

# Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

590 Park Street  
Suite 410  
St. Paul, MN 55103

Voice: (651) 646-6177  
Fax: (651) 646-1527  
Web: [www.mcbw.org](http://www.mcbw.org)

## Service Provision to Women Escaping Prostitution

### Resolution passed by the MCBW Board of Directors on March 15, 1991

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women believes that violence against women stems from racism, classism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and ableism which exist within a patriarchal society. As a coalition, we work to confront the roots of that violence within ourselves and within the larger economic, social, and political systems, and to gain recognition of the validity of women's experiences. It is in keeping with these beliefs that we identify prostitution as a form of battering and extend our services to women used in prostitution.

Prostitution stems from the same social conditions that cause battering and other forms of violence against women. The definition of prostitution is predicated on ownership and unconditional access to a woman's body. The social, sexual, and economic subordination of women can keep them bound to individual men in abusive marriages/relationships and to men as a class in prostitution. These systems allow males to exercise their prerogative to own and control women in both the public and private spheres. Thus, a man who believes in male control of women is reinforced in his choice to batter his partner or to buy a woman for sexual use or abuse.

In women's experiences, if the sexual act is predicated on ownership, the act itself and its subsequent effects are that of sexual assault. Studies of marital rape reveal that women how are raped by their partners suffer many of the same effects as other sexual assault victims: physical trauma, humiliation, guilt, and self-blame. When compared to other battered women, women who are sexually assaulted by their partners suffer even greater damage to their self-esteem and are more likely to have psychosomatic symptoms or attempt suicide. A parallel trauma response is found in survivors of prostitution and other victims of physical and/or sexual abuse.

In prostitution, women are subjected to a number of sexual acts that would be perceived as assaults or, at least, unwanted and coerced, if they were acted against a woman who was not prostituted. Whether or not the woman herself maintains control of or benefits of the exchange, society allows an exchange of money to permit the client to use the woman in a manner that would not be tolerated otherwise. The prostituted woman's acceptance of the money is construed as her free consent to such treatment. If this logic were applied to other victims of abuse, then one would assume that battered women or sexual abuse victims, for example, also choose abusive relationships because they accept food, lodging, and sometimes money from their assailants. This argument is spurious today because we now understand how the oppression of women in our society facilitates violence against women and limits women's ability to escape from it. We do not believe that a victim chooses violence because she may be currently powerless to change the objective circumstance in her life, nor do we allow any amount of material compensation to justify violence against women.

Like other victims of sexual assault and battering, women and girls used in prostitution need and deserve tangible assistance to escape and overcome the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation. Like other battered women, a woman used in prostitution may not be able to escape without abandoning her current home, and often must flee from a pimp/boyfriend/husband who coerces or forces her to turn tricks, or at the very least,

benefits financially from her exploitation. The emotional support and advocacy services provided by the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women member programs are precisely the assistance that women require to exit prostitution safely and establish new lives for themselves and their children.

For these reasons, MCBW defines women who are used in prostitution as battered women and urges its member programs to provide the same shelter and advocacy services to prostituted women as those provided to other battered women.

**For more information on working with prostituted women, please call:**

**PRIDE**

**Family and Children's Service**

**4123 E. Lake Street**

**Minneapolis, MN 55406-2028**

**(612) 729-0340**

**Breaking Free**

**770 University Avenue West, Suite S-216**

**St. Paul, MN 55104**

**(651) 645-6557**