

# **Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian Case**

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The research and publication of this study were funded by Status of Women Canada's Policy Research Fund. This document expresses the views of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada or the Government of Canada.

November 2000

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### **Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

McDonald, Lynn

Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union [computer file]: The Canadian Case

Issued also in French under t.p.: *Les travailleuses migrantes du sexe originaires d'Europe de l'Est et de l'ancienne Union soviétique : le dossier canadien*

Includes bibliographical references.

Issued also in print format.

Mode of access: WWW site of Status of Women Canada.

ISBN 0-662-65335-1 [print format]

Cat. no. SW21-63/2000 [print format]

1. Prostitutes — Health and hygiene — Canada — Case studies.
2. Women immigrants — Canada — Social conditions — Case studies.
3. Canada — Emigration and immigration — Case studies.
4. Europe, Eastern — Emigration and immigration — Case studies.
5. Soviet Union — Emigration and immigration — Case studies.
6. Sex-oriented business — Canada — Case studies.

I. Moore, Brooke.

II. Timoshkina, Natalya.

III. Canada. Status of Women Canada.

IV. Title: *Les travailleuses migrantes du sexe originaires d'Europe de l'Est et de l'ancienne Union soviétique : le dossier canadien*

HQ148.M32 2000 331.7'613'0642 C00-980429-3

**Project Manager:** Julie Cool and Vesna Radulovic, Status of Women Canada

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**Editing & Layout:** PMF Editorial Services Inc. / PMF Services de rédaction inc.

**Translation:** Société Gamma inc.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The United Nations estimates that four million people are trafficked throughout the world each year either because of choice, or coercion due to violence or the threat of violence, abuse of authority, debt bondage or deception (Caldwell et al. 1997; Specter 1998; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). Women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are part of a new and growing supply source for this international sex industry. This study explored the trafficking in women from Central and Eastern Europe to Canada. The purpose was to examine the circumstances under which the Slavic women came to Canada, their working conditions when they arrived and how they adapted to the sex trade in the strip clubs and massage studios. Their use of social and health services was documented and recommendations made for service delivery for this population. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women, 15 agency personnel who had provided or were likely to provide services to these women and 15 key informants who had extensive experience with this group of women. Fifty interviews were conducted overall. Findings indicated that the poor economic and political conditions in the women's home countries had powerful, wide-ranging effects on the women's lives leading them to migrate to Canada. At least half of the women interviewed were trafficked according to the definitions used by Chew (1999). The conditions of recruitment, migration and employment were, in many cases, deplorable and characterized by exploitation, control and illegal activity. The women trafficked from the Slavic region typically did not access social or health services in Canada and, if they did, they indicated they did not want services delivered by their own ethnic community because of the stigma attached to their work.

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## PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues and to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent policy issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under an urgent call for proposals in September 1998, entitled *Trafficking in Women: The Canadian Dimension*. The purpose of this call was to generate research which could provide concrete knowledge on the extent and nature of trafficking in Canada in order to develop policies and programs which would recognize and protect the human rights of trafficked women.

Status of Women Canada funded four research projects on this issue. They deal with Filipino mail-order brides, sex trade workers from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the legal framework for mail-order marriages and immigrant domestic workers, and a comprehensive profile of women trafficked to, from, and within Canada. A complete list of research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We would like to thank all the women and the service providers who graciously gave of their time to be interviewed for this research. We would also like to thank Jeff Ramdowar and Bert O'Mera for helping us realize our goals.

We also thank the Independent Policy Research Fund, Status of Women Canada, for making this research possible.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The United Nations estimates that four million people are trafficked throughout the world each year, either because of choice, or coercion due to violence or the threat of violence, abuse of authority, debt bondage or deception (Specter 1998; Caldwell et al. 1997; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). Reports by the Global Survival Network (GSN) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) argue that the rate of trafficking in women is on the rise based on the increased numbers of Russian and Eastern European women found in the sex trade in Belgium, the Netherlands and in the United States (IOM 1995; Caldwell et al. 1997). Slavic women represent a population that has not been examined by Canadian researchers, a reflection of the research activity at the international level, where few studies exist on this demographic group (e.g., IOM 1995; Caldwell et al. 1997). We know virtually nothing about the women in these circumstances, their trials and tribulations and the obstacles that prevent their escape or, at minimum, an improvement in their working conditions.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to explore the experiences of women who had been trafficked into Canada from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The objectives were:

- Explore the circumstances that lead Slavic women to migrate to Canada for the purposes of sex work.
- Identify the type and nature of their work when they arrive in Canada.
- Determine the conditions that lead them to remain in or change their original working situation.
- Explore difficulties with migration or in the workplace after coming to Canada.
- Identify the health and social services used by the women.
- Document the gaps in services available to these women.
- Make recommendations to improve policy for the delivery of health and social services for these women.

### **Method**

Since little is known about the women, an exploratory naturalist approach was adopted to help us understand day-to-day life for the women and the service providers (Creswell 1998). In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women, 15 agency personnel who had provided, or were likely to provide, services to these women and with 15 key informants such as police officers, massage parlour owners and immigration officers, all of whom had extensive

experience with this group of women. Fifty interviews were conducted overall. Twelve interviews were conducted in Russian. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for meanings.

## **Findings**

- Poor economic and political conditions in the home country were cited by service providers, key informants and the women themselves as being the major reason for migrating.
- Although nine women were clearly trafficked, none perceived themselves to be trafficked.
- Conditions of recruitment, migration and employment were, in many cases, deplorable and characterized by exploitation, control and illegal activity.
- Very few service providers had dealt with women trafficked from the Slavic region as the women did not typically access social services in Canada.
- The women did not use services because they did not think they needed them. The women had illegal immigration status and didn't think they would be allowed to use them, or they did not know the services existed, how they worked or where they were located.
- The women indicated they would like social services in the areas of education, therapy and drug counselling. Most of all they wanted help with employment.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were proposed.

1. Distribute materials in the countries of origin conveying more realistic facts about the life of exotic dancing in Canada and the realities of trafficking.
2. The materials pertaining to Canadian laws, should be distributed at ports of entry, to all temporary workers, visitors and students. The information should be made available in foreign languages. This is essential given that the majority of these women speak English poorly, if at all.
3. Given that many of these women are trafficked as visitors, it is recommended that the procedural aspects of obtaining and maintaining a visitor's visa be re-evaluated and ways found to avoid the use of the category of illegal status when the women overstay their time.

4. The process of accrediting immigrant professionals needs to be sped up, and English/French as a Second Language courses should be made available even if the women are in Canada illegally.
5. Efforts should be made to ameliorate unfavourable working conditions in the strip clubs and massage parlours. Public health inspections should be conducted of the entire premises (not just the kitchen) on a regular basis.
6. Create a neutral, regulated, governing body to oversee strip clubs and massage parlours during hours of operation to ensure that the rules remain stable.
7. Make it mandatory to have information written in various languages about health-related issues (i.e., sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex practices, etc.) and health and social service options (i.e., substance abuse treatment, shelters, medical services) centrally posted for the workers in strip clubs, massage parlours and any other establishments involved in the sex trade.
8. Promote further development and provide funding for existing social service agencies solely devoted to the sex trade. These agencies must become an integral component of the sex industry, engaging in very active outreach in the clubs and the massage studios. Their access to clubs and studios should be mandated by law.
9. Develop and fund interdisciplinary, joint service operations similar to the successful Project Almonzo which works to combat organized prostitution.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations estimates that four million people are trafficked<sup>1</sup> throughout the world each year either because of choice, or coercion due to violence or the threat of violence, abuse of authority, debt bondage or deception (Caldwell et al. 1997; Specter 1998; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). This massive illicit movement of people has created a black market for smuggling and trafficking estimated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to be almost US\$7 billion globally (Solicitor General 1998). Although it is impossible to document the extent of the practice, many international human rights organizations argue that the sex trade is one of the fastest growing forms of trafficking (Caldwell et al. 1997; Gramegna 1996; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). For example, a recent working paper prepared for the UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery estimates that two million women and children are trafficked each year (IMADR 1998). In other reports by the Global Survival Network (GSN) and the International Organization for Migration, the trafficking in women is argued to be on the rise based on the increased numbers of Russian and Eastern European women found in the sex trade in Belgium, the Netherlands and the United States (Caldwell et al. 1997; IOM 1995). These figures, however, have to be regarded with some caution since there is little systematic, reliable research on the issue, the definitions of trafficking in women vary widely, and the illegality or criminal nature of trafficking makes it a hidden activity (Weijers and Lap-Chew 1997).

The estimates for yearly figures on trafficking into Canada vary from 8,000 to 16,000 migrants, who either stay in Canada or try to continue to the United States.<sup>2</sup> The money involved has been estimated to be between US\$120 million and US\$400 million per year (Solicitor General 1998). The number of women trafficked into Canada for sexual exploitation, however, remains unknown (GAATW Canada 1997). An examination of the number of temporary workers that fall under the heading of “buskers,” the category under which employment authorizations are issued for exotic dancers, indicates that over 1,000 employment authorizations are issued each year. In 1999, 1,027 authorizations were issued, compared to 1,028 in 1998 and 1,532 in 1995 (CIC 1999). While the entry of women into the country for exotic dancing is legal, so is entry as a student, visitor, domestic worker or mail-order bride. Government information regarding these categories is too broad to estimate the number of women who might be trafficked into the sex trade. As would be expected, there is no reliable way of accounting for undocumented workers who enter Canada illegally.

Within the sex trade, there has also been a noticeable shift in the sources of supply to the international sex industry. A number of international organizations have noted that trafficking in women from Eastern Europe has exploded since 1989. It has been suggested that two thirds of the estimated 500,000 women annually trafficked for prostitution worldwide come from Eastern Europe (IOM 1997; Hughes et al. 1999). The United States estimates that about 4,000 women are trafficked from the newly independent states and Eastern Europe (O’Neill Richard 2000). Some have argued that the Ukraine, Russia and Belarus have replaced Thailand and the Philippines as the epicentre of the global business in trafficking women (Ling 1997; Specter, 1998). A number of organizations have also argued

that all indicators show that Slavic women will soon become the primary group of those recruited and transported to North America (IOM 1997; McMahon, 1999). These and other organizations also note that in the last year, private agencies in several Eastern European countries have started aggressive campaigns to recruit new “workers” for North America and Canada, in particular, a country portrayed as one of the most desirable in the world (Bradley nd; Caldwell et al. 1997; IOM 1998).

Although some research has been done on the migration or trafficking of women to Canada, the focus has been on those coming from Asia. Slavic women represent a population that has not been examined by Canadian researchers, a reflection of the research activity at the international level, where few studies exist on Slavic women (e.g., Caldwell et al. 1997; IOM 1995). We know very little about the women in these circumstances, their trials and tribulations, and the obstacles that prevent their escape or, at minimum, an improvement in their working conditions. The consequences of trafficking are grave. The women are often subjected to violence by traffickers and clients alike, and are deprived of basic human rights. Many are forced to live in unendurable, slavery-like conditions and some pay with their lives. The consequences are also grave for Canada because of the growth of organized crime which is known to be linked to trafficking women for sexual exploitation and the growth of a clandestine migrant community with its attendant political, economic and social effects (Bradley nd; IOM 1995, 1996).

This project explores the experiences of women who have been trafficked into Canada from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The goals are to explore the circumstances that lead women to Canada, to ascertain the nature of their work and their working conditions, when they arrive and any attempts they may make to change their situation. The roles that health and social services play, or might play, in this transition are examined from the point of view of the women involved and from the perspective of those providing health and social services. The information collected has implications for the formulation of policies that influence the delivery of health and social services to these women. The method of inquiry begins with women’s experience in the everyday world that direct us to the cultural, political, economic and social forces that help create and transform these everyday experiences (Ng 1997; Smith 1987).

## 2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the research are:

- Explore the circumstances that lead Slavic women to migrate to Canada for the purposes of sex work.
- Identify the type and nature of their work when they arrive in Canada.
- Determine the conditions that lead them to remain in or change their original working situation.
- Explore difficulties with migration or in the workplace after coming to Canada.
- Identify the health and social services used by the women.
- Document the gaps in services available to these women.
- Make recommendations to improve policy for the delivery of health and social services for these women.

Despite the fact that trafficking in women has been the subject of a growing number of international conventions and declarations, and is a preferred subject of the media, it remains a topic that is long on discussion and short on research for many of the reasons noted above.

In an examination of the literature on Slavic women, there are few extant studies: one by the International Organization for Migration, which devoted its first monograph in the Migration Information Program series to this issue (IOM 1995) and the study by Caldwell et al. (1997), carried out under the auspices of the Global Survival Network (1997). The IOM study collected data on 155 women trafficked to the Netherlands, two thirds of whom were trafficked from Central and Eastern Europe. The Caldwell et al. study focussed on Russian women, interviewing over 50 women along with traffickers, the police and government officials in Russia, Western Europe, Asia and the United States. Related studies included the series done by the International Organization for Migration as part of an information campaign against trafficking which included studies of women in the Ukraine and Bulgaria (IOM 1997, 1998). More recently, a study by the American government touches on Russian trafficking and its link to organized crime (O'Neill Richard 2000). At the time of this review, there were no studies of Central and Eastern European women trafficked into Canada.

In keeping with these observations, this study represents a first attempt to capture the day-to-day experiences of Slavic women in the sex trade in Canada. The report should, therefore, be regarded as a preliminary assessment and analysis of their situation.

### 3. THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Trafficking in women occurs in the context of a growing global economy, a gendered international labour market and the worldwide feminization of labour migration (IOM 1998; McMahon 1999).

With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the ensuing transition to a market economy, Central and Eastern Europe experienced massive job losses and an increase in poverty. Much of the burden of poverty fell on women. For example, in the Russian Federation, women made up 52 percent of the labour force but accounted for 71 percent of the unemployed in 1992 (Barr 1994). Approximately 98 percent of the women were literate and a substantial number were university educated indicating the depth of the discrimination experienced by Russian women in a labour force where jobs reportedly depend on personal connections and the willingness to provide sexual favours (Caldwell et al. 1997). To add to their burden, 94 percent of lone-parent households were headed by women (IOM 1995). With ever-diminishing options for work and faced with the need to support their family, it is not surprising that women have to migrate in large numbers to seek employment.

Many countries have enacted restrictive immigration policies that reduce the legal options open to migrant women and make them vulnerable to the services of legal traffickers. In 1997 and 1998, Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided “new directions on the processing of temporary employment authorizations,” that made it more difficult for exotic dancers to enter Canada (CIC 1998: 1).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the demand for foreign labour rose in the informal service sectors of destination countries such as Canada. Unregulated factory work, sex work, domestic work and the commercial marriage market are rarely regulated by legislation and encourage conditions that permit the exploitation of migrant women (McMahon 1999).

The existence of organized networks of criminals has facilitated the trafficking in women by stepping into the breach between the ever-tightening legal immigration laws and the demand for foreign labour in the semi-legal or illegal service sectors. In Central and Eastern Europe, these networks originally surfaced to fill the gaps in the economy and in law enforcement created by the transition to a market economy (Caldwell et al. 1997). For example, in Hungary reported crime doubled in the four years starting in 1991. The traffickers are usually organized along regional or ethnic lines, and are reported to be highly organized and extremely violent (Caldwell et al. 1997).

The fact that many traffickers are migrants themselves and the newly booming domestic sex trade in Eastern Europe have made doing business easier for traffickers. Knowing the language facilitates the recruitment of women, provides a source of local resources and enhances the trust of the women. In many instances, the sex trade has flourished in countries that overlooked prostitution before the fall of communist regimes as in Hungary where the law was changed to make prostitution legal (IOM 1995). Moreover, sentences against traffickers are light, and there are few successful convictions according to the study done by the International Organization for Migration (Chew 1999; IOM 1995). Add to this

a growing demand for foreign “exotic” women, and it is not difficult to understand why traffickers thrive (Escaler 1998).

How women are trafficked depends, to a great extent, on the scale of the trafficking network involved: small, medium or large (Gramegna 1996). The large-scale network has political and economic international contacts in both the country of origin and destination. These are very sophisticated networks with access to fraudulent documents and a substantial infrastructure in transit and destination countries (Gramegna 1996). Falling into this category is Russian organized crime and government, both reported to be heavily involved in the business (Caldwell et al. 1997).

Conversely, the medium-scale network does not sell the women it recruits to other groups. Instead, it keeps the women under its control and places them in its own clubs and brothels. Such a network tends to specialize in trafficking women from one specific country (Gramegna 1996).

The small-scale network trafficks one or two women at a time, whenever a club or brothel owner places an order through contacts. The contacts recruit the woman, accompany her to the country of destination and deliver her to the club owner (Gramegna 1996). Different criminal networks, both local and transnational, facilitate and manage trafficking and sexual exploitation, while making substantial profits (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute 1999).

Recent evidence suggests that the method of trafficking some women from Central and Eastern European countries may be more informal. For instance, many women are recruited by word of mouth from friends and acquaintances (Caldwell et al. 1997; Gramegna 1996; IOM 1995).

In almost all situations, no matter what the size of the network or its degree of formality, an agent manipulates the women’s desires to migrate by promising a well-paying job, a means of travel and the necessary documents—all of which would normally be impossible for the women if they were to rely on their own resources. Some women are offered legitimate jobs and then tricked into prostitution; others know they will work in the sex trade but are usually deceived as to the extent and length of their involvement (Caldwell et al. 1997; IOM 1995; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997).

These same scenarios are played out in many countries—Hungary, the Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, etc.—so we would expect the situation of the women trafficked into Canada to be very similar, irregardless of the country of origin.

## 4. THE LEGAL CONTEXT IN CANADA

### **Criminal Code**

The criminal treatment of prostitution in Canada renders the work of trafficked women clandestine, marginal and highly stigmatized. Because of this approach, there are few options open to women who might need or want help (Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). A migrant woman is not likely to ask for help if she is already a criminal by nature of her work. She may also fear reprisal from her agent or broker and may not want to be sent back to her country of origin. Women involved in systems of prostitution are subject to a number of prostitution-related charges, under the *Criminal Code of Canada*. However, women who work in the industry are most often under the threat of working in a common bawdy-house. Being an inmate of a bawdy-house, section 210 (2) (a) under the Criminal Code, is a summary offence that is charged to those found in any place used for the purpose of prostitution or the practice of acts of indecency.

If the women are in Canada illegally, they face a deportation order. If they are here legally and they have a criminal record, they may be required to leave Canada. To avoid leaving Canada, some will go to diversion programs which facilitate their exit from the sex trade (CIC 2000). If they enroll in these programs, charges against them are dropped.

