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# Introduction to Dignity Special Issue: Freedom from Sexploitation

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## **Keywords**

sexual exploitation, violence, sex trafficking, prostitution, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, pornography, harm, national agenda

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## INTRODUCTION TO *DIGNITY* SPECIAL ISSUE: FREEDOM FROM SEXPLOITATION

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### KEYWORDS

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**T**HIS SPECIAL ISSUE of *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* brings together the papers and videos of presentations made at a national briefing held on March 20, 2017, at the U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC, on types of sexual exploitation and their interconnectivity.

The Freedom from Sexploitation Agenda briefing was hosted by Senator Orrin Hatch and organized by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE). NCOSE recognizes the suffering from sexual exploitation and related violence. Sex trafficking, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, pornography, and more are issues significantly impacting individuals, families, and communities. This crisis necessitates that our federal government address the full spectrum of sexual harm.

The briefing brought together a diverse group of advocates to make policy recommendations to address these harms. Advocates called on U.S. national leaders for increased recognition of the continuum of sexual exploitation—and leadership to address it.

Sexual exploitation encompasses a broad spectrum of sexual abuse or sexual uses of persons, of all ages, through sexual objectification, sexual violence, pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking; it includes “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes.”<sup>1</sup> This broad definition unifies a range of issues including child sexual abuse, sexual extortion, cyber-based sexual abuse, and prostitution under a common umbrella of concern.

In our view, individuals and groups working to address sexually-rooted social ills, often focus narrowly on one specific form of sexual exploitation, violence, or

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Secretariat, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse,” Secretary-General’s Bulletin, (October 9, 2013).

abuse. Such focus is often necessary given the limited human and financial resources available to those working in this area, but can result in separate fields of expertise running along parallel tracks, that do not intersect. For instance, in our years of advocacy we have encountered experts and agencies combating child sexual abuse, sexual assault, pornography or sex trafficking working in isolation from one another. This lack of connectivity is a detriment to us all. While specialization is certainly necessary, recognizing the intersectionality of the distinct yet interrelated forms of sexual exploitation and violence, and working together to build a comprehensive approach to address them all, is a vital part of building a strong, cohesive, and irresistible movement for human dignity.

Accordingly, the briefing introduced the *Freedom from Sexploitation Agenda*—a policy and legislative plan for addressing multiple forms of sexual exploitation at the federal level. *The Agenda* represents the beginning of a comprehensive platform for broadly addressing sexual exploitation and violence.

While the problem of sexual exploitation is as immense as ever, as the presentations from the national briefing and *The Agenda* demonstrate, opportunities to take new ground abound. We hope as you read the analyses and recommendations herein, that you will be reenergized and inspired in our common mission of a world free from sexual exploitation and violence.

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

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Lisa L. Thompson serves as the Vice President of Education and Outreach for the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE), where she oversees NCOSE's strategic planning for increased public understanding of sexual exploitation related issues. She conducts analysis, develops research initiatives, and liaises with a wide range of public officials, non-profit organizations, institutions of higher learning, and academics to generate collaborative action to combat the full spectrum of sexual exploitation—especially as pertains to the harms of pornography, stripping, prostitution, and sexual trafficking. Lisa joins NCOSE following nearly two years with World Hope International (WHI), where as its Director of Anti-Trafficking, Lisa administered WHI's anti-trafficking and sexual violence recovery programs in Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Lisa is a contributing author to *Hands that Heal: International Curriculum for Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors*, as well as the book *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Europe Latin America, North America, and Global*, in which she contributed chapters about the use of torture by pimps, as well as the policy conflicts between sex trafficking abolitionists and HIV/AIDS advocates. She has also provided expert testimony to the U.S. Congress. Additionally, Lisa served for more than 12 years as the Liaison for the Abolition of Sexual Trafficking for The Salvation Army USA National Headquarters. In that role she pioneered strategies for The Salvation Army to create recovery services for survivors of sexual trafficking and advocated on public policy issues and initiatives related to combating sexual trafficking and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Lisa chaired The Salvation Army's North

American Anti-Trafficking Council and directed its Initiative Against Sexual Trafficking. Lisa earned her Bachelor of Arts in Government from Western Kentucky University, and her Master's degree in Leadership, Public Policy and Social Issues from Union Institute and University.

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Donna M. Hughes, Ph.D. (<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6563-2573>) holds the Eleanor M. and Oscar M. Carlson Endowed Chair in Women's Studies at the University of Rhode Island. She is a Professor in the Gender and Women's Studies Program and Sociology and Anthropology Department. She has worked for the last 30 years to combat all forms of violence against women and girls through teaching, research, and advocacy. She is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the open access, peer-reviewed scholarly journal *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual*

*Exploitation and Violence*. She has been honored with the following recognition for her community activism and advocacy: the Josephine Butler Award (one of the Norma Hotaling Awards) for "challenging the status quo and creating new abolitionist policy approach to sex trafficking in the United States" (2010), and the Alice Paul Award for Women Who Have Worked to Confront Men's Violence against Women (2017). She has also won the following academic awards: the College of Arts and Sciences Award for Research Excellence Award (2017), the University of Rhode Island Research Council Annual Research Award (2010), and the Outstanding Outreach Award for International Networking on Trafficking in Women, Vice Provost's Office on Research and Graduate Studies, the University of Rhode Island (2002).

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