

Chaikin, R. and H. Safran (forthcoming). Immigration, Women and Prostitution: the Case of Women from the Former Soviet Union in Israel, in (eds.) Dalla, L. Rochelle, John DeFrain, Lynda M. Baker & Celia Williamson, *The Prostitution of Women, Men & Children: A Global Perspective Implications for Research, Policy, Education, and Service*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, Inc.

Immigration, Women and Prostitution: the Case of Women from the Former Soviet Union in Israel

Rita Chaikin, Anti-Trafficking Project Coordinator, Isha L'Isha – Haifa Feminist Center ¹

Dr. Hannah Safran, Political Science, Emek Yizreel College. Isha L'Isha – Haifa Feminist Center

Israel had been one of the major target countries of trafficking in women from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) since the early 1990s until recently. A series of successful campaigns, coupled with pressure from the US, prompted the Israeli government to introduce a new law and to crack down on traffickers. The present article shifts its focus as the time period changes; it starts with the massive immigration from the FSU to Israel in the early 1990s, goes on to describe the trafficking that accompanied it and the subsequent campaigns against trafficking led by non-government organizations (NGOs) in Israel that curtailed trafficking from the FSU, and lastly, it describes the current situation in which local women, themselves immigrants are being forced into prostitution.²

As we shall demonstrate, a successful campaign against trafficking does not necessarily lead to an end in exploiting and abusing women's lives in prostitution. In Israel, after a series of effective campaigns there is a noticeable decrease in the numbers of women being trafficked into the country. As a result, there have been remarkable changes in the patterns of prostitution in Israel. However, the reduction in the phenomenon of trafficking in women did not result in a change in the fact that many women who are in prostitution are immigrants. The curtailment in trafficking reduced the numbers of women brought into the country but did not change the fact that during the process of immigration women are extremely vulnerable and often forced into the sex industry. This research focuses on the connection between the phenomenon of trafficking and that of prostitution among immigrant women.³

In the past, it was women who were illegal in the country; nowadays it is mainly women from similar places and backgrounds whose immigration to Israel was legal, but whose acclimatization into the new society had severely failed. They may often be daughters of immigrants who

had not found a way to make their lives in the new country. If the successful campaign led to a reduction in the numbers of women trafficked from the FSU who were mostly illegal in the country, it is now legal immigrants who are filling this vacancy.

The success of the campaign led by women, feminists and human rights organizations in Israel, together with some Parliament members and efforts of the local police⁴ in collaboration with local police forces in source countries to prevent trafficking in women, has resulted in a serious crackdown on traffickers, thus leading to a reduction in the number of women trafficked from the FSU to Israel. However, as the demand has not been reduced, the pressure exerted on women whose lives as immigrants in Israel have been fraught with social and cultural difficulties, to revert to prostitution, has been immense. The cycle of exploitation will continue as long as there are enough men who are willing and able to buy sex for money, and as long as society at large does not see prostitution as an unacceptable habit and as an expression of violence against women.

The present article will examine the effect of immigration on women and the pressures they have to endure as they come to a completely different society where they have to cope under strenuous circumstances. The article will focus on women who immigrated to Israel from the FSU either as legal immigrants or trafficked into the country illegally and ended up being lured into prostitution. We will interview women in prostitution in an effort to make their voices heard and their needs visible. In addition, this article will focus on the role of culture differences in hindering women from obtaining and receiving their rights to support from the state, gaining their freedom and determining their own lives. Finally, we will describe the success of the campaign led by Isha L'Isha (Woman to Woman) against trafficking in women.

We believe that prostitution is not a choice made by women, but rather a social situation into which women without support and resources find themselves pushed. The Haifa Feminist Center Isha L'Isha became involved in the campaign against trafficking in women as part of its feminist ideology to actively search for women who are directly and specifically oppressed and maltreated. Our commitment to the campaign against trafficking in women in Israel is based on the belief that social movements can play a significant role in changing policies towards women in our society.

Immigration from the FSU: the Effects of Cultural Values in Countries of Origin

Surveying the historical background, we need to distinguish between two major periods: the period of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a communist and socialist country, and the subsequent period beginning from the dismantlement of the USSR into 15 independent states in 1991. The initial period was characterized by immense anger of the public towards the old regime. Due to the rapid and partly spontaneous processes, the new states began their way to independence without appropriate legislation, with no regulations and no budgets. As a result, a sharp economic deterioration was set in motion and resulted in lack of social services and welfare

education systems. The first to suffer severely were women, children and young families.⁵

It is important to emphasize that in the USSR, despite its characteristics as a difficult and totalitarian country, women had important advantages as citizens. An example of this is the parenting support system, which included kindergartens that operated from morning until evening, as well as group activities for children of all ages, both free of charge. These possibilities made it easier, especially for young families, as well as the fact that higher education was also free and students received monthly stipends. Although this support system was not enough for living, it ensured a possibility to study. After completing academic studies, students did not have to search for jobs, as the state provided automatic placement services in the job market, according to the profession they acquired. This unique social structure, which supported and protected individuals and families, completely disappeared with the collapse of the USSR.

The collapse of the familiar support circles and the disintegration of the social and community system especially affected women and caused deterioration in their status. Professions held mainly by women began to lose of their value; there was difficulty in finding work – professional or non-professional – and most of the women lost their sources of income. The parenting support system of the older generation also collapsed because of massive unemployment, and many families began suffering from economic difficulties. A great burden fell on the shoulders of women, as often they became the main breadwinners, while at the same time they had to bring up their children and sometimes also support their own parents. This situation led to difficult relationships, the breaking up of many families and a sharp increase in separation and divorce rates.

