FRAME OF REFERENCE

FOR
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION INTERVENTIONS

Québec

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PREAMBLE

Sexual exploitation is one of the many forms of abuse of another person. It involves people who take advantage of the vulnerability of others in order to benefit, often financially. It manifests itself in many ways and involves asymmetrical relationships between its actors, whether they are the exploiters (or pimps), the exploited (or people who sell their sexual services) or the clients (or people who purchase the sexual services of another person).

While the majority of pimps are men and women are more likely to sell sex, men are not immune to being exploited and women may also sexually exploit others. Sexual exploitation does not have a specific gender, sexual identity or sexual orientation.

Putting an end to sexual exploitation is complex, despite the will to do so, and involves a lot of back and forth. It requires physical healing as well as psychological and social rehabilitation. Services for sexually exploited persons must promote recovery by enabling them to regain control over their lives, make choices and exercise their power to act.

While there is general agreement on the need to protect sexually exploited persons, there is no consensus on how to do so. All youth workers who deal with cases of sexual exploitation are faced with numerous conceptual, moral, social, legal and clinical issues when working with people who sell their sexual services. Not only are the services rendered based largely on a given youth worker's intervention philosophy or intuition rather than evidence-based practices, but they are also often provided in a discontinuous, uncoordinated manner that is tailored to the needs of the provider rather than those of the recipient.

The purpose of this frame of reference is to define the parameters of intervention for persons engaged in a cycle of sexual exploitation, whether they are minors, adults, male, female or transgender. The main terms used to describe sexual exploitation are first defined, followed by a review of the process of engagement in the cycle of sexual exploitation, a brief description of the vulnerability factors, and the associated harms. Finally, the approaches and principles that guide this proposal of a common intervention framework are presented along with recommended strategies for each stage of the engagement and withdrawal cycle[1] associated with sexual exploitation.

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1   In this document, the use of the term "withdrawal" refers to the process of abandoning the sex trade, terminating the commodification of sexual services or leaving a sexually exploitative lifestyle.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sexual exploitation is undeniably a major social concern due to the abuse it entails, the vulnerability of the people who follow that path and the inequitable relationships between the protagonists, namely the exploiters (or pimps), the exploited (or people who sell their sexual services) and the clients (or people who purchase the sexual services of another person).

However, it is difficult to provide an accurate picture of the extent of sexual exploitation in Quebec, as it is elsewhere in the world. Its illegal nature, secrecy and social stigma as well as the organization of the sex industry and limited access to abusive environments for both researchers and youth workers are among the many factors that make the exercise difficult. Nevertheless, it is possible to define the main concepts and describe in general terms the profile and path taken by persons who engage in a sexually exploitative lifestyle.

Some definitions

The terms "exploitation," "exploiter" and "exploited" are subject to multiple debates because they encompass a variety of heterogeneous manifestations and protagonists. The terms "prostitution," "procuring" or "pimping," "sexual exploitation" and "trafficking in persons" are generally used to describe the phenomenon of selling sexual services.

Prostitution

Hanigan[2] defines prostitution as "the act of engaging in sexual activity in exchange for goods or services and primarily for reasons other than one's own sexual and emotional needs."

While the prostitution of minors has always been outlawed in Canada, the exchange of sexual services for payment between adults has never been illegal. However, in December 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada declared the following three offences unconstitutional: keeping or being in a bawdy house for the purposes of prostitution, living on the avails of prostitution, and communicating in public for the purpose of engaging in prostitution. In response to the Bedford[3] arrest, Bill C-36, which came into force a year later, criminalized the purchase of sexual services, making prostitution *de facto* illegal. It cannot be practised without at least one of the persons involved, the client, committing an illegal act.

However, it is important to note that persons who sell their own sexual services and promote them are immune, legally-speaking. Therefore, they cannot be prosecuted under section 286.5 of the Criminal Code of Canada.[4]

Legally, prostitution offences are grouped under the term "commodification of sexual activity."[5] Sections 286.1(1) and 286.1(2) of the Criminal Code of Canada[6] define obtaining sexual services for consideration as follows:

> "Everyone who, in any place, obtains for consideration, or communicates with anyone [over or under 18 years of age] for the purpose of obtaining for consideration, the sexual services of a person."

In addition, sections 286.2(1) and 286.2(2) criminalize obtaining a material benefit from the provision of sexual services:

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2   Hanigan, P. (1990). *La jeunesse en difficulté: comprendre pour mieux intervenir.* Québec, Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, p. 110.
3   In reference to Terri-Jean Bedford, who, along with Amy Lebovitch and Valerie Scott, brought a lawsuit against the Government of Canada in order to have certain prostitution-related offences declared unconstitutional. These women sold their own sexual services.
4   https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-65.html
5   https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-64.html
6   https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html

> Every person who "receives a financial or other material benefit, knowing that it is obtained by or derived directly or indirectly" by obtaining for consideration the sexual services of a person over or under 18 years of age.

Evidence that a person lives with or is customarily in the company of someone who, for consideration, offers or renders sexual services proves, unless otherwise indicated, that the person receives a material benefit from such services.[7]

Procuring (or pimping)

Procuring (or pimping) is commonly defined as promoting the prostitution of others or deriving income from the prostitution of others. Legally, sections 286.3(1) and 286.3(2) of the Criminal Code of Canada[8] define procuring as follows:

> Everyone who procures a person [over or under 18 years of age] to offer or provide sexual services for consideration or, for the purpose of facilitating such an offence [...], recruits, holds, conceals or harbours a person who offers or provides sexual services for consideration, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of that person.

Sexual exploitation

According to the Quebec government's *Secrétariat à la condition féminine*[9]:

> "Through its many manifestations, sexual exploitation generally involves a situation, context or relationship where an individual takes advantage of a person's state of vulnerability or dependence, or an inequitable position of power, in order to use that person's body for sexual purposes, with a view to gaining an advantage."

This definition is also the one adopted by the Quebec government's Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors,[10] whose report was tabled in the National Assembly on December 3, 2020.

Legally, section 153(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada[11] defines sexual exploitation as follows:

> Every person who is in a position of trust or authority towards a young person [who is at least 16 but less than 18 years of age], who is a person with whom the young person is in a relationship of dependency or who is in a relationship with a young person that is exploitative of the young person and who, for a sexual purpose, (a) touches, directly or indirectly, with a part of the body or with an object, any part of the body of the young person; or (b) invites, counsels or incites a young person to touch, directly or indirectly, with a part of the body or with an object, the body of any person, including the body of the person who so invites, counsels or incites and the body of the young person.

Therefore, under the Criminal Code of Canada, sexual exploitation is limited to persons between the ages of 16 and 18. However, a person "who, for a sexual purpose, invites, counsels or incites a person under the age of 16 years to touch, directly or indirectly, with a part of the body or with an object, the body of any person, including the body of the person who so invites, counsels or incites and the body of the person under the age of 16 years" can be charged with invitation to sexual touching under section 152.

Under the Youth Protection Act,[12] sexual exploitation is considered a sexually abusive situation under section 38(d), but is not explicitly defined:

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7   Criminal Code of Canada, section 286.2(3) (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html).
8   https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html
9   Secrétariat à la condition féminine (2016). *Les violences sexuelles, c'est non.* Quebec, Quebec: Secrétariat à la condition féminine, Government of Quebec.
10 Report from the Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors, December 2020. Quebec City, Quebec: Quebec National Assembly, Government of Quebec.
11 https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html
12 http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/P-34.1

"The security or development of a child is considered to be in danger [if the child is subjected to sexual abuse, meaning that he or she] is subjected to gestures of a sexual nature, with or without physical contact, including any form of sexual exploitation by the child's parents or another person [or if the child] runs a serious risk of being subjected to gestures of a sexual nature, with or without physical contact, including a serious risk of sexual exploitation, by the child's parents or another person, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation."

Trafficking in persons

According to the Palermo Protocol adopted by the United Nations,[13] trafficking in persons is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion such as abduction, fraud, deception or the abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation.

Legally, sections 279.01(1) and 279.011(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada[14] define trafficking in persons as follows:

"[Every person who] recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person over or under the age of eighteen years, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation [...]. [A] person exploits another person if they cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in conduct that, in all circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service."

