

Escaping prostitution

An 18-year-old's spiral into the sex business and her steep climb out

By Petr Svab

She thought she was about to die. Lying on the hotel room floor, she was red and swollen from an hour-long beating, and the man responsible was now strangling her. "God, please let me live through this," she pleaded. "And I promise I won't be a prostitute anymore."

She broke her promise.

Like thousands of Americans, Lacy (not her real name) had sunk into the cesspool of the sex industry.

Growing up

Lacy grew up in a high-income family on the West Coast of the US. She was a bright girl, but with a short attention span. Her first problems emerged in high school when she struggled with anxiety and started skipping school a lot.

Her parents thought a boarding school for youth with special needs might help. But she felt they were sending her away. Rebellious, she found a suitable bad-boy boyfriend and he introduced her to a "bad crowd", including drug dealers and prostitutes.

Her impulsive and thrill-seeking nature took over. Her boyfriend convinced her to try petty thievery, and she started smoking marijuana and occasionally took ecstasy. With little self-esteem, she wanted to prove her worth to the crowd.

Prostitution

One summer night in 2009, she made her way to the notorious part of town and, conspicuously, started to walk around. Two men pulled over, and she got in the car. A while later, they dropped her

off with \$100. She was 18.

"I felt dirty," she said.

But there was \$100 in her hand, and she also felt like a "badass" – what her friends would approve of. So she did it again, and again.

She stopped for a while when she landed an administrative job at a law firm. But the temptation of quick money always lingered in her mind. She landed a side job as a stripper and, from time to time, exchanged sex for money.

Over the next year, she developed bipolar disorder, a condition marked by bouts of depression and mania, and lost her job.

Shortly after, she met her first pimp. He showed her how to get clients on the internet and took her to Las Vegas to "work".

One of her clients turned out to be an undercover police officer, and she was arrested for prostitution. She spent two days in jail.

With a court case pending against her, she needed a lawyer, but didn't have enough money, and the pimp couldn't care less. Desperate, she spilled the beans to her sister. And her sister told her parents.

Despite deep disappointment, her father agreed to pay for a lawyer. The case against her was dropped, and her family tried to push her to get treatment.

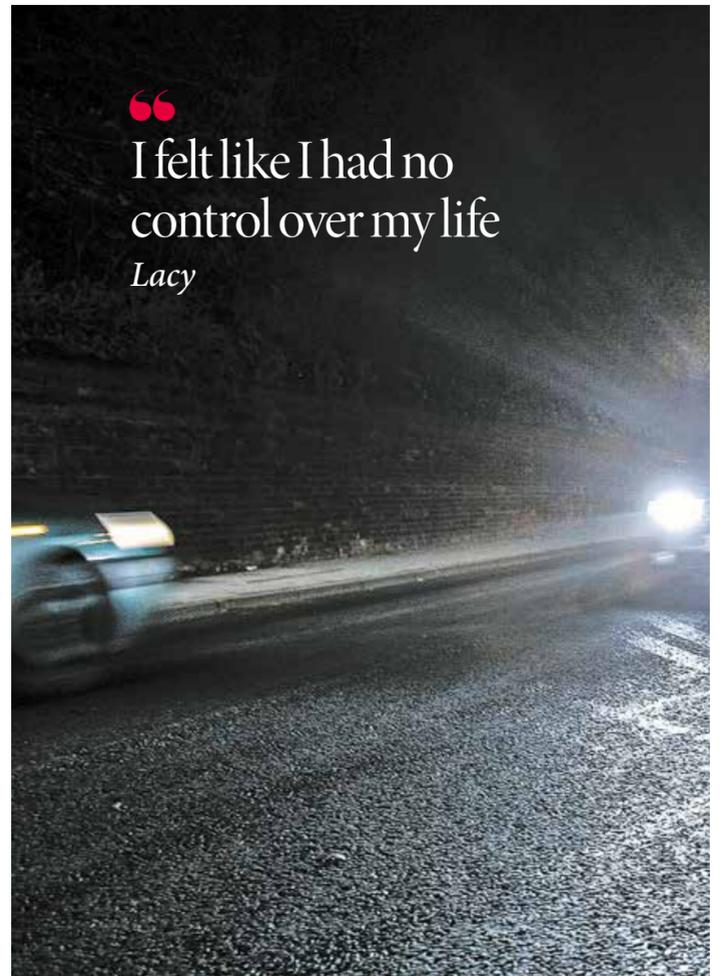
But their efforts backfired – which is often the case, according to Jody Williams, who founded Sex Workers Anonymous, a volunteer network of support groups for former prostitutes and others in the sex industry.

Instead, Lacy found another pimp.

Obsession

"I thought he was such an interesting person," Lacy said. "He had this charisma about him. I was just very sexually attracted to him."

She became obsessed with the man. "I felt like I just wanted his approval so badly," she said.



“I felt like I had no control over my life”

Lacy

£80
BILLION

Estimated profits generated per year by prostitution globally

SOURCE: FOUNDATION SCELLES

Pimps develop skills of psychological influence that can be described as brainwashing, said Williams, who is an ex-prostitute and has 30 years' experience counselling ex-prostitutes.

The pimp convinced Lacy to become a full-time prostitute, promising she could make \$400 a night.

