

# OFF-STREET COMMERCIAL SEX: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores women's experiences working in off-street prostitution venues in Vancouver, BC. The victimization experienced by street-based sex workers has led many people to conclude that prostitution is inherently dangerous. However, street-based workers form the minority of sex workers in Canada. The question remains, can their experiences be generalized to other types of prostitution? Consequently, this thesis examines whether female off-street sex workers face the same degree of victimization as female street-based sex workers, and asks if the experience of prostitution always entails violence. The research contained two components: a) a victimization survey examining interpersonal violence and other forms of victimization of off-street sex workers (n=39); and b) in-depth interviews with ten off-street sex workers exploring their working conditions, safety, stereotypes of prostitution, and law reform (n=10). While violence and exploitation do occur in the off-street industry, this study indicates that some women sell sex without experiencing any violence.

**Key words:** sex work; violence; victimization; off-street; decriminalization.

**Subject Terms:** prostitution; research; law & legislation; Canada; prostitutes; conditions

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# INTRODUCTION

Vancouver's Downtown East-Side (DTES) is notorious for drugs, prostitution and violence. At least 69 women, most of whom were associated with the street-based sex industry, have gone missing from this area since the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Research reveals that up to 98% of women who work on the streets of the DTES experience violence from clients, pimps and other sex workers (Currie, Laliberte, Bird, Rosa, Noelle and Sprung, 1995; Lowman & Fraser, 1996; Cler-Cunningham & Christensen, 2001). The high levels of violence reported by street workers are not unique to Canada: researchers from other countries – including the United States, England, The Netherlands and Sweden – have similarly concluded that street-based sex workers are exposed to inordinately high levels of violence (Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Kuo, 2002; Sanders, 2005; Working Group on the Legal Regulation of the Purchase of Sexual Services, 2004).

While the victimization experienced by street-based sex workers around the world has led some researchers to argue that prostitution is inherently dangerous (Dworkin, 1993; Farley, 2004; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Raymond, 2003), others assert that prostitution is not always violent, and that criminalization produces working conditions that facilitate violence against sex workers (Betteridge, 2005; Bindman & Doezema, 1997; Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2005; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver & Gillies, 2005; Lowman, 2005; Network of Sex Work Projects, n.d.; Pivot Legal Society, 2003; Reckart, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> The latest Missing Women Poster maintained by the RCMP Joint task force for Missing Women has 69 names and pictures.

The criminal law and its enforcement encourage violence against sex workers, contribute to the continued low income of sex workers who have few options but to work on the street because of their poverty and other issues such as addictions, and increase those sex workers' risk of being exposed to HIV. (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2005, p.44)

Section 213 of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibits public communication for the purpose of prostitution. This section has garnered much criticism since its inception in 1985. The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network concluded that the communicating provision has done little to reduce street prostitution, and argued that the criminal status of prostitution, “has contributed, both directly and indirectly, to the risk of violence and other health and safety risks faced by sex workers in Canada” (2005, p. 45).

The communication provision aspires to prevent the nuisance attributed to traffic and loitering (Lowman, 1998); its purpose is to eliminate the public display of prostitution. Lowman asserts that the nuisance-eradication approach has forced women to work in isolated, poorly lit, areas of Vancouver. The communication provision has had the unintended effect of reducing street-based sex workers' negotiating powers: in order to avoid potential criminal charges, street sex workers must enter vehicles quickly and accept clients without first coming to an agreement about the services to be provided and the costs of the transaction (Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver, and Gillies, 2005; Davis, 1994). Lowman (2000) argues that the nuisance philosophy behind the communication provision has contributed to escalating violence rates for street-based sex workers:

It appears that the discourse on prostitution of the early 1980's dominated by demands to “get rid” of prostitutes created a social milieu in which violence against prostitutes could flourish. (p.18)



Many people and organizations around the world have called for the decriminalization of the sex industry to ameliorate working conditions and improve safety for sex workers. Some of the international organizations which support decriminalization include the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Anti-Slavery International and the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW). Two Canadian legal organizations have recently undertaken in-depth analyses of the effects of prostitution laws on the health and safety of sex workers (Pivot Legal Society, 2003; Pivot Legal Society, 2006; Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2005). Both concluded that decriminalization is necessary to reduce the violence experienced by sex workers.

In opposition to this view, radical feminists argue that the act of prostitution is itself an example of violence against women, and should be abolished. To this end they seek to criminalize the sale of sex on the grounds that “prostituted women” are victims, and they support criminally prohibiting both procuring and sex purchasing (Dworkin, 1993; Farley, 2004; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004; Raymond, 2003). The claim that prostitution is violence against women is partly political – radical feminists deny that women ever “consent” to prostitute – and partly empirical: they assert that all prostitutes are victims of violence. It is this latter claim that my thesis sets out to investigate.

Given that researchers consistently report high violence rates in street-based prostitution, the act of selling sex via the street is clearly dangerous. But are rates of violence in other parts of the industry the same?

In order to assess the validity of the feminist argument that prostitution is dangerous, we must establish the extent to which these hazards exist and the extent to which they are linked to the commoditization of sex. Only then can

we assess whether or not they can be used to justify the position that prostitution should be eliminated and prostitutes rehabilitated for their own good. (Shaver, 1988, p. 84)

Approximately 80% of the sex industry in BC occurs *off-street* (Benoit & Millar, 2001; Lowman, 2005, Pivot Legal Society, 2006). Weitzer (2000) cautions that, “when it comes to prostitution, the most serious blunder is that of equating all prostitution with street prostitution, ignoring entirely the indoor side of the market” (p. 4). Data from research conducted with street-based sex workers may not be generalizable across the industry. At present, we do not have a comprehensive understanding of the experience of sex workers in different parts of the off-street commercial sex industry. Do women providing in-call and out-call services experience the same degree of victimization as street-based workers? Do in-call and out-call workers experience the same degree of risk of victimization? Is the experience of prostitution always an experience of violence? Can women sell sex without experiencing violence?

To begin exploring women’s experiences of violence in off-street prostitution, my thesis focuses on women working in massage parlours, escort agencies, or independently out of their own homes in Vancouver, BC. There were two components to this research: a) a victimization survey examining interpersonal violence and other harmful activities, such as theft and client refusals to wear condoms; and b) in-depth interviews with ten off-street sex workers exploring themes such as working conditions, safety, stereotypes of prostitution, and law reform.

The project is concerned with the exchange of sexual services for remuneration by *consenting adults*. Because the term “sex work” may include erotic massage, exotic dancing, telephone

sex operations, escorting, domination services, and pornography as well as prostitution, I use the term “prostitution” to refer to direct-contact sexual services performed for remuneration. I use the term ‘sex worker’ to refer to the people who sell these sexual services.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Bindman & Doezema (1997) for a discussion regarding terminology.

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE

In order to understand the theoretical discourse on sex work in Canada, the first part of this chapter is divided into three parts: politics, laws pertaining to prostitution, and research. The first section discusses the political dichotomy which has framed much prostitution research: abolitionism versus decriminalization. I then briefly discuss the existing legal structure of the industry, the negative impacts of prostitution laws in Canada and the recent conclusions of the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws. The research segment focuses on existing Canadian research on sex work, and pays particular attention to research conducted in British Columbia and the off-street sector of the industry. Next, I highlight the most relevant research from two other jurisdictions: England and the United States. The chapter concludes with a discussion of gaps in Canadian prostitution research.

### *Politics*

The two dominant perspectives that frame prostitution research are the radical feminist abolition perspective which holds that prostitution is violence against women, and the feminist occupational perspective which holds that consenting adult prostitution is a form of work and should be decriminalized. While other views on women's engagement in the sex industry exist, the bulk of academic literature is centered on the two aforementioned perspectives. In this section, I describe the main contours of this highly polarized debate, and I outline the challenges and ethical considerations facing prostitution researchers.

## **The Radical-Feminist Perspective on Prostitution.**

According to radical feminism, prostitution in and of itself is an abuse of a woman's body. Viewed as a product of patriarchy, prostitution is universally harmful to women.<sup>3</sup> Typifying this view, Dworkin (1993) asserts that, "...prostitution comes from male dominance, not from female nature. It is a political reality that exists because one group of people has and maintains power over another group of people" (p.2). Consequently, radical feminists like Raphael and Shapiro (2004) urge us to label the men who buy sex as "batterers" instead of "clients," regardless of whether they commit violence against women: they consider buying sex to be an act of violence.

Radical feminists assert that no woman would choose prostitution if she had realistic alternatives (MacKinnon, 1989; Simmons, 1999). Raymond (2003) argues that because of her poverty, "...rather than consent, a prostituted woman more accurately complies to the only options available to her" (para.43). Further, Raymond maintains that women's choices to work in the sex industry should be understood in the same way women's choices to remain in abusive relationships are understood:

When a woman remains in an abusive relationship with a partner who batters her, or even when she defends his actions, concerned people don't say she is there voluntarily. They recognize the complexity of her compliance. Like battered women, women in prostitution often deny their abuse if provided with no meaningful alternatives. (sect. 9, para. 7)

In this way, radical feminists consider any distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution to be erroneous.

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<sup>3</sup> See also Cole (1987); Dworkin (1987); Farley, (2004); Raphael & Shapiro (2004); Raymond (2003).

Recently, radical feminists have begun to report information about violence rates and experiences in off-street prostitution. Raphael & Shapiro (2004) explored the experiences of over 200 female sex workers in Chicago. Approximately half of the participants had some off-street experience. Raphael & Shapiro concluded that while the rates for violence were higher outdoors, the existence of violence indoors provides evidence that, "...women across all prostitution venues are often victims of violence" (p.126). Further, they concluded that indoor prostitution should not be, "...depict[ed]... as harmless, consensual entertainment" (p.126). Farley (2004), upon surveying five research projects<sup>4</sup> and her own research involving 854 people in nine countries, suggests that, "Sexual violence and physical assault are the norm for women in all types of prostitution" (p.1094). Both Farley and Raphael & Shapiro argue that women are not "safer" when working indoors. Further, Raphael & Shapiro suggest that research shows, "...women in indoor prostitution have less control over the conditions of their lives and probably face greater risks of exploitation, enslavement and physical harm" (p.1101).

Radical feminists are adamant that prostitution be abolished. They seek to abolish it by focusing on demand: they lobby for the criminalization of men who purchase sexual services and third parties who assist prostitution (pimps, owners/ operators of agencies, etc.). Radical feminists oppose criminalizing the "victims" of prostitution (the women who sell sexual services) directly.

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<sup>4</sup>The projects referred to are: Nemoto, Operario, Takenaka, Iwamoto, and Le (2003); Raymond, D'Cunha et al. (2002); Parriott (1994); Miller (1995) and Vanwesenbeek (1994).

## **Sex Workers' Rights and the Occupational Perspective**

Many sex workers contest radical feminist claims about sex work. COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was one of the first prostitution rights organizations to become politically active and call for the acknowledgement of human rights for sex workers and decriminalization of the adult consensual sex industry. Organizations such as the Network for Sex Work Projects (NSWP) have brought together individuals and groups from different countries to fight for the rights of sex workers internationally. Their principle demands are the decriminalization of prostitution and the extension to sex workers basic human rights, such as employment and health rights. The “sex as work” perspective offered by sex workers has been taken up by many feminists and other critically-oriented academics including: Benoit & Millar (2001); Bruckert et al. (2003); Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006); Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale (2000); and Shaver (2005b).

The occupational perspective suggests that the conditions of work are responsible for differential rates of violence in different types of prostitution (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998; NSWP, n.d.). Advocates of decriminalization argue that criminal prohibition creates the conditions in which violence and exploitation flourish, especially on the street. They claim that, due to the illegality of prostitution, sex workers are typically not able to seek recourse in the event of unsafe working conditions, acts of violence, and various forms of exploitation (NSWP, n.d.). In effect, criminal laws prohibiting prostitution serve to “...justify violence against those who work in [the] industry” (NSWP, n.d.).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also Ditmore (1999); Betteridge (2005); Lowman (2000); Benoit & Millar (2001); Bruckert et al. (2003).

In 1997, with decriminalization in mind, Bindman & Doezema (1997) produced a legal analysis suggesting ways to incorporate sex work under various international statutes. In 2005, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network published an extensive review of the effects of the criminal prostitution laws on the health and safety of sex workers in Canada. In 2003, Pivot Legal Society, after consulting 82 sex workers and two business owners, produced a report on the working situations of Vancouver sex workers. In 2006, Pivot Legal Society published a legal analysis of the issues that would need to be addressed should prostitution be decriminalized in Canada. These four major legal analyses concluded that the decriminalization of prostitution is a necessary step in reducing the harms associated with prostitution.

The issue of human agency is of primary importance for both sex workers' rights activists and researchers who bring an occupational perspective to the study of sex work.<sup>6</sup> Against radical feminism, they firmly believe that adults are capable of consenting to exchange sex for money. They suggest that the radical feminist denial of choice is simplistic and paternalistic.

Any theory that denies agency retards the changes in patriarchal social structure of which feminism strives, because it denies the existence of an entity to attack those structures. Women are seen as the primary and necessary agents of change. Feminists relegate sex workers to the status of objects: seen to be violently manipulated and wrought into passivity and acquiescence. (Kempadoo, 1998, p.9)

Ditmore (1999) argues that while the decision to prostitute is often made out of economic necessity, simply because an individual makes a politically or morally unpopular choice is no reason to deny his/her ability to make it:

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<sup>6</sup> See Doezema (2002) & Kempadoo & Doezema (1998) for further discussion about agency.



Prostitution is a viable occupation that provides income to sex workers and their families. I caution against the assumption that if something is repugnant to some people, no one else should be allowed to do it. Sex work is not inherently degrading or a violation of a woman's human rights simply because the work is distasteful to some. Many people opt for sex work because it is less degrading, better paying and provides more freedom than other available options (E.g., work in export processing zone factories). (para. 8)

Sex workers' rights activists insist that violence is not an inherent component of prostitution, but is largely a result of legal regimes and working conditions. They maintain that sex workers should not be held responsible for the violence committed against them, and that the existence of violence does not mean that it is inevitable: instead it points to the need for greater protection for sex workers.

### **Problems with the Polarization of Debate**

Recently, authors such as Weitzer (2005) have characterized the debate on prostitution as unnecessarily polarized and overly simplistic. He suggests that when either the radical feminists or the "sex as work" theorists use extreme examples as evidence for their positions, they ignore the complexity of the issues and the heterogeneity of the experiences of people in prostitution. He is particularly critical of radical feminist "absolutism" and argues that its protagonists use "ideological blinders" to interpret research findings in a way that supports their political position. Weitzer makes much the same criticism of authors who "romanticize" sex work by ignoring the violence and exploitation occurring in parts of the industry.

Benoit & Shaver (2006) and Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006) argue the current polarization of the debate is not helpful to the individuals involved in prostitution, researchers or policy

makers. Benoit & Shaver state, “The dichotomy is flawed, not only because it excludes the middle ground, but also because it fails to reflect the complex heterogeneity between [sex workers] at any point in time and across place” (2006, para.18). They urge researchers and other academics to move beyond the traditional debate and delve deeper into the working situations of the people working in the sex industry (PWSI), especially to address their health, well-being and social exclusion.

In order to conduct an adequate analysis of the Canadian sex industry, we need to first name prostitution as work (recognizing that, like any other work, it has the potential for exploitation), grant agency to PWSI, and then study it within the working and non-working contexts of their lives. (para.18)

Of course, Benoit & Shaver remain firmly committed to the sex-as-work perspective, in which case their call to “name prostitution as work” does not really move us beyond the current debate, as this is precisely the point at which abolitionists cannot agree.

Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006) urge researchers to include sex workers’ voices and opinions prior to developing theory in order to ensure that theory is grounded in sex workers’ experiences. They describe much current theory as oppressive to sex workers:

There is a hegemonic discourse around sex work. It is a discourse that dominates any understanding of the lives of sex workers or the realities they face. Furthermore, it judges sex workers, reinforces their pathological stigmatization and, even in attempts to portray the sex worker as "victim," infantilizes her, denies her of agency and is contextual in explanation. Our claim is that sex workers themselves are the experts on their lives, and that, before making proclamations on the "why," "how" and "where" of sex work, all academics, journalists and policy makers really need to talk to these workers. (para.2)

Finally, these advocates of the sex-as-work perspective deplore the portrayal of prostitution as a universal experience. They insist that research must allow for the diversity of sex-work experiences and caution researchers to avoid making generalizations across the industry.

## **Methodological Concerns facing Prostitution Researchers**

As the sex industry is largely underground, researchers face challenges accessing potential research participants.<sup>7</sup> Researchers generally rely on non-generalizable sampling methods generating self-selected, snowball and purposive samples, all of which produce samples that limit the statistical generalizability of the findings of the projects. The use of non-probability sampling methods is not particularly problematic in and of itself. However, Weitzer (2005) suggests that problems develop when researchers use such data to make sweeping assertions about the experience of prostitution in general. He asserts that, "...reliance on unrepresentative samples is widespread..." (p. 938) in this field of inquiry and that volunteer bias is rarely addressed. Weitzer explains that when researchers include only individuals from the most vulnerable segment of the industry (street workers) or when researchers interview sex workers who have been incarcerated, the resulting data should not be used to represent off-street sex workers and those who have not been incarcerated.

While a large scale, probabilistic form of research is needed, it is not feasible (Shaver, 2005b). Currently, there exist only small-scale individual projects that are difficult to compare. Because each project uses its own definitions, parameters and sampling method, divergent results may be methodological artifacts. Self-report data are often treated with suspicion, particularly when it does not conform to traditional opinion about sex workers and violence. Nevertheless, when it comes to sex work, we have to make do with non-probabilistic sampling techniques because of the illegality of prostitution and sex workers' concerns about confidentiality.

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<sup>7</sup> See Lever & Kanouse (1998).

Both Weitzer (2005) and Shaver (2005b) argue that future research should explore the diversity of prostitution experiences and compare them to other kinds of service work. Shaver encourages researchers to compare findings across different forms of labour, while Weitzer suggests that comparison groups of similarly situated, non-sex-working individuals would assist in determining such things as whether there is a significantly higher rate of family violence for individuals in the sex industry as compared to those not involved in prostitution.

Several recent Canadian studies have sought to address some of these concerns by exploring people's experiences working in different segments of the sex industry. Projects include the works of organizations such as Pivot Legal Society (2006), and authors such as Benoit & Millar (2001), Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006), Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver & Shramm (2005), and Bruckert, Parent & Robitaille (2003). These studies demonstrate the importance of consulting people from the various sectors of the sex industry as the experience of selling sex can vary greatly. However, prior to discussing the findings, it is important to describe the legal status of prostitution in Canada.

### ***Criminal and Civil Laws Pertaining to Prostitution***

The criminal law has created a pseudo-legal structure for the Canadian commercial sex industry. While the act of prostitution as such is legal, many of the acts that facilitate prostitution are criminalized.<sup>8</sup> Section 210 of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibits owning, operating or working in a bawdy-house (commonly known as a brothel). Section 211 prohibits individuals from “transporting” potential clients to bawdy houses. Section 212, the

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A for a reproduction of the Criminal Code sections.

“pimping” section, prohibits third parties from “enticing” individuals to become prostitutes; it attempts to prevent third parties from obtaining customers for sex workers; it generally bars anyone from aiding another person to engage in prostitution, and prohibits “living on the avails” of the prostitution of another person. Section 212 also prohibits purchasing sex from anyone less than 18 years of age. Finally, section 213 prohibits public communication for the purpose of prostitution.

In addition to the criminal law, various municipal by-laws regulate the off-street industry. For example, Vancouver’s by-laws prohibit businesses from offering “nude encounters”, “out-call body massage services” and “erotic telephone calls.”<sup>9</sup> Body rubs are prohibited if done on an out-call basis, but are permitted if conducted in accordance with the Body-Rub License. Vancouver’s By-law #4450 outlines how Body Rub Parlours, Social Escort services, and other Health Enhancement Centers may operate. Prostitution is specifically prohibited in each of the licenses except the Body Rub Parlour license.<sup>10</sup> Coincidentally, the cost for the Body Rub License is \$7,891 annually while the other licenses range from \$198 to \$758 annually.

### **The Negative Effects of Canadian Prostitution Law**

The effect of the Canadian prostitution laws has been a topic of concern among activists, politicians and academics from the 1980s on. In 2003, the Federal government struck a Subcommittee to review the criminal laws relating to prostitution. At the Parliamentary hearings, academics and activists presented information detailing the impact of the laws on the safety and health of sex workers. Jacqueline Lewis, Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, Frances

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<sup>9</sup> See City of Vancouver By-Law # 5156.

<sup>10</sup> See Pivot Legal Society (2006) for a discussion of the municipal laws.

Shaver and Kara Gillies outlined a number of negative effects of the existing laws. Specifically, they explained that sex workers must contravene the Criminal Code in order to stay safe while working. They argued that the provisions relating to bawdy-houses criminalize the safest venue for sex workers. Lewis et al. (2005) discussed the findings from their various research projects as evidence that specific strategies which serve to increase safety for sex workers, such as the use of drivers or working with a partner, are prohibited by law. Furthermore, they suggested that criminalizing “communication” per s. 213 of the Criminal Code has contributed to violence against street sex workers as they cannot openly negotiate the terms of an exchange with a potential client prior to entering his vehicle.

