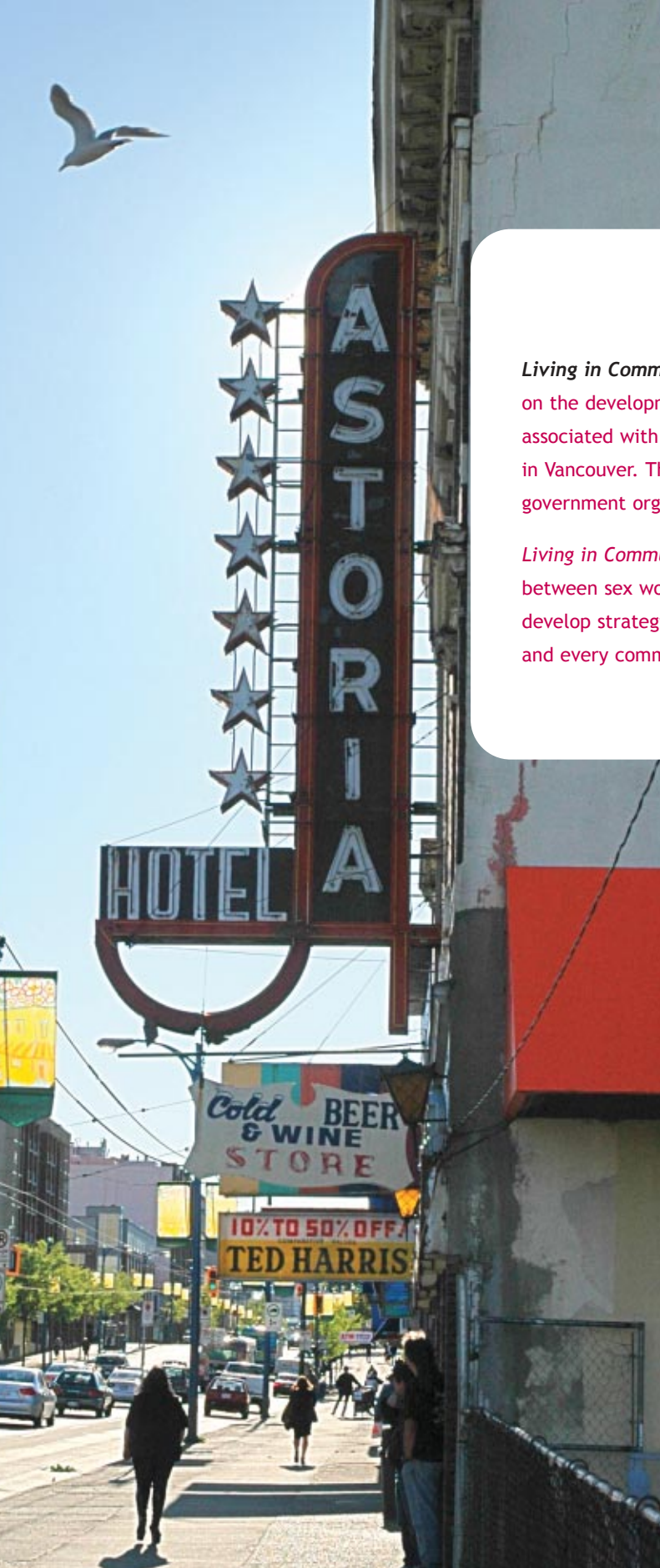




Living in Community:

Balancing Perspectives ***on Vancouver's Sex Industry***





Living in Community is a two-year community-based project focusing on the development of a well-informed, coordinated approach to issues associated with child and youth sexual exploitation, and adult sex work in Vancouver. The project is a collaboration of community, business and government organizations.

Living in Community aims to facilitate dialogue and build relationships between sex workers, residents, community groups and businesses to develop strategies to make communities healthier and safer for each and every community member.

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Executive Summary and Overview

The current negative impacts of the sex industry on sex workers, sexually exploited children and youth, residents, businesses, and communities throughout Vancouver are unacceptable, and there is a growing swell of support for change to make communities healthier and safer for all community members. It is an issue that has risen to the forefront of public debate in recent years and continues to fuel much controversy. There is consensus that the status quo is not working and the sexual exploitation of children and youth must be addressed immediately and more effectively. However, no such consensus has formed regarding adult sex work and perspectives on this issue vary widely.

Sex work is the term that those who provide or have provided commercial sexual services choose to use to refer to their work. Sex work is used throughout this report except when discussing the law, where prostitution is used to maintain consistency with the Criminal Code of Canada.

