



The Swan Groups

An evaluation of the Swan
groups with a focus on the
participant experience.

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PREFACE TO THE SWAN GROUP REPORT

On July 1st 1999 prostitution was decriminalized in Denmark. This meant that it no longer was an offense to sell sexual services. For the 500 years previous to this enforcement, it had been possible to punish those who sold sexual services. Any woman who lived on an income from prostitution was considered destitute and could face up to one year in prison.

There has never existed consequences for those who request for or pay for prostitution.

Since 1999, all income from prostitution has been dealt with between the individual selling the sexual services (who must be over the age of 18) and the Danish tax authorities.

IN THE NORDIC REGION, PROSTITUTION IS DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

"Prostitution exists when at least two parties respectively purchase and sell sexual services against (usually) a financial compensation. This compensation is a prerequisite for the sexual service to take place."

Prostitution is considered a social problem in Denmark.

Prostitution is not viewed as a vocation in Denmark.

The number of people working in prostitution in Denmark is currently estimated at approximately 3,200 people.

Approximately half of all women in prostitution in Denmark are foreigners.

Street prostitution exists primarily in the Copenhagen area. Approximately 20% of all prostitution takes place on the streets and almost exclusively carried out by foreign women. The few Danish women who continue to work in street prostitution in Aarhus, Odense and Copenhagen are addicted to drugs.

All remaining prostitution takes place at brothels, via escort services and at strip bars in Copenhagen.

Only a small percentage of men sell prostitution and this prostitution is, for the most part, aimed at other men.

A Danish study from 2005 showed that 14% (which amounts to about 300,000 of the Danish male population) purchase prostitution and that 67% of those men who purchase sexual services are in a relationship with a woman.

Only 8% of those who purchase sexual favors do this because they feel that this is their only means to sex.

Since it is not illegal to buy prostitution, 60% of the men from the study say that they bought prostitution because it was possible to do so.



Since 1999, it has been illegal to purchase sexual services from anyone under the age of 18 in Denmark.

You can be punished for purchasing sexual services from a victim of trafficking.

Since 1999, it has been illegal to purchase sexual services from another person in Sweden, and since 2009, in Norway and Island

Since 2005, Finland has criminalized the sale of sexual services from victims of trafficking.

One of the promises made by the current Danish government before the elections in 2011 was to follow the model of the rest of the Nordic region to criminalize prostitution.

Despite earlier promises, in the fall of 2012 the government decided that Denmark, as the only remaining Nordic country still allowing the purchase of sexual service, would maintain the right of purchase of sexual service from other people.

Dorit Otzen
Project Leader
The Swan Groups

INTRODUCTION

This report presents an evaluation of the Swan Groups with a focus on the participant experience. Swan groups support women who either wish to leave prostitution or have already left prostitution and therefore now looking for support in enabling them to move on in their lives. By making an evaluation from the participant perspective, it is possible to research what is achieved from the efforts that are put in at the Swan Groups. The evaluation also provides insight into which intended and unintended consequences there are for the target group as well as for their partners. By focusing on an evaluation of the Swan groups from the participant perspective, has in turn provided insight into opportunities as well as challenges for Swan groups in the future.

CONCLUSION

The following analysis unfolds the effects of participating in a Swan group. It also unfolds the outcomes of participation in a Swan group in terms of the target group as well as for their partners.

By focusing on an evaluation from the participant perspective, it provides an insight into the opportunities as well as the challenges with regard to the continued development of the Swan groups.

Results show that the Swan groups have had an overall positive effect on the women who wish to leave or have already left prostitution, and are looking for support in moving on in their lives.

By getting in touch with a Swan group, women feel that they are being heard, seen and understood in relation to their experiences of working in prostitution. Women feel that they are supported throughout the difficult process of having decided to live a life without prostitution as well as feel supported in standing by this decision in the longer term.

From the women's perspective who participated in the Swan group, experience feeling led and guided as they start to make sense and understand the various situations and experiences that they have lived through. The women become more self-aware than they have ever experienced before and because of this, it allows them to understand themselves better outside the world of prostitution. The self-awareness also develops the women's personal resources and readiness to complete an education, find work, or in any other means get on the right track. Each case is considered with their individual capabilities in mind. Their closest relationships become strengthened and are rebuilt and the women feel better overall. The women will only continue to prosper through this process.