John Lowman presented his findings and recommendations to the Subcommittee in 2005. He explained that the communication provision has forced sex workers to work in geographically isolated areas thereby increasing their vulnerability to violence. He attributes the high rates of murder of street-based sex workers to this displacement strategy. Lowman observes that while approximately 80% of the sex industry in Canada is located off-street, the vast majority of criminal offences are related to street prostitution. This legal hypocrisy has created a two-tiered system of prostitution where unseen work is not subject to criminal law while visible sex work is heavily targeted. He concludes with the recommendation that the government decriminalize prostitution and determine “...where and under what circumstances sex workers can meet their clients and conduct their business” (p.10).

In, “Beyond Decriminalization: Sex Work, Human Rights and a New Framework for Law Reform” Pivot Legal Society undertook a thorough examination of the legal questions that would arise in the event of decriminalization. Pivot explored the various areas of law that would come into play, and described the current municipal prostitution by-law provisions in

force in Vancouver. Pivot's overall recommendation is that adult consenting prostitution be treated as a legitimate business and be regulated by statutes pertaining to employment, health, welfare, zoning, etc. During the 2005 Parliamentary hearings, Pivot urged the government to decriminalize prostitution and exempt individuals and small cooperatives from the municipal licensing provisions to allow home-based prostitution businesses.

The Subcommittee published its final report in December of 2006 (Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, 2006). The final report recognized that the existing prostitution laws are unacceptable:

After reviewing the criminal laws pertaining to prostitution...members agree that the status quo is unacceptable. The social and legal framework pertaining to adult prostitution does not effectively prevent and address prostitution or the exploitation and abuse occurring in prostitution, nor does it prevent or address harms to communities. This framework must therefore be reformed or reinforced. (Chap. 7, para.7)

Rather than make specific recommendations for law reform, the Subcommittee urged the government to conduct more research into various aspects of the commercial sex industry prior to any legislative reform.

The Subcommittee's report garnered responses from many of the groups and individuals who participated in the parliamentary hearings. The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network criticized the committee for failing to stay within its mandate to review the prostitution laws with the goal of improving the safety of sex workers (2007, 1). The Network argued that the committee focused on issues of child sexual exploitation and trafficking instead of dealing with the issues of violence against sex workers and the health concerns for sex workers. The Network berated the Subcommittee for ignoring the human rights of sex workers:

The Subcommittee's devaluation of human rights is unacceptable and undermines the idea that all people in Canada are deserving of equal respect and dignity. Rather than seeing the fulfillment of human rights as a baseline standard to be met by all Canadian laws, the report characterizes human rights- particularly those of sex workers- as just one "philosophy" of sex work. (2007, 1)

While organizations such as the Network criticized the government for becoming engaged in the political debate around consent and exploitation of women at the expense of dealing with the harmful impacts of the laws, some radical feminist groups have applauded the minority, Conservative position. Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, a staunch advocate of the abolitionist perspective, congratulated the Conservative government for "...appropriately question[ing] the idea of consent and harmlessness in prostitution and accurately see[ing] prostitution as a form of violence" (2006).

## ***Research***

While there are numerous academic studies of the sex industry, the off-street sector has only recently been the target of research. Historically, in Canada and elsewhere, prostitution research has focused on the experiences of street-based sex workers. The following review is divided into two main components: street-based sex work in British Columbia, and off-street sex work. The off-street research includes data from BC, the rest of Canada, England, and the US.

### **Street-based Sex Work in British Columbia, Canada**

While this thesis seeks to explore the off-street sex industry, it is necessary to provide a cursory examination of the most directly relevant studies into street-based sex work. A brief



review will allow for comparison between victimization faced by street-based and off-street sex workers. The review is limited to research conducted in BC.

Currie, Laliberte, Bird, Rosa, and Sprung looked at 85 women's experiences working from the streets of Vancouver in 1995. They found that 99% of the women had been victims of violence with 97% of the respondents indicating that they had experienced more than one form of violence. 98% of the respondents reported that they had been victimized by a client while working in the sex industry; 66% of the women had experienced violence from a client at least twice in the preceding six months. Approximately half of their respondents contacted police after a violent date with a client. Almost all of the respondents (94%) had used alcohol or drugs in the past six months. Only nine percent of the respondents had completed high-school.

In 1996, Lowman & Fraser published a report exploring the experiences of violence for sex workers in BC. The study included: interviews with sex workers, service providers, and police officers; news accounts of violence against sex workers; and the results from two anonymous surveys— one conducted in 1993 by local service agencies and the other conducted by Lowman & Fraser in 1994. Lowman & Fraser compared the victimization rates of street-based sex workers in different areas of Vancouver. Instead of asking if the participants had *ever* experienced any victimization while working in the sex industry, Lowman & Fraser asked how many “bad dates” (incidents involving some form of violence) were likely to occur out of every 100 dates. The average number of “bad dates” experienced by the respondents was seven for every hundred clients for those who worked “high track” and fifteen for every hundred clients for those who worked on the Downtown East-side.

In 2001, Cler-Cunningham and Christensen published their research concerning the experiences of 183 street-based sex workers in Vancouver. Cler-Cunningham & Christensen focused their questions on Criminal Code provisions related to interpersonal violence. The researchers also asked about experiences relevant to other forms of victimization, such as harassment and client refusal to wear condoms. Cler-Cunningham and Christensen found that while rates of violence were inordinately high for sex workers, other forms of victimization, like harassment, were even more likely. They found that 83% of the respondents had experienced harassment while working the streets of Vancouver. Approximately 70% of the respondents reported that they had been threatened and 54% had been robbed.<sup>11</sup>

### **Off-Street Sex Work in British Columbia, Canada**

Lowman & Fraser's (1996) study was administered to street-based sex workers and the focus of the majority of the report is therefore on street-based prostitution. However, they also asked respondents about their experiences working in off-street venues of prostitution, and they were able to gather information on rates of violence, reporting practices and safety strategies.<sup>12</sup> Lowman & Fraser concluded that their respondents faced higher levels of violence, and more serious violence, while working the streets of Vancouver. They also found that sex workers were more concerned about safety and violence when they were working on the street.

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<sup>11</sup> This study will be re-visited in Chapter 5 where I compare rates of victimization of street and off-street sex workers.

<sup>12</sup> Their results will be discussed in detail in the Chapter 5.

Benoit & Millar conducted a large study of sex work in the Victoria area of BC in 2001. Their work included both street level and off-street sex workers; however, they recruited participants from contacts made by service providers and individuals connected to the street level trade, which means that street-based workers were likely over-represented in the sample. Benoit & Millar employed a “sex-as-work” perspective to examine prostitution as a form of labour rather than as a criminal activity. While the demographic characteristics of their participants and violence rates will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5, several key points about the off-street industry in general deserve highlighting at this juncture.

Benoit & Millar found that off-street workers are exploited in various ways. The participants reported financial exploitation in the form of systems of fines (for such things as lateness), the requirement to submit between 40 and 60% of earnings to the agency, and the need to “tip” management, phone operators, and drivers. The participants reported varying levels of control over whether they would accept a client and over what type of service they would provide. People who worked indoors for an agency reported lower rates of control over the number of clients seen in a shift than did those who worked independently, whether via the street or in any other venue. Benoit and Millar did not report specific rates of violence, but noted that, “...almost all those interviewed for this study said that they had been exposed to dangerous working conditions on at least one occasion” (p.50). The participants reported feeling much safer when working in off-street venues. Benoit & Millar found that clients were the most likely source of violence against sex workers, and that sex workers were not likely to report violence to the police. “Virtually all those interviewed expressed alienation from the protective services of the police and expressed a reluctance to report violent incidences or turn to the police for help” (p.54).

In 2006, Pivot released a report echoing the findings from the Benoit & Millar project. Pivot included the experiences of both street level and off-street sex workers from Vancouver in their analysis, and highlighted the specific concerns of workers in each venue. Violence was the greatest concern for street-based workers. Pivot found that the fear of violence was one of the biggest reasons that people turned to agencies for work: they felt better protected working for an agency than working alone. However, escorts reported that attending a client at an unknown location (a significant part of the work) was a safety issue. For this reason, some individuals chose to work in massage parlours. Massage parlour workers, however, were shown to have a lower degree of control over their client and the services they performed.

The participants in the Pivot report acknowledged growing pressure to provide certain services (e.g., oral sex) without the protection of a condom – this was true of both escorts and massage workers – and was attributed to the growing popularity of the “Girl-Friend Experience” (GFE) in sex work. There was a general consensus among indoor workers that disclosure of their identities to any government body would result in legal problems. Some feared criminal repercussion if they reported exploitation to government-agencies such as Employment Standards. Others feared personal repercussion if they disclosed that they were being required to perform unsafe acts. Still others reported that it was not in their interests to have an agency shut down because they would then be unemployed. Pivot found that most sex workers were uninformed or misinformed about their legal rights.

Lowman, Atchison & Fraser completed an internet-based study of 130 clients in 1997. Their research is unique in Canada as it focused on the perspectives of clients rather than sex

providers. They included a comparison group of non-sex buying men to determine if there were any significant differences between the two groups.

Lowman, Atchison & Fraser (1997) found that massage parlours were the most popular venue for clients, closely followed by escort agencies. Clients reported moderately high rates of condom-use with 87% indicating that they always used condoms for vaginal intercourse with a commercial sex partner. However, clients reported lower rates of condom use for oral sex: approximately 50% of clients reported that they did not always use condoms when receiving fellatio from a sex worker.

Clients reported low rates of violence against sex workers. The self-reported rates included: 3% robbery; 6.3% assault; 3.1% sexual assault; and 8.7% forcible confinement of a sex worker. Less than 11% of respondents stated that they had verbally abused sex workers. In comparing the sex-buyers with the non-buyers, Lowman, Atchison & Fraser (1997) found that those who bought sex had more positive views of sex workers. They concluded that the majority of sex-buyers do not commit violence against sex workers, and that a minority of clients commit most of the violence.

### **Other Canadian Research into the Off-street Sex Industry**

Bruckert, Parent & Robitaille conducted interviews with 14 women working in-call venues in Toronto and Montreal in 2003. The project was undertaken with the goal of exploring the labour dimension of women's prostitution. One of their first findings of note was the diversity of the work.

We found women who work in massage parlours; women who provide sexual services in houses or establishments designated as in-call escorts (as

opposed to out-call escorts, who travel from one location to another in order to provide their services); women who work in dungeons and provide domination or submission services; and even women who work in establishments providing private erotic shows. (para. 5)

Bruckert et al's (2003) participants expressed diverse reasons for their entry into sex work, including such things as escaping isolation, enjoying a highly social lifestyle and benefiting from financial independence. The respondents indicated that they had chosen in-call work due to its relative safety compared to outcall work, the privacy or anonymity it granted and, for some respondents, the ability to provide services which did not involve sexual intercourse with clients.

Like most other researchers, Bruckert et al. (2003) reported that their participants were generally misinformed about the laws relating to prostitution and that this misinformation contributes to a reluctance to use the services of the local police. Physical safety was found to be one of the participants' main concerns, and the women reported being hyper-vigilant about condom use to protect themselves from STDs. The participants reported a number of personal safety strategies, such as ensuring they do not take alcohol or drugs while working, using their intuition, and relying on the presence of others to protect their safety.

Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver & Shramm (2005) used a purposive method to create a diverse sample of male and female sex workers from a variety of venues within the sex industry. Based on interviews with 61 participants, they found that off-street work was less risky than street-based work; that in-call work for an agency was safer than out-call work; and that the degree of independence of the sex worker influences her ability to mitigate risk. Lewis et al. conclude that, "...independent off-street workers had the freedom to develop

their own descriptions and parameters for their work and to establish their own ways of dealing with safety and risk” (p.154).

Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006) interviewed sex workers from the Maritimes, examining how the interviewees experienced prostitution as a form of labour. They argue:

...what sex workers are resisting through sex work is not simply the risk of poverty or underpayment in the “straight” world, but the hegemonic discourses that render sex workers benighted objects of intervention and management rather than economic and political agents. (para. 1)

In their analysis of prostitution as work, Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006) point to the similarities between sex work and other forms of labour. They suggest that the perceived negative aspects of prostitution - such as inconsistent wages and hours, addictions, physical and emotional stress and even the “...expectation to ‘enjoy’ one’s work”- are characteristics of many jobs. However, they acknowledge that sex work is incomparable to other forms of work because of the way prostitution is stigmatized, the illegality involved and “...the resultant risk of violence attached to the job” (para. 34).

Jeffrey & MacDonald (2006) identified flexibility as one of the most beneficial aspects of sex work, particularly for female participants. On the negative side, “...many of [the participants’] central concerns revolve around maintaining and/or increasing their independence as workers, their control over the pace and price of their labour, and the conditions of their work” (para. 41). They conclude that sex workers need to be involved in any law reform as they are “...experts on their lives” (para. 2).

Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale conducted a case study of a municipal licensing experiment in Windsor, Ontario in 2000, examining the effects of the introduction of licensing provisions

on sex workers' "health and well-being." They found that the main effect of the provisions was to increase the visibility of off-street sex workers. While created with the intention of professionalizing the industry and respecting workers' rights, the licensing scheme only served to benefit local police and the municipality's finances.

Licensing of escorts and escort agencies merely provides the municipality and police with information about who is or has ever been an escort or agency owner and an increase in revenues to police and the municipality." (2000, p.447)

The emerging portrait of off-street prostitution in Canada confirms that there is a diverse range of experiences for sex workers: this diversity of experience is one of the few generalizations that can be made. Off-street sex workers are not immune from exploitation; however, the level of exploitation appears to vary greatly in different venues and in individual working conditions. The Canadian legal system contributes to the exploitative working conditions through the irregularity in enforcement of the laws, the uncertainty over the specifics of which activities are illegal and which are allowed, and the perceived lack of recourse in the event of violence, exploitation or other unsafe working conditions.

### **Highlights of Research from Other Jurisdictions**

There is a wealth of information about off-street sex work in other jurisdictions.<sup>13</sup> However, it is difficult to know whether the information from one area can be used to describe the situation in another city for, as Lowman (2001) suggests, the organization of off-street prostitution varies in different cities. There are concerns about comparing research across nations due to the differences in legal systems, social supports available, and significant

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<sup>13</sup> See Albert (2001); Boyle et al. (1997); Brock (1998), Chapkis ; Harcourt et al. (1997), Kuo (2002); Lever & Dolnick, Potter & Romans (1999); Sanders (2005); Weitzer (2000); Whittaker & Hart (1996); Working group on the legal regulation of the purchase of sexual services (2004).



differences in legal regimes and attitudes to sex and female sexuality. Nevertheless, because researchers in England and the United States have explored violence in off-street sex work, it is worth reviewing their findings here.

In 2005, Sanders published her data on the off-street working situation of women in England. She interviewed 50 women who worked in a variety of venues: licensed saunas (similar to massage parlours in Canada), brothels, small co-operatives, escort agencies and independent venues. She found that 68% of her participants had never experienced violence while working in the indoor sex industry. She reported that violence was not the main worry for women in off-street sex work: being identified or discovered was of greater concern. In spite of this, Sanders notes:

...selling sex is very different from other, mainstream occupations...care must be taken not to overstate discourses that present a normalized view of prostitution that ignores both the negative public image and the damage prostitution can cause to individuals... Few other jobs attract stigma and marginalization to the same extent as sex work. (p.40)

Sanders (2005) found that violence prevention was a “constant” issue for women regardless of whether they had experienced violence. She reported that women employ precautionary strategies to prevent violence, such as screening clients and avoiding working in isolation. The participants also identified using their intuition and strong interpersonal communication skills to ensure that the “date” remained safe and controlled.

Kuo (2002) and Whittacker & Hart (1996) reported similar findings related to violence prevention strategies for off-street sex workers. Kuo’s research explored the experiences of women working out of legal brothels in Nevada, US. Whittacker & Hart conducted their research with women working independently out of their homes or in small cooperatives in

London. The conclusions from these two projects substantiate Sanders' findings. All three projects found that women employed similar safety strategies, including screening, intuition, maintaining a degree of control over the encounter, and ensuring that clients were uncertain about security measures at a given site.

A key finding from these projects, and one that is echoed in the Canadian literature, is that women's experiences in sex work vary greatly. Kuo states, "...the diverse picture of prostitution clearly calls for a policy that is sensitive to and distinguishes among the experiences of those in the sex industry" (2002, p. 101).

### **Identified Gaps in the Research**

The Canadian literature is lacking information about levels of violence experienced by off-street workers in different work situations. It is difficult to compare findings between projects because the definitions of violence vary considerably. The specific forms and rates of violence in off-street commercial sex remain unexplored. Compounding the definitional differences, many research samples are still limited to street-based workers or are developed with the participation of street outreach agencies. In order to determine the levels of violence in different segments of the sex industry, we need to access sex workers who do not have connections to the street. We need to seek information directly about the violence experienced in different venues of sex work to get a better idea of why certain kinds of sex workers may be much more at risk of victimization than others.

Benoit & Shaver (2006) identified the need for national large-scale research to assist in determining the size and breadth of the population of sex workers in Canada, sampled in

such a way as to compare different prostitution venues. They suggest that more research comparing sex work to other service occupations is necessary “to undermine the enduring associations between sex work and victimization, the prevalence of dichotomies, and the assumptions of homogeneity” (para.20).

In 2001 Lowman identified nine gaps in research on prostitution in Canada including, among others: male and female experiences in off-street sex work, pimps and managers, municipal provisions relating to prostitution, clients, and exiting strategies. Both Lowman (2001) and Benoit & Shaver (2006) also identified the need for longitudinal studies to properly assess the long-range impact of sex work on men and women.

The information gathered for my thesis concerns women’s experiences of victimization in different venues of off-street sex work. This information will enable comparison of experiences in different off-street venues that can be compared directly to information about victimization of street-based workers. The analysis focuses on research in British Columbia.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE METHODOLOGY

The methodology was designed to facilitate the greatest amount of meaningful involvement by experiential<sup>14</sup> women to ensure that they had opportunities to guide the research. The purpose of this involvement was twofold: it was intended to overcome any outsider blindness or insensitivity to issues and concerns relating to female sex workers, and it was hoped that by involving women in all aspects of the project the thesis would accurately reflect women's experiences.<sup>15</sup> These goals are founded on the belief that the experiences and concerns of women involved in the sex industry should take priority in discussions concerning the industry and prostitution-law reform.

The research consisted of two elements: 1) an interview segment exploring the experiences of women who work off-street; and 2) an anonymous, self-administered survey dealing specifically with victimization in the workplace. The interviews were conducted to provide context for the statistical information collected via the survey.

### *Research Objectives*

This study had seven objectives:

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<sup>14</sup> The term "experiential" refers to individuals who have worked in the commercial sex industry.

<sup>15</sup> For more discussion on activist research and grounded theory, see Kirby & McKenna (1989), Naples (2003) and Strauss & Corbin (1989).

- to learn more about work in Vancouver's off-street commercial sex industry by exploring women's experiences in indoor venues;
- to inform legal and academic communities about the existing conditions and needs of women involved in the off-street sector of the industry;
- to collect data on the rates and types of victimization experienced by off-street sex workers in Vancouver;
- to contribute to the understanding of the off-street sector and the people involved;
- to create informed strategies for law reform;
- to increase safety for women involved in the sex industry;
- to expose the academic and legal communities to sex worker's voices.

### ***The Instruments: Survey and Interview Schedule***

The instruments for both the interview and the survey components of the research were created with the assistance from a pool of collaborators and academics. The survey, found in Appendix B, was fifteen pages in length. The expected completion time was between 20 and 30 minutes. The interview schedule, found in Appendix C, contained only fourteen questions, but lasted between one and four hours.

#### **Development of the survey**

In order to create an appropriately worded, respectful, concise and relevant instrument, I sought out four women who had worked in the sex industry in different venues to be a part of a research-design team. I examined a similar survey conducted by Lowman, Atchison &

Fraser (1997) and based some of the questions on their work. I brought my first draft to each of the collaborators and had them provide feedback and advice. I repeated this process several times until we were all satisfied with the instrument. I also had both Lowman and Atchison review the survey.

The collaborators provided key insight into specific areas of inquiry that were not included prior to their input. They identified issues, such as client refusal to use condoms and women's abilities to refuse to provide services to clients, as important areas of potential risk and victimization. They alerted me to the need to include co-workers as a potential source of victimization, and they ensured that appropriate language was used throughout the survey. The collaborators also suggested a strategy for accessing interview participants from the pool of survey respondents. They explained that women would be more likely to participate in a survey than an interview due to time constraints, the fear of being exposed, and the lack of compensation for involvement. They explained that the survey would provide women with information about the project and allow them to make educated decisions about whether to consent to an interview. The input from the collaborators was invaluable, and contributed enormously to the success of the project in securing respondents.

The survey was available either in hard copy or online. I provided an online version for several reasons. First, the target sample was a difficult to access, underground population. By providing an online survey, I aspired to provide a completely anonymous, convenient and easy way for women to participate. Second, as I was relying on personal contacts to recruit respondents, I felt that it would be easier for women to pass along a web site address, or a business card with the web site address printed on it, than to pass along paper copies of the survey. Finally, online surveys have a clear advantage over hard copies. With the online

version I was able to insert automated skip patterns which reduced the length of the survey and made it much easier to navigate. I hoped that these patterns would reduce human errors in completing the survey as well.<sup>16</sup>

The online version of the survey was developed with significant assistance from Chris Atchison.<sup>17</sup> He maintained the survey from a secure server and forwarded the data to me at the end of the data collection period. The online survey was posted for seven months at [www.workviolence.ca](http://www.workviolence.ca).

