in Lebanon since the laws are punitive towards women and others in prostitution, and protection mechanisms are rare.

The longer women are in prostitution, the more they are likely to encounter violence and the greater the impact on them. To protect themselves, women try to develop strategies to tolerate violence and attempt to reduce the harms of prostitution inflicted on them by sex buyers and pimps. The – often vain – strategies used by women interviewed in this study included: 1) escaping their pimps, thus managing to keep more of the money from prostitution 2) sweet talking sex buyers and having to act as if they liked what men did to them in order to avoid spurring violent reactions from sex buyers or to make them finish the sex act quicker, 3) using condoms to protect themselves against STDs, 4) negotiating and refusing to perform certain sexual acts, 5) getting paid at the start of the encounter and not at the end, 6) picking up older sex buyers, 7) meeting buyers in hotels rather than in private houses, 8) get acquainted with a law enforcement official to whom she could solicit help in case of trouble, 9) turning away/walking away from threatening or intoxicated sex buyers, 10) consuming alcohol and drugs to cope with sex buyers, 11) dominating or fighting back sex buyers, 12) screening buyers to check if they have a gun, 13) marrying a pimp, and 14) using some “tricks” to take periods of rest from the sex act. One woman explained that she pretends that she needs to vomit so she can take a break. She explained:

Sometimes I tell the client: stop, stop, I feel like I need to vomit. And I tell him that I need to go to the toilet, because I cannot stop myself from vomiting. I discovered these techniques with time. When I do that, sometimes the client pays, and sometimes he does not.

Nabila (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

As mentioned earlier, the use of alcohol and drugs are coping strategies detected in the narratives of the women interviewed to reduce the physical and emotional pain of prostitution.⁵⁵ One woman explained:

55 Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff & Ursel, *The everyday occurrence: Violence in the lives of girls exploited through prostitution*, *Violence Against Women*, 8, 2002, pp. 1016- 1043, mentioned in: *Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, The Intersection Between Prostitution and Sexual Violence*, 2013.

I hate the dark, when the night comes, I tell myself, God how will I be able to go out. Then I drink beer and force myself to go out.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

Another woman used alcohol and cigarettes to numb the pain:

The cigarette makes you forget the entire world. You can also have a bottle of beer to forget about everything. I smell my children to forget the pain. It is a very big pain.

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Feelings of numbness and normalization of prostitution is another coping strategy to reduce the pain and trauma, such as in the case of this woman who said:

Everything became normal for me. I do not get impacted anymore. One time during the holidays, I had 150 clients. My pussy became as big as this [making a gesture to show what happened to her body].

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Strategies differ from one woman to another, and from one situation to another. Age is also a factor in the strategy women decide to adopt. One interviewee, who was 62 years old, described how she has attempted to protect herself from new and possibly violent sex buyers as she aged:

Things were different a while ago. When I was young, I did not care too much, I was hitting and kicking off clients, one client gone, another hundred would come by. But now I cannot do that anymore. When I get hold of a client now, and if he is kind, I put effort so he would come back again, which would allow me to avoid going with someone new. So, he could become a regular client. Time teaches you lessons.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

Sadly, these attempts at avoiding violence do not protect women or eliminate the risks associated with prostitution. Women in prostitution across the globe are raped and killed more than any other group of women.⁵⁶ The following testimonies are recurrent in the lives of prostituted persons:

Sometimes I get beaten hard. Once a guy pointed a gun to my head, I then opened the car door and threw myself out while the car was moving - I swear.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Once I went out with a client and when he finished, he pulled a knife on me demanding I give back the 50,000 [Lebanese pounds], but I did not let him take anything, I hit him on his balls and started yelling in public.

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Being in prostitution is about survival, both in terms of fighting one's way out of poverty in a society that leaves women with few choices, and in terms of trying to avoid harm and minimize the abuse and violence that is intrinsic to prostitution.

⁵⁶ Melissa Farley, Prostitution, the Sex Trade, and the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Logos - a journal of modern society & culture*, Spring 2020, Volume 19 #1, p.16.

CHAPTER SIX: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO EXITING PROSTITUTION

Women face numerous challenges while in prostitution, many of which act as obstacles for them to exit. The obstacles are related to individual, relational, institutional, societal, and structural factors. For many women, these challenges remain, even after exiting.

6.1 Inability to Find a Job and Lack of Educational Qualifications

Women interviewed in this study most often said that the greatest barrier for escaping prostitution was their inability to find work despite many attempts for some. For Hadil, all her attempts were unsuccessful:

I tried many times, more than 5 times. I tried to find a better job, such as cleaning houses or becoming a janitor. I could not find anything, so far. There are no jobs.

Hadil (pseudonym), Syrian woman, 30 years old, married

Their lack of educational qualifications makes it more difficult for women to find a job and leaves them with very limited options for work in a country where unemployment is very high and where low skilled jobs are reserved to migrant workers. Sexual harassment and stigma are also obstacles that often force women to stay in prostitution or re-enter prostitution. And for women who were able to find jobs, they were often subjected to sexual harassment by their supervisor, driving them to refuse/leave the job and go back to prostitution. Some women stated that stigma is difficult to dispel and follows them everywhere they go. Sex buyers often recognize them in public and call them names. As one survivor of prostitution explained:

Prostitution is destructive for your reputation and it will stigmatize you forever. All the time, wherever you go and whatever you do, you are a hooker. This is the nicest word they tell you. I will never forget this word.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman

6.2 Homelessness

Lack of housing is a push factor that drives women to enter prostitution everywhere in the world;⁵⁷ and at the same time, constitutes a challenge to exit.

Sixteen out of the 19 women interviewed (84%) were homeless once or more in their lives. Women cited becoming homeless as a result of not being able to pay rent, or after leaving abusive husbands and families behind. One woman explained that she left her violent family in Syria and crossed the borders to Lebanon at the age of 12, and as a result she became homeless in a foreign country. Another woman said that she used to turn herself in to the police just to be able to sleep the night in prison and not on the streets. The same woman said that she still struggles with homelessness, and sometimes puts herself in prostitution-like situations just to have a place to sleep and bathe:

I am now 53 years old, and despite my age I did not totally exit. I am trying hard not to fall back again, but things force you to go down again. Why? Because I don't have a house, I want to take a shower. I am sleeping while I have my legs bent, I need to fold them. These are the things that a woman needs, a place to sleep. She would tell herself, let me find an old man and sleep in his place. He would not be able to have a hard-on. But he would touch me here and there. This is still harassment you know.

Rouba (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

6.3 Mental Health

Prostitution causes mental health harms, which can prevent women from exiting prostitution or seeing a better future. Research on this topic has established a link between prostitution, depression, and anxiety, and in particular, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSDs).⁵⁸ These conditions are suggested to be the result of direct and indirect exposure to traumatic events in prostitution. One research found that “68% of 827 people in several different types of prostitution in 9 countries met the criteria of PTSD. The severity of PTSD symptoms of participants in this study were in the same range as treatment-seeking war veterans.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, the study found that there is a positive correlation between trauma-related symptoms and the extent of involvement in prostitution.

The impact of prostitution on mental health may not be obvious to women still in prostitution. It sometimes takes years of healing after exiting prostitution to become self-conscious about the impact.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, almost all of the women reported said they that they felt depressed and/or lonely. Three of the women revealed that they attempted to commit suicide.