The owners of strip clubs and massage parlours are often at risk of keeping a common bawdy-house. Section 210 (1) under the Criminal Code is the charge laid if it has been determined that the establishment is indeed a bawdy-house. This indictable offence is often considered associated with “enterprise crimes.” Therefore, any money and assets held by the owners/operators are considered proceeds of crime. The agents and brokers (recruiters) associated with foreign sex trade workers are liable under “procuring” (section 212 under the Criminal Code). Activities under this section include transporting foreign women for the purposes of prostitution, living off the avails of prostitution for the purposes of gain and exercising control over the movement of the individuals procured.

### **By-Laws**

Various jurisdictions have different by-laws pertaining to lap dancing that affect many of the women in the strip clubs and bars. The women in our study were affected by a lap dancing by-law that prohibited touching between the client and the women.

### **Immigration**

As noted above, changes have been made to Canadian immigration regulations that seem more restrictive regarding women’s options. Before 1997, long-standing instructions were in place to issue employment authorizations to exotic dancers without Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) validation based on exemption E-99 (reciprocity). The reciprocity agreement allowed women from the United States to work as exotic dancers in

Canada. In 1997, E-99 was revoked due to the shift of patterns regarding countries of origin of exotic dancers entering Canada.

Various changes have resulted from the revocation of E-99 which have the potential to slow down the migration of these women. Such changes include the determination of incidentality (A 08). This regulation exempts from validation “a person under contract to fulfill a single or continuous guest engagement in the performing arts, except where the engagement is merely incidental to a commercial activity that does not limit itself to artistic presentation or constitutes employment in a permanent position in a Canadian organization” (CIC 1998). The amount of documentation and information for exempt status A 08 makes it necessary for the detailed paperwork to be completed before coming to Canada. Therefore, most exotic dancers seeking entry to Canada apply through missions abroad. Part of the revocation of E-99 is the issuance of a labour market opinion from HRDC that determined, for the last two years, that the entry of exotic dancers to Canada would not adversely affect the employment opportunities for Canadian citizens or permanent residents in Canada. This has implications for the findings in this study.

Aside from coming to Canada under the guise of an exotic dancer or entertainer, the most common routes, as reported in the literature, involve coming as a visitor or refugee (Caldwell et al. 1997, IOM 1995). With the exception of residents of Hungary, Eastern European women require a visitor’s visa to come for a temporary stay. In most cases, the invitation to visit Canada is provided by the recruiter and the visitor’s visa is generally applicable for a maximum of six months (CIC 2000). The women usually find themselves working illegally and eventually overstay their visa. This coincides with Caldwell et al.’s (1997) assertion that the best way, from the trafficker’s perspective, to move a woman overseas is to ensure that she has illegal migration status so she can be further controlled by the trafficking networks involved.

Another way recruiters can circumvent the immigration system is by having women claim refugee status at the port of entry. These women, who are classified as refugee claimants awaiting determination of their claims, have the right to employment, education and health services (CIC 2000). If a refugee claim is not made as soon as the woman reaches Canada, the recruiters often suggest that she claim refugee status if she finds herself in trouble with the law.

## 5. DEFINING TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

If there is one recurring theme in the writings about trafficking in women, it is the problem of adequately defining the term. This is a very serious issue since a definition communicates a message about the value of women. It suggests certain legal remedies and circumscribes what can be done to redress the problem. To a lesser extent, the lack of consensus on a suitable definition makes the comparison of international data and the tracking of migrants cross-nationally a challenge. A definition of trafficking also has political leverage in bringing about change in the treatment of women. In fact, it was the political function which led to the creation of new definitions of trafficking, based on the perspectives and interests of women (Chew 1999; Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997).

In a report developed for the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women under the auspices of the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and the Foundation Against Trafficking in Women, Wijers and Lap-Chew (1997) clearly identify the flaws in national legislation and international conventions pertaining to trafficking in women. Tracing the historical evolution of definitions through five iterations from the 1949 *Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others* to the present-day *UN General Assembly Resolution on Traffic in Women and Girls, 1994*, the authors demonstrate that the traditional definitions of trafficking focus only on prostitution and procurement and only involve the transportation of people across national borders, overlooking the transportation of people within borders. The legislation ignores the abuses and slavery-like conditions in brothels, paints women as “innocents” and totally overlooks contemporary forms of trafficking such as the trafficking of domestic workers or mail-order brides.

The authors offer new definitions they believe cover abusive brokerage practices and abusive working and living conditions in the public and private sectors of women’s lives. In their view, trafficking can operate on two separate levels: the process of recruitment and the context of work or services. The reason for the separation is that recruitment, for example, can be a matter of choice while the context of work could involve the application of force.

**Trafficking in Women:** All acts involved in the recruitment and transportation of a woman within and across national borders for work or services by means of violence, or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion.

**Forced Labour and Slavery-Like Practices:** The extraction of work or services from any woman or the appropriation of the legal identity or physical person of any woman by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion (Chew 1999: 14).

While there are many definitions in the literature, such as the one used by the International Organization for Migration (IOM 1996), these two are the most suitable for our study. The benefits of using these definitions to guide the research are threefold. First, the definitions

recognize the right of women to self-determination which underscores the fact that women have a human right to live and work in the sex trade according to their own choices. They are not owned by anyone. Maintaining this perspective helps create a clearer picture of the gender imbalance between men and women in the sex trade and speaks to the slavery-like conditions experienced by some women. Second, these definitions recognize prostitution as a form of female labour regardless of whether it is considered legal or illegal. Most important, the inclusion of a broad range of types of coercion—violence, threat of violence, deception, debt bondage or abuse of authority—allows for the broadest inclusion of women's experiences in the research.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

### Design

Since little is known about the Slavic women involved, an exploratory naturalist approach was adopted to help us understand the day-to-day lives of the women and of the service providers (Creswell 1998). Specifically, a phenomenological study of trafficking was chosen to answer the research questions because the goal of this methodological “tradition” is to capture the essence of an experience (Creswell 1998). The approach is appropriate in that it tries to capture what it is like to be part of the sex trade and what it is like to use and provide health and social services. Such an understanding of “what is,” from the participants’ view, can contribute to the development of a responsive health and social service system.

Toronto was chosen for convenience reasons and because it has one of the highest rates of prostitution in Canada (*Juristat* 1993). Toronto also has witnessed the infiltration of organized crime from Russia and other Eastern European countries making it a likely destination for trafficked women from Russia and the Federated States. Given the recency of the issue, Toronto is one of the few jurisdictions where enough women might be found to participate in the research, a concern that was quickly born out. Based on previous research, it was reasonable to assume that the experiences of the women would be fairly similar to the experiences of women trafficked to other urban areas while recognizing that there might be differences in the delivery of health and social services.

A small committee was struck to deal with methodological issues regarding this rare population. Members of the committee included a Canadian sex trade worker, a service provider and members of the research team. Members moved in and out of the “advisory committee” according to their time and interests. The plan was to enlist sex trade workers to help gain access to the women in the strip clubs and massage parlours, and to help with the interviews. As the project unfolded, we learned that we would have to make changes.

First, the sex trade workers objected to the name of the project and requested that we change it. They found the word “trafficking” inappropriate since it portrayed *all* sex trade workers to be helpless victims who did not choose their work, or to migrate to Canada. In their view, this was not always the case. This is a common perception held by many women in the sex industry who are attempting to alter the “paradigmatic” view of the trafficking “victim” (Doezema 1999; Murray 1998). They also suggested that some women would not participate in the study when they saw the word trafficking since the word implied breaking the law and would frighten them off; others would not want to be put at risk if their sponsors found out about a “trafficking” study. The title of the project was, therefore, changed from *The Trafficking in Women from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian Case* to *Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian Case*.

Second, finding women willing to participate in the study turned out to be far more difficult than originally envisioned. Even the sex workers could not reach the women and,

if they did, they were not encouraged. The control exercised over the women by their agents/brokers/bar owners was part of the problem, but other issues became apparent as we collected more data. There were problems with language and in belonging to an ethnic minority group. The owners of the clubs and massage parlours encouraged competitive business practices among the women from different ethnic backgrounds to the extent that women from one ethnic group would not talk to women from another ethnic group. As a result, the Slavic women did not want to talk to the Canadian women and vice versa, so the idea of Canadian women interviewing Russian women was unworkable.

One mechanism used for reaching the women was to participate in police raids that were part of a special project, called Project Almonzo, to curtail criminal activity (living on the avails of prostitution, exercising control, procuring, money laundering) in strip clubs.<sup>4</sup> The interest in the clubs arose from the “new money” pouring into the clubs from recently forged partnerships based on organized crime from Eastern Europe, Asia and South America. Phase 2 of Project Almonzo, however, only got under way in late February because of the logistics of implementing such a large inter-organizational operation. As a result, we did not interview as many women as we might have because our timing didn’t coincide with that of the police project. Because of all the complicated problems we confronted in attempting to engage the women, we decided to interview the service providers first to conserve time and with the expectation that we would find other avenues to help us get closer to the women.

Third, safety issues added to the problems of recruiting women for the study. While we gained access to the massage parlours, it was very difficult to gain access to the women in the strip clubs because they were “watched” or thought they were watched. As well, the interviewers confronted what the women experienced every day—they were recruited for the business by agents and brokers, sexually harassed by the agents or owners, and threatened on several occasions. These problems, plus the reality that interviews had to occur very late at night, often in remote areas of the city, meant that caution had to be exercised at all times, sometimes reducing the opportunities for data collection.

### **Sampling Strategy**

Non-probability sampling was used, because it suited the study, and it was virtually impossible to determine the location of the women or what agencies actually served them.

### ***The Women***

We used several strategies to engage the women and several venues for participant observation:

- five advertisements in local Russian and Eastern European newspapers which generated 25 responses;
- a local television show in Russian allowed one researcher to make a direct plea for participants which produced no results;

- 16 massage parlours directly called where the women were asked for interviews generating 10 responses;
- contacting 16 companies in the adult entertainment business (escort services, independent women) produced two responses;
- participation in one raid of a strip club (see Oziewicz 2000);
- attendance at a diversion/exit group for women;
- two court hearings for trafficked women;
- snowball sampling of the women and the massage parlour owners;
- two referrals from police; and
- nine referrals from a service provider.

Overall, we interviewed 20 women, two of whom were Canadian sex trade workers. The two Canadians were added to explore further the relationships between the Canadian and East European women and to compare their working conditions which turned out to be very different from those of the European women. Although the sample was small, the 18 Slavic respondents represented a sufficient number of situations given the phenomenological nature of the study (Polkinghorne 1989).

All the approaches produced results although some were better than others. Newspaper advertisements, word of mouth and referrals from a service provider and a police detective working in the sex trade were the most useful. The service provider and the detective were the only routes to the women who were completely trafficked into Canada. They also provided the opportunity to go on the raids wherein we developed a better understanding of what the women confronted and the fear they experienced in these circumstances.

The newspaper articles and advertisements resulted in 25 responses. The advertisements produced some interesting encounters with several massage parlour owners who called us because we “were incompetent when it comes to the issue.” At least one broker called to collect intelligence about what was happening after the police raided one of the strip clubs, and one researcher was called and asked if she wanted to “come down” for photographs for “modelling.” One woman, not in the business, wanted information on the “business.”

We did have some idea of how our advertisements were received.

*You know the girls gave me the article.... They say: “Hey, look there is a phone number there, and it says they even pay something.” Ha-ha-ha! So it makes people laugh. (Massage parlour owner)*

The researchers also made extensive field notes from their trips to court, on the raid, and on visits to the massage parlours and to the strip clubs. Some documentation pertaining to correspondence between Human Resources Development Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada was also analyzed. The field notes were used to provide context for the study.

Most of the women were between 18 and 26, and could have been younger by all appearances and, perhaps were, because they were very hesitant to provide their age to the interviewers. Some women in the massage parlours tended to be older and had children in their teens, so they could have been in their 40s. Four women were from Hungary, two from Poland, six from Russia, one from the Czech Republic, one from the Ukraine, three from Romania and one from Moldova. Consistent with the economic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, all of them arrived in Canada in 1992 or later. Thirteen of the women were single, three were married and two were divorced. Five of the women had children.

At least three of the women had university degrees (economist, engineer, philologist). All had finished high school and six had graduated from vocational schools (nurse, nutritionist, secretary, beauticians, broadcaster). One was a professional athlete and three women had been waitresses before coming to Canada. Four of the women were students in vocational schools prior to arriving in Canada. It is important to note that none of them previously worked in the sex trade industry in their country of origin, or at least did not indicate that this was the case. Unlike the Canadian women, none of the eastern European women were in school at the time of the study. Generally, the women were very similar to the women interviewed in the IOM (1995) study: they tended to be young and not to have children.

### ***Agencies and Key Informants***

Initially, criterion sampling was to be used to sample the agencies but was abandoned after it became apparent that many agencies had little or no knowledge of Eastern/Russian sex trade workers.<sup>5</sup> With knowledge gained from the advisory committee, the researchers identified the agencies to be included in the study using the following sources:

- *The Toronto Immigrant Services Directory*, fifth edition, distributed by the YMCA A-LINC;
- *The Directory of Community Services in Toronto*, Blue Book 1999, Community Information Toronto;
- a list of community health centres from the Ontario Ministry of Health – Toronto;
- literature and Internet searches;
- referrals from other service providers; and
- referrals from the women.

Once the research team made initial contacts, snowball sampling was employed, because participants would frequently suggest others who could help us.

In total, 109 agencies were contacted. The agencies chosen were the ones we had reason to believe provided services to the women in question or would reasonably be expected to provide services to these women. Of the 109 agencies, 14 did not return our phone calls which left 95 agencies to be considered as possible candidates for the study. The breakdown of agency types is illustrated in Table 1. In addition, Table 2 lists the types of agencies that agreed to interviews according to the clients they served.

**Table 1. Sampling Frame of Social Service Agencies (n = 95)**

Type of Agency	Number of Agencies
Health services (including outreach programs)	28
Women's shelters, hostels and drop-in centres	17
Ethnic specific agencies	8
Non-ethnic specific immigration/refugee services	13
Social services linked to the legal system	9
General social services	7
Research and information	3
Sex trade workers' organizations (advocacy)	4
Multi-service women's centres	6

**Table 2. Types of Agencies According to Types of Clients Served (n = 15)**

Type of Agency	Types of Clients Served			
	Sex trade workers from Eastern Europe	Sex trade workers (but <u>not</u> from Eastern Bloc countries)	Women from Eastern Bloc countries (but <u>not</u> in the sex trade)	Neither sex trade workers nor those from Eastern Bloc countries
Health-related services	1	1	2	
Ethnic-specific agencies	1*		1	
Agencies run by workers involved in sex industry	2			
Legal services	1	1		
Shelters		1	1	
Women's centres / Drop-in centres		1	1	1
	n = 5	n = 4	n = 5	n = 1

Note:

\* Case specific – Gorby Girls in 1991.

In our sample of service agencies, there were only four agencies/services that had actually dealt directly with this population. Another agency had worked with these women, but only on one occasion (the Gorby Girls case which received extensive coverage from the media). Since that time, they have not had any further dealings with these women. There was not one agency that offered services solely to Central and Eastern European women, let alone sex trade workers. Five agencies had occasionally seen women from Eastern Bloc countries, but the women were not identified as sex trade workers. Conversely, four agencies worked with women involved in the sex industry but had never worked specifically with anyone

from the former Soviet Union or Federated States. Finally, there was one agency that provided a diverse range of services to women; however, it had no involvement with either sex trade workers or women from the countries included in our study.

As a result of building rapport with a number of service providers dealing directly with this population, the researchers were connected to key informants who had either been sex trade workers, or who had extensive experiential knowledge about trafficking in women. The 15 key informants interviewed are listed in Table 3. Two paralegals were interviewed who worked as migration specialists, two police officers were interviewed from the Morality Unit, the detective heading a special investigations unit was interviewed as was an enforcement officer for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. An agent from the Toronto Licensing Bureau which issues the licences to the bars and massage parlours agreed to an interview as did two ex-sex trade workers who were Canadian. One German entertainment agent/broker and a massage parlour owner asked to be interviewed. Two women who formerly worked in the sex trade also helped us extensively. Three journalists—one from the Russian community where several of the women lived and worked, one from a Ukrainian ethnic newspaper and a national journalist who has done extensive investigations of the Eastern European sex trade in Toronto—were also interviewed.

### Data Collection

In-depth interviews (McCracken 1988) were conducted with 20 women, 15 agency personnel who had provided or were likely to provide services to these women and 15 key informants who had extensive experience with this group of women. Fifty interviews were conducted overall.

**Table 3. Key Informants Interviewed (n = 15)**

Area of Expertise	Job Title	Number of Interviews
Legal/Law Enforcement	Paralegal (immigration specialist)	2
	Police constable, Morality Unit	2
	Detective, Special Investigations Services	1
	Officer, Citizenship and Immigration Canada	1
	Agent, Metro Toronto Licensing Bureau	1
Sex Industry	Massage parlour owner/operator	2
	Entertainment agent/madam	1
	Women formerly involved in the sex trade	2
Journalism	Journalist, ethnic-specific newspaper	2
	Journalist, national newspaper	1

The length of the interviews ranged from one to four hours. Confidentiality was protected through the use of signed information and consent forms, and every person had the choice to audio-tape or not and to speak off the record at any time during the interview. The data were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Toronto and only the three members of

the research team had access to the cabinet. Most participants signed consent forms, where applicable.

The women and some of the key informants were given an honorarium of \$30. All the service providers consented to the audio-taping. Two of the key informants, and three of the women did not wish to be tape recorded but allowed note taking. Three interviews were conducted on the telephone instead of face to face. Twelve interviews were conducted in Russian: five key informants and seven women. The interviews were translated into English by the Russian member of the team.

### **The Interview Guides**

The Human Subjects Review Committee at the University of Toronto gave ethical approval to conduct the study. Our project team prepared initial drafts of interview guides for the women, the key informants and service providers, based on the existing literature and suggestions from the research advisory committee.

#### ***Women's Interview Guide***

A broad set of questions were developed for the women which explored their move to Canada, working and living circumstances in Canada and their use/non-use of social and health services. The semi-structured interview guide was based on information from the Advisory Committee and data collected from the service providers (See Appendix C). This guide was pre-tested on one migrant woman from Hungary and, as was expected, a number of adjustments were made. For example, asking certain questions about their migration made the women edgy, so we had to reduce these types of questions. One woman said to our Russian interviewer: "Look, this looks more like an immigration interview than...."

Because the women were reluctant to engage in interviews, we did no further pre-testing and adjusted the guides as we interviewed.

#### ***The Key Informant's and Service Provider's Interview Guides***

The key informant and the service provider interview guides dealt with:

- the types of services offered;
- barriers to service; and
- the service providers' and key informants' views of why the women came to Canada, the dangers they faced and whether or not they thought the women wanted out of the trade (see appendices A and B).