## **Survey Content**

The survey's introductory page outlined the objectives of the project, the main lines of inquiry, and information about how to contact me. This page explained that the survey would take approximately 20 minutes, that anonymity was guaranteed, and that women were welcome to skip any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering. Also, I provided my contact information for those who wished to take part in an interview. With the hard copies, participants were instructed to keep the introductory page and submit the remainder by mail in the envelope provided. The introductory page functioned as the survey consent form.

The online version contained the majority of this same information on the home page. Further information about privacy, detailed instructions for completing the survey, and other information about the project were available on additional pages. In order to start the survey, the participants would have to go through the consent page.

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<sup>16</sup> See Palys (2003).

<sup>17</sup> Chris Atchison completed an internet-based research project concerning the client dimension of commercial sex in 1998. This project formed the independent research component of his Masters Degree at SFU.

The survey was divided into four main sections: Experiences of Victimization, Reporting Practices, Violence Prevention and Personal Information. The first section asked the respondents to separate experiences working in three different venues: in-call (massage parlours and body rub parlours), out-call (via escort agencies) and independent work (not including street work). If a participant had not worked in any particular venue, she was instructed to indicate “no” and skip to the section on the next type of venue.

The language used to describe the venues was developed with the help of the collaborators; however, the resulting schema posed difficulties for some respondents. It was explained to me that some women consider themselves to be escorts, but work independently. Some women work as independent masseuses. Others included street experiences as a form of independent work in spite of my request to omit any street experiences from the survey. A more clear way of differentiating between the categories would be to focus on whether the individuals work for an agency or parlour, and then ask them what type of work they do (full service, fetish, massage, etc.).

This first section asked women how long they had worked in a particular venue, and how concerned they were about safety (defined as being free from violence) when working in that venue. Participants were then asked about the frequency of experiences of victimization, and the source of that violence. The types of victimization listed were based on Criminal Code definitions: uttering threats, threatening with a weapon, physical assault, sexual assault, kidnapping/confinement, and theft. I included a definition for each category. Respondents were asked to indicate how many times they had experienced each form of victimization, and to identify the perpetrators: clients, police officers, significant others, managers, and co-workers.



There were questions about clients' refusal to use condoms, and their refusal to pay for services. Respondents were then asked if they had experienced types of victimization not listed in the survey. All sex workers were asked to briefly describe their most serious experience of violence. Finally, they were asked to indicate which venue they considered to be the most dangerous and offer supporting reasons.

The second section of the survey sought information about reporting practices. Respondents were instructed to skip the section if they had never experienced any victimization in the first place. If they had been victimized but had not reported it, they were asked why they did not report it. For those who had reported an incident to someone there was a series of questions about who they reported it to, and what happened.

In the third section, respondents were asked open ended questions about their personal safety strategies and their recommendations for other women to stay safe while working in the sex industry. They were also asked about safety mechanisms such as the use of surveillance cameras, security guards and training.

The survey concluded with a section on personal information. These questions were mostly pre-coded categorical questions. The last question provided respondents with an opportunity to include any other comments.

### **The Interview Schedule**

I undertook a pilot study in 2004 which consisted of analyzing the transcripts of five interviews with women who worked as off-street sex workers. The interviews were

conducted by John Lowman. This project formed the basis for the interview schedule that I eventually developed. The schedule was refined numerous times as I discussed it with my collaborators, and then again once I had started to conduct the interviews. I found that I had to continually re-focus the interview in order to simplify the questions and reduce the breadth of information I was seeking. In the end, I had a list of 15 questions which I described as, “starting point questions.” I explained to each woman that the structure was very open and that I would rather they discuss the issues that they identified as most important. I gave the women the opportunity to review the interview schedule prior to our meeting so that they could see what kind of information interested me. Women were told to skip topics of inquiry with which they were not comfortable. One woman opted not to divulge her current occupation and another woman dismissed the schedule and said she would rather talk freely.

### **The Interview Process**

Based on my experiences working with street-based survival sex workers through Prostitution, Alternatives, Counseling and Education (PACE) Society (a non-profit organization in Vancouver), I expected the interviews to require a significant amount of preparation time to build trust and develop a relationship with the participants. I expected this trust building period would be necessary, as participants were being asked to divulge information that could have negative consequences for them if they were to be identified. However, eight out of ten of the women required no relationship building at all. We simply exchanged a couple of emails, arranged meeting times and then met over coffee, food or wine. Two of the participants were more wary. One read through the thesis proposal prior to

agreeing to an interview and another involved numerous phone conversations before she was comfortable meeting me.

I offered women three options for the interviews: an in-person meeting, a phone interview, or email correspondence. I conducted one interview predominantly over the phone with follow up email. Another interview took place solely through email - I emailed the respondent the questions, she responded, I emailed a couple of questions about her responses, and she responded again.

All of the participants were sent transcripts of their interviews shortly after they occurred. Many of the women had additional comments that occurred to them after the interview. One of the participants became concerned about whether she might be identifiable through her responses; we revised her transcript to delete everything that she felt might identify her.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I destroyed the audiotapes. I did not keep any identifying information. Since most of my correspondence with these women was via email, I did have email addresses and working names of the participants. However, I deleted those emails as soon as possible, and deleted all references to their working names from all of my files. I then assigned each woman a number as a way to track and organize the data.

I was not able to record the phone interview, so I took detailed notes throughout the conversation. I sent the notes to the woman, which she read, and to which she then added several comments. I used the resulting document as her transcript.

The women who chose to participate in the interview were well aware of the political issues surrounding sex work, legal reform and research. In this regard there was clear volunteer bias. Two of the women chose to participate simply because they knew my supervisor, John Lowman. I did not decline any offers for interviews. There were a few women who offered to do interviews, but we were simply unable to connect despite numerous attempts.

### ***Survey Sampling Method***

The survey sample was not random, so it cannot be taken to be representative of the off-street sex-worker population. The sampling was purposive to the extent that I attempted to find women with very little, if any, experience working on the street; I wanted to focus on women who worked in the relatively more exclusive and usually better paid end of the sex industry. The data reflect only the particular experiences of the women involved in the project. Nevertheless, the 39 responses I obtained are sufficient to provide an important insight into the world of this particular group of off-street sex workers.

I distributed copies of the survey and business cards with the address of the web site to two massage parlours in Vancouver.<sup>18</sup> The surveys were placed in the staff areas with a poster explaining the purpose of the project and methods of contacting me. I also had business cards delivered to an escort agency owner who was willing to distribute the cards to her staff. I sent out 35 paper copies of the survey, 19 of which were completed and returned by mail.

I did attempt to contact two other agencies by phone. However, without a personal contact at these agencies, the telephone inquiries were screened and my calls were not returned. I

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<sup>18</sup> Self-addressed and stamped envelopes accompanied the paper surveys.

sent an email requesting the participation of 5 other agencies in Vancouver, but received no replies.

In addition, I sent out email requests with a link to the survey website to approximately 40 independent sex workers who advertised their services online.<sup>19</sup> I received a surprising number of responses from women interested not only in completing the survey but also in participating in interviews. Seven out of the ten interviews were with women who were contacted this way. Twenty of the 39 questionnaires were completed online.

I had not set many parameters around my target sample other than to seek the participation of women currently working in one of Greater Vancouver's off-street venues. I specifically sought out women who advertised as "elite" and contacted some of the more expensive agencies in Vancouver. I excluded ten survey responses where the individuals did not submit any information other than the venue in which they had worked.

I did not anticipate capturing transsexual women in my sample. I received an email from one woman who identified herself as transsexual and offered to do an interview with me. Unfortunately, the interview did not take place, but she completed the survey. Since she identified herself as a female independent escort working in the Vancouver off-street sex industry I saw no reason to exclude her from the sample.

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<sup>19</sup> I have chosen not to list the directories I accessed in order to maintain anonymity for the participants.

## **An unanticipated Event**

An unexpected event occurred shortly after I sent out my solicitation to the online independent sex workers. One woman posted the following message on an online review board:

Girls only, I got a request to do this survey in my e-mail. Did anyone else get it and if so what do you think???
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The message included the link to the survey but was posted in an area of the review board geared towards other sex providers. Within hours of the posting I was notified by one of the women who had done an interview. By the time I was able to locate the posting, the message had been online for approximately 12 hours and there were several responses. One of the responders advised the original poster to delete the link to the survey citing concerns about the validity of the data should the link be accessible to the general public. The link had been removed by the time I found the postings.

The responses to the posting on the review board were quite favorable to participation. There were a couple of women who responded that they would not participate, but also a few who strongly suggested that others should participate. This set of comments allowed me to see some of the reasons women gave for not wanting to participate. Two expressed concerns about “discretion” and implied that they did not discuss their work. One woman suggested that the survey was a “waste of time” since women who work off-street did not face the violence that street-involved women confront. Two clients posted replies encouraging women to participate and expressed their interest in the findings.

## *Ethical Considerations*

I received approval from the Research Ethics Board at SFU in August of 2005. In developing this project, I was keenly aware of the fact that I would be asking women to identify themselves and share information about ostensibly illegal activities. Because of the potential harm to research participants that a violation of confidentiality could create, I did not place any limitations on the guarantee of confidentiality given to potential research participants. To help maintain confidentiality, I requested that each participant remain anonymous. In the case of those women with whom I had a prior relationship, I am the only person who knows their identities; I guaranteed them confidentiality as far as professional ethics<sup>20</sup> allow, i.e. unlimited confidentiality.

I did not record any information that could be used to identify participants. The transcripts were edited to ensure that any identifying information - including names, geographic locations or other specific information - was removed. These steps were necessary to allow women to feel free to disclose information about their relationships with police, violence in the workplace, workplace policies for dealing with violence, and work done in contravention of Criminal Code sections, other federal statutes, and municipal bylaws.

The women involved in the study had the option of electing, prior to and during the interview, not to discuss certain topics. I offered contact information for a support service in Vancouver to three women over the course of the project. One of the women was not an interview participant. She contacted me to vent about an incident that had occurred with her significant other. I sent her contact information for a safe and non-judgemental organization

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<sup>20</sup> I am adhering to the ethics code of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

that could offer her support. The other two women were both interview participants who identified the lack of existing services as contributing to their feelings of isolation. I passed along the support information I had in case they wanted to explore these other options.

I was as open as possible about the project's goals, my values, and the potential uses to which I would put the information that participants provided. I made the thesis proposal available to them, and tried to answer all of their questions as thoroughly as possible. I gave the participants full control over the editing of their own transcript. The transcripts were not analyzed until the women had the opportunity to review them to ensure their accuracy and to confirm that all identifying information had been removed. I offered the women the right to revoke their consent at any time prior to the submission of the thesis.



## CHAPTER THREE: KEY FINDINGS

This Chapter focuses on the four areas explored in the questionnaire: victimization, reporting practices, violence prevention and demographic information about the respondents. The discussion focuses on the questionnaire survey, and incorporates information from the interviews where appropriate.

In total, I received 39 completed surveys. The online version was completed by 20 women and I received 19 hard-copies by mail. To begin the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had ever worked in each of the three venues; 64% (n=25) of respondents indicated that they had worked in a massage parlour, 67% (n=26) had worked as an escort, and 72% (n=28) had worked independently. Of the total of 39 responses, 14 respondents (37.8%) had experience working in all three venues. It was obvious from the outset that there was a high degree of cross-over among venues in this particular sample.

### *Victimization*

Respondents were asked to identify how concerned they were about safety while working in a specific venue by choosing among three options:

- 1) Very concerned (It's always on my mind);
- 2) A little concerned (I'm aware but not really worried);
- 3) Not at all concerned (I don't even think about it).

Massage parlours were perceived to be the safest environments: 52% of the 25 respondents with experience working in massage parlours indicated that they were *not at all* concerned about safety when working in a massage parlour. Approximately half of both the escorts and independent workers responded that they were *very concerned* about safety, while only 15.4% of independents indicated that they were *not at all concerned* about violence. Every one of the escorts was at least *a little* concerned about safety. The results suggest that these perceptions accurately reflect the women's experiences: escorts report experiencing more violence than individuals working in massage or independent venues (See Tables 6, 7, & 8, Appendix D).

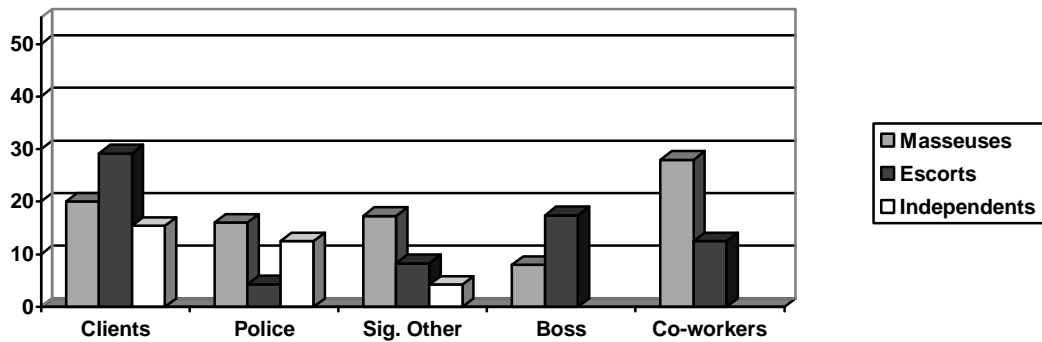
Respondents were asked to indicate how often they experienced eight forms of victimization:

- 1) **Uttering Threats:** Threatening to cause you physical harm if you don't do what is asked;
- 2) **Threatening with a weapon:** Threatening to cause you physical harm while holding a weapon (knife, gun or some other weapon).
- 3) **Physical Assault:** For example being hit, kicked, or held down.
- 4) **Sexual Assault:** Physically forced to do something sexually that you were not prepared to do.
- 5) **Kidnapping/confinement:** Physically restrained and not allowed to leave when you wanted to.
- 6) **Theft:** having money, jewelry or other items stolen.
- 7) **Client refusal to pay for services**
- 8) **Client refusal to use condoms**

In the case of the first six options, respondents were asked to classify the offender. The masseuses and the escorts were given five options: clients, police, significant others, boss/managers, and co-workers. The independents were given the three options: clients, police and significant others.

Respondents were asked how many times they had experienced each of the types of victimization; the options were: never, once, twice, three times, four times or five times or more. In general, little victimization was reported. Indeed, in the charts presented below I report the percentage of respondents who had EVER experienced any form of victimization from each of the perpetrator groups. Detailed statistical tables can be found in Appendix D.

**Chart 1: Threatening (% Ever)**



**Chart 2: Threats/weapons (% Ever)**

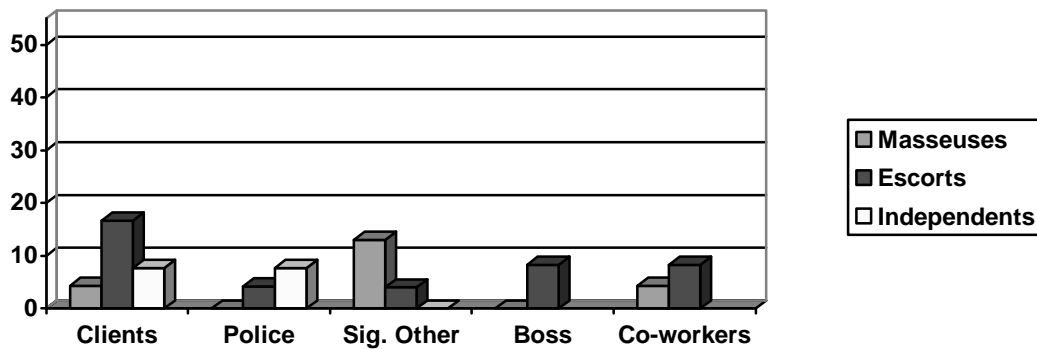


Chart 3: Physical Assault (% Ever)

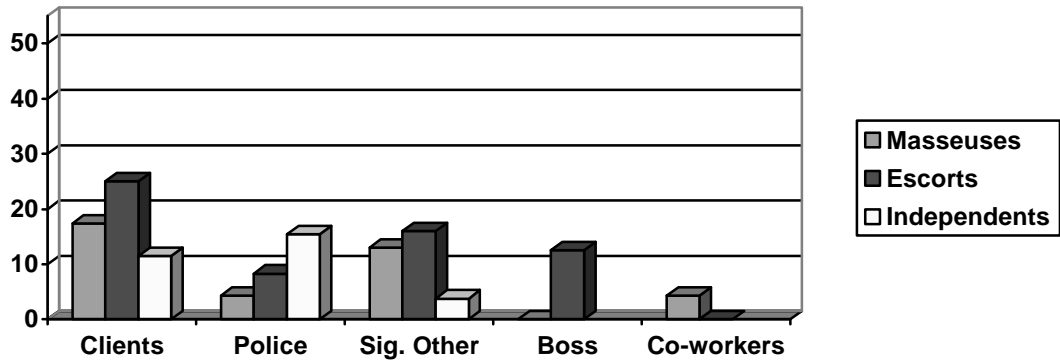


Chart 4: Sexual Assault (% Ever)

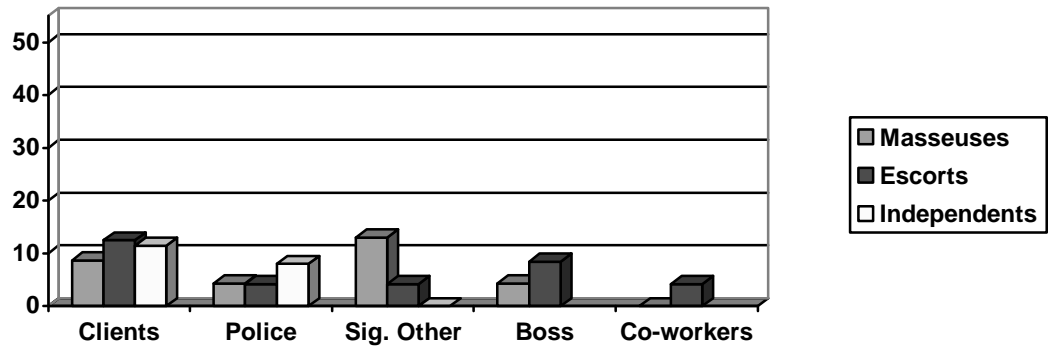


Chart 5: Kidnapping/Confinement (% Ever)

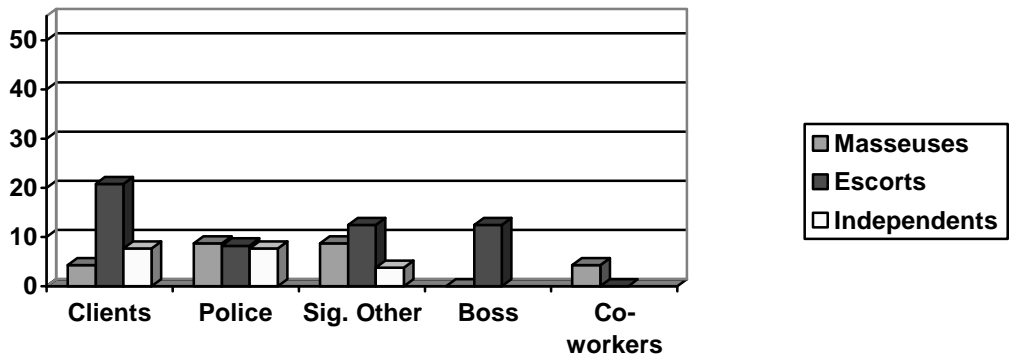
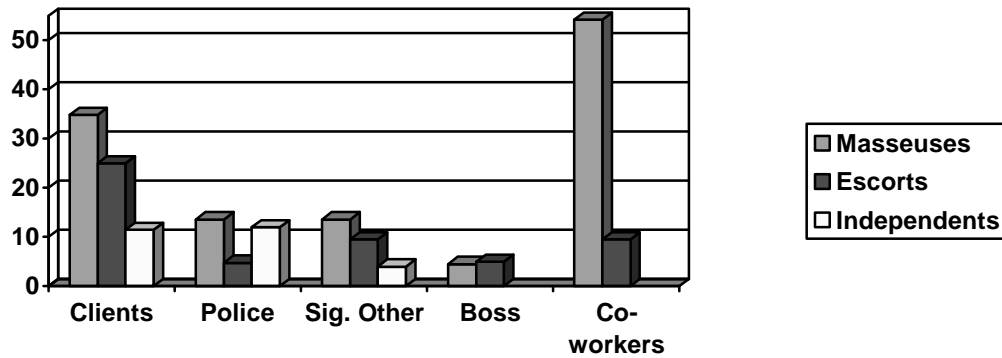


Chart 6: Theft (% Ever)



### Victimization Rates for Massage Parlours

The most common form of victimization of women who work in massage parlours was theft perpetrated by co-workers: this had occurred at least once for 54.2% of the participants (See Table 6, Appendix D). Co-workers were also the most likely source of “threats” for masseuses. The most common form of victimization perpetrated by clients on masseuses was theft (34.8%). The most likely form of violence perpetrated by clients was threats (20%), closely followed by physical assault (17.4%).

Threatening was the most likely form of violence perpetrated by police officers: 16% of the respondents indicated that a police officer has threatened them while they were working in a massage parlour. Violence perpetrated by significant others was relatively constant with between 8% and 17% of the masseuses reporting a significant other had committed each of the forms of violence at least once. Bosses were the least likely to perpetrate violence on their employees.