For some of the women interviewed in this study, depression and feelings of loneliness are recurrent. Samira explains that these negative feelings start when she is alone:

⁵⁷ A study on prostitution in nine countries, found that 75% of those in prostitution who have been interviewed and been homeless at some point of their lives, see Melissa Farley et al., *Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries*, id., p. 56.

⁵⁸ Melissa Farley et al, *Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries*, id.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ CLES, *Pour S'en Sortir*, id., p. 7.

When I am sitting like this [idle], I think about my life, how I was and where I used to be, and how I ended up in this situation. I feel then very depressed. I cry from anger. I cry about everything. And I wonder when will I be better off like everybody else. Like someone who can pay her rent, someone who has not debts. I wish I can register my son [at school]. There are a lot of things one thinks about when one is alone.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Commodified, dehumanized, and under constant verbal degradation by pimps and sex buyers, many women internalize the social stigma of being prostituted, and feel ashamed. The majority of women interviewed had extremely negative perceptions towards their bodies, even feeling disgusted by it. One woman explained that she perceived her body:

With contempt, with disgust. I am disgusted by my body, my body is full of Lebanese men, Syrian, Iraqi, Saudi, Jordanian, all men, all men. Disgusting. My body is not mine; it is for everyone.

Samah (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Another woman described her body as garbage – internalizing the way that sex buyers and pimps treated her:

My body is like garbage, it is only for buying and selling.

Nadine (pseudonym), Syrian woman

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When asked about their perceptions of the future and where they see themselves in five years, many of the women interviewed were unable to articulate a precise plan for their future. They expressed general hopes, such as being out of prostitution, having a house, getting married, raising their children and giving them opportunities, or having a job. Other women were pessimistic as they had already given up on their present and held no hopes for their future. One woman said that her future looks:

Like garbage, everything is going backwards for me.

Samira (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Another woman described her future as:

A failure, I wished to have a house and stop prostitution. Then I found this difficult to achieve, because I have no education.

Hadil (pseudonym), Syrian woman, 30 years old, married

6.4 Coercion and Violence by Traffickers and Pimps

Many of the women in this study were recruited into prostitution via force, deception, and abuse of power. Many of the pimps/traffickers were also the women's husbands. They used multiple means to recruit and maintain their victims in prostitution. Women were subjected to economic, physical, and sexual violence. They were also threatened, blackmailed, and put women under debt bondage.

For Sirine, suicide was the only way to resist or escape prostitution from her husband who was also her pimp:

I married him, and the destruction started right after. I have a daughter from him. I suffered because of him for five or six years. First, he took me to Ms. [name of woman pimp], he was a client at her place. I did not know about this then. Later, I could not go back [home], I was afraid of my parents. I started doing what he wanted me to do. He used to tell me that we need to secure a home and we needed money, and he got me clients. First, we were married informally by the sheikh, then when I got pregnant, we registered the marriage. During the last year in this five-year period, I got really tired... The last day, I took an overdose of pills and I was taken to the hospital. They gave me medication that made me sedated for three days. He [the husband-pimp] threw a bucket of water on me. He told me you cannot keep sleeping like this, how are we going to make money. I called the police on him, and I started yelling in front of everyone that I am a hooker, and I want to be left alone. He ran away before the police came.

Sirine (pseudonym), Syrian woman

Another challenge to exiting prostitution is the trauma-coerced attachment or bonding⁶¹ that women develop with their pimps/traffickers. This traumatic entrapment is common among people who are under the absolute control of another person and serves to protect oneself from psychological or physical harm by identifying with the abuser. At least five women interviewed in this study perceived their pimps/traffickers and/or husbands, as “protectors”, who saved them from even worse danger or arrest. One woman even married her pimp because she needed protection. The women's perceptions of being protected by their abusers, is in line with the findings of a previous study conducted by Kafa in 2012. The study revealed how women differentiated between their pimp versus pimps in general. Most women described their pimp as protector, provider of support, provider of shelter, and described him as a sweetheart and affectionate person. However, when the women were asked about their opinion of pimps in general, the tone and adjectives used by women to qualify pimps changed and became negative. They described pimps as being exploitative, despicable, and compared them to garbage. One woman said that he “lives off the earnings of women.” Another, said a pimp is “like cancer, he invades women.” One woman interviewed in 2012 described these paradoxical feelings towards her pimp, she said:

⁶¹ Chitra Raghavan and Kendra Doychak, Trauma-coerced Bonding and Victims of Sex Trafficking: Where do we go from here?, *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, Vol 17, No 2, 2015, pp. 583-587.

I love and hate him at the same time. I love him because he stands by me and protects me, and I hate him because he lives off my earning and sends me clients. I mean he is called pimp... But I have affection for him sometimes, when he sees that I cannot or don't want to take clients, or I am sick, he tells me to rest. I am really attached to him; he has promised to marry me.⁶²

These contradictory perceptions illustrate the trauma-coerced bonding women are made to form with their abusers as a consequence of chronic coercive control. Pimps and traffickers use abusive coercion strategies, including alternating between showing kindness towards the woman and exploiting her. Prolonged coercion makes the victim give up all autonomy and thoughts of escape. The victim ends up internalizing her abuser's perceptions of herself and loses her self-perception, self-esteem, and self-care. She experiences contradictory feelings towards the abuser including feelings of love and idolization. These positive feelings are in fact used as a coping and defense mechanism in response to trauma. According to Cantor and Price, the origins of these feelings are a "(i) perceived threat to one's physical or psychological survival at the hands of an abuser(s); (ii) perceived small kindnesses from the abuser to the victim; (iii) isolation from perspectives other than those of the abuser; and (iv) the inescapability of the situation."⁶³

6.5 Debts and Debt Bondage

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Debt, like homelessness, is both a push factor into prostitution and a barrier to exiting. The majority of the women interviewed had or were currently in debt. Debts were incurred mostly to cover rent and pay for food. One woman reported that she had borrowed money from pimps, leaving her stuck in a cycle of debt and prostitution with no possibility of exit:

I had lots of debts, from people I worked with. I borrowed money to rent a house, and I worked it off after, it was Daman.

Maya (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

"Daman" or "guarantee" is a debt practice in Lebanon according to which women in prostitution receive a sum of money (usually around \$1,000) in advance from a pimp with the understanding that they would work off the debt in one month. A pimp could send a woman who owes him money an unlimited number of clients. This practice is particularly common among Syrian women, who may be more vulnerable, because they need to support their families in Syria.⁶⁴

⁶² Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation, Women in Street Prostitution, unpublished study gathering qualitative interviews with 27 women in street prostitution, 2012.

⁶³ Chris Cantor and John Price, Traumatic entrapment, appeasement and complex post-traumatic stress disorder: Evolutionary perspectives of hostage reactions, domestic abuse and the Stockholm syndrome, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 41, 2007, pp. 377-384, cited in Chitra Raghavan and Kendra Doychak, Trauma-coerced Bonding and Victims of Sex Trafficking: Where do we go from here?, id.

⁶⁴ Many Syrian women Kafa met during outreach activities at Ras-Beirut police detention center shared that they were under Daman conditions.

6.6 Criminalization of the Victims of Prostitution and Trafficking

Women in prostitution are victimized by pimps/traffickers and sex buyers and also by the law, which criminalizes them under article 523 of the Penal Code. In addition to the risks they face for engaging in prostitution, women may be arrested, penalized, and imprisoned. Twelve out of 19 women interviewed (63%) have been arrested at least once by law enforcement, mostly for prostitution-related charges. A few were arrested for other charges, such as drug use or violating residency requirements. Some interviewees spoke about their distrust of law enforcement, even comparing police to pimps. Some women also expressed their dismay about the criminal justice system, which separates the mother from her children when she is charged with prostitution-related crimes, giving custody of the children to the father or to juvenile centers. This practice ignores the needs of children and the need to keep families together.