Another significant change for women was the situation of single mothers. Single parenthood was possible and relatively acceptable in the USSR, as the state supported single mothers; the education system and support services for women were relatively cheap and accessible. With the collapse of the USSR, 40% of the women defined at that time as single mothers found themselves below the poverty line. During the 1990s, this rate continued to rise. Longitudinal studies conducted on the situation of single mothers from the FSU show that these women were significantly poorer than other families and for longer periods of time.⁶

Poverty, the lack of workplaces and concern for parents with no means of income led to a situation of despair and hopelessness, with a subsequent additional rise in divorce rates and increase in distress. Another trend that undermined the family nucleus, identified by Natalia Khodyreva,⁷ was that most women who began to live with partners in Russia after the collapse of the USSR developed unrealistic expectations of their partners, expecting the men to take on the traditional role of sole responsibility over sources of income. This process contributed to an impossible pressure on the relationship and on family life.

The existence of the FSU states as independent entities in the early 1990s was characterized, among other factors, by the spread of organized crime. The chaotic situation and the control of organized crime did not receive any response or intervention from the state. Furthermore, civil servants were in many cases involved in crime in one way or another, and men who returned from wars and completed their military service became

security guards cooperating with crime nets. These patterns of high unemployment rates, organized crime and the collapse of governmental institutions constituted fertile ground for the development of trafficking in women all over East Europe. The common cultural basis for the different countries, as well as the common Russian language contributed to the widening process of the exploitation.

In the years before the collapse of the USSR, its borders were closed, except in cases of special permits from the authorities, in an effort to prevent the penetration and influence of western concepts, especially those related to perceptions of liberty and freedom. As a result, western civilization and its concepts were entirely inaccessible to the public. The public was politically administered by a centralized and dictatorial rule, controlling public consciousness since the Soviet revolution of 1917.

Familiarity with this background is of utmost importance for analyzing and understanding the situation of women who left the FSU for the west in search of income sources. This population had no understanding of the places where they were going. The problem was even greater for women who came from small, remote villages and towns of the FSU and who, until then, had never left their villages.

Trafficking in Women and Prostitution in Israel

Background

Isha L'Isha's Fighting against Trafficking and Prostitution in Women project began in 2001, focusing on work with foreign trafficked women and struggling to eradicate the phenomenon. This focus on activity related only to a specific aspect of the prostitution phenomenon was due to recognizing the urgent need for a struggle against trafficking in women worldwide in general, and in Israel in particular. During those years, Israel was a country with extensive trafficking activity because of the significant immigration from East European countries, which began with the fall of the Eastern bloc. At that time, the sex industry in Israel was organized around discrete apartments, brothels, and escort services in the central cities, where women were enslaved and exploited. Most of them did not know they were going to be integrated into the sex market and had not imagined what fate awaited them. They had come from East Europe with the aim of making a little more money than they could in their countries of origin.⁸

During eight years of the project's activity, we provided help and support to over 1,600 women trafficked into Israel, most of them between the ages 19 and 33, approximately half of them single mothers, separated or divorced. Most of the women we have encountered in the framework of the project are from East European countries: Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova and others. Other women trafficked into Israel for purposes of prostitution through designated trafficking channels include women from Asian countries – most of them from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Women from other places, who fell into the trafficking trap, but in smaller numbers, are citizens of the Baltic countries.

Following the publication of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report⁹ in 2000 on the scope and characteristics of trafficking in humans

worldwide, the United States of America began classifying the different countries according to their struggle against the trafficking phenomenon. The introduction of this classification system and the position of Israel at the bottom of the ladder led to a number of positive changes in Israel. Following this classification, Israel began to change its practices; the government stopped ignoring the phenomenon and began exerting efforts in the struggle against trafficking in women within Israel's borders.

Until this stage, trafficked victims were considered criminals for merely being in the country without a permit and against immigration laws. Most of them were deported from Israel and, in the absence of clear procedures how to assist them, the majority of these women did not receive – before or during the deportation process – any assistance.¹⁰ The new situation, created in light of the threat that Israel might lose its American aid by being defined as a country not fighting against trafficking in women, brought about changes in laws and procedures. As a result, and following the cooperation created since then with women's and human rights organizations, most of the women identified according to the new procedures as trafficked victims receive assistance.

As part of these changes, a parliamentary inquiry commission began to function in 2000. The committee's goal was to eradicate the trafficking in women phenomenon and to assist women victims of trafficking. In the framework of the first stage of the legal efforts, the committee submitted sixteen legislation proposals in various fields relating to trafficking in human beings. Six of these proposals passed a first reading in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), another proposal passed a pre-reading, and nine were put on the Knesset table. In December 2002, the committee submitted an interim report on the issue, in which it chose to focus on the legal aspects and provision of operational responses for the struggle against the trafficking phenomenon through comprehensive legislation on related issues.

Until 2003, the trafficking in women phenomenon was low in priority as far as state policies were concerned, which were not disconnected from the lack of attention expressed by the state towards the prostitution phenomenon in general. In 2003, the parliamentary investigation committee initiated a survey that, for the first time in Israel, examined public awareness and moral attitudes towards the phenomenon and the public perception of the relationship between trafficking in women and human rights violations. The survey results indicated that trafficking in women was not connected in the public consciousness to violations of human rights, but rather perceived as part of the migrant workers' problem in Israel. Moreover, it was perceived as a moral crime rather than as a violation of human rights. The findings of the survey further pointed to the public's blindness regarding everything that is related to human dignity, freedom and rights, and the indifference of Israeli society towards anyone who is not Israeli.¹¹

Only after 2003 did we begin to feel a change in state policies regarding prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims, and prevention of trafficking in women. Until we began to see these changes, however, we felt deep distress because we had neither resources to help so many foreign women victims of trafficking, nor anywhere to turn for help. We had to focus on the brothels that were overflowing with women trafficked from foreign countries. We could not do much beyond providing assistance to

these women at this stage. At the same time, perceiving the struggle against trafficking in women as an integral part of the attempt to change the prostitution phenomenon, we began to tour the field, collect data, and make efforts to understand the scope and characteristics of the prostitution phenomenon in Israel.

