

# **From Victims to Victimizers: Interviews with 25 Ex-Pimps in Chicago**

By Jody Raphael and Brenda Myers-Powell

**September 2010**



*Researcher Brenda Myers-Powell (left) and DePaul Senior Research Fellow Jody Raphael*

## Introduction

This research project is a follow-up to the Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center's 2008 research with 100 girls selling sex in the Chicago metropolitan area who were under the control of a pimp.<sup>1</sup> That study raised a series of questions about just who Chicago pimps are and the operation and organization of the Chicago sex trade. Answers to these questions would inform law enforcement efforts to end the recruitment, trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable young girls in Chicago's sex trade industry.

In April 2009, the Center issued the results of a pilot project in which five male ex-pimps were surveyed.<sup>2</sup> That study uncovered interesting and important information about how pimps became involved in the industry, the organization of their business, how they interacted with law enforcement, and why they left prostitution. Because the small size of the sample limited the applicability of the research findings, the Center determined to expand the research. Funding from the NoVo Foundation (through the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation) and the DePaul College of Law Dean's Innovation Fund enabled the Center to expand the research to a total of 25 ex-pimps and madams.

Pimps were recruited and interviewed by prostitution survivor Brenda Myers-Powell using a 91-question survey instrument. Ms. Myers-Powell located pimps known to her during her time in the business and was referred to others by those she interviewed. Participants were provided a cash honorarium upon completion of the interview. Interviews occurred between September 2009 and May 2010 in the Chicago metropolitan area. They took place in public spaces, usually in private areas of restaurants. Each interview lasted between one to two hours.

The number of extant pimp research studies is low, undoubtedly due to the difficulties in finding pimps for interview and concerns about security, in addition to the mistaken view that pimping no longer was as prevalent as it once was. Although this research adds to our body of knowledge, it does have limitations. This convenience sample cannot be deemed to represent the entire world of pimps. The sample remains small, but it is similar in size to several other pimp samples, which present similar data (to be discussed below). As it happens, the pimps located by Ms. Myers-Powell represent a variety of types of involvement in the sex trade industry and thus can, even with the limitations, provide useful information for those working on criminal justice strategies and general cultural approaches to reduce the amount of sexual exploitation in our society.

<sup>1</sup> "Domestic Sex Trafficking of Chicago Women and Girls," May 2008 report, available at [www.law.depaul.edu/family](http://www.law.depaul.edu/family).

<sup>2</sup> "Interviews with Five Ex-Pimps in Chicago," 2009 report, available at [www.law.depaul.edu/family](http://www.law.depaul.edu/family).

## I. SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Profile of pimps and madams (n=25)	
Racial and ethnic breakdown	
Black	64%
White	20%
Hispanic	4%
Biracial	8%
Male	72%
Female	28%
Percent without high school degree	64%
Men	61%
Women	71%
Average age at onset of pimping	22.48
Average number of years pimping	15.6
Range of years of pimping	4-28
Percent who sold sex prior to pimping	68%
Men	56%
Women	100%
Average age of onset of selling sex	
Sample	15.4
Women	14.4
Men	16
Range of yearly earnings	\$150,000-\$500,000
Number of women pimped	4,135 minimum (range of 20-800 lifetime)
Number of women at any given time	2-30
Percent addicted to alcohol while pimping	20%
Percent addicted to drugs while pimping	16%

## II. HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

Table 2: Household characteristics	
Physical abuse while growing up	88%
Childhood sexual assault	76%
Average age of onset of childhood sexual assault	9.5
Domestic violence in home	88%
Drugs and alcohol abuse in home	84%
Family members involved in prostitution	60%
Neighborhood members involved in prostitution	64%
Regular self-use of alcohol as child	84%
Average age of onset of alcohol use	12.5
Committed to foster care	24%
Ran away from home due to physical or sexual abuse	48%

## Physical Abuse and Sexual Assault

The overwhelming majority of ex-pimps suffered physical abuse and sexual assault while growing up and watched their mother being physically assaulted by their fathers, stepfathers or boyfriends. One pimp's mother was killed by his alcoholic father while the child was hiding behind the couch. After that time he was placed in foster care, where he was sexually abused at age seven by the foster father—abuse which continued until he ran away at age 15. One ex-pimp said he saw his mother, a prostituted woman, beaten badly by a boyfriend, and he swore to **“get him when I got big, and I did.”** He was subject to physical abuse from these boyfriends and sexual abuse from a **“neighbor lady friend”** of his mother's when he was 10 years old.