Evidence that a non-exploited person lives with or is ordinarily in the company of an exploited person proves, unless otherwise attested, that the person exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of the exploited person for the purpose of exploiting or facilitating the exploitation of that person.[15]

Commodification of sexual services

This frame of reference favours the terms "sexual exploitation" and "commodification of sexual services" (or "selling sexual services") as they reflect the asymmetrical relationships of those who benefit from others in the sex industry. In addition, the semantics of these terms allow for the inclusion of the previously defined offences of child prostitution (sec. 286.1(2) CCC) and trafficking in persons (sec. 279.01(1) and 279.011(1) CCC).[16] It also allows for the inclusion of the offence of child pornography, defined in section 163.1(1) of the Criminal Code as follows:

"A photographic, film, video or other visual representation, whether or not it was made by electronic or mechanical means, that shows a person who is or is depicted as being under the age of eighteen years and is engaged in or is depicted as engaged in explicit sexual activity [... or] the dominant characteristic of which is the depiction, for a sexual purpose, of a sexual organ or the anal region of a person under the age of eighteen years, [as well as] any written material, visual representation or audio recording that advocates or counsels sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years [...]; any written material whose dominant characteristic is the description, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years [... and] any audio recording that has as its dominant characteristic the description, presentation or representation, for a sexual purpose, of sexual activity with a person under the age of eighteen years."

Moreover, the legal meanings of the terms "sexual exploitation" and "commodification of sexual services" also allow the inclusion of sex tourism, which can be defined as any travel abroad for the purpose of, among other things, obtaining

13 Supplementary protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime intended to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/static-files/trafficking/learn.htm).
14 https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html
15 Criminal Code of Canada, section 279.01(3) (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html).
16 https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/index.html

sex in return for payment.[17] Although sex tourism is not an offence by itself, the Criminal Code of Canada nevertheless provides that any Canadian citizen or permanent resident who commits a sexual offence[18] against a minor outside Canada which is prohibited under its provisions is deemed to have committed it in Canada.[19]
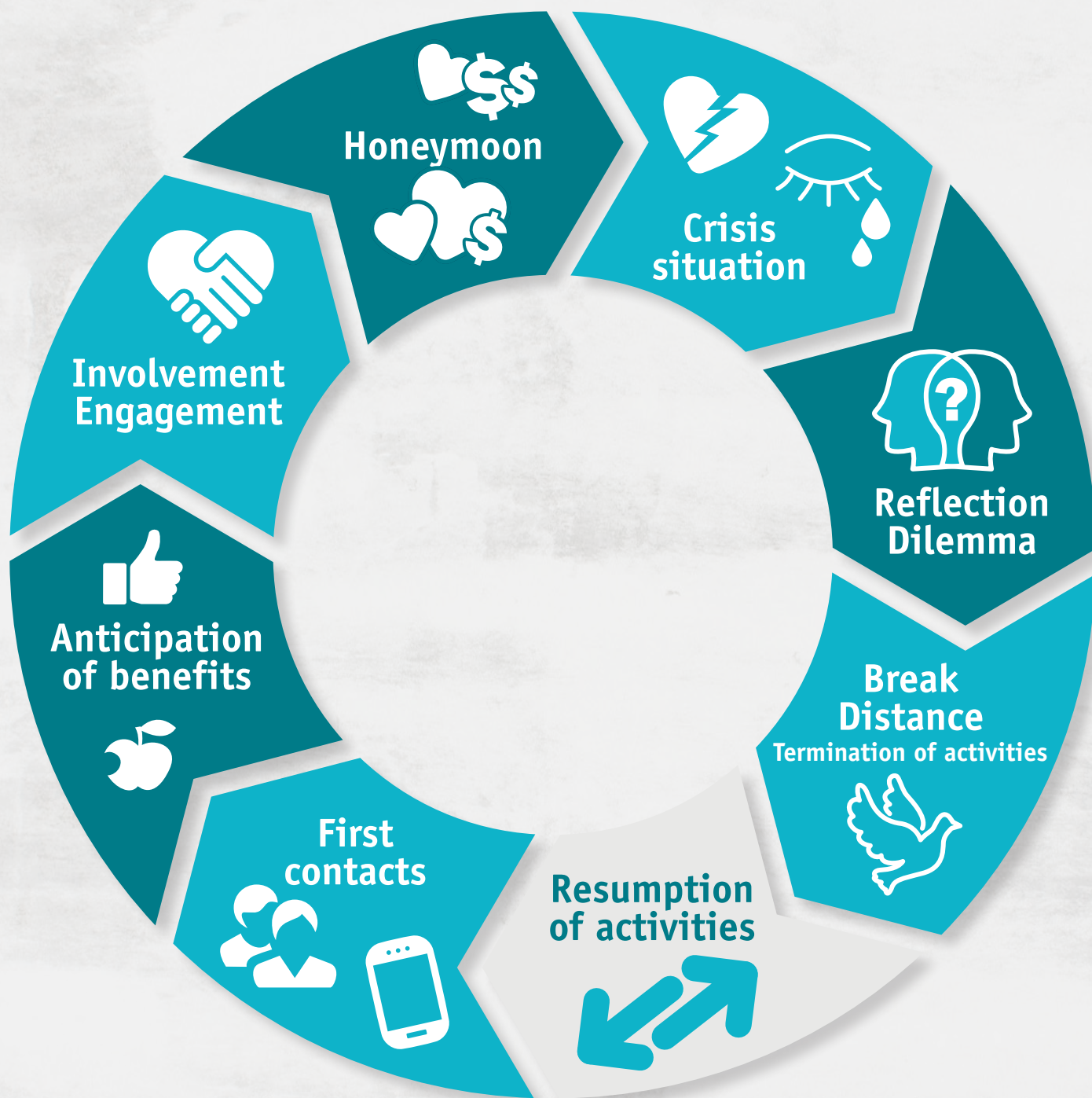
Finally, while sexual exploitation for business purposes is certainly a form of sexual abuse, it must be distinguished from sexual abuse because of the particular nature of the process that leads people to sell their sexual services. Such individuals make decisions that allow them to obtain some form of gratification, whether material, financial or emotional. Even if this commodification benefits a third party (e.g., the pimp), these persons may still derive some benefits. It is precisely this quest for gratification that can help us analyze the commodification of sexual services as a type of addiction. Initially, individuals anticipate the benefits of selling their sexual services without necessarily knowing the consequences. Afterward, they may remain in such a situation for different reasons, such as being forced to stay, staying because they see no other possible solution, or staying because the situation still provides them with benefits. Therefore, when it comes to interventions, it is important to remember that such persons make choices that lead them to exchange sexual services for payment and that despite the risks associated with this activity, it is often the associated gains or benefits that explain the continuation of a sexually exploitative situation.

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17 Colin, A. (2012). L'imaginaire géographique du tourisme sexuel. *Cairn.info, 2*(76): 16-39.
18 Sexual interference with a person under the age of 16 years (s. 151), inciting anyone to have sexual contact with a person under the age of 16 years (s. 152), sexual exploitation of a person between the ages of 16 years and 18 years (s. 153), incest (s. 155), compelling the commission of bestiality (s. 160(2)), bestiality in the presence of or by a child (s. 160(3)), producing, distributing or possessing obscene materials (s. 163.1), procuring a child (if a parent or guardian) to commit a prohibited sexual act (s. 170), keeping a house that permits a prohibited sexual act (s. 171), making sexually explicit material available to a person under 18 years of age (s. 171.1), agreement with a third party to commit a sexual offence against a person under 18 years of age (s. 172.2), committing an indecent act (s. 173) and kidnapping a person under the age of 16 (art. 286.1).
19 Section 4(4.1) CCC (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-3.html).

The cycle of the diagram shows eight stages: Honeymoon, Crisis situation, Reflection Dilemma, Break Distance — Termination of activities, Resumption of activities, First contacts, Anticipation of benefits, Involvement Engagement.

The cycle of sexual exploitation

Originally developed to comprehend the adoption of and withdrawal from prostitution in a gang environment, the engagement process conceptualized by Fleury and Fredette (2002)[20] is useful for understanding the engagement in a sexually exploitative lifestyle more broadly. Divided into eight stages, it promotes the adoption of attitudes that can prevent sexual exploitation and work with exploited persons in a way that respects their pace and experience.

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20 Fleury, E. and Fredette, C. (2002). *Guide d'accompagnement et d'animation de la bande dessinée* Le silence de Cendrillon. Quebec, Montreal: Centre jeunesse de Montréal – Institut universitaire.

Anticipation of benefits

From the very first contacts with actors in the sex industry, the person, whether the exploited or exploiter, becomes aware of the benefits of selling sexual services. At the benefit anticipation stage, individuals foresee the possibilities of fulfilling their needs for security, affection, belonging and recognition as well as obtaining material gratification, rather than seeing the dangers to which they might be exposed.

At the involvement and engagement stage, individuals verbalize certain discomforts without being able to clearly state what is troubling them. In response to inquiries, they may be tempted to describe the activities in which they are involved with detachment. They may also be tempted to insist that they are voluntarily selling sex, which they feel they are doing of their own free will.

Involvement Engagement

Honeymoon

During the honeymoon stage, persons are exclusively focused on the gains and benefits of selling their sexual services. They minimize, even deny, its disadvantages, harms and risks. They go to great lengths to suppress all forms of discomfort in order to concentrate exclusively on the benefits of selling their sexual services.

