

Rationalization for a Faith Based Outreach to Prostituted Adolescent Girls

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We propose a "faith based" response to the problem of underage prostitution based on the latest religious, scientific, and social science research. We seek to assist not just prostituted girls but their families, community leaders, religious leaders, and the broader faith based community.

Mending the Soul Ministries is unambiguously designed as a "faith based," nonprofit organization. It is important to clarify what is and is not meant by "faith based." This means that MTS and its leaders embrace the Christian faith and incorporate nonsectarian Christian spirituality into our ministries and curriculum in various ways (prayer, curriculum which addresses spiritual themes, education on what the Christian Scriptures teach about abuse, etc.). This does not, however, mean that our leaders or volunteers would ever force or push Christianity on prostituted girls we serve. Participation in the spiritual elements of the outreach are voluntary. In fact, coercion, manipulation, and disrespecting those with religious views different from our own go against our ministry philosophy and our understanding of the Christian faith.

We believe that all humans are made in the image of God and invested with innate dignity and worth, which includes the right to make decisions for themselves and to be treated with dignity and respect regardless of beliefs or lifestyle. Prostituted girls, like all abuse survivors, have been victimized by individuals who had greater power and used it against them. Healing from abuse trauma necessitates overcoming a deep seated sense of powerlessness by regaining a sense of personal potency. Hence, it is our philosophy to love and respect those we minister to regardless of their religious convictions, to avoid coercion or manipulation, and to simply share what God has taught us in word and deed with those who desire it. Over many years of outreach to abuse

survivors here in the U.S. and in the developing world, we have seen this approach to be quite effective and appreciated by abuse survivors and their families.

A "faith based" response to the problem of underage prostitution is appropriate, logical, and economically prudent for several reasons:

1. It is desired by many abuse survivors

One of the foundational principles of social work and clinical psychology is that the beliefs and felt needs of the client are to be respected. This should include providing faith based resources for abuse recovery for those who desire it. One of the most common effects of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is disrupted spirituality (Falsetti, et al., 2003; Garbarino, 1996; Reinert & Smith, 1997; Schmutzer, 2009). This is often very distressing to the survivor, and can result in survivors developing harmful beliefs such as: "I must have been a very bad person for God to have allowed the abuse to happen to me"; "God can't love me and will never forgive me"; "I deserve to be punished by God for causing my father to abuse me. I don't deserve to experience happiness in this life," etc. Only a faith based program can fully address such issues. It should also be noted that faith based resources can offer particularly robust resources for the healing of shame (Albers, 2000; Layer, et al., 2004; Smedes, 1993; Tracy, 2005; Wilson, 2002). Since one's own religious heritage as well as one's sense of disconnection from God can significantly increase shame (Albers, 2000; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Kennedy & Drebring, 2002; Murray & Ciarrocchi, 2007), and shame is one of the most destructive results of abuse (Feiring, et al., 2002; Feiring, et al., 1998; Kessler & Bieshke, 1999), faith based resources for healing shame are particularly essential for religious abuse survivors. Research indicates a high percentage of adult abuse survivors value and practice religion/spirituality, desire helpful faith based services and resources, and rarely find them (Collins & Moore, 2006; Horton, 1998; Nason-Clark, 2000). For instance, a survey of 600 women in Maricopa County revealed that among women presently in an abusive relationship, 62% practice their religion either strictly or moderately, 42% attend religious services weekly or almost weekly, and yet only 7% felt they could confide in their clergy if they needed help because they felt unsafe (Domestic Violence Survey, 1999).

While there is very limited specific research data on the religious beliefs and needs of prostituted girls, the data we do have strongly suggests that many prostituted girls, perhaps the majority, have religious faith, find spirituality an important part of their lives, and would desire spirituality to be incorporated into their recovery program. We do know that for homeless and run away adolescents, one of the most likely adolescent groups to be prostituted (Cusick, 2002; Gwadz, et al., 2009), religion/spirituality is important and often serves as a critical resource for coping with the overwhelming stresses they face (Kidd, 2003; Lindsay, et al., 2000; Williams, 2004). For instance, in one study of homeless and run away adolescents, virtually every one of the adolescents surveyed said that spirituality was important to them. Furthermore, the five spiritual behaviors and experiences that provided the most support in their stressful life situation and helped them move forward were: the experience of divine intervention, prayer, participation in religious practices, finding a personal relationship with a Higher Power, and finding meaning and purpose in life (Williams, 2004). Finally, we should note that women who have left prostitution report that spirituality was a significant factor in their exit and recovery (Prince, 2008; Valandra, 2007).

2. It is cost effective.

Faith based programs have been shown to be as or more effective in providing various important social services such as health care, mental health services, drug treatment programs, and HIV prevention, often at a fraction of the cost to tax payers of government funded programs (DeHaven, et al., 2004; Francis & Liverpool, 2009; Koenig, 2005; Stahler, et al., 2007). This is a particularly important issue at a time of greatly decreased social services and increased needs. For instance, in our home city of Phoenix there are hundreds of thousands of professing Christians and thousands of churches which, with proper training and resources could assist outreach efforts to prostituted in countless ways at little or no cost. A faith based program which facilitates and equips religious volunteers and churches to donate their resources to an outreach to prostituted girls is financially prudent.