From the early 2000s until 2004, there was no facility in which the women could remain during their testimony against their traffickers. A typical example was a case from August 2003, when we received a request from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Moldova to help a woman who, as far as they knew, was imprisoned in a brothel. We succeeded in contacting the woman and obtaining the details of the place where she had been locked up. Despite our appeals to various police representatives to rescue the woman, a whole week passed before we could provide her with any help. During the rescue operation, ten additional women were discovered locked up in the brothel. Police investigators called Rita Chaikin, the project coordinator and co-author of this article, and asked for her advice: what should they do with eleven Moldovan citizens rescued from their imprisonment with nowhere to go? There were no shelters for trafficked victims and, due to the lack of space; the Immigration Police was not ready to give up vacant space in a detention facility for migrant workers to trafficked women.

According to state laws, the police could not arrest these women as criminals, but it could arrest them on the basis of illegal stay in Israel, and indeed it did so. The only punishment awaiting them as trafficked victims was deportation from Israel. During that period, detention centers in Israel were full of migrant workers who were not entitled to become immigrants according to the law of return – a law that specifically allow only Jews and their families to immigrate to Israel. – or any other immigration laws. This reality created an urgent need for finding a budget for a place where trafficked women could stay until they arrange their documents and leave the country; a budget which, needless to say, we did not have. In this particular case, the women were freed and left to find their way in a strange country on their own, while we were unable to provide them with any assistance. The woman regarding whom we received the appeal from IOM was given – thanks to repeated appeals – a temporary place at a shelter for battered women until her documents were arranged and she was able to return to her country of origin.

Another case illustrating the difficulties characterizing that period was when we called a police station in the north to report on two trafficked victims who had arrived at a town near the station. The investigator who answered our call replied that he knew nothing about trafficked victims. However, he emphasized in a harsh tone: “There are two prostitutes here, do you want to talk to them?” His reply reflects the prevalent attitude in the state and its institutions until 2004 regarding the phenomenon of trafficking in women in Israel.

It is important to note that already in 2000, a law prohibiting trafficking in women was passed in Israel. Although the law sets a maximum of 16 years of incarceration for the crime of trafficking in women, the punishments traffickers received then were minimal, reflecting the lack of motivation on behalf of the police to initiate investigations and to act in this field. Rita Chaikin remembers only too well her struggles during

this time when she wanted to bring about the opening of files on trafficking in women. She encountered great difficulties, as well as the complete lack of understanding on the part of the authorities.

At the end of 2003, an event that shook government members, especially Ariel Sharon, then Prime Minister, took place and led to a major turning point. In December of that year, the news featured headlines of an assassination attempt of a very well known criminal by a certain gang, during which two innocent civilians were killed. Due to the severity of the case, the Prime Minister and the Police Inspector General decided to fight organized crime in Israel with an iron hand. As part of this new policy, the police conducted many raids on establishments such as brothels, escort services, and illegal gambling businesses. In a period of one year, approximately 650 trafficking in women cases were opened. Detention centers of the Immigration Police were full of trafficked women who awaited their laissez-passers (free pass) to return back home. For some of these women, this was a period of contemplation, during and following which they mustered courage and expressed their consent to testify against their traffickers.

As a NGO with experience in the issue, we at Isha L'Isha began receiving calls from authorities inviting us to come to detention centers in the north in order to interview the detained women and provide them with initial help, with special emphasis on explaining their rights to them. In addition, we were allowed, for the first time, to bring the women supplies they needed, including clothes and personal items they had left behind in the brothels, to which they decided not to return out of fear that it would lead to the arrest of other women. In other cases, the pimp himself prevented the women from obtaining their clothes and personal items, thus leaving them with nothing. The atmosphere among the detainees was that of uncertainty and fear of what awaited them in the detention center and in the unknown future.

Project Activity and Field Work

The activity of the project was designed to work with women in prostitution, including those who wished to begin a rehabilitation process, as well as with women who had left prostitution in the past, but were still finding it difficult to integrate into society. After long discussions and consultations with other feminist organizations in Israel, it was decided in Isha L'Isha that we cannot accept the terms "voluntary prostitution" or "choosing prostitution." Thus, we do not act out of the assumption that women in prostitution are "sex workers." This basic stance has a number of implications, one of which is our belief that civil cases dealing with trafficking in women must not be dealt with in labor courts, as in cases of employer-employee disputes, but rather in the district court that can grant trafficking victims compensation.

In the framework of our activity, we try to provide the women help in times of need, as well as initiate a process that will enable them to cope better in the future, with the aim of helping them escape the cycle of prostitution. In order to enable this process, we work with the women to examine their past and understand the factors that led them into prostitution. In our belief, this complex process and development are the most important

parts of our work with trafficking victims, out of the realization that by understanding the root causes of their personal distresses, we can begin to get close to the women in a way that will enable us to help them. Out of this belief, we design a personal program for every individual woman to suit her unique needs.