One woman said she was sexually abused as early as six years old by **“whoever my mom, a prostituted heroin addict, wanted to sell me to.”** Her own mother sexually abused her: **“Whenever she got high she would stick things in me until I ran away.”** Another woman reported that her mother and father were bikers and **“lived the life of drugs. He passed her [mother] around” and beat her as well. She was subjected to physical abuse from her parents “ever since I can remember” and childhood sexual assault from “my mom and dad’s biker buddies”** between age seven and 13, when she ran away. She also began abusing alcohol at age nine. She said she was attracted to pimping because **“I created my own family, not the bastards I came from.”** One male told of the janitor in his building who used to give him money **“to suck my d---,”** a practice that lasted a year between the ages of 12 and 13. **“One day me and a few of my friends beat and robbed him. He moved.”**

Some of the physical and sexual abuse was at the hands of foster parents. One pimp, who really didn't know his mother or father, grew up in foster care and group homes. He experienced childhood sexual assault from a foster father at age 12 about once a week for a year, and began abusing alcohol at that time. Another said he **“watched different foster mothers get busted up.”**

Drug use was not prevalent while growing up, with the exception of adolescent use of marijuana. But the large majority of the sample (84%) said they began regular alcohol use at young ages, during the times of physical and sexual abuse.

## Prostitution as a Family Business

The majority of our sample (60%) came from homes in which prostitution was the family

business. Over half (53%) of those with family members involved in prostitution said their mothers were prostituting and/or pimping. Others involved were uncles, sisters and cousins. Some of these family members prostituted the participants at young ages, often against their will.

In addition, the majority of our sample (64%) saw neighborhood persons involved in the sex trade industry. As one commented, **“There were lots of guys making money, driving nice cars and dressing nice.”** Although they experienced abuse at the hands of their mothers and mothers' boyfriends who were involved in the sex trade industry, the pimps also saw the material gains that flowed from participation. The message was that one should be paid for sex and that sex would provide monetary benefits. One pimp, who asserted he knew he was a “trick baby,” related that his mother always said, **“I could and would get paid by women. She taught me.”** He always had nice things: **“My mom saw to that. She used to give me money. I guess it was her way of making up for all the crazy sh-- that went on in our house.”** As we shall discover, these childhood experiences impacted on the men and women's decisions to participate in the sex trade industry as pimps.

We did not specifically ask the pimps whether they ever ran away from home, but almost half (48%) mentioned that they did. Almost a quarter (24%) said they had been in foster care, but this number may be an underrepresentation because we did not specifically ask about foster care or group home involvement. Running away from foster care at ages 14 and 15, or from home at 16, were common occurrences in our sample. Along with low educational attainment, this severely limited the choices and opportunities open to these young men and women.

## III. GETTING IN: BECOMING A PIMP

Seventy-two percent of participants said they were recruited into pimping; in other words, someone suggested that they undertake this role.

For the participants in our research there were several routes to pimping. They can be summarized as:

- One thing led to another ...
- Pimping was a safe survival strategy
- Male and female participants were coerced into pimping, with the majority of females coerced
- Pimping met needs for a missing sense of power, control and respect

These different scenarios are described on the following two pages.

## One Thing Led to Another . . .

Since 68 percent of our sample sold their bodies for sex prior to pimping, their earlier involvement in the sex trade industry might have made a “graduation” into pimping natural. There were, however, specific routes into pimping. Several males with computer skills started posting ads for girls in their neighborhood who would pay them to handle their sites. This eventually led to their managing the girls in the industry.

Another played base guitar but the money wasn’t good, so he began to set up the parties rather than just play at them. Still another was a bartender on the Gold Coast of Chicago. **“I used to get offers myself from men and women. There was a lot of money to be made, so I decided to start a business for wealthy clients, men and women who wanted escorts.”**

One male was a cab driver. Guys asked him to get girls for them and from that he saw that he could make money from this activity by taking a cut. It was so successful that he was able to buy his own cab and now owns two. Now that he has left pimping, he still drives a cab but says he does not participate in the sex trade industry.