In contrast to what transpires in the honeymoon stage, persons in a crisis situation are focused exclusively on the damaging effects of commodification. They recognize the dangers and are aware of their consequences for their physical, psychological and social health. They minimize, even deny, the benefits they may have received. Selling their sexual services no longer satisfies their needs. This is a period of imbalance characterized by anxiety and fear.

Crisis situation

Reflection Dilemma

In the reflection and dilemma stage, persons feel the need to improve their situation. Although they anticipate the losses and costs associated with ending the commodification of their sexual services, they are still able to identify the gains and benefits. They remain ambivalent, however, fearing both stopping and continuing their engagement in a cycle of sexual exploitation.

At the break and distance stage, persons are ready to change. They clarify and determine their decisions. They apply chosen strategies, modify their lifestyle and change their behaviour. However, difficulties exist and are sometimes significant. Such individuals must remain cautious as there are still many temptations to start selling their sexual services again.

Break Distance
Termination of activities

Resumption of activities

The resumption of activities can be momentary or prolonged. The "back and forth" between each of these stages is normal and should not be considered failures or as evidence of bad faith. Many attempts are needed before a permanent break from the sex industry can be made.

Vulnerability factors and harms

While the majority of pimps are men and women are more likely to sell sex, men are not immune to being exploited and women may also sexually exploit others. Sexual exploitation does not have a specific gender, sexual identity or sexual orientation.[21]

That said, it is possible to distinguish between two main profiles of people who sell their sexual services[22]: those viewed as vulnerable[23] and those viewed as adventurous.[24] While the former are characterized by emotional deficiencies, family difficulties and psychological problems, the latter are characterized by their "voluntary participation," the trivialization of sexuality and their excessive desire for independence and thrills. In both cases, the lack of family support, neglect, sexual abuse, depression, isolation, drug use and running away from home are vulnerability factors that favour entry into and the maintenance of the cycle of sexual exploitation.[25]

Experiences involving conflict, abuse and/or neglect during childhood lead to a cascade of negative effects that can harm a child's development. Individuals from difficult family backgrounds are more likely to run away from home, and repeated episodes of running away are associated with sexual exploitation.[26] The same is true for substance abuse, whether it precedes or follows sexual exploitation.[27] In some cases, the commodification of sexual services is used to support their addiction.[28]

Many other issues are associated with sexual exploitation, including educational difficulties, which, combined with low graduation rates, are a distinct disadvantage when it comes to finding employment, making the commodification of sexual services a source of income that is difficult to ignore.[29] In addition, many sexually exploited persons suffer from anxiety and depression,[30] which can be compounded by physical health problems, unwanted pregnancies, symptoms of trauma (including hypervigilance), shame, insecure attachment, relationship difficulties and stigma.[31]

Ending the cycle of sexual exploitation

The vulnerabilities that lead to selling one's sexual services and its consequences complicate the process of withdrawal from the cycle of sexual exploitation. Several attempts are usually required to succeed, despite the genuine desire to do so.[32] Individuals who wish to end the commodification of their sexual services face many challenges, such as managing symptoms of trauma, dealing with an addiction, redefining their identity and rebuilding their social group, to name just a few. In general, the aftermath is far from promising.

21 Canadian Public Health Association (2014). *Sex Work in Canada: A Public Health Perspective.* Ottawa: Canadian Public Health Association.
22 Inspired by the work of M. Dorais in collaboration with P. Corriveau (2006). *Jeunes filles sous influence: prostitution et gangs de rue. Quebec,* Montreal: VLB Éditeur.
23 To which could be added the "submissive" and "sex slaves" according to the typology proposed by Dorais (2006).
24 To which could be added the "independents" according to the typology proposed by Dorais (2006).
25 Wilson, H.W. and Widom, C.S. (2010). The Role of Youth Problem Behaviors in the Path from Child Abuse and Neglect to Prostitution: A Prospective Examination. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 20*(1): 210-236.
26 Tyler, K.A. and Johnson, K.A. (2006). Trading Sex: Voluntary or Coerced? The Experiences of Homeless Youth. *The Journal of Sex Research, 43*: 208-216.
27 Reid, J.A. and Piquero, A.R. (2014). On the Relationships Between Commercial Sexual Exploitation/Prostitution, Substance Dependency, and Delinquency in Youthful Offenders. *Child Maltreatment, 19*(3-4): 247-260.
28 Chen, X., Tyler, K.A., Whitbeck, L.B. and Hoyt, D.R. (2004). Early Sexual Abuse, Street Adversity, and Drug Use Among Female Homeless and Runaway Adolescents in the Midwest. *Journal of Drug Issues, 34*: 1-22.
29 Ricard-Guay, A. (2015). Exploitation sexuelle d'adolescentes et jeunes femmes au Québec: perceptions et interventions. De l'ambivalence des sujets aux dilemmes d'intervention. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Quebec, Montreal: McGill University.
30 Cole, J., Sprang, G., Lee, R. and Cohen, J. (2016). The Trauma of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth: A Comparison of CSE Victims to Sexual Abuse Victims in a Clinical Sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(1): 122-146.
31 Lanctôt, N., Couture, S., Couvrette, A., Laurier, C., Parent, G., Paquette, G. and Turcotte, M. (2016). *La face cachée de la prostitution: une étude des conséquences de la prostitution sur le développement et le bien-être des filles et des femmes.* Research report submitted to the Research Fund – Society and Culture. Longueuil: Université de Sherbrooke.
32 Szczepanik, G. and Ismé, C., Boulebsol, C. (2014). *Connaître les besoins des femmes dans l'industrie du sexe pour mieux baliser les services.* Research report of the Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle (CLES). Quebec, Montreal.

At first glance, it is often difficult to satisfy basic needs, such as finding a job and place to live.[33] Selling sexual services, which was initially an attractive source of income, now contributes to accentuating financial insecurity.[34] With no diploma and jobs that are precarious, menial and poorly paid, the prospects for social integration are bleak. What's more, many exploited persons have to deal with an addiction that affects their overall ability to function and increases the temptation to sell sex again in order to finance their consumption. Symptoms of trauma,[35] anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, aggression and somatization[36] can also interfere with the ability to live independently.

Redefining one's identity is also a major consideration, as sexually exploited persons often have low self-esteem, which is exacerbated by the stigma they face.[37] These individuals must also redefine their personal boundaries, learn to make choices and determine the interpersonal boundaries they wish to build or dismantle. Ending the cycle of sexual exploitation also means dismantling a social group in order to build a new one. Those who have been exploited have maintained dependent and coercive social relationships, and most have weakened or broken family ties.[38] Establishing a new social group for these people, who often suffer from insecure attachments, is a real challenge.

The need for an effective intervention

Sexual exploitation is associated with a variety of significant emotional, developmental, psychological and behavioural problems that profoundly affect the course of a person's life. It also appears to uniquely affect the traumatic symptoms of those who sell their sexual services, necessitating different treatments than those typically provided to people who are sexually abused or assaulted.

The health, safety and developmental risks for persons engaged in a cycle of sexual exploitation are therefore significant, raising numerous moral and ethical issues when it comes time for intervention. Anyone who works with people selling sexual services is faced with legal and clinical issues that are often contradictory. The positions adopted by the various community and institutional organizations with regard to the commodification of sexual services are numerous and often incompatible, ranging conceptually from sexual victimization to behavioural disorders and, for interventions, from the repressive approach to harm reduction. In concrete terms, the actions favoured are based more on the intervention philosophy of the organizations and the clinical intuitions of the youth workers rather than promising practices supported by research.[39] Therefore, the targets of the interventions are more a reflection of the way youth workers view the people engaged in a cycle of sexual exploitation than a reflection of their real needs. The deployment of concerted interventions based on recognized practices is necessary in order to act effectively in cases of sexual exploitation.

The discontinuity of services available to people in sexually exploitative situations also compromises the effectiveness of interventions with this group. Persons who sell their sexual services must often deal with service cancellations due to their transition from adolescence to adulthood or to the complexity of their problems (e.g., addiction, mental health, poverty, legal problems, etc.), which require services from separate agencies. However, it is widely recognized that a comprehensive rather than sectoral intervention, regardless of age, is a better response to the needs of sexually exploited persons.[40]

Furthermore, an effective intervention addresses not only the needs directly linked to the commodification of sexual services, but also the associated issues that often keep people in the cycle of sexual exploitation. There are many obstacles to the process of withdrawal, including substance use, violence, mental health disorders, trauma, social isolation, stigma and poverty.[41]

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33 In addition, it is often difficult to find temporary housing resources adapted to the situations of persons who sell their sexual services. Several of these resources are also reluctant to accept victims of sexual exploitation.
34 Lanctôt, N. et al., 2016.
35 Dodsworth, J. (2012). Pathways Through Sex Work: Childhood Experiences and Adult Identities. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*(3): 519-536.
36 Greenbaum, J., Crawford-Jakubiak, J.E., & Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect. (2015). Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims. *Pediatrics, 135*(3): 566-574.
37 Ricard-Guay, A., 2015.
38 Lanctôt, N. et al., 2016.
39 Lanctôt, N. et al., 2016.
40 Vinet-Bonin, A. (2013). *Quand l'appel à l'aide n'est pas entendu: l'expérience de femmes en processus de sortie de la prostitution.* Master's thesis. Quebec, Montreal: Université de Montréal.
41 Lanctôt, N., Couture *et al.*, 2016.