At the beginning of the project, we visited women victims of trafficking in different detention facilities administered by the Immigration Police throughout the country. In our encounters with these women, we tried to help them with the different processes awaiting them, including testifying against their traffickers, returning to their countries of origin if they desired, and informing them of their rights while still in Israel. All this was done in order to give these women first aid and help them regain the self-confidence most of them had lost at this stage of their lives.

A parallel aspect of the project was the struggle for policy change in dealing with the phenomenon of trafficking in women. The reality, as reflected in our encounters with women, enabled us to analyze the situation and set goals, for ourselves and the authorities, to eradicate the phenomenon. In cases where we felt that we could not, or that it was not appropriate, to cope alone with the different challenges in the field, we turned to help from other human rights organizations, including those working specifically for the rights of women.

Throughout the years, our organization, Isha L'Isha, had to face various dilemmas relating to our work with trafficked women. Our discussions together with our experience led us to understand that we will achieve our aims better if we have good relationships with bodies and institutions such as the Israeli police, courts of justice, hospitals, media and others. We will demand all the support and the justice these women deserve from the state while at same time providing the women with the urgently needed support and help. The characteristics of this dual work are gaining experience in working with the establishment, alongside professionalization in accompaniment and treatment of women.

Already in the beginning stages of the project, the need for dealing in a comprehensive and theoretical manner with the dilemma of women choosing prostitution arose. Long discussions and learning followed among activist women in the organization, especially among members of the project steering committee. As part of our feminist approach, we invited women in prostitution to our discussions, out of the wish to hear their voices and to consolidate our position as part of a dialogue with them. After a long period of discussions and learning, we consolidated a clear stance as an organization: no woman is in prostitution out of choice, and therefore we need to support women in prostitution and to struggle for conditions that will allow them to leave the vicious cycle of prostitution and become rehabilitated.¹²

Another dilemma we continue to face is the essence and quality of work with the establishment and the different authorities. An example of this can be found in the field of media. The state of Israel led a number of information campaigns designed against the prostitution phenomenon. The question we faced in this case was whether it is appropriate that such campaigns be run by a governmental body that is committed to certain types of contents. Resolved to succeed in influencing from within the system as well, we began to cooperate with the Israeli police in educational work,

focusing on lectures at police academies in the framework of advanced courses for investigators. The main goal of these lectures was shattering existing myths prevalent not only among the public but also among professionals. The widespread social perception, according to which prostitution is a profession and women in prostitution have chosen it of their own free will, leads to perpetuation of the collective accusation toward women in prostitution. Furthermore, it leads to a complete public social disregard of the exploitation accompanying the phenomenon. During lectures to police officers and investigators, we make efforts at undermining this pattern of thought through reality analysis and dialogue.

Working with the police has strengthened our resolve to continue our efforts of cooperating with the establishment and to act for the eradication of stereotypes at the core of treatment patterns of the different bodies working with immigrant women. The main institutes we cooperate with include the National Insurance Institute, hospitals and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. One of the major problems we identify today is that the state of Israel does not issue legal status and does not grant rights for single mothers. Although there is a court decision issued by the High Court that the National Insurance Institute has to pay child support to these women, the Institute continues to deny them any support and does not recognize them as entitled to child support payments. This policy has created a state of distress, as the women are impelled to try and provide for their children while at the same time they are not entitled to any rights, such as medical care or other welfare services available to Israeli citizens. This reality often leads to extremely absurd situations, such as when the Department of Welfare proposes transferring children from the mother's custody into a foster family because they are entitled to treatment denied to the mother. The mother thus loses her children and is left to cope with her situation alone, with no support whatsoever.

The question here is not only the right to rehabilitation for a woman who has experienced exploitation, but also the broader question of the right to motherhood for women in prostitution or women trying to leave that cycle. Our stance is that these women need a helping hand and maximum support, especially because they are in distress and may still be in prostitution.¹³

Project Target Group

In our work, we have come across various difficult cases where we have to deal with complex problems and challenges, such as the immigration experience and the status of women in Israel. One of the main problems stems from immigration laws in Israel, which are based on ethnic relation to the Jewish people. Today, only those who immigrate to Israel within the framework of the law of return gain permanent legal status. Thus, some of the women who turn to us have different rights as citizens of Israel. Many of them have no legal status in Israel because they arrived in the country in different ways (direct flights, smuggled through the Egyptian border, via the sea, or trapped in cargo compartments), as part of trafficking in women for prostitution purposes.

During 2002-2008, most of the women were either deported to their countries of origin or left of their own free will. Most of those who remained in Israel are single mothers with no legal status, or mothers to children of Israeli fathers. These women are usually not entitled to citizenship, though their children are apparently entitled to it because their fathers are Israeli citizens. These are women who succeeded in leaving the world of prostitution, but were caught in a violent relationship with Israeli men, and after their breakup were left with no rights, despite being mothers of children born in Israel.

These women become an especially weakened group, and often have no possibility of leaving the country due to a stay of exit order procedures initiated by the fathers of their children. A woman without sufficient Hebrew language skills and in continuous economic distress has no possibility for a strenuous and complex legal struggle. On the other hand, these women are not willing to leave the country because they believe their children have a much better potential for a good future than they would in their countries of origin. Given their situation, the potential for these women to return to prostitution is relatively high.

The results of the deportation policy of foreign women have led traffickers to stop trafficking women to Israel, leading to a significant reduction in this phenomenon. However, because the demand for sex services has not decreased, pimping in local prostitution has begun flourishing instead. In recent years, we have witnessed a significant increase in pimping and, as a result, massive numbers of immigrant women and women from weakened groups have lapsed into prostitution. Furthermore, we are witnessing a new model of a second generation, the so called transition from victim to Madam. This process-oriented model emphasizes the endlessness and brutal nature of human exploitation.

