

1,250 arrests for prostitution, 922 of whom were prostitutes, according to the Portland Police Department.

Detective Daryl Dick with Portland's Drug and Vice Division says it is almost impossible to determine how many prostitutes there are in Portland because it varies so much according to the season and the number of women who prostitute part time.

Dick, who has interviewed about 350 male and female prostitutes, says many prostitutes seem to have left Eugene because they are more likely to be prosecuted here. "In Eugene, (the police) just haven't let them get started. If you let it go, (prostitutes) perpetuate demand."

With police struggling to control their prostitution problem, others are seeking different ways to keep the lid on prostitution. A Portland group was the first in the nation formed exclusively for adult female prostitutes trying to break away from the business.

The Council for Prostitution Alternatives, founded in 1984 and funded by the city and the county, provides prostitutes with housing, child and medical care, job training and other things they need to get started in a new life.

About 60 women a month talk to the program's counselors, looking for ways to escape abusive pimps, drugs and the cycle of poverty, says Susan Hunter, the program coordinator. "The life of a prostitute is literally one of working 14 hours a day, selling your body to eight or 10 different men."

According to Hunter, only about 40 percent of prostitutes have a high school education. Many are runaways, and some are actually sold or forced into prostitution. Sixty percent are mothers, although only 45 percent have custody. About 75 percent to 90 percent of prostitutes were sexually abused children, and 78 percent have a history of severe substance abuse, including one-third who are heroin addicts.

"There's not a woman in the program who says she hasn't been beaten or raped by a john or her pimp. Many of them don't even get to keep the money they make. They are very much

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the victims... and the products in a man's business."

But "Sue," a University law school student who used to be a prostitute in Houston, says she never had a really bad experience while prostituting. "I did straight sex, and that was all. I was never raped or forced. It's a part of my life, and I don't feel ashamed about it — I did what I did to survive," she says.

Sue was working at a minimum-wage job in the late 1960s in Houston, just barely making ends meet for herself and her two children. When one of her male co-workers asked her if she wanted to be set up with men who would pay for sex in return for giving him free sex, she accepted. "When you're young and pretty... you seem to put out signals to men." She saw about four to six men a week, making about \$250 a month.

If there is someone to blame for women becoming prostitutes, Sue says the fault lies with society. "Women need to have more options as far as the jobs they do. I think it's wrong for society to put you in the situation where you have to (prostitute) — it's wrong when your choices become so narrow that that's almost the only choice you have."

Goldman believes prostitution is a normal extension of the U.S. social structure.

"Sexual exchange seems to be built into our lives. Anything goes in our marketplace," she says. "And women have fewer resources than men as far as access to well-paying jobs."

The prostitution scene has changed dramatically over the last 100 years as more people have entered the profession. While Goldman was researching the business in San Francisco some time ago, she talked to a streetwalker and a high-class call girl and discovered that when the two met, they had nothing to say to each other.

"Their life and their work experiences were completely different," she says. In addition, many transvestites and homosexuals have entered the profession so that today there is no longer a "typical" prostitute.

Sally had a few bad experiences in her 10 years as a prostitute. Once she was picked up by a man who kidnapped her and started driving her to Seattle. Sally promised him money if he would return to Portland. On the way back, he stopped at a stoplight, and she jumped out.

"I was a survivor, and (prostitution) is something I did to take care of myself," she says. "You're pretty much isolated, though. I wouldn't wish it on my daughter because it can get cold out there."

But Sally believes being a prostitute means having a certain power over men. "You're the one in control. You're calling the shots. Most men have never had a prostitute before — they want something, and they know they have to do something to get it. And you're free to say no."

"I suppose it appears that prostitutes are victims, but it's not true," Sally adds.

Hunter disagrees. She says most women who are prostitutes don't want

to see their profession as what it is: an institution that Hunter equates with slavery.

"These women are meal tickets. They are used and abused by men. These women aren't enriched by being prostitutes. They won't tell you that some john will pay \$25 extra so that he can choke her until her eyes pop."

Of the more than 250 women who have entered the Council for Prostitution Alternatives, almost all of them initially refuse to admit that they work for a pimp or that they have been abused, Hunter says. "Of course they won't tell you that they're beaten up. They want you to think they have some control over their lives. It's not easy to admit in this day and age that you are controlled by another person, a man."

Priscilla Alexander, co-director of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), a prostitutes' rights advocacy organization, says the issue is a feminist one, as significant to the women's movement as abortion or the right to choose sexual preference.

"There's no distinction between being a prostitute and being a woman. Why is it OK for someone to use my brain but not my body? Why is it OK for me to cook for somebody and not to give him a hand-job? There's no distinction between a whore and (the) Madonna."

But Alexander says prostitutes do have one thing that most women do not: power.

"They're not afraid of men," Alexander says. "They're in control, and the rest of us are not. Prostitutes can take care of themselves."

The San Francisco-based organization has been working since it was established in 1973 to legalize prostitution, which would allow women to improve their working conditions and to work in collectives or independently without fearing arrest, Alexander says.

"Prostitution is the only industry in which women are paid more than men," Alexander says. "If you're forced or coerced into it, that's different. But if you looked for a prostitution job and got it, you needed the money and got it... it's an exchange."

But Hunter calls this view "a fairy tale."

"What is the value in creating a slave zone? Who does it benefit? It's the cruelest joke when people say legalizing prostitution would help these women. It will help their pimps," she says.

In Nevada, where prostitution is legal in some counties, it has not solved that state's problems with drug abuse, sex abuse, rape and battery of women, despite the arguments of some people who say prostitutes prevent many violent crimes, she adds.

"You have to look at what prostitution is. Prostitution is having your body sold to a man, and he can do whatever he wants to you for that money... until you're all used up."

Professor Goldman says she supports decriminalization, which minimizes regulation by removing prostitution from the criminal code, making it a form of commercial sexual



Photo by Michael Wilhelm