An appreciation of their views provided us with some awareness as to:

- their attitudes toward, and knowledge about, the women;
- the types of services that should or should not be offered according to their perceptions of the women;
- the barriers to services;

- why they might or might not offer a service; and
- where the service gaps are located.

Their views are compared with the women's views on the same issues at different points in the report. Similarities in perceptions usually indicate that the service providers are sensitive to the needs of clients while major differences warrant further investigation (McDonald and Peressini 1992).

The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) was tested with four service providers: three who worked with the women of interest and to whom they provided services, and one who had no experience with Eastern European/Russian women. Feedback from the testing was incorporated into the interview guide, and further adjustments were made after reviewing the transcriptions from the pre-tests. The interview guide for key informants (Appendix B) was tested with two respondents who had extensive involvement with migrant sex trade workers from former communist countries. Overall, only a few questions in the pilot interviews were unclear or could not be answered by the respondents. As the interviews proceeded, additional questions were added based on what we considered new and important information that should be systematically collected.

### **Data Analysis**

On completion of the transcriptions, members of the research team read through each transcript, while listening to the audio-tape to ensure that the transcription was accurate. Changes to the transcripts were made as required.

The transcripts were read a number of times by the research team in order to acquire a sense of the women and their experiences. Margin notes were made to flag significant statements that were then extracted. Initial codes were developed from the margin notes and later classified into groups of meanings. The research team jointly analyzed these groups, and a preliminary sketch of clusters of themes that represented the women's and service provider's experiences was developed. The themes were compared to the transcripts to ensure that the clusters were consistent with the original interviews and that other themes had not been missed. The groups of themes appear in Chapter 7 under "Core Experiences." The findings constitute only a preliminary look at the women's lives; the data will be mined further, given more time for thought and reflection.

The theme related to stigma is an illustration of how the analysis was conducted starting with the following quote.

*Some of them look at you...like they basically take you for a prostitute, you know. And there is no way you can prove to them you are a normal human being.... Maybe I just keep talking myself into it because I think I am only doing it with hands, I am not selling my body. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

From this we extracted the significant statements.

- a. Some of them look at you—being judged.
- b. They basically take you for a prostitute—being labelled and judged.
- c. Prove you are a normal human being—being labelled a deviate and judged.
- d. Talking myself into it—coping behaviour.
- e. Only doing it with my hands—coping behaviour.

Statements a, b and c suggested the stigma attached to the work from their own, and others, points of view.

There was no way to check the accuracy of the transcripts with the women because talking to them more than once usually was not feasible. The quotes we present are the actual words the women used and reflect a variety of competencies with the English language.

## 7. FINDINGS

### Listening to the Service Providers

#### *Perception of Trafficking in Women*

Initial investigation by the researchers revealed a lack of consensus regarding the phrase “trafficking in women.” Therefore, a question about peoples’ perception of the term was included in the key informant, service provider and women’s interview guides. If the women and service providers see the problem from the same perspective, they are more likely to be able to work together. A few individuals admitted they had never heard the particular phrase; however, after some thought, they offered their perceptions. Preliminary findings reveal the following recurring concepts in relation to this theme.

#### **Sex trade/prostitution**

*Trafficking in women, I think, is bringing women in for illegal prostitution.*  
(Service provider from a health-related service)

*I perceive it as a dirty business, which, however helps [to achieve] certain material dreams of some women. Dirty business in a sense that women are getting involved in sexual activities, making money by satisfying—how we consider it in the Christian world—people’s dirty or primal needs.* (Key informant from a paralegal firm)

#### **Women as objects (a commodity)**

*My perception of that phrase is that it is a system in which women are subjected to prostitution in which they are commodities. They are traded, they’re passed on to buyer to buyer and it’s all based on prostitution and sort of like...yeah, that would be my perception.* (Service provider from a women’s centre/drop-in)

*I think it looks as women viewed somewhat as objects, almost as a commodity.... I think it’s pretty degrading.* (Key informant from police).

#### **Underground organized activities**

*I think that whenever you are talking about any kind of trafficking, it’s got to be organized. On some level.... You know, you’ve got to be well connected, it’s all under the table, it’s very seedy, it’s all illegal, so you have to know who you are dealing with. So all that kind of stuff has to be organized.*  
(Service provider from a women’s centre/drop-in)

#### **Buying and selling women**

*It’s bringing women...from other countries for sexual purposes—to sell them or to use them.* (Service provider from an ethnic-specific agency)

*It's buying and selling of women, in a sense that women are kept and asked to work without information.... It's like somebody gets ownership of the women and they are forced...to work. (Service provider from a shelter)*

### **Slavery**

*I consider it to be slavery, you know, that's basically what it is, it's like horse trading and that's not right. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*Basically slavery in sex industry. (Service provider from a shelter)*

Without doubt, the overriding view of the phrase “trafficking in women” was negative on the part of the service providers and the key informants. In fact, no one had a positive interpretation, or even partially positive interpretation, of trafficking—an unexpected finding given the objection to the use of the phrase by the active sex trade workers on our advisory committee. In other words, the service providers and key informants appeared to subscribe to the “Madonna” view of trafficking, that the women were innocents who were forced to work in the sex trade (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). This perception is also at odds with the actual situation of the Slavic women as seen later in the report. Finally, their views did not reflect the possibility of differences between the recruitment of these women and the context of their work or their services as indicated by Chew (1999).

Many of these women were considered to be in Canada illegally. This was perceived to be especially true for what they labelled “purely trafficked women.”

### ***The Transition to Canada***

Respondents mentioned that increasing numbers of women are migrating to Canada from the former Eastern Bloc countries, specifically Hungary, Russia, Czech Republic, Romania, Lithuania, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Poland. When we inquired as to why the respondents felt there were more women coming from these countries, the consensus seemed to be a change in market conditions or demand.

*I think there's a market for it now and, therefore, people are using those women. I think, in a sense, they probably have exhausted a lot of the Canadian women.... I guess it has to do with the clientele too...it goes with the flow, the clientele might be requesting that...I would think that probably because for the longest time...Eastern Europe was so closed, because of the whole government structure, and now that a lot of that has kind of become obsolete, the transportation in and out of the country is a bit more, you know, easier.... People are recognizing that, hey...Eastern European women, they're the good thing now. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*A lot of strippers are coming out of Hungary.... It seems because we have a shortage of strippers. (Service provider from an agency run by sex workers)*

It would appear that trafficking in women, like the sale of any other commodity, is subject to supply and demand, changing styles and preferences, and opportunistic behaviour. Essentially, the service providers agreed with the international organizations that warned of a dramatic increase in trafficking in women from Eastern European countries resulting from the break-up of the Soviet Union (IOM 1997).

When respondents were asked why they felt women from former Eastern Bloc countries migrated specifically to Canada, the following suggestions emerged:

- media/popular culture;
- Canada is seen as the “golden land of opportunity”;
- need to make money and there is money to be made in Canada;
- new and better life;
- home is worse than here (poor political system, not valued as an individual); and
- freedom.

For the most part, service providers and key informants identified economic reasons, such as the necessity or desire to improve one’s material status, as the major reason for coming to Canada. This, of course, was coupled with the difficult situation in the countries of origin. Social factors related to aspects of the political system in these countries were also frequently cited.

*Media...North America is seen as the golden land for opportunity.... They feel they need to come here. They want to come here; they want to make money, to become as North American as possible, and I mean like really leaving all traditions behind.... The majority of people that I’ve talked to, Canada is where they want to be. Canada is it. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I think the main thing for a lot of the girls is they just want to stay in Canada. They just want a better life, because whatever they were, whatever they were running from at home or whatever they wanted to get away from, you know, is a lot worse than what they’re going through here for a lot of them. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*They need money. It’s as plain and simple as that. They cannot...find work at home. And in Hungary, I know, that the field is so tight now that women are stopping trucks along the highway in bikinis to try and earn their cash that way from regular truck drivers. Because elsewhere the areas are absolutely just fully sated and they cannot get enough income.... It is very difficult to earn income now in many of these countries. So women need extra income and coming to North America seems to be the easiest place. (Service provider from a health service)*

Closely linked to the economic reasons for coming to Canada were the respondents' perceptions as to why these women get involved in the sex trade.

*The three main reasons [are] to support family back home, to make some money, to purchase a large item like a house or a car, you know. So they don't plan on staying here. They plan on making enough money and going home. The ones who tend to stay longer are the ones who are supporting their families. (Service provider from an agency run by sex workers)*

*Some women want to change their lives, experience something else. But they are not aware how difficult the process is. And sometimes, you know, when they come here—especially illegally—they have to do whatever to survive. And sometimes, they are forced by their circumstances to do things they don't want to do. (Service provider from a shelter)*

Preliminary analysis also revealed a shared perception among respondents about how these women go about remaining in Canada. Both service providers and key informants consider marriage to a Canadian to be the major mechanism for women to ensure their continued residency in Canada.

*You've got to figure that a good majority of these girls end up marrying these guys that are going into these bars because they want to stay in the country, and then like I said, you know, basically she's a maid during the day and a whore at night. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I talked to three Hungarian women who were very—at first very reticent to talk to me. They were all married to Canadian men. So they had come here and quickly married... well the one woman said she's only been here six months and she's already married. So they obviously have plans to be citizens. (Service provider from a health service)*

The implication behind most of the comments was that the women wanted out of the trade and marriage to a Canadian was the route. This particular conceptualization of the process negates the possibility of the sex trade as a legitimate form of work.

### **Perception of the women—naïveté**

Most service providers and key informants felt the migrant women were naïve about most aspects of the sex trade. The main areas of naïveté were:

- Canadian laws and the consequences of violations (especially in relation to prostitution);
- knowledge of the system;
- how poor the working conditions were in prostitution and pornography;
- misconceptions about Canada such as “it is easy to make money here”;
- thinking that dancing is easy money;

- health risks—sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); and
- language.

*A lot of these women have no clue that it's [lap-dancing/prostitution] illegal and especially the immigrant women will just be, you know, sent back.*  
(Service provider from an agency run by sex workers)

*Well, these women are brought here and you know nothing at all is explained to them...from other dancers. It's all told to them by the agents and the club owners. And they tell them you know...you kiss the guy and give them hand jobs and blow jobs and you charge just \$20 for it or a token or whatever.*  
(Service provider from an agency run by sex workers)

*Women that were brought into this country, that don't have the language, don't have knowledge of the system.* (Service provider from a health service)

*There is sort of unrealistic and sort of not true perceptions of Western countries in Poland and the other [Eastern] European countries, you know: There's money growing on the trees, and all this stuff is going on here—how good it is here, you don't have to work to get the money.* (Service provider from a shelter)

*Their expectation is that it's really easy to make money here. And the truth is that it isn't...because they're going to have pimps, for one thing, who are going to take all their money.* (Service provider from a health-related service)

*[Not afraid of STDs because] Canada is a very strong country from the point of view of medical system, there is medication against everything.... It seems they are not afraid at all because they say that the diseases are in numbers in Ukraine, spread very widely, and more chances to get contaminated in Ukraine rather than here.* (Key informant, a paralegal, immigration specialist)

In reflecting on these observations, three initial themes stood out for the researchers. First, all the service providers saw the women as uninformed victims, although they did acknowledge that they were coming to Canada for “easy money,” implying, that on some level, the women must have known what they were getting into when they arrived. In essence, there seemed to be a concerted effort not to blame the victim, but skimming below the surface of the dialogue was a sense that the women were, in fact, not quite as naïve as they were being portrayed. Second, the migrant sex trade workers were seen as driving the market down in terms of the going rates for sex that, in turn, would have some impact on Canadian sex trade workers. How this plays out in the migrant women’s relationships with their co-workers in Canada is reported in the next section and is important because it appears to contribute to competitive relationships, further isolation and an inability to access services. Third, the role of the media in the women’s home countries in producing

erroneous messages about Canada, is suggestive of educational interventions that begin in the country of origin.

### **Recruitment**

Our preliminary investigation revealed active recruitment of women for the sex trade in the former Eastern Bloc countries.<sup>6</sup> Agents/brokers typically travel to these countries to meet with women who have answered an advertisement in a newspaper offering opportunities in Canada by an entertainment agency. Recruitment, fuelled by the women's naïveté, was characterized as deceptive and controlling.

*Well they have like agents working in the other countries who will just put ads in papers, or who will, through word of mouth. A girl will go, and she'll talk to these people, she won't really have any idea where it is that she's going, but she will be hired for the job, and supposedly given, "this is with a question mark," totally fake identification, comes here, so a fee is paid for her to come here and then she just arrives and works, and is owned by this club, and that is where her work permit is. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*"Oh you have a nice house, drive a car, I give you phone"—con them. That's the biggest thing, it's the biggest con job ever. A lot of them they are told this. They get a fake passport, they come across, they get abused and then they find out that they can never go home. (Key informant, an ex-sex trade worker)*

### **Deception**

The deception of the women who were brought to Canada for the sex trade was a theme which surfaced in an overwhelming number of interviews. Various deceptions in relation to employment in Canada and about certain aspects of the sex industry were consistently mentioned. Distinctions were often made between the women who knew what they would be doing when they arrived and those who did not know they would be involved in the sex industry. The deception of those who were not aware included:

- not knowing they'd have as much competition in the job market;
- being told the money they make will be sent home for them; and
- being told they'd be doing different jobs when coming to Canada such as waitress, maid, model, singer/entertainer and professional dancer.

The women who knew they were going to be involved in the sex trade were deceived in different ways:

- glamorizing the lifestyle;
- being told about the large amount of money to be made in the industry;
- being told they would only be stripping (sex acts not included); and

- misled about the laws (i.e., being told that prostitution is not illegal).

*What they're told is that they, the money is, the money that they make is being sent back home for them.... [But] when they finish the contract they can go back home and collect that money, but it's never there. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*They were brought over with the intention...to work in Canada. A few of them were told they were going to be working as waitresses, maids, and a few were told they were going to dance, which is fine, until they come over and then they find out that it's not just dancing, there's you know, sex acts that they have to perform. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I'm sure some of them knew they were going to be dancers, I'm sure some of them didn't know. What I'm pretty sure about, almost 90 percent sure about, none of them were told they were going to be prostitutes, and that's exactly what they're doing. They're performing sex, acts of sex for money, which is prostitution, so I don't think that, I don't think that was the selling point over there. I think maybe some of them were told they were going to be dancers. I think some of them were told, you know, you're going to be waitresses, domestic person, whatever, and they come over here and they're told, well, you know, that job was taken by these other girls, you know, but we have a job as a dancer, okay fine, they'll dance. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*These girls come over. They'll bring costumes with them. They figure they are going to be entertainers. They figure they are going to have the bright lights, big show, the whole bit: "Look at me, I'm a dancer." They're going to be taught how to dance, whether it be sort of the Las Vegas chorus line idea, something along those lines. Yeah, a lot of girls, they bring these costumes and these guys basically just take their costumes, take their whole ideas, flush them down the toilet and say: "No you'll be up on stage naked." (Key informant, a police constable)*

*I think a lot of these brokers mislead the women about the laws in Canada. Because it's not illegal here, so they kind of present it as being legal, so the girls are, like: "Yeah, no problem."... Prostitution is not illegal, but it's not legalized, and they confuse that... they are misinformed about the laws.*

### ***Life in Canada***

The issue of control exercised over the women's lives received considerable comment from the providers. Many respondents went to great lengths to point out the nature and types of control they believed were exercised over the women. The types of control noted included:

- the women's money;
- the women's movement;

- the lack of opportunity for women in relation to recourse;
- the women's communications with others;
- family threats;
- psychological/emotional tactics;
- the women's disposable income (pocket money);
- the removal of documents (tickets, passports);
- threats of police/deportation; and
- complete dictatorship (i.e., where they go and work, how much they have to make, clothes to wear, where to buy costumes, hotel to sleep in).

*There's quite an underworld here that deals with women...and it is very, very powerful. It's a strong group and so, I think, that women who run afoul of any of the players in that underworld are at great risk. (Service provider from a health service)*

*They are so controlled and brainwashed that they don't realize...they're basically told that the only people they can trust, the only people they can talk to is the bar, the people in the bar, the managers, the owner, the other girls. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I think...they don't realize how much their freedom of movement is going to be restricted. I don't think they realize their passports are going to be held on to, and they are going to be basically driven and dropped off, and basically their time is going to be spent between where they live and where they dance or where they whore, you know, and that's it. So I think that is the part that remains unclear...that basically their working conditions are going to be shitty and they are going to have no free time. (Service provider from an agency run by sex workers)*

*You're not allowed to talk to them. They're not allowed to talk to you. They're very strict. The men who carry them are very strict. (Key informant, a former sex trade worker)*

*Family threats are one of the biggest things because they, that's where most people can hurt you the most is by threatening to do something to your family because then you feel responsible. If you don't do something to protect them then it's your fault that it happened. It happened because you didn't do what you were supposed to do. (Key informant, a former sex trade worker)*

*Part of the control, though, is not just physical, its also psychological, it's an emotional control, right. You've been brought to this country; you don't know anybody. So it's just like an abused woman who may have the money to leave but still isn't able to leave her partner for a whole bunch of reasons. You are*

*conditioned as a woman to not leave. It's like rape; you don't even have to be raped to be afraid of rape. (Service provider from a women's centre/drop-in)*

*You'll have girls, especially from the Eastern European Blocs and so on, who when they come here, their return tickets are taken from them, their passports are taken from them, their visas are taken from them, and they're told: "If you try and jerk me around with money, you have no one here to go to. I'll hurt you. The police will arrest you. They'll put you in jail. I have all your documents. You'll never go home. We have contacts at home. We know where your family lives." Things like that and they just prey on these girls. It's just things like that and it's just a huge control factor. (Key informant, a police constable)*

*[Sometimes the threat to lose their job is enough] I think they're very controlled.... I think that the major thing is they are being threatened and they are being abused, and that's a way of controlling somebody, you know, just probably living in fear. So they're not going to go out on their own, they're not going to do anything they're not supposed to.... I'm sure they're told lots of things: that...they'll be sent, you know, they'll be deported, that they'll be arrested, whatever. So they believe those things and they don't know where to turn for help, I'm sure. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*There is always the fear of being deported, and if you don't have legal status...you don't have language, you don't have the understanding of the laws here, people can very much threaten you and hold you at ransom. (Service provider from a shelter)*

*There's trauma, there's low self-esteem, there's feeling of inadequacy, of lack of control, or being unable to make their own decisions or believe in themselves to make their own decisions. Easily manipulated, vulnerable people. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

From the service providers' perspective, the importance of control was crucial to the overall success of trafficking. It was clear that they believed the women were being controlled physically, emotionally and socially, and fear seemed to be the cornerstone of the network of control. This fear was also palpable among the service providers. Because many of the clubs where the women worked were believed to be managed by organized crime, this comes as no surprise. In light of this fear, the possibilities of offering services in this environment quickly shrink when both the women and the service providers are threatened.