### **Victimization Rates for Escorts**

Escorts faced more serious violence, more frequently than the other groups of sex workers in this study (See Table 7, Appendix D). Clients were the most likely source of violence. Almost 30% of the escorts had been threatened by a client at least once while working in the sex industry. Physical assault and theft were equally as likely to occur, with 25% of escorts reporting these forms of violence. Escorts reported more violence perpetrated by bosses than either masseuses or independent workers reported.

### **Victimization Rates for Independents**

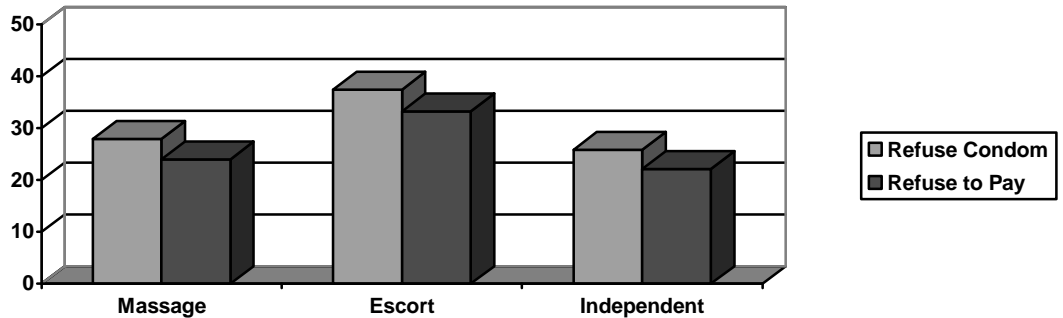
The independent sex workers reported less violence than the other groups of respondents (See Table 8, Appendix D). The highest rate of victimization was threats by clients at 15% (n=4). Clients and police officers were equally as likely to perpetrate violence against independent workers; clients were the most common source of threats and police officers were the most common source of physical assault. Because at least two respondents included experiences of violence while working the streets of Vancouver, the higher rates of violence by police may be explained by the inclusion of street-based experiences. The independent sex workers were also the least likely group to be victimized by significant others.

### **Client Refusals**

During the questionnaire design phase of this study, the collaborators indicated that condom refusal and payment refusal were very important forms of victimization to include in the survey. I included one question relating to each: whether or not a client had ever refused to

use a condom, and whether or not a client had ever refused to pay for the services provided. As indicated in the chart below, escorts were again the most likely to face either eventuality.

**Chart 7: Client Refusals (% Ever)**



Indeed, client refusal to wear condoms was the most frequent source of victimization against independents and escorts, and it was the second most frequent form of victimization for masseuses (See Table 9, Appendix D). Many of the participants wrote additional comments in response to this question. Quite often, participants would say, “I would refuse to provide services if he refused to pay me or if he wouldn’t use a condom” or “other service offered instead.” While it is quite common for sex workers to encounter a client who refuses to wear a condom, their reactions to these situations were not recorded.

I posed an open-ended question asking respondents to identify their grounds for refusing to service a client. The following table summarizes the number of respondents from each venue who identified grounds on which they would refuse to provide services. The independent women were more likely to list at least one ground for refusing a client, and they identified more varied grounds than the escorts and masseuses. Overall, the differences between the groups were minimal: the participants were most likely to report similar grounds for refusing clients.

**Table 1: Sex Providers' Grounds to Refuse Services**

	<b>Massage</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independents</b>
Health concerns (Visible STD's, admitted intra-venous drug user.)	8	8	8
Under the influence of drugs/alcohol	8	6	7
Not enough money	7	7	4
Rude/ obnoxious/ disrespectful	7	7	3
No condom	7	6	6
Safety/ comfort concerns	4	4	7
Hygiene lacking	6	6	5
Aggressive	5	4	4
Uncomfortable with act requested	4	4	2
Intuition			3
Asks for a discount, tries to negotiate rates.			2

This is a selection of responses from the open-ended question:

*If he was disorderly, disrespectful, and wanted to take control of the session... If my intuition tells me that something is amiss, I listen and act on that.* Survey Participant #8

*On any ground I see fit which is the idea of being independent. If ever the client, in any way, makes me feel uncomfortable, he's denied my services.* Survey Participant #12

*Rudeness. They have to know that it is a service provided to them for a fee, not a chance to tell a woman what to do for them sexually. Money doesn't excuse good manners and respect for women. As well, I expect the client to display a sincere appreciation of the service provided for them.* Survey Participant #33

### **Other Forms of Victimization**

There were two open-ended questions relating directly to experiences of victimization. First, respondents were asked if they had experienced any form of violence that was not included in my questions. Four women entered additional responses. Two massage parlour women indicated that “cattiness from other workers” and the “emotional impact of sex work” are additional forms of victimization.

*Let's not forget the emotional abuse we all encounter every day in the rooms: name calling is big, insults, etc.* Survey Participant #17



The other two women who entered additional information worked independently. One described being harassed by neighbors who knew she was a sex worker. The other woman described an incident where a client tried to get his money back and ripped her boot.

Seven of the ten women I interviewed identified the online review boards as major sources of harassment, blackmail, slander and emotional abuse. These boards allow clients to review their dates. The interviewees reported that some clients abuse the boards. A client can threaten to post bad reviews unless the woman gives free sessions or otherwise relaxes her rules. Women reported that clients have posted home addresses or other details about sex workers' private lives. These reviews have serious economic repercussions as the boards are a major source of advertising for independent escorts.

*And the review boards are stacked against us so badly because at any point they can be used as extortion. There are a lot of really horrible stories about the one online review board where guys tell you that you have to give them a freebie or they will ban all your reviews, or take them down. Or, give me a freebie or I'll give you a bad review. There was a form letter going around that a guy was sending to all the women that basically said, give me a freebie and I'll increase your business. If you don't do this, something bad is going to happen. He just mass-mailed them out. I mean, we do our best in this business to have control over what happens and if we just give in to these boards, we become moving targets. Because we never know who they are, but they know who we are and they know what we look like and that is dangerous. I mean, if someone with enough computer skills decides to track you down, they can and they basically have. Interview 6*

### **Most Serious Experience of Violence**

The second open-ended question relating to experiences of victimization asked women to describe briefly the most serious incident of violence that they experienced while working in the sex industry. Twelve respondents (42% of the 28 responses to this question) reported that they had never experienced any violence while working in the industry. Indeed one

woman expressed her frustration with the assumption that the sex industry is rife with violence:

*I have not experienced ANY incidences of violence, serious or otherwise, while working in the sex industry, and I believe that this question should be reworded to exclude the assumption that a sex-trade worker MUST have experienced violence at some point.*  
Survey Participant #9

Another woman explained that the only victimization she had ever been exposed to was perpetrated by co-workers. Five women indicated that their most serious incident was a verbal disagreement or a non-serious incident. Two of the five women reported that men had tried to have sex without condoms.

*A client tried to have sex without a condom and held me down. I did manage to get up and tell him how dangerous that was and he apologized.* Survey Participant #29

The other three women dismissed their most serious incidents as “not serious” and explained that clients had given them a hickey, pushed them down, or “got a bit rough.”

*One client, who seemed particularly "excited", pushed me up into a corner. I'm not sure if he was being "violent" or just "enthusiastic." In any event, it made me a bit uncomfortable so I just pushed him away. End of story.* Survey Participant #16

Nine women (29%) described more serious incidents of violence which ranged from being threatened, to being held against their will, to being physically and sexually assaulted. Eleven respondents did not answer this question. One woman wrote:

*I can't- I mostly try not to think about it.* Survey Participant #1

Clients were the main perpetrators of the victimization described in this question: they were mentioned in 12 of the 16 descriptions of victimization. Three women reported that their worst experiences were at the hands of co-workers, and one woman said that her pimp was the source of the most serious industry-related violence she had experienced. All of the

altercations described between workers and clients were related either to condom use or rates for services provided.

*While working for an agency, I refused to sleep with [a client] for \$200. Agency, driver and phone girl takes \$130 and I would only make \$70. I asked for more \$, he said no. Then he attacked me for the \$, destroyed my cell phone (Worth \$500) and acted like a complete ass. All because the agency said that was enough \$. Survey Participant #33*

## **Perceptions of Dangerousness**

To conclude this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate in which off-street venue they felt that women risked the most violence. 71.9% of the respondents (n=32) indicated that they felt women who worked independently faced the most violence. 18.8% perceived escorting to be the most dangerous venue.

*While I still do not agree with the assumption that women in sex work must face violence, I have chosen Independent work, as perhaps clients are aware that an Independent escort may have less of a support system in place in terms of people knowing where she is and who she is with, so clients may see more of an opportunity to inflict violence. That said, I believe that any sex trade worker is more at risk of violence if she (or he, let us be open-minded) is irresponsible about details of her work, than if she or he pursues a specific type of sex work as opposed to another. Survey Participant #9*

*It makes sense to me that this (independent work) would be more risky, since many independents work alone. They drive themselves to meet clients, and they don't have any security. In a parlour or at an agency, I think a man is less likely to do something violent because he knows that the agency is aware of where they are and what time they are supposed to be done. The parlours have people around all the time in other rooms, and the agencies usually have security, or at least they have some information on the client (phone number and address). Survey Participant #4*

Concern about women working alone was the most frequent reason given to explain why respondents felt that independents were the most likely to face violence. This included concern about a lack of security, meeting a client at an unknown location, not having an agency calling periodically to check in, and not having someone know where the women

were at all times. Women reported that they felt clients would treat women differently if they knew that the women were alone and more “vulnerable.” One woman offered the following insight:

*Well, I think when you do out calls to private homes, as an Independent or working for an Escort Agency, you are very vulnerable to any and all forms of violence. You don't know what is waiting for you there, and you cannot control the environment or situation as well as you can in your own place despite having someone (the Agency) knowing where you are going and a driver waiting outside...I think it's not a case so much of whether you are independent or not, it's where you go to see a client. Survey Participant #8*

The self-reported victimization data from the survey do not support the perception of independent work as the most risky form of off-street sex work: among survey respondents, independent workers reported the least victimization.

### ***Reporting Practices***

This section of the survey was designed to find out how often women reported incidents of violence to a third party, to whom they reported it, and whether they were satisfied with the response to their report.

The first question introduced a skip pattern: if women had never experienced any violence, they could simply tick the appropriate box and skip the entire section. 59.4% of the respondents, or 19 out of 32 individuals (there were seven missing responses), indicated that they had never experienced any violence while working in the sex industry. If the respondents had experienced violence but had not reported the incident(s), they skipped to a question asking for the reasons they did not report it. 25% of the respondents indicated that they had not reported the violence that they had experienced, indicating variously that they

believed it wasn't serious enough, didn't believe anyone cared, they were afraid to lose their jobs, or that they were embarrassed.

*You are ashamed that you weren't careful enough. Shamed, don't want others to know you were raped- feel vulnerable.* Survey Participant #17

*I have not reported many incidents (street) because the humiliation of being the "whore" and the knowledge that reporting won't bring justice and won't change what happened.* Survey Participant #1

Seven of the women (18%) reported incidents of violence. Four of them had reported one or two incidents, while the other three indicated that they had reported violence more than twice. Friends were the most likely people to whom respondents would turn. Three women, one from each type of venue, indicated that they had reported violence to the police. One respondent indicated that she had also reported an incident while working as an independent on the street.

The respondents who reported incidents to their managers were generally satisfied with the managers' responses.

*Absolutely- they responded quickly and came to my rescue. They did however want me to go right back to work. I remember a booking girl saying, "I'm so tired of hearing, 'I've been attacked, I don't want to work.'" Survey Participant #1*

Only one person said that she was not satisfied with her boss's response. There was much less satisfaction with police responses. Two of the three women were very unsatisfied:

*No, never, ever. Always disappointed. Fuckers don't give a shit at all. Even when I was stabbed the cop didn't care- bitch!* Survey Participant #31

One of the respondents had mixed responses to her reports to police. On one occasion, she was completely unsatisfied with the response from police. However, the second time she

reported violence, she received full support from the officers involved. She was much more satisfied with the response from police when she was working off-street as an escort.

*In the one instance, on the street, they seemed unwilling to do anything. And I tried to report it three times. The second time, when I was working as an escort, they responded well and three RCMP testified at my attacker's trial— a lot of good it did, he was acquitted anyway.*  
Survey Participant #1

## ***Violence Prevention***

Respondents were asked a combination of open and pre-coded questions in this section of the survey. First, I posed a broad, open-ended question asking participants what strategies they used to ensure their own safety while working; 74% of respondents reported using specific safety strategies. Violence prevention was one of the main areas of my discussion with the interview participants as well. The majority of the respondents wrote out detailed and lengthy answers in the survey, or spent a considerable amount of time discussing prevention strategies. The three most frequent safety strategies were: a) screening clients; b) using intuition; and c) ensuring that an emergency plan was in place (knowing the locations of exits from various locations, ensuring doors are unlocked, etc.). In addition to these I identify several other strategies, including: public locations and 'checking in'; security measures; direct communication; references; advertising & rates; control & professionalism; and interpersonal communication skills.

### **Screening**

Screening is a conscious and proactive strategy employed prior to meeting clients. It is a strategy employed by some agencies and many independent workers. Seven survey

participants mentioned screening by name, and many of the related strategies women discussed entailed some form of client screening.

*I generally screen my clients quite well. I do not see anybody without having a verifiable name, address and phone number prior to meeting. The majority of my clients are business travelers staying in upscale hotels, which means they would be easy to track down if anything did happen (a big deterrent). If I have any sort of odd feeling prior to an appointment, I contact a fellow escort and tell her exactly where I'm going and when I will "check in" with her for safety. I also come across as fairly confident and assertive and I don't believe I tend to attract the sort of men who like to victimize women.* Survey Participant #3

Screening techniques include verifying names and addresses of clients. Participants reported using online directories to confirm the contact information for a potential client or verifying the client's employment. One woman reported asking for identification upon meeting new clients. Several women mentioned that they did not accept calls from unlisted phone numbers.

## **Intuition**

Use of intuition, the ability to be able to assess clients throughout the date, was identified by nine survey respondents as a key violence-prevention strategy.

*I am very careful to note the tone and attitude of anyone who emails or calls me. If something bothers me, even if I don't know exactly what it is, I will not book with them. I have an emergency plan should someone get violent and the \*mental preparation\* to do what I have to do, including seriously injuring or killing a client with whatever is handy if I am in fear for my life. When it comes down to me, or him, it's always going to be him.* Survey Participant #6

Four of the interviewees spoke directly about intuition, or "trusting your gut." In two situations, women denied employing violence prevention strategies. However, they asserted that while they used their intuition to screen out unwanted dates, they did not think of this as a prevention of violence strategy until I identified it as such. Interview participants

reported using intuition to continuously re-assess the situation in order to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

*You can tell when a guy's off because you see so many normal people. If he sounds like a controlling pimp, not polite, not sincere, and condescending to me... I won't accept it and decline the date in the safest way possible. I would do it in public, or when he has no idea I am about to bail. You catch HIM off guard rather than allowing him to catch YOU off guard. You learn to listen to those red flags and never forget them, just like defensive driver anticipating what the other driver may do (but hasn't done yet) and therefore avoiding any "potential" danger before it occurs. Just like in any other profession that could pose a danger to you. Interview 6*

### **Public Locations & “Checking In”**

Some women meet clients at upscale hotels because they can easily confirm the client's reservation. Clients from upscale hotels would be “easy to track down” should a problem arise. Many of the women prefer public meetings with clients, meeting them in bars, coffee shops, or other public venues.

Interview participants often reported structuring their work to avoid isolation. For some, this includes working in a place, such as an apartment, where an usher or security guard is employed. Other women choose to work in brothels or massage parlours. Drivers are often employed by escorts to serve multiple functions including transport and security.

*My fiancé is my driver, and he waits outside for me at all my jobs. I do outcalls to either a client's home or hotel room, and my fiancé drives me there, waits outside, and has the client's information written down with him. I have a cell phone, and so does he. When I am done an appointment, the arrangement is for me to call him within 15 minutes of the time the appointment is supposed to be done. I'll then tell him I'm done and leaving the client. Usually I phone him within 5 minutes, but we agree on 15, and if he hasn't heard from me after 15 minutes, his instructions are to phone the police. Also, we have a code word that sounds perfectly normal, that I could say in front of a client, and if I ever say that word on the cell phone to him, he will call the police, and attempt to come get me. We follow this procedure every single time, even with regulars. Survey Participant #4*



This system of “checking in” by phone is employed by many escort agencies. Independent women reported using similar systems of ensuring that a friend knows how long they will be and who to call in the event that they do not contact the friend in the prearranged time.

### **Security Measures: cameras, weapons and personal alarms**

Security cameras were mentioned as another means to ensure safety. In the same way that having another person nearby is a deterrent, women mentioned ensuring that their clients saw the security camera was a key safety strategy. Three women mentioned hiding weapons in accessible locations, and two women mentioned having a personal alarm nearby.

*I listen for odd-ball phone inquiries and screen clients that way. I have two alarms on either side of my bed, I have a weapon (hammer) under my mattress. I make sure they can see my TV, which views the entry way where they buzz in, and then they know they are on Candid Camera and they behave. Survey Participant #8*

Being alert and aware of one’s surroundings, using common sense, and being safety conscious in general were mentioned by eight respondents.

### **Direct Communication**

The ability to be honest and direct with clients about rates and services offered was mentioned as a key way to prevent arguments and, therefore, violence.

*I’m a very straight forward player. I don’t negotiate my rates, I don’t hustle people. I’m sure I could make tons of money if I did, but I think you put yourself at a higher risk the more hustle you use— the more you try and manipulate someone out of their money. So it’s a very straight forward transaction with me. Back at my youngest days, I was taught to hustle and I faced far, far more scary events in those circumstances and I’m not prepared to do that. With the communication, if someone tries to play games, I’m just not up for that. I’m not going to negotiate what I’m comfortable with as far as providing services. I will simply say that I believe there is someone better suited to you, have a nice day. And usually that is fine. Interview 7*

*I've got to the point now, where I won't even see a guy if he doesn't give me respect. Basically, this is the session I offer. If you don't want it, or you want something cheaper, go somewhere else. So what I found is that, if a guy on the phone is saying something like, "Are you sure I can't touch you?" – and even if they're being polite, you know they're going to be pushing your boundaries. You've already told them what the deal is and they're not listening. So I won't even bother with them. Interview 4*

One of the women interviewed explained that she did not find it necessary to discuss services offered or rates because these details were available on her web site.

*You know what, the thing is, my clients pretty much understand that from the get-go. I don't have to communicate that... I am quite clear- "If you have any concerns than just ask me." Because otherwise, I'm going to take the lead. I don't really have to communicate it. I've never minded being forward that I use condoms. I've never had anyone flinch an eyebrow at that. More than not, I like things to be organic, so I don't do the whole speech up front. Because you know what, to get to me, you have to jump through enough hoops in the first place. They know. And maybe it'll come up one day, but I state quite clearly in my website and the kind of guys that get to be my clients are the ones who've demonstrated that they're read my website. Generally the ones that care about no protection usually ask and then I will say, I'm sorry. So they know. Interview 9*

Another woman explained the inherent danger in setting up a system where rates and services offered are NOT clearly identified prior to the interaction:

*Danger comes when unstable guys who have distrust and no respect for women feel they are being ripped off or when they expect something else (are led to believe they will get something different from what the girl is willing to do when she gets there). Example: when girls charge the upfront fee for a massage and then upon arrival tell the guy that the rate doesn't include sex can give someone with anger issues a reason to become angry and violent. Interview 6*

Participants reported that escort agencies typically charge the client a fee and leave the escort to explain that the fee does not include sex; if the client wants sexual intercourse, he has to pay an additional fee directly to the service provider.

*When you work (at an escort agency) the booking girl is sending you anywhere because she wants her \$20 commission for the call. And you can get fined by the agency if you don't get the money. So, out of \$200, 40% goes to the agency (\$80) and \$20 to the booking girl. There's half your money- already. And then you have to pay the driver- now if you're going*

*to \*\*\*, which there's lots of call in \*\*\*, or anywhere up and down the Valley all night long. Then that's like \$60, and I'm down to \$40. All that work- three hours to get \$40. That's insanity. This is if the guy refuses to tip me. But this is where the dangerous environment comes in- because you have to get the rate- the hourly rate (\$200) in order to pay everybody who got you to the door. So, you've got that money. Now you have to ask the guy for a tip or money for the sexual service. Otherwise, you might as well step out on low-track and make the money and save yourself the time. So, at this point, now you've asked him for extra money. The booking girl has told him everything's included- you're going to do it without a condom, you're going to take it up the ass, whatever... anything to book the call. Interview 2*

Massage parlours are often set up in a similar way: clients typically pay an up front fee for a massage, and additional services and rates are discussed between the client and the provider.<sup>21</sup> One of the main reasons that some businesses are structured this way reflects the pseudo-illegal nature of the transaction. Establishments generally do not discuss details of services provided by their staff members in order to protect the owners from allegations of pimping or from business license violations. Individual sex providers are often expected to negotiate the details of the transaction on a one-on-one basis.

## References

Another strategy that many interview participants employed was to ask clients for a reference. They might ask new clients to give the name and contact information of another sex worker who could vouch for them. Some of the women explained that they don't usually bother with references because they would rather trust their own judgment than someone else's assessment of a potential client. Three of the women explained that there are reference systems available in many states in the US and in Toronto which operate similarly to a dating service. Clients enter their contact information into either a telephone-operated system or an online system and some services conduct a criminal record check on the client. Sex workers

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion on different fee structures, see Pivot (2006) "Beyond Decriminalization."

agree to report “bad dates” to the company so that other sex workers can consult the database and check the rating of a potential client at any time. The service is typically free for sex providers; clients are charged a membership fee. Three of the interview participants mentioned that this system is much more accepted in the US than in Canada.