Finally, sustained, prolonged and personalized interventions based on positive approaches that are focused on strengths and needs and sensitive to trauma are a more promising strategy than traditional programs focused solely on risk factors.[42] The complex nature of sexual exploitation requires clinical thinking outside of a linear framework of understanding, which requires youth workers to think and act differently.

Promising clinical approaches

The commodification of sexual services generates long-term consequences, including trauma. The resulting physical, psychological and social symptoms are among the many obstacles that complicate a withdrawal from a cycle of sexual exploitation. Intervention practices should be tailored to helping sexually exploited individuals understand how traumatic experiences affect their lives and shape their needs.[43] Trauma-informed practices take a humanistic and person-centered approach. They do not assign blame. If such individuals have difficulties making changes in their lives, it is not from a lack of knowledge but because of the rewards. The gains are worth the risks.

The humanistic approach espoused by Carl Rogers[44] is an essential foundation for sexual exploitation interventions. Focused on the individual, it is based on the premise that human beings have the potential to make changes in their lives. It does not rely *a priori* on the youth worker's knowledge and skills but rather on his or her interpersonal skills. According to Rogers' approach, the four fundamental attitudes of a youth worker are empathy, congruence, compassion and unconditional positive regard. By adopting these attitudes, youth workers enable the persons being helped to make sense of their life experiences and resolve the problems that arise from them, without confining these persons to their pattern of sexual victimization. In addition, youth workers do not make decisions for their clients, but rather promote the development of their clients' ability to make the changes they feel are necessary for their overall well-being.

Interventions must allow sexually exploited persons to reconstruct their life stories in order to give them meaning[45] while ensuring their physical and psychological safety, addressing their associated difficulties (e.g., addiction, homelessness, unwanted pregnancy, isolation, poverty, etc.), unconditionally encouraging their power to act, recognizing their ability to make choices, promoting their resilience and preventing new victimizations.[46]

More specifically, trauma-informed approaches[47] initially require the gathering of information, during which youth workers agree to question their initial perceptions not only of the behaviour and situations of the persons being helped, but also the persons themselves. Youth workers must be interested in the situations, emotions and thoughts that trigger stressful episodes and put the persons being helped in contact with their previous traumatic experiences. To do so, they pay attention to the behaviours that the persons adopt as survival strategies (e.g., fighting, running away, paralysis, etc.) to deal with stimuli (e.g., situations, people, flashbacks, etc.) associated with traumatic experiences. These different strategies can take several forms:

- Aggressive, hostile or self-injurious behaviours (fight)
- Condescending or omnipotent attitudes, interchangeable relationships, running away or drug use (flight)
- A dissociative state, lack of emotional expression or emotions that are disconnected from the situation (paralysis)

Such stimuli can elicit emotional responses as intense as those experienced at the time of the events leading to the trauma. However, the triggers that cause these persons to relive such experiences are not always easily recognizable. Usually, traumatized persons are unaware of these triggers, so they cannot easily relate them to their reactions. Therefore, youth workers may need to take charge of the interventions at the very beginning of the process in order to act on the triggers

42 Lanctôt, N., Couture *et al.*, 2016.
43 Lanctôt, N., Couture *et al.*, 2016.
44 In reference to Carl Rogers, the American humanistic psychologist (1902-1987).
45 Lanctôt, N., Couture *et al.*, 2016.
46 Muraya, D.N. and Fry, D. (2016). Aftercare Services for Child Victims of Sex Trafficking: A Systematic Review of Policy and Practice. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 17*(2): 204-220.
47 Inspired by Côté, C. and Le Blanc, A. (2018). *Pratique intégrant la notion de trauma auprès des adolescents: trousse de soutien.* Montreal, Quebec: CIUSSS of the Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

of traumatic revival and calm these persons down enough to allow them to engage in the treatment process. Then, once the persons are ready, youth workers must support them in their search for the triggers of these survival strategies. This work must be done progressively and respect the person's pace. Trauma-informed interventions require patience and time.

Then, as with those undergoing physical rehabilitation following an accident, people suffering from complex trauma need to be supported so that they can be responsible for their rehabilitation, in combination with the youth workers helping them. To do so, it is necessary, on the one hand, to create and maintain a climate of safety by paying attention to the circumstances that trigger survival reflexes in the persons being helped in order to defuse them as quickly as possible. On the other hand, the persons being helped and those around them (family, siblings, spouses, etc.) must have access to knowledge, tools and resources that will enable them to become aware of the impact of a complex trauma; recognize the emotional, behavioural and social difficulties experienced as traumatic reactions; prevent their recurrence and respond with new strategies. In this regard, complex trauma-informed interventions provide opportunities for persons being helped to develop emotional regulation and problem-solving skills in order to regain control over their lives and realize their full potential.[48]

In summary, a trauma-informed approach[49] must do the following:

- **Provide psychological safety** to the persons being helped so that they can let go of their state of hypervigilance.

- **Promote self-validation** so that the needs of the persons being helped are truly recognized and accepted as intrinsically valid, which is rarely the case in the lives of those who are sexually exploited.

- **Promote self-exploration** so that the persons being helped can define themselves based on who they really are (e.g., their interests, values, needs, goals, etc.) rather than the expectations and motivations of others.

- **Encourage self-actualization** (versus social devaluation) so that the persons being helped learn more about themselves in order to gain a sense of self-efficacy and, ultimately, realize their full potential.

Promising intervention practices for sexual exploitation are also based on the premises of the transtheoretical model of behaviour change by Prochaska and DiClemente[50] and motivational interviewing by Miller and Rollnick.[51] The effectiveness of the transtheoretical model and motivational interviewing has been recognized in several studies in the health and social sciences.[52, 53] While the use of these two approaches is mainly favoured in the treatment of addictions, their relevance in relation to the commodification of sexual services is increasingly being discussed.[54]

Selling sexual services can be viewed, in many ways, as an addictive behaviour, involving emotional and cognitive processes that must necessarily be addressed by intervention. As described by Fleury and Fredette (2002), the unique nature of the process that leads people to sell their sexual services involves different stages that require practices tailored to each stage, while respecting people's willingness and motivation to change their situation regardless of the risks they face. In this sense, promising intervention practices for sexual exploitation follow the principles of harm reduction[55] and relapse (or recidivism) prevention.[56]

48 Côté, C. and Le Blanc, A., 2018.
49 Briere, J., and Lanktree, C. (2013). *Integrative Treatment of Complexe Trauma for Adolescents (ITCT-A)*. Guide de traitement (2nd ed.). California, Los Angeles: https://keck.usc.edu/adolescent-trauma-training-center/
50 Prochaska, J.O. and DiClemente, C.C. (1982). Transtheoretical Therapy: Toward A More Integrative Model of Change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 19*(3): 276288.
51 Miller, W.R. and Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change* (2nd ed.). New York, New York: Guilford Press.
52 Norcross, J.C., Krebs, P.M. and Prochaska, J.O. (2011). Stages of Change. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 67*: 143-154.
53 Lundahl, B.W., Kunz, C., Brownell, C., Tollefson, D. and Burke, B.L. (2010). *A Meta-Analysis of Motivational Interviewing: Twenty-Five Years of Empirical Studies, 20*(2): 137-160.
54 Bruhns, M.E., Del Prado, A., Slezakova, J., Lapinski, A.J., Li, T. and Pizer, B. (2018). Survivors' Perspectives on Recovery From Commercial Sexual Exploitation Beginning in Childhood. *The Counseling Psychologist, 46*(4): 413-455.
55 Brisson, P. (1997). *L'approche de réduction des méfaits: sources, situation, pratiques.* Quebec, Quebec: Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, Government of Quebec.
56 Marlatt, G.A. and Donovan, D.M. (2005). *Relapse Prevention: Maintenance Strategies in the Treatment of Addictive Behaviors.* New York, New York: The Guilford Press.

