

# Pimps tend to be like prostitutes: abused as children, once sold their own bodies: study

**Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation conference on sex trafficking at DePaul finds interesting conclusions**

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April 16, 2009

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In television, movies and music, they exude cool and confidence.

But a new study has found out something else about some Chicago pimps -- like the women they often peddle on the sex market, they are victims of sexual abuse and have sold their own bodies for sex.

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A new study finds that the popular image of pimps as cool guys in control isn't exactly accurate.

(AP file)

"That's the persona they put on," study author Jody Raphael said of popular images of pimps. "Underneath, they are no different than the women. ... They come from the same households and dysfunction as the women do."

The research, while limited in that only five pimps were interviewed, marks the first extensive interviews with street pimps to find out their backgrounds and how they operate, said Raphael, staff attorney at the DePaul College of Law's Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center.

Details about the men -- one white, one Hispanic and three African-American -- were released this week at a sex trafficking conference at DePaul University held by video linkup and involving six U.S. cities.

Taina Bien-Aime, executive director of Equality Now in New York, said pimps' backgrounds were not too surprising, given that their violent backgrounds could have led them to "dehumanize" the women they controlled.

But Bien-Aime said the research is noteworthy because it shifts focus onto the demand side of the commercial sex industry that fuels the sale of women in prostitution.

"What was interesting and galvanizing about this multicity conference is we always feel that we are alone to work on the demand side," Bien-Aime said. "Other people around the country are connecting the dots."

The conference was sponsored by the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

The men surveyed by Raphael were all paid. None is currently pimping, but they had all been active within the last five years and had spent an average of 24 years involved in the trade.

According to the findings, four of the men regularly experienced sexual abuse as children, had family members involved in the sex trade and had sold their bodies for sex before becoming a pimp -- one when he was just 12.

All grew up in households with domestic violence and addiction issues.

They were interviewed by Brenda Myers-Powell, a former prostitute who has worked with Raphael on previous studies. The size of the sample was restrained by Raphael's budget, but she is seeking more money to expand the study.

Because two of the five pimps reported working for someone else, Raphael also would also like to find out to what extent pimps are controlled by larger, more organized criminal enterprises.