These often repeated arrests and the resulting judicial records officially carve the stigma against women in prostitution into the public record. Many employers in Lebanon require a judicial record in order to obtain a job. Convictions for prostitution charges would deny women's entry into the labor market.

6.7 Lack of Legal Residency Documentation

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Six out of the nine interviewed Syrian women in this study had no residency papers. The lack of proper residency documents forbids Syrian women to seek legal employment in Lebanon and restricts greatly their freedom of movement. This situation also makes opportunities to access housing, education, justice and legal protections, and health services⁶⁵ increasingly limited. Moreover, migrant and refugee women who lack residency permits are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, as well as arrest and detention by the Lebanese authorities. Syrian refugees are especially targeted since an estimated 73% of Syrian refugees aged 15 years or older do not have legal residency.⁶⁶ While permitting a large refugee population, Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no legislation to address the needs of refugees or asylum-seekers. In 2015, the Lebanese government suspended the registration of Syrian refugees by UNHCR, and ended its previously open-door policy for Syrians, which had previously allowed Syrians to enter the country without a visa and to renew their residency permits free of charge. Lebanon adopted a new policy in 2015 which imposed conditions and fees for renewal of residency for Syrian refugees – conditions many could not meet.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Norwegian Refugee Council, Women refugees in Lebanon and the consequences of limited legal status on their housing, land and property rights, 2016.

⁶⁶ UNHCR, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2018.

⁶⁷ To know more about the residency regulations for Syrian Refugees, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/protection>, last accessed on March 13, 2020.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NEEDS OF WOMEN IN PROSTITUTION AND PROTECTION GAPS

All of the women (100%) who were interviewed for this study wanted to escape prostitution provided that they could meet their survival needs. Women spoke of their struggle to break or avoid the cycle of exploitation. The desire to escape prostitution concurs with findings of a study in nine other countries in which 89% of prostituted women also wished to exit.⁶⁸

7.1 The Process of Exiting Prostitution

47 Exiting is not a linear process or a one-time decision. For some women, exiting prostitution can happen quickly and permanently; but for many, it is a long process during which they may re-enter prostitution multiple times. As mentioned earlier, while eight women stated that they had exited prostitution at the time of the interview, it was clear from their responses that they are still involved in it on an occasional basis when they are in need of cash. The reasons stated by interviewees for leaving (temporarily or occasionally) prostitution included: facing severe and ongoing violence from their pimp; changes in their personal lives such as marriage, pregnancy, and giving birth; getting older; aging; and being arrested. Layla explained:

I was still working and I was pregnant. [The police] raided the place, but then when they saw that I was pregnant, they did not arrest me. I was saved by my son.

Layla (pseudonym), Lebanese woman

Several models have been identified to conceptualize the process of exiting prostitution.⁶⁹ The six steps in the integrated model developed by Baker in 2014 is particularly relevant and reflects the process described by many of the women interviewed for this study.⁷⁰ The Canadian organization - Concertation des Luttes Contre l'Exploitation Sexuelle (CLES), included an additional step related to exiting prostitution permanently.⁷¹ This final step is in fact where interviewed women have struggled to achieve in order to permanently exit.

The seven steps for exiting prostitution include:

1. The immersion period, where women do not think yet about the exit;

⁶⁸ Melissa Farley et al., *Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries*, id., p. 56.

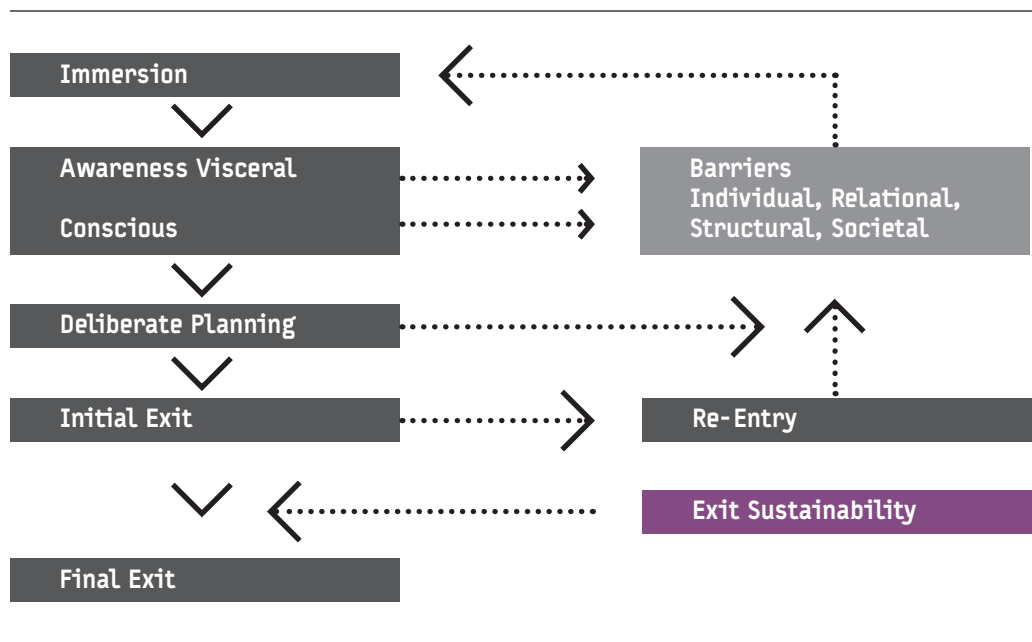
⁶⁹ For a summary of the main models of exiting prostitution see CLES, *Pour s'en sortir*, id., p. 47-48.

⁷⁰ Lynda Baker, Rochelle Dalla, and Celia Williamson, *Exiting Prostitution: An Integrated Model*, *Violence Against Women*, 16(5), 2010, pp. 579-600.

⁷¹ Concertation des Luttes contre l'Exploitation Sexuelle (CLES), in English, *Concertation of Struggles against Sexual Exploitation*, is a Canadian coalition of organizations and individuals that is based in Quebec. It was established in November 2004 and focuses on awareness raising and services, and its work is based on the lived experiences of women in prostitution. The coalition speaks out for women struggling with prostitution. See, <https://www.lacles.org/>.

2. The process of becoming aware of their uneasiness of being in prostitution;
3. The deliberate preparation to exit, where women begin searching and assessing available support services, and during which women are likely to contact service providers;
4. The “initial exit”, where women actively use the support services available to them and may exit;
5. The period in which women re-enter into the prostitution industry or activities where they find themselves trapped again;
6. The final exit – often after several attempts of being in and out of prostitution – where women create a new role for themselves, and drastic changes occur in their lives; and
7. The sustained exit, where women may still need to be supported to maintain their exit.