The transtheoretical model of change
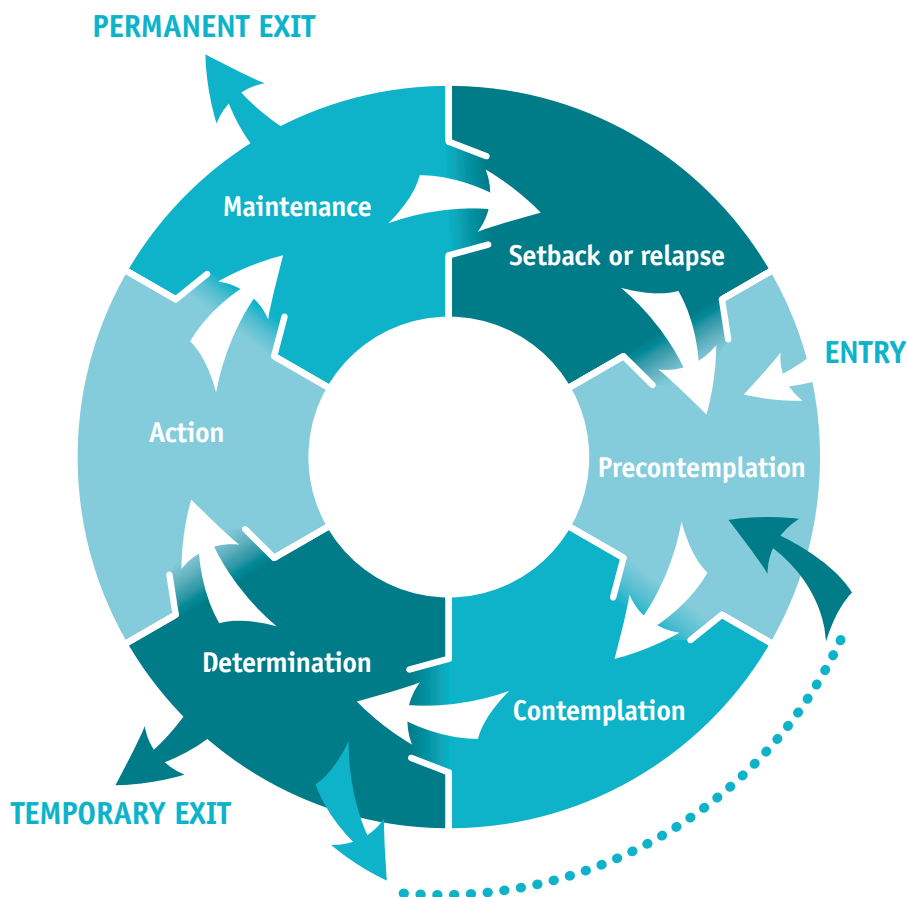
In the early 1980s, Prochaska and DiClemente decided to study people who were making significant changes in their lives, with or without professional help.[57] They concluded that change, regardless of its context, rarely takes the form of a sudden, arrested event in time; rather, it occurs in stages. Recognizing that no single approach can explain the complexity of human behaviour, they developed an integrative model of change called the "transtheoretical model" based on various behavioural and socio-cognitive theories, with its main component being the stages of change. The stages of change provide a better understanding of how and why people manage to change by exploring and resolving their ambivalence.[58] Ambivalence is a necessary, if not obligatory, step to change, especially for people with problems that have become habits in their lifestyle.

The stages of change model, comprising six stages,[59] is based on the idea that a person who is considering changing a behaviour goes through different stages several times. The proposed sequence is neither static nor linear. It should be conceptualized as a game of Snakes and Ladders. While ladders can be climbed to stop risky behaviours, it is also possible to backtrack. Such back-and-forth behaviour is neither unhealthy nor fatal. It is necessary for change. Abandoning certain behaviour, no matter how risky, involves sacrifice and loss. Adopting new behaviour is difficult. It is a leap into the unknown, full of hope and new benefits, but requires patience, kindness and determination.

57 Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C. and DiClemente C.C. (1994). *Changing for Good.* New York, New York: Avon Books, Inc.
58 Miller, W.R., Rollnick, S., Michaud, P. and Lécallier, D. (2013). *L'entretien motivationnel: aider la personne à engager le changement.* France, Paris: InterÉditions.
59 https://intervenir-addictions.fr/intervenir/le-cercle-de-prochaska-et-di-clemente/

A problem is a question to be solved, and change is movement toward an answer. Solving a problem means moving through time and space in search of a solution that satisfies our personal and social well-being, without hindering our autonomy and freedom. Change takes time ....

"Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times."

Mark Twain, American writer and humourist

In the **precontemplation** stage, individuals do not believe they have a problem and do not intend to change, since they are benefitting from their situation. If they seek help at this stage, it is because of extrinsic motivation, often related to pressure from those around them (e.g., parents, spouse, friends, youth workers, etc.), who believe that they have a problem.

In the **contemplation** stage, individuals recognize that they have a problem, but are not ready to change. They weigh the pros and cons of the change they are contemplating and are ambivalent about it, reluctant to give up the benefits they are deriving from their situation. This is the "yeah, but" stage.

At the **determination** stage,[60] individuals are less ambivalent toward change. They feel ready to change in the near future. They clarify and determine their decisions. They look for ways to change and prepare themselves. However, the willingness to change does not guarantee action. People may return to the contemplation stage at any time, especially if obstacles are encountered. They may even terminate their efforts to change.

At the **action** stage, individuals apply their chosen strategies. The change is observable and measurable. It is a stage of collaboration with youth workers and all the other people supporting those changing. However, difficulties exist and are sometimes significant. It is a period of trial and error. The necessary time must be given to the acquisition of new skills and the changes in living conditions required for change.

At the **maintenance** stage, individuals have changed and are making efforts to maintain the change. However, they need to be cautious since there are many temptations to reverse course. These people will necessarily have to face situations that could lead them to stop the change and make missteps. The challenge of changing happens at this point.

At any time, individuals may choose to stop the change that was initiated, either momentarily or more seriously. The **relapse** should not be considered a failure or a sign of unwillingness. In general, people will go through several trials before staying the course. They need to learn how to get back on track after setbacks. They are able to permanently dispense with the different stages of change once the new habits have become well established in their lifestyle.

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60 Also called the "intention," "decision" or "preparation" stage.

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing[61, 62] is an approach that has been found to be effective in reducing the ambivalence regarding change and increasing one's motivation to act. The motivational interviewing[63] approach is person-centered and change-oriented. It supports the intrinsic motivation to change by focusing on an awareness of people's motivations and values as well as their sense of self-efficacy and ability to make choices.[64]

More specifically, motivational interviewing is defined as follows:

> "[…] a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication that pays particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion."[65]

During a motivational interview, youth workers follow the pace and objectives of the persons being helped. Expressing empathy and kindness, these youth workers accept who the individuals are and what they are experiencing, creating a climate of trust and security. The youth workers and persons being helped have conversations directed toward change so that the latter convince themselves of the importance of change. This change and the means to achieve it must be brought up by the persons being helped. The youth workers give the individuals hope that what they are doing will produce satisfactory results. The workers also support the sense of self-efficacy, which is defined as the confidence in one's ability to complete an action.[66] Supporting a sense of self-efficacy affirms to the persons being helped that they have the ability to change.

Motivational interviewing also aims to bring out contradictions (or discrepancies) in the statements of the persons being helped, while encouraging self-efficacy and avoiding arguments. In this regard, youth workers avoid discord by pressing the persons being helped to change. The youth workers always keep in mind that the final decision to change rests exclusively with the persons being helped. The youth workers do not hesitate to objectively discuss (without judgment or evaluation) the benefits of change, the fear or anxiousness to change, the pessimism or ambiguous intentions to change, and the optimism or aspirations to change.

Getting someone to talk about change facilitates change.[67]

To conduct a motivational interview, five communication techniques are used: 1) asking **o**pen-ended questions, 2) **a**ffirming, 3) **r**eflecting (or active listening), 4) **s**ummarizing what the person being helped has said and 5) informing-advising based on the knowledge of the person being helped (ask – provide – ask). The first four are known by the acronym "**OARS**."

Before establishing an action (change or intervention) plan, youth workers must allow the language of change to emerge in the persons being helped. To do so, youth workers pose evocative questions (e.g., "What are your concerns regarding …?") or ask for clarifications or concrete examples. Youth workers enable the persons being helped to look back (e.g., at past successes) or ahead (e.g., "How do you see yourself in five years?"). Youth workers may also bring up extreme situations

61 Jensen, C.D., Cushing, C.C., Aylward, B.S., Craig, J.T., Sorell, D.M. and Steele, R.G. (2011). Effectiveness of Motivational Interviewing Interventions for Adolescent Substance Use Behavior Change: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*(4): 433-440.

62 Smedslund, G., Berg, R.C., Hammerstrøm, K., Steiro, A., Leiknes, K.A., Dahl, H.M. and Karlsen, K. (2011). Motivational Interviewing for Substance Abuse. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 5:* CD008063.

63 Miller, W.R. and Rollnick, S. (2006). *L'entretien motivationnel.* France, Paris: InterÉditions.

64 Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2002). *Handbook of Self-Determination Research.* New York, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

65 Miller, W.R., *et al.,* 2013.

66 Bandura, A. (1977) Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2): 191-215.

67 Amrhein, P.C., Miller, W.R., Yahne, C.E., Palmer, M. and Fulcher, L. (2003). Client Commitment Language During Motivational Interviewing Predicts Drug Use Outcomes. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(5): 862-878.

