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19 Officers Accused of Allowing N.Y. Brothel in Exchange for Sex

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NEW YORK — Nineteen police officers in the precinct that covers Times Square have been accused of having sex with prostitutes in return for allowing a brothel to stay open, a practice authorities say may date back 15 years.

The accusations are embarrassing to Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, who has sold New York as a tourist-friendly place where a smutty Times Square and graffiti-smearred subways have given way to Mickey Mouse on 42nd Street and cheery, cookie-cutter eateries.

Police Commissioner Howard Safir said 19 police officers, one sergeant, one lieutenant and the top two commanders from the precinct have been disciplined so far. Only the 19 officers are under suspicion of having sex with prostitutes.

Was Giuliani galled that the illegal sex was taking place near Times Square, the spot he has portrayed as a gleaming symbol for a new New York?

"It wouldn't have made much difference where it was in the city," the mayor said at a Friday news conference. "It is the dishonoring of the badge that is the most outrageous part of it."

The department's Internal Affairs Bureau and the Manhattan district attorney's office began investigating 400 officers assigned to the precinct based on tips from prostitutes. The officers are also accused of using an apartment to sleep on the job.