Women trafficked to other countries of the world, who have not received any treatment or support, are engaged today in similar patterns of exploiting other women. The dilemma is a difficult one. How do we, as activists and members of women's organizations, deal with these women? Should we help them even though they are making a living by exploiting other women, and if so, how do we break this brutal cycle where the woman is simultaneously a victim and a victimizer? Despite the many dilemmas, we continue to provide these women with support, out of the belief that if they have support in their personal struggles, they will have the ability to escape the cycle of violence and abuse.

Characteristics of Immigrant Women in Prostitution

A prominent characteristic of women in prostitution is their life story that abounds with violence directed towards them in childhood. During eight years of work, we learned that sexual abuse and violence experienced in childhood also characterizes immigrant women in prostitution; however, in their case, these are only some of the reasons leading them to sink into prostitution.

The distinctiveness of women who received help within the framework of our project include, among others, not knowing their rights, lack of trust in the establishment, lack of cultural understanding of the

establishment's representatives, and identification with different cultural and social worldviews. Among the social patterns characterizing immigrant women from the FSU, there are differences in the definition of personal autonomy and independence, a tendency for self-blame and different priorities than those in Israel.

1. Lacking knowledge of rights and distrust of the establishment: during 2009, more than 30 immigrant women approached us for help. All of them, whether they are in Israel legally or not, complained about a continuous fear of the establishment and clearly stated that they do not believe in the welfare system, nor in its ability or willingness to help them in their situation. In addition, those who are also mothers suffer from fear that their children will be taken away from their custody due to lack of economic security and their inability to support them.
2. Lack of cultural understanding of the establishment's representatives: welfare departments that do not have culture-sensitive services cannot offer services in the different languages of the women. The difficulty arising from this fact can be demonstrated through a case of a trafficked victim from Uzbekistan, who is still in prostitution to this day. She came to an emergency apartment after being beaten by a client, and asked the counselor in the apartment to help her and give her something for her headache and the bruises on her face. Meanwhile, she went to the refrigerator and took out cold cucumbers and put them on the bruises covering her body, although women are not allowed to open the refrigerator without permission. The counselor was very angry and decided that the woman is making a "beauty mask." An argument ensued between the two women, at the end of which the victim left the apartment, called us and complained that she was not being understood. This is an example of cultural differences. Women from Eastern Europe put cold cucumbers on bruises in order to soothe the pain. Not being familiar with this cultural practice led the counselor to act in a way that caused the woman to distrust her.

Another example of culture and language differences related to a misunderstanding of the word "intimacy." A trafficking victim from Ukraine and a single mother of two joined a project where women have an opportunity to acquire sound parental tools. The woman separated from her partner who used to beat her. During a discussion with a social worker, the latter asked about the intimacy level of the relationship between the woman and the father of her children. The woman did not understand why the social worker was using the word "intimacy," while she repeatedly stated that she was not interested in any kind of relationship with the father. The victim thought the social worker was asking about her sex life. This misunderstanding caused damage to the therapeutic program and threatened the remaining meetings. Only after the woman turned to us and told us about this difficulty was it discovered that the social worker was only interested in the woman's ability to create a close emotional relation. This example demonstrates the complexity of the support and treatment issues among immigrant groups and the difficulties they face even after they gather courage to seek help.

3. Different social values and worldviews: the social values characterizing the cultures of the FSU countries are different not only from those

common in western countries, but they also differ among the countries themselves. Although more than ten years have passed since the main immigration waves from these countries, our encounters with the women make it clear to us that the welfare system and governmental bodies have failed in identifying the different cultural patterns. Following are a number of examples in areas where social norms among the immigrant population differ from those in Israel. Insensitivity on the part of authorities may cause gaps in communication and result in women feeling frustrated and discontinuing their treatment.

Clothing code: the choice of clothes and the manner of wearing them constitute an important aspect of life for immigrant women, one that demands an elegant and meticulous dress in standards differing from those common in Israel. In various talks with colleagues and women from these countries, there is a repeated saying, according to which “even if there is no bread in the house, the woman will buy a pretty dress with her last money.”

Perception of personal autonomy and independence: in the FSU, women grew up with a significant degree of independence, which they acquired as part of a learning process of becoming citizens of the Soviet power. Women received training and acquired professions that are viewed in Israel as well as in the west as male professions, such as bus drivers, construction workers, heavy machine technicians, mechanics and other such professions. These fields of work did not relieve them from their responsibilities for the household. In fact, their double role was defined in advance. They were in charge of both breadwinning and the household, including responsibility over the house budget and family expenses. In Israel, when they cannot be primary breadwinners, these women feel enormous frustration stemming from the fact that they continue to feel responsibility for the family but cannot supply the solutions themselves.

Self-blame: in popular Russian culture, a woman is considered the mother of all sin and the immediate source of every problem. A series of Russian proverbs perpetuate the thought that the woman is to blame for everything, especially for the temptation of men and causing them to deviate from the path of righteousness, as in the popular saying “if the bitch does not wish it, the dog will not jump.” This normative way of thinking, beside the fact that the local culture lacks any open discussion on issues of sex and sexual violence, has caused many immigrant women to blame themselves for the failure of their relationships and for the incidents of violence they experienced. It took a long time for the therapeutic team to understand that, in many cases, what was presented by the women as an incident which they perceive as being blamed for, and seen as not being of importance or not worth to file a complaint about, was indeed a rape by a pimp, client or partner.