THE SWAN GROUPS MAIN GOAL is to support women in leaving prostitution and in getting on with their lives. The data collected cannot prove that all women who receive support through a Swan group in fact leave prostitution. However, as per employees at the Swan groups, the women in question do continue on the path of leaving prostitution. This data testifies that with



respect to the goal and intention of the Swan groups for the future of the women, the Swan Groups goals are met. In their different ways and at their different paces, the women do move on in their lives. This has been a great success.

The women describe themselves as feeling healthy and view life in a new light. Their daily life, with regards to their personal relationships and their work, all function better. In terms of the situation of their children, this is especially seen as a huge positive outcome of their progress. If these women are unable to care for their children and be emotionally stable, the children will be left without care and feel psychologically and socially overwhelmed. This could lead to a situation where they too will need help and support in managing life.

GETTING BACK INTO WORK or education are other positive outcomes of partaking in a Swan Group. By getting clarification regarding employment, the women will be able to contribute to society, have a normal income, and receive early retirement or another form of income. This will enable them to support their children and themselves.

IN TERMS OF THE SITUATION for the partners of the women involved in a Swan group, it has become clear, that as the women continue to progress, there is a need for support for their partners. Men ask for support and for support for their partner. At the Swan Groups there has been a great deal of work put in to meeting this need. This demonstrates that there is a basis for examining how and in what ways these men can receive the support and help needed so that they can be there for their partners. In connection with this, it would be equally necessary to ensure that all others affected, receive the required help and support (such as children, siblings or other closely related persons).

THE MENTOR ROLE is central at the Swan Groups. Until today, those that have established Swan Groups function as mentors in all our various groups. They have a unique and successful purpose, but one that cannot persist. To avoid dependency on these people, we would benefit from a new mentor recruitment plan. Employees at Swan Groups are currently in the process of writing up this new plan, which is to establish a mentor education. The target group for this mentor role is women who have participated in a Swan Group and who have come so far in their process, that they now can function as mentors.

In general, the women do not ask for any further support after having completed their time in one or several Swan Groups. But at the same time, they feel comforted by the fact that they can phone a mentor at any time if they feel the need to. Some experience a type of dependency on having contact with the Swan Groups. The question is, whether we will continue to have the resources that are needed to meet this need or if we will need to consider that the "old Swan Group women's" needs must be met in another way.

Our data does not include interviews with women who have left Swan Groups before completing the full "Swan Group course". Such interviews could have led to a variation in the results.

Seen from a participant perspective, the Swan Groups appear as an organization that meets a particular target group with particular needs in relation to their desire to leave prostitution and move on in their lives.

The women benefit from taking part in a support group under the protection of the Swan Groups in many different ways.

Moreover, the work done at Swan Groups has the potential to develop both in relation to the women's partners / those affected and for the Swan Groups sustainability and future mentors.

The report will first take you through a history to the Swan Groups, the methods of working, as well as the key concepts. Secondly, the analytical points from the interviews are unfolded under the various topics, which all are part of the analysis.

METHOD

The evaluation is carried out using qualitative data collection methods. There has initially been a lot of information gathered and meetings held with the Swan Groups personnel. More extensively, interviews have been held with the project leader Dorit Otzen. Also, several semi-structured interviews have been held with a mentor and the psychologist. These have been held with the intention of understanding good working methods, whilst gaining an understanding of women in prostitution and to get concrete understanding for organizing group sessions for women. Semi-structured interviews have been done with in total six previous and /or current participants of Swan Groups. These interviews are used to get an insight into the women's experiences of taking part in one or several Swan Groups. It is also used to get a personal assessment of the outcomes of completing a full Swan Group course. Furthermore, interviews have been held with two men both who are partners of women who are / have participated in a Swan Group. These interviews are used to get an insight into men's experience of being a partner of a woman who has been in prostitution and also who has been or is currently participating in a Swan Group.

Furthermore material has been gathered about the history of the Swan Groups and its establishment. This has been collected particularly with the support of "The Swan Groups – a collection of experiences." (2008) prepared by the consultant Lenie Persson.