Sexual exploitation is the term used in this report to refer to the involvement of children and youth under 18 years of age in sex work, to emphasize that they are inherently exploited. Adults may also be sexually exploited.

Many varied perspectives about sex work exist based on differing cultural attitudes, worldviews, and collective norms. While these differences are important to acknowledge and respect, *Living in Community* has chosen to focus without judgment on the current realities of the lives of residents, businesses, sex workers and customers of sex workers. Our shared goal is not to engage in philosophical debate, but to take a pragmatic stance to reduce the harm currently experienced by some community members. Health, safety, dignity, and respect are all basic human rights, which must be respected and upheld. It is with this shared goal that we move forward in making real change that will promote the human rights of all community members.

Since its establishment in the fall of 2004, *Living in Community* has focused on developing a well-informed, coordinated approach to the issues associated with sex work and sexual exploitation in Vancouver. Community involvement and input have been central to this project. It is a collaboration guided by a 16-person steering committee representing community, sex worker, business and government organizations.

Through this Action Plan *Living in Community* hopes:

- to encourage ongoing dialogue and partnerships between community organizations, sex workers, residents, businesses, government, and police about sex work-related issues,
- to increase the health and safety of all community members in relation to the effects of sex work, and
- to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth, and adults.





Executive Summary and Overview



This Action Plan is the culmination of two years of community effort. Extensive research and initial public consultation led to the development of draft recommendations. Along with background information on the sex industry in Vancouver and Canada, these recommendations were distributed in *Living in Community's Draft Action Plan* in September, 2006. An extensive, city-wide Community Engagement Process followed throughout the fall and winter of 2006-07. Neighbourhood dialogues, focus groups, and an online survey were conducted to develop a better understanding of sex work's impact on communities throughout Vancouver, and to gather recommendations for making communities healthier and safer. Input was invited from sex workers, residents, community groups, businesses, and others.

The differences in how community members are affected – from residents to business owners to sex workers – contributed to the diversity of recommendations. However, the messages that echoed throughout the consultation process demonstrated that:

- the status quo is not acceptable,
- action is urgently needed to increase health and safety for sex workers, residents, businesses, and the entire community, and
- sustained, robust efforts are needed to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

Living in Community found that the working conditions of sex workers and their resultant experiences vary tremendously. Overall, sex workers, particularly those who are street-based, face extremely high levels of sexual assault and violence, including murder. Survival sex workers, of whom a high percentage are Aboriginal, are extremely vulnerable. Many male and transgendered sex workers experience multiple barriers and high levels of violence. Sex workers in indoor venues, such as massage parlours, may be exploited by their employers, and often have limited access to supports. Indoor sex workers who are from immigrant communities face greater challenges because of language and other cultural barriers. Sexual exploitation of children and youth continues in multiple forms, often fuelled by the Internet and other technologies. However, some sex workers report relatively safe experiences, demonstrating the divide within the community when it comes to these difficult issues.

As well, residents and businesspeople continue to be affected by the nuisance, mess and public disorder street-based sex work creates, and often feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods. The safety of young people is compromised by recruitment, children are endangered where they live and play, and businesses find it difficult to attract employees and customers. The upcoming 2010 Olympic Winter Games may only heighten the negative impacts on the street-based sex industry due to increased policing and military presence. Unfortunately, these issues have existed for many years in Vancouver neighbourhoods.

In 1985, the Fraser Committee was formed in response to growing concerns about street-based sex work across Canada. The committee acknowledged that the contradictory and self-defeating nature of Canada's prostitution laws was contributing to the problems, but the criminal law reform they recommended was never realized. Over 20 years later, in December 2006, the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws issued its report on Canada's prostitution laws, with a majority of the committee concluding that paid or unpaid sexual activities between consenting adults should not be criminalized, and that enforcement should focus on exploitation and violence rather than consenting adults.* However, with no concrete recommendations for law reform, and the climate of the current federal government, moving forward with any law reform seems unlikely.

Even in the midst of the horrifying evidence related to Vancouver's 67 missing women, it appears that no government – federal, provincial or municipal – has sufficient desire or ability to take action. Although government and private organizations currently fund a number of very important programs supporting individuals working in the sex industry and those trying to exit, funding is often uncertain and many service gaps remain. The *Living in Community* committee is resolute in its belief that society as a whole must work together to address this issue.