The Integrated Model on Exiting Prostitution



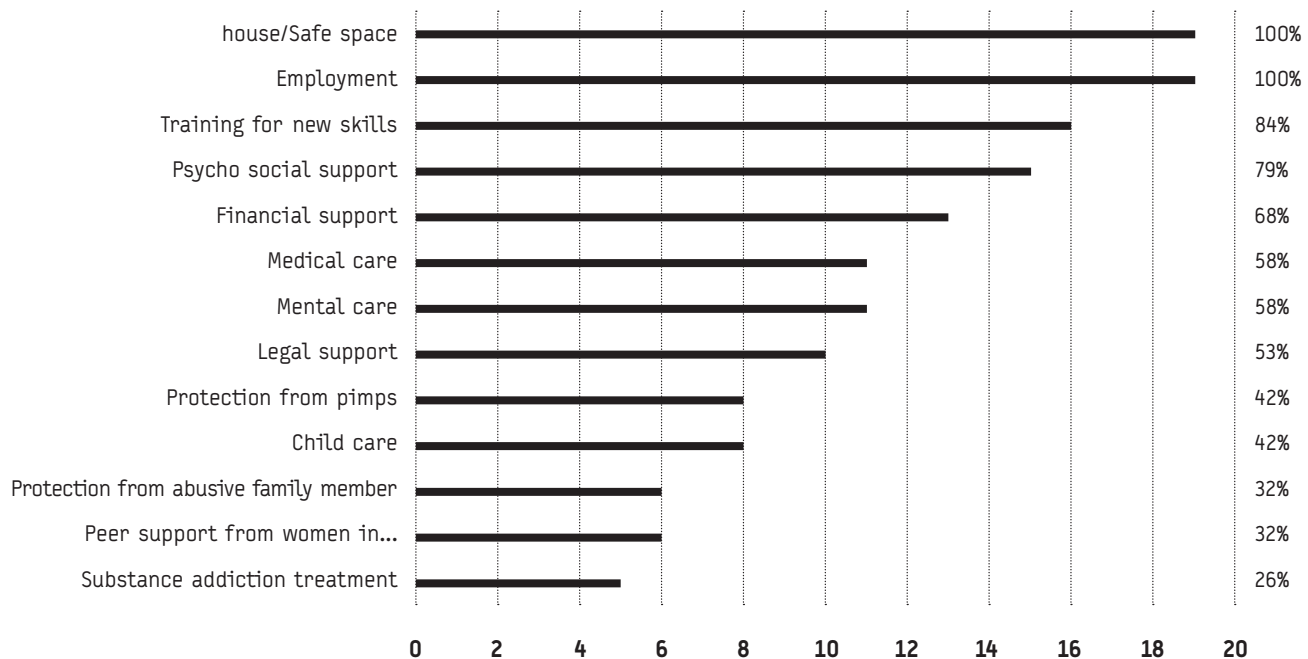
Exit model developed by Baker et al., 2014 and modified by the organization CLES to reflect the Exit Sustainability step.⁷²

72 CLES, Pour s'en sortir, id., p.26.

7.2 Women's Needs in Order to Safely Exit Prostitution

Women in prostitution need tailored services and support that enable them to first overcome the risks and challenges of being in prostitution, and second, to exit. When asked about what they would need to successfully exit, interviewed women identified several needs from a long list that was provided to them.

Needs of 19 Women in Prostitution in Lebanon



Women seeking to exit prostitution need multiple forms of support. However, the two areas prioritized by all of the women interviewed (100%) were having a house and a job. Learning new skills and receiving support (be it financial or psycho-social) were mentioned as important needs by at least 13 women (68%). Access to health-care (including mental health and addiction programs) and legal support were also mentioned. While only a few women mentioned peer support, others considered seeking such help would risk keeping them in prostitution.

Given the limited services available to women in prostitution in Lebanon, the research team inquired to whom these women turn to for help. Half of the interviewees stated that they would seek help from service providers, NGO staff with whom they have regular communications, family, and friends. However, support that is tailored to the mental health and material needs of women is unusual in Lebanon. Only a handful of NGOs provide services but most of these services are time-bound and do not adopt a holistic approach. The remaining half stated they would not ask help from anyone or they do not know who to turn to. One woman explained that as a Syrian it was even harder for her to get help. She said:

I ask for support from God. When I ask for someone's help and no one [helps me], I feel like my hands are tied and I can't do anything. When I knock on someone's door and they learn that I am Syrian, that's it.

Nadia (pseudonym), Syrian woman

7.3 Gaps in the Protection of Women in Prostitution

Observations gathered from interviews with key informants, focus group discussions with senior staff of organizations, and officials from Lebanese and UN agencies helped identify a number of major protection and prevention gaps in addressing the needs of prostituted women. These gaps included: failure to acknowledge the issue of prostitution among key players; the government's failure to provide social and legal protection to victims; the lack of services for women in prostitution and the limited knowledge and capacity among service providers to address the needs of this population; and, the general confusion concerning prostitution and human trafficking among key players.

7.3.1 Lack of Acknowledgment of the Issue of Prostitution among Key Players

The Lebanese government does not recognize the issue of prostitution as a priority for action even though multiple reports have demonstrated that sexual exploitation is pervasive particularly among refugee and migrant communities.

The Lebanese government has taken a limited number of actions to address trafficking for sexual exploitation. The most important of which is adoption of the Anti-Trafficking Law in 2011, the creation of the Anti-trafficking and Human Rights Bureau at the Internal Security Forces and the DGS, and the adoption of the National Action Plan on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2019, which encompasses one output dedicated to amending the Anti-Trafficking Law. However, these actions have not translated into tangible measures on the ground to improve the protection of victims of sexual exploitation or prevent exploitation from taking place. Lebanon still does not have a dedicated strategy or program to address trafficking or procedures for a national referral system. Identification of victims is almost nonexistent. Law enforcement agencies have only identified a small number of victims over the years, despite estimates that indicate the number of victims could be in the thousands.⁷³ Along the same line, the judiciary does not fully apply the Anti-Trafficking Law, leaving women victims of exploitation with no protection, and in many cases, they are penalized for their victimization by criminals. The few measures taken by the Lebanese government over the past decade have solely focused on human trafficking, while ignoring the system of prostitution in which trafficking happens. The Lebanese government's efforts to address human trafficking reflects a fragmented approach that leaves many victims undetected and unprotected, and conveys the message that only victims of the most extreme forms of sexual exploitation are deserving of justice and protection.

Similarly, UN agencies operating SGBV programs and services for refugees and host communities (i.e., Lebanese) do not list trafficking for sexual exploitation among their programmatic priorities, let alone prostitution. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides protection and resettlement services to refugees victim of SGBV, including trafficking victims; however, at the time of this study, it did not have a targeted, ongoing program on the topic other than a single project implemented by a local partner to build the capacities of law enforcement on the issue of prostitution or trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁷⁴ The United Nations Fund for Population Agency (UNFPA), a major donor and key player in SGBV programming in Lebanon, had no programs on this issue. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the agency that oversees the UN Trafficking Protocol, had no running programs trafficking for sexual exploitation at the time of the study, aside from provision of psycho-social support to girls in juvenile detention centers. The

⁷³ Daniela Sala, *The Syrian Women and Girls Sold Into Sexual Slavery in Lebanon*, February 11, 2020, Al Jazeera.

⁷⁴ Kafa has been implementing a project supported by the UNHCR since 2015 to build the capacity of law enforcement officers on the issue of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation.

United Nations for Migration agency⁷⁵ was the only UN agency that had a program focused on trafficking – which aimed at improving the protection of trafficked people and at-risk populations impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey.⁷⁶ However, the program was time bound (32 months), covered all forms of human trafficking (not only for sexual purposes), and did not include actions around the issue of prostitution. Similar to the Lebanese government’s actions, all UN run programs in Lebanon fail to confront the source of the problem which is the system of prostitution.