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THE HISTORY TO THE SWAN GROUPS

In the fall of 2004, Reden received a number of inquiries from both women and men working in the escort and brothel industry in Copenhagen. The questions and requests predominantly were concerned with how to manage a life in prostitution. Over the last 25 years, Reden has become known as a leading actor with solid understanding for the field of prostitution. Publicly, Reden is equally well known for supporting the idea that people who work in prostitution experience a host of serious symptoms. These symptoms reveal a serious concern for the individual's abilities to manage their lives. Had there been any other option, only the fewest women would have chosen prostitution as a means for covering living expenses.

The Information and Communication Center for socially vulnerable people (today known as the Social Services) published a report in 2004 with an account of the existing information about prostitution in Denmark. The report builds on interviews with 123 women from the Danish brothel environment and concludes, among other things, that the women interviewed request anonymous psychological advice as well as support with establishing a life without prostitution. Reden's main goal is to focus on the most vulnerable individuals working in prostitution; namely those women who work on the streets and are drug addicted. The fact that inquiries are made to Reden, underlines and supports the view that women who represent other groups related to prostitution do not have any other places to turn to when looking for support.

One of the inquiries made was from a woman who had worked in prostitution who was very persistent about her particular query. She contacted the center several times and insisted that Reden was the one that took the initiative to start a process of creating a means for women, in need of support in standing firm in their decision to leave prostitution. The woman concerned ex-

- 1. There has been a request to also interview women who for any variety of reasons have not completed the full Swan Group course. This would have provided an insight into reasons for dropping out. It has however not been possible to get interviews arranged with women who have dropped out of a Swan Group course and therefore not completed a full course. As per employees at Swan Groups only few women actually drop out of a course. If there is any drop out, it will happen at the start of a course and usually due to a bad psychological condition. There has however not been any data compiled on the total number of drop outs or types of drop out from a Swan Group course.*
- 2. There was a desire to interview children (young adults) of one of more of the women in order to get an insight into their experiences of being a child of a mother who has taken part in Swan Groups. This has however not been possible.*

plained that, in conjunction with her recent decision to leave prostitution, she felt confronted with a list of crucial questions related to her self-awareness as well as in terms of getting clarity around having lived a life in prostitution.

In her inquiry, the woman clearly stated that even before leaving prostitution, she was certain that she would be unable to leave prostitution on her own and would need support underway. She had at first sought help from her practicing doctor, who referred her to a psychologist. However, the woman didn't feel that the support provided was what she needed. Redens social support center later offered their support, but again this did not provide the support that she felt she needed. Through a discussion she held with the head of Reden and their social workers, a decision was made to establish support groups for woman with similar needs.

In terms of the woman's previous life experiences, it was evident that there was a need for support from a psychologist who would be able to support women in managing the psychological aspects they face as they leave prostitution.

At the end of 2005, Reden received a small donation that was used to start the first support group with a psychologist as facilitator. For the initial application for financial support, Reden applied through the Social Ministry, which was successful. The ministry later also granted support for 2006. For 2007 and for the two years that followed, the support groups have been able to continue to run with the financial support received from private funds and donations. Between the years 2009 – 2012 Swan Groups have received support via SATS-funds and actively continue running the support groups from private donations.

Until today, a total of 42 women have been through a full course (that is, 7 weeks of a support group). Some women have participated in more than one group. 25 women have participated in a single course, 5 women have participated in a total of two courses, 11 women have participated in three courses and one woman participated in four courses.

CONCEPT

A Swan Group is a group of eight women lead by a psychologist. All eight women have made the decision to leave prostitution. The goal of the Swan Group is to support these women either in helping them to stand by their decision to leave prostitution, or in supporting them in their lives after having left prostitution. At the same time the support workers work towards developing a model that meets each participant's needs and wishes. The support workers are aware of that fact that each woman, although they all have come from the same life situation in the sense that they all have worked in prostitution, has a unique story. Each woman, with her own stories, family background and family situations and coping mechanisms (in relation to their ambitions about leaving and not returning to prostitution) will be different. Because of this, each woman is regarded and cared for as an individual and



cared for as a part of a group. Each group will be unique because of the individuals that make up that group.

The psychologist at the Swan Groups has many of years' experience working with the complications of sexual assault and women in prostitution. She has held the therapist role for the Swan Groups since 2008. The Swan Groups have also been working with the same mentor almost since the very start.

The mentor has two roles. Firstly, as contact person for all participants between the weekly Swan Group sessions and secondly, meets each participant prior to starting a course.