*There are services that I use when I'm down in the States- referral services. So if a client wants to be discreet, they don't have to give me the information. They can give it to the service, who will keep it private and they will just give me the ok...I don't pay them- the client does. Ontario is just starting to use that, Vancouver- there are only a few girls who do that. Any girl who demands that kind of reference is going to lose a lot of business.*

Interview 7

*There is a new version of 411, which is a client reference data base where clients sign up and they do all the screening and checking out and everything else so if the client's been approved, then their references check out... The problem is that they don't keep the reference information once they clear someone. They don't actually have that info anymore. So you still have to do it. The purpose of it is to expedite the process because you can go on the website and check if he's ok. That's all they can say- if he's ok or not, you can't get any details. And the thing is you still need reference information yourself.*

Interview 9

## **Advertising & Rates**

*My prices, website, intuition and my standards save me from disrespectful abusive men.*

Interview 6

Five of the women interviewed suggested that the way they advertise their businesses was extremely important in ensuring their overall safety. They all credited their higher service rates and their style of advertising for allowing them to work free from violence. The main advertising method for the women was via individual websites. Online advertising allows women to present themselves as they choose; it allows them to be very clear about their expectations of clients, and about the type of session they offer. Sex workers can provide details about their rates, pictures, rules and contact information.

*Have you seen my website? It's probably one the best out there, if not the best. And I do that for a reason— it's my way of marketing for the right gentleman. I'm marketing for a gentleman that appreciates that- that he looks and he sees. A good client looks at what you say and what you don't say, what you show and what you don't show. Interview 9*

## **Control & Professionalism**

*You have to meet me on my terms or there are no terms at all. That's it. Interview 9*

Almost all of the interviewees discussed their need to control transactions with their clients. Women explained that their experience of relative freedom from any violence while working was largely due to the way they structured their work. By ensuring that they always remained in control of the interaction, and by ensuring that the clients understood that the woman was in control, they were able to construct a session the way they wanted to.

*If you do not control it, you should not do it. And the internet has allowed us to turn that power structure upside down- we've inverted it. You don't need a guy or anyone to help you. You can design your own website, if you're on it, you don't have to pay anyone- you can do what you want... I mean, you want to make sure that they know, right from the get go, that I think you're a nice guy and you are going to stay that way. If you stay that way, everything's fine. But if you even think about getting out of line, I'm going to know and I'm going to stop everything, and I'm going to take my money and leave. Interview 5*

*You always need to take control, make sure the dates know that you're in control, that you're not stupid and that they won't get away with anything. This is so important to do in a subtle way rather than offending him by being too stern... any female, sex-worker or not, that allows a man to control the situation e.g.; conversation, plans, feelings and subtly talk down to her in a condescending way, even sarcastically, this puts any woman in danger since this is a sneaky way men ascertain a woman's weakness in character and I believe can lead to rape and worse if it isn't nipped in the bud intellectually by her. Interview 6*

Further, women reported that their sense of professionalism ensured that the clients treated sex workers with the respect they deserve. They generally decline alcoholic drinks and recreational drugs, although some of the women did report accepting one or two glasses of wine during the date. They insist on their “donation” being dealt with immediately and

discreetly by asking the client to have the money ready in an envelope at the start of the date. Five of the women interviewed mentioned the word “professional” when describing the way they conduct their business.

### **Interpersonal Communication Skills**

Sex workers appear to be particularly skilled at molding their sessions to conform to their own boundaries. As one agency owner reports, interpersonal communication skills are crucial in this line of work: they assist in diffusing situations and in ensuring women’s health and safety are not compromised.

*For example, we try to teach them to never say, “No”. We don’t mean you have to do anything someone asks of you, but there are other ways around it. We try to teach basic customer service skills as a preventative measure... Interview 1*

### ***Demographics***

It is important to be clear about the target population I sampled in this project. I specifically sought women who were working in high-end establishments in Vancouver, or independently in the Greater Vancouver area. The demographic data are based on 24 respondents (the others did not provide this information). This section was the final section in a fairly long and detailed survey, so it may have suffered from some attrition. Some participants may have preferred not to discuss information related to demographics. In spite of the reduction in numbers, the results of this self-reported victimization survey indicate that it is important to ensure that different groups of sex workers, not just street sex workers, are included in research prior to enacting law reform, as these results show a very different picture of victimization than the one usually associated with prostitution.

The average age of the respondents in this project was 30 years. The youngest respondent was 20 and the oldest was 45. The average number of years worked in both massage and escorting was 3.3 years. The average number of years worked in independent venues was slightly longer at 4.4 years. The range was smallest for massage parlours: the longest time spent working in massage parlours was 11 ½ years. For escorting and independent work, the longest time worked was 19 ½ years.

The respondents were asked to indicate the age and venue in which they had started to work in the sex industry. Only two respondents started working prior to the age of 18. The majority of the respondents (56.7%, n=17) started between the ages of 19 and 24, while 16.6% (n=5) started working in the industry at age 30 or older. In terms of the type of venue in which they first worked, 41.9% (n=13) of the respondents began in massage parlours; only five respondents indicated that they started on the street (21%).

This self-selected sample differs drastically from the reported self-selected samples in other Canadian studies – most of which focus on street sex worker populations – in terms of the respondents’ income, race and education. Over half the respondents reported earning over \$5,000 per month, and more than \$60,000 annually. Those working as independents were most likely to earn over \$10,000 monthly (21.1% of independent workers). The respondents reported working an average of 3.87 days per week (SD=1.52).

**Table 2: Monthly Income**

<b>Income</b>	<b>Massage (n= 21)</b>	<b>Escort (n= 18)</b>	<b>Independent (n=19)</b>
Less than \$2,000	14.3%	22%	0%
\$2,000- \$5,000	33.3%	22%	36.8%
\$5,000- \$10,000	38.1%	33.3%	42.1%
\$10,000 or more	14.3%	16.7%	21.1%

Of the 23 women who reported their “race,” the majority were Caucasian (79.3%). The majority of the respondents were Canadian (72.4%), most of whom were born in British Columbia. 10 % of the sample identified as South East Asian. Aboriginal women were unrepresented in this study.

As to levels of education, this sample of sex workers had much higher levels of educational attainment than any other sample: 90.3% (n=31) indicated that they had some post-secondary training, while 35.5% had completed either a Bachelor’s Degree (n=4), Masters Degree (n=2) or PhD (n=5). Only 32.2% of the respondents had children.

The interview participants differed from these statistics only slightly; five of the ten were over 30; nine of the interview participants were working as independents at the time of the interview; two of the ten had first started in the industry as youths; three of the women had worked on the street at some point in their careers; seven of the women had at least some university education; and only two of the ten were mothers. The length of time they had worked in the industry ranged from 2 years to 20 years.

In sum, my self-selected sample comprised mainly well-educated, financially comfortable, local, white women near the age of 30. They appear to be distinguishable from the general population of women only by their higher than average earnings.<sup>22</sup> These are some of the women who work in the high end, off street sex work industry in Greater Vancouver.

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<sup>22</sup> The average income for women in Canada according to the 2001 census was \$21, 963.



## CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTEXT OF SEX WORK

This chapter focuses on the results of the ten interviews I conducted. It examines working conditions in the off-street sex industry, and describes participants' recommendations for law and social policy reforms. I have concluded this chapter with a selection of quotes that reflect the participants' thoughts about the sex industry, and their experiences as sex workers.

### *Working in the Off-Street Sex Industry*

All of the interview participants reported that their main reason for participating in this project was to explain what working in their segment of the sex industry was really like; they wanted to combat stereotypes about women who sell sex. These women stressed their desire for the general public and the government to understand that the experience of sex work is not homogenous: individuals engage in sex work for many different reasons and in many different circumstances. For most of my participants, the decision was primarily financial: sex work can offer a very high wage without the need for specific training or education. Some women report working in the industry because they enjoy their work, and they enjoy providing a positive sexual experience for men.

*And then there are the lonely postmen who are shy, don't know how to seduce women or aren't very good in the dating department. And when I see him, I make him feel good himself because he's actually quite sexy. And he's quite skilled and I am able to find what is sexy about every one of my clients. Interview 9*

*And what about the guy who's got the coke- bottle bottom glasses, he's the guy who nobody will have sex with...what would you do if you couldn't even pay for sex?...I've seen guys dumpster diving and them standing at my door with the money in their hands. Their once a year treat - once a year shower for that matter - come in and they are so freaked out it almost makes me scared... I've been in bed with men who are blind or quadriplegic. Climbed right into the extended care bed... It's totally wonderful to do those kinds of things. Interview 2*

*I mean these guys don't want to be seeing me - they want to be home with you- if only...like this one old guy with Parkinson's - he just wished his wife would touch him. And I'm like... Oh my god. It's so sad on such a deep level...So, I love most of my clients. I can honestly say, for the most part, I connect really well with my clients and they are really sweet. Especially with the type of sex I offer- they really do come to me for tenderness. And I like to do that healing, have good intentions. Interview 4*

The ability to choose to work in the sex industry featured prominently in the discussion regarding entrance. All of the participants were adamant that their decision to work in the industry was consciously made, and all of them were indignant that people should question their choice.

*I just wish people would stop judging what I do as breaking something they think should be sacred and feeling sorry for girls like me. Why? Respect me. Help those that are really being exploited. I'll let you know if I am, but how can I be if I'm the boss of my business and not at the mercy of the streets and a rough agency? In a perfect world we'd all wish for the perfect job and a great income and to not have to do anything hard for it. But whether I'm an escort or not, everyone deals with this dilemma of doing jobs that pay great but aren't perfectly enjoyable. In most cases, as in mine, you have your ups and downs, likes and dislikes about it. There is no perfection. They didn't out-law the most dangerous job in the world, crabbing in Alaska, just because the chances of being killed were higher than what I do... the men make huge money and THEY choose to take that risk based upon informed knowledge and it's legal! Same with ocean welding or mining! Why is what I do any worse when at my elite level there is next to no cases of death or violence caused by occupation! Interview 6*

The interview participants were asked to identify the “best” parts of the job. The wages were certainly one of the best parts. One woman responded that the friendships she had built with other women in the industry were the best part of her work. The other two most common answers were: a) the freedom of operating as an independent; and b) the confidence or self-esteem that can be gained through sex work.

*The best part is the freedom I have. I work whenever I want, I can charge whatever I'm comfortable with, and I have no boss to exploit me or otherwise make life difficult (which is what I experienced in every other job I've ever had).* Interview 10

Interview participants explained that the negative impact sex work can have on personal relationships was the biggest cost of their work. Some of the women felt isolated because they could not discuss their work with family and friends unless they were willing to be truthful about their occupation. One of the women said that she felt she could not have a family while she worked in the sex industry. Another doubted that she would be able to find a partner who would accept her work. Two of the women had serious concerns about negative long-term effects the work could have on women, and the social stigma attached to being a sex worker. One woman said that she did not see any negatives associated with her work.

There was a great deal of variety in styles of sex work. One woman worked independently as a masseuse who did not offer “full service” to her clients (no sexual intercourse). Two women worked independently on part-time schedules because they had other occupations. Some of the women worked solely on an out-call basis, while others preferred to work out of their residences. Three of the women explained that their dates were typically full-evening affairs or weekend trips.

Some of the women want everything about the transaction to be open and directly stated. Others prefer not to discuss details and just let the date unfold. These latter women were more likely to describe their work as “companionship:” they were being paid for their time, not for specific services. Almost all of the women said that the flexibility and the ability to structure the work the way they wanted was one of the best parts of independent sex work.

When it comes to their future expectations, one of the interview participants was looking to end her career in the sex industry. Another woman was looking to end “in the near future”: she explained that the double life she was required to live was beginning to wear on her. The other eight women had no plans for leaving the sex industry at the time of the interview.

The women explained that one of the more difficult aspects of sex work relates to leaving the industry: Two participants suggested that transitioning out to more legitimate work would be very difficult because they were unsure what kind of work they could do that would match their current income. One woman who had exited a couple of times explained that she had done so only to satisfy a partner: she always returned to sex work because she preferred it to other work. Experiences of violence prompted one of the women to leave the industry on at least one occasion.

## **Combating Stereotypes**

One of the main reasons that the interview participants gave for sharing their stories was to try to help the general public and the academic community see what their work is really like. They all felt that there are too many misconceptions and hurtful stereotypes about women who engage in sex work. These stereotypes include the assumed homogeneity of the work, victimization, exploitation, and the lack of choice women are presumed to have. This section examines these women’s experience of stereotypes and the stigmatizing of sex workers.

## **Homogeneity of sex work**

*Like everything else in the world, we are all different girls, we all have different circumstances - it is very hard to blanket everybody. You just can’t generalize. Everyone’s gotten into it for different reasons, even in the high end. I mean we don’t even consider each other competition,*

*because we all have our own way of doing things and likewise we all have our reasons for being here. Interview 8*

Some of the most important lessons to take from this research are that women engage in off-street sex work for many different reasons, they work in many different ways, and they come from many different backgrounds. Two of the women began working in the sex industry at around 30 years of age. One woman came from a “very wealthy background,” four others said they had very “normal” backgrounds. Two women started sex work when they were teenagers living on the street. One woman had never worked in a “straight job”—her experience was completely limited to the sex industry. Nine had held other types of jobs, four of whom were working in a “straight job” at the time of the interview in addition to their sex work.

### **Victimization**

The interview participants expressed their frustration with the assumption that they had experienced childhood sexual abuse, emotional trauma, or that there was simply something “wrong with them.” This stereotyping seems to be the only way people who are not involved in the sex industry can make sense of women who choose to prostitute. One interview participant said that she was labeled “mentally ill” by her mother: this was the only way the mother could understand her daughter’s involvement in the sex industry. Another woman expressed her frustration with common assumptions by asking, “Am I unicorn? Do I not exist?” The interview participants were especially critical of “feminists.”

*It’s so amazing that there are people who are like, “I am woman, hear me roar” who come to a complete stop on this. Interview 6*

*I think it is really sad when crazy right wing feminists – I mean if you're calling yourself an educated woman, someone who is free-thinking and a feminist who breaks through moulds - then don't shut yourself off to other opinions because they are just as valid. Interview 4*

## **Exploitation**

The participants were asked how they responded to the allegation that the sex industry exploits and harms all women. Their responses ranged from anger at the “ignorance” underlying the allegation, to deciding to share their experiences in order to disprove the allegation, to questioning its accuracy.

*Those allegations make me angry. I think it's incredibly arrogant for someone to say that they know the nature of the work of ALL women in this industry. It's a very ignorant and offensive thing to say. When people say things like that, I feel like I'm being treated like a young child who can't make her own decisions about what to do. I think these allegations come from people who refuse to believe that there can be positive things about the sex trade, and don't bother considering all the information that is available. Interview 10*

One of the women argued that, to address the question about exploitation, we need to take the socio-economic position of women into consideration:

*I believe that in a world with such significant socio-economic imbalances, it is often financial disparity or other vulnerabilities that lead women into this business. If you took those factors away, if we had a just world and prostitution still existed, I would accept prostitution as being non-exploitative and I don't think I'm going to see that in my day. Furthermore unlike other service industries, the commoditization or value is mostly based on objectification rather than the quality of the service. Now in regards to whether or not the sex trade harms women outside the trade, I would have to agree with this statement to the extent that, say, the modeling industry (for example) portrays unrealistic expectations of what women should look like, or porn represents an unrealistic perception of female sexuality... And even though I do struggle with the contradictions, saying that it is exploitative is a generalization and that means I am forcing my position on to the other women around me. Interview 7*

Six women identified working conditions as being the primary source of exploitation in the sex industry. They described how the need to advertise their services results in sex workers having to pay exorbitant rates simply because of the nature of the work. Further, they

suggested that the amount of money some agencies make from sex workers, the systems of fines that are often imposed, and requirements by some agencies that staff offer unsafe sexual services were all forms of exploitation.

### **Agency: The state of exerting power** <sup>23</sup>

All of the women who participated in the interviews insisted that they made conscious choices to work in the sex industry. Two women stated that were it not for their financial need, they would not choose sex work. However, six women commented that they work because they want to: they did have other sources of income and still chose to continue working as sex workers.

*I have options. That's all I can say. I have a degree, I have a job, and it's good extra cash. I meet interesting people and I feel good about myself.* Interview 8

Another common misconception is that sex workers drug themselves in order to cope with the work. Nine of the women interviewed explicitly stated that they make a point of never doing any kind of drug while working. Four women said that they limited their alcohol consumption to one or two glasses of wine during the course of a date. These self-imposed restrictions arise from the woman's desire to remain in control throughout the date.

Questions relating to how much agency these women exercise extend beyond their initial decision to work in the sex industry; they concern sex workers' power to control sex transactions. Women were asked how they felt about the assertion that men buy sex from women because they want to be able to exert power over women. All the respondents were adamant that this was not the case in their experience – if anything, the reverse is true: these women consider sex work to empower them.

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<sup>23</sup> Source: [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com)

*It's a very empowering thing. I don't really know how to describe it. Only someone who's actually done it would understand. Anyone who thinks the man is in power in these transactions has never worked – the women are controlling these transactions.* Interview 1

Many participants described their work as meeting the aspirations of many feminists: they do what they want with their bodies, with partners they choose, and in conditions they choose. Some of the women described themselves as the ultimate feminists.

The participants' sense of power was greatest when they felt they were in control of the circumstances of their work. The women I interviewed all operated independently. They were in a position to structure their work in a way that felt comfortable. The women defined their own boundaries of comfort for physical acts. For them, sex work was not about selling unrestricted sexual access to their bodies. Women often commented that "it's not all about sex" or "the work is so much more than sex." Five of the women provided examples of dates where no sex actually occurred: they were being paid for their companionship.

### **Stigmatization**

Synonyms for the word "stigma" include shame, dishonor, and disgrace. Prostitution is often viewed as disgraceful, shameful and dishonorable. Five women discussed issues relating to the sense of shame attached to their work. It appears that one of the primary effects of this stigma is to prevent women from "coming out" about their work. They did not want certain people to know about their occupation because of the reaction it would occasion. While sex workers may feel completely comfortable about their work, they may choose to keep it hidden in order to avoid judgment. One woman explained that while all of her friends and family knew about her work, she chooses not to identify herself as a sex worker "...in the company of people who may have the power to make my life difficult" (Interview7).



Women suggested that there is a more negative stigma towards women who actively seek work in the industry. When prostitution can be explained away as the result of drug addictions, abuse or coercion, people seem to be much more accepting of the prostitute, who they can see as a victim. Women who stand firmly behind their decisions to sell sex are treated as anomalies and dismissed. As one participant explained:

*From what I have found, a lot of people are comfortable accepting you if you were a hooker but you left it in your past. Not many people are comfortable if you are a hooker.”*

Interview 7

### ***Participants’ Recommendations about Law Reform***

One of the main goals of this project was to provide a means by which women could voice their recommendations for law reform to the academic and legal communities. Respondents were asked how to make the work “safer.” The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended question asking for additional comments, thereby giving respondents an opportunity to make whatever recommendations they liked. Twenty-one of the respondents wrote additional comments, the majority of which expressed the need for law reform and increased education about the nature of off-street sex work. In the following section, I outline the main recommendations that emerged over the course of the interviews and in the survey responses.

#### **Decriminalization**

*This job is as legitimate as any other and should be completely legal. What people choose to do with their own time and bodies is nobody’s business unless somebody is being harmed.*

Interview 10

All of the individuals who participated in this project firmly opposed the criminalization of sex work. The following comments suggest that a double standard underlies the criminalization of prostitution:

*At its most fundamental form, whenever someone doesn't understand, especially people not in this industry— my favourite line is to say, Let's back up a bit. Do you think there should be a law against a woman being a slut? Really- is a woman free to do whatever she wants with her own body? Forget about the money for a second. Can I go out and fuck a different guy every day or should there be a law against that? It may not sit well with you, you may have no respect for a "loose" woman, but really, if I want to go out, chase different guys, fuck different men, fuck three guys in one night and then go back to the bar for more, should there be a law against that? You'd be hard pressed to find someone to say yes. Then what changes when I decide that I want to ask for money? Are you trying to say that women should be available for free? Is that really what you're trying to say? A woman is free to be a slut, as long as she doesn't want to ask for money.... It's really hard to justify criminalization of prostitution when you start from that premise... As soon as the compensation enters the equation it turns scary. Interview 1*

Generally, the respondents were not afraid of being charged with a criminal prostitution offence: they reported that the likelihood of police intervention in their work is extremely low or non-existent. For them, the biggest risk of working in the industry is being identified as a sex worker and facing social consequences. However, as argued below, the quasi-legal status of sex work in Canada does affect off-street sex workers in the following ways: it has an important impact on the way agencies are structured; it affects how well informed individuals are upon entering the industry; it limits sex workers' abilities to openly negotiate the terms of transactions; and the legal status can deter individuals from turning to the police when they are criminally victimized.

