

A RICH AND COMPLICATED WEB: PROSTITUTION DIVERSION PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND PROVIDERS

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PROSTITUTION DIVERSION PROGRAMS

- ▶ Sale of sex is criminalized in the United States
- ▶ Diversion programs have been created as an alternative criminal justice response
- ▶ Understandings of prostitution are shaped by:
 - ▶ Criminalized and stigmatized status
 - ▶ Coerced assistance
 - ▶ Mandated exit

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

- ▶ Longitudinal data collection
- ▶ Interviews with respondents during (and in some cases after) participation in the program
- ▶ Observations in court, probation, jail
- ▶ Interviews with criminal justice professionals
- ▶ Interviews were confidential; pseudonyms chosen by participants

PROGRAM CONTOURS

	Participant Gender	Program Duration	Pleading Requirement	Program Arena	Program Content	Outcomes
Program						
Baltimore's Specialized Prostitution Diversion Program (SPD)	Any	90 days	Pre-plea	Social Work and pretrial offices at the courthouse	Individualized	Success: Null processing. Failure: Return to plea state.
Philadelphia's Project Dawn Court (PDC)	Women only	Minimum one year (4 Phases)	No contest plea required and clients are supervised through probation	Courts and Probation officers	Individualized with common services such as trauma focus and sexual abuse therapy	Success: Cases dismissed with Prejudice Failure: Guilty verdict entered

SAMPLE

- ▶ 29 Cisgender women
- ▶ Diversion program participants
- ▶ Between 1-7 interviews
- ▶ Not representative of women engaged in sex work
 - ▶ Street-based
 - ▶ Survival sex
 - ▶ Severe and long-term addiction

THE LONE ACTOR?

- ▶ Much of current research focuses on individual reasons for engaging in prostitution
- ▶ Interventions are largely individualized
- ▶ Supervised behaviors and stipulations are addressed to individuals and often isolate them from others outside of the program

THE EMBEDDED ACTOR

- ▶ Respondents are embedded within a network of relationships that influence their motivations to enter, remain in, or exit prostitution and their ability to do so
 - ▶ Other women currently or formerly engaged in prostitution
 - ▶ Families of origin
 - ▶ Children or other dependents
 - ▶ Significant others
 - ▶ Criminal justice personnel

AMBIGUOUS UNDERSTANDINGS

- Respondents find these relationships both hinder and facilitate achieving their goals
- Criminal justice understandings of which relationships are valuable often differ from defendants' understandings

RELATIONSHIPS ARE DYNAMIC

- ▶ Relationships are multi-faceted and evolved over time
- ▶ Respondents often make relationship-related decisions due to perceived lack of options
 - ▶ Social
 - ▶ Financial
 - ▶ Material
- ▶ Automatic characterization of relationships as “good” or “bad” misses much of the complexity

Once I move out of here and get my own place, I think I can get my mind set a bit stronger because . . . my mother's put me down my whole life. She makes me feel like an animal. I gotta be in a certain time, I can't have phone calls. I'm forty-five years old. . . And it's not helpin' me. If anything, it's pushin' me back—it's makin' me fall backwards instead of forwards. I got to get away from all this negative feedbacks . . . get my life back in order the right way 'cause I don't have nobody talkin'—puttin' me down. Makin' me feel as though I'm not nothing. But when I'm here, that's all I get, so that's how I feel. I don't even really try to do anything in here. Just sit here and do nothing. Just watch TV.

Lorena, Specialized Prostitution Diversion Program

CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES; CONFLICTING VIEWS

- ▶ Women in prostitution often have very different views of relationships than court personnel and social service providers
- ▶ This stems from different
 - ▶ Different roles
 - ▶ Different visions or goals
 - ▶ Different knowledge

If it's gonna keep me out of prison, I was alright with [leaving my boyfriend as] a stipulation. Because obviously, he makes me sick. We make each other sick. I can see the logic in it. I mean I'm not licensed. But, I'm sure they know a lot more about peoples' behaviors than I do.... I cried everyday. I just, wasn't a happy camper. I was miserable. And I don't know if it was because the material things I was losing...or [that] I knew the relationship was over. I had a lot of surrendering and acceptance too, because, okay, this was making me sick. I need to do whatever it is that's going to make me well.

Lorraine, Project Dawn Court

ROLE IDENTIFICATION

- ▶ Good daughter
- ▶ Good mother
- ▶ Good wife
- ▶ Living a “normal” life

My ideal life is getting a house that my daughter wants to live in and not having to worry about money on a daily basis. And some people may think, 'That's it? That's all you wanna do? You don't wanna have a yacht? You don't wanna travel to Vail? You don't wanna do this [or] that?' 'No; I don't need any of that stuff. ...I just want a life comfortably with my daughter and my husband and stay clean and go to work every day like a normal person does.

Amy, Project Dawn Court

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Increase options of those engaging in prostitution may enable them to leave relationships that they see as problematic but necessary
- ▶ Avoid overly simplistic valorization or demonization of relationships based on unexplored assumptions
- ▶ Learn more about relationships and how they function for women in prostitution in general and in particular cases