Different priorities: citizens of the FSU, born and raised under the Soviet regime, internalized their natural low place in the priorities of the totalitarian society. A Russian proverb says that the letter “YA” meaning “I” is located not by chance at the end of the Russian alphabet, as the individual is always located at the bottom of the priorities. Thus, for example, in contrast to what is accepted in Israel, when immigrant

women from the FSU are asked to talk about themselves, they would first relate to their status, their profession and work – clear social parameters, and only then they would say that they are mothers. The significant changes experienced by citizens with the fall of communism completely changed the collective and individual priorities. The need for personal property made the race for economic welfare into a value of itself, and created a new reality within which there is a need to struggle in every way in order to ensure the family an appropriate level of existence that conveys high economic status.

Many women trafficked to Israel believed they were leaving for a country where they would earn money in foreign currency. This temptation was so great that many of them left their children in the belief that securing the future of their children was their greatest mission, while love can be provided by others, such as grandparents. The older generation bringing up young children was a common, accepted practice in the traditional Russian culture. Ironically, many women discovered that when they returned to their countries of origin, not only had their children been neglected, but also the money they sent for them was spent on other things. The mother-child relationship, which was severely damaged during the mother's absence, is difficult to restore.

All the issues presented above indicate that immigrant women from the FSU, who grew up in a world with completely different priorities and values, face difficulties in their process of absorption into Israel and experience feelings of alienation. Immigration does not change the value system of an individual or her/his ability to interpret social messages and adapt behavioral patterns overnight. Women who immigrated to Israel with their children feel pressured to reduce material gaps, such as buying a house, a car, and other things needed for the welfare of the family. The race for material integration hinders the cultural integration process and leaves women and their families like a foreign plant in a new land.

There is no doubt that cultural sensitivity is one of the central elements that facilitate understanding of the needs of various and different populations. Understanding the women's culture of origin and a deep knowledge of it are necessary in order to provide successful treatment.

Women's Voices

The last part of our article is dedicated to bringing forth the voices of the women about the issues presented here. It is our belief as feminists, social activists and researchers, that making women's voices heard has a double role in the framework of the discourse we are proposing. Putting women's words into writing does not only present their personal and authentic voices, it also proposes change in our behavioral patterns as society. In this choice, there is a call for involving the voices of research participants in work processes, not as objects, but as women with a voice of utmost importance for analysis, understanding, and social coping with the difficulties raised in this research.

As part of the attempt to bring the voices of women, we interviewed seven immigrant women in prostitution – today or in the past – and one social worker working at a therapeutic center for women in prostitution. All the women, ranging in ages from 30 to 47 years, came to Israel during 1995 – 2000 from the FSU. From the many different issues they raised, we include the following:

The absorption process: most of the women interviewed for this article came to Israel legally according to the law of return. The dominant experience in their lives is loneliness and uncertainty. The yearning for control was expressed in a desperate attempt at acquiring the new language and necessary information for integration; a yearning that all of the interviewed women described as being a repeatedly shattering experience.

Already during her learning at the Ulpan (school for intensive study of Hebrew), A. says that she began to cope with many fears, the biggest one being her uncertainty about the future. A. emphasizes that she sought out apparently simple information – how to search for a job and who can help her, but she failed. She describes the indifference of authorities and relates that she was unable to ask questions and did not receive any comprehensive explanation regarding her rights. Similar to A., M. also needed simple information and support in searching for a job and preparing her resume. The two women did not know about welfare services and were left alone and lonely in their efforts to support their children before they sank into prostitution.

Non-familiarity with institutions and welfare services: a central part of the personal narrative of deterioration as described by the women themselves is the failure to decipher the new and unfamiliar social codes, as well as understanding the absorption procedure in a new country. “In a foreign country, no matter what they say, there is no such thing that people will help,” V. told us. Ten years after she immigrated, V. is deep in prostitution and drugs, and she emphasizes that from the first moment of her arrival, the country turned its back on her.

A. relates how she lives alone with her daughter, who suffers from chronic medical conditions. She had to call an ambulance on numerous occasions and was repeatedly charged with high amounts she could not pay, only because representatives of the medical institute did not explain to her that she was supposed to fill out a form and submit it in order to get her money back. In the FSU, using the services of an ambulance does not cost anything and does not require completing forms. A. assumed it is the same in Israel.

M. describes the frustration and feelings of loneliness she experienced when she decided to separate from her husband because of their strenuous relationship. She did not know to whom she could turn, what organizations dealt with these issues, or how she could proceed with the process. The common experience of these two women is the feeling of utter loneliness in a country where authorities do not lend a helping hand. Another woman, (I.) had signed many checks for her partner who, contrary to his promises, deposited them in order to cover his own debts, leaving her in great debt and exposed to threats from confiscation companies. At that stage, she relates, when all her efforts at obtaining support from the welfare authorities had failed, the path to prostitution was fast.

New language: most of the women emphasized that it took time to acquire control over the Hebrew language at a level that enabled them a certain degree of integration into society. Some of them noted that there is a shortage of help or information in Russian that would have greatly improved their ability to decipher the new reality and develop coping strategies.

V. told us that although during her main period of downturn, she was in contact with a number of organizations in Israel that tried to help her. Her yearning to understand what was being said led her to being drawn to anyone approaching her in Russian, even if he was trying to get her to prostitute her body. His words, in her native language, seemed more convincing than words in the new and foreign language. The turning point in V's life, from which she was able to begin her rehabilitation process occurred not by chance, but only after a number of years of prostitution and suffering, when she gathered enough courage and turned to the police. She was received by a Russian-speaking team, who called for representatives who provide help for women in Russian. This was the first time V. cooperated with the authorities and began her rehabilitation process.

