

Workshop

“The Science, Policy and Law of Addictive Substances: Licit and Illicit Strategies in the Context of Tobacco”

Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences
Stanford, CA
November 15, 2002

Prostitution and Sexual Trafficking

Report by Paul J. Zak

The Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University graciously hosted a one-day meeting on sexual trafficking and prostitution organized by the Gruter Institute. The meeting brought together researchers with an interest in this topic from a variety of fields in order to initiate a new research program. In attendance were Margaret Gruter, Gruter Institute Executive Director; Mark Turner, CASBS Associate Director; Monika Gruter Morhenn, Gruter Institute Associate Director; David Buss, Evolutionary Psychologist, University of Texas; Ruth Jones, Professor Law, McGeorge School of Law; Per Aage Brandt, CASBS Fellow; Dr. Melissa Farley, President of the Prostitution Research and Education Project (San Francisco); Paul J. Zak, Economics Professor, Claremont Graduate University; Francis Steen, Professor of Communication Studies, UCLA; Camelia Mesrobian, Assistant District Attorney, San Bernardino County (CA); June Carbone, Professor of Law, Santa Clara University. The meeting focused on the multiple aspects of sexual trafficking and prostitution, including: the underlying physiological and psychological causes; health issues, especially drug use and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases; the role of childhood sexual abuse/rape; changes in law to reduce prostitution internationally; the evolved psychology of "johns"; the impact that environmental factors, for example, strip clubs and sex shops have at inducing prostitution; identifying at-risk entrants and effective exit strategies; and the meaning of the early age of entry into prostitution (14 years old).

The meeting was quite lively given the many different perspectives represented. All those in attendance agreed that the intersection of biology, law, and economics make the study of sexual trafficking and prostitution an ideal interdisciplinary collaboration for Gruter Institute research fellows and CASBS fellows.

This meeting will be followed up by the definition of a research project, identification of those who will be involved, the writing of a grant to fund the research, and the execution of the research itself. Publications are expected to include law review articles as well as scholarly publications in psychology and economics. When complete, this research expects to characterize why (primarily) women enter prostitution, how they and their "johns" respond to laws restricting prostitution, and how biologically-informed legal changes can reduce both the supply and demand for illicit sexual activity.