The mentor has personal experience from the brothel, escort and prostitution world and therefore functions as a role model for the participants. Last but not least, the mentor manages the Swan Group support line.

Today the mentor is educated as a cognitive therapist and has several years' experience of working with psychiatric patients.

The working relationship between the psychologist and the mentor is a central element for how the Swan Groups work. Planning, implementation, debriefing and follow-up for each Swan Group takes place in close working relationship between the psychologist, mentor and project leader. The Swan Groups project leader works as a cooperating partner for the individual groups, and as a whole, works on the operations and development of the Swan Groups.

During the actual Swan Groups session it is the psychologist who sets the agenda and sets the therapeutic framework of the sessions. The mentor would also very much be involved in the therapeutic part of the sessions.

Firstly, the mentor shares her own experiences from prostitution. Because of their mentor role they have the ability to say "as they feel". The psychologist, who uses the mentor's knowledge to set the therapeutic framework for the group, collects all information.

Aside from this, the mentor also has the role as an observer and uses at the following questions in her observation: What happens to the women as they go through the course? Is there anyone who they can see is upset and requires a break? What has happened throughout the session that will be significant for the following session? Etc.

The fundamental factual information documented about prostitution, has supported the establishment of the Swan Group concept. This information encompasses Reden's experiences in the field, inspirations gathered from educational trips to Israel and SAGE in San Francisco, as well as its experiences of working with the remaining Nordic Region. Continuously, new knowledge through new experience is collected as well as new ideas.

Duration

A full Swan Group course stretches over 17 weeks where participants meet weekly for a group session for a 2.5 hour period. An intensive day session is also part of every course. The weekly meetings are held in Redens meeting room in Østerbro. Participants are not asked to pay to take part in a course and they will need to plan their work and personal lives around the sessions in order to participate in the full course.

Enrollment

Participants are enrolled in a number of different ways. An article about the Swan Groups has at several occasions been published in the magazine *Psykolog Nyt*. Reden regularly publishes relevant news about their aims and achievements. Experiences from previous participants has also, over time, spread to others who may be interested in joining, and thereby led to new members enrolling. Others have contacted Reden after reading an advertisement in the free magazine *Urban*. Mentors have received a number of enquiries from various caseworkers from various municipalities and finally, Redens personnel and the Prostitution Information Center also refers participants.

The Swan Groups team has also set up meetings for caseworkers and other interested parties after working hours.

The project leader has been active in establishing the Swan Group in Bergen and in Reykavik. Aside from this, the project leader also trained healthcare workers, sexologists and other students in Denmark and the other Nordic countries.

Visitation and Target Group

A team at Swan Group work together during the enrollment phase.

In order to be accepted as a participant, the woman must have a desire to leave or have already left prostitution. She must also speak Danish and must not be taking any drugs. There will also be an assessment of the woman's ability to participate in a Swan Group.

The structure of a group session

The 17 group sessions that are part of a course are structured as follows:

- A presentation of the new member (if relevant)

3. *SAGE Standing Against Global Exploitation*, is an NGO that deals with child and adult survivors of exploitation and sexual abuse. They provide support without any risk of further trauma.



- Practical information
- Each participant to provide a “sum up” of any follow up made since the previous week
- A discussion and reflection of various topics in relation to each participant’s personal stories.
- Training given on a topic relevant for participants needs.
- Discussion and reflection about homework from the previous week. Homework assignments are aligned with the individual’s personal stories in mind.
- A final round where each individual explains what new knowledge they will take with them home from the day’s session

Topics and Areas of Work

From looking at Swan Group sessions held to date there is a list of topics that come again and again as the women share their personal stories.

These are the areas that are dealt with:

- Clarification and understanding for the underlying individual and shared factors that makes leaving prostitution and standing by the decision of leaving prostitution difficult for participants.
- To look at each participant’s behavioral patterns during the course, by alleviating any behavior linked with prostitution.
- To get a clarification for each participants resources and competences.
- To get clarification in relation to their economic situation, opportunities for work, opportunities for studying (including the possibility of rehabilitation), and their physical and mental condition.
- Clarification and development of one identity and self-confidence.
- To develop means for setting up boundaries in their lives.
- Training in dealing with complicated or embarrassing feelings.
- Development for relationship building and network building
- Sexuality and eroticism

THE PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCES OF THE SWAN GROUPS

In this section an evaluation is presented with a focus on participant experience. Women who have experienced partaking in a Swan Group voice their opinions. Any patterns and consistency that came about from the analysis are presented and highlighted thematically. The data has been collected through interviews with six women of whom two of their partners also have participated. All information is anonymous and the participants' are cited with fake names.