### ***Perception of Financial and Living Arrangements***

Those service providers and key informants, who worked with or had extensive experience with the women, offered some observations about the financial and living arrangements of the migrant women. Most providers, however, indicated that their information was not first-hand knowledge.

*And some of the clubs don't even use money, they have a, kind of a slot process where the men purchase the slots, they give them to the women, the women can cash the slots in, and then their percentage is immediately taken out, so they're never even aware of what the man is actually paying for them. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*In general, I think that the women are paying out most of what they make. I mean, it may be provided for them, somebody may give them a place to live and give them food or whatever, but it's still their money, because almost all of their money is being taken away. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*They probably, you know, have them all stay in one apartment or something. I could see lots of mattresses, you know. I don't see it as a glamorous thing. (Service provider from a health service)*

From our perspective, it was noteworthy that there was scant knowledge about the living arrangements or the financial arrangements of the sex trade workers. Since money had been identified by the service providers and the key informants as an important motivator for trafficking, for tolerating the alleged exploitation and, perhaps, for being willingly “duped,” we were a little surprised at the sketchy information we received.

### ***Using Health and Social Services***

One factor that immediately emerged during the identification of the agencies to be interviewed, and which was confirmed on analysis of the data, was the limited use the women made of social and health services. Aside from the four agencies that had contact with the migrant sex trade workers from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, no other service providers had contact on a regular basis. In addition, most service providers did not mention health care, which we thought would be an important issue for the women. In an attempt to fill gaps in our data, we used our field notes and asked employees in the massage parlours about the use of health care services. According to them, women who are in Canada temporarily or illegally usually do not use any health service; they deal with their illnesses by themselves.

*They go to a doctor only when it's really necessary, when it is a last resort: when they are really in pain or they need some prescription drugs, although when it comes to those drugs they would first ask some of their “legal” friends to go to their doctor and try to get a prescription for them. (Sex trade worker at massage parlour)*

In terms of birth control, everyone used condoms and, supposedly, few women picked up STDs. No one seemed to know much about community health centres where they could receive free services even if they were illegally in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

When we asked the service providers why they felt these women were not accessing their services, they offered the following reasons:

- cultural values;
- language problems;
- reliance on each other;
- lack of knowledge of services; and
- fear.

*I think there is difference, cultural difference in approaching availability of social services for the women. In Poland, usually someone else should offer the service, then a woman was willing to accept these. But she never looked actively for a service of any kind because maybe they were very scarce in Poland. In Canada, as I see, people want something and they go for that, they ask for help. (Service provider from a shelter)*

*[Also women don't believe their anonymity/privacy will be protected by the agencies.] You know, it's a Canadian way of treating the issue. In Poland anonymity and privacy was practically non-existent, so they would not trust very much. (Service provider from a shelter)*

*I don't think they go any place. I think they are probably very isolated, and they don't know, and they don't have the language. (Service provider from a shelter)*

*I think word of mouth goes a long way. As big as prostitution is, it's really small, the sort of network is small, so [subculture]. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I think they probably go to each other.... So I see them doing support among each other, you know, which is going to be limited support. (Service provider from a legal service)*

*I believe because women who are victims of this trafficking are really unaware of what's out there for them, and they sort of operate on a different group of assistance. There are groups of people rather than organizations I think. (Service provider from an ethnic-specific agency)*

Our sense was that the service providers were offering “educated guesses” as to why the women did not access the agencies, and it would be very important to pursue this issue with

the women. We also recognized that the arrival of Eastern Bloc women on the Canadian sex trade scene was relatively new and could just as easily account for the lack of interest in services.

### **Specific barriers to service**

When asked to identify specific characteristics of the women's situations or characteristics of the agencies that might prevent the use of social services, the following themes emerged:

- no access;
- lifestyle;
- minimal support to agencies which do help;
- stigma;
- lack of trust; and
- problems specific to agencies serving ethnic groups.

*[Managers of the clubs as gatekeepers] so there are clubs that we not even able to get into yet because the managers won't let us pass the door. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*I think the people that bring them here have a lot of control over them.... It's pretty complicated and...I don't even see how you could...contact these women, while they're involved in it, without sort of going underground and getting involved in it yourself.... How do you reach those women, how do you let them know that you're there? (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*They're probably sleeping during the day, you know, out at night. I would think that they probably go, you know, to services where outreach has been done...so they may go there or ask friends and find out. (Service provider from a women's centre/drop-in)*

*My sense is that in women's services, you know there is a hierarchy. Who gets service, who doesn't and who's valued and who's not. And prostitutes fall at the bottom of that hierarchy. And I think that a lot of services that work with women in systems of prostitution and pornography are very isolated and don't get a lot of support from a lot of other agencies. I think that it's sort of a hard core group that a lot of agencies don't want to work with. I know, for instance, sometimes it is very difficult to get a prostitute into a shelter. Where if you are being abused by your partner, I can get you in like that, but if you are being abused by your pimp, it's not that easy. People are afraid, they don't know what is going to happen and I think there's a lot of.... I don't think that there's enough of an astute analysis around prostitution...as much as women's service has come a long way, and are on the forefront of a lot of*

*analyses, they still perpetuate systemically, a lot of the stuff that they're fighting against. (Service provider from a women's centre/drop-in)*

### **Stigma**

*They don't know where to go...going back to your community, even if your community is here for help, sometimes you are afraid to do that because of the stigma, you know, and sort of admitting that this is happening to you. (Service provider from a shelter)*

*There's so much stigma around it...if there was an agency that specifically worked with Eastern Europeans, women that were sex trade workers, and they knew to go there, I mean, that would be ideal. But, you know, nothing like that exists. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*Right now public opinion is so much against dancers and so much against immigrant people that being an immigrant dancer is like sub, sub-human. And to try and sway public opinion—it wouldn't be so easy. (Service provider from a health-related agency)*

### **Development of trust**

*A lot of these sex trade workers are very private. It takes a long time to develop a relationship. (Service provider from a health-related service)*

*The hard thing, it's a real hard thing to get a girl from a foreign country to trust you, especially after she trusted this broker that said, you'll be doing this, this and this, and then she comes over and she is doing this, this and this, right. So, and then you're this other guy who comes in and you say no, no, no, the bar was raided, you know, the bar owner still has the influence on you, already has the influence on you, and yet there's this other guy going, trust me, right. So it's a tough sell. (Service provider from a legal service)*

### **Ethnic issues**

Two consistent themes were identified when it came to a discussion of providing ethnic services: there were none available and there was a problem with attitude toward the sex trade and, presumably, the women who worked in it.

*None of the communities help them much.... Not Russian, not Jewish, not Ukrainian. I've never heard them being of a big help. (Key informant, a paralegal, immigration specialist)*

*So, say, I go over to the Hungarian or the Czech community centre or whatever, and say look, you know, nice girls from your country coming in ...they've been arrested for this...and they're inmates of a common bawdy-house and they're like what's that? You try to explain it to them and they're taken aback. See, they totally don't understand that what's happening, they*

*don't believe it or they may believe, but they just don't want to believe that this has happened to their girls.* (Service provider from a legal service)

Underlying all these comments was a sense of frustration on the part of the service providers who clearly wanted to offer the best service possible to the women, yet faced almost insurmountable odds in achieving this objective. A recurring theme also emerged from the interviews with the key informants who themselves were from Central or Eastern Europe. Most of their comments were barely disguised in terms of the distaste they had for the sex trade and for the women working in the industry. An extreme view is represented in the following quote.

*Oh, nobody forces them to do anything. They are in it for the money. It's all about money. They just want money. [But you said this business is all under the Mafia.] It doesn't mean they are being forced. Mafia or no Mafia, they do it because they want to. [Asked about social services] Believe me, they don't need anything. They make enough money.* (Journalist from ethnic-specific newspaper)

### ***Core Experiences of the Key Informants and the Service Providers***

Ultimately, most of the service providers had very little experience with the Slavic women, yet they were not short on views about the women and their experiences. Based on the information offered by the key informants and service providers, it was possible to construct an overall picture of their perception of the women who migrated from Russia/Eastern Europe to the sex trade in Canada. They tended to see the women in terms of the degree to which they were trafficked and did not split the trafficking and work context as did Chew (1999).

#### **“Purely trafficked women”**

They were women who were brought to Canada under false pretences (e.g., promised jobs as models, waitresses, domestic workers, secretaries, etc.) and then forced into the sex trade. According to the service providers, an overwhelming majority of women in this category came from Russia and the Ukraine and from some other parts of the former Soviet Union such as Belarus and Lithuania. These women appeared to be totally controlled by organized crime.

#### **“Semi-trafficked women”**

They were women who knew they would be involved in the sex industry—that they would be strippers or exotic dancers. However, they were not aware of the extent of the work or the harshness of the conditions. For example, they didn't know they were going to have to work so many hours or that they would have to give most of their money to a third party. Further, they did not know a third party would control them (loss of freedom), and that their passports would be taken away from them. They were misled in terms of the nature of Canadian laws since most were told that prostitution was legal and not told that they could be arrested for acts revolving around prostitution.

### **“Unintentional sex trade workers”**

Some women who were legal immigrants become permanent residents of Canada with the goal of living in Canada permanently. Most were independent, family class or, occasionally, business class immigrants. These women ended up in the sex trade because they could not find a job. Many were highly educated but did not possess the qualifications or language skills to obtain employment in their field in Canada (i.e., economist). Other factors thought to contribute to their initiation into the sex trade included family breakdown, loneliness/isolation, the importance of finding a place in society and economic necessity.

### **“Occasional prostitutes”**

These women were mostly street prostitutes supporting their drug habit. When we asked if there were street prostitutes from former Eastern Bloc countries, the overall sentiment was that there were very few of these women in this type of sex work. Drug abuse was seen to be their primary issue and prostitution was secondary.

While Chew’s (1999) definition of trafficking clearly allows for contradictory conditions to exist side-by-side, such as choice and coercion, the service providers’ definition allows for graduated degrees of trafficking and is more in line with their “Madonna” view of trafficking. Given this perception, the service providers could be challenged in their work when confronted with women in equivocal situations, namely those women who were not perceived to be “innocent.”

The service providers believed that the women were coming to Canada because they needed money and desired a better quality of life than was available in the newly independent states and Russia. The view that Canada was a land of opportunity, fuelled by the media and popular culture in the countries of origin led them to choose Canada. Most of the service providers strongly believed that the life these women led was socially, psychologically and economically controlled by agents or club owners, in keeping with the “victim” perception. It was also a common observation among the service providers that the only way out of the industry was through marriage to a Canadian.

Although the service providers perceived trafficked women to be victimized innocents, their views also suggested they understood some of the complexities of life experienced by these women and their difficulties in using health and social services. While never articulated outright, a number of service providers saw some of the women as knowledgeable participants in their work, yet the tendency *not* to acknowledge this complexity was pervasive. They were very aware of, and sensitive to, the meaning of ethnic difference and how this translated into problems accessing and using services. Some informants and providers expressed considerable frustration with what they considered to be the negative moral views of the sex trade held by the agencies offering ethnic-specific services. There was a noticeable theme in the interviews with informants from Central and Eastern Europe that indicated they were more cynical about the women’s work and considered them to be simply prostitutes. This attitude was flagged as a potential obstacle for the women to overcome in seeking services in their own language.

Finally, according to the service providers and key informants, the women did not use health or social services for a myriad of reasons: no access, a nocturnal lifestyle, stigma, suspiciousness and lack of trust, ethnic issues and, in some instances, because of their illegal status in Canada.

## **Listening to the Women**

### ***Background***

Most of the women were from large urban areas, with a few from small villages. All the migrant women interviewed lived in apartments in their home country. These apartments ranged from two rooms to four-room co-operatives. Two women from Russia also indicated that they had a dacha (summer cottage). One woman's father was a major general and another's was a businessman. Those who assessed their living situations to be "alright" actually were living with their parents and depended on their parents' resources. As one woman stated:

*We were younger, there were no problems...Mom and Dad took care of us.*  
(Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

Our findings suggested that the migrant women working in massage parlours (n = 9) came from slightly better circumstances. Specifically, the women who mentioned having country homes and cars worked in massage parlours and were the ones less likely to report feeling trafficked or forced to work in the sex trade. Of the eight women who worked in massage parlours, only one came from a lone-parent household. This is in comparison to the women in the strip clubs, where eight out of 10 were from lone-parent homes. The service providers were correct when they said that some of the women were the products of broken homes and family troubles back home.

Of the women interviewed who had children (n = 5), two were married, one was divorced and the other two were single. The two single women migrated to Canada without their children, although one woman had subsequently arranged to have her child move to Canada to reside with her. The other single woman indicated that she had no intention of bringing her child to Canada because she had never wanted the child in the first place, and the child was better off with her mother.

Notwithstanding the high unemployment rate in Central and Eastern Europe, none of the women interviewed were previously unemployed with the exception of the students. However, their jobs tended to be unstable, boring and low paying, and were in the low end of the service sector in most instances.

*I didn't get that money for...the stuff [videos] and honestly I get tired of this.*  
*I didn't like it anymore.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

*I had a job in Hungary before I came to Canada but still it was kind of a good job and I made kind of good money compared to Hungarian money. But still it wasn't good enough to save any money to buy a condo or to buy a car*

*or to build my own life basically because it was about enough to cover the expenses and that's all. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*So I worked as an engineer-designer for two years...then worked as a chief of the patent sector. And then I worked as an esthetician—you know, cosmetologist. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

### ***Perception of “Trafficking in Women”***

In keeping with the trafficking definitions proposed by Chew (1999), the women interviewed in the study represented several combinations of the two-tiered explanation of recruitment and work conditions. Nine women experienced both trafficking and forced labour and slavery-like practices. These nine women came from a variety of countries: Hungary (four), Romania (three), Poland (one) and Russia (one). Each was employed at strip clubs in the Greater Toronto Area. The nine remaining women were employed in massage parlours and most could be classified as non-trafficked workers. This number is not firm because their legal status may have lapsed by the time they were interviewed, but the women were not keen to share this information with us. Our interviews with the agent/madam, a service provider and the massage parlour owner indicated that the legal status of the women did lapse in some cases and that this change was used to exploit them in the workplace. Some of the women hinted at this in their interviews, but never directly confirmed their legal status. We could, therefore, argue that more women were actually trafficked according to Chew's (1999) definition.

It is interesting to note that even though the service providers saw trafficking differently (i.e., degree of trafficking), the results are fairly similar as seen in Table 4. Applying the definitions implicit in the service provider and key informant interviews, three women were purely trafficked, six were semi-trafficked and nine were classified as unintentional sex trade workers.

When asked about their perception of the phrase “trafficking in women,” most of the women interviewed did not recognize the term.

*I just heard it right now and I didn't know what it was. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I don't know what trafficking is. What's that? (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*No, I don't know what it means. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

Part of the problem was a language barrier because once the interviewers gave a brief explanation of the term, all the women said they recognized some of the aspects associated with the concept.

*Yes, yes. I've heard about it here.... I've heard about one girl...she came to Canada like that. I think it was four or five years ago.... She had no idea.*

*They made her work in a strip bar. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*Well I think it's a really bad thing because most of the girls who come in this situation...most of them don't speak any of the language of the country and they can be in trouble and in a bad situation so easily. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

**Table 4. Pathways of Migration**

Sex Trade Worker	Documentation	Category of Trafficking: Service Providers*	Category of Trafficking: Chew (1999)**
1	Work authorization (fake)	Purely trafficked	Trafficked
2	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked
3	Visitor	Unintentional	Not trafficked
4	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked
5	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked
6	Visitor	Unintentional	Not trafficked
7	Visitor	Purely trafficked	Trafficked
8	Visitor	Unintentional	Not trafficked
9	Visitor	Unintentional	Not trafficked
10	Visitor	Unintentional	Not trafficked
11	Refugee	Unintentional	Not trafficked
12	Immigrant	Unintentional	Not trafficked
13	Immigrant	Unintentional	Not trafficked
14	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked
15	Visitor	Purely trafficked	Trafficked
16	Immigrant	Unintentional	Not trafficked
17	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked
18	Visitor	Semi-trafficked	Trafficked

Notes:

\* Service providers' definitions:

- purely trafficked women brought to Canada under totally false pretenses;
- semi-trafficked women knew they were destined for the sex trade but not aware of coercive work conditions; and
- unintentional legal immigrants ending up in sex trade because they could not obtain employment.

\*\*Chew's (1999: 14) definitions:

- Trafficking in women: all acts involved in the recruitment and transportation of a woman within and across national borders for work or services by means of violence, or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominate position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion.
- Forced labour and slavery-like practices: The extraction of work or services from any woman or the appropriation of the legal identity and physical person of any woman by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominate position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion.

It was very interesting to note that the women who were purely or semi-trafficked did not apply the term to themselves. When they discussed trafficking, they talked in reference to other women they had heard about from other workers and friends, usually in the Canadian context, not at home. They did not see themselves as “victims” but saw their own experiences as fairly “normal” and trafficking as something that happened to other women which was viewed as a “bad thing.”

While this seemed like a self-protective response on the part of Slavic women, the Canadian sex trade workers on the advisory committee and in the study strenuously objected to the term stating that “trafficking could mean anything.” They expressed the view that women in the migrant sex trade are “free people” with the ability to act on their own and were committed to changing society’s views on this matter. In short, the Canadian women in our study did not subscribe to the “Madonna” view of trafficked women. In contrast, the majority of Slavic women wrestled with a view of themselves as possible prostitutes which seemed like a nagging moral burden for them.

*Well, it’s a kind of dirty side of life. It’s really dirty, and it would have been better for everybody not to experience it. Because it is all deviation from normal life.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*I don’t know—the moral part of it was such that I was nauseous and vomiting and I didn’t know whether I would be able to return there. But in the end, it was money.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

Both Slavic and Canadian women chose not to see themselves as trafficked but for different reasons. The Slavic women tried not to see themselves in terms of what they did while the Canadians seemed more interested in changing the ideas of how others saw them as workers. How the Slavic women distanced themselves from their work became a common theme.

*Some of them look at you—like they basically take you for a prostitute, you know. And there is no way you can prove to them you are a normal human being.... Maybe I just keep talking myself into it because I think I’m only doing it with my hands, I am not selling my body.* (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

This view of themselves permeates many aspects of their life. Most of the women did not tell their family back home about their job, although they sent money. They generally did not tell their friends what they did, and some said they would not use services because they felt they could not talk to the providers about their occupation. Most of the Slavic women in this study lived a life that was a lie. One woman captures this duplicity and the toll it took.