7.3.2 Lack of Social and Legal Protection by the Government

At the time of this study, the Lebanese government did not carry any support programs for trafficking victims, let alone persons in prostitution. In the rare cases where law enforcement agencies identified victims of trafficking, they only referred the victims to NGOs providing services and operating shelters. However, the vast majority of victims of sexual exploitation are not identified and remain unprotected.

The Lebanese authorities have not fully enforced the Anti-Trafficking Law. Often when a trafficker or traffickers have been charged under this law, their victims have not been considered as such and have not been provided with protection or access to redress.⁷⁷ The judiciary indeed has failed to recognize the power imbalance and inherent exploitation in the relationship between victims and those who exploit them in prostitution. In fact, despite the adoption of the Anti-trafficking Law, the judiciary continues to punish prostituted person under article 523 of the Penal Code, even when the prostituted person is being exploited by another person.⁷⁸ The judiciary’s failure to recognize exploitation and provide redress to victims is mainly due to the fact that contradicting articles of Penal Code were not amended to align with the Anti-Trafficking Law (as explained in Chapter Three). This failure also reflects a weak understanding of the Anti-Trafficking Law by the judiciary, and an embedded prejudice against women and persons in prostitution.

In a series of articles covering cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation at different courts in Lebanon during the years 2016 and 2017, the Legal Agenda – a Lebanese NGO – found that the judiciary tends to penalize women for engaging in prostitution, despite the presence of abuse of vulnerability, exploitation, and other trafficking elements.⁷⁹ The judiciary did not look at whether women were victims of exploitation. They ignored elements of exploitation and trafficking and focused instead on whether the women consented to her involvement in criminal activities.⁸⁰ Among the elements used by judges to prove consent were whether the woman was making a profit, whether the profit was equally split between her and the pimp/trafficker, and whether she has been charged before for prostitution. These practices are contrary to the principles of the UN Trafficking Protocol which

⁷⁵ Formerly International Organization for Migration – IOM.

⁷⁶ This project is entitled ATIP-LEVANT and is funded by the US State Department. A Brief presentation of this project can be found on <https://www.state.gov/tip-of-ice-project-descriptions/#nea> under Near East section.

⁷⁷ Ghida Frangieh, Human Trafficking Crimes Before the Courts: In the Shadow of Prosecution, Legal Agenda, 18 September 2019.

⁷⁸ For rulings on prostitution issued prior to the adoption of the Anti-Trafficking Law in Lebanon in 2011, see Nizar Saghieh and Ghida Frangieh, Prostitution: A Moral Crime or a Crime of Exploitation? An Analysis of 228 Cases of Women Charged with the Crime of Clandestine Prostitution, (in Arabic) Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation, 2013.

⁷⁹ Ghida Frangieh, Human Trafficking Victims Marginalized Before the Courts, Legal Agenda, 25 September 2018.

⁸⁰ Ghida Frangieh, Preconceptions Over-shadow Sexual Exploitation, Legal Agenda, 13 October 2018.

Lebanon has ratified and also the Lebanese Anti-Trafficking Law. Both clearly state that the consent of the victim is irrelevant when any of the means of recruitment (such as the abuse of vulnerability of the victim) are present.

Moreover, judges not only convicted victims of trafficking for engaging in prostitution, but they also convicted women for failing to obtain residency permits and for drug use.⁸¹ By doing so, judges overlooked the fact that women may have committed these violations as a direct consequence of their victimization. Judges failed to grant women amnesty from punishment as victims of trafficking as specified by the Lebanese Anti-Trafficking Law.

In the rare situations where the judiciary identified victims of trafficking, no protective measures were provided. For instance, the Anti-Trafficking Law provides judges the prerogative to grant residency to victims while the investigations are ongoing. It also allows for the seizure of the assets of the traffickers in order to provide compensation to the victims. These measures have never been exercised by judges, even for the victims of the infamous “Chez Maurice” case mentioned in the introduction. Along the same line, the law specifies that the Ministry of Justice can enter into agreements with organizations offering assistance and protection to victims of human trafficking. However, other than a one-year agreement with a local NGO to support trafficked migrant domestic workers, the Ministry has not signed any other agreements with local organizations. The law also stipulates that a fund should be established to support victims of trafficking under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs. This fund was never established. All of these examples lead to one conclusion: protection measures provided to the victims are almost nonexistent, and the little protection that is stipulated in the law has not been properly implemented.

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7.3.3 Lack of Specialized Services for Women in Prostitution and Limited Knowledge among Providers

Due to the absence of government support services, the burden of providing most SGBV and health services falls on civil society. Yet organizations with dedicated programs for prostitution survivors are rare, have limited capacity, and are unable to cover the multifaceted needs of women in prostitution. Dar al Amal and Kafa are the only NGOs that have such programs where specialized services such as case management, psycho-social and legal support, outreach programs at prisons and detention centers, and safe sheltering are provided. In addition to these two organizations, a limited number of other NGOs provide sexual and reproductive health services and

⁸¹ *Idem.*

HIV and drug treatment to a range of populations at risk which include prostituted persons. While all these local organizations serve affected people regardless of their nationality, their scope of operation does not target refugees, in a large part due to limited capacities. This situation leaves Syrian women in prostitution with less protection than the Lebanese.

Services provided to Syrian women refugees generally fall under the larger umbrella of services to all SGBV survivors provided by local and international organizations, as set by coordinated referral pathways and standard operating procedures. These services include case management, medical support, legal assistance, emergency shelter, psycho-social support, cash assistance, and livelihood options. However, persons in prostitution and victims of trafficking are not the usual target group for these services, which predominately serve women victims of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.⁸²

According to KI interviews and FGD with service providers, existing SGBV services for Syrian refugees and host communities fall short of effectively protecting victims of prostitution and trafficking for several reasons. Most services are offered for a limited timeframe when women in prostitution need a long-term support mechanism. Participants pinpointed that the psychological issues women in prostitution face cannot be resolved “in just 12 or 15 sessions,” which is the average number of sessions offered by the NGOs. Other service providers highlighted the short period survivors are allowed to stay in shelters, which was not considered to be adequate for women in prostitution. Many shelters have limitations such as not accepting women with their children or not accepting women with mental health issues. Moreover, many shelters are not specialized in the field of prostitution and trafficking, and they do not follow-up with survivors after they leave the shelter. These shortcomings can contribute to a woman’s decision to go back to prostitution. The lack of cash assistance to victims and the lack of support for re-integration of survivors into society were also highlighted as a gap. More than one service provider specified that for survivors who are Syrian refugees, the only solution would be resettlement in a third country – a solution that is rarely applied in reality.

Key informants also highlighted the lack of knowledge about prostitution and trafficking and the limited capacity of case managers and frontline staff to assist women. During a FGD held with international organizations, one participant said:

“[T]here isn’t any capacity building of the people who are dealing directly with prostitution/trafficking cases. The organizations are not building the capacity of these people, they are not equipped to deal with such cases. They might be equipped to deal with GBV cases, CP [child protection] cases but not prostitution cases. I remember when I was in my old organization, the people that responded to the one trafficking ring, we were not equipped, we were not trained, we never had such cases before. We were new to the trafficking concept. This is a bad practice that is happening in almost all organizations.”

⁸² National Gender-Based Information Management System Steering Committee (Lebanon), GBIMS Overview 2015-2019.

