Response to the SALRC Report on Project 107 Adult Prostitution

**Introduction**

After more than 35 years of focussed interaction with individuals (in and exiting from prostitution) we (Straatwerk) support the Criminalization Model. We take our hopeful stand, based on the reality of broken and transformed lives, well-documented research and strong conviction.

However well intentioned, decriminalizing prostitution (in any form) cannot be a gift to those exploited. Research clearly shows that most prostituted individuals want to exit. Journeying with many precious people, over decades, has given us a very privileged position. Our conclusion is that everything needs to be done to prevent entry into, as well as support exit out of, prostitution.

**SALRC Report on Adult Prostitution – Comments**

Reading the South African Law Reform’s Report on Adult Prostitution has been encouraging and enthusing. We hear the voices of our people and the stories of their lives. The well-researched, clearly reasoned, and professionally compiled document addresses the realities and opens the truths needed to be understood to make wise and responsible decisions concerning the legislation.

**Motivation for Total Criminalization**

We would like to mention a few aspects, specifically apparent from our vantage point. (We are aware that each point asks for a whole conversation, which we are more than open to.)

* The law needs to communicate hope.
* Criminalization of prostitution is helping to keep the (already horrifying) statistics down.
* The context for exploitation, injury, damage and devastation in prostitution is not the law, but the industry of prostitution.
* Perceived “safer environments” does not stop the violence and abuse women involved in prostitution suffer.
* Criminalizing prostitution does not criminalize people, but an industry which degrades and damages people.
* Prostitution mostly preys on the most vulnerable.
* The environment created through prostitution is detrimental in the development of our youth.
* Our society is fertile soil for prostitution to grow, because of rampant sexual exploitation.
* In many ways, prostitution furthers the perception that women are commodities who can be bought
* Damage caused by prostitution cannot be prevented, as it is intrinsic to the act.
* The physiological damage is severe.
* Prostitution does not fit the definition for “decent work” and cannot be positioned as if it does.
* Negative attitudes towards prostituted individuals does not originate in the law, but in the hearts of those needing change.
* It is an illusion that prostitution is only a “choice”!
* Legalising prostitution does not eradicate violence.
* Regardless of our high unemployment level, we do not need prostitution to take care of our people!
* Money is not made through prostitution, only moved around from one broken and needy individual to another, further causing damage to those involved.
* Women involved in prostitution are not denied health care!
* A high percentage of women involved in prostitution wants to exit.
* A transformed society is needed and cannot be established with prostitution freely being practiced.
* Prostitution can be ended, but it needs to be believed!

**Roots of Prostitution**

Intense TRAUMA and severe DEPRIVATION are at the root of prostitution, usually suffered over an extended period, and often in a context where they should have been cared for and loved! It is extremely sad and ironic that those abused and neglected are willing to be traumatized and used repeatedly in an attempt to no longer be deprived. The reality is that prostitution does not provide what they hope for.

**Seeing the Prostituted Individuals**

Addressing the phenomena of prostitution, we need to truly see and hear those involved. It is necessary to hear their “voices” - not only their words spoken, but also the stories of their lives. They are honest when they are convinced that those listening want to hear, care and have hope to offer them. To survive prostitution, the men and women involved usually cut off hope, because they cannot hope and be involved in the lifestyle. We need to communicate hope!

It is especially helpful to hear and see those who have exited and are on their journeys of healing and restoration. Once they are not trapped anymore, they see clearly and often eagerly share about the reality of the lifestyle and what is needed to exit.

**Taking Responsibility**

When we give permission for any of our precious (and often in different ways most vulnerable) people to be sold, we are doing so from a position in which we are not taking up our responsibility. When we say it is their right to sell themselves, we are neglecting our responsibility to care, by giving them the right to do what they do not want to.

**Exiting Prostitution**

Exiting prostitution is a brave step, as change is difficult! The journey following the exit is long, intense, challenging and unique (as each individual is). All the rehabilitation and habilitation need to happen in a context of respect, care and hands-on support and guidance. For each individual, this journey will be different and yet there are many principles and “themes” which are the same. A holistic approach is needed, nested in committed, caring relationships.

Those involved usually see prostitution as their only way of survival. Their belief is based on their seen needs (accommodation, food, clothes, toiletries and other necessities). Yet, there is a deeper need. This need is for belonging. Brokenness happens in the context of relationships. Healing does too; and when this healing happens, the need for prostitution is not present anymore – partly because they then realize there are other options and pursue those options, but mainly because care spontaneously happens in the context of a constant, nurturing Community of Love.

Thus the “exit strategy” suggested is a group of loving, caring people adopting a motivated, exiting individual into their family, where he/she would be cared for and guided on the journey. Consequently, our suggestion does not start with extra resources and services, but groups of caring people helping the individual to access needed services, resources and opportunities. The provision of such services and resources could be addressed in many ways.

**Services and Resources**

We need mechanisms in place to facilitate and provide care. Journeying with exiting individuals, we have found that much of what is needed already exist in our Social Work System; Health Care System; Training Opportunities; Entry Level Job possibilities and in other unique and creative opportunities which could and need to be explored. Attention can be given to further develop these services, resources and opportunities.

The needed services, resources and opportunities should be available for those desiring to exit prostitution as well as those at risk of entering! This implies that everyone in need should be able to access the services, which is a healthy principle.

**Conclusion**

Prostitution is a trap of deception and destruction. We need to do everything to keep more women from entering and we need to do everything to come alongside those who desire to exit. They can all live brilliant, beautiful lives when they become part of a Community of Love and find their part in making the world a better place!