To be seen, heard and understood

As the women interviewed describe their life situation in relation to having worked in prostitution and made the decision to leave prostitution, they speak from a very particular position because of their participation in a Swan Group. Women feel that as they come in contact with the Swan Groups they are, for the first time, met with an understanding for who they are and where they have come from. For most women the decision to leave prostitution has been a long journey of meetings with social workers, confrontations with different forms of therapeutic help at private practicing psychologists and psychiatrists. The woman below provides her experience from having gone to a psychologist:

“Well, she was very sweet, and it was alright to see her, but she didn’t have very much life experience and didn’t know anything about the world of prostitution. Because of this, she referred me on to the Swan Groups after she had seen an advertisement in a magazine.” (Mette)

The experience Mette had is not a unique case. Several other women can relate to her story. She goes on to say that at the very first meeting held with the Swan Groups she felt reciprocity. Suddenly there was someone that was like her and someone who could understand her, and vice-versa. Through having met the mentor it made her feel confident, that the Swan Groups was a place where people know what they are talking about. For this reason, the role of the mentor is extremely important, as it is the contact made with the mentor that creates this feeling of reciprocity. It is through the mentor that the women first start to feel confidence and start feeling being “heard” in the sense of “Here was someone, who also has been in prostitution”, as one woman puts it. Below Mette explains what happened to her as she continued working on herself at the Swan Groups:

“By being in a closed room, a safe place where it is okay to say that you have been in prostitution. This is where I started working on bettering myself” (Mette)

The Swan Groups are seen as a room where one feels safe and without any feeling of accusation. There is agreement on the fact that Swan Groups kick-start the process of dealing with experiences in prostitution. Many women



have, as described above, many times over tried various routes to get support without seeing any positive results.

The women describe the Swan Groups as a real match with their life situation. They have reached a point in their lives where they, for whatever reason, are ready to assess / come to terms with prostitution or leave prostitution, but also feel that is not an easy step to take. More precisely, the women feel that this connection they feel with the Swan Groups comes about because of the therapeutic work in the groups. This work has a natural understanding for the ambivalent feelings they feel when they (often with the help of others) ask for support in leaving prostitution. Just as they explain in the interviews, only the fewest women who come to the Swan Groups are aware of exactly what prostitution has done to them. It is therefore also the fewest people that are 100% aware that prostitution has damaged them and that these damages are linked with their past experiences. To get clarification around this is, in other words, part of the process.

To be understood and accepted for who you are and where you come from is also something that the women experience happens in the groups. In the groups, the women must relate to 7 other women who are in the same situation. It is through listening and being listened to that the participant experiences a so called "aha" moment in relation to their personal development. Many describe how the mutual exchange of experiences, thoughts and feelings is what they profit from the most:

"It gave me such a feeling of caring for other women and participants in their process. Not because you become friends, but it is free therapy to hear someone else talk about something that you are also currently fighting with. So you are sitting on the sideline and getting therapy by listening to the other women. This is surely the most beneficial part of being in a group." (Mette)

Coming from the same situation of working in prostitution, as well as the principle of sharing stories, is here described as a central part for why the groups work. The interaction between a woman and psychologist allows the whole group to reflect on that specific example/topic. Though the women are different it is usually these examples that most women can relate to. All women interviewed without any exception, do however say that, although this is very useful, it is also a difficult part of participating. It is difficult to hear other women's horrifying experiences and for some they feel it can be hard to relate to certain women in the group and even can feel tricked by them. But as one woman recognizes, this is part of the therapy to react in this way to what other women in the group share.

