

The High Cost of Prostitution Control- money spent arresting consenting adults could be spent to help real victims

In 1987, each prostitution arrest cost around \$2,000- in 2013 dollars, that's \$4,155.67

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By LAURIE BECKLUND,
Times Staff Writer

Law enforcement agencies in America's biggest cities spend an average of about \$2,000 for each arrest of a prostitute, which amounts to more than \$120 million a year in enforcement costs nationwide, according to a new study that describes itself as the country's first "cost-benefit analysis" of prostitution laws.

The study, published by the University of California's Hastings Law Journal in April, concludes that "arrests for prostitution, a misdemeanor, exact a disproportionately high toll on law enforcement resources" to the point that agencies can no longer "afford" to keep the crime "illegal."

"Faced with far more threatening crime . . . one wonders why police departments devote so much of their resources to enforcing prostitution laws," the study says.

Number Arrested

For example, the study points out, police officers arrested 74,550 people for prostitution in America's 16 largest cities in 1985. That means that the average big-city police department spent 213 man-hours a day enforcing prostitution laws.

Meanwhile, the study points out, reports of violent crime were up 32% in 1985 from a decade before. However, arrests for violent crimes rose only 3.7%, and arrests for homicide and robbery

Prostitution Arrests Cost \$2,000 Each, Study Finds

dropped 15%.

Research for the study was conducted in 1985 by Julie Pearl, a 1987 graduate student of Hastings College of the Law. The premise of the study was that law enforcement resources would be better spent investigating and preventing violent crimes instead of prostitution.

"We can't afford to keep prostitution illegal anymore," Pearl said in a telephone interview from her San Francisco home. "That's the point."

Jim Rasmussen, chief of the California Bureau of Criminal Statistics, confirmed in an interview that the study was the first known to look at the costs of prostitution enforcement nationwide.

According to the study, Los Angeles arrested 15,000 prostitutes—more than any other U.S. city—in 1984, the year for which data was available. However, that was the year Los Angeles police officers conducted broad sweeps of Hollywood and other areas in preparation for the Summer Olympics.

Arrests for prostitution last year in Los Angeles totaled 7,189, according to LAPD statistics. This year, prostitution arrests are up by more than 1,000 over the same period last year, as police attempt to limit prostitution in the San Fernando Valley, police spokesmen said.

If Los Angeles arrested the most prostitutes, it was the most economical in its arrests, the study reported. Because of a policy that allows officers to report to courts when called, rather than having to wait in court hallways, the study found, the average cost per prostitute arrest was \$1,118—considerably less than the average \$1,989 spent by big cities nationwide.

San Diego arrested only 1,600 prostitutes in 1984 at an average cost per arrest of \$1,991, the study found.

'Hidden Costs'

Several "hidden costs" taken into account by the study were time spent driving to arrest sites, overtime pay for officers working nights, and jail costs. The data was based upon police statistics and interviews with police officers, the study says.

One of the points that Pearl makes in the study is that vice officers are among the best-trained officers—"who would be very capable of . . . deterring violence and property crime if their attention were directed toward it."

"Overall, LAPD was innovative in finding new measures in cutting down

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time it takes to arrest prostitutes," Pearl said in an interview. "But given that it takes well over an hour to three man-hours to do one arrest, that's a lot of time that could be spent protecting citizens and solving violent crimes."

Capt. Jim Docherty, commanding officer of LAPD's Administrative Vice Division, disagreed with Pearl's conclusions.

"Cleaning up prostitution is one of the best ways we can prevent violent crime," he said. "When we cleaned up prostitution in Hollywood a couple of years ago, we did a survey of violent crimes related to prostitution and we found an

85% decrease. It was dramatic. And that decrease freed up a lot of investigators to go after other crimes."

Asked if those violent criminals might not simply commit similar crimes elsewhere, he said: "I admit that if you chase a rattlesnake away, he won't disappear, but he won't bite me. The best you can hope for in some situations is to try to chase prostitution out of your area."

see also "Prostitution is like rape"