Cultural gap: from an interview with a social worker from "Women's Horizon," a therapeutic center for women rehabilitating from prostitution in Haifa and specializing in treatment of women from East Europe, we learned the effects of significant differences in cultural background on the absorption process in Israel, as well as about their route into prostitution. As already mentioned, in many Soviet families, it was common that a child grows up with her/his grandparents and that parents do not play the dominant role in children's upbringing. This social structure had certain features, among them the absence of emotional communication channels with children. Children were perceived as a kind of human asset that needs to be clothed and educated. However, emotional aspects were not included in the common parental pattern. Besides being in a new country and sinking into prostitution, there are two problematic implications of this background on immigrant women:

- At times of crisis, women's response was characterized by two extremes: on the one hand, temptation to trust anyone who might seem – even for a moment – to care about them and their needs, or promising love these women lacked in their childhood. On the other hand, in a state of victimization and objectification, women identify similarity to a known pattern and believe that making them an object of economic worth is acceptable.
- The women truly believed that material needs of their child are superior to her/his emotional needs. Therefore, they take the "no-choice" step of prostitution that they hoped would promise certain material welfare. The social worker interviewed emphasized that in all her sessions with women in prostitution, they noted that at least in the first stages it was clear to them that the emotional and psychological damage to their children of being exposed to their mother's prostitution seemed to be less than the damage caused by poverty or material lack.

Exposure to violence and rape as part of the personal background: in a recent research study on women in prostitution published in Israel, Anat Gur¹⁴ demonstrated that most women in prostitution had suffered in the past

from sexual violence. In addition to the common reasons for immigrant women entering prostitution such as poverty, social, and cultural differences, we also discovered, through our own work in the project and through interviews with the women, that most immigrant women in prostitution had experienced violence and sexual abuse, most often rape, in their past. Of course, it should not be assumed that in every case where a woman suffers childhood sexual violence it means she would enter prostitution, but indeed it can be said that many women in prostitution had suffered sexual violence in their past. A. was raped by her boyfriend at the age of 15, and in the absence of family support, she never told anyone about her trauma. To the social worker's question of why she had never told anyone in Israel, A. responded "because nobody had asked." M. was raped by a group of teenagers at the age of 15. V. was raped by her husband at the age of 18.

The three women, like other interviewees, completely repressed and denied their traumas until the beginning of a rehabilitation process they are undergoing now in Israel. Both from the social worker as well as from the women interviewed, it becomes clear that in 100% of the cases, the women experienced physical violence and public humiliation in their families. All women indicated that they never attributed any importance to this nor did they try to obtain treatment, and most of them blame themselves for being in a violent environment.

Potential for Prostitution: the women are victims of sophisticated pimps, who know how to recognize the personal and emotional patterns indicating in their language "which woman can be a good whore." The first enticement for prostitution is exerted on those women who convey being emotionally neglected in childhood, those who face difficulties in integration into the new society, and those who as they say "do not take their dirty laundry out" and tend not to report.

S. related that she was not willing to talk to anybody about her difficulties, not even to her close friends. Later on in her life, she was not willing to talk about her husband's violence towards her and continued to believe that if she kept silent and worked to improve their economic situation, things would get better.

M. told us that she arrived in Israel thanks to her Jewish husband. His parents kept reminding her of this fact and made it clear that without their support she would find herself deported. Thus M. found herself in a situation where she could not get divorced for fear that she would be deported and separated from her children, and her sinking into prostitution began when somebody used her fears.

Hope for better times: despite the difficult situations of the women interviewed for this research, and in spite of the complex and unsuccessful absorption processes, most of them are determined to stay in Israel because they feel a sense of belonging to the country and hope to succeed in building a better life in the future.

I. and A. noted that receiving help in the Russian language was a turning point that helped them begin a sound absorption process, where they learned their rights and began to trust the authorities. More importantly, they were able to express themselves with confidence, were being understood and felt supported in their efforts to act for their own benefit and that of their families.

Most of the women emphasized that they recognized the necessity of building a new life in Israel. They share a background story whereby they came to Israel out of a belief that life would be better here than in their country of origin. They still feel that it is worth trying again because, potentially, this is a better place for them. Their longing to belong and shatter the feeling of alienation enables them today to integrate into therapeutic groups, with the hope that their trust in the system will not fail them this time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The winding journey of saving women from prostitution has not come to an end. The complex integration into a new culture, coupled with poverty and social and economic crisis in the country of origin, have led to a situation of degrading abuse of the women as they immigrated to Israel. The cultural gap created is continuous and difficult to overcome and does not end with the immigration process. This research has focused on identification of immigrant women caught in prostitution, with the intent of focusing on the weak components of the immigration process. Familiarity with these weaknesses and comprehensive treatment of them will decrease the numbers of women caught in this situation.

Prostitution is a social phenomenon with various different aspects that influence the lives of women in general, and immigrant women in particular. We chose to focus on describing our work with women in prostitution and integrating their voices into this discourse. We touched on issues of cultural and social differences and their meaning in the lives of immigrant women in Israel, and we demonstrated how the unwillingness and inability of social services and welfare institutions to understand the immigrant population causes direct and often irreversible damage to the process of absorption and integration.