3. Religion/spirituality has been shown to promote physical and emotional health.

Prostituted woman and prostituted adolescents experience a staggering range of physical and mental health problems at staggering rates (Farley, 2003; National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2002; Rafferty, 2008). For instance, a study of 278 street-based prostituted women in Miami revealed that: 52.9% had symptoms of moderate or severe depression; 69% had acute traumatic stress symptoms; 19% tested positive for HIV; 48% tested positive for hepatitis B; 19% tested positive for hepatitis C (Surratt, et al., 2005). We have much less data on prostituted adolescents, but can reasonably anticipate that their physical and mental health would be as bad or worse than that of adult prostituted women. We know the majority of prostituted adolescent females suffer from depression and suicidal ideation (Rafferty, 2008; Gajic-Velianoski & Stewart, 2007; Herman, 2003; Leidholdt, 2003). It is thus significant that religion/spirituality has been repeatedly correlated with improved physical health and recovery from illnesses (Hummer, et al., 1999; Mueller, et al., 2001; Powell, et al., 2003). Religion/spirituality has also been shown to be strongly correlated with improved mental health, including lowered rates of depression, suicide, and mental illness (Dervic, et al., 2004; Hall, 2004; Wong, et al., 2006). For adolescent girls, spirituality and participation in religious community has been shown to decrease the likelihood of depression by 19%- 43% (Miller & Gur, 2002). Religion/spirituality has also been shown to be a significant resource for those struggling with a mental illness and for their family members (Corrigan, 2003; Murray-Swank, et al., 2006).

4. Religion/spirituality has been shown to prevent and facilitate recovery from harmful behaviors such as drug and alcohol addiction.

Illegal drug and alcohol abuse is strongly, even inextricably, linked to prostitution. Some begin using drugs and alcohol to numb pain in their lives before they enter the world of prostitution. Some prostituted adolescents are forced to use drugs by their pimps to keep them dependent on them. Others begin abusing drugs and alcohol once they enter the world of prostitution. Regardless of when drug and alcohol abuse began, the vast majority of adolescents who are prostituted, as well as most prostituted

adults, abuse alcohol and drugs (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Kramer, 2003; Ugarte et al., 2003). It is a primary coping mechanism against the shame, emotional pain, physical, sexual, and verbal abuse they chronically suffer (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Knauer, 2002). Kramer (2003) found that of the prostitutes she surveyed: 70% used drugs to detach emotionally while turning tricks; 44% used substances to cope with fear while turning tricks; 54% indicated that it was necessary to be high to go through turning a trick. In this context, it is significant that religion/spirituality is positively correlated with long term recovery from drug and alcohol addiction (Hawke, et al., 2005; Margolis, 2000; Vaillant, 2005) and to lower overall alcohol and drug abuse rates among adolescents (Caputo, 2005; Hodge, 2001; Yu & Stiffman, 2007). For this reason, a high percentage of drug and alcohol treatment programs incorporate some form of spirituality.

5. Religion/spirituality has been shown to promote healing from abuse and other forms of trauma.

Prostituted females (adults and adolescents) experience horrendous levels of physical and sexual violence while engaging in prostitution and have experienced greatly elevated rates of childhood abuse (Farley, 2003; National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2002). For instance, in one study 95% of women reported having experienced an injury caused by violence while engaged in prostitution and 95% also reported experiencing a head injury while engaging in prostitution (Farley, et al., 2003). In another study of street-based prostituted women in Miami: 51% had experienced childhood physical abuse; 53% had experienced childhood sexual abuse; 65% had experienced childhood emotional abuse; 71% had experienced a violent encounter in the past three months; 17% had experienced a violent encounter with a "date" in the previous month (Surratt, et al., 2005). Another study revealed that while women were engaging in prostitution: 88% reported they had been physically threatened; 83% had been physically threatened with a weapon; 88% had experienced serious injury from physical attacks by pimps and customers; 68% had been raped since entering prostitution; 48% had been raped more than five times (Farley, 2003). Many reasonably argue that even the ostensibly "consensual" sex experienced by prostituted women is abusive (Dworkin, 2002; Farley, 2004). Even more would view "consensual" sex experienced by under age

prostituted girls as abusive. The greatly elevated childhood and recent abuse rates and chronic danger and threats to physical well being experienced by prostituted girls and women results in great psychological damage. For instance, one study of 130 prostituted women in San Francisco revealed that 68% of the women met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (Farley & Barkan, 1998). We can see how astoundingly high this level of PTSD is by comparing it to the current estimated 20% PTSD rate for soldiers returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is thus quite significant for the faith based outreach that religion/spirituality has been strongly correlated with enhanced abuse and other trauma recovery (Exline, et al., 2005; Falsetti, et al., 2003; Gall, et al., 2007; Reinert & Smith, 1997; Weaver, et al., 2003). In fact, the positive role of religion/spirituality in abuse and trauma recovery is so well attested that therapists are advised in the secular psychological literature to consider and address this element of their clients' lives (Garbarino, 1996). Many trauma healing results have been proposed for the positive effect of religion/spirituality in abuse healing, including: relief of shame, a greater sense of personal worth, experience of forgiveness, restored hope, and a new framework for interpreting and integrating the traumatic events.

6. A faith based program for prostituted girls can strengthen additional critical resources

Prostituted girls most often come from disrupted and dysfunctional families and have few if any healthy, nurturing relationships (Brawn & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008; Lung, et al., 2004). They often experience great isolation and are in need of a healthy community. Faith communities can be a very important resource for families and individuals in need. Ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans, tend to look to their spiritual leaders for help in times of crisis (Taylor, et al., 2000; Young, et al., 2003). Clergy report that they often minister to abuse survivors but only a tiny minority feel adequately trained and equipped to help abuse survivors (Homiak, & Singletary, 2007; Miles, 2000). Thus, a faith based program for prostituted girls can uniquely assist and strengthen important resources by providing spiritually based education and resources on abuse, trauma, and healing desired by religious families, churches, and clergy (Abbott, et al., 1990; Dell, 2004).

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