## Survival

Some participants said they weren’t particularly attracted to pimping, but it was only a means of survival. One, who needed to survive when he had to leave home at around age 15, said, **“it was easier than me committing a felony or going to the penitentiary.”** Another male who needed money put out a couple of girls so he could get enough money to buy a big package of dope to sell. **“But they started making a nice piece of money, and I didn’t have to sell drugs and the women loved me.”**

One man’s story illustrates a typical survival scenario. This individual said he was in four different foster homes; in two of them there was heavy drinking, and there was physical abuse and sexual assault from one family. At age 16 he ran away from a foster home and for two years he sold drugs to survive. Most of the girls he had around him were runaways or from group homes.

**“We all hung out together. When they needed someone to watch their back or hold money for them it would be me. The next thing you know I was letting them live with me. Then I got involved with setting up the dates on the Internet and checking out the johns because I had all the technology. It was just business. It was a way of never being broke or poor again.”**

## Coercion

Some of our participants were coerced into pimping, some males through gang involvement. One participant said his father was a pimp and his mother a prostituted woman. **“I was raised in the game. It was a way of life in my household and neighborhood. It was almost hereditary.”** He began pimping himself in the family business at age 17. Although his father was a harsh man, this young man had been conditioned and groomed so that he wanted to imitate his father.

**“I wanted to be respected like my daddy. He dressed very well, \$400 and \$500 suits. He drove the best Cadillacs. I wanted all of that. I grew up in it. It gave me the same things I saw my daddy with. I loved pimping.”**

One hundred percent of the women in our sample began in the sex trade industry by selling their own bodies between the ages of nine and 25, with the average age of onset at 14. They all ended up pimping, and it was not totally voluntary. One 40-year-old woman with a sixth-grade education explained that her mother was a prostituted woman who physically and sexually assaulted her and put her out in prostitution at age 12. **“My mother was my first pimp. She used to sell me to the landlord and other men who wanted a young girl. She was a junkie.”** After she ran away, she was picked up by a pimp and held against her will, and later was held captive by another. **“I thought that was normal.”**

She ended up in a massage parlor and eventually the manager asked her to watch the desk a couple of times, **“and the rest was history. He told me if I could recruit girls I could run the spot myself as long as I covered each shift with a least three to four girls. I have been pimped all my life, used by my family, and sold to my Johnny-come-lately. I was tired of selling my own body. It wasn’t my idea at first but I knew all the ropes and the girls trusted me.”**

When asked what her attitude was toward pimping, she explained, **“I wanted to run every day, but what would I do with a sixth-grade education and make the money I was making, and who is to say they would let me walk like that?”** She was, however, fired from her job because she had gotten into a fight and her face was cut pretty badly; she was told she couldn’t work because of the scar. Today, she takes two different drugs for depression and has been diagnosed as bipolar. **“I just hope what I’m telling you can help someone not end up feeling and looking like me.”**

Fifty percent of the female pimps in our sample said they were coerced into pimping, and 57 percent entered pimping at the requests and imprecations of their boyfriends. The following are a few examples of this coercion.

Two women in our sample said their boyfriends coerced them to take over the business when the men had to go to jail or prison. One woman, whose three sisters were in the sex trade industry, and who was a victim of physical abuse and childhood sexual assault from her mother's boyfriends, began selling her body at age 14 when she was kidnapped and held for two months by a pimp. When her boyfriend had to serve 10 years for aggravated assault, pimping and pandering, she was required to continue the business in his absence. **"I didn't want to but it was my job to take over and get his money. He told me he would have me taken care of [injured] if I didn't continue to take care of his business and stable."** Now, at age 29, she told our surveyor she was trying to get her kids back and trying to stay away from the sex trade industry: **"I hope I don't have to go back."** But after the interview she returned to pimping and was arrested 18 days later.

Another woman with an eighth-grade education, also a victim of childhood sexual assault, said she was required at age 25 to take her boyfriend's girls to the customers and collect the money. **"I used to think he did it that way because I was special to him, but I found out it was only so he wouldn't get arrested for pimping. No one could say they gave him money because they gave it to me. I had to make sure the hos made his money and collect it, or he would bust me up, real simple."** When he went to prison for 10 years for almost killing one of his girls, she took over the business to raise money for his attorney fees.

Even when the pimping decision was voluntary, it was made within the backdrop of this coercion. Becoming a pimp appeared to provide an exit from being a violence victim.

