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**Title:** Integrating sociological and health behavior theory into an intervention for exiting female street level prostitution: Identity and the stages of change

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research, which used female street level prostitution as a case study, was to: 1) assess the relevance of identity theory to behavior change; 2) identify critical elements of identity theory that relate to the stages of change model; and 3) describe an intervention for exiting prostitution based on an integrated model.

**Methods:** Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to conduct 13 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Interviews included key stakeholders in criminal justice and social services and former street prostitutes. The interviews were compiled to explore how personal identity affects participation in prostitution.

**Results:** Key stakeholder interviews confirmed: a) identity is central to negotiating both entry into, and exit from, prostitution. According to stakeholders, entry is partially precipitated by personal acceptance that a woman's body can be used to earn money. By engaging in the trade, a prostitute identity emerges and eventually becomes the sole identity of the prostitute. This effectively locks her in the trade because she cannot envision an alternative life; b) identity and behavior change are intimately tied, as one reinforces the other. Shedding the prostitute identity is crucial for successful and sustained exit. Former street prostitutes revealed that taking on identities that are diametrically opposed to the prostitute identity secured their exit; c) elements of identity change were mapped to the stages of change model to provide a theoretical foundation for an intervention to help women exit street prostitution.

**Conclusions:** Results suggest identity change is an important component of behavior change and is a useful concept for behavioral interventions. Further work is needed to validate results in larger samples and explore interrelationships between identity and other factors thought to fuel change. More research should additionally assess applicability of identity as a necessary component to behavior change in other conditions.