Order in the chaos

It is evident from the interviews that the continuity of being met with understanding at Swan Groups has a direct effect on helping the women set boundaries in their previously hectic lives, to make it less hectic. In other

words, they are able to organize and categorize their living conditions and the life events that have characterized their lives until now. These living conditions and events previously appeared fragmented. One woman explains that through the help that she receives in the continuous weekly sessions, she has experienced one eye opening situation after the other in relation to the damages caused from having worked in prostitution. In part, these eye openers are related to her life experiences and cause her to get an insight into the causalities that are part of her own life. For example, neglect as a child or bad childhood life situations, have been revealed by several women as a reason to seeing prostitution as an acceptable way of life. In other words, in a narrative sense, they are able to discuss having worked in prostitution and having a given moment later chosen a life without prostitution. In the data collection, this appears as a contribution to a less chaotic outlook on life for the individual woman.

The work of making order in the chaos appears different for each individual woman. For most, it is partly about comprehending some life experiences and relationships that have had meaning in their lives. How have I been able to choose a life of prostitution? For most women this process has been about seeing and understanding the symptoms that have led them to react to their lives in prostitution. These symptoms are some that they have now, but that they have not been able to understand. The woman below explains how she was made aware of some of these symptoms that were so serious that she was about to lose her family:

“At that time I was not able to recognize that I had any other problems other than obsessions over cleanliness. I knew that something was wrong and that it wasn’t normal, but I didn’t know that it was linked to (prostitution) that” (Anna)

With support, Anna is able to understand the underlying reasons for her symptoms and therefore able to open her eyes to the damages that prostitution has done to her life. Her need for continually cleaning and tidying are the characteristics of these damages. In the support groups, they work with certain frameworks for understanding these symptoms. This has led Anna to open her eyes and understand herself better and her time spent in prostitution. It has given her the “know-how” to develop and take some important steps in relation to her decision of leaving prostitution and in relation to the most disabling effects of having worked in prostitution.

All the women interviewed, stated that it was central that they reflect on the past. Often, as they try to access some past events, they find it hard to remember when certain events happened in their lives. Because of the narrative framework of the Swan Groups, it gives participants the tools to be able to put events into chronological order, as well as be able to link the various events and thereby understand when and why certain events happened in their lives. These events and incidents are in part related to times they spent in prostitution, as well as traumatic events in their lives. These traumatic events are linked with their stories related to their lives in prostitution.



In most cases a meaningful (although not also easily digestible) story has been told with the help of being part of a Swan Group. In this way the women clarify what has led them, at some point in their lives, to choose prostitution. This makes it possible for them to work with these insights as they unfold the story of their lives.

Who am I?

Namely the forward thinking drive that there is in the narrative aspect by participating in a Swan Group, unfolds itself through the interviews. Surprisingly, work is often times not about making the future better, but about the past. One woman formulates it in this way:

“Over time as the months past, I started to recognize myself. Therefore, it wouldn’t have been so cool (to prostitute oneself). I had lied to myself (...) My way of being has changed, because I have gotten to know myself better” (Stine)

By looking at oneself and working on those things that have happened in the past, Stine has been able to get to know herself better and get the tools to change the inappropriate reactions and actions and make new decisions for herself in the future. It is essential for the women that they know themselves well, they experience an “inner journey of self-knowledge” as one woman put it.

For all involved, this had led to them having to relate to their own needs, which is a new world for most of those involved. Because they explain that they namely have been good at reading the needs of their customers and family members and addressing the demands. What do I need? What do I like? What do I want? This is a question that challenges them very much. Because of these questions, many women, as they work on these questions, become diagnosed with a psychological disorder and /or find themselves in a posttraumatic stress disorder that is plagued by flashbacks and other disabling symptoms which, with only a small exercise of just allowing yourself to choose which cup you would like from the kitchen, gives her an insight that she never has made decisions on her own, but decisions have always been made for her. At this point she feels that it is a difficult task to make a decision without thinking of others opinions first. To be able to express her own opinions and stand by them, she links with that she is psychologically unstable, has low self-worth and low self-confidence.

“I couldn’t understand that I was good enough just as I am.”
(Hanne)

Self-worth and self-confidence is a topic that unfolds itself in most interviews. For most of these women, this allows them to understand what personal resources they have or they need to find in themselves. The future for the women will depend on their ability to answer questions such as “who am I? What are my competences? Hanne describes below her development from

at first finding it very difficult to know what she is good at, to later being able to concretely explain what her needs are.

“In the past I was not able to take a walk on my own and enjoy nature. Now I have a need for doing that alone.” (Hanne)

Just as Hanne, others describe having learnt new things about themselves, which allows them to move forward in life positively and resourcefully. Through this process, the women are able to feel real feelings which are not related to making other people happy, but to feel these feelings for themselves.