*I lie. I always lie. I say I work in a restaurant as a waitress.... I got tired of everything, of the massage business.* (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

Even when the women were clear about whether or not they were trafficked, they still appeared to be coerced into the work and they appeared to feel badly about this fact. One woman who did not report feeling trafficked or forced to work in the sex trade, was married and worked in a massage parlour because her husband could not find work and she had two children to support. Despite the “rosier” picture she presented of her life, she cried when asked if her husband knew what she did. She too, seemed forced into a job she did not want by unfortunate circumstances.

*Of course, he is concerned in his own way. But he understands that it's easier for me than when I worked in the bakery and was so tired all the time [starts crying].* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

### ***The Transition to Canada***

#### **Reasons for coming**

The women came to Canada because of:

- economic reasons;
- war;
- the shortage of exotic dancers in Canada; and
- Mafia.

Every woman mentioned the economic aspects involved in the move to Canada, confirming the views of the service providers and key informants. However, some were more direct and outspoken than others about the economic disadvantages they experienced in their home country. In a number of interviews, the women sketched a very positive picture of their country of origin, noting that all was well “at home.” Without fail, their circumstances at home were reportedly “excellent” and they came to Canada on their own volition.

*I have a very good family. My mother worked in sales. My father worked as a policeman, then he retired. Basically we lived very good.* (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

However, the women who seemed afraid to say anything unfavourable about their country would then proceed to outline, in their own words, how they were trafficked into Canada and that they needed the money. For example, some exceptionally positive migrants had several comments.

*No, no [she came] just as visitor.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*Basically we live very well. [Better than back home?] Yes.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*You get fake visitor invitations from this firm and go.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)

*First and foremost it is about money. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

We had a sense that the women may have been suspicious of us and tended to be guarded in their comments about their homeland because of the inconsistencies in what they said. Regardless, even the women who did not feel their situation at home was “too bad,” still reported that the reason they came to Canada was to improve their social and economic circumstances (IOM 1997).

*You don't understand. Anything is better than the life back home. Anything. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, massage parlour)*

*How, why did we decide to move to Canada? You know, the major reason was—we feared for our children's lives. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*[In Israel] I tried to go to college, but it didn't work out: They said that first I had to serve in the army, and then I could go to college.... So I worked there as a waitress....I really got a sense of what “difficult” was all about. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*Well in Hungary the average wage is about \$200 to \$250 a month. That's the average wage. But my job was better because I had my diploma degree. I made about \$350 for a month. But the thing is that the prices are very similar to here. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I didn't see any opportunity to make, well not a lot of money but more money than I could make in Hungary during a short time. That was the only way I could see even if I had the schooling or know, it doesn't really matter in Hungary because it's not a very...this country doesn't work very good. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

Several came because of war-like conditions that made any option seem feasible or because they did not wish to be called up into the army.

*Even if you were sitting at home, it was like a time bomb. Not to mention the streets...many people I knew, many of my friends died back home, at war. And life back then was crazy: you couldn't go out in the street after 5 p.m... everybody here thought it was just fiction, but really, if you didn't speak Moldavian they thought you were a Communist...And so many were killed and raped, girls especially. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

*But then the war started, I was liable for call-up: I used to work, I used to serve in Murmansk at a closed army base for two years. And when the war in*

*Pridnestrovie began, they started sending me notices. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

The shortage of exotic dancers in Canada (Godfrey 1998a, b) was also mentioned by a few of the women interviewed. The dancers believed they were not taking jobs away from local women—there were lots of jobs.

*[Speaking about a conversation with women who were already working as exotic dancers in Canada] there was more than enough work and everything. Everything is great—you just have to come here. (Sex trade worker from Moldova)*

*If there are no shortages of exotic dancers in Canada, why do they put ads in papers telling us about the opportunities here? (Sex trade worker from Hungary (strip club))*

One woman and her husband who owned their own company came to Canada to flee from the Mafia. The Mafia was demanding protection money for their business called the “roof.”

*[So those people kept coming] talked about the “roof”...yes. We feared for our children’s lives. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

### **Recruitment**

The process of recruiting these women was very similar to the recruitment practices found in the literature (IOM 1995). The most popular approaches included:

- newspaper advertisements; and
- word of mouth from friends and family.

*I get a newspaper, the Hungarian newspaper, and I see one sign job for girls outside of the country and you don’t have to speak English. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I answered an ad. It was a telephone number. I called it. It was a guy and he said they are an agency. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I came to Canada to visit a girlfriend who worked at a strip bar.... She says, come and check it out. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*[Speaking of her sister who was already here working in the sex trade] she sent me an invitation. Then I came here. She took care of the contract for me. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

The recruitment of the migrants already in Canada followed a similar process. For instance, one woman cited a fellow employee at her previous job as the reason for her career change.

*One of the guys I worked with says: “What are you doing here, go to the massage studio!” He said I’d be making \$200 to \$300 a day. And I was making \$200 a week then. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

Another woman mentioned seeing the information in a newspaper.

*I found a job at the massage studio, through a newspaper...a Russian newspaper. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

The research team found examples of such advertisements in several local newspapers.

Considering that trafficking in women is a worldwide phenomenon, the women’s reasoning for choosing Canada as their destination was explored. Given that a mode of recruitment involves hearing about others’ experiences in Canada, it makes sense that this was a significant reason for choosing Canada as a port of entry. In addition, some women made comments indicative of the perceived idealization of North America (one of the reasons offered by the service providers as well).

*I was sure that Canada, the place itself is fine and, well, in the European people’s minds, North America is always something really good. So I didn’t have any doubt about the country. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I have always had a dream of coming here. I have always been told that Canada is one of the best places to live in the world. It is very happy and friendly. It is also very, how do you say, new...modern...and there is many opportunities for a good life here. (Sex trade worker from Romania, strip club)*

For those women who actually chose their destination, they cited the perceived ease in relocating in Canada, in comparison with other countries as part of their reasoning.

*It was easier to go to Canada for me. Because if I came to the U.S., I would have needed more things, more papers. It seemed to be more official, that’s why I came to Canada. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club, who was recruited—came as a visitor)*

*Well, and in terms of Canada—we just applied officially through the immigration without any problems.... When we faced the necessity of immigration, we started doing some research: where it would be better, how it would be better...and where it would be easier. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour who came as a family-class immigrant)*

The puzzling aspect of recruitment was how friends and family actually recruited each other which was at odds with the theme that sex work was morally wrong within the Eastern

European community. Sister recruiting sister, uncle recruiting niece, husband recruiting wife and a reported story of father recruiting daughter could be construed as even more morally reprehensible than being trafficked by unknown, unrelated people. We wondered if the relatives were perhaps not such close relatives, or if families were so desperate they were pushed into these conditions. Other possibilities included the low value placed on women, which is reportedly the situation at least in Russia (Caldwell et al. 1997), or simply the fact that for some, the work is not morally wrong. Although we never encountered the view that the work was morally acceptable among the foreign women, it could be a matter of the women not wanting to convey this image to the researchers. Whatever the reasons, the idea of relatives as recruiters is consistent with Chew's (1999) approach that conceptualizes the recruitment phase as sometimes voluntary.

### ***Methods of Migration***

The various routes into Canada included coming as:

- visitors;
- family-class immigrants; and
- refugees.

Of the 18 migrant sex trade workers interviewed, 13 reported that they came under the guise of visitors as indicated in Table 4.<sup>8</sup> Some were legitimate visitors; however, most were not, as their visitor claim was part of the deceptive trafficking process. The routes into Canada used by the women are permissible under Canadian immigration rules and are consistent with most of the current research on routes of entry (Caldwell et al. 1997; IOM 1995; O'Neill Richard 2000). Once the woman overstays her visa and becomes illegal, the traffickers can increase control over her activities.

*I came here as a visitor and I didn't need anything else, just an invitational letter which was written by one of these agent guys and it said that he's my boyfriend and I'm visiting him. So he gave me details about himself because I'd never met him before, how he looks and how old he is, and just the basic things and I had to learn these things just in case if I'm asked. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*We bought those invitations.... It was \$800 for the two of us. We didn't have the money, so we took out a mortgage on my mom's apartment.... I was going to Canada to visit a complete stranger. Well, I mean, officially she was my relative, but in reality I didn't know her. (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)*

Three of the women came as family-class immigrants.

*We applied as independent immigrants...my husband was the primary applicant. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*I came here with my girl and got married to a Russian immigrant, whom I've known before, back in Leningrad, since I was 19. He was sort of my first love. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*I came to Canada with my family. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

One woman came as a refugee.

*The plane was going to Cuba and we had to change planes in Gander. We got off the plane there and asked for asylum. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

Finally, one woman initially came as a visitor and subsequently claimed refugee status.

*We came on a visitor's visa...but we immediately—we went to the shelter first, and then we went to immigration and applied for a refugee status. (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)*

We were somewhat surprised that traffickers did not take more advantage of the refugee system which allows the women to work and to receive health services which is often noted in the literature. However, this may have been a function of the small sample size (Caldwell et al. 1997; O'Neill Richard 2000).

It seemed to us that the majority of the women were not well versed in the details of immigration law, and most did not come with the intention of manipulating the system illegally, although a few did. It seemed to be the norm to solicit help from baby-sitting or modelling agencies (traffickers) and it seemed to be natural to trust friends and family who may have helped to “normalize” the illegal process. Even when the women knew they were engaged in illegal behaviour, it still seemed to be the norm or a small infraction in the face of the serious crimes they confronted on a day-to-day basis in their home country.

Some, however, were so naïve they actually undermined the best laid plans of traffickers and had to immigrate twice. A woman from Hungary who was completely trafficked:

*Ya, I supposed to tell them [immigration at port of entry to Canada]...I am stripper dancer at Hungary...and I didn't because I said to them I have no idea what is it, so they said: “Well if you don't want to be a stripper then you have to go home.” So 12 hours later I went home. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

### **Deception**

According to the findings, deception is an integral component of both the recruitment process and the nature of the work, as previously suggested by Chew (1999). The level of deceptiveness varies along a continuum from complete to partial deception. There is also

self-deception on the part of the women. For instance, extreme deception was experienced by some of the women who were told they were being recruited for an entirely different job.

*I call them and I meet with them, and they said it's a baby-sitting job and stuff...and then when I come to Canada I find out here that it's not a baby-sitting job. And then I just find out this group in Hungary it's really organized crime. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*When I get to the flight and was one girl and we had a work contract and then I didn't write English either. But I keep see every time one word strip, strip, strip, strip and I start to thinking on the flight and I was ask her: "What is this strip, strip, strip, strip. Do you have any idea?" She go: "Ya, it's dance like you know when you have to take...." I go: "And why I have this strip there. I'm not going to dancing." And she go: "Sure you do, that's why you came to Canada." And then, I did find out what went on. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*When I first asked what I would be doing, they told me a waitress. I said: "I am already one here," but they tell me that I would make lots more money doing the same thing in Canada. (Sex trade worker from Romania, strip club)*

Even for those women who knew they would be coming to dance, deception was still an issue.

*So I met him and he told me about the job, about the details, how much money I can make, how the dance is exactly. But well these information, half of them were not true anyway. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*The most lies were about the papers exactly. Before I came, my agent gave me the choice that I either tried to get the papers officially...from Austria... which makes things a bit more difficult...or I can come here and because they have good connections, that's what they said, they can get me the papers within two weeks. So they gave me the choice, which one I'd like and I said okay I'll go as a visitor then and you get me the papers as soon as you can. But this was the biggest lie that they never, they could never get it. And then they offered me to buy fake papers for two or three thousand dollars and of course I said no way. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*That's what they said that they had an agency but when I came here already I found out that they didn't have an agency. They say they are an agency but they are not. They don't pay tax after us. They are not official. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I heard that they keep the rules very strictly so I shouldn't worry about the dance. They knew I'd never danced before that's why they said it. That nobody can ever touch me...always security everywhere. And so I won't have*

*any problems with any customers, nobody can come close to me.... The difference was that of course people tried to touch me, of course they were closer to me than I expected. There was no security where we danced. So the customers could do whatever they wanted. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

Not only did deception come from the trafficker, but it also came from within.

*Ya, but I mean, I knew something was going on. I knew but I didn't do anything...like it's when you know this is the fire, it's going to burn you, you know it is but you keep on going. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

As can be seen in the data, the complexity of the trafficking makes deceit possible at numerous stages along the way and around a multiplicity of issues. It appeared that the political and economic upheaval in Eastern Bloc countries rendered these women vulnerable, making the findings from this study consistent with the observations made by Skrobanek et al. (1997). Women's limited choices caused them to be more vulnerable to trafficking, and this vulnerability often left them susceptible to things, such as deceit about the nature of the work, a lack of awareness of working conditions and, sometimes, even a lack of awareness of their destination. Some women who were anxious to escape their less than perfect situations at home and search for a "better life" may have been so desperate that they believed anything and anyone as long as it appeared to have the potential to change their circumstances. Sometimes, they were so desperate, they deluded themselves as to what they were getting into.

### ***Working Conditions***

#### **Work arrangements**

The establishments that house sex-related activities are usually characterized as either "clean" or "dirty." These terms are applicable to both the massage parlours and strip clubs where the women interviewed were employed. Such terminology relates to the level of sexual activity taking place within these operations, the meaning of which varies depending on the individual.

*As the clients call them, "clean" studios and "dirty" studios. What's a clean studio? It's the one where they don't do sex [only the hand job].... And girls also undress—topless, nude, sometimes the reverse.... [In dirty studios], they do everything.... So there are studios where they do sex and there are studios where they don't do sex. And there are different categories of clients. They usually don't mix, never. And clients come to us because they know that there is no sex, and that's exactly why they are coming, because it's clean. (Massage parlour owner from Russia)*

*A "clean" club is one where there are no "sex acts" going on. With that I mean oral sex or intercourse. I wish I could say that there are some clean clubs out there but I am afraid that is not the case. If we went out and found one today, there is no doubt that it would close soon because they would not*

*make any money. There are not enough “good” girls to keep a club clean.*  
(Agent/Madam from Canada)

Whether or not the club or massage parlour was a clean or dirty place was an essential feature of the workplace for the women. Control seemed to vary according to whether the woman had reported being trafficked and whether the place was described as clean or dirty. Both factors dictated the degree of illicit behaviour expected of the women. Fundamentally, the control feature of work influenced their own personal boundaries as to what was acceptable sexual behaviour for them—the last aspect of control they exercised over their own life. Deciding what was acceptable dictated where they would work if they had a choice. It affected their relationships with the other women as noted below; it affected their income and it influenced how often they had to move from establishment to establishment. It also presented one of the biggest problems they confronted in their work—the constant changing of the ground rules governing their behaviour, as clubs “moved over the line” from clean to dirty establishments.

*And I went there for an interview, I remember, horrible place. I see...the curtains red and blue and I said that's got to be...prostitute place...thank you and bye, bye. I left.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*If I didn't lap dance, nobody took me.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

*[They should] establish some kind of boundaries for the services, for the kind of services that are offered.... There should be cameras in the rooms. [So the girls wouldn't cross the line?] Yes...if there are certain lines being crossed ...then it should be another kind of business.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine (massage parlour)

*I never do more than they expect me to do.... Actually, that's why I've been changing places a lot. I never stay in one place.* (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)

### **Schedule**

Schedules were used in a number of ways. In the clubs, they were a means to control the activities of the women, leaving them with little free time and no time for illness.

*Like we have an off day like Sunday...but we always have to go work but even if I was sick or something, they let me stay home for three or four hours and then I have to go but I still have to pay the \$200.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

*So what you only see the motel room, the car and the club. They take you from 12:00 noon until 6:00 a.m. and then 6:00 in the morning he come pick you up.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

The schedule was also used strategically to avoid brushes with the law.

*I worked in the daytime actually because I didn't have my papers and the bar let me work without papers. They always told me that at the end of the day shift I have to leave because normally these police raids happen at nighttime so I wasn't allowed to work at night at all. I always had to leave around 7:00 p.m., 8:00 p.m. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

Massage parlour owners exerted less control than the club owners. Undoubtedly, this was partly due to the video recordings made of the front door and, in some cases, in the rooms. As a result, the schedules were more flexible making the studios more attractive to the women. For example, our observations on site indicated that a number of lone-parent women worked in the parlours.

*[The schedule] is totally up to you. You can come for four hours only, or you can sit here all day—from opening until closing time. It's up to you. Nobody will force you here. (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)*

*There were shifts.... I remember there was a time I was working 16 hours. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

*Um, you can always reach an agreement with the owner. It's not the first massage studio I work at, I worked in more than one.... In three. In some places, the conditions are similarly good, but then it always depends on...the owner.... Then it depends on what kind of conditions she puts you in. Some owners are good. They consider your needs when you need a day off or something like that, or if you need to work only at night, or only in the morning. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

### **Fees paid to the women**

Although it is true that the women were now making more money than they ever made in their country of origin, the industry operated in a way that paid them just enough money to keep them in the business. The level of payment was more than they would make anywhere else given their education, work experience and language skills. In other words, if they went to work in a mainstream occupation, they would not have come close to what they made in the sex trade.

*I would work for five to six hours [cleaning houses], would get tired out of my mind, and would make \$50 to \$60. And in the massage studio—I'll tell you, in my first day, I made \$300! It blew my mind!... So on the average, I make \$600/week. It's good. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*I know a million cases where girls came to massage studios from bakeries, from baby-sitting, from whatever. But I don't know a single case where at least one of them had gone from massage back to the bakery. There wasn't a single case like that. (Massage parlour owner from Russia, massage parlour)*

The Russian massage parlour owner added up the reasons as to why a woman would not do well on her own.

*If a woman opens a place and works there herself, she can charge as low as \$20 to \$25. Because she works for herself, she is not concerned with the price of a single massage; she is concerned with the number of clients. If a man or a woman who don't work themselves open a place.... Like, I can't charge \$20 because I have to give at least \$10 to the girl, so I would have only \$10 left from each massage. If I have from eight to 10 clients a day, it won't even cover the rent, not to mention advertising, plus utilities. So I would have to put in my own money, there will be no profit. So, yes, prices basically range from \$20 to \$60. On the average, it costs \$35 to \$40. In mine it's \$40. (Massage parlour owner from Russia)*

One of the problems noted by a number of the women was that competition had gotten worse in the last few years.