A 30-year-old woman told of her involvement in prostitution. Both her two older sisters and her mother sold their bodies in prostitution. When she was nine, her mother allowed her uncle to rape her **"so I could lose my innocence. For sure, he paid her. Soon after she brought other men to me, some raped me, some took pictures. By the time I was 12 I was used to it. If I didn't do it we would live in the streets."** She became involved in pimping, she said, because of her many girlfriends who were asking her to help make money in this way. **"I know today that I was only doing it because my mother did it to me, but the money is so good in this business and you don't feel like you are hurting**

**anyone."** She concluded, **"You call it pimping, I call it surviving and being smart. You either get in this world or you get got. No one will get me again like my mother did."**

## Power and Control

For these young men and women coming from households marked by domestic violence, physical abuse and sexual assault, pimping allowed them to gain a sense of power and control over their environment for the first time, as evidenced by these comments:

**"First, it gave me power. Then it gave me respect, because everyone couldn't do it and it gave you a sense of love. And last but not least, it gave me money and fame."**

**"All my life I was pushed around, beat up, and treated like sh--. I always got the hand-me-downs. I was never shown any love or care. But when I got these ladies who let me control and run their lives and gave me their money, and would do whatever I said, I had all the cards in my hand. Every man wishes they were me. For the first time in my life I was number one."**

**"I was attracted to the girls. I liked them and they liked me. We all had one main thing in common. We were hustling hard and wanted nice things. We came from sh---y places. It's like we needed each other."**

Many of the participants emphasized **"the satisfaction of having my own business,"** and the self-esteem from being a good manager. Over and over again they said that being a good businessman or woman was satisfying to them: **"It made me feel I had my own business. It made me feel important."** In addition, helping girls get paid for what has been taken from them provided self-esteem.

## IV. LIFE IN THE BUSINESS

### Business Organization

Participants in our sample worked in a variety of ways in the Chicago metropolitan area sex trade industry. Several worked for large escort services or strip clubs, recruiting and managing girls and women. Others had their own small and medium-sized escort services. One woman owned and ran a brothel. Still others posted ads for girls and women on the Internet and managed the escort business that resulted. Some provided girls and women for private parties. Although altogether our sample pimped a minimum of 4,135 women during their lifetimes, at any given time they managed two to 30 women.

In the main sample, those working for larger businesses were reluctant to provide details. One said the owners were **“a very organized and scary bunch of gentlemen.”** Another was run by a gang. Not one pimp reported earnings to the IRS and paid taxes.

## Recruiting Girls and Women

Recruiting was ongoing, not only because of turnover, but also because repeat customers wanted variety and new faces had to be continually supplied. One said that every six months he would **“clean house.”**

Pimps made clear they focused on vulnerable women. The prime candidate was a blonde runaway. Runaways were frequently mentioned.

**“I would look for girls who needed sh-- who would do whatever to come out of the messed up homes and escape from their f---ed-up parents. I pulled these girls. Women who had been abused by some sucker and wanted better treatment and nice things.”**

**“Girls who ran away from home or were put out by their parents. Ladies who were pretty but were on welfare, drop outs, you know you can smell desperation. If she is hungry, she will go.”**

**“I looked for girls who were willing to travel and were running away from something or someone.”**

**“Any player can tell when a girl has the look of desperation that you know she needs attention or love. It’s something you start to have a sixth sense about.”**

**“I helped girls who no one else would. I picked up throwaways and runaways and dressed them up and taught them how to survive.”**

**“What would you look for? Broken bones, unhappy with parents, abused by some sucker.”**

**“I wanted very pretty girls and young because they took orders better. White girls from the bars who like to get high. They were really a lot of profit but they didn’t last long because they used too many drugs. Most were 16 to 17 years old.”**

Another waxed poetic:

**“From the hood to Hollywood  
From the street to the ocean  
From the high school to the beauty shops  
Hos can be knocked from anywhere.”**

Pimps used various deceptive strategies to recruit needy young girls: **“It’s impossible to protect all girls from guys like I was because that’s what we do. We eat, drink and sleep thinking of ways to trick young girls into doing what we want them to do.”**

**“I had many games to cop a girl. I would tell them I was an agent. I would say I designed clothes. I even told them I sang with certain bands and managed different people. It was more challenging when I got girls who were older. I really became more creative the older the girls were.”**

Another explained that he recruited groupies or girls trying to be stars: **“I told them I was an agent. I got them back stage.”** But after they ran away from home and then were dropped from show business, they came to the pimp to make a quick dollar.

