

Alex Powell
Living in Freedom Together

As a survivor of the sex trade and an employee of a survivor-led organization, I can speak to the harms of prostitution on many levels. There are a few areas of harm that I would particularly like to highlight. One is the further marginalization and oppression of already marginalized individuals. Both locally and nationally, BIPOC women and LGBTQIA++ individuals are particularly vulnerable due to their exclusion in the larger communities and are targeted due to fetishization of both populations. As prostituted people, these individuals become repeated targets of even further violence and are often invisible at best in the larger community. The sex trade is inherently a form of racial violence as the trade frequently consists of white men of means buying access to the bodies Black and Brown girls. This repeated transactional trauma takes a significant toll, psychologically and spiritually. I have heard many survivors refer to 'losing a piece of her/their soul every time,' a sentiment I have shared over time. This is not a choice. It is a means of survival and form of overt violence and oppression that comes as a combo deal with severe complex and chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic and debilitating illness resulting from 'the life' (e.g., complications due to substance use disorder and/or homelessness; significant toll on physical, sexual, and reproductive health due to repeated and violent sex acts; etc.), and the loss of normalcy in any human interaction. Places and people that were once considered 'safe' are no longer as we are further exploited. Everyone is a buyer, and if they aren't, they still look like one. Medical services feel like further violation of our bodies, and medical screenings often are. Every survivor's journey is different, but these are sentiments I've experienced firsthand and heard time and time again from other survivors. And the impact of these harms is not isolated to us. The harm of the sex trade impacts our families, our relationships, our children. This violence spans generations in families and communities as we are continuously othered and objectified. This is not an industry that can be reformed. This is an 'industry' that should never have been accepted in the first place. This is not an industry – it is the commoditization of violence and oppression, and it needs to be abolished. Supporting survivors means supporting the equality model and ending demand for good.