The following *Living in Community Action Plan* has been redrafted from the initial recommendations based on findings from the Community Engagement Process, research, and consultation with key experts in the field. This Action Plan attempts to take into account how change occurs at individual, community, and societal levels, while balancing human rights, harm reduction, and prevention. *Living in Community's* recommendations provide strategies in five areas:

- Community development
- Prevention/education
- Intervention/harm reduction
- Exiting
- Legal responses

The following recommendations are put forth to represent the will and address the overall needs of the community. Some can be implemented immediately; others are more suited to the medium or long term. It is our hope that the recommendations will lead to healthier, safer neighbourhoods for everyone. As we move forward to the implementation stage, we will continue to make space for building relationships and trust in recognition of the interdependent roles of individuals, communities, and systems in creating change.



*For a full version of this report, visit <http://cmte.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/committee/391/just/reports/rp2599932/justrp06/sslrp06-e.pdf>.



Executive Summary and Overview



Key Actions

Following are some of the actions that form the *Living in Community Action Plan*.

Fund a community-based position to facilitate the implementation of the *Living in Community Action Plan* in collaboration with community members and groups, including sex workers', business, and governmental organizations.

Lead organizations: *Living in Community Steering Committee, Vancouver Agreement, private foundations and community partners.*

We recommend that this *Living in Community* position specifically focus on:

- supporting ongoing dialogue about adult sex work and the sexual exploitation of children and youth among affected communities throughout Vancouver, and
- supporting existing multi-stakeholder teams in neighbourhoods to address ongoing concerns about sex work and develop appropriate local strategies to increase health and safety in communities.

Funding this position is key to ensuring that action is taken to address the concerns and ideas expressed by community members and groups. The community development position should be supported by sustained funding from all three levels of government.

Fund the expansion of service by the MAP Van (Mobile Access Project Van) to daytime hours to provide a Quick Response liaison and support role for sex workers and other community members impacted by the sex industry, to reduce reliance on enforcement and promote health and safety in the community.

Lead organizations: *Vancouver Agreement, City of Vancouver, Federal and Provincial Governments, PACE, and WISH, in collaboration with community and business organizations.*

The Mobile Access Project Quick Response Initiative will be an extension and development of the existing Mobile Access Project to provide service during the day. Its purpose is to provide immediate response to specific incidents of community concern about the impacts of sex work. The Quick Response Initiative relies on the secure funding and sustainability of the current Mobile Access Project (see Action 9 for further details on the Mobile Access Project).

Develop and fund a continuum of safe spaces providing appropriate treatment and supports to individuals who wish to exit the sex industry, at all stages of recovery.

***Lead organizations:** Sex worker organizations and experiential people, with support from Federal and Provincial governments and Vancouver Coastal Health.*

Programs to support exiting sex work must address the spectrum of related issues. Programs with broad representation will be most effective at providing appropriate assistance. Exiting facilities should be developed and staffed with strong representation by experiential people, in partnership with economic development and employment-service providers.

Provide safehouses with adequate space for sexually exploited children and youth, and female, male, and transgendered sex workers.

***Lead organizations:** Vancouver Coastal Health and the Ministry for Children and Family Development.*

Safehouses are emergency shelters that provide a wide range of support to individuals in unsafe situations: immediate support for dealing with violence and trauma; support and referrals for addiction issues, pregnancy, legal problems, medical concerns, etc.; and assistance in finding accommodations, education, and work. There is a critical need for services to support vulnerable individuals involved in the sex industry. These services must be able to address the unique needs of individuals, given their varying experiences.

Information and support need to be accessible in terms of culture and language.

Review, improve, and support existing programs that prevent sexual exploitation and recruitment, and develop a standardized curriculum for children, youth, and parents focusing on healthy sexuality, self-esteem, recruitment prevention, and positive parenting.

***Lead organizations:** Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health, and Living in Community development position in collaboration with sex worker and community organizations.*

The many prevention programs that already exist should be broadened, strengthened, and supported to ensure more universal delivery. The Vancouver School Board needs to incorporate similar content into its curriculum to ensure that the entire student population receives this information. Parents need to be involved in this process to ensure that they are familiar with the information and can anticipate and respond to their children's questions. Community organizations, such as neighbourhood houses and community centres, should also assume responsibility for delivering this information through their diverse programming for children, youth and families.