(e.g., "What's the best or worst that could happen if …?") or defend the *status quo*. Youth workers explore the goals and values of the persons being helped or allow them to self-assess their confidence in their ability to change or the importance they place on this change on a scale of 0 to 10.[68]

An example of the importance of change on a scale of 0 to 10

YOUTH WORKER: On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being "not at all important" and 10 being "very important," how important do you perceive change to be?

PERSON BEING HELPED: I would say 6.

YOUTH WORKER: That's very good, I see that you consider change important. [*The language of change should be encouraged regardless of the assessment of the persons being helped.*] Explain to me why you think it's a 6 rather than a 4. [*Asking the persons to explain why they are not assigning a lower number helps elicit the language of change.*]

PERSON BEING HELPED: I'm tired of suffering. I just want to feel better, I want people to see me as a person like everyone else, not like a whore. And I'm tired of youth centres!

YOUTH WORKER: I understand. You're tired of suffering and you want to feel better. You'd also like to be free and no longer have to deal with youth centres. [*Reflective listening demonstrates understanding and allows persons being helped to hear themselves talk about change.*]

PERSON BEING HELPED: That's it! If I can change that in my life, I'd feel a lot better.

YOUTH WORKER: I see. Now tell me, what would it take to get you to an 8? [*Getting persons to name other reasons for change helps elicit the language of change.*]

PERSON BEING HELPED: If I could count on finding a decent-paying job, it would be easier for me to give up prostitution. [*The solutions proposed to the persons being helped can enable them to set goals and allow the youth worker to support them in the means chosen to achieve these goals.*]

Another strategy in motivational interviewing is decisional balance, which involves describing the advantages and disadvantages of the *status quo* and change. However, caution should be exercised in the timing of its use. Since it is essentially a cognitive strategy, it is contraindicated if the individuals have little interest in change or are ambivalent about it.[69] In these situations, the use of decisional balance tends to reduce people's commitment to change or even support their decision not to change. In doing so, rather than allow the language of change to emerge, decisional balance will instead be tilted in favour of maintaining the *status quo*.

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68 These are the 10 motivational interviewing strategies to elicit the language of change in persons being helped. (https://psymontreal.com/health-care-professionals/?lang=en).
69 Feldstein Ewing, S.W., Apodaca, T.R. and Gaume, J. (2016). Ambivalence: Prerequisite for Success in Motivational Interviewing with Adolescents? *Addiction, 111*: 1900-1907.

Getting people to talk about the benefits of not changing when that's what they want maintains the desire not to change.

Decisional balance is useful for reinforcing the commitment to change after a person has decided to change. It serves to support the language of change by exploring the benefits and drawbacks of change rather than resolving the ambivalence toward change.[70]

The decisional balance strategy is not a panacea

Decisional balance must be used at the appropriate time; that is, when individuals have resolved their ambivalence and are ready to change [e.g., when people are at the determination or action stage of change]. Moreover, decisional balance goes beyond simply listing the "pros" and "cons" of change. It should allow people to clarify and measure the change desired [e.g., persons may be asked to rate each advantage and disadvantage on a scale from 1 to 3].

Decisional balance is not intended to reassure youth workers, but to make the persons being helped aware of the path taken toward change.

Once the persons being helped are committed to changing, the motivational interview is used to strengthen this commitment. Youth workers can help them develop an action (change or intervention) plan aimed at achieving one objective at a time and which takes into account the prioritization of needs. The youth workers ensure that the goals targeted and means evoked are "SMART": specific, measurable, adapted, realistic and timely. They also ensure that the plan provides for the risk of relapse and how to manage it. Youth workers must not hesitate to regularly assess the relevance of the plan with the persons being helped and revise it as needed. Once an initial objective has been reached, a new plan can be developed with these persons to gradually help them adopt new lifestyle habits.

In summary, supporting a person undergoing change is similar to the change itself; that is, a dynamic process implemented in four phases that are both consecutive and intertwined:[71]

1 Engagement in the relationship: What strategies are used to foster the creation of the bond of trust?

2 Focusing: What is the common objective of the support process?

3 Evocation: What strategies are used to foster the emergence of the language of change in the person being helped?

4 Planning: What are the methods used to support the change?

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70 Miller, W.R. and Rose, G.S. (2015). Motivational Interviewing and Decisional Balance: Contrasting Responses to Client Ambivalence. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 43*: 129-141.
71 Miller, W.R. *et al.*, 2013.

Finally, the spirit of motivational interviewing is as important as the communication techniques. It is based on partnership, acceptance, compassion and evocation, which are the skills toward which youth workers must strive.[72] A helping relationship is a collaboration in which each of the protagonists is an expert: youth workers have "technical knowledge" while the persons being helped have "experiential knowledge." Youth workers accept the persons being helped unconditionally and positively, express empathy and respect for them, support their autonomy, and value their abilities. Youth workers encourage the persons being helped in their search for well-being and help them express the inner resources they have to achieve it.

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72 Miller, W.R. and Rose, G.S., 2015.

Harm reduction

Harm reduction is a public health approach that aims to reduce the negative physical, psychological and social conse-quences of certain behaviours for the persons being helped, their family and friends, and society in general.[73] It relies on a person's ability to make choices and adopt protective behaviour to reduce the risks associated with conduct deemed problematic rather than aiming to eliminate the risks in an *a priori* manner. Consistent with the model of change proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982), it relies on respecting the individual's pace in making gradual lifestyle changes.

The harm reduction approach is based on humanistic and pragmatic principles and relies on the tolerance of socially and morally reprehensible behaviour in order to gradually reduce the associated harm. It is not intended to condone or trivialize the behaviour. Rather, it focuses on prioritizing goals to address the most pressing harms and gradually encouraging the persons being helped to terminate their risky behaviour, if that is what they want. The harm reduction approach requires providing services and care tailored to the physical and psychological conditions of people who engage in risky behaviour.

The best known actions in this area are those identified for legal and illegal drug use (i.e., support services, distribution of drug paraphernalia, supervised injection sites, etc.). Recognized for its effectiveness, the harm reduction approach is used in various situations, including the commodification of sexual services.[74] The SCSEM recognizes its value in interventions involving sexually exploited minors.[75]

Relapse prevention

The relapse prevention strategy developed by Marlatt and Donovan (2005)[76] is based on the theoretical foundations of the model of change proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982). To promote the maintenance of acquired skills, it relies on people's capacity for self-control by teaching them different ways of anticipating and preventing missteps and resuming problematic behaviour. To do so, youth workers make the persons aware of situational, behavioural, affective and cognitive signals that could lead to a relapse in order to react promptly. In other words, relapse prevention aims to teach those being helped to spot alarm signals (e.g., lifestyle imbalance, critical event, desire for a good time, desire for self-indulgence, need for immediate gratification, exposure to people or environments encouraging criminal behaviour, etc.) that may lead to the resumption of problematic behaviour and to control these risky situations.

Typically, persons who are unprepared to deal with risky situations will have a heightened need for immediate gratification, lower perceived self-efficacy and higher positive expectations associated with problematic behaviour. Setbacks are often preceded by missteps that create cognitive distortions leading people to convince themselves that they have legitimate reasons to repeat the problematic behaviour. To prevent setbacks, youth workers and the persons being helped examine all the external (environment, family and friends) and internal (thoughts and emotions) factors that promote the adoption of problematic behaviour. Ultimately, relapse prevention aims to enable people to accomplish the following:

- Recognize lifestyle imbalances, the desire to indulge themselves, and seemingly innocuous decisions that put them at risk of committing missteps.

- Anticipate, prepare for and respond appropriately to situations that may lead to missteps (without compromising their safety or development).

- Plan the necessary changes to avoid high-risk situations.

- Develop and maintain coping strategies[77] such as anticipating emotional reactions to failure, discouragement and defeatism; problem solving; and asking for help.

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73 Brisson, P. (2014). *Prévention des toxicomanies. Aspects théoriques et méthodologiques* (2nd ed.). Quebec, Montreal: PUM.
74 Rosa, J. and Chadillon-Farinacci, V. (2014). *Exploitation sexuelle et sujets connexes.* Montreal: City of Montreal police department.
75 Report from the Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors, December 2020, page 26.
76 Marlatt, G.A. and Donovan, D.M., 2005.
77 The notion of "coping" comes from studies of stress and refers to the cognitive processes that a person initiates during a disturbing event in order to control, endure or reduce its impact (Lazarus, R.S. and Folkman, S., 1984).

Taking action, from engagement to change

Combining the strategies behind the cycle of sexual exploitation (Fleury and Fredette, 2002), trauma-informed approaches (Coté and Le Blanc, 2018), the stages of change model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1982), motivational interviewing (Miller and Rollnick, 2006), harm reduction (Brisson, 2014) and relapse prevention (Marlatt and Donovan, 2005) holds the promise of tailored, personalized solutions for those who sell their sexual services.