But he kept all the money and only gave her enough for groceries or clothes. "We'd go to the mall, he'd give me \$50, and he'd come out with \$700 worth of stuff for himself," she said.

The pimp started criticising her and pushing her hard to make more money. She was miserable. "I felt like I had no control over my life," she said.

US ideological vetting aims at closing known security loopholes

Correcting the lack of screening for radical ideas is part of new approach to immigration

By Joshua Philipp

While the travel restrictions announced by President Donald Trump on 27 January met with immediate contention, there was little sober discussion about what the president's policy directive signified. What it appears to signal is the budding of a new visa-assurance process that looks at whether visa holders believe in the values of the United States.

The 90-day travel ban affected seven countries – Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen – using a list drafted by the Obama administration. The thinking behind it is explained in Trump's executive order, which states: "In order to protect Americans, the United States must ensure that those admitted to this country do not bear hostile attitudes toward it and its founding principles. The United States cannot, and should not, admit those who do not support the Constitution, or those who would place violent ideologies over American law."

It also says the United States "should not admit those who engage in acts of bigotry or hatred (including 'honour' killings, other forms of violence against women, or the persecution of those who practice religions different from their own) or those who would oppress Americans of any race, gender, or sexual orientation".

Screening for political ideology

The new rules appear to go beyond screening for belief in violent jihadism to also include belief in jihadist struggle and Islamism – neither of which should be confused with the reli-

gion of Islam, according to Dr Zuhdi Jasser, founder and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, and a devout Muslim.

"I think it's important to look at what we're dealing with, based on looking at the order itself. I don't think in reality it's a Muslim ban," he said.

According to Jasser, Islamism is a political movement that adheres to an Islamic party that will institute forms of sharia (Islamic law), and "they believe the state should derive its identity from Islam". He said this ideology has led to many of the repressive Islamist regimes throughout the Arab world.

This is different from, yet connected to, jihadism, which he said "is the way you domestically or globally achieve those Islamic state ends, through war or through nonviolent struggle". Jasser believes the United States is right to screen for Islamism as well as jihadism, noting, "I believe the last eight years have not included any ideological vetting – and they should have."

Jasser said he doesn't agree with every part of the executive order, noting that the immediate visa ban, which affected people in transit, may have sent a bad message. He also disagrees with Syria being on the indefinite ban list.

He said many people view America as a place of liberation from theocracy, and that if the restrictions were aimed to limit this, "that would be harmful", but added, "I don't think that's what this is." Rather, it looks like what Trump says it is: a temporary travel ban on countries that are unstable and have serious terrorist problems.



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Visa restrictions

There are conflicting numbers on how many people in the affected countries had their visas suspended. It was broadly reported by media (but there don't appear to be any official statements) that the Justice Department said the number was 100,000, and the State Department followed up by saying less than 60,000 visas were affected. The restrictions only targeted visa holders not already on US soil.

According to Drew Berquist, counterterrorism expert for the intelligence community and founder of security news website OpsLens, the US vetting process for potential terrorists has always been lacking.

"People think that everyone has these robust databases and that big Uncle Sam knows everything going on," Berquist said. But the reality is very different. "It's more difficult than people think."

This point was stated more plainly in the text of the executive order, which notes the United States strengthened its visa-assurance process after the 9/11

terrorist attacks. Before then, it says, the "State Department policy prevented consular officers from properly scrutinising the visa applications of several of the 19 foreign nationals who went on to murder nearly 3,000 Americans" in those attacks.

It says that based on the "deteriorating conditions in certain countries" caused by war, civil unrest and other issues, there is now a higher chance that "terrorists will use any means possible to enter the United States". And in light of this, the United States "must be vigilant during the visa-issuance process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism."

Complicating the screening process even more is the fact that there are networks helping terrorists obtain fake travel documents. "ISIS has got much better at acquiring those through nefarious means," Berquist said. Also, for people from some of the more remote parts of those countries, it's difficult for the government to

screen them for potential security threats when they travel.

"We need to figure out better ways to vet individuals coming from anywhere, not just those seven countries," Berquist said. "I hope the reason behind the temporary halt is to let us figure out how we let people come in here."

Terror threats

During remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington on 2 February, Trump expanded on the intentions behind the temporary restrictions:

"In the coming days, we will develop a system to help ensure that those admitted into our country fully embrace our values of religious and personal liberty, and that they reject any form of oppression and discrimination."

"We want people to come into our nation, but we want people to love us and to love our values – not to hate us and to hate our values. We will be a safe country. We will be a free country. And we will be a country where all citizens can practise their beliefs without fear of hostility or fear

of violence."

Robert Spencer, director of Jihad Watch, believes there is an immediate threat and that the president's orders were warranted.

"The Islamic State has vowed to infiltrate the refugee stream, and European authorities have acknowledged that it has done so," Spencer said. "The jihadis who murdered 130 people in Paris in November 2015 were all refugees."

"The choice we face is to ban temporarily some legitimate travellers or to allow in people among whom will almost certainly be some Islamic jihadis," he added.

Spencer noted that one of the shooters in the 2015 San Bernardino terrorist attack, Tashfeen Malik, was from Pakistan and lived in Saudi Arabia (neither of which is on the temporary ban list). Malik passed background checks from five different US agencies. "Clearly, there need to be restrictions until better vetting procedures can be developed and implemented."