Stories

The following stories represent some of the many ways that different community members are affected by sex work:



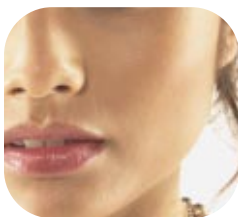
Anna is a 27 year old female who works in a neighbourhood where there are many street-based sex workers. She does shift work and so is often going to and from work late at night and early in the morning. She has been mistaken for a sex worker numerous times by customers who drive up to her while she is walking, or follow her down the street on foot. She is now scared to walk to work and has been getting her boyfriend to drop her off and pick her up, but he is not always able to depending on his schedule. Her employer is sympathetic, but there is nothing that he can do to help. She is thinking of quitting her job because she is tired of being afraid of going to work, but doesn't have many other options and she enjoys the work she is doing right now.



Sam has been working in Boystown (the outdoor stroll where male sex workers work) for about 5 years. At 15 when his stepdad kicked him out of the house, he moved from Ontario to Vancouver. He couldn't find a job or a place to live and could never make enough panhandling. Soon, he was using crystal meth and sleeping on the streets. One night he went out with another friend who worked Boystown. And, that's how it started. Now it's been 5 years. He makes enough to pay for a cheap hotel room in one of the SROs downtown, and some money for food but he hates standing out there every night having to deal with the harassment and the violence from residents and people walking by. He's never had a 'straight' job, and now he's too old for a lot of youth support services. So, every night, it's back to the street.



Kate lives in an area of East Vancouver where sex workers often work on the corners in the neighbourhood. Her two young daughters are afraid of the sex workers who they often have to pass when going to and from school or to the store. Her daughters are also afraid when they see sex trade workers that are high on drugs and behaving strangely, or when they see them "fixing" their drugs in the park. Amanda is concerned about the wellbeing of the women working but is also concerned about her children's safety. She feels helpless and doesn't know what to say to her daughters when they ask her questions about the women working. She is also afraid to let them play freely in the parks and playgrounds because of used condoms and needles. Her family members are afraid to ask the sex workers to move off of her property or away from their houses as they have been told by neighbours that they will send their pimp or throw a rock through their window if they don't leave them alone.



Rhonda lives in Vancouver and has been working for the past 5 years as an independent escort. She started working when she was a university student because she needed the money. The work was flexible and she managed to pay her way through school without going into debt. She got another job at a bank when she finished school but kept escorting on the side because she made really good money. She eventually quit the other job because she likes being able to work for herself and set her own hours. Because she works independently, she doesn't know many other escorts, and is sometimes concerned about her own safety when she does out-call jobs. Rhonda is afraid to tell many of her friends and family about the real work that she does because she is afraid of what they will think about her. So, she pretends that she is still working at the bank.

Coming to Terms with the Impacts of Sex Work in Vancouver

1

SECTION

Living in Community aims to build relationships among diverse community groups who are affected by the sex industry, to support the coordination of services, and to develop grassroots strategies to improve the health and safety of all community members.

1 The Living in Community Project

Living in Community is a two-year community project focusing on commercial sexual services that are exchanged in both indoor and outdoor venues, and on the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

The intent of the project was to develop and implement a well-informed, grassroots approach to the health and safety issues associated with sex work. The project was developed by and for the affected communities.

Living in Community grew out of discussions among resident groups, business improvement associations, community policing centres, and neighbourhood houses. These groups recognized the urgent need for change and the need to identify and address the underlying issues associated with sex work. The group developed into a coalition that included sex workers, advocacy organizations, and other community partners. The coalition approached the Vancouver Agreement (VA) to fund this project, and the VA committed two-year funding to the project.

A steering committee was formed of 16 diverse members from the community representing a broad range of positions and approaches. Community, business, government, and sex worker organizations were represented.

A basic premise of *Living in Community* has been that the term community needs to be redefined as including everyone: sex workers, residents, business owners and employees, and schoolchildren. The issues associated with the sex industry are the responsibility of the entire community. A collective effort is required to develop a unique, innovative action plan for change. Because it works to ensure the health and safety of all – community groups, businesses, sex workers, and residents alike – this plan will bring about positive change in our community.

Vision and Objectives

Living in Community envisions a city where each and every member feels safe, healthy, respected, and supported to develop to his or her full potential – a place where all community members can contribute economically, socially, and politically to increase the overall quality of life. *Living in Community* aims to create space to build healthy relationships that promote peace, equality, social justice, and a clean, safe physical environment.