7.3.4 Confusion and Misunderstanding about the Links between Prostitution and Trafficking

Another limit to effective prevention and protection programs is the lack of understanding of the link between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. Interviews with KI and FGDs' participants revealed that a large number of respondents had little knowledge of what international and Lebanese laws state and did not fully understand the experiences of prostituted women. Respondents at times provided contradictory perceptions about prostitution and affected people during the same interview.

The terminology used to qualify prostitution varied among respondents, even in the same organization. This indicates that the organization may have no position on the topic, and that each staff member had their own views on prostitution – either as a system of oppression or a job like any other job. While some respondents used the terms “prostitution” and “women in prostitution”, others used the terms “survival sex,” “sex work” or “sex workers”, “commercial sex workers”, and “women engaged in sexual relationships in exchange for money” to qualify prostitution and prostituted women. When asked about the definition of survival sex, respondents gave the same definition as prostitution: “a sex act in exchange for money.” Respondents used the term survival sex in reference to refugee populations, and thought that this term is less discriminatory compared to prostitution. One respondent specified that survival sex is only applicable to Syrians, Palestinians, and stateless people while Lebanese people only engage in sex work. Respondents who used the term sex work thought it was less discriminatory and viewed prostitution a “choice” of employment or a profession for some people.

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When asked about the difference between prostitution and trafficking, key stakeholders varied in their levels of understanding of the subject. A very limited number of respondents rightly stated that they are interlinked and both result in the exploitation of the person in prostitution, whether this exploitation comes at the hands of the pimp/trafficker, or the sex buyer. The majority of respondents in fact believed that the difference was that “exploitation” exists in the case of trafficking, implying (in error) that there are no elements of exploitation within prostitution.

For some respondents, exploitation was defined by the presence of a pimp or a trafficker who exploits and benefits financially from the prostitution of others. A few of these respondents said that the pimp (as stipulated in the article 523) and the sex trafficker (as determined in the Anti-Trafficking Law)⁸³ are practically the same. However, for others, not all women who have pimps are exploited or coerced by them. Some NGOs operating harm reduction programs suggested that their programs could better protect women because they partnered with pimps. While pimps are considered criminals under Lebanese

⁸³ Law Number 164 Punishment for the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, the Official Gazette, No. 40, September 01, 2011.

laws, the National AIDS Program Director explained why it was beneficial to coordinate with pimps; “The pimp can prevent the harm; you explain to him how much benefit he can get through his girls.”⁸⁴

In the opinion of many respondents, including UN agency representatives, government officials and NGO members, exploitation requires the presence of elements of coercion, which would indicate the lack of consent of the victim. Examples of coercion provided by respondents were “bad working conditions”, “not being paid”, “forced into prostitution”, “having papers held”, being subject to “threats” and “not being able to leave.” One law enforcement officer stated that if the woman keeps getting arrested and re-enters prostitution after each release, it is an indication that she has given her “consent” and is not a victim of trafficking. This officer did not view that women may be repetitively coerced and may not have any other alternatives for survival.

Stating that only coercion and lack of consent is what determines trafficking reflects a weak understanding of the definition of human trafficking according to international law. Coercion is one of the means stated by the UN Trafficking Protocol for traffickers to recruit their victims, but not the only means. Other means were also included in the definition, particularly the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability of the victim. Traffickers and pimps widely use women’s vulnerability – such as their extreme poverty or their refugee status – to recruit them into the sex trade. Moreover, according to the UN Trafficking Protocol, the consent of the victim is irrelevant when any of the UN Protocol’s listed means are used. In other words, according to international law a victim of trafficking could be “consenting” and “not coerced” into committing a crime and still be exploited and trafficked.

The common misunderstanding that prostitution and trafficking are totally separate issues hinders many prostituted women from receiving support and assistance. This also results in a lack of a cohesive and coordinated approach to service provision and programming. This fragmentation has led to duplication of efforts among organizations. For example, UN agencies and international organizations operating in Lebanon have separately submitted different proposals to amend existing laws⁸⁵ and have produced different standard operating procedures (SOPs) for identifying and referring human trafficking victims – none of which have been adopted by the Lebanese government at the time of this study.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Interview with the Director of the National Aids Program, conducted on May 28, 2019.

⁸⁵ Particularly, draft amendments were proposed by UNODC and IOM/UN Migration.

⁸⁶ The International Center for Migration Policies and Development (ICMP) implemented TELAE project (Training to Enhance Lebanese Anti-trafficking Effort) during which draft SOPs on identification and referral of trafficked persons in Lebanon has been developed. See ICMPP, Training-of-Trainers Curriculum on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Identification and Referral of Trafficked Persons in Lebanon, 2013.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Prostitution: Another Form of Violence Against Women

57 Prostitution is an institution that stands in opposition to gender equality. No society can claim to aspire for equality between men and women if it allows men to pay for the sexual access to women's bodies. Interviews with women in this study showed that prostitution is in itself violence, and that prostitution is often a continuity of prior forms of violence such as child sexual abuse, early and forced marriage, domestic and familial violence, and sexual assault. The violence experienced by women in prostitution is similar to other forms of male violence against women, such as intimate partner violence. Both are rooted in sex inequalities and patriarchy, and are manifestations of male domination over women. In prostitution, physical assault, sexual assault and rape, threats, murder, economic violence, and emotional abuse are the norm, not the exception. Like others abusive intimate partners, pimps/traffickers, and sex buyers control, coerce, and dominate their victims. As well understood in the field of domestic violence, the money exchanged in the prostitution transaction is reminiscent of the gifts offered by abusers to their partners during the "honeymoon phase" that follows the "incident of violence" phase. Yet the payment of money or gifts cannot remove the harm that is inflicted on women in prostitution, or later, when the mental and health effects of being prostituted surface. Just as the coerced consent of a woman who is being domestically terrorized by a violent spouse is irrelevant, so is the coerced consent of a prostitution survivor irrelevant.