> From a legal, social and moral perspective, sexual exploitation is defined as a problem by the health care, social service and criminal justice systems. However, it is not necessarily viewed as a problem by minors or adults who voluntarily seek support services or are coerced into receiving them.

Defining and understanding sexual exploitation as a problem are major issues, particularly in the context of state-mandated intervention. They are both what unites and divides the youth workers and persons being helped. Viewing sexual exploitation as a problem necessarily unites the youth workers and persons being helped since it is because of such exploitation that assistance is imposed. However, this also puts them in fierce opposition because youth workers strive to have the problem recognized by persons who do not recognize it or who believe that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

As a result, the clinical approach must first allow the persons being helped and youth workers to mutually define the perceived problem(s) in relation to the situation that requires an intervention. Consistent with motivational interviewing, the definition and understanding of the situation must be those of the persons being helped in order to make change possible. Therefore, it is important to discuss what the minors undergoing state-mandated intervention want to resolve in order to agree on an initial goal to be achieved during the imposed interventions. Once this goal has been achieved, another goal for change can be set with the persons being helped in order to gradually help them make the necessary lifestyle changes that will reduce or eliminate the risks to which they are exposing themselves by selling their sexual services.

> For example, persons placed under the care of the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) may deny that they are being sexually exploited and wish to avoid government-mandated interventions. They believe that the problem is not the commodification of their sexual services, but the interventions imposed by the DYP. The clinical approach must therefore aim to steer these individuals toward the change they believe is necessary to put an end to these interventions. To "get rid of" the DYP, these individuals will understand that they must reduce the risks, which requires a change in behaviour.

However, youth workers must clearly explain to the persons being helped the legal obligations to which they are bound and their impact on the assistance provided. It is important to reach an agreement with the persons being helped on the rules that will govern the interventions carried out with them. In keeping with the harm reduction approach, youth workers must also prioritize the objectives of change in order to meet the needs considered priorities by the persons being helped and to address the most pressing harms of commodifying their sexual services. Youth workers are also sensitive to the traumas that can occur during sexual exploitation and ensure that the persons being helped receive any physical and psychological health care they may desire to recover from their traumatic experiences.

Then, the clinical approach with sexually exploited individuals is facilitated by recognizing the stage of engagement and change in which they find themselves. This enables the most appropriate interventions to be established so that the persons being helped can move on to the next stage and, ultimately, put an end to the cycle of sexual exploitation.

The cycle of sexual exploitation and change is neither linear nor static. It is a process marked by fluctuations. Far from being unhealthy, the frequent shifts back and forth between the stages are actually beneficial. To change is to dive headfirst into the unknown, an experience often more anxiety-provoking than the risks to which we expose ourselves. Change is a resolutely personal process that requires time.

"The door to change can only be opened from within."

Jacques Salomé, French social psychologist and author

There are no problems... or so few...

Anticipation of benefits

When anticipating the benefits of their behaviour, persons engaged in a cycle of sexual exploitation are usually in the precontemplation stage of change. Therefore, it is pointless, even dangerous, to make them aware of the risks associated with the commodification of their sexual services. Youth workers must first and foremost create a bond of trust with them.

Using open-ended questions and various interview techniques (e.g., active listening, reflection/reformulation, affirmation, summarizing), youth workers encourage the expression of perceptions regarding the commodification of sexual services and convey observable and measurable facts about the sex industry, without trying to convince the persons of anything. The goal is to initiate the language of change. Youth workers objectively discuss the commodification of sex with the persons being helped. The youth workers help the persons clarify their values; encourage discussions about healthy, equal relationships and sexuality; and avoid giving unsolicited advice.

Precontemplation

Involvement Engagement

At the involvement stage, individuals are generally able to verbalize discomfort about selling their sexual services. Without being convinced of its dangers, they nevertheless observe the pitfalls that come with a cycle of sexual exploitation. If they are not directly confronted with the harms (e.g., threats, abuse, health problems, loss of relationships, etc.), they will be situated in the precontemplation stage. On the other hand, they may recognize the risks to their safety and be ambivalent about the commodification of their sexual services. In such a case, they may find themselves in the contemplation stage of change.

Precontemplation

Contemplation

Youth workers take the opportunity to explore the ambivalence[78] of the persons being helped by objectively discussing the commodification of their sexual services. Youth workers highlight the gaps between the behaviour of these persons and their values in order to create cognitive dissonance; that is, an internal tension between their thoughts, beliefs, emotions and some of their attitudes. Youth workers continue to acknowledge the benefits, even if they are exaggerated by the persons who are trying to convince themselves that there is nothing to worry about. Youth workers clarify the discomforts with them without judging them or trying to convince them that they outweigh the benefits. Their goal is always to allow the language of change to emerge. Youth workers consolidate their bond of trust with the persons being helped and increase their perceived self-efficacy by valuing their strengths and skills.

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78 However, youth workers need to be careful about using decisional balance, which can be counterproductive if the persons being helped are not ready to change or are in an emotional state that prevents them from seeing the benefits of change.

Problems? No problems here ...

Honeymoon

Persons in the honeymoon stage spend a great deal of energy keeping any type of discomfort at bay, dismissing the harms associated with their lifestyle and ignoring the dangers to which they are exposed. No change is contemplated at this stage regarding the commodification of sex. The honeymoon stage is marked by a strong sense of powerlessness on the part of the person's social group (parents, friends, youth workers, etc.). Exploited individuals in the honeymoon stage can often not even be considered within the stages of change. If they enter treatment for an extrinsic reason (placement, detention, peer pressure, etc.), they may be considered in the precontemplation stage. As in the benefit anticipation stage, it is useless, even counterproductive, to try to convince them of anything. Youth workers maximize their efforts to strengthen their bond of trust with the persons being helped and the ties these persons have with important people around them. Youth workers must also ensure that care will be available to these persons when they face a crisis situation.

Precontemplation

Using open-ended questions and motivational interviewing techniques, youth workers focus on the experiences, perceptions and emotions of the persons being helped in order to arrive at a shared understanding of the situation. They focus on the persons rather than what they are doing. The honeymoon stage is often an ideal time to learn more about these persons, as they are often in a euphoric state that makes it easier for them to verbalize their needs and interests, who they associate with, where they spend their time, and so on.

It is important, however, not to explore the benefits of their situation in depth, as this may magnify their importance (which should be avoided at all costs). This does not mean accepting everything without saying anything. Based on their mandate, youth workers are clear and consistent about which values and behaviours are acceptable and which are not. They take a stand by denouncing any offensive and disrespectful language and any conduct that is dangerous to their safety and that of others. As in the benefit anticipation stage, youth workers objectively discuss observable and measurable facts about the sex industry with persons being helped. They help such persons clarify their values and encourage discussions about consensual relationships and sexuality. They respectfully point out inconsistencies in these persons' statements, highlight conflicts in their values and avoid giving unsolicited advice.

Problems? That's all I have ...

Crisis situation

The crisis situation represents a period of significant imbalance. From the outset, persons in such a situation need to be surrounded by secure, responsible people (e.g., parents, friends, youth workers, etc.) who are able to reassure them. Before discussing the possibility of initiating change, youth workers need to care for these individuals, avoid dramatizing the risks (without minimizing them) and, above all, avoid making them feel guilty.

Youth workers must objectively assess the risks and level of danger to which the persons being helped are exposed (e.g., debts, threats, harassment, etc.). They also make sure to clarify these persons' intentions and expectations. In addition, they invite these persons to notify the important people around them (e.g., parents, siblings, spouse, friends, etc.) so that they can contribute to the strategies necessary to ensure their safety and physical and psychological well-being. Where necessary, youth workers take the initiative to direct these persons to various resources likely to alleviate the crisis (e.g., medical clinic, addiction follow-up, psychological counselling, etc.) and support them through this process.

Youth workers are also sensitive to the possibility that the persons being helped suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Repeated and prolonged episodes of abuse in any form are invasive and shatter the lives of the individuals exposed to them. Even a single traumatic experience can have major repercussions. Therefore, it is essential to watch for it and act

accordingly. Youth workers make sure that the persons being helped have access, if they desire, to the care they need to treat their trauma.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an acute response to a stressful event (recent or past) experienced directly (victim) or indirectly (witness).[79] It can be associated with anxiety or mood disorders and is similar to acute distress. It is considered PTSD when symptoms of flashbacks,[80] avoidance[81] or emotional anesthesia[82] and hypervigilance[83] last for more than four weeks.[84] If this occurs, it is important to seek help and treatment. However, it is also necessary to consult a physician, as a diagnosis of PTSD is reserved for designated health care professionals.