We believe that the issues touched upon here, as well as the insights we presented regarding cultural sensitivity, constitute contents that should be integrated into workshops at schools and lectures to representatives and staff members of social and welfare departments. We want to pass the experience and knowledge we have gained to every place where genuine public discussion can take place, with the aim of changing the social patterns that perpetuate prostitution. Following are a number of recommendations for practical actions intended to change the reality described in this article:

1. The authorities should examine the different and unique needs of immigrant women, with sensitivity for the specific culture of each woman. A support structure should be designed for bridging gaps, with special focus on workshops for parents in situations of immigration. All activity and explanations should be available in the languages of the immigrants' countries of origins.
2. Groups for support, empowerment, assertiveness and acquisition of life-skills should be provided for immigrant women. The groups should be facilitated in participants' mother tongue. Participating in a group where one is among equals and one's voice is understood

- enables an experience of belonging and coping better with reality outside of the group.
3. Recognizing the prevalent stereotype in western society and particularly in Israeli society, according to which Russian women are “easy and promiscuous,” demands appropriate coping with its implications. Immigrants from the FSU are entitled to receive explanations regarding laws on sexual harassment, rights in the workplace and legal procedures.
 4. Priority in departments of social work should be given to students with different mother tongues familiar with the cultural background of various immigrant populations. Special priority should be given to students who immigrated at an older age, who can help in the integration process of new immigrants.
 5. Trainings should be held for staff personnel from welfare departments, social services and other public bodies on immigration characteristics and the cultural patterns of women and men immigrating to Israel.
 6. Trainings should be held for staff personnel from welfare departments, social services and other public bodies on prostitution, its sources and root causes, the scope of the phenomenon and the different and common characteristics of women in prostitution. Workshop participants should be empowered to act as change agents who fight against the perception whereby women in prostitution have become “invisible women” in society not entitled to professional help because of their own “choice.”
 7. Welfare authorities should help the new families of women trafficked to Israel in order to help their children and prevent the phenomenon of second generation. The damages of the transition from the family nucleus to a foster family need to be minimized, and families whose origin is the FSU should be encouraged to join the circle of foster families. This step will facilitate the integration of children into families with similar cultural background and language.
 8. Budgets should be developed and allocated to support groups for women rehabilitating from prostitution, especially support groups for the acquisition of parenting skills. These groups should deal with the unique aspects of the cultures of origin and the special needs based on belonging to specific cultures.
 9. The National Insurance Institute has to recognize the right of women with no legal status in Israel to receive child support allocations for their children who are citizens of Israel.
 10. Support groups need to be made accessible and publicized in the media in the Russian language, including details of the contents and available services.

These recommendations can significantly contribute not only to improving the lives of many women, but also to the development of accessible, culture-sensitive services for different communities in our society.

Our success and achievements in the fight against trafficking in women have shown that it is possible to make real change in women's lives, but also that it is difficult to make change in the whole society. The use of women's bodies and the violence against them [us] are still common characteristics of the society we live in, and the situation of many women in Israeli society is difficult. But is this question only relevant to certain women? From our perspective, we see a much more intricate and complex picture; in coping with prostitution, we identify a common issue for all women and men. Only a complete eradication of the phenomenon can change society's perceptions of women and, accordingly, lead to significant reduction in violence. Our place as women, whatever our role or occupation, is closely connected to learning and understanding the violence against women and knowing how terrible this situation is. The very existence of violence against women in one form or another affects all of our lives, directly or indirectly. Only a society that knows how to listen to the other in different languages can be a containing and patient society, and can develop to include multiculturalism where women can live with a sense of liberty.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Adva Shai (editing) and Khulud Khamis (translation into English) for their invaluable contribution.
2. Levenkron, Naomi and Dahan Yossi. *A Woman Passed to Trafficker – Trafficking in Women in Israel*. Tel Aviv: Top Print, 2003.
3. Chaikin, Rita. "Fighting against Trafficking in Women in the North of Israel" Pp. p. 201-216. In K. Beeks & D. Amir (Eds.) *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*. Oxford, UK: Lexington Books, 2006.
4. We acknowledge the efforts of the Special Investigation Team in the Special Intelligence Unit for Organized Crimes Investigations, Tel-Aviv District.
5. Sulaimonova, Saltanat. "Trafficking in Women from the Former Soviet Union for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation." Pp. 61-75. In K. Beeks & D. Amir (Eds.) *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006.
6. Lokshin, Michael and Popkin, M. Barry. "Emerging Underclass in Russia: Income Dynamics, 1992–1996." Pp.803–829. *Journal of Economic Development and Cultural Change* 47 (4). 1999.
7. Khodyreva, Natalia. *Modern Discussions on Prostitution: A Gender Approach*. St. Petersburg: Altia Publishing, 2006. (In Russian).
8. Vandenberg, Martina. *Trafficking of Women to Israel and Forced Prostitution*. Jerusalem: A report for the Israel Women's Network, 1997.
9. "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000: Trafficking in Persons Report" (TIP) US Department of State. (2000) <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/>

10. Amnesty International Israeli Section. Report on Trafficking in Women. Tel-Aviv, 2000.

11. Heller, Ella. Findings of Public Opinion Poll on Trafficking in Women in Israel: Public Awareness and Perceptions on the Phenomenon and Perception of the Connection between Trafficking in Women and Violations of Human Rights. Parliamentary Investigation Committee on Trafficking in Women. Jerusalem: the Knesset, Center for Research and Information, 2003. (In Hebrew).
<http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/doc.asp?doc=m00693&type=pdf>

12. Buman, Masha and Solomonick, Sonia. (2009). A Silent Voice in Israeli Feminist Polyphony. Unpublished paper.

13. Tselnik, Pauline. At-Risk and Distressed Immigrant Girls. Report written for Elem, 1999. <http://www.shatil.org.il/sites/noar-oleh/library/1234871264>

14. Gur, Anat. *Women Abandoned*. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House Ltd, 2008. (In Hebrew).