Relationships

By focusing on identity, personal needs and resources has a direct effect on the women's relationships to their partners, children and others close to them. Below Anna explains how, while working on improving herself in a Swan Group, it led her to recognize that her relationship with her son was suffering:

“Two months into my course, Alice told her story and suddenly it dawned on me that I have been distant throughout my sons' entire life. I have missed out on his entire childhood. I have provided food and clothes for him and heaps of toys but I have never given myself to him, as I simply never was there. I needed to remove myself. At this point I broke down, entirely. This is also where my self-development started within the Swan Group. And this is also why I had been able to be part of it for so many years, exactly for this reason, that I have not been myself” (Anna)

Anna also explains how her relationship with her son was absent of feelings and closeness and that it was during her self-development in a Swan Group that she became aware that something was wrong. Following many years of working in Swan Groups in which, among other things, she was involved in relationship development, she worked constructively to strengthen the relationship with her son. She has received help in closeness, being there for him and being open with him. She is positive about her relationships with her younger children who were born at the point in her life in which she was in the process of leaving prostitution.

Those women who have a boyfriend/husband work hard to manage not only their personal development (involving huge emotional ups and downs), but also their relationship with their partners. Prostitution comes between them in many different ways. Concretely, the sexual aspect is most challenging because the women, because of their time in prostitution, have no desire for sex. They also do not enjoy sex while their partners do. According to the women, they furthermore take great leaps at various points in their development. These leaps are mostly seen very positively in their homes, but sometimes as being out of line with what is most important in relation to their partner's needs, their children, their economic situation etc. One woman, for example, wanted to tell her children that she had prostituted herself



at one stage in her life, but her husband voted against this as it was not the right time for this to be discussed. Many experience their relationships falling apart, then mending and falling apart again or see a break in their relationship. This situation appears to wear out some of the women but is also seen as inevitable while they work so hard on improving themselves.

The men who are able to see everything from a different perspective, support their partners work in the Swan Groups. They can see the positive development happening to the women whom they are together with and describe this as something wonderful and as something that they support. They feel terrible about the fact that their partners have been working in prostitution and as something they probably will not be able to get to terms with. However, they wish that their partners can come to terms with this. The women's self-development in the Swan Groups has both positive and negative effects on their relationships. Below one man explains his experience of being a partner to a woman who is linked to a Swan Group:

"It takes up a lot of time and effort while she works on improving herself in a Swan Group. It is difficult to stand on the side line and just receive (...) I am not able to play the part of the boyfriend, husband, father, reserve parent, friend and therapist all of a sudden. So much friction and misunderstandings came out of it" (Mikkel)

And then later in the interview:

"It has opened a new world for her, and it is so cool to see it. The fact that she started in a group has been the best of all things that have happened. Since then, things have only gotten better. She understands herself a lot better. Then she can come home and tell me about it and because of this, I can work with her on these things." (Mikkel)

Mikkel plainly states that his girlfriend's process of self-development has on one hand given him a very difficult supportive role to play on the sidelines. This part has many faces, most of which he never signed up for. Self-development does not only happen during the weekly sessions in the Swan Groups, but very much in the daily life. This gives their partners and others close to them a very particular part to play. Mikkel elaborates that he would like to be there for his partner, but he at times feels pushed to the side. This is because it has been all about his girlfriend and her problems that has had all the focus for such a long time and probably will continue to do so. At the same time, he is proud of her and is happy that she is working on improving herself and he can see that she continues to improve. He can also see that her improvement has a direct effect on how their relationship and relationships in the family function and so sees it altogether as a positive gain.

4. A problematic relationship to sex is also an issue for those women who are not in a relationship and they experience this as a barrier to entering a relationship with a man.

Another man, Christian, explains his concerns for his girlfriend in relation to her psychological problems, admissions to hospital, and attempts of suicide. Their problems were at one point so big that it was at one point himself who sought help from the Swan Groups. His girlfriend had reached such a severe breakdown and was unable to see the problems at hand. In other words, at that time, he was not able to see any other solution other than to get his girlfriend to start a goal oriented course directly in relation to her problems of having worked in prostitution. Partners and other relatives can therefore play a central role by contacting the Swan Groups directly as well as being supportive during the course of a Swan Group.