*Sometimes you can sit here—the week before Christmas I was sitting here all the time and made only \$150, for the whole week. Because we had literally one or two clients a day. So...sometimes you can make \$400 a day, but I don't even remember the last time it happened. So we basically stay at the level of \$150 to \$200, on average. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

*The prices for sex have gone down significantly—those oriental girls really pushed them down. So you can basically find a blow job for \$30 to \$40. Sex is also from \$40 to \$60. There is no sense in doing it. Why? Because, topless—when you're half naked—is \$20; nude—if you are fully undressed—is \$40. Reverse—it's when a client gives a massage to you—is \$60, and body sliding is \$80. So body sliding is basically twice as much as sex, and there are no risks of the intercourse. So there is no sense. But the other thing is that studios, where they do sex, naturally have more clients. So those girls work to generate the flow of clients. So it's not that she'll get more money from one client, it's that instead of one client she'll have two or three. That's the whole difference. (Massage parlour owner from Russia)*

The women who were fully trafficked were never paid at all.

*You didn't have money for food 'cause yesterday, like, last night, they take your money. Whatever they find in your pockets, they take it. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

### **Fees paid by the women**

Although a regular practice in the business, the extraction of fees from these women was, in some cases, exploitative and suppressive. These ongoing charges served to disadvantage the

women because they prevented them from saving money, impelled them to work longer hours and, most important, helped to ensure their attachment to the business.

*I had a Canadian agent who I have to pay per week \$140 and a Hungarian agent \$200 per day. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*If I make \$200 it's not enough because I have to pay for the club and \$5 for the gas [for the ride to the club] So every day I have to make like \$250...if I don't want any food or drinks. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*I paid for these two Hungarian guys, either one or the other. They were always together so it didn't matter which one. I paid, well it's an interesting thing, because first I thought I was going to pay them for the papers, to get me the papers [the work visa]. Because that's what they said...and it cost this much money and that's what I have to pay for...but they never got me these papers but I had to pay at the same time, at the end of every month—\$1,100 altogether. And well sometimes I asked them: "Why am I paying?" And they answered to me: "OK we will get you the papers don't worry." And the other answer was that basically I have to pay for the opportunity that I can be here. Just the thing that I can be here because if I didn't have them as agents, I couldn't be here. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

The women also had to pay standard club fees, such as for the disk jockey, for using the VIP rooms for sex, for being late and any creative charge the owners could think of.

*Typically she has to pay a \$20 DJ fee. This is paid to him for announcing the women, hyping up the patrons, spinning the CDs. Essentially, the girls must answer to him. He controls the floor. Also, depending on the club, the woman may have to pay a fee each evening if she wants to have access to the VIP rooms. (Agent/Madam from Canada)*

*There are tons of fees. Like it's \$40 to work, \$40 to go in the VIP room level one, \$40 for the next level, \$60 for the next. (Sex trade worker from Canada, strip club)*

*If you are ever late you get fined. If you're five minutes late you get a \$20 fine. (Sex trade worker from Canada, strip club)*

### **The day-to-day work**

Countless aspects of their work within these establishments were controlling, exploitative and discriminatory—integral components to the trafficking in women. Varying combinations of the following factors resulted in an intricate milieu contrived to entangle the workers in forced labour and slavery-like practices. According to the women, such aspects included:

- training;
- fees paid by the women;

- environmental conditions;
- safety;
- surveillance;
- stigma; and
- continual movement.

### **Job preparation**

Considering that all the women we interviewed reported that they had never worked in the sex industry, the lack of preparation they received was considered to be problematic. On the one hand, proprietors in the industry wanted the sector viewed as a legitimate business/profession. However, they did not seem willing to provide the necessary preparation for the women. When the migrant women first started work, they were not provided with adequate information about the law, what was expected, or who or what might be dangerous. We could only conclude that this was all part of the plan to keep the women in a state of ignorance.

*No other business will give you such a high profit from such a low investment. You basically don't invest anything.* (Massage parlour owner from Russia)

*I mean, the foreigners are brought in and most of them don't have a clue what to do. They literally watch the woman beside them and that is how they learn.* (Sex trade worker from Canada, strip club)

At the same time, perpetuating the myth about “training” was an attempt to normalize the work. One woman saw the ruse for what it was.

*No training, so she said: “Come tomorrow and I will show you.” ... Training? That's BS you know.* (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)

Any preparation the women did receive was related to how to please the customer and not about how to look after themselves.

*The girls explained everything, even did the role playing. One would play the client and another one would play me. And that's how they showed me how I was supposed to behave, what I was supposed to do, where I should smile, where I should make a serious face. Because you have to work with all kinds of clients.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)

*No, there was no training. I just looked at those girls there—well, I don't consider myself a beauty, but there were girls there much worse than me, you know, fat, old. So I thought: “Why can't I do this?”* (Sex trade worker from Russia, strip club)

### **Environmental conditions**

Given that the establishments within which these women worked were not subject to health inspections (with the exceptions of the kitchens only in the strip clubs), most were breeding grounds for poor environmental conditions. The women interviewed felt their places of employment had less than ideal environmental conditions. Their concerns could be divided into two categories:

- the physical surroundings; and
- exposure to drugs.

The physical conditions:

*They have little small tables and the floor is dirty. Everything is dirty. The woman's washroom is like...you don't want to go in there. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*Well the changing room wasn't very clean, but I think everywhere it's the same. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*The chairs are often broken and there's not enough chairs because they don't want you to sit in the change rooms. They want you out on the floor, so there's not enough places to sit. And another huge problem is heat. They never have heat in the change rooms.... There's like those basic you know human needs kinds of things like where if they get cleaned regularly and toilet paper and heat, those things and space they're just not there. And there's no way to get them.... The pole on stage is just smeared with stuff.... The stages are filthy and a lot of them are cracked, like there's big—they're usually cheap sort of like a makeshift one. The laminate on them will wear down to like a chipboard. And if you're wearing high heel shoes, it's precarious because you can trip on that kind of thing. Yeah the conditions of the stages are usually atrocious. (Sex trade worker from Canada, strip club)*

Exposure to drugs:

*You are not allowed to drink alcohol, you are not allowed to do drugs. I liked that. Although I wouldn't say that all the girls were following the rules. Yeah, they were always high on something. (Sex trade worker from Russia, strip club)*

*Some women their agency start to give them drugs and alcohol and everything you know. Some women take the drugs all the time and once they start taking the drugs they have no control. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*Like a lot of Polish girls that I know and Hungarian girls that are in the business, if they've been in it for a long time, they start using drugs, they start using alcohol. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

*You go into the change room, which is small to begin with, and all you can smell is marijuana. You can hardly breathe. (Sex trade worker from Czech Republic, strip club)*

These appalling conditions further illustrated the lack of importance/worth ascribed to women in the sex trade. The only concerns many owners and agents had was profitability. As long as women continued making them money, everything else was peripheral. In the case of those owners who proclaimed to really care about the women, a look at the disgusting conditions in which they worked quickly belied their statements.

### **Safety**

In light of the vulnerability of these women and the exploitation they were subjected to, workplace safety was a realistic concern. The women had concerns about violence from their bosses as well as patrons.

*You got to keep your head up and say: "Don't touch me." ... They try to touch you everywhere.... Sometimes, there was the lady, you know the boss was sitting somewhere. So if you were having problems, you could just leave the room and go and tell her, but some places you were just by yourself, I mean by yourself with the other girls. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

*[The club security] they were never there when we needed. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*If somebody didn't want to pay, there was a security person downstairs so the person couldn't come downstairs, only if he paid but that's all we had of the security. But it was only after 6:00 p.m. Not in the daytime. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

There were reports of some really dangerous, extreme cases.

*I had one guy. He says: "I'd like a massage." I say: "OK, pay first." He says: "I also want this, this and that." I say: "No, we don't do that." He closes the door. I say: "Hey, why are you closing the door?" And he basically says: "No, you gonna do everything I'll tell you." And takes out this thing, you know, that cops wear on their jackets. So he shows it to me and says: "I'm a cop, do what I say or I'm gonna put you in jail" ...and all kinds of stuff. I realized that something wasn't right, but I got scared. I could see he was nuts. So I rushed to the door, opened it and started screaming. Fortunately, there were people here— well, not people, the girls were sitting here. He ran away of course, immediately. He got scared himself. But for me*

*it was also quite an experience. So there are sick people out there. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*Once a client hit the girl with a bottle. (Sex trade worker from Russia, strip club)*

There were times when these dangerous events precipitated a report to the police; however, as indicated below, the views of police involvement differ between the owners and the women.

*[Once this guy came to rob us]. We got so scared! It was 4 o'clock in the morning, we were already closing. And this guy in a mask comes in. Says: "Give me your cash!" [He didn't have a gun].... He was simply a drug addict. He didn't really think it through. But thanks to our police: in three minutes they were all here—with helicopters, with dogs and everything. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*Basically you try—even if something happens, you try not to get the police involved. Cuz the business is such that for the police to come to you yet another time. (Massage parlour owner from Russia)*

These extreme cases, however, happened rarely according to the women.

*It's very rare, there are just few cases like that.... Once in a while there would be a client who had too much to drink. But generally.... Usually they would say something rude. When I couldn't understand a lot of things, I would be just standing there, smiling. But now, when you understand, you understand what he's talking about. You understand that he isn't saying anything nice. [But nobody ever became abusive]. In two years there wasn't a single case, not a single one. (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)*

Only one sex worker acknowledged the existence of explicit safety rules in the workplace when it comes to dealing with abusive clients.

*We all go into the rooms carrying cell phones. Each one of us has a cell phone on her belt. If the owner is not here, then we would immediately dial 911. No talk, no arguments, nothing—you just press the speed dial.... If he really crosses the line. Only if you can't calm him down, can't talk him out of it, then you should call the police.... Because when you come to work at places like this one, they tell you that you shouldn't, you simply shouldn't do this, this and that if you don't want this, this and that to happen to you. End of story. (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)*

While patrons were definitely violent, they were no match for the owners/agents.

*The first, second, third, fourth night I didn't work at all. I said: "There is no way I going to dance. You can do anything with me. I'm not going to dance." On Sunday night he said: "OK, you've been here one week...you didn't make any money, and we are going to teach you how to make the money...he sent four guys in my room so he could teach me how I have to make the money. They raped me for four days and four nights. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

*Ya, they [the agents] keep telling me how much it hurts when somebody hits you with a baseball bat. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

### **Surveillance**

An interview with a massage parlour owner revealed that in some establishments there are certain forms of surveillance. For instance, he had cameras installed in his parlour because he did not trust the women.

*In my place, sex is absolutely out of the question. And it's not just because I talk to them, but because I have cameras.... So my girls, the girls who work for me, they don't go to studios where they don't have cameras.... Because you can't even trust your own wife, much less each other. Because even if you, personally, don't do sex it still doesn't mean that you can't be held responsible. If there is just one girl who does sex, even if she's not in your shift and not even on your day—everybody will be held responsible. It's the law. So girls don't trust each other too. But all of them trust me. (Key informant from Russia, owner of a massage parlour)*

The use of surveillance techniques, both concrete and perceived, was also mentioned by some of the women we interviewed. However, in contrast with the preceding statement from the owner of the massage parlour, it seems the illusion of surveillance was used to control rather than protect the women.

*He [the agent] just took me to the club and came back to pick me up...he told me that there is somebody to watch me in the club so that's why I had no idea how I going to leave there. Later when I did find out, there is nobody watch me in the club. That is bullshit like anything else. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club).*

Perhaps worst of all the surveillance was used to blackmail the women.

*There was this girl who came to work for us, and she said she's tried to work in another studio, and there were cameras there. And she didn't know about the cameras in the rooms. Then she left that studio, and they called her and said: "You know, you have to come back and work for us, because we have cameras in the rooms, we've got you on tape, and if you don't come to work for us we would start blackmailing you." (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

## Stigma

As noted earlier, stigma was almost always associated with the work the women performed. As illustrated in the following comment, the Slavic community viewed the women's work as dishonourable.

*Believe me, they are simply fallen women. Fallen women who got seduced by money. And now they can't get out: their mentality, their whole psychology has changed.* (Key informant, journalist from an ethnic Ukrainian newspaper)

Many of the women we interviewed expressed both their awareness of the fact that some individuals discredit them, as well as their frustrations with such stigmatization. They saw the situation somewhat differently by making a distinction between prostitution and entertainment, or they appealed to the fact that they were not a burden on the state.

*Why on earth did you include strip clubs in the category of sex work? Why are you putting together dancers and prostitutes? I am not a sex worker, I am an entertainer.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, strip club)

*I am so sick of people in the Russian community who look at exotic dancers like they are nothing. Those same people are sitting on welfare for years, doing nothing, while I am proud of not being on welfare, of working, of making money on my own. And these people look at me like I'm trash. How dare they!* (Sex trade worker from Russia, strip club)

*When I started working in this massage studio, all my acquaintances were, like: "Hey, she's basically a low-life prostitute." So there is just so much contempt. It's awful. And I am, like: "And all of you are doing it for free." Because at that time there was so much, pardon me, fucking around going on here. Well, I guess it's still there in the Russian community. So I say: "All of you are doing it for free. You are all married, and all your husbands have mistresses, and so on. At least I make money off it." And now they are all working in massage studios too.* (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

*We went to get a manicure the other day and even the manicurist knew about us.... She [somehow] learned that we were from a massage studio and raised the price for us just like that. Can you believe that?* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*We are not being viewed as worthy.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

## Continual movement

The women we interviewed alluded to the transient nature of the industry, although the reason for the move depended on whether it was a club or massage parlour. In the massage parlours their tenure tended to be short.

*We never stay in one place, because they [the clients] get tired of you. So...I have worked in two other studios before this one.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

If the massage parlour crossed the line the women might move on.

*I always work in maybe 15 massage parlours in my life.... All kinds of locations because...nobody wanted to keep me in a place, because some places there's lineups waiting for them because they've been doing everything.* (Sex trade worker from Poland, strip club)

In some cases, there was even a transient component to their living arrangements, usually if they worked in a club.

*[Speaking about being made to stay in a hotel room with other trafficked women] we moved from one motel to the other...but we all stayed in one motel together.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

### ***Relationships with Colleagues***

One of the most consistent and unexpected themes in the interviews revolved around the relationships among the sex trade workers in the workplace, both in the clubs and in the massage parlours. The themes were:

- the creation of ethnic enclaves;
- competition between and within ethnic groups;
- professionalism; and
- friendship.

One of the first noticeable aspects of the clubs and massage parlours was how the women naturally grouped together along ethnic lines.

*I was very surprised how many Hungarian girls were there [in her strip club].* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

*Yeah, they were still more on their own. The Russian girls would sit at one table, on one couch, and all the Hungarian girls would be on another couch.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*The Spanish girls would also stay separately. Maybe because migrant girls—not many spoke English, so it was easier for them to socialize on their own.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

Although the various ethnic groups kept to themselves, there was considerable animosity among the groups. Based on interviews with the women and the key informants, the issue

was, ultimately, about money. The process was as follows. Foreign women were brought to the clubs where they received no training or preparation for their job. In addition, they were told little or were given the wrong information so they were deceived about the nature of stripping. As a consequence, they ended up providing sexual services for the same price that the Canadian women would charge for less intimate acts. Being cheaper, the Slavic women attracted all the customers and the Canadian workers were expected to redraw their own personal boundaries and provide more sexual acts for less money if they wanted to survive. The fact that they spoke little English and were told by their agent not to talk to anyone because they might be “some kind of government person” just added to the problem. And, that “so many women are desperate to pay these fools off” ensures that the women would not be influenced by other workers.

*And the fact is that a lot of Canadians just have a lot of animosity toward immigrant dancers because they blame them for this. And I have heard women say: “I will never work at that club because it is all Russian women.”*  
(Sex trade worker from Canada)

The animosity is confirmed when the perspectives of the Slavic women are considered.

*[Discussion about Canadian women] They are jealous.... And it was more like I'm the best or something.... I am from this country and, you know, like, I am, pity you because you are nobody.”* (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)

*They really did not like me [Canadians] because I was new...there was one ...girl, she was all the time want to kill me.* (Sex worker from Hungary, strip club)

*[Commenting on relationship with Canadian women] a little bit harsh. A little bit harsh.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

At the same time, the Eastern women accused other groups of the same behaviour in driving prices down.

*'Cause I heard the Chinese women, they do everything...the Hungarians do it too.* (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)

*[The Ukrainians] Very greedy. What they would do in a studio—for \$10.*  
(Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

While it is easy to blame the women for this behaviour, it was in the best interests of the club owners to foster this enmity.

*Oh yeah, they play the division completely. It's in their best interest to keep the immigrant women incommunicado, not talking to them...like having*

*Russian nights [one night devoted solely to Russian women] is the best way for them.* (Sex trade worker from Canada)

Even though there were problems among some women, others opted to go the professional route and, in fact, wanted to emulate the Canadian women.

*Canadian girls treat it totally as a job: you come, you work, you have a smoke, you look through some magazines and good bye! Canadian girls understand it even better than our girls [Russians].* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*Work is work, so you shouldn't make...friends at work. You come, you work your shift—hi—bye with everyone, and that's it.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

And others noted that the women were friendly and supportive.

*I try to maintain good relationships...we all in the studio realized that it's better to be nice to each other.* (Sex trade worker from the Ukraine, massage parlour)

Although less in evidence, sometimes there were poor relations among women within the same ethnic group.

*Not bad. Sometimes, there would be fights if someone kind of took a table dance away from someone else.* (Sex trade worker from Romania, strip club)

As a whole, the conditions of the women were very similar to the employment of immigrants in “employment ghettos” where the solidarity in one ethnic group is used against another by unscrupulous employers (Abu-Laban 1998). The consequences for these women, however, were probably even more severe. The women in the sex trade were economically and emotionally dependent on an agent, broker or club owner, and they could not turn to each other for solace or help. The inability to have relationships with the Canadian women, in particular, was a huge disadvantage because the Canadians would have been an important resource to the Slavic women.

### ***Coping with the Work***

Because the women's own culture viewed work in the sex trade as a deviant occupation, coping strategies were necessary for the women involved. These coping strategies became all the more important as the women slowly realized that leaving the business was not an easy option. One of the first strategies we noticed was how the women distanced themselves from the work, but there were many more techniques in evidence. For example, one woman suggested that her way of coping was to do the minimum expected of her until she figured out how to escape her situation.

*Only what I did, I did that \$200 for him because it was not a lot of fun for me and only my think was, pay him and that's it. I don't want to live from this money. I don't want to take home thousands and thousands of dollars from this job. I did for him the \$200 and I did \$50 to \$60 more...that's how I paid the bar and that's how I make money for my food and that's it. I didn't make more money. And as soon as I made the \$260, I sat down. I didn't get up for the money even if the customer want me to dance, I didn't. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

Another woman engaged in a form of downward comparison as a way to feel better about her situation.

*Some women's situation is maybe worse...the Russians for example, the Russian agencies they really crazy. Like not my Hungarian because he was just talk, he didn't do anything.... Like he tried to hit us but he never did he just keep talk and yelling but its nothing. But the Russians get really crazy sometime you know. They're going to hit every night if they need to. The girls you know...its much worse...so I guess they have more problems. (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)*

This statement comes from a woman who was raped repeatedly, threatened by violence and controlled 24 hours a day. In fact, her situation was probably the worst of all the women we interviewed for the project.