In a loss of control, persons in a crisis situation tend to focus exclusively on the harms, sometimes even renouncing the benefits they have derived from selling their sexual services. Unfortunately, recognizing and experiencing the consequences of their actions do not guarantee that persons in crisis are willing to change, let alone are determined to do so. At this stage, these persons recognize that they have problems, but are not necessarily ready to change, usually staying in the contemplation stage.

Contemplation

Determination

To promote a transition to the determination stage, youth workers encourage any decision to change and reinforce the persons' power to change. They objectively discuss the consequences of selling their sexual services and defend the *status quo*. Youth workers may sometimes need to remind persons in crisis that they have benefitted from their lifestyle, benefits that still exist and that they may be tempted to take advantage of again. They also reinforce the persons' sense of self-efficacy and do not deny that all change involves suffering. They allow the language of change to emerge. To do so, youth workers may use the following approach: "On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being 'I am completely incapable' and 10 being 'I am definitely capable,' how capable are you of changing? What do you need to maintain your confidence in your ability to change?"

Similarly, youth workers can ask the persons being helped about the importance they place on the necessity to change to improve their living conditions and meet their needs. They can use more than one motivational interviewing strategy to elicit the language of change from these persons. However, decisional balance should be avoided, since the crisis period is too emotional for such a cognitive strategy to be used. At all times, youth workers provide care to the persons being helped and show confidence in their abilities.

Problems? I can't take it anymore, things have to change ...

Reflection Dilemma

Once individuals are in the reflection stage, they remain ambivalent about change. They spend a lot of energy trying to resolve their dilemma and decide whether or not to stop selling their sexual services. They fear one scenario as much as another. Nevertheless, they recognize their problems and are willing to change in the near future. They find themselves in the determination stage.

Using decisional balance, youth workers allow the persons being helped to weigh the pros and cons of the *status quo* against those of changing. They can also take extreme positions by using the following approach: "What's the worst that can happen if you leave? What's the

Determination

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79 https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Quebec/Trouble-de-stress-post-traumatique-TSPT/index.php?m=article&ID=8885
80 Intrusive memories, fear or horror identical to that during the experience; nightmares; feeling of reliving the experience.
81 Avoidance of situations or people that trigger painful memories, refusal to talk or think about the experience.
82 Difficulty expressing feelings, disinterest in previous activities, forgetting or not being able to talk about aspects of the experience.
83 Constant nervousness, looking for danger.
84 American Psychiatric Association (2015). *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5). Columbia, Washington: American Psychiatric Association (APA).

best that can happen if you leave? What's the worst that can happen if you stay? What's the best that can happen if you stay?" Youth workers clarify the needs and expectations of the persons being helped. They help these persons define the strengths and skills they already possess and that will help them to change and adopt new behaviours to meet their needs.

Youth workers encourage the persons being helped to choose the best strategies for change. They avoid imposing solutions and remain neutral so as not to direct the persons' decisions. Youth workers must take into account the needs of the persons being helped rather than their own, since the latter option may be particularly tempting when those persons are minors. If decisions need to be made with which these persons do not agree in order to ensure their safety and development, the youth workers must be transparent and take the time necessary to explain their interventions. If possible, they secure the co-operation of the persons being helped when implementing these decisions.[85]

Together with the persons being helped, youth workers establish an action (or change) plan before any intervention by determining and prioritizing the needs to be met and the means to do so. Reinforcement is particularly important at this stage, not only from youth workers but also from the significant people in the lives of the persons being helped. The latter should be encouraged to mobilize their social (parents, friends, etc.) and professional (community and institutional) contacts so that they feel supported, focused on what is positive (well-being, new activities, new peers, personal satisfaction, pride, etc.) and capable of changing. Since there are many causes of sexual exploitation, youth workers do not hesitate to work in a concerted manner with the various organizations involved with sexually exploited persons or with any other intervention setting capable of providing support in the process of change.

That's enough ... I'm changing ...

Break Distance
Termination of activities

Once the persons reach the break and distance stage, they are usually at the stage of change where they are ready to act. They are committed to ending the commodification of their sexual services and applying the strategies defined in the action (change or intervention) plan. The lifestyle changes they make are observable and measurable.

Action

Youth workers collaborate with the colleagues, friends and family members of the persons being helped to encourage them and provide positive reinforcement for their new choices. They support these persons in implementing the methods defined in the action (change or intervention) plan and encourage them to develop their powers to act by exposing them to all the situations in which it is possible to do so. Constructive feedback is also essential. Youth workers teach the persons being helped to congratulate themselves and feel empowered every time they do not give in to the impulse to sell their sexual services again. Youth workers allow the language of change to emerge by reinforcing the motivations to maintain the changes. They strengthen the commitment of the persons being helped to change by exploring post-decisional ambivalence (i.e., the pros and cons of change) using decisional balance.

Resumption of activities

Youth workers prepare a relapse prevention plan by identifying all risky situations (or pitfalls) that the persons may face which could lead them to recommodify their sexual services. They help these persons choose the best strategies to promptly respond to situational, behavioural, emotional and cognitive cues that may represent situations potentially leading to a setback. To promote a permanent exit from a cycle of sexual exploitation, it is essential that the persons being helped are able to anticipate the chains of events that could lead them to recommodify their sexual services and put an end to them as quickly as possible.

In general, persons engaged in a cycle of sexual exploitation will go through several attempts before putting an end to it. Should a relapse occur, it is important to de-dramatize the situation and not make the persons feel guilty, as they often feel shame about the setback. Youth workers explain that a relapse is not a sign of pathology or the persons' lack of willingness

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85 This strategy is recommended at every stage of the cycle.

to change, but part of the process of change. They remind the persons being helped of the gains they have made and renew their confidence in their ability to change.

To help these individuals get back on track, youth workers encourage them to discuss the factors that led them to recommodify their sexual services. The youth workers help them clarify their understanding of the situational, behavioural, emotional and cognitive cues that may be interfering with the achievement of their goals. If necessary, the youth workers collaborate with the persons being helped to develop a new action (change or intervention) plan and relapse prevention plan.

If decisions need to be made with which the persons being helped may disagree in order to ensure their safety and development, the youth workers remain transparent and take the time necessary to explain their actions. If possible, the youth workers secure the co-operation of the persons being helped when implementing these decisions.

PERMANENT EXIT

Maintenance
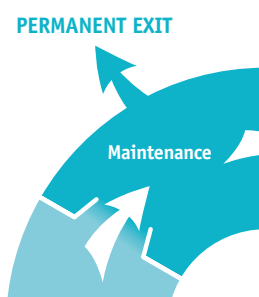
Persons being helped will succeed in permanently ending a cycle of sexual exploitation and the associated stages of change when they consolidate their new methods of meeting their needs and these become an integral part of their new way of life. To consolidate and sustain such gains, these persons must be able to positively project themselves into the future. Youth workers strive to ensure that these persons have goals in life and remain motivated to move away from a cycle of sexual exploitation in order to eventually put an end to it permanently. Youth workers also ensure that these individuals are able to deal with life's challenges through coping strategies such as problem solving and asking for help.

CONCLUSION

This document is a proposal for a common frame of reference for sexual exploitation interventions using evidence-based practices. It does not describe interventions in institutional (or other) settings but rather provides general guidelines to individually support minors or adults – men, women or transgender – who commodify their sexual services.

This document is also intended as a response to the moral conflicts that arise from interventions in sexual exploitation, which are not always resolved either. To this day, there is still an implicitly dual perception of persons in sexually exploitative situations that hinders concerted efforts to help them. The perception of being victims (often minors), who require protection in spite of themselves if necessary, still clashes with that of willing sex workers (often adults) who are free to choose whether or not to be helped. Moral acceptability and people's beliefs about the sex industry, the commodification of sexual services and sexual exploitation based on personal values (rather than data from research) impede the adoption of effective policies. They hinder the implementation of programs that can save lives not only physically, but also existentially: living freely and autonomously in decent living conditions that nurture the person's physical, psychological and social well-being.

This frame of reference is based on the idea that sexually exploited persons, whether minors or adults, are both victims of abuse who need to be cared for **and** persons who are free to make choices, no matter how risky they may be to their safety. As such, it relies on the ability of sexually exploited persons to act on their choices and regain control over their lives from a harm reduction (i.e., pragmatic and human) perspective rather than a prohibition (i.e., control and alienation) perspective, whose harms greatly exceed the health, societal and economic benefits.

This frame of reference is also based on the principle that it is necessary to support the ability of sexually exploited persons to make choices that are good for them and their power to solve whatever problems they face. Rather than limiting ourselves to simply managing the risks facing sexually exploited persons, it is more effective to help them reduce or eliminate the harms that threaten their safety and development. The best strategy to ensure the protection of sexually exploited minors and adults is to help them develop their autonomy to avoid living or ending up on the street. To achieve this, they must be exposed to all opportunities and situations where they can test their judgment, practice making choices, assert themselves, develop their social skills and exercise their power to act.

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