Next of Kin Group

In the summer of 2012, following a request from one of the partners to a Swan woman, we decided to establish a "next of kin" group on a trial basis. This group was led by an external psychologist and project leader. It ran over a period of 5 weeks and was financed by a private donation.

Both of the male informants have experiences in participating in this next of kin group as part of the Swan Groups. Just as the women, they also experienced a great weight off their shoulders for the very first time by being part of a group of people with similar experiences. Christian explains:

"It was nice to take part in a forum with a good cause and where I had a chance to speak. It was very settling to see that there were so many people with the same experience.

What is important for both men, as Christian explains, is that "they could use a network". In relation to being the husband/nearest relative to a woman previously working in prostitution, Mikkel goes more in depth into his needs. To being husband to a woman who is in a situation "where you cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel" and wonders "when have they recovered?", he adds:

"I really could use someone to explain to me what I should do with these feelings and how I should convey these words to my partner. I need tools for getting through the feeling of being somewhat "pushed to the side". Someone, who supports me (...). I could really use the help, a help that is objective different to my family and friends. Also, because I do not know how they feel about (prostitution), and it is of course "tabu". It is also too difficult to manage on your own." (Mikkel)

Mikkel clearly demonstrates a need for help partly to support him in his situation and in part to help his partner. Both men explain that caring so much for their partners as being a heavy load for them and as being very difficult to manage without also themselves suffering from the situation. In other words, we here look at husbands to women previously working in prostitution, who need support and help in order to better be able to be there for their partners.



Rehabilitation and employment

From the interviews, it appears that a long period of both ups and downs hit women both during and after partaking in a Swan Group. Most experience their day-to-day life becoming somewhat easier to manage because of the resources and guidelines they received during the course of a Swan group. Hanne explains:

“I have now put up barriers to stop me from continuing to prostitute myself. I no longer work in that trade although I have been very close to it. (Hanne)”

Hanne elaborates, that had she not gone through therapy, then she would not at all have been able to stop prostituting herself. In fact, it stills feels hard not to. Another woman explains that her life in general has become easier. She is no longer psychologically unwell and is now officially healthy. She has also found meaningful work and functions better socially. She explains that the social aspect may be the most challenging to improve and work on.

For the most part, throughout the course of a Swan group, women find solutions to their situations in relation to finding work, getting into education, receiving early pension and so on. This establishes a long term and stable life situation for the future of each individual woman. Some have, for example, informed that they started or completed an education by having taken part in a Swan Group course. This is because during the course they have been provided support and guidelines for entering the job market. One woman, for example, received early pension, as she was not in a condition to work. All of these cases result in the women finding peace and security. They are then also in a position to care for their children and to continue to look after themselves, so as not to fall back into the same cycle again.

Many explain that they continue to be connected with or have plans to connect with Swan Groups after they have completed a course. They are aware that they can phone a mentor to chat and, in the case that they do fall back into prostitution, they will be able to start a dialogue with Swan Groups and take part in another Swan Group course. One woman says that she is “hooked” and cannot imagine being without Swan Groups. From an overview of how many courses women participate in, for the most part, it continues to be just a single course. Employees at Swan Groups inform that they do not see the majority of the women who participate, again.



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In the autumn of 2011, the women from the Swan Groups explained that the reasons why prostitution was an option for them were:

- Neglect
- Growing up in a dysfunctional family
- Psychological illnesses in the family
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Violence
- Sexual assaults / Incest

The Swan Group is an offer for women who wish to leave prostitution or women who have left prostitution recently or for a longer period of time. The only demands for joining a Swan Group are no substance abuse and that you are able to speak Danish.

Each group process spans over a period of 17 Wednesdays from 5pm to 7.30pm – and is lead by a psychologist.

The Swan Groups have their own meeting places in Østerbro.

Joining a Swan Group is free.

A mentor and a visitor with several years of experience within the prostitution industry are associated with each Swan Group.

CONTACT A MENTOR VIA THE SWAN TELEPHONE

2814 6328

Project Manager Dorit Otzen, 40409425
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CURRENT PILOT PROJECT

The Nany Project

- An offer, which includes pedagogical support in the home, with an experienced family therapist.
- The Nany project is for women in the Swan Group that need more tools to deal with the role as educator.