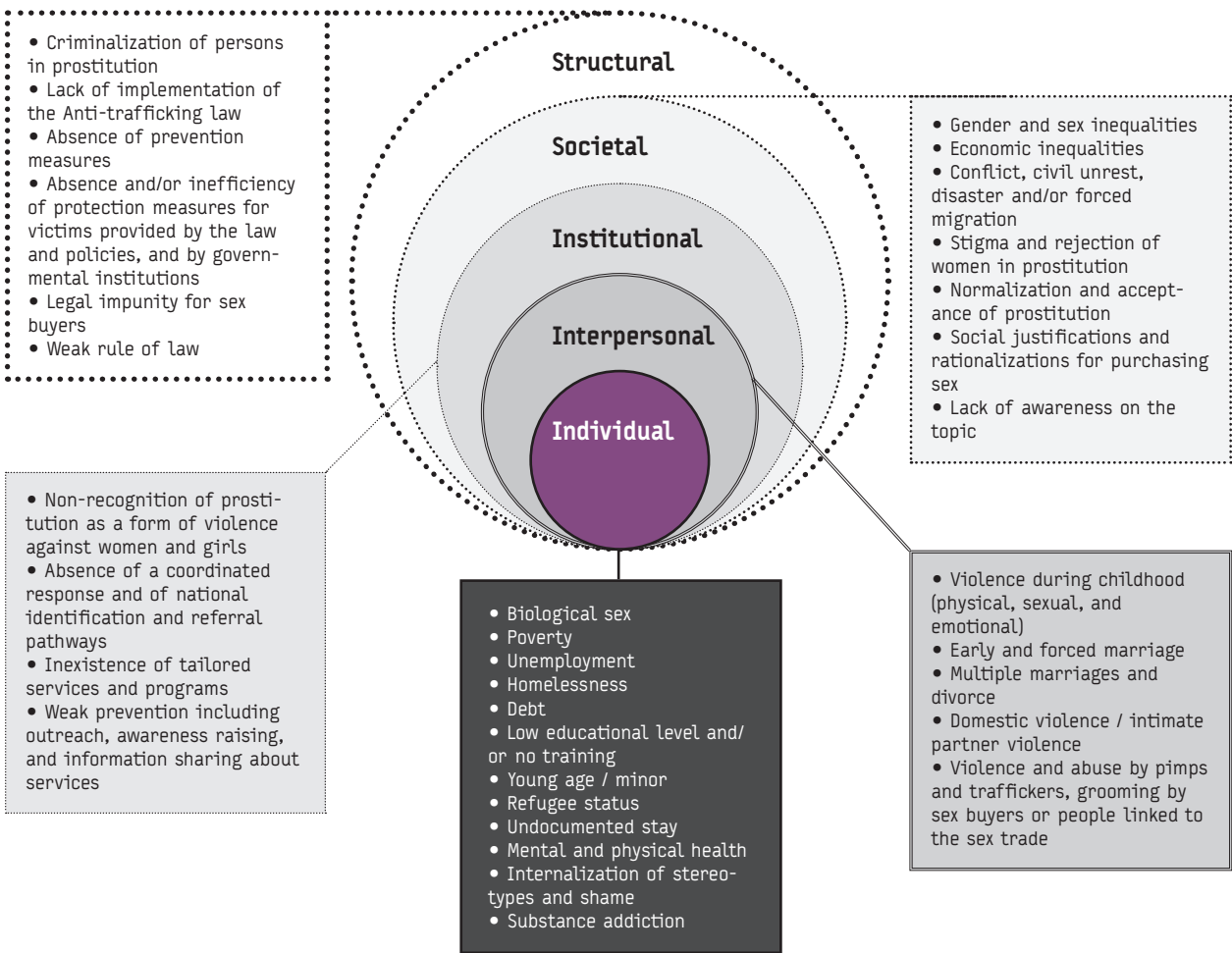
These interviews with women in prostitution demonstrated that they are alone in facing violence and exploitation. They can only rely on themselves to develop coping mechanisms and strategies to minimize harm of prostitution. They are also alone in their efforts to escape poverty and homelessness. At the same time, these women suffer the social stigma and legal criminalization. For Syrian women, their precarious living conditions in Lebanon and often lack of legal residency are additional factors that entrap them in the sex trade.

Prevention measures, tailored services, legal protection and support for victims of prostitution are severely lacking or nonexistent for all women, irrespective of nationality. This is largely due to the fact that providing protection for victims of prostitution is not a priority for

most governmental institutions and NGOs. The few agencies that have actions on the topic focus solely on the trafficking angle and leave out prostitution or see it as an unrelated phenomenon.

The following ecological model shows the linkages between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation. It illustrates the key risk factors and the many challenges that act as barriers to women's ability to escape prostitution and trafficking.

Ecological Model for Factors Leading to Prostitution & Trafficking, Including Challenges to Exiting Prostitution



The needs of women are significant, and the complex interaction between individual, interpersonal, institutional, societal, and structural factors that drive women into prostitution and trafficking, warrant a multi-dimensional strategy. Such strategy needs concerted efforts by various stakeholders including government entities, donors, UN agencies, and local and international service providers operating in Lebanon.

8.2 Recommendations to the Government of Lebanon: Decriminalize Prostituted Women and Persons, Offer them Exit Assistance and Support, and Criminalize Sex Buyers and Pimps

In light of its international obligations to women's human rights, Lebanon must acknowledge that prostitution is a form of exploitation and violence against women. Lebanon needs to recognize that women trapped in prostitution, whether they have a pimp/trafficker or not, are victims of a system of exploitation that targets those most vulnerable, those who suffer from gender-based sex inequality, and those who suffer from conflicts and wars. Accordingly, the Lebanese government should aim to prevent prostitution, protect its victims, and prosecute the exploiters and the profiteers of prostitution. In particular, the Lebanese government needs to:

A. Repeal all criminal measures that penalize prostituted persons as they are victims of a serious form of violence and exploitation and their human rights are violated. In particular, repeal Section of Article 523 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which criminalizes prostituted persons.

B. Criminalize the act of purchasing sex and introduce appropriate fines and penalties. Most of the violence against women in prostitution is perpetrated by sex buyers. The purchase of sex acts is violence in itself. Several countries have introduced laws that criminalize sex buyers as a way to address the root causes of prostitution and trafficking. Known as the Nordic Model, this legal framework was introduced first in Sweden followed by other countries such as Iceland, Norway, Canada, Ireland, and France.⁸⁷ This legal model is consistent with article 9.3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol, which requires States parties to reduce the demand that fosters exploitation and leads to trafficking.

C. Strengthen the implementation of the Lebanese 2011 Anti-Trafficking Law and amend it to include improved protection measures

⁸⁷ Gunilla Ekberg, *The Swedish Law That Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services: Best Practices for Prevention of Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings, Violence Against Women*, 10 (10), 2004, pp.1187-1218.

for victims and to ensure at minimum:

a) The removal from the 2011 Anti-Trafficking Law of the requirement that the victim must prove that she was “compelled” to engage in prostitution and/or commit other violations of law in order to prove that she is a victim and should be granted amnesty for violating residency or work regulations.⁸⁸

b) The immediate referral of, and assistance to, victims of trafficking while granting non-Lebanese victims residency at a minimum during court investigations and proceedings. Refugees victims should be granted long-term residency.

c) The amendment of articles 523, 524, 525, 526 and 527 of the Lebanese Penal Code to:

i) Criminalize all acts of pimping and the facilitation and recruitment of persons into prostitution, regardless of whether the victim consents.

ii) Significantly increase corresponding fines and the period of incarceration to be in accordance with the 2011 Anti-Trafficking law.

D. Prepare, finance, and implement a national strategy to combat prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation in Lebanon that will include at minimum:

a) A prevention action plan that will provide public education to the society and especially men that there cannot be equality between men and women if men are allowed to buy women for their sexual use. The general public must be educated on the realities of prostituted women's lives and their victimization - so that the women are no longer stigmatized. Sex buyers should be stigmatized and arrested, not their victims. Educational programs should include information about toxic and harmful masculinities which includes awareness of men's role in perpetrating violence against women, including attitudes that promote women's sexual exploitation.

b) A protection action plan that would include:

i. Creating national identification and referral pathways, and protection mechanisms for prostituted persons including victims of trafficking.

ii. Partnering with service providers and international agencies to implement services and programs for women in prostitution and those who wish to escape prostitution.

iii. Creating a victims compensation fund per the provisions of the 2011 Anti-Trafficking Law.

iv. Reinforcing the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking law and prosecuting those who exploit and profit off of the prostitution of others.

⁸⁸ Article 586.1 of the Anti-Trafficking Law that define 'human trafficking' and 'victim' reads [...According to the provisions of this Article, compelling a person to participate in any of the following acts shall be considered exploitation: A) Acts that are punishable by law; B) Prostitution or exploitation of the prostitution of others; C) Sexual exploitation; D) ...] Also article 586.8 reads: [A victim who proves that he was compelled to commit acts that are punishable by law or that he was compelled to violate the terms of [his] residency or work [permit] shall be given amnesty from punishment...]