Living in Community's objectives for this Action Plan are:

- to encourage ongoing dialogue and partnerships between community organizations, sex workers, residents, businesses, government, and police about sex work-related issues,
- to increase the health and safety of all community members in relation to the effects of sex work, and
- to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

In September 2006, *Living in Community* released its draft document based on extensive research and initial public consultations. The document provided background information on the sex industry in Vancouver and Canada, and outlined draft recommendations. In the fall and winter of 2006-07, *Living in Community* facilitated an extensive Community Engagement Process designed to encourage people to start talking about sex work openly, to share their concerns, to brainstorm actions to make communities healthier and safer for all community members, and to provide feedback on the draft recommendations. The Community Engagement Process included Neighbourhood Dialogues, focus groups, and an online survey. Input was invited from sex workers, residents, community groups, businesses, and others. The input from this broad process has guided the development of this Action Plan. The Community Engagement Process is discussed at greater length in Section 2.



Coming to Terms with the Impacts of Sex Work in Vancouver

1

SECTION

The Community Initiative for Health and Safety

The Community Initiative for Health and Safety (CIHS) grew out of recognition by *Living in Community* that the issues that community members face daily needed to be addressed immediately. Its objective was to build understanding between community members and to provide essential resources and strategies to assist them to address the negative impacts of street-based sex work.

During the summer and fall of 2006, the CIHS team held a series of focus groups and dialogues with a wide range of stakeholders, including police officers, business people, street nurses, and sex workers. (For further discussion of this consultation process, see *Overview of CIHS Consultations* in Section 2.)

Based on information gathered in focus groups and at Neighbourhood Dialogues, *Tools for Change*, a health and safety toolkit, was launched in April 2007. It includes such important information as how to build co-operative relationships between sex workers and other community members, tips for sex work customers about respecting the neighbourhoods they frequent, strategies to prevent the sexual exploitation of young people, and strategies for sex workers who want to exit the industry.

The toolkit will assist in garnering broader understanding of sex work, community safety, and collaboration. It includes services, supports, and information targeted to sex workers, sex work customers, sexually exploited children and youth, and members of the community at large.

Tools for Change is available online at www.livingincommunity.ca/toolkit. The printed version, *EPIC (Evolving Partnerships in Community)*, was co-developed with CIHS by the Environmental Youth Alliance and is being distributed through community and business organizations.

2 Sex Work in Vancouver and Canada: History and Trends

The Current Context in Vancouver

The issues associated with sex work have come to the forefront of public discourse in Vancouver over the past few years. There have been varied responses throughout the city's history, but there has been little resolution.

Sex work and sexual exploitation continue to affect many individuals and communities throughout the city. The related issues touch all community members, from sex workers themselves to residents and businesses, to the families of those involved in the sex industry, to the police and politicians attempting to regulate and enforce various laws and policies.

Perspectives on sex work are as diverse as the sex worker population and other members of the community. Some acknowledge sex work as a legitimate form of employment, while others view it as inherently exploitative. Still others see sex work as a "public nuisance" or as the result of government mismanagement. Responses to sex work and the associated issues are affected by values, worldviews, and personal experiences.

John Lowman, a professor in the Simon Fraser University School of Criminology and a Canadian authority on prostitution, asserts that distinctions need to be made among types of sex work because of the range in levels of choice and options^{1*} that sex workers experience. He identifies three levels of prostitution. *Sexual slavery* refers to situations where people are forced to engage in commercial sex work and, as in slavery, have little, if any, control. *Survival sex work* refers to individuals who are engaged in sex work because they have very few other options due to poverty, addiction, homelessness, and racism. In other forms of sex work, individual adults are engaging in the consensual exchange of commercial sexual services.² *Commercial sexual services* refer to other forms of sex work by adults by consensual exchange.

*Please see endnotes on pages 76-77

Each and every individual in the community (sex workers, residents, business owners/employees, etc.) has the right to live in a healthy, safe environment where their human rights are respected and upheld.

A high number of children and youth are being forced or coerced to engage in commercial sex work. *Sexual exploitation* is the sexual abuse of children and youth under the age of 18 through the exchange of sex or sexual acts for drugs, food, shelter, protection, other basics of life, and/or money. Sexual exploitation includes involving children and youth in the creation of pornography and sexually explicit websites. It is imperative to distinguish between children and adults, as children and youth are inherently exploited by being involved in sex work.

However, exploitation can happen across the spectrum of sex work, not just to children and youth. Exploitation is more prevalent when individuals have fewer options and are more vulnerable. Race, gender, class, socio-economic status, and culture heavily influence an individual's experience of the sex industry. (See page 70 for the Sex Work Continuum Diagram.)