As was expected, some women engaged in unhealthy behaviour as a means of coping. For instance, mention was made of substance use and extreme spending habits.

*I was start drinking but I never drink during the work. Sometimes, but after work because I was so upset. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

*It depends on the client. Depends on your attitude. And, in general.... Of course, I can tell you from my experience that many girls can't handle it, very many during these years began drinking, some started doing drugs, and so on.... Well, it's kind of a dirty side of life. It's really dirty, and it would've been better for everybody not to experience it. Because it's all a deviation from normal life. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*You have the money and can go wherever. I just you know, went to a store and kind of...I was spending so much money...shoes clothes and everything [speaking about spending money she made from the "dirty business"—guilt]. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

Conversely, one woman discussed coping with the trade by using positive techniques.

*As to me, I go to the fitness club every day and I completely...I simply know what I'm surviving for—I'm surviving for my child whom I'm trying to give everything, show other countries. I know that.... So for me it's all...I'm a vegetarian, I don't eat meat, I don't do a lot of things. In other words, I know what I need the money for...I just keep always working on myself mentally and morally, otherwise you can go nuts with the work like that. Besides, I keep myself occupied during the breaks—I always take books with me, to get my mind off.... Stuff like that. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

Enjoyment of the work was another strategy used by the women.

*Some women just like it. You know—men.... [There is this woman] imagine, she's 56.... She has tons of clients. She sees 14-15 clients a day.... You know, she has her own, special way. She really wins clients' sympathy; she talks real well. That's her way.... Well, when it comes to her, she says that this business gave her a lot. First of all, she says: "It gave me money. And then I finally felt—I came here an old cow, and now I feel like a woman—because men like me." She says: "Nobody has ever told me so many nice things before." And she showed us her photos—she looked indeed like an old woman. And now she just blossomed, she looks 15 to 20 years younger. So, for her the moral side of it—she feels like a woman. It's not like me: I'm lying in bed at night and pray: "Dear Lord, please forgive me for what I've done!" And there she is—saying thank you Lord for this business! So there you go. She says: "My clients, I love them all, they are my dear boys." (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

As noted earlier, many women dissociate themselves from the work over time.

*For the girls it's hard psychologically, although only in the beginning. At first, it's hard. Newcomers in this business, especially the young ones, they just psychologically, can't work too many days, too many hours, have too many clients right away. It's hard. They have nightmares. But then they get sucked in. And everything is fine. (Key informant from Russia, massage parlour owner)*

### ***The Decision to Leave or Remain in the Sex Trade***

As outlined earlier, the need for money was the main reason for most women to stay in the industry. This need was reinforced by the fact that the money was quick, it was a large amount of money compared to what other jobs would pay, it helped maintain a lifestyle that would otherwise have to change and the work was not considered as physically demanding as being a factory worker or housekeeper. The sex trade workers were also expected to send money back to families, and this would have been impossible on an ordinary income. Furthermore, sex work was sometimes all that was available in a weak economy or if a person was in Canada illegally. Finally, several women felt the money gave them a social standing they would not normally have experienced.

*I have seen many [girls] who have started and then quit real quick. But once the money starts coming in...I'll tell you more...we didn't have any work lately and I began calling factories. So it's not like I'm fixated on this money, it's not like I just have to have this \$200 a day. I began calling factories. And what do you think? There is no work! Right now, there isn't...but before I called about some sort of sorting work or something like that. But \$6.25 an hour! Six dollars! What would you do? So like that, you won't be able to find anything decent. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

*Whether you like it or not—you won't be able to get out of here. I'm trying to explain it. But practically all of them stay.... Good money, you get used to the job. Nobody left, nobody. There are some who stop working, leave and then tell the girls that they found a great job, are doing fine, that they work at a factory, or a photo studio, or a newspaper—whatever. And then you learn that they are still in the massage business. So they just decide to tell people that they are out of this business, have no relation to it. But sooner or later the truth comes out: they are still in it.... You won't make that much money anywhere else.... It's impossible to get out of it. You get sucked in. It really sucks you in. (Massage parlour owner)*

*You know, I've been working in this business for several years, and I can tell you that all the girls have goals. But, for some reason, even older women who keep saying: "Oh, I'll just save some money and go to school." ... You see, it is so hard to get out of it, out of this business. Mainly because of the money. It's very difficult. I tried to get out three or four times. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

*In one day you can make \$200. It's a big difference when you used to make \$50 a day. It means that you can work for two days, just close your eyes on everything and you can survive already. I signed up my girl for dancing classes, signed her up for music classes, and she paints too. And I became happier. I can help out my mother. And my back doesn't hurt, and I treat it as a job, and that's it. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

*When everyone thinks that if you are washing dishes you are nobody, no one would even talk to you, you don't have any friends, don't have anything.... But once I started working at the massage studio, I immediately got new friends, and even those relatives of mine who've come to Canada before me—they immediately started to treat me differently. Well, they didn't know what I was doing. I was telling them that—I don't remember what kinds of lies I was telling them.... I don't know, I got some sort of power, I've got myself a new life. I rented an apartment, started feeling like a human being. Once again, it was very hard for me—the kind of life I had back home and here I was washing dishes for \$5 an hour, it was obviously very difficult. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

For the women who have left the business at some point, the push–pull factors were very powerful.

*I actually went to college here—got tired of everything, of the massage business, decided not to do it anymore, went to business school. And then what? I've paid for the first semester, studied for four months, and then there was no money left to pay tuition. And that was the end of it. So I had to drop out.... I didn't get a loan. I filled out all the papers, but they wouldn't give me a loan. I don't know why.... Yes, they can refuse you, it's not like they give loans to everyone. I don't know why. (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)*

*To tell you the truth, I've been...not long ago, I start thinking about because like I said you know I was afraid about the money, my financial situation and I was wondering if I should go back just for two nights and make a couple of hundred bucks. But then it's two nights and then it finished, one night couple hundred then another couple hundred, then you know the owner of this place or maybe you want to come tomorrow...another couple hundred and then another and then never finished and then you are stuck in this business again. That's why I don't want to go back. (Sex trade worker from Poland, massage parlour)*

Of all the women in our study, those who managed to get out of the sex trade and stay out were either forced out by being charged or they were to be deported. They also got out by escaping but this was usually in conjunction with being arrested. While our sample was very small, this finding underscores the amount of help and support these women require to make their way in Canadian society.

### ***The Women's Use of Health and Social Services***

The service providers indicated that the women rarely used health and social services, and the women we interviewed confirmed this observation. The women had surprisingly few comments to share with us about their use of social services or health care services. The most consistent comments were that they didn't use them and they probably didn't need them. When they were asked to speculate about using services, they couldn't.

*No, we don't need it. (Sex trade worker from the Ukraine, massage parlour)*

*Yes we have OHIP [Ontario Health Insurance Plan]. But I actually never used it...because I don't have any pains, I'm not bothered by anything. (Sex trade worker from the Ukraine, massage parlour)*

*Yeah, we don't need it, I'm OK. (Sex trade worker from the Ukraine, massage parlour)*

*[Asked if she needed services] no, no, no. (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)*

The massage parlour owner could not fathom why the women might want social services, a view that was similar to the women's.

*What, do they complain about something? [No.] Then what made you think they needed any services? What is needed...is to legalize it [the business].*  
(Massage parlour owner)

According to some of the key informants, if the women were illegal they weren't likely to request health care or any type of service, although few women mentioned this problem.

*[Asked about services] I didn't try because I didn't have any papers and I knew I couldn't get services.... But I don't need.* (Sex trade worker from Hungary, strip club)

We hypothesized that their views were a reflection of their young age and their good health. Because they reportedly did not use birth control pills, there was little reason to see a doctor, at least according to key informants. During a number of the interviews we found ourselves being asked for information about health services, dental services and services to treat drug addiction by the "older" women who were more likely to have families. We also had a sense that in their countries of origin health and social services were in a shambles and weren't something they would turn to if they were in trouble. For example, one woman who had an ill child said:

*During those years the situation with the doctors in Russia was very bad.*  
(Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

There was also some indication that "at home" one turned to friends and family for help.

*At home, even the walls help you. [Don't you have friends here?] Well yes, but they are friends. Canadian style..... Yeah socializing is one thing, but nobody wants your problems.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

The one woman who fraudulently came to Canada as a refugee used the full range of refugee services—she lived in a shelter for refugees, she received an allowance, she had free lawyers, interpreters and English lessons.

*[The conditions in the shelter for refugees were] really good. Free meals three times a day, \$26 per person every Thursday.... A teacher was coming to teach us English for free...we had to deal with the lawyers, with the documents, with all that.... Everything was free.* (Sex trade worker from the Ukraine, massage parlour)

Generally, the women—even the landed immigrants—had virtually no information about Canadian health and social services in terms of their existence, how they worked and their availability. One woman mentioned that she went to a marriage counsellor with her husband and had to pay the counsellor because she did not know that there were free services available.

*I didn't get any information from the Canadians. Well, at this point in my life, I realize that people [here] don't understand what we need, how hard it is for us to get on our feet, so there was no information, nothing.... So I didn't know anything.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

Another woman paid an employment agency to find her a “normal job” and when the interviewer told her that she could have had this service for free she wasn't impressed. We wondered if this was a carry-over from previous experiences in her own country.

*Of course, I don't think they can offer any real help.* (Sex trade worker from Moldova, massage parlour)

What did emerge very clearly was the role stigma plays in the use of services. The women emphatically said they would not go to a Russian agency because “their mentality” (the service workers) was such that they would not understand.

*If you work in a place like that—it's all over, you are marked.* (Sex trade worker from Russia, massage parlour)

*Well, I don't need a therapist at the moment, but who knows...I can't tell them that I work here and ask for help.... [You can.] I wouldn't be able to bring myself to tell him where I work.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)

If they had services where people understood and accepted the nature of the women's work, then:

*I would know that they would listen to me, and nobody would give me any looks.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)

When asked if they would rather go to an English-speaking therapist than to a Russian one, the response was:

*I wouldn't go to a Russian therapist, even if he was the best of the best.... I would take a pocket dictionary with me.* (Sex trade worker from Ukraine, massage parlour)

Finally, when pressed, the women identified three services that would be most useful to them: employment assistance, help in getting an education and language training—services that would be instrumental in helping them exit the sex trade industry or give them more control over their lives, if they remained in the industry.

### ***Summary: Core Experiences of the Women***

It seemed to the researchers that the women came to Canada with a shared hope for a better quality of life only to be faced with further social and economic insecurity, a controlled and deceitful lifestyle, physical danger, moral and social degradation in the workplace and in

their personal lives and, more often than not, hopeless entrapment in the sex trade industry. Those women who were trafficked tended to have harsher experiences than the unintentional sex trade workers who usually ended up in massage parlours.

Poor economic and political conditions in the women's home countries were cited by the service providers, key informants and the women as being the major reasons for migrating. Although at least half of the women were trafficked, according to the definition of Chew (1999), none perceived themselves to be trafficked. It was something bad that happened to other people.

The conditions of recruitment, migration and employment were, in many cases, deplorable and characterized by exploitation, control and illegal activity. The experience of being controlled was an underlying theme for all the women, although the degree and type of control varied. The degree of control was reflected in how they were trafficked, where they worked and whether their workplace was clean or dirty. The coping mechanisms used to survive in the industry included distancing themselves from their work, normalization, enjoyment of work, downward comparisons, substance use and physical exercise. Women tended to stay within their own ethnic groups and, sometimes, felt their business was threatened by sex trade workers from other ethnic groups. Few women ever left the industry and, if they did, it was because they were driven out through arrest or deportation.

Very few service providers had dealt with the women trafficked from the Slavic region as these women did not typically access social services in Canada. The women did not use services because they did not think they needed them, the women were illegal and didn't think they would be permitted to use them or they did not know the services existed, how they worked or where they were located. Many had already witnessed the collapse of health and social services in their country of origin and could not believe that anything for free could be useful. The women indicated that they would like social services in the areas of education, language training and, most of all, they wanted help with employment.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made on the basis of what we were told by the women, the key informants and the service providers. Although it was not our goal to formulate concrete recommendations specific to the Criminal Code or to immigration laws and policies, some general recommendations are briefly discussed. Much of the discussion is the result of findings about the laws and policies which inevitably brushed the lives of the women in our study. Also, the following recommendations are made with the recognition that the highly organized criminal element governing the sex trade in Canada will always manage to find avenues to circumvent the system. Finally, due to the international nature of the trafficking in women, preventive and interventionist efforts must be undertaken globally to achieve effective outcomes for the women.

### **Preventive**

Because the women clearly had little, if any knowledge, about the entertainment field and its less savory characteristics, it seems logical that they should be educated as to what falls under the rubric of entertainment and exotic dancing. The materials should also include a section on the trafficking phenomenon and the issues involved. A general education campaign that targets parents as well would be useful since many of the women lived with family up until their departure for Canada. This type of program would be in the spirit of the IOM (1998) *Information Campaign Against Trafficking in Women from the Ukraine*.

### **Information**

1. Distribute materials in the countries of origin conveying more realistic facts about the life of exotic dancing in Canada and the realities of trafficking.

Women trafficked to Canada have no inkling about Canadian law and the consequences when these laws are violated. Citizenship and Immigration Canada provides packages of information to immigrants which should be expanded to include the laws on prostitution and distributed to temporary workers, visitors and students.

2. The materials pertaining to Canadian laws should be distributed at ports of entry, to all temporary workers, visitors and students. The information should be made available in foreign languages. This is essential given that the majority of these women speak English poorly, if at all.

In our study, most of the women were trafficked as visitors to Canada. They usually stayed after their visas expired making their status illegal. Being illegal seriously limited their choices especially in terms of their work because they could not find jobs. It also pushed them deeper into the sex trade where they might work in clubs and studios that were more likely to be “dirty.”

***Visas***

3. Given that many of these women are trafficked as visitors, it is recommended that the procedural aspects of obtaining and maintaining a visitor's visa be re-evaluated and ways found to avoid the use of the category of illegal status when the women overstay their time.

***Employment and Education***

The continuing problem the women and, sometimes their partners, have with finding regular employment in the core of the economy needs to be expedited. Women need help in gaining education or realizing the education they already have.

4. The process of accrediting immigrant professionals needs to be sped up and English/French as a second language courses should be made available even if the women are in Canada illegally.

***Working Conditions***

The working conditions of the women were appalling. Some of the very basic standards for cleanliness, safety and heat were not met.

5. Efforts should be made to ameliorate unfavourable working conditions in the strip clubs and massage parlours. Public health inspections should be conducted of the entire premises (not just the kitchen) on a regular basis.

One of the worst nightmares for the women was the crossover of their establishment from "clean" to "dirty." To avoid this development, the establishments require ongoing monitoring. Since this is a shared interest of some of the owners, all parties should be involved in this process with the back-up of the law.

6. Develop a neutral, regulated, governing body mandated to oversee the strip clubs and massage parlours during hours of operation to ensure that the rules remain stable.

***Health and Social Services***

The women knew nothing about social and health services, or the dangers that could befall them.

7. Make it mandatory to have information written in various languages about health-related issues (i.e., sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex practices, etc.), and health and social service options (i.e., substance abuse treatment, shelters, medical services) centrally posted for the workers in the strip clubs, massage parlours and any other establishments involved in the sex trade.

Because the women do not want help from anybody outside of the sex trade industry—including their own ethnic community, a more visible, more inviting and active network of services solely devoted to their needs seems necessary. Traditional services do not seem to work.

8. Promote further development and provide funding for existing social service agencies that are solely devoted to the sex trade. These agencies must become an integral component of the sex industry, engaging in very active outreach in the clubs and the massage studios. Their access to clubs and studios should be mandated by law.

### **Reactionary**

Project Almonzo was an interdisciplinary, joint services (immigration officers, police, social work, licensing bodies) operation that addressed issues related to organized prostitution. This service was successful because the goal was to arrest the traffickers, not the women.

9. Develop and fund interdisciplinary, joint service operations similar to the successful Project Almonzo which works to combat organized prostitution.

## 9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An increase in the number of Eastern European and Russian women trafficked worldwide for the purposes of prostitution has been flagged as a serious issue by various international governments and organizations. Most experts maintain that the growing number of women trafficked from Eastern Europe and Russia is due largely to massive job losses and abject poverty resulting from economic restructuring in the former Soviet Union. These deteriorating economic conditions have driven Eastern European and Russian women to search for alternative jobs—searches that often lead them straight into the hands of traffickers, who sometimes are friends or relatives.

Little is known about the trafficking of Eastern European women into Canada, a serious issue not only from the women's perspective but also for Canadians. The growth of organized crime linked to the international sex trade, plus the establishment of a clandestine migrant community, can lead to complicated social, economic and political problems. This study, which employed an exploratory naturalist approach, sought to capture the day-to-day experiences of Slavic women in the sex trade in Canada through the use of in-depth interviews. Given the invisible and illegal nature of their work, an important component of the study was whether or not the women had access to social and health services and whether or not they used them. Service providers and key informants were interviewed to help answer these questions.

At least half of the sex trade workers interviewed were trafficked into Canada no matter what definition was applied to their situation. Overall, the women's routes and processes of migration were represented along a continuum of trafficking which underscored the complexity of the women's situations, consistent with the limited number of studies on this population. Interestingly, the service providers had mixed views of the sex trade workers and saw most of them as innocent victims of traffickers. Yet, consistently the women did not identify themselves as trafficked individuals even when they were clearly trafficked into the country. Their self-perceptions may partially account for the finding that the women did not see the need for services and did not use them. An important finding was that if they were to use services, they did not want them delivered by their own ethnic community, possibly because of the stigma attached to their work. The service providers had little or no experience with these women, confirming the reports from the women that they did not use services.

The themes that emerged from the data about the life these women led were similar to those found in the general research on trafficked women all over the world. They came under false pretenses with a fragile hope for a better life only to be faced with further social and economic insecurity, physical danger, a controlled and deceitful lifestyle, moral and social degradation in the workplace and, more often than not, hopeless entrapment in the sex trade industry. Each recommendation is directed at alleviating these conditions so women can exit or remain in the sex trade, but on their own terms.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE—SERVICE PROVIDERS

NAME OF AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

JOB TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

*(i.e., religious, health service, social service, etc.)*

### CLASSIFICATION OF ORGANIZATION:

1. Not-for-profit service provider
2. Proprietary service providers (for profit)
3. Government operated
4. Religious organization

❖ Is your organization a branch or a franchise of a larger provincial, national or multinational organization or corporate chain?