Pimps also offered love and attention and isolating the needy young girls helped bind them to him. **“I liked to get my best girls from another state and bring them back where they knew no one and I was their only friend and focus. I found them in many places, but mostly from running into them on the street or at a bar or restaurant.”**

Pimps said that the Internet, MySpace or Craigslist could also be used to recruit girls. And sometimes the girls didn’t even know they were being pimped. One pimp said he gave parties, got young girls high on liquor and marijuana, and the girls never knew the guys at the party had paid for the pleasure of being there and having sex with them.

Pimps made clear that the recruitment and the control provided a missing sense of power for them. **“It gives you a rush,”** said one. The girls and women also provided love to the pimps: **“I liked being big daddy, knowing that a woman loved me or liked me enough to sell her pussy and give me the money,”** said one. And another explained, **“It made me feel like I was a lucky guy to have women pay me and control their heads and bodies.”**

To justify this control, many pimps explained that they were helping the girls. They were teaching them not to give away their bodies for free. They were taking them from the gutter and feeding, housing and clothing them. They were restoring power to them as well. With so much demand for paid sex, there seemed nothing wrong for them all to profit from the **“greed and social stupidity of customers.”**

**“I felt I was a good businesswoman to get paid and help my girls get paid for the same sh-- that gets taken from you. It is a part of our society and what people want.”**

## Customers

Sample participants explained that customers seemed to be falling off the trees. This was a business with unlimited potential: **“Sex sells like wildfire,”** said one. **“It’s like sticking your pole into a fishing hole. Somebody is going to bite,”** explained another. Customers came from Internet advertisements and referrals from bartenders, hotel bellmen, and importantly, cab drivers. One pimp said that bachelor parties were a good source; two or three regular customers would come from each bachelor party.

Most were white men and Southeast Asians with money, **“who all had a fantasy about sex with a black woman.”**

**“Business guys, lots of stock market clients, conventioners. High-end guys who had the bucks, mostly Caucasian or Oriental, no black guys unless they were pro ball players.”**

**“Mostly high-end guys with money, not many blacks. They bought sex because they could get what they wanted without any strings.”**

**“Sports, music, news people, artists, comedians, politicians.”**

**“Some police, lawyers, men who could afford to pay for a room and the outcall.”**

**“All sizes and shapes, ages. Lots of big wigs, some snooty college kids who had lots of money to spend, even came with their dads, some of them.”**

**“From laborers to astronauts.”**

## Transporting Girls and Women

Eighty-eight percent of the sample transported the girls and women to the customer, unless they had installed the girl or woman in a hotel room in advance. However, in those instances the pimps moved the girls around so they didn’t get known as regulars to law enforcement: **“Nothing was permanent, we had to be a moving target.”** In some instances the pimps did the driving, and in others drivers were employed, or cab drivers paid. Some moved girls and women all over, from Springfield to the Gold Coast of Chicago, and to different states, including Indiana, Iowa, Nevada and Florida.

## Financial Arrangements

Over a third of our sample (36%) said that their girls and women were not allowed to keep any of the money that was made, and from their comments it was clear that limiting the money was an important form of control. To the question, “How much money was she allowed to keep?” the answers included:

**“Nothing. I met all their needs. I was their doctor, lawyer, manager and financial advisor.”**

**“That’s funny! None.”**

**“Daddy handles all money.”**

**“You can’t control your stable if you allow your hos to keep a dime of the money.”**

**“They paid me all of it. We were a family.”**

**“I was the money handler. Hos don’t need money.”**

**“I had all the cash. Money is power. Hos have no power.”**

Another 16 percent explained that their “main girls” who lived with them didn’t keep any money, but that others gave 40 to 50 percent to them: **“Some gave me all if they wanted to be special and stay with Daddy.”**

Thus, over half (52%) left some of their girls and women with no money. In the rest of the cases, the arrangements were variable. Those girls and women working for organized escort services got 60 percent of the take, but then had to give their pimp at least half of their portion. Some required the girls and women to give them a 30 percent cut of their earnings, and for others it was 40 to 60 percent of the take.

## V. THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF PIMPING

### Law Enforcement Support

Statements made by pimps reflect the degree to which other entities profit from the sex trade industry and, in the process, enable it to continue to survive despite its illegality.

Sixty percent of the sample said they paid law enforcement in order to survive in the business.

