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From Streetwalking to the Information Superhighway: The New Method in Prostitution

The days of the easy-to-spot streetwalker in Spenard, Fairview or Mountain View are coming to an end.

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Bio

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A prostitution bust at a massage parlor this week reminded Anchorage residents that the long history of vice in the city is still being written.

But there's an evolution in the way that flesh is being marketed.

The days of the easy-to-spot streetwalker in Spenard, Fairview or Mountain View are coming to an end.

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And while massage parlors continue to serve as fronts for prostitution, the Internet has become the portal of entry for many young women who may think they're making a short-term choice -- but find themselves unable to get out.

Sergeant Kathy Lacey of the Anchorage Police Department sees a big shift in prostitution.

"It's always been here, always will be here. Anywhere you have men and women, you're going to have commercial sex. Part of the difference we've seen is that the Internet has facilitated prostitution to just an exponential level. It's just a different type of marketing -- the way they sell themselves."

The trend is toward websites such as Craig's List, where services can be offered via numbers on disposable cell phones and a rendezvous can be scheduled in a private residence or hotel room.

"And all the inherent problems that come with prostitution are still there -- the robberies, the assaults, the drug sales, the drug rip-offs, all those things are still there. It's just more kind of behind closed doors than it used to be."

"The problem is definitely getting worse," says Nancy Cole, director of the Mary Magdalene Home, a Christian-based non-profit, where prostitutes can get counseling, advice on social services and job-hunting, and for a few, temporary shelter.

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But Cole says it's hard for women to leave that life.

"The women here talk about being in prostitution from the age of 10, and some younger. They're now 46, and since they were 10 they have no work history."

Along the way, they likely have developed a substance abuse problem or even a mental illness, she said.

"Because prostitution is its own addiction. It's power, and control, money and intimacy -- having someone to connect to."

Sgt. Lacey says the problem is growing because of media glamorization and a public unwilling to face what prostitution actually is.

"It's the underbelly of our society. And we really need to look at it. It's not just sex between two consenting adults, which is what everybody wants to say. If you sit down and talk to that woman for any length of time, their tales are horrific, what they've been through and what their background is."

The world's oldest profession isn't improving with age.

Lacey says the johns, who are charged with a misdemeanor, aren't required to register as sex offenders.

She says the police department once tried to create a deterrent by publicizing their names, but she says the media didn't go along.

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Celia Harrison said on Thursday, Aug 4 at 10:53 PM

This is not new, it's just that law enforcement in AK is just now catching on.

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anon said on Sunday, Jul 31 at 7:23 AM

As long as we criminalize prostitution, criminals will run it.

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akjulie said on Friday, Jul 29 at 9:22 PM

"It's not just sex between two consenting adults, which is what everybody wants to say" Um, yes, it IS Ms Lacey. As you well know, any woman who seeks out help to get out of that line of work can be helped. Yes, some were forced into it, some chose to do it. Regardless, help is there for anyone who wants to change their occupation. And why SHOULD the 'Johns' be required to register as sex offenders??? Nobody was raped, nobody was assaulted (and if they were, or were underage, then press charges). Why is it so hard to accept this service to men as legitimate? Everybody has physical needs. Eating is legal, sleeping is legal, going to the bathroom is legal, and sex is right up there with all those needs. Crack down on the pimps and the sex traffickers but for christ sake leave the legitimate working women (and their customers) alone!

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