Escort agencies were identified as a potential source of exploitation. The interview participants asserted that while escort agencies and massage parlours are necessary for many individuals who are either not able to or are unwilling to run their own business, they should be subject to employment standards and they should be structured as non-exploitably as

possible. However, because of the current legal regime, agencies are able to operate in ways that are not in the best interests of workers. Respondents reported a system of fines for being late or for calling in sick. Some agencies charge workers a “book on” fee whereby the worker pays the agency for the privilege of getting dates. In some organizations workers are required to pay between 40% and 60% of the hourly rate to the agency as the agency cut. In addition, workers are expected to “tip” the phone girls, the drivers (if one is provided, otherwise they have to drive themselves or pay for their own transportation), and the management (if applicable). If the workers do not tip the phone girls, they will not get clients referred to them.

Many of the participants understood that one of the reasons agencies require such high rates from their workers is the high cost of operating an “adult entertainment” establishment. The advertising fees such establishments are charged in comparison to other license fees are exorbitant. One woman explained that fees upwards of \$30,000 annually are charged for an advertisement in the local telephone directory. Licensing fees can be extremely high, and many establishments are charged higher than average rental fees, in part due to their questionable legal status. Agency operators, municipal governments, advertisers, and landlords all reap additional profit out of the sex business because of its marginal legal status; ironically, in the process they all appear to live partly on the avails of prostitution, a criminal offence.<sup>24</sup>

Sex work is an underground occupation. This is largely due to the social stigma attached to the work, and the criminal and municipal prohibitions against it. The law silences sex workers thereby reducing the amount of information available to individuals who are

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<sup>24</sup> See Pivot (2006) for more information on the various structures of agencies.

considering entering the industry. One of the most common recommendations is to provide access to information about how to work safely and provide training for women getting into the business. Participants recommended that there be training to provide women with necessary customer service and other skills unique to escort work. However, training cannot legally occur in Canada as it may be considered procuring (s. 212), communication for the purposes of prostitution (s. 213), or aiding or abetting someone to become a prostitute (s. 212(1) (d)). Training is important to the protection of the health and safety of escort agency and massage parlour workers:

*Well, if you're going to run a place where you don't expect someone to risk their health, give them the tools to show someone a good time for an hour. If you're going to charge someone \$300, and they go to do the things they want to do – "Oh no, you can't kiss me, you can't touch me down there, no you can't perform oral sex on me, no, I'm not touching your dick without a condom on it" – the guy's going to be pissed off. You can't justifiably run an establishment where you let girls charge \$300 for sex and don't give them some sort of knowledge of how to entertain someone. So, it eclipses mere occupational health and safety, you can't just tell someone, don't do this and don't do this and don't do this because those will all risk your health – what are you going to tell them to do – just lay there? If you're going to charge top dollar, then give someone the tools and the knowledge they need to entertain someone for an hour. Further, this training should be provided by a certified public health nurse but it's impossible to organize that when the service (sex work) is illegal.*

Interview 1

The criminal laws have a much more significant impact on the lives of street-based sex workers. All of the women interviewed expressed concern about the safety of women who work the street. They discussed how wrong it felt to know that while they were able to work free from violence, other women who are doing essentially the same work are risking their lives.

*A lot of us see it as really nasty that we can do what we do, and I haven't heard about any violence... we could ask a cop if we get lost where the Four Seasons is, and that's fine. But these girls on the DTES are just getting slaughtered. I mean, how can that be happening? What is going on? It's just disgraceful. A lot of us actually feel guilty about that because we're going to these nice hotels, being taken for dinner, I mean it's something that is*

*essentially the same thing and these girls are being killed, or beat up or raped and maimed.*  
Interview 5

However, while off-street workers are not subject to enforcement of the criminal laws like street workers, women who work indoors are often misinformed, unaware or confused about the legalities of their work. This confusion can result in sex workers' safety being compromised. While s. 213 of the Criminal Code is directed towards street-based sex work, many off-street workers believe that they are not allowed to openly discuss the terms of the exchange either by phone or by email. This does not deter people from engaging in acts of prostitution (which is technically *not* a criminal offence), it only serves to prevent people from discussing their boundaries and services offered prior to the meeting. Similarly, some women reported a reluctance to report incidents to police officers for fear of legal or social repercussions.

One woman revealed how her recent report of being harassed was turned against her when the police became involved.

*I have reported experiences of harassment, when harassment escalated to my neighbors receiving flyers (mock advertisements). This encounter involved the RCMP's vice unit coming and having a discussion over coffee. Our discussion involved vice officers telling me my work was illegal and my responding by quoting sec. 210 of the criminal code. The officers instructed me to make efforts to exit the trade within the next 3 months. I made them aware that I would leave "when I am good and ready to." The officers then made threats about arrest and ministry involvement. I told them they could do whatever they felt they needed to and escorted them to the door. I proceeded to get a lawyer the next day in case they followed through on their threats. The officers did not come back as they said they would in 3 months, nor was I arrested, nor was there any involvement from the Ministry of Children and Families. Interview 7*

## Legalization, Licensing and Taxes

The majority of the women interviewed balked at the idea of legalizing and licensing the industry. Their main fear was that licensing would result in their losing their independence, and force them into a situation where they would be pimped by the government.

*But that would be something that could harm my business with legalization. Anything coming in would have some restrictions and right now there are none. I mean there are some things I could see would be reasonable, like having a medical test every couple of months, but if they made you join a union, I wouldn't be into that. My business is my business. And there are discretion issues, too. If everyone knew you were an escort, and they see you with a guy, they'll assume he's a client. I think that's problematic. If it is regulation and my real name is going to be somewhere, I don't want to give out my real name for safety. Interview 5*

One of the women was in the process of applying for her escort license at the time of the interview. None of the other eight independent women had licenses – either because they knew that they did not need to have a license to work independently, or because they did not want to formally associate themselves with the adult entertainment industry for fear that it would lead to some kind of repercussion.

*I wonder if it could not involve licensing. Like just create a safe zone where women could work and it's not heavily regulated. Because I don't see a lot of women who work the street being willing to walk in get a license and give out their real names. Then you are suddenly in the radar. Like, right now, as far as I'm concerned nobody knows my real name. As far as I know. So, no I wouldn't want to register. Interview 8*

When it came to taxation, four women said that sex workers are often unaware of the tax implications of their work. Some sex workers are reluctant to claim income associated with escorting or massaging for fear that identifying their occupation to the federal government would eventually harm them financially, legally or in some occupationally-related way. However, failure to declare income may negatively affect a person's ability to purchase real estate or get a credit card. One of the women described the problem this way:

*I realized that for a lot of women in this business, the fact of being (or feeling) unable to declare income is a seriously limiting factor in life. How does one get credit or a mortgage without having proof of income? I guess I've taken those things for granted because I've always had a regular job with a decent income, but it seems that relatively few women in this business are able to lead "normal" financial lives. I've also noticed that despite the relatively good incomes this business brings, a lot of women are scrambling for rent money at month's end. Why is this? Perhaps the very fact that they cannot put their income down on paper and that everything is cash based prevents women from ever really analyzing their finances (budgeting, etc.). Interview 8*

Another woman explained how it is difficult to deal with Revenue Canada because sex workers cannot get accurate information about how to declare their income because they cannot find out what expenses can legitimately be deducted.

### **Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety**

One common suggestion was that employment standards should apply to adult entertainment establishments. One woman suggested that the agencies should have a set of guidelines imposed, but that these guidelines should be developed by experiential individuals. They should include rules eliminating the system of fines and “book on” fees, ensuring clean and safe working conditions, and creating specific health and safety guidelines to protect sex workers. The system should include resources for sex workers, such as financial advice, personal and career counseling, training or education opportunities, and access to medical services. Participants suggested that advertisers should apply the same rates to all businesses and stop imposing exorbitant rates on adult entertainment services. This would assist in bringing operating costs down, and reduce the percentage that agencies take from the hourly rate.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Pivot (2006) for more recommendations related to occupation health and safety.

*It makes me angry the way that the agencies take so much money. It's a common complaint. And I think that sometimes girls will flip from agency to agency looking for a better deal, but I mean these people are making tons of dough. And who's the person that's giving their body? It's wrong...10%- that's reasonable! That's like what an agent for an athlete would charge. After all, it's a promotional agency. Yeah, there's some booking and whatever, but take a booking fee and then charge a percentage – that's fair. Interview 9*

Occupational health and safety was a concern for several women in both the survey and the interview samples. Condom use during intercourse appears to be a non-negotiable part of sex work in this particular segment of the industry. However, this does not extend to condom use during other risky sexual activities like oral sex. Many women reported being asked by a prospective client to have sex without a condom, and reported that some agencies pressure escorts to provide certain sexual services, such as oral sex, without a condom.

*One of the biggest concerns for women who work in the sex industry is GFE (Girl Friend Experience) sessions. There are people who know it's a health risk but it's just like people who smoke. You don't light up a cigarette and think it's healthy for you, just like you don't provide a bareback blowjob and think that it's healthy for you. But given what you're being compensated for, you decide well, the risk is going to be this percentage; well...maybe you'll go with that. Interview 1*

The practices in GFE sessions vary depending on the worker.<sup>26</sup> Some women offer unprotected oral sex as a part of the experience. Others simply offer a higher level of intimacy and activities such as cuddling and kissing.

*Every woman has to make her own decision about what she is willing to do and take a calculated risk. Ideally, we would all take our health seriously... Really, unless you abstain from sexual activities, there is some risk involved. I do take some risk, but much less than some others. E.g. – I perform oral sex unprotected in some situations. It is a part of the GFE I offer and expected as a part of GFE in a lot of places... If it wasn't expected by most, I wouldn't offer it, especially since it actually impedes my skills. Interview 7*

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<sup>26</sup> See also Pivot (2006): pp.27-28.



While there is a stereotype that clients would all prefer to have unprotected sex, one interview participant mentioned that she had been turned down by a prospective client because she offered unprotected oral sex. She explained that it is important to be open and honest about the type of activities that you are willing to do so that clients can make their own decisions.

Five of the interview participants stressed their opinions that “civilian” women were far more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour than they were.

*You are probably at a greater risk to get an STD from a civilian pick up at a bar because for us, if we get an STD, we're out of business. We're done. We've got to go back to work wherever, at a shoe store, and we don't want to do that, we're having fun. But if it's a pick up, and you're drunk and she's never going to see you again, why would she tell you? And then, you're going to come to us and give it us and then we're going to give it to other clients? That's not happening. They assume that since you're in the profession, you might be willing to take the risk. They don't think about it from a business sense. Interview 5*

Sex workers report being instructed by managers in agencies to do visual and manual checks to ensure that clients are not infected with STD's prior to engaging in activities. As five interviewees explained, they would refuse to have sex with anyone who exhibited any symptoms of an STD. The women interviewed took their health very seriously and insisted on regular medical testing. Some of the women expressed their frustration at the fact that some clients continue to request unsafe practices:

*It's not the women that have to change their opinion because many of them- again, there are some that just don't know any better – but that's not the majority of it. So, it's not the ignorance- it's the demand side of it. It infuriates me because there's less risk to them. It's not that they're ignorant, it's that they are not fluid receptive. So, there's very little risk to them and all the risk is born by the provider. So, yes it's the demand side that has the money and that will dictate the services and the prices...Public information campaigns would be great because it's ultimately the demand side of the equation that has to change their opinion. Interview 1*

## Access to Information about the Sex Industry

*I feel there is a lot of misunderstanding and misconception about this industry - an industry that is so broad, a spectrum that is so immensely wide – and people’s opinions are largely jaded by centuries of religious confines... Of course there are women who are coerced into this industry and not treated well. But the more exposure that is brought to the real underlying situation in the industry, the real circumstances we work in, the reality of the clients we see, the more possibility for enlightenment. The thing is they don’t know it could be better- that’s the problem. And the public makes you feel that you have to hide and that you are an outcast. Interview 9*

Most of the women who participated in this project recommended that there be greater access to information about the sex industry, about the different types of sex work, and the options available to people who are considering sex work.

*Make it a more open working environment so that there are choices as opposed to it’s either A or B, there’s nothing in the middle. And we should be encouraging people, educating people on how to enter the industry rather than this whole “sink or swim”... You can imagine all sorts of circumstances that aren’t like the choice I made (just because), I want them to know what they’re deciding and what the options are...if they knew they could run a little ad and work for themselves, or if they knew that there were body rub places... I think it’s like a preemptive strike: if you have the tools to make the decision then you’ll make a better decision. Interview 2*

*I had a colleague contact me and we had this wonderful talk and she was like, “wow– if I had known these things when I first started out, I definitely would have done things differently. But nobody knows; you either figure it out or you get lost. Women get lost because there’s no education. That’s not fair – because the public doesn’t want to know about it? That’s just not fair. Interview 9*

Sex workers need access to information about the law, financial advice, tax implications, and increased access to medical information. They strongly recommend that clients be given more information about STD’s and sex in general. The interview participants assigned the

responsibility for stigmatization of sex workers to society in general. The harmful stereotypes and condemnatory attitudes contribute more to stigma than the act of selling sex.

*I would like to be able to say, "I'm a professional elite independent escort" and not feel afraid I'm going to be arrested, ridiculed or judged wrongly as "loose", "slutty" or "pathetic". I feel proud of myself what I've achieved and angry that I have to keep it a secret and feel the shame of others. I'm not ashamed – it's other people's issues because of ignorance. Interview 6*

*I don't think it has much to do with the profession. I think the profession catches the end result of problems that are already there in society and it's a further expression of insecurity. Interview 5*

The legal and academic communities need more information about the heterogeneity of sex work, and they need to base their laws and theories on more inclusive research.

*I agreed to participate in the research as I believe it is important to shed light about the reality of the sex trade, at least from my experience. This is useful and any person who's studying it academically can't get a genuine perception of the business without people who have been genuinely in it. Interview 7*

## **Socio-Economic Factors**

*I think the biggest problem is that girls get into this out of desperate circumstances. Whether it's because of an addiction or just poor financial management, it's a worry when someone becomes dependent on this. Interview 8*

Most of the women interviewed (8 out of 10) felt quite strongly that one of the key reasons they have positive experiences working in the sex industry is because they are not completely dependent on the income generated. Five of the women said that it is when women are in difficult financial positions that they accept more risky behaviour, and it is in these circumstances that women take chances they otherwise would not take. Two women suggested that the sex industry is ideal for circumstances when women find themselves suddenly in extreme financial need (widows, women who are leaving abusive husbands etc.).

*I would like to say no [I wouldn't encourage women to enter this industry], but I have known women in desperate situations. My best friend had an abusive partner and felt she couldn't leave. I did encourage her because it is a fast source of income. Interview 7*

Another woman suggested that the current stigmatization of prostitution makes work in the sex industry undesirable.

*The hard part about that question is if the environment still exists the way it is, then I don't really think it's a good idea. Look at the ways in the past, the times where courtesans were running the country. In those times, ladies of the palace would ask for their daughters to be taken into servitude because of the wonderful life that was given to the courtesans, their education, the only women allowed in the library... Yeah, so it depends on the political environment. I think that things are changing, I like to think that things are changing. I can see a movement towards acceptance on a broader scale of the industry itself. Interview 2*

Four women perceived the political climate surrounding sex work to be changing. They hope that people are gaining more tolerance of different forms of female sexuality and that attitudes to sex workers are changing.

*Societies where they are more accepting of it, like Europe, the level of safety is different. It's almost as though society creates the risk because of the stigma that's attached. Now that being said, I feel that we are at a point right now, in the development where things are starting to change- both in terms of clients' willingness and acceptance of certain things. Interview 9*

## ***Reflections on Sex Work***

In this final section, I have tried to capture each of the interview participants' perspectives in one or two quotes. For some of the women, this was very simple as they developed the same theme throughout their interview. For those who gave more diverse opinions on sex work and their experiences, this was quite challenging.

*I feel that I am in a place and I work with people who bring light to this completely misunderstood area of society – that which is completely natural and completely normal and has very positive health related benefits to different people for different reasons. Interview 9*

*I'm an entrepreneur type, so I love the fact that I'm running my own business... The luxury of the free time, the money, being able to work out of my house, being able to have the extra time to focus on my company... And giving a man an orgasm is good energy. Just sharing that, being admired for an hour, and giving someone that amount of pleasure- it has boosted my self-esteem to levels I never thought would be possible. Interview 4*

*So in that way, you can be yourself. To some extent, there is a client for everybody. Doing what you want to do, the way you want to, I think that is a feminist ideal. And the body acceptance thing is not well known at all. I think it's a cool thing, but strange, that women in the most exploitative industry can feel better and better about themselves. I feel sexier now than ever before. And guys like jiggle! News to me- having a big ass is good?! You may even want to gain a little weight! So it is a feminist thing... if you want some of this, you better treat me well. And the serious self-esteem boost – I mean people pay \$300 an hour to be with me. That's a lot of positive reinforcement that I must be ok. Interview 5*

*I struggle with finding the right word for what I do. I generally think of myself as an escort, or a prostitute. The reason it's hard to find the right word is because all the popular words only really refer to the exchange of sex for money, but my work is so much more than that. Interview 10*

*I don't have all these glory things to say about escorting. It's not always for a good time, but I made it that way. Interview 3*

*One thing I have noticed since being in this business is that having men pay for my company and/or body can be very empowering at times – especially when the clients are intelligent, successful and attractive. It seems to carry over into my regular life, in that I feel much more confident and attractive around the men in my life... in a good way. Interview 8*

*[A] huge part of where I'm coming from... [is] the right for a woman to do whatever she wants with her body. No one should tell me who I can and cannot fuck. That's as bad as saying I don't have the right to be on birth control. Interview 1*

*It makes me struggle with my own feminist views and living modestly in contradiction of them... I've built some really amazing friendships [and] I have some really strong rapports with some of my clients which makes me struggle very much with my own political beliefs... There are serious negative psychological impacts that can happen and you really have to wrestle with that. Interview 7*

*I like to view [sex work] as the highest form of feminism. I say it like: abolitionists are cock blockers and sex workers are the nut-nustlers. Not the academic terms, but it's so descriptive. My experience is what makes that. I see men at their most vulnerable. I hear their most intimate things – that they wouldn't tell anyone else... It's about the heart.*

Interview 2

*This job can either bring you down and destroy you or empower you and give you strength and intelligence. It can build incredible character if done correctly, but if exploited by lack of structure and knowledge it can destroy you. I am an Elite Escort: refined, educated, mature, worldly, and very attractive inside out.* Interview 6

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Five summarizes the key findings of the research and considers their similarities to and differences from other studies of victimization in the sex industry in Canada. I will discuss specific recommendations for law and social policy reform, and describe limitations of the study.

### *Situating the Findings in the Literature*

In considering research on victimization, I focus on recent research conducted in British Columbia by Pivot Legal Society (2006), Benoit & Millar (2001), Lowman & Fraser (1996) and Cler-Cunningham & Christensen (2001). I will also compare the findings to Sanders' (2005) study of off-street prostitution in England that examines similar issues.

### **Experiences of Victimization**

The term “victimization” has been used throughout this project as it allows for the consideration of various forms of harm – theft and client refusals to pay or use condoms - which might not necessarily be included as “violence.” In the interviews, off-street independent workers identified two additional forms of victimization: online review boards and harassment by neighbors. While none of these other forms of victimization involve interpersonal violence, they have more impact on the work of these off-street sex workers. In stark contrast to street sex workers (Cler-Cunningham & Christensen (2001); Currie et al., 1996; Lowman & Fraser, 1996) the majority (63%) of the women who participated in this

project had not experienced *any* violence while working in the sex industry, a finding that dramatically contradicts the radical feminist assertion that violence is inherent to prostitution. If they were victimized, my respondents were more likely to experience other forms of victimization, such as theft by co-workers, or clients refusing to use condoms or pay for services. Needless to say, masseuses were more likely to be theft victims than escorts and independents because they operate in a workplace with other staff. Pivot (2006) similarly concluded that other forms of victimization, such as harassment and client refusal to wear condoms, were major concerns for sex workers (p.23). Street-based sex workers are equally as affected by the other forms of victimization: Cler-Cunningham & Christensen (2001) reported that harassment and client refusals to wear condoms were two of the most common forms of victimization for street-based sex workers.

The independent workers in this study reported the lowest rates of victimization. Escorts faced the highest rate of violence (29.2% had experienced threats), and were the most likely group of sex workers to face serious violence such as physical assault, sexual assault, or kidnapping/confinement (See Table 7, Appendix D). These findings are not generalizable to the entire industry, however, as they are based on a small sample of participants. The participants in Pivot's (2006) report indicated that the uncertainty of attending at an unknown location for a date, which is how escorts usually meet their clients, was a major source of danger for off-street sex workers (p. 23).

Clients were the main source of victimization for escorts and independents, although a minority of respondents had *ever* experienced such victimization (See Tables 7 & 8, Appendix D). Violence perpetrated by significant others (husbands, boyfriends) and police



was reported less frequently: approximately 12% of the respondents indicated that they experienced violence at the hands of a significant other or the police.

Women reported that some agencies promote the idea that independent sex work is unsafe. Indeed, 72% of the respondents perceived independent work to be the most dangerous form of off-street prostitution. However, this perception was not supported by rates of violence reported by independent workers as compared to escort agency and massage parlour workers. Instead, independent workers were the least likely to experience any form of victimization. Benoit & Millar (2001) similarly concluded that independent workers were, "...in the best relative position to determine their own cost of labour, net earnings, pace of work, clientele and the sex activities performed while working" (p. iv). Pivot (2006) confirmed that a main reason many escorts worked for agencies was to take advantage of the security offered by agencies (p.24).