**“We paid who we had to so we could run our business. Police, detectives, and an alderman or two.”**

**“We paid vice and a couple of hungry beat cops.”**



**“I always had to pay these certain cops to have my parties.”**

**“I paid my dues, the regular crooked cops.”**

**“I paid a vice and a captain regularly, like twice a month.”**

**“I’ve done my share of sexual favors and kickbacks.” [female]**

**“Police would harass me, especially if I had more than one lady in the car. Sometimes they would arrest me just so they could take my money, shake me down, punch me, or take my car to the pound.”**

## **Other Support Payments**

Pimps said they shared profits with a host of other actors, including lawyers and doctors, but also bellmen, hotel clerks, bartenders and cab drivers, all of whom were regularly paid for referring customers. Explained one, **“A few bellman, hotel clerks, bartenders and a few cab driver buddies who knew I had ladies, but not everyone knew. I had to be careful.”**

A few pimps also mentioned paid referrals from convention information centers. All thus have a financial stake in the sex trade industry and are important cogs in the machine, without which it could not operate.

In addition, the female pimps operating their own businesses made weekly payments as high as \$2,000 a week to gangs and other entities that provided needed protection and security. Since they regularly made \$5,000 to \$6,000 a week, the women were all robbed a few times until they **“got connected and paid the right people off. So even though I was in charge I really wasn’t. I always knew that if I didn’t play by the rules my career was over.”**

When one woman’s man was in prison and she took over the business, he had other **“guys watch my back. They had to be paid.”** Explained another, **“A woman can’t survive without some protection or connection, and you have to pay.”** One woman had a gang for protection: **“It was kind of like a donation, but if they asked you to perform a favor you had better show up. They didn’t ask me for much, thank God, just free pussy for some brother just out of jail or a donation now and then.”**

## **VI. ATTITUDES TOWARD PIMPING**

Because of the high demand for paid sex observed by the pimps, and the obligation to share the profits with law enforcement and

other supportive entities, pimps believe that the sex trade industry is accepted by society, and thus, that pimping is a safe activity, as evidenced by these comments:

**“I see no one trying to stop this lifestyle [prostitution], so why condemn the people who survive doing this? Don’t knock a woman who is struggling. You tell me if we didn’t sell our bodies to survive, how else would we take care of ourselves and our families?”**

**“As long as men can get away with it, there will always be prostitution.”**

**“If people want somebody to blame for this, they need to look in the mirror. We all contribute to this stuff one way or the other. If we didn’t, there wouldn’t be so much money to be made.”**

**“The money is too good. It will never stop. It’s like stopping people from eating. This game will never stop. My opinion is that if a woman sells it, she’s smarter than one that gives it away, and if she wants to help her man, then good for her.”**

**“As long as there are people with money and power, there will be poorer people who they will be able to buy.”**

Only 32 percent of the sample said they rued their participation in pimping. Of those with regrets, half were women. **“I would like to give back what was taken from me and maybe helping others will give me some peace,”** said one male. And another commented, **“The only way I can rectify my wrongs is not to disrespect any woman in any way for the rest of my life.”** Added another, **“I wish I had treated people better. Sometimes I can’t sleep thinking about what I did.”**

The majority of the pimps in our sample, however, see an unending demand for paid sex, a world that appears to accept it, and participants lining up to make profits from it. So why should they feel guilty about what they have done or are doing?

## **VII. GETTING OUT**

A description of the process of leaving pimping and life after pimping shines a light on the attractions of pimping for the men and women in our sample.

Not one pimp in our sample made a decision to leave pimping. Rather, circumstances forced them to leave: **“You don’t leave pimping, it leaves you.”**

Poor health caused retirement for a few. One explained that his health deteriorated from abuse of alcohol, and once he stopped drinking he **“didn’t have the stomach for it. I couldn’t do that sober, treating people like cattle.”** Now he is **“broke”** on SSI and has a lot of medical problems. Liver disease has claimed the livelihood of another pimp.

Others said they simply got too old for the business: **“I’m not as young as I used to be. Like I said, it’s about control and a little fear. The older you get the less people fear you, so you get replaced.”**

Several of the women left pimping because they were robbed or beaten, perhaps in efforts to drive them from the business. Still others were defeated by the law, because they are now on parole, are in battles with the IRS, or were shut down by the police. Several of the women have quit the business in an effort to get their children back. Others left pimping because of the death of some of their girls or women. One man said that when one of his women gave birth to his child, he quit the business: **“I love my kid. I can’t have my kid’s mother hustling. If things get tight, I still post a girl or two.”** He is now making money by building websites.