8.3 Recommendations to Relevant UN Agencies and International Organizations: Place Prostitution on Your Agenda and Respect UN Languagee

- A.** Acknowledge that prostitution is violence that is exclusively perpetrated by men most always against women and girls, and include it among the list of programmatic priorities.
- B.** Finance exit programs and support services for women who are prostituted and/or trafficked; also support prostitution prevention and advocacy initiatives.
- C.** For UN agencies: refrain from using terminology such as “sex work/sex workers” or “survival sex” as this is not compliant with the language in international UN conventions, which instead use the terms “prostitution”, “sexual exploitation”, “exploitation of the prostitution of others”, and “trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation”. The UN General Assembly has declared that prostitution is “incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person.” Furthermore, CEDAW calls on states' parties to the 1949 Convention to “suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”.⁸⁹ When prostitution is presented as “work” there is an implied demand to decriminalize “sex work”, along with decriminalizing the sex trade in its entirety, which is in severe contradiction to the prohibitions on prostitution that exist in international human rights law.⁹⁰

8.4 Recommendations to Service Providers: Towards Tailored Services and Exit Programs

Exit programs for women in prostitution should address the broad range of needs highlighted by the women in this study. Their urgent needs include housing, employment, psycho-social support, mental and physical health care, legal support, training, and financial assistance. While individual women may not need all of these supports, nonetheless an exit program should be holistic in coverage, specifically focused on the special needs of women in prostitution, free of charge, and accessible. Service providers, particularly the SGBV service providers who are in contact with women in prostitution should take the following measures:

⁸⁹ Article 6 of CEDAW, id.

⁹⁰ Decriminalization of “sex work” effectively decriminalizes the actions of those who pimp and profit from the prostitution of others, while failing to fully put in place an environment in which persons who are in prostitution and exploited by pimps or traffickers are able to safely exit to build a life free from violence. Rather, the lack of protection and support lead many survivors who exited to return to exploitative situations for lack of other options to survive.

- A.** Acknowledge that prostitution is a form of violence perpetrated by men almost always against women and girls.
- B.** Build staff capacities on ways to intervene with women in prostitution and help staff deepen their knowledge about prostitution, including its legal and social aspects, as well as the realities faced by women in this industry. Service providers should fully understand the linkages between childhood neglect and abuse, the status of women, prostitution, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and trafficking, and other forms of SGBV. They also need to be trained on trauma and its impacts on women in prostitution and those who are trafficked, including manifestations of symptoms of PTSD so that they can better serve this population.
- C.** Ensure that staff working for service providers are properly evaluated and recruited based on their qualifications and on their non-prejudicial attitudes toward women in prostitution.⁹¹ This is central to establishing services that listen to, respect and understand the experiences of prostitution survivors. This allows the creation of a trusting and egalitarian relationship between service providers and the women they serve.
- D.** Offer services to all women in prostitution unconditionally, and not only to those who agree to exit. No difference should be made between victims of prostitution or victims of trafficking; both are exploited and are driven by the same risk factors.
- E.** Service providers should be proactive in identifying victims of violence and exploitation. They also should be able to identify in which stage (see the “Exit Model” in Chapter 7, section 7.1) women in prostitution currently are. For instance, service providers need to be aware that women may take time to exit, may return to prostitution, may not exit successfully, or may not wish to exit at all.
- F.** Service providers should help women understand the links between prostitution and violence so that they do not blame themselves for their own victimization in the sex trade. Women need to know that their prostitution is the consequence of a larger socio-economic context of inequalities, including sex and gender inequalities.
- G.** Expand support and services to women who have exited. Women may need time to heal, reconstruct their self-image, overcome traumatic stress, and reintegrate into society and into the workforce. Thus, it is crucial to keep supporting them until they reach a point where they regain power and autonomy.
- H.** Offer services in women only spaces. These services should be centralized if possible, to avoid situations in which women must go through the stressful process of describing their past experiences many times to different people.
- I.** Include outreach activities as part of programming. Prostitution isolates and dehumanizes women. It is therefore important to conduct outreach activities to build trust and inform them of available services.
- J.** In the case of harm reduction programs, the public health lens through which these programs are framed must ensure they are implemented within an approach that includes harm elimination

⁹¹ Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), Providing Care and Case Management Services to Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Humanitarian Settings, Interagency Gender-based Violence Case Management Guidelines, 2017, p. 161-162.

(i.e., escape from prostitution) as well as the far more modest goal of harm reduction (such as STD education, reducing stigma, and condom distribution). These harm reduction programs must question the system of prostitution rather than normalizing the presence of prostitution or accepting it as inevitable.

K. Offer support with the objective of serving women in their quest to regain power over their lives. Women in prostitution know better than anyone else about their needs. In this study, they have let us know what they need.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWS

DATE OF INTERVIEW	ORGANIZATION	TITLE OF INTERVIEWEE
May 15, 2019	SGBV National Task Force	SGBV National Task Force Coordinator
May 16, 2019	UNODC	UNODC Program Coordinator
May 20, 2019	IOM	Program Officer
May 20, 2019	Dar AL Amal	Social Worker
May 20, 2019	UNHCR	Protection Officer
May 20, 2019	UNHCR	Protection Officer
May 20, 2019	UNHCR	Protection Officer
May 22, 2019	Legal Agenda	President
May 23, 2019	Syrian Citizenship League	Member
May 28, 2019	National Aids Program	Spokesperson
May 28, 2019	National Aids Program	Manager
May 29, 2019	SIDC	Executive Director
May 30, 2019	Sawa for Development and Aid	Protection Coordinator
May 31, 2019	UNFPA	Assistant Representative/Head of the Office
June 10, 2019	Palais de Justice / Ministry of Justice	Judge
June 17, 2019	Marsa	Project Manager
June 21, 2019	Mission D'amour	Member
June 28, 2019	Ministry of Social Affairs	LCRP General Supervisor
June 28, 2019	Ministry of Social Affairs	Head of the Family Affairs Unit
June 28, 2019	Ministry of Social Affairs	Head of the NGO section
July 1, 2019	Ministry of Justice	Judge
July 1, 2019	Ministry of Justice	Judge
July 3, 2019	Palestinian Najdeh organization	Coordinator of the Women's program
July 11, 2019	General Security	Colonel
July 19, 2019	General Security	Head of the Human Rights Section
July 19, 2019	ISF	Head of Anti-Trafficking and Protection of Morals Bureau
July 25, 2019	Kafa	Lawyer / Anti-Trafficking Unit

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FIRST FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION - MAY 31, 2019	
NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION	TITLE OF THE PARTICIPANT
Intersos	Senior Case Worker
Norwegian Refugee Council	Protection Advisor
Care International	Gender and Protection Specialist
Médecins Sans Frontières - Switzerland	Mental Health Supervisor
International Rescue Committee	Senior Case Management Officer – Women Protection and Empowerment
International Medical Corps	Case Manager GBV

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SECOND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION – JUNE 13, 2019	
NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION	TITLE OF THE PARTICIPANT
Mouvement Social	Center Manager
Rassemblement Démocratique Des Femmes Libanaises - RDFL	Project Coordinator
Mariam and Martha Shelter	Coordination and GBV Case Worker
Soins Infirmiers et Développement Communautaire - SIDC	Executive Director
Amel Association	Lawyer/Project Assistant
Makhzoumi Foundation	Senior GBV Case Worker
Oum El Nour	Social Worker

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