Often it is difficult to compare rates of violence reported in different surveys. The definitions of violence vary, and the data generated may not be readily comparable. For example, Benoit & Millar (2001) report simply that, "Almost all of those interviewed for this study said that they had been exposed to dangerous working conditions on at least one occasion" (p.51). They do not report frequencies, nor do they ask specific questions about violence as such: their survey addresses *unsafe working conditions*. Further, they do not differentiate between the rates reported by street workers and off-street workers.

Lowman & Fraser (1996) report their findings in two different ways: the researchers asked the participants to indicate how many "bad dates" they would likely have out of a hundred dates and then they asked the participants if they had ever experienced certain types of

violence. Lowman & Fraser report that street workers experience more serious violence, and more frequent violence than off-street workers.

Sanders reports that 68% of her sample had never experienced violence while working in off-street sex work. Unfortunately, she provides no definition of violence, so it is not clear if her study yields data that can be directly compared to mine.

In addition to the definitional differences, the projects differed in sampling method: Lowman & Fraser’s sample of off-street experiences was collected from women working on the street. Benoit & Millar partnered with a street outreach agency to employ former or current sex workers as research assistants. There were four different geographic areas represented in the four studies: Lowman & Fraser’s study focused on Vancouver; Benoit & Millar were based in Victoria, BC; Sanders’ research project was conducted in England and my research included women from Greater Vancouver.

The following chart compares the findings between Lowman & Fraser’s (1996) report on off-street rates in Vancouver and the findings in this project. I have included only the types of violence that are found in both projects. I did not include the reported violence from co-workers as Lowman & Fraser’s project did not include co-workers as a source of violence.

**Table 3: Comparison of Victimization Rates: Off-Street Venues**

Type of victimization (Lowman’s terminology in brackets)	O’Doherty (2007) N= 39	Lowman & Fraser (1996) N= 22
Threats (intimidation)	Up to 29%	40.5%
Threats with weapon (had/use knife or gun)	Up to 16.6%	Up to 13.6%
Physical assault (beating)	Up to 25%	13.6%
Sexual Assault	Up to 12.5%	9.1% Unwanted acts: 18.2%
Kidnapping/confinement	Up to 20.8%	4.5%
Theft (robbery)	Up to 34.7%	9.1%

Direct comparison between the two surveys is challenging because of the differences in terminology. For example, I asked women if they had experienced theft, while Lowman & Fraser (1996) asked their respondents if they had ever experienced robbery. These are two very different acts. Theft was defined as, “having money, jewelry or other items stolen from you.” Robbery typically involves a personal exchange involving violence or threats of violence.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, I asked women about “physical assault” and included the examples of “being hit, kicked or held down” in the definition. Lowman & Fraser used the term, “beating.” One might not include an act such as being held down, or pushed, in the category of “beating”, but one might include the act under my definition of “physical assault.”

It is difficult to generalize about violence in the sex industry because of the aforementioned methodological differences between projects. Nevertheless, two clear trends emerged from the data, definitional issues notwithstanding. First, the overall rates of violence for this project, Lowman & Fraser’s (1996) project and Sanders’ (2005) English report are remarkably consistent in certain respects. Specifically, 63% (O’Doherty), 60% (Lowman & Fraser) and 68% (Sanders) of the participants had *never* experienced violence while working in off-street prostitution. The similarity in the statistics is striking considering these differences. The three projects question the assertion that selling sex necessarily involves violence.

Second, my finding that independent sex workers may face the least amount of violence and escorts may face the most replicates the findings of Benoit & Millar (2001), Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver & Schramm (2005), and Kuo (2002). The assertion that women must work

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<sup>27</sup> S. 343 of the Criminal Code outlines the details of robbery.

for an agency in order to stay safe in sex work is not supported by the empirical data: women are safer when they are able to structure their working environments and deal directly with potential clients.

The findings from my research challenge the view that prostitution is inherently violent. While certain sectors of street-based prostitution are extraordinarily violent, other prostitution venues are very different. The following table compares the victimization rates to the Cler-Cunningham & Christensen (2001) study on street level prostitution. I chose the Cler-Cunningham & Christensen report as it used very similar language for the types of victimization and the study included a total of 183 female street-based sex workers.

**Table 4: Comparison by Venue**

Type of victimization	O'Doherty (2007) N= 39			Cler-Cunningham & Christensen (2001) N=183
	Massage	Escort	Independent	Street
Threats	28%	29.2%	15.4%	70.5%
Threats with weapon	13%	16.7%	7.7%	44.5%
Physical assault	17.4%	25%	15.4%	51.2%
Sexual Assault	13%	12.5%	11.5%	45.8%
Kidnapping/confinement	8.7%	20%	7.7%	41.2%
Theft (robbery)	54.2%	25%	12%	53.7%
Refuse condom	28%	37.5%	25.9%	82.9%

Victimization occurs at different rates for off-street workers and street sex workers. Within off-street sex work, the type of venue, structure of work, a sex worker's degree of independence and control over the services she provides all influence her susceptibility to violence. However, this data demonstrates that it is entirely possible for women to work in prostitution without ever experiencing violence.

The respondents reported that women often face high levels of exploitation in the off-street sex industry. The quasi-criminal status of prostitution in Canada directly contributes to the financial exploitation of sex workers by enabling agencies, landlords, and advertisers to operate in a mostly unregulated way. Respondents allege that landlords and advertisers charge high rates of agencies because the adult entertainment agencies are reluctant to draw attention to themselves by complaining to the authorities. In turn, workers are affected as they are often required to pay the agency up to 60% of their hourly earnings. While decriminalization would likely not alter the capitalist structure of agencies, it would allow sex workers recourse to Employment Standards without fearing legal repercussions for self-identifying themselves as sex workers. Currently, sex workers cannot resolve conflicts with employers via the Employment Standards Act without taking significant personal risks.

Some agencies in Vancouver strive to create non-exploitative working situations and work to increase the level of education for sex workers around issues of health and safety. Similarly, Pivot (2006) found that there were agencies in Vancouver who created, “positive working environments” for their staff (p.24). Unfortunately, this may not be the common experience, and those agencies which do attempt to eliminate such practices as condom-free oral sex appear to face a drop in clientele for refusing to sacrifice the health of their workers (Interview 1).

Disagreements between sex workers and clients arise due to miscommunication about prices and services. This finding is corroborated by the Pivot (2006) evidence that prices and services to be performed (including the use of condoms) were the main sources of disagreements between sex workers and clients across each of the venues (street level, escorting, massage parlours and independent workers). Respondents report that some

agencies mislead clients about the activities that a sex worker is willing to provide. Similarly, clients may be led to believe that the initial agency fee includes sexual activities when it is only an “introduction” fee. Sex workers are left in the vulnerable position of having to correct the misinformation about the prices and services offered.<sup>28</sup> Sex workers may be forced to walk a precarious line urging the client to purchase additional services and agree to “tip” the sex worker in addition to paying the agency fee. If women and agencies could communicate the details of a transaction prior to the meeting, both the sex worker and the client would have a clear understanding of the services to be provided and the rate to be paid. The safety of sex workers is directly compromised by criminal laws which prevent women from openly communicating their boundaries and expectations prior to an exchange of sex for money.

### **Reporting Practices**

Only 15% of the participants had ever reported incidents of violence to anyone. Of these seven respondents, three had reported violence to police. The respondents were more likely to report violence to a friend. Benoit & Millar (2001) similarly reported that police were not a source of support for sex workers who experienced violence while working. Surprisingly, women who had never experienced violence said that they would turn to the police without hesitation. There appears to be a significant difference between hypothetically contacting police in the event of victimization, and the consequences of self-identification as a sex provider if a woman does actually contact the police. Pivot (2006) concluded that the potential for charges related to the bawdy house provisions of the Criminal Code was a major deterrent for those sex workers who work out of massage parlours (p.27).

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<sup>28</sup> See Pivot (2006) for more information on agency fee structures: pp.29-31.

Lowman and Fraser's (1996) findings reveal a different trend among street workers: "The more serious the bad date and the more bad dates a person experiences, the more likely they are to tell someone about it." They found that women who worked on the Downtown Eastside were more likely to report violence to police than women who worked on the so-called "High Track" in Vancouver (the Richards-Seymour stroll). Their statistics reveal that 33.3 % of the women who work in the most dangerous stroll in Vancouver – the Downtown Eastside – indicated that they always report violence. Currie et al. (1995) reported that 49% of their respondents turned to police in the event of a violent incident.

My participants indicated that the social consequences of being identified as a sex worker are a significant barrier to reporting victimization. Many of the respondents were uncertain about whether there would be legal ramifications if they reveal to police the type of work they do. Sanders (2005) also found that being identified as a sex worker was the most serious concern for her participants.

## **Violence Prevention**

The off-street commercial sex workers who participated in my research take violence prevention seriously. The main strategies that women employ to prevent violence are to screen their clients, to use their intuition, and to make sure that they plan ahead and prepare an escape plan should a problem with a client arise. The prevention strategies identified by the participants in this study are reported in all of the related research (Albert, 2001; Bruckert et al., 2003, Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006; Kuo, 2002; Lewis et al., 2005; Lowman & Fraser, 1996; Pivot, 2006; Sanders, 2005; Whittacker & Hart, 1996).

Lowman & Fraser (1996) suggested that one of the reasons for the difference in violence rates between street and off-street sex workers is that off-street clients usually have to identify themselves, or leave traces of their identity, when they make a contract to purchase sexual services. They conclude that:

The structure of the escort trade is such that the clients often have to identify themselves in the course of conducting business, because they contact the escort agency from a hotel at which they are staying, and may use a credit card to pay for the date. Leaving evidence of their identity makes their committing offences against prostitutes much less likely.

One of the main reasons women in this project choose to work for agencies is the assumption that they will be safer, because the agency is aware of the identity of clients and the location of the date. This finding is corroborated by Pivot's (2006) conclusion that third party knowledge of the location of the date and name of the client lessened the risk of victimization for sex workers (p.24). Independent workers emphasized that adequate screening of clients and confirming their identities are essential for violence prevention.

Lowman & Fraser (1996) identified women's individual circumstances as a key factor affecting violence rates. The most economically marginalized women, especially those with a substance addiction, are the most vulnerable. They suggest that women who are "hurting for a fix" are less likely to refuse a client and more likely to enter into risky situations. At least half of the women who participated in the interview segment of this project drew the same conclusion: financial desperation creates greater risk for sex workers who, as a result, are less likely to listen to their intuition and more likely to accept unsafe clients and risky behaviours.



## Demographics

Because of their different sampling methods, the Benoit & Millar (2001), Lowman & Fraser (1996) and my samples represent different, albeit overlapping populations of sex workers in BC. The Benoit & Millar sample included many individuals with experience both on and off the street. They suggest that paying a \$40 honorarium meant that their sample over-represented the more “economically marginalized” individuals. Lowman and Fraser’s sample all had street experience. While I did not ask respondents if they had ever worked the street, only 16% of the participants in my project began their work in the sex industry via the street. There was a high degree of cross-over between indoor venues: nearly 40% of the respondents had worked in all three indoor venues.

Table 9 shows the differences in age, income, education and aboriginal representation in the three samples. The differences in average age and in age of entry appear to be attributable to the proportion of street sex workers in each sample: the greater the percentage of street workers, the lower the age. The most extreme differences were in income and level of education. The income level of the participants in my study was far greater than that of the other studies. Similarly, the level of education reported by the participants in my study was substantially higher, with 35% of the respondents indicating that they had completed either a bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree.

The other distinct difference in the three samples is their racial composition. 15% of Benoit and Millar’s respondents identified themselves as aboriginal. Lowman & Fraser’s sample contained a similar proportion of aboriginals and Metis. No one self-identified as aboriginal in my study. The demographic differences indicate that there is a clear racial difference between street-based and off-street sex work.

**Table 5: Demographic Comparison of Off-Street Workers in BC**

	<b>O'Doherty</b>	<b>Benoit &amp; Millar</b>	<b>Lowman &amp; Fraser</b>
<b>Average age of respondents</b>	30	32	24
<b>Average age of entry into the sex industry</b>	23	18	16
<b>Average annual income</b>	Near \$60,000	\$15,000- \$18,000	Not reported
<b>Aboriginal/ Metis representation</b>	0	15%	18%
<b>Percentage of workers with post-secondary education</b>	90.3%	39% had completed high-school.	No data.

The income level for the participants in this study was almost triple the average income for women in Canada in 2001: according to the Canadian census, the average income for women that year was \$21,963. The census indicates that the percentage of women with at least a university degree in Canada was 30% in 2001; 35% of my respondents reported that they had completed at least a university degree.

The demographic results from my study indicate that very different socio-economic conditions exist for women in different parts of the off-street sex industry. The statistics are even more striking when they are compared against research with street-based sex workers. Currie et al. (1995) reported that nearly 70% of their respondents were Aboriginal. Only 9 % of their sample had completed high-school.

Currie et al. (1995) reported that 64% of their respondents were from other provinces or countries than BC, Canada. In contrast, 71% of the respondents in my sample were born in BC. While 73% of Currie et al. participants started working the sex industry prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, only 16% of the participants in my sample had started working in the industry as youths.

## *Recommendations*

Lowman & Fraser (1996) and Benoit & Millar (2001) make a series of recommendations based on their research, including: educating the public about the reality of sex worker's lives; decriminalizing sex work in order to improve working conditions; increasing sensitivity training for criminal justice personnel; and increasing support and resources for women in the areas of housing, health, education, and finances.

Reckart (2005) suggests harm-reduction strategies to increase the safety of sex workers. He argues that the harms associated with prostitution (drug use, disease, violence and exploitation) should be addressed on several fronts. He urges governments to create programs relating to health, physical safety, human rights, and employment rights in a way that empowers sex workers. He admonishes governments for the criminalization of prostitution and suggests that criminal status creates the environment in which violence against sex workers flourishes.

Criminalization leads to violence; police harassment; increased HIV and STI risk; reduced access to services; psychological disease; drug use; poor self-esteem; loss of family and friends; work-related mortality; and restrictions on travel, employment, housing and parenting. (p. 2124)

Reckart suggests that sex workers need to be able to more easily access medical and social programs. Also, he suggests that those programs need to be made more sensitive to sex worker needs, hence his recommending that sex workers be involved in program creation and delivery.

The participants' in my study recommended similar strategies. Their focus was similarly on society: the one common reason they gave for participating in this project was their desire to

share their experience of sex work so that the general public, academic and political communities could begin to set aside traditional stereotypes of prostitution and sex workers. Each participant was emphatic that generalization of experiences across the industry is misleading. Based on the advice of the participants, I recommend two immediate strategies to increase the safety for sex workers: a) explore the use of a computerized reference system; and b) provide training for those considering working in the sex industry. In addition to these two strategies, we need to address two structural issues: 1) clarify the legal status of prostitution; and 2) create more resources and opportunities for sex workers and women in general. These issues are described in more detail below.

### **Reference/ Check-in system**

Some participants have recommended that we create a computerized reference system, operated by an independent non-governmental and non-profit organization. They suggest that the system could be used by both clients and providers; it could operate to do both background checks on potential clients, and provide a check-in service to independent sex workers. This check-in service could be either online or phone-based and could provide women an alert system where they could enter information about the time they expect to be finished and the location of the date. If the women do not check in at the prescribed time, then an alert could be sent to police services. Information on the client and the sex worker could then be released to police – but any identity information must be securely kept and not accessible by the public or the government. Such systems are currently in use in some states in the US and in Ontario. Further research into the use and effectiveness of these systems is needed to determine how practical they are.

## **Training for Work in the Sex Industry**

Women need information about how to work safely in the sex industry because information is crucial to preventing violence. Women need to be able to make educated decisions about the type of work they are willing to do, the risks associated with different kinds of service, the laws related to their work, and its tax implications. The participants in the Pivot (2006) report similarly conclude that further education regarding health and hygiene is needed (p.22). Sex workers need opportunities for training in such things as proper use of condoms, different sexual arousal techniques, and other skills related to the work.<sup>29</sup> They should be encouraged to communicate with each other and derive support from one another. They need practical tips on how to set up independent businesses and how to advertise. They need to be able to take workshops on investing, accounting, fraud, computer skills and all the other areas that are important to any small business. They also need to know how different agencies operate, and they need to know the benefits and drawbacks of working for an agency. Similarly, clients need information about the legal status of prostitution, and about the health risks associated with various sexual activities. Clients could use tips on proper etiquette and expectations of sex workers for their dates.

## **Clarity about the Legal Status of Prostitution**

Women need to be able to turn to police in the event of a violent incident without fearing legal repercussion. While the interview participants mostly suggested that they would not hesitate to contact police, those who participated in the questionnaire survey were not as willing. Also there is discrepancy between the responses of women who had actually

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<sup>29</sup> See Sorfleet (2005) for an example of material developed by sex workers, for sex workers, regarding rights, work venues, safety tips and other information.

experienced violence, and the hypothetical responses of women who had not experienced violence. The reluctance to turn to police is the result of a system that pits sex workers against police.

The participants described Canadian prostitution law as “hypocritical” and “discriminatory.” They identified the criminalization of prostitution-related activities, such as procuring and living on the avails, as key reasons for the current exploitative structure of many Vancouver escort agencies. The quasi-legal status of sex work enables third parties – including owners of agencies, advertising companies, and municipal cities – to profit from prostitution. Sex workers need clarity about the legal status of their work. As Lowman (2005) writes, “All three levels of government need to decide where, and under what circumstances sex workers can meet their customers and conduct their business” (p.10).

### **Resources and Opportunities**

One of the most important factors in preventing violence against female sex workers relates to poverty. Sex workers report that when they find themselves in financially desperate situations, they take more risks. It is this financial circumstance, more than which venue the woman is working in, how old she is, or whether or not she has a university degree, which may be a far more accurate determinant of who is likely to experience violence while working in the sex industry.

### **Directions for Future Research**

More research into the off-street sector would be beneficial to determine how reflective my data is of this population of sex workers. However, more research is not needed to

determine whether the existing legal regulations harm women involved in prostitution. This conclusion has already been reached by numerous research projects and the 2006 Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws. Certainly, more research should be conducted prior to any enactment of laws targeted at legalizing the industry but this research must include sex workers from the various venues. Sex workers should be given the opportunity to conduct research, to assist with law reform and to develop workplace safety standards.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to expose the different experiences of women who work in the off-street sex trade. The sample is self-selected, and purposive: it was specifically geared to high-end workers, and included 39 survey respondents and 10 interview participants. There will undoubtedly be an element of volunteer bias as those who feel strongly about such things as decriminalization or dispelling myths would have been more likely to participate.

The survey was self-administered and the data are self-reported. Self-reported data relies on individual memories and can be inaccurate. The primary limitation of this project is that I use a non-probabilistic sampling method: we have no idea how representative this data is of the general population of sex workers in Canada. However, for the purpose of showing that sex work is not one homogenous experience, these limitations do not significantly impact the stated goals of the project.

## *Conclusions*

In this research I sought to find out how much violence and other kinds of victimization occur in various kinds of off-street sex work. The findings indicate that it is possible for women to work safely in the sex industry and that, contrary to radical feminist assertions, violence is *not* inherent to prostitution. If women are able to sell sex off-street without experiencing violence, then we must look to conditions unique to the street to determine why street-based sex workers face such high levels of violence. Perhaps, as Lowman (2000) suggests in his discussion of the “discourse of disposal,” society’s treatment of street level sex workers as disposable nuisances has contributed to the high rates of violence.

There is no evidence to support the assertion that all men who buy sex are violent to sex workers; indeed such men likely form the minority of sex purchasers (Lowman & Atchison, 2006). It should be no surprise that misogynistic men turn to the women who work the streets of Vancouver to abuse them. Street sex workers forced to work in isolation with little or no protection from police are ideal prey for violent men. Instead of doing our best to protect these vulnerable members of our society, we have enacted laws such as the communication provision that further marginalize and expose them to harm:

The Criminal Code reinforces stigma associated with prostitution and pushes sex workers to the margins of society. It dehumanizes sex workers by taking away their fundamental rights to equal benefit and protection of the law, reinforcing the attitude that sex workers “deserve what they get” when they are violently abused or murdered and making it more difficult for them to seek the protective services of the police. (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2007, p.6)

If these women were able to have the full protection of police, perhaps predators would be less inclined to commit violence against sex workers.



Radical feminists define prostitution as violence against women; no actual “violence” needs to take place. In this regard, my findings are irrelevant, because prostitution is “violence” by definition. This is much like saying that because some husbands are violent, all marriage is violent, in which case marriage is violence against women. However, if we restrict “violence” to the legal and dictionary definitions of that term, data from Canadian, English and American studies suggest that the rates of violence for off-street sex workers are lower than the rates experienced by street-based sex workers. Indeed, for the majority of off-street sex workers in my sample, prostitution has not been an experience of violence.

The act of selling sex does not necessarily cause sex workers to experience violence, and we need to stop basing policy on the idea that a causal link has been established. It is exploitative working structures and the quasi-legal status of prostitution that severely compromise sex workers’ safety. Therefore, much of the responsibility for the current levels of violence and harm experienced by sex workers in Canada must be attributed to Canada’s prostitution laws.

# APPENDICES

## *Appendix A: Criminal Code Sections*

### **Bawdy-houses**

210. (1) Every one who keeps a common bawdy-house is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

(2) Every one who

(a) is an inmate of a common bawdy-house,

(b) is found, without lawful excuse, in a common bawdy-house, or

(c) as owner, landlord, lessor, tenant, occupier, agent or otherwise having charge or control of any place, knowingly permits the place or any part thereof to be let or used for the purposes of a common bawdy-house,

is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

R.S., c. C-34, s. 193.