Sex work has existed in Vancouver in some form since the earliest days of colonization. However, its visibility, its forms, and responses to it have been influenced by the changing political, social, economic, and legal context. Although venues for sex work have always been diverse, from brothels to massage parlours to escort agencies, it was only in the 1970s that street-based sex work became prevalent. Even today, only about 20 percent of sex work takes place on the street.³ However, because of its visibility, street-based sex work is seen as predominant and as a source of health and safety concerns in neighbourhoods.

Historically, problems associated with the sex industry have been addressed through law enforcement. Although the exchange of sexual services on a commercial basis between consenting adults has never been illegal, various related activities are against the law. It is virtually impossible

to sell sexual services without breaking the law – by communicating for the purpose of prostitution, for example. As a result, many sex workers are criminalized for engaging in what is otherwise a legal activity. This contributes to their economic and social marginalization.⁴

Sex work also falls under municipal jurisdiction. City of Vancouver by-laws cover the licensing of “health enhancement centres,” escort agencies, and massage parlours, where the exchange of commercial sexual services commonly occurs.

How strictly federal laws have been enforced has been influenced by the prevailing political climate of the time. Under pressure from groups concerned about the impact of the street-based sex industry on their neighbourhoods, police have cracked down in certain communities, forcing street-based sex workers to move. This may temporarily address nuisance and safety concerns, but it only pushes the problem to another area without providing a long-term solution. Nor does it address the poverty, violence, lack of affordable housing, mental illness, addiction, exploitation, and/or discrimination that underlie many of the issues related to sex work.

Due to the illicit and stigmatized nature of the work, it is difficult to determine the number of sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth in Vancouver and in Canada. Official statistics tend to reflect law enforcement trends rather than the actual extent of sex work.⁵ The lack of accurate information hampers efforts to develop solutions.





Coming to Terms with the Impacts of Sex Work in Vancouver

1

SECTION

The Legal Status of Prostitution in Canada: 1800s to Present

Federal Law

Canada's legal response to prostitution has been to criminalize activities related to sex work rather than the actual act of having sex for money. This is a form of criminalization or prohibition. The Criminal Code currently prohibits the following activities:

- Running or frequenting a bawdy house (section 210)
- Transporting a person to a bawdy house (section 211)
- Procuring or living on the avails of the prostitution of another person (section 212)
- Obtaining or attempting to obtain the sexual services of someone who is under 18 in exchange for money, clothes, shelter, or anything else of value (section 212.4)
- All forms of public communication for the purposes of prostitution (section 213)

Canada's prostitution laws originated in Britain and primarily dealt with problems stemming from the presence of residential and street prostitution.⁶ In the 1860s, the Contagious Diseases Acts, designed to control the spread of venereal disease among military men, authorized the police to force any woman suspected of being a "common prostitute" to undergo an internal examination.⁷ With the creation of Canada's Criminal Code in 1869, the Vagrancy Act authorized police to arrest any woman wandering the streets who was unable to "give a good account of herself." In the late 1800s, influenced by the social purity movement, laws were implemented to protect women and children from the supposed "social evils" of prostitution. Numerous laws relating to bawdy houses, living on the avails of the prostitution of another person, and procuring for the purposes of prostitution remain in place today.

It was not until 1972 that the Vagrancy Acts, commonly known as "Vag C," were replaced by the Soliciting Law, which applied to male as well as female sex workers. Instead of criminalizing the state of being a "common prostitute," it criminalized the activity of "soliciting" clients in public places. A number of court challenges to the new law followed. After a number of off-street sex work venues were closed in Vancouver and Toronto, street-based sex work increased across Canada. In 1983, the government convened the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (the "Fraser Committee") to examine why Canadian prostitution laws were ineffective. The Fraser Committee recommended extensive changes: the redrafting of prostitution laws; the legalization of adult prostitution under specified circumstances; and introduction of various social and economic initiatives for women and children.⁸ However, the government opted to replace the Soliciting Law with the Communicating Law, Bill C-49, without changing any of the other prostitution legislation. The Communicating Law made it illegal for sex workers to communicate for the purposes of engaging in prostitution and for clients to proposition sex workers in public places. This only strengthened the previous law.

Research shows that the Communicating Law has had little impact on reducing levels of street-based sex work in Canada, and in fact contributes to the impacts on sex workers, residents, and businesses