However, most of the ex-pimps in our sample who are employed have generally remained involved in the entertainment industry. Some play at clubs or work as floor managers, DJs, bartenders or cab drivers. One works in the gambling industry on a boat in Indiana and at an off-track betting place.

Some men in our sample now sell jewelry, clothes and perfume, some of which may be fraudulent knock-offs. Others, both men and women, live with others who support them: **“I married a woman with money. We share a small business and I’m a deacon in the church, thinking about becoming a minister.”**

When pimping became unavailable to them, several in our sample tried selling crack cocaine or marijuana but did not like the business. Most have remained in the entertainment industry, probably because low educational attainment and years of pimping did not open doors to other occupations for them.

Only when pimping became too dangerous or out-and-out impossible due to ill health did these men and women give it up. Given the large amount of money they made (\$150,000 to \$500,000 annually) and the general lack of danger, pimping remained more attractive than selling drugs or other off-market activities.

## VIII. DISCUSSION

Prior research has documented the strategies pimps employ to recruit girls for the sex trade industry under the guise of affection or by use of deceit,<sup>3</sup> although still unknown is the percentage of women and girls under the control of pimps at any given time. What is largely not understood, however, are the reasons young men and women decide to participate as pimps and how they view the industry and their participation in it—information that would be useful for strategies to combat pimping and trafficking.

When we look at the sex trade industry from the viewpoint of pimps and madams, we see a landscape of unfettered demand and an industry, although illegal, supported by a large cast of characters, including some law enforcement officers, hotel and convention personnel, bartenders, and cab drivers. By and large, participation in the industry appears to present no danger, little hard work and large financial payoffs. This finding is corroborated by May and colleagues’ interviews with 16 pimps, half of whom told the researchers that pimping was a deliberate choice owing to the lucrative nature of the work and “the lack of effort involved.”<sup>4</sup>

As a result of their early household experiences, men and women in our sample have been damaged by both physical and sexual assault and by witnessing domestic violence. Sixty percent had family members involved in prostitution and 68 percent sold their own bodies as well, some under force and coercion at very young ages. The women, especially, had been subjected to sexual abuse and were forced into prostitution when very young by parents. Almost half said they ran away from home at early ages.

3 James F. Hodgson, *Games Pimps Play: Pimps, Players and Wives-in-Law: A Qualitative Analysis of Street Prostitution* (Toronto, Canadian Scholars’ Press, 1997); Tiggey May, Alex Harocopos, and Michael Hough, “For Love or Money: Pimps and the Management of Sex Work,” 2000 report from the UK Home Office, available at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icpr/publications/Pimps.pdf>; Kennedy et. al., “Routes of Recruitment: Pimps’ Techniques and Other Circumstances That Lead to Street Prostitution,” *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 15 (2007); “Domestic Sex Trafficking, footnote 1, supra.

4 May et. al., “For Love or Money.”

A common attitude pervades these interviews: pimping helped them regain a sense of missing power, but it also helped make amends; they were now getting paid for something that in the past had been taken from them. In running their lucrative small businesses, they believed they had the upper hand over the customers, who were seen as greedy suckers. And lastly, they saw support for the sex trade industry through various strata of society.

Ultimately, eliminating demand for prostitution will be the only truly effective way to end pimping, which always involves the exploitation and abuse of needy girls and women. Strategies to end demand are beginning to be employed by law enforcement officials through arrests of customers. However, our research makes clear that it would be an effective strategy to make pimping more dangerous or expensive through arrests and prosecutions of individuals for pimping and trafficking, using current laws available to law enforcement. In Illinois, laws have recently been amended to enhance penalties for those who traffic and sexually exploit persons under age 18. In addition, efforts to dismantle the support for the sex trade industry at all levels would yield rich dividends, because current attitudes buttress pimps and traffickers' current views that society approves of selling sex and the sex trade industry.

Lastly, the early experiences of individuals in our sample mandate that we devise methods to intervene early to prevent childhood sexual assault or establish mechanisms to assist victims of childhood sexual abuse and physical violence, which are precursors of pimping and trafficking, contributing to a process by which victims become victimizers.

For more information about the Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, please contact:

**Barbara Hausman**  
*Executive Director*  
(312) 362-8117  
bhausman@depaul.edu

[law.depaul.edu/family](http://law.depaul.edu/family)