### Transporting person to bawdy-house

211. Every one who knowingly takes, transports, directs, or offers to take, transport or direct, any other person to a common bawdy-house is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

R.S., c. C-34, s. 194.

### **Procuring**

**212.** (1) Every one who

(a) procures, attempts to procure or solicits a person to have illicit sexual intercourse with another person, whether in or out of Canada,

(b) inveigles or entices a person who is not a prostitute to a common bawdy-house for the purpose of illicit sexual intercourse or prostitution,

- (c) knowingly conceals a person in a common bawdy-house,
  - (d) procures or attempts to procure a person to become, whether in or out of Canada, a prostitute,
  - (e) procures or attempts to procure a person to leave the usual place of abode of that person in Canada, if that place is not a common bawdy-house, with intent that the person may become an inmate or frequenter of a common bawdy-house, whether in or out of Canada,
  - (f) on the arrival of a person in Canada, directs or causes that person to be directed or takes or causes that person to be taken, to a common bawdy-house,
  - (g) procures a person to enter or leave Canada, for the purpose of prostitution,
  - (h) for the purposes of gain, exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in such manner as to show that he is aiding, abetting or compelling that person to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally,
  - (i) applies or administers to a person or causes that person to take any drug, intoxicating liquor, matter or thing with intent to stupefy or overpower that person in order thereby to enable any person to have illicit sexual intercourse with that person, or
  - (j) lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person,
- is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

#### Living on the avails of prostitution of person under eighteen

(2) Despite paragraph (1)(j), every person who lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person who is under the age of eighteen years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of two years.

#### Aggravated offence in relation to living on the avails of prostitution of a person under the age of eighteen years

(2.1) Notwithstanding paragraph (1)(j) and subsection (2), every person who lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person under the age of eighteen years, and who

- (a) for the purposes of profit, aids, abets, counsels or compels the person under that age to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally, and
- (b) uses, threatens to use or attempts to use violence, intimidation or coercion in relation to the person under that age,

is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years but not less than five years.

#### Presumption

(3) Evidence that a person lives with or is habitually in the company of a prostitute or lives in a common bawdy-house is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, proof that the person lives on the avails of prostitution, for the purposes of paragraph (1)(j) and subsections (2) and (2.1).

Offence — prostitution of person under eighteen

(4) Every person who, in any place, obtains for consideration, or communicates with anyone for the purpose of obtaining for consideration, the sexual services of a person who is under the age of eighteen years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of six months.

(5) [Repealed, 1999, c. 5, s. 8]

R.S., 1985, c. C-46, s. 212; R.S., 1985, c. 19 (3rd Supp.), s. 9; 1997, c. 16, s. 2; 1999, c. 5, s. 8; 2005, c. 32, s. 10.1.

### **Offence in Relation to Prostitution**

**213.** (1) Every person who in a public place or in any place open to public view

(a) stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle,

(b) impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place, or

(c) stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person

for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or of obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Definition of “public place”

(2) In this section, "public place" includes any place to which the public have access as of right or by invitation, express or implied, and any motor vehicle located in a public place or in any place open to public view.

R.S., 1985, c. C-46, s. 213; R.S., 1985, c. 51 (1st Supp.), s. 1.

## ***Appendix B: Violence in the Workplace Questionnaire***

**A questionnaire about women's experiences of violence while working in the off-street sex industry.**

**Tamara O'Doherty**

This questionnaire is focused on experiences of violence in the workplace. I ask some personal questions about your experiences to gain a better understanding of:

- How often violence is experienced by women working in the off-street sex industry;
- Who perpetrates the violence;
- What type of violence is experienced;
- In which location of work women are most likely to experience violence (massage/body rub parlours, escorting or independent work);
- And what violence-prevention strategies women use.

The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you feel that certain questions are too personal, or in any way objectionable, feel free to skip certain items or terminate the questionnaire.

Anonymity is guaranteed. Please do not include any information in your answers that could be used to identify you.

If you have any questions or concerns about the questionnaire, please contact Tamara O'Doherty at [tco@sfu.ca](mailto:tco@sfu.ca). If you have any complaints about the research that I am unable to resolve, please contact Professor R. Gordon at 604.291.4305.

The information gathered will be used to complete the thesis requirement of my Master's degree in the Criminology Department at SFU. Also, I may use it for academic articles and other publications, and distribute the data to other researchers. Copies of the final results will be available early in 2006.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will contribute to law reform and expose women's experiences and voices to the academic and legal communities.

Please keep this page and submit the rest of the completed questionnaire in the envelop provided.

Thank you for your participation.

## EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

*The first part of the questionnaire is designed to find out about the safety of women working in three different off-street sex work venues: a) In-call (massage and body rub parlours); b) Out-call (escort agencies), and c) independent (working independently out of your own home, rented apartment, or attending hotel rooms, residences etc.). If you haven't worked in a particular venue, please skip that section. Please do not include any experiences from other venues (e.g. Street work). Subsequent questions ask about your experiences of violence, if any, including: physical assault, sexual assault, threats of harm, confinement, kidnapping, theft, etc.*

### **In- call Sex Workers (massage/body rub parlour)**

1. a) Have you ever worked in a massage or body rub parlour in a commercial building?
  - Yes (please answer the following questions)
  - No (please skip to question #2)
  
- b) How long have you worked in a massage or body rub parlour? (Please indicate the number of years or months in total you have worked in this kind of venue)
  
- c) How concerned are you about safety (being free from violence) while working in a massage/ or body rub parlour? (Please tick the most appropriate box)

<b>Very concerned (It's always on my mind)</b>	<b>A little concerned (I'm aware but not really worried)</b>	<b>Not at all concerned (I don't even think about it)</b>

The remaining questions in this section ask about specific types of violence, who perpetrates the violence, and how many incidents have occurred when you were working in a massage or body rub parlour. Please indicate if you have experienced the form of violence by the perpetrator listed and how many incidents you have experienced.

- d) **Uttering Threats:** Threatening to cause you physical harm if you don't do what is asked.

<b>In-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

e) **Threatening with a weapon:** Threatening to cause you physical harm while holding a weapon (knife, gun or some other weapon).

In-call	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

f) **Physical Assault:** For example being hit, kicked, or held down.

In-call	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

g) **Sexual Assault:** Physically forced to do something sexually that you were not prepared to do.

In-call	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

h) **Kidnapping/confinement:** Physically restrained and not allowed to leave when you wanted to.

In-call	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

i) **Theft:** having money, jewelry or other items stolen.

<b>In-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

j) Has a client ever refused to use a condom with you while you were working in a massage or body rub parlour?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

k) Has a client ever refused to pay you while you were working in a massage or body rub parlour?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

l) On what grounds would you refuse to provide services for a client?

m) Have you experienced a form of violence while working in a massage or body rub parlour that is not listed here? If yes, please describe the incident(s) and the perpetrator(s).



**Out-call Sex Workers (escort agencies)**

2. a) Have you ever worked as an escort (outcall working for an agency and traveling to the client’s hotel room/home/apartment)?

- Yes *(please answer the following questions)*
- No *(please skip to question #3)*

b) How long have you worked as an escort? *(Please indicate the number of years or months in total you have worked as an escort)*

c) How concerned are you about safety (being free from violence) while working as an escort? *(Please tick the most appropriate box)*

<b>Very concerned (It’s always on my mind)</b>	<b>A little concerned (I’m aware but not really worried)</b>	<b>Not at all concerned (I don’t even think about it)</b>

*The following series of questions asks about specific types of violence, who perpetrates the violence, and how many incidents have occurred while you worked as an escort. Please indicate if you have experienced the form of violence by the perpetrator listed and how many incidents you have experienced.*

d) **Uttering Threats:** Threatening to cause you physical harm if you don’t do what is asked.

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

e) **Threatening with a weapon:** Threatening to cause you physical harm while holding a weapon (knife, gun or some other weapon).

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

f) **Physical Assault:** For example being hit, kicked, or held down.

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

g) **Sexual Assault:** Physically forced to do something sexually that you were not prepared to do.

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

h) **Kidnapping/ confinement:** Physically restrained and not allowed to leave when you wanted to.

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

i) **Theft:** having money, jewelry or other items stolen.

<b>Out-call</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more

						times
Client						
Police Officer						
Significant other						
Boss/manager						
Co-workers						

j) Has a client ever refused to use a condom with you while you were working as an escort?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

k) Has a client ever refused to pay you while you were working as an escort?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

l) On what grounds would you refuse to provide services to a client?

m) Have you experienced a form of violence while working as an escort that is not listed here? If yes, please describe the incident(s) and the perpetrator(s).

**Independent Sex Workers**

3. a) Have you ever worked as an independent (meeting clients through ads, bars, regulars etc. but NOT including street experiences)?

- Yes *(please answer the following questions)*
- No *(please skip to question #4)*

b) How long have you worked as an independent? *(Please indicate the total number of years or months you have worked as an independent)*

c) How concerned are you about safety (being free from violence) while working as an independent? *(Please tick the most appropriate box)*

<b>Very concerned</b> (It's always on my mind)	<b>A little concerned</b> (I'm aware but not really worried)	<b>Not at all concerned</b> (I don't even think about it)

*The following series of questions asks about specific types of violence, who perpetrates the violence, and how many incidents have occurred. Please indicate if you have experienced the form of violence by the perpetrator listed and how many incidents you have experienced while working as an independent.*

d) **Uttering Threats:** Threatening to cause you physical harm if you don't do what is asked.

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

e) **Threatening with a weapon:** Threatening to cause you physical harm while holding a weapon (knife, gun or some other weapon).

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

f) **Physical Assault:** For example being hit, kicked, or held down.

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

g) **Sexual Assault:** Physically forced to do something sexually that you were not prepared to do.

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

h) **Kidnapping/ confinement:** Physically restrained and not allowed to leave when you wanted to.

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

i) **Theft:** having money, jewelry or other items stolen.

<b>Independent</b>	Never	Once	Twice	3 times	4 times	5 or more times
Client						
Significant Other						
Police Officer						

j) Has a client ever refused to use a condom with you while you were working as an independent?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

k) Has a client ever refused to pay you while you were working as an independent?

Yes- How many times? \_\_\_\_\_

No

l) On what grounds would you refuse to provide services to a client?

m) Have you experienced a form of violence while working as an independent that is not listed here? If yes, please describe the incident(s) and the perpetrator(s).

### All Sex Workers

4. Please describe the most serious incident of violence that you have experienced while working in the sex industry.

5. In what kind of off-street sex work situation do you think women face **THE MOST** violence? (Please tick one)

- Massage/ body rub parlour
- Escort
- Independent (through ads, bars, regulars, etc)

6. Why do you think women face the most violence in that particular venue?

<b>REPORTING PRACTICES</b>
----------------------------

*This section is designed to find out about how often women report violent incidents, to whom they report the incidents and what happened with the report.*

7. Have you ever reported an incident of violence to anyone?

- Yes (please answer questions (a)-(g))
- No (please skip to question (h))
- I have never experienced violence while working

If **YES**, you have reported at least one incident of violence:

a) How many times have you reported incidents of violence?

b) Who did you report the incidents to (police, agency owner, friend, etc.)?

c) In which venue(s) were you working when you reported the incident(s) (in-call, out-call, independent, etc)?

d) How many times have you reported an incident to the police?

e) If you ever reported an incident to the police, were you satisfied with the police response(s) to your complaint? (Please briefly describe the police response(s).)

f) If you ever reported an incident to your manager/ boss/ agency, were you satisfied with the response? (Please briefly describe the response(s).)

h) If **NO**, you did not report the incident(s), why not?



<b>VIOLENCE PREVENTION</b>
----------------------------

*This section focuses on what strategies women employ to prevent violence while working.*

8. What do you do to ensure that you are safe from violence when you are on the job?

9. Do you carry any form of personal protection like mace or a weapon while working?  
*(Please tick yes or no for each venue you have worked in. If you haven't worked in the venue, please leave the column blank.)*

	<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Yes</b>			
<b>No</b>			

10. Have any of the places that you have worked for provided someone to protect you (e.g., a security guard, doorman or driver) in case there is trouble?  
*(Please tick yes or no for each venue you have worked in. If you haven't worked in the venue, please leave the column blank.)*

	<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Yes</b>			
<b>No</b>			

11. Is there some kind of surveillance (e.g. cameras) at any of the venues you have worked for?  
*(Please tick yes or no for each venue you have worked in. If you haven't worked in the venue, please leave the column blank.)*

	<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Yes</b>			
<b>No</b>			

12. Is there a way for you to get help if you needed it? If yes, please describe. *(If you haven't worked in the venue, please leave the column blank.)*

<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>

13. Did you receive any training on how to handle things if a client gets violent? *(Please tick yes or no for each venue you have worked in. If you haven't worked in the venue, please leave the column blank.)*

	<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Yes</b>			
<b>No</b>			

14. What would make you feel safer while working:

a) **In a massage/ body rub parlour?**

b) **As an escort**

c) **As an independent?**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

*This information is being collected for statistical purposes.*

15. How old were you when you started working in the sex industry?

16. In what venue did you start working in the sex industry?

- Massage/ body rub parlour
- Escort
- Independent
- Street
- Exotic dancing
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Over the past year, how many days a week on average do you work?

18. Do you currently have another occupation besides sex work? If yes, please specify.

- No
- Yes, \_\_\_\_\_

19. Please list other jobs that you have held in your lifetime.

20. Over the past year, what is your average **monthly take home income** from your work in the sex industry? (Please tick the most appropriate box)

	<b>Less than \$1000</b>	<b>\$1000-\$2000</b>	<b>\$2000-\$3000</b>	<b>\$4000-\$5000</b>	<b>\$5000-\$10,000</b>	<b>More than \$10,000</b>
<b>Massage/ body rub parlour</b>						
<b>Escort</b>						
<b>Independent</b>						

21. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

22. What is your marital status?

- Married/ common-law
- Single
- Widowed
- Separated/divorced
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Do you have any children?

- No
- Yes

25. What country were you born in?

26. If you were born in Canada, in what province were you born?

27. How would you classify your “race” (or would you)?

- White
- African American
- African
- South East Asian
- Indo Asian
- Aboriginal North American
- Inter-racial
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not identify with racial categories

28. What is your highest level of education?

- High school
- Some college/ university
- Some trade/ technical/ vocational school
- Diploma or certificate
- University Degree
- Masters (inc. LLB or JD)
- Ph.D.
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

29. Do you have any additional comments?

## *Appendix C: Interview Schedule*

Why did you agree to participate in this research?

How do you describe what you do? Are there any terms that would offend you?

What are you most concerned about while working?

What do you think are the biggest costs of working as a sex worker? What's the best part?

How do you respond to the allegations that the sex industry exploits and harms all women?

How concerned are you about the legal status of your work?

Tell me about the women you know who work in the industry- do you know of any women who have "pimps"? What about drug use? Is this a full time job for most women or do many have other jobs?

Tell me about your first job in the industry...

Does your family know about your work? What about partners/boyfriends?

Have you ever reported an incident of violence? To whom? What were the results?

How do you prevent violence while working in this industry? What kind of safety strategies do you employ?

How do you think the industry should be regulated?

What should we be most concerned about in relation to the sex industry? Minors? Pimping? Drug use? Violence? STD's? Trafficking?

Would you encourage women to work in the sex industry?

## *Appendix D: Victimization Statistics (Table Form)*

**Table 6: Victimization Rates for Masseuses**

<b>Threats</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>At least Once</b>	<b>Total N</b>	<b>Missing</b>
Clients	80% (n=20)	20% (n=5)	25	0
Police Officers	84% (n=21)	16% (n=4)	25	0
Significant Others	82.6% (n=19)	17.3% (n=4)	23	2
Boss	92% (n=23)	8% (n=2)	25	0
Co-workers	72% (n=18)	28% (n=7)	25	0
<b>Threats with Violence</b>				
Clients	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
Police Officers	100% (n=23)	0%	23	2
Significant Others	87% (n=20)	13% (n=3)	23	2
Boss	100% (n=23)	0%	23	2
Co-workers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
<b>Physical Assault</b>				
Clients	82.6% (n=19)	17.4% (n=4)	23	2
Police Officers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
Significant Others	87% (n=20)	13% (n=3)	23	2
Boss	100% (n=23)	0%	23	2
Co-workers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
<b>Sexual Assault</b>				
Clients	91.3% (n=21)	8.7% (n=2)	23	2
Police Officers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
Significant Others	87% (n=20)	13% (n=3)	23	2
Boss	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
Co-workers	100% (n=22)	0%	22	3
<b>Kidnapping</b>				
Clients	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
Police Officers	91.3% (n=21)	8.7% (n=2)	23	2
Significant Others	91.3% (n=21)	8.7% (n=2)	23	2
Boss	100% (n=23)	0%	23	2
Co-workers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	2
<b>Theft</b>				
Clients	65.2% (n=15)	34.8% (n=8)	23	2
Police Officers	86.4% (n=19)	13.6% (n=3)	22	3
Significant Others	86.4% (n=19)	13.6% (n=3)	22	3
Boss	95.5% (n=21)	4.5% (n=1)	22	3
Co-workers	45.8% (n=11)	54.2% (n=13)	24	1

**Table 7: Victimization Rates for Escorts**

<b>Form of Victimization</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>At least Once</b>	<b>Total N</b>	<b>Missing</b>
<b>Threats</b>				
Clients	70.8% (n=17)	29.2% (n=7)	26	0
Police Officers	95.7% (n=22)	4.3% (n=1)	23	3
Significant Others	91.7% (n=22)	8.3% (n=2)	24	2
Boss	82.6% (n=19)	17.4% (n=4)	23	3
Co-workers	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	2
<b>Threats with Weapons</b>				
Clients	83.3% (n=20)	16.7% (n=4)	24	2
Police Officers	95.8% (n=23)	4.2% (n=1)	24	2
Significant Others	96% (n=24)	4% (n=1)	25	1
Boss	91.7% (n=22)	8.3% (n=2)	24	2
Co-workers	91.7% (n=22)	8.3% (n=2)	24	2
<b>Physical Assault</b>				
Clients	75% (n=18)	25% (n=6)	24	2
Police Officers	91.7% (n=22)	8.3% (n=2)	24	2
Significant Others	84% (n=21)	16% (n=4)	25	1
Boss	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	2
Co-workers	100% (n=23)	0%	23	3
<b>Sexual Assault</b>				
Clients	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	2
Police Officers	95.8% (n=23)	4.2% (n=1)	24	2
Significant Others	95.8% (n=23)	4.2% (n=1)	24	2
Boss	91.7% (n=22)	8.4% (n=2)	24	2
Co-workers	95.8% (n=23)	4.2% (n=1)	24	2
<b>Kidnapping</b>				
Clients	79.2% (n=19)	20.8% (n=5)	24	2
Police Officers	91.7% (n=22)	8.3% (n=2)	24	2
Significant Others	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	2
Boss	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	2
Co-workers	100% (n=24)	0%	24	2
<b>Theft</b>				
Clients	75% (n=18)	25% (n=6)	24	2
Police Officers	95.2% (n=20)	4.8% (n=1)	21	5
Significant Others	90.5% (n=19)	9.5% (n=2)	21	5
Boss	95% (n=19)	5% (n=1)	20	6
Co-workers	90.5% (n=19)	9.5% (n=2)	21	5

**Table 8: Victimization Rates for Independents**

<b>Threats</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>At least Once</b>	<b>Total N</b>	<b>Missing</b>
Clients	84.6% (n=22)	15.4% (n=4)	26	2
Police Officers	87.5% (n=21)	12.5% (n=3)	24	4
Significant Others	95.8% (n=23)	4.2% (n=1)	24	4
<b>Threatening with weapons</b>				
Clients	92.3% (n=24)	7.7% (n=2)	26	2
Police Officers	92.3% (n=24)	7.7% (n=2)	26	2
Significant Others	100% (n=26)	0%	26	2
<b>Physical Assault</b>				
Clients	88.5% (n=23)	11.5% (n=3)	26	2
Police Officers	84.6% (n=22)	15.4% (n=4)	26	2
Significant Others	96.2% (25)	3.8% (n=1)	26	2
<b>Sexual Assault</b>				
Clients	88.5% (n=23)	11.5% (n=3)	26	2
Police Officers	92.3% (n=24)	8% (n=2)	26	2
Significant Others	100% (n=26)	0%	26	2
<b>Kidnapping</b>				
Clients	92.3% (n=24)	7.7% (n=2)	26	2
Police Officers	92.3% (n=24)	7.7% (n=2)	26	2
Significant Others	96.2% (n=25)	3.8% (n=1)	26	2
<b>Theft</b>				
Clients	88.5% (n=23)	11.5% (n=3)	26	2
Police Officers	88% (n=22)	12% (n=3)	25	3
Significant Others	96% (n=24)	4% (n=1)	25	3

**Table 9: Client Refusals**

<b>Refuse to use a Condom</b>	<b>Massage</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
Yes	28% (n=7)	37.5% (n=9)	25.9% (n=7)
No	72% (n=18)	62.5% (n=15)	74.1% (n=20)
Total	25	24	27
Missing	0	2	1
<b>Refuse to pay</b>	<b>Massage</b>	<b>Escort</b>	<b>Independent</b>
Yes	24% (n=6)	33.3% (n=8)	22.2% (n=6)
No	76% (n=19)	66.7% (n=16)	77.8% (n=21)
Total	25	24	27
Missing	0	2	1



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