### Section A:

1. Could you tell me briefly about your agency?
2. What [other] ethnic populations do you serve?
3. Do you advertise your services? If so, what methods do you use to advertise? How broadly do you advertise?
4. What are your funding sources?
5. If necessary, do you use interpreters in your work with the clients? If so, is this a free service that you provide to them? Where do you get the interpreters?

6. What is your perception of the term “trafficking”?
  7. What is your perception of the phrase “trafficking in women”?
  8. Have you had any experience working with women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union? **IF NO, SKIP TO QUESTION 12.**
  9. Have you had any experience in this agency with trafficked women?
  10. Have you had any experience with trafficked female sex trade workers from the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union?
  11. If yes, from which countries?
  12. Have you had any experience working with sex trade workers from other countries?
- IF NO EXPERIENCE WITH SEX TRADE WORKERS FROM ANY COUNTRY, GO TO SECTION B FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT PROVIDE SERVICES TO THESE CLIENTELE**
13. If yes, what countries were they from?
  14. How did they find out about your agency?
  15. Did they speak English? If yes, how well did they speak English?

16. If not, did you use interpreters?

17. What forms of assistance were these women requesting?

**PROBES:** *Help with health, money, language, legal issues, immigration issues, children, etc.?*

18. What forms of assistance were you able to offer these women?

**PROBES:** *Referrals (specify what agencies or individuals), financial assistance, health services, interpretation?*

19. Given their requests, what forms of assistance were you unable to provide?

20. How much discretion is there in your agency's policies?

21. How much discretion does each individual worker have?

22. Do you have formal policies for trafficked women?

23. What are you able to do for women who want to stay in the trade?

24. What are you able to do for women who want out of the trade?

25. How would you describe the relationships among the agencies that provide services to this clientele?

**PROBES:** *Little contact? Co-operative? Unco-operative? Please explain.*

26. Based on your experience with these women, why do you think they come to Canada?

27. Do you think they use Canada as a transit to another country? If yes, what country?

28. Do you think they knew what they would be doing for work when they arrived?

29. Do you think they are in any sort of danger?

29a. If so, what type of danger?

**PROBES:** *Physical abuse (specify what kind: are they beaten up, slapped or just threatened to be beaten up), sexual abuse (specify), psychological/ emotional abuse, threat to their families back home (specify what kind of threat), financial dependence, arrest and imprisonment, deportation.*

30. Who poses the threat of danger to them: clients, pimps, Mafia, police?

31. What do you think their living situation is in Canada?

**PROBES:** *Housing—What type of housing—hotel/motel, apartment, house? Do you think it is shared housing? Do you think they live with those who brought them to Canada? Do you think they live with other women in the sex trade? Who do you think pays for the housing? Do you think they are provided room and board?*

32. What do you think their financial arrangements are?

**PROBES:** *Do you think they are well paid? Do you think they must remit a large percentage of their income to a second party? If so, who do you think collects this money? Do you think they have any control over their finances? If so, how much control do you think they really have?*

33. Do you think they want out of the sex trade?

34. For those who want out, do you think that it is possible for them to do so?

**If we have any additional questions, may we contact you again?**

**Section B: For Those Who Do Not Provide Services to These Clientele**

1. If you are not providing help to these women, what prevents your agency from helping?

**PROBES:** *No funding, service criteria, mandate of the agency, the Board, lack of staff?*

2. Why do you think these women don't come to your agency?

3. Where do you think these women go for the services they require?

4. Why do you think these women come to Canada?

5. Do you think they use Canada as a transit to another country? If yes, what country?

6. Do you think they knew what they would be doing for work when they arrived?
7. Do you think they are in any sort of danger?
8. If so, what type of danger?

**PROBES:** *Physical abuse (specify what kind: are they are beaten up, slapped or just threatened to be beaten up), sexual abuse (specify), psychological/emotional abuse, threat to their families back home (specify what kind of threat), financial dependence, arrest and imprisonment, deportation.*

9. Who poses the threat of danger to them: clients, pimps, Mafia, police?
10. Do you think these women are connected to organized crime? If yes, is it their home country Mafia, Canadian Mafia or a third country Mafia?
11. What do you think their living situation is in Canada?

**PROBES:** *Housing—What type of housing—hotel/motel, apartment, house? Do you think it is shared housing? Do you think they live with those who brought them to Canada? Do you think they live with other women in the sex trade? Who do you think pays for the housing? Do you think they are provided room and board?*

12. What do you think their financial arrangements are?

**PROBES:** *Do you think they are well paid? Do you think they must remit a large percentage of their income to a second party? If so, who do you think collects this money? Do you think they have any control over their finances? If so, how much control do you think they really have?*

13. Do you think these women want out of the sex trade?

14. For those who want out, do you think it is possible for them to do so?

15. If you could (i.e., could apply for extra funding), would your agency provide services to/create special program(s) for this group?

**PROBES:** *Why? Why not?*

16. If yes, what would these services/programs look like, what would they include?

**If we have any additional questions, may we contact you again?**

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE—KEY INFORMANTS

*These questions pertain to women who have migrated into Canada and are involved in the sex trade (particularly those women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union).*

1. Could you tell me briefly about what you do?
2. What is your perception of the term “trafficking”?
3. What is your perception of the phrase “trafficking in women”?
4. Have you had any experience with female sex trade workers from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union?
5. If so, what was/is your involvement with this population?
6. Could you tell me how you got involved with this population?
7. Could you tell me a bit about the nature of the sex trade?
8. What do you think the main issues are?
9. Based on your experiences with these women, why do you think they come to Canada?

10. Do you think they use Canada as a transit to another country? If so, what country?

11. Do you think they knew what they would be doing for work when they arrived?

12. Do you think they are in any sort of danger?

13. If so, what type of danger?

**PROBES:** *Physical abuse (specify what kind: are they beaten up, slapped or just threatened to be beaten up), sexual abuse (specify), psychological/emotional abuse, threat to their families back home (specify what kind of threat), financial dependence, arrest and imprisonment, deportation.*

14. Who poses the threat of danger to them? Clients, pimps, Mafia, police?

15. What do you know about their living situation in Canada?

**PROBES:** *Housing—What type of housing—hotel/motel, apartment, house? Do you think it is shared housing? Do you think they live with those who brought them to Canada? Do you think they live with other women in the sex trade? Who do you think pays for the housing? Do you think they are provided room and board?*

16. What are their financial arrangements?

**PROBES:** *Are they well paid? Do they have to remit a large percentage of their income to a second party? If so, who collects this money? Do they have any control over their finances? If so, how much control do you think they really have?*

17. Do you think that they want out of the trade?

18. Is it possible for them to get out of the trade?

19. What would you like to see changed (i.e., laws, policies, services for these women, conditions, etc.)?

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE—MIGRANT SEX TRADE WORKERS

### A. Background

A1. Could you tell me about yourself/your background?

**PROBES:** *Where were you born? Where were you raised? Where were you living prior to coming to Canada? Was it a city/village, etc.? Location within the country? What were your living conditions (i.e., house, apartment, shared housing—live with extended family/friends/roommates/boyfriend/parents)? Would your living situation be considered above average, average or below average? Did/do you or your family have a car? Did/do you have a driver's licence in your country? Did you drive?*

A2. Could you tell me about your family?

**PROBES:** *Did you live in a lone-parent home or a two-parent home? What did your parents do for a living? Do you have any siblings? What about grandparents or other extended family (i.e., aunts/uncles/cousins, etc.)?*

A3. Were you ever married? Did/do you have a boyfriend in your home country?

A4. Do you have any children? IF YES: Was your child born in your home country? If so, are they still in your home country? If so, who is looking after your child?

A5. Could you tell me about you education and employment history?

**PROBES:** *What was the highest level of education that you completed? Do you have any other skilled training/specialization, etc.? What jobs did you have? \*\*\*\* If she worked as a sex trade worker in her home country, explore with her the nature of the sex trade in that particular country (Was it illegal? was the money poor compared to what she makes in Canada? Were the working conditions better or worse in her home country? Did she have a agent/pimp there? Etc.). \*\*\*\**

A6. Was your income sufficient to meet your living expenses?

**PROBES:** *Approximately what was your income? Approximately what were your expenses? Did you feel that your income was adequate to meet your basic standard of living?*

**B. Recruitment**

B1. What year did you come to Canada?

B2. Why was it Canada that you chose to migrate to?

B3. How did you come to know/hear about potential “jobs” in Canada?

**PROBES:** *Did you hear through advertisements? Friends? Relatives? Co-workers? Other women who had already come to Canada or were in the process of migrating to Canada?*

B4. How did you come to be recruited to Canada?

**PROBES:** *Did someone contact you? If so, who? Did you contact someone? If so, who?*

B5. If you were involved with an agent/broker, could you describe your relationship with them? Both the agent/broker in your home country and the one in Canada.

**PROBES:** *Were they kind to you? Did you trust them?*

B6. How was the decision made for you to come to Canada?

**PROBES:** *Was it solely your decision? Was the decision made within your family? Did they have input? Did your boyfriend, friends, etc. have input?*

B7. Did you have any initial doubts or hesitations about your decision to come to Canada?

B8. Did your broker pay you or your family any money up front before coming to Canada?

B9. Did you know what you would be doing once you came to Canada?

**PROBES:** *Before you left your home country, what “job” were you promised once you were in Canada? If you are not working in the promised job/field, what happened?*

B10. Did the story of what you would be doing for work change once you arrived in Canada?

B11. Could you explain the recruitment/migration process?

**PROBES:** *How long did the process take (i.e., from first meeting with the agent/broker to arriving in Canada)? How did you travel to Canada (i.e., plane or other means of transportation)? Who paid for your transportation? Was it a direct trip (i.e., no stopovers)? If you had stopover(s), were you accompanied by someone? If so, who? Did your agent come to the airport/seaport/station with you? Did he/she travel with you? Did you travel with other girls being promised jobs in Canada?*

B12. Prior to coming to Canada, what information were you given about this country?

B13. Prior to this experience in Canada, had you ever travelled to Canada before?

B14. Do you have any family in Canada?

B15. Do you have any friends or other contacts in Canada?

**C. Documentation**

C1. Were you provided with formal documents/papers (i.e., passport, working visa, etc.)?

C2. Did you have the opportunity to read your contract prior to your arrival in Canada?

C3. If so, did you understand everything in the contract?

**PROBES:** *Was the contract written in English? Are you fluent in English? Were there confusing legal terms used that you did not understand?*

C4. What was the length of your contract?

C5. If you knew everything that was in the contract, would you still have agreed to the terms of the contract?

C6. Could you tell me a bit about what was in the contract?

**PROBES:** *How much money went to the broker? How much money went to the agent? How much money went to the bar? Were there any other financial details of the contract? Did you have to work off a contract fee?*

C7. If you had chosen to break the contract, was there a fee to do so?

C8. If you found once you came to Canada that you had been misinformed, why didn't you refuse and say that you wanted to return to your home country?

- C9. Did you ever have your contract renewed? If so, why? Did you go back to your home country between contracts?

**PROBES:** *Did you just stay in Canada after your visa expired? If you went back home, what did you do while you were there? How long were you there before you returned to Canada?*

**D. Arrival in Canada**

- D1. Did someone meet you at the airport/seaport/station in Canada?

- D2. Did you have any difficulties passing through Immigration?

- D3. Once you got to Canada, what happened next?

- D4. How soon after you arrived in Canada did you start working?

**E. Situation in Canada**

- E1. Since your arrival in Canada, have you remained working in the same club/parlour, etc.? If not, does this other establishment have the same owner? Why did you change clubs? How did you find work at this other club?

\*\*\*\*\*If she worked at various clubs, ask the following questions as they pertain to each club\*\*\*\*\*

- E2. Could you tell me the general area where the club/parlour, etc. was located?

- E3. Could you tell me about the conditions and atmosphere of the club and the neighbourhood surrounding the club?

**PROBES:** *What size was the club? What were the hours of the club? Was the place clean/well looked after?*

- E4. Did you ever receive any outreach services in the club (i.e., public health nurses, Exotic Dancers Alliance, etc.)? If so, what was involved with that?

- E5. Could you tell me about your fellow dancers/sex trade workers?

**PROBES:** *Approximately how many girls did you work with? What was their average age? What were their ethnic backgrounds? Did you work with many women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union?*

- E6. What were the relationships like between the dancers/sex trade workers?

- E7. Could you tell me about the club owner(s)?

**PROBES:** *Was there more than one owner involved? How did they behave with the clients? How did they treat the dancers/workers? How old were they? What was their citizenship (i.e., Canadian? If not, from which country)? Do you know if they were involved in organized crime?*

- E8. Were you told not to trust outsiders? Were you encouraged to keep to yourself?

- E9. Could you tell me about the clientele?

**PROBES:** *Their behaviour, ages, ethnicity, where from, occupation? On average, how many clients would be at the club? Were their regulars at the club? Were some clients regulars with specific women?*

E10. If you knew before you came to Canada that you would be dancing or working in the sex trade, what were your initial expectations? Were they met?

E11. Did you know the specifics of your work expectations (i.e., don't have to take off all your clothes, etc.)? If so, did these specifics change once you arrived in Canada?

E12. Could you tell me about the nature of your work?

**PROBES:** *Was it strictly dancing? Was there lap dancing? Did you provide sexual favours for extra money?*

E13. Were you ever forced to perform acts against your will?

**PROBES:** *If a client requested something that you did not want to do, was the bar/club/parlour supportive to you? Was the club protective of you?*

E14. Did the bar (club owners) tell you that you could get arrested for some activities (i.e., lap dancing, sexual acts, etc.)?

## **F. Financial**

F1. How did the payment system work at the club?

**PROBES:** *Was there a token system in place? Was the money paid directly to you and you were required to remit a portion to the bar? Did you have to pay DJ fees, floor fees and your driver? If so, once you paid those fees, were you able to keep the rest of the money? Were the fees always a flat rate or were they based on the amount of money you made in a shift? Who collects the money from you?*

F2. Do you feel that you have total/some/little control over your finances?

- F3. Were you ever told that the money you earned would be sent back home and would be there when you returned home?
- F4. Did your family ever expect you to send money home to them? If so, how much and how often?
- F5. If you sent money home, what was the money used for?

**PROBES:** *Household expenses, medical expenses, purchasing material goods? Did the money you sent home improve your family's living situation?*

**G. Living Arrangement**

- G1. What is/was your living situation in Canada?

**PROBES:** *Where did you live ( i.e., independently, or was your residence affiliated with your place of work)? What type of housing— hotel/apartment, house? Was it shared housing? If so, who did you live with—fellow sex trade workers? Who pays for your housing? Are you provided room and board?*

- G2. Is the club/parlour close to your residence?
- G3. How were you transported to and from the club?
- G4. Were you free to come and go as you pleased?
- G5. Has your living situation changed since you first came to Canada?

**H. Current Situation**

H1. Have you been arrested at any point in time?

H2. If yes, were you arrested during a raid of the club by the police?

H3. If yes, when the raids are done on the bars, are the police advising the women of agencies/services that they can access?

H4. If not, did you see any advertised services or know of any that were available to you?

H5. Are you currently involved in the court process?

H6. What are your charges?

H7. Had you not been arrested and charged, would you have remained at your job?

**PROBES:** *Were you wanting out of the trade before you were arrested? If so, was it possible for you to get out? If not, what were the difficulties in your leaving the sex trade?*

H8. Do you think other women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are in a similar situation to yours?

**PROBES:** *Do you think they want out of the trade? Do you think they want to return home or stay in Canada?*

**I. Future Plans**

I1. Could you tell me about your future plans?

**PROBES:** *Are you planning to stay in the sex trade? Are you planning to stay in Canada? Are you planning on returning home? If you are returning home, what plans do you have for a job there?*

I2. Does your family/friends/boyfriend back home know what you were doing for work in Canada?

I3. If yes, did they know from the very beginning (when the agent in your country recruited you)?

I4. What is their reaction to what you do?

I5. If your wish is to return home, will your family be supportive of you once you return? What are the issues you are faced with once you get home?

**J. General Questions Pertaining to the Sex Trade**

J1. What is your perception of the phrase “trafficking in women”?

J2. Could you tell me a bit about the nature of the sex trade from your perspective?

J3. What do you think the main issues are?

J4. At any point in time, did you feel that you were in any danger?

J5. If so, what type of danger?

**PROBES:** *Physical abuse (specify what kind: are they beaten up, slapped or just threatened to be beaten up), sexual abuse (specify), psychological/emotional abuse, threat to your family back home (specify what kind of threat), financial dependence, arrest and imprisonment, deportation.*

J6. Who posed the threat of danger to you? Clients, pimps, Mafia, bar owners, brokers, agents, etc.?

J7. During your involvement with the sex trade, did you ever feel you were being exploited or treated unfairly?

J8. Do you feel you were deceived or lied to in any way? If so, by whom?

J9. What would you like to see changed?

**PROBES:** *Laws, police, services for women like yourself, working conditions, changes in your home country (i.e., recruitment process), etc.?*

J10. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The use of the word trafficking is controversial and is discussed later in this report.
- <sup>2</sup> This number is based on the number of “undeserving” refugee claimants in 1996—the 30 percent who were not accepted as refugees (Solicitor General 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> In 1997, exotic dancers were to be treated like other entertainers, and in 1998 all exotic dancers had to apply for an employment authorization at missions abroad.
- <sup>4</sup> The purpose of the raids was to arrest the agents/brokers and bar owners who were trafficking the women. At raids, a social worker, an immigration agent and several interpreters attended to assist the women. Since the completion of this report, Project Almonzo has been discontinued due to political and budgetary constraints.
- <sup>5</sup> Criterion sampling involves recruiting only those who have direct knowledge of the topic.
- <sup>6</sup> Typically, agents/brokers are in countries of destination while recruiters are in countries of origin. These agent/brokers may or may not be owners of strip clubs and massage parlours.
- <sup>7</sup> Later in the interviews, several women were very interested to know about these centres so the interviewers gave out numbers and addresses.
- <sup>8</sup> This finding was in contrast with Project Almonzo’s statement that “the female individual of foreign origin, working under the authority of a federally issued work authorization as an exotic dancer was found to be the norm.” Such discrepancy may be due to the fact that since the development of Project Almonzo’s statement, the CIC made it more difficult to secure work authorizations for exotic dancing, and Project Almonzo did not carry out systematic research.

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Call for Proposals

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Lynn McDonald, Brooke Moore and Natalya Timoshkina

*Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides*

Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia

*Comprehensive Profile of Women Trafficked To, From and Within Canada*

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

*Trafficking in Women: A Critical Analysis of the Legal Framework for the Hiring of Live-in Immigrant Domestic Workers and the Practice of Mail-Order Marriage*

Louise Langevin and Marie-Claire Belleau

\* Some of these papers are in progress, and not all titles are finalized.