



Honolulu Star-Bulletin

View Point

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Pimps, not prostitutes, should be targeted

**Prostitutes need an avenue
of escape from their 'managers'**

By Kelly A. Hill



STACEY was a prostitute at age 19. A Pacific Islander with long dark hair and big brown eyes, she was born and raised in Waianae. Stacey was persuaded to drop out of her first semester of college by a "friend," who bought her a plane ticket to the mainland, promised to take care of her and provide her with a good job. Her "friend" turned out to be a pimp. He forced her to sell her body in the casinos by night and locked her in a hotel room by day.

Darcy is a shy, polite, Filipino girl from a middle/upper-class family in Honolulu. She was studying to become a nurse when she got to know a high school girls athletic coach. They met one night at a local nightclub and Darcy fell in love with him.

What she didn't know about her boyfriend, however, was that he also had several girls working the streets for him in Waikiki. He eventually revealed this secret and wanted Darcy to "prove her love" by supporting him through prostitution. She refused until he beat her to submission.

Ann is a bubbly, sweet 15-year-old who was born and raised in the islands. Her family is devoutly Catholic. She was befriended by a man while she was hanging out with friends in Waikiki. He raped her, gave her \$200 and told her that she had just "turned her first trick" and that she should go shopping.

These are the prostitutes you see walking the streets of Waikiki -- local females being victimized by pimps, recruiters and pornographers. They are children being forced into prostitution, teen-agers being forced to sell themselves by those who seek only to profit at all costs.

Vulnerable kids are targeted by those in the sex exploitation business because they are trusting and easy to manipulate. These pimps appear to offer most what young girls desire during adolescence -- independence, love, security and material wealth. They may appear to offer a

carefree, exciting, nonstop partying lifestyle.

Common recruitment tactics include hanging out in the malls waiting for the girl who just had a fight with her boyfriend; who stands in front of Chanel or Gucci, wishing for better things in life; who thinks she's not pretty enough or thin enough. A pimp will befriend her and put her on the pedestal she has always wanted.

Then, without warning, he will kick it out from under her. Then she's on the street with nowhere to turn. The Council for Prostitution Alternatives in Oregon estimates that each year, 78 percent of prostituted women and children are raped, 84 percent are assaulted and 53 percent are tortured.

This sexual exploitation can no longer be ignored or explained away. It is not going to go away by simply penalizing the 800-plus prostituted women and children being exploited in Honolulu.

When are we going to stand up and stop those responsible for putting our children and other people's children out on the streets to sell their bodies? Will you wait until it's your daughter? Your granddaughter?

It is the 25-30 pimps responsible for the prostitution in Waikiki who are reaping the profits while negatively affecting people's lives and the visitor industry. It is the pimps who promote the theft and harassment of tourists.

Did you know that the average age of entry into prostitution is 14 years old, and that many of these teens in Hawaii are local girls? The hard fact of prostitution is this: Pimps (also known as "recruiters" and "managers") are coming from the mainland and exploiting our children. They are venturing into our neighborhoods, befriending our daughters and then putting them on the streets to sell their bodies.

While we form task forces, meet in committees and develop legislation targeted at prostitutes, pimps are taking action and turning our kids into commodities.

We can deter the "oldest profession in the world" by making these pimps responsible for their crimes.

We need to fight prostitution by educating children about sexual exploitation and common recruitment tactics.

We can provide resources to help women and children escape prostitution instead of sending them back to their pimps after being arrested.

Sisters Offering Support offers these resources. It has developed an alternative sentencing program aimed at female prostitution offenders, and we will be working to present this idea to next year's session of the state Legislature.

Intervention and education aimed at prevention and community awareness of the problem are vital to stemming the increasing incidents of sexual exploitation in our community. Only when we confront this societal issue can we successfully prevent the sexual use and abuse of our young people.

To continue hiding from the truth is to continue to let the pimps win and prosper.

Kelly A. Hill is president of Sisters Offering Support, a nonprofit organization in Hawaii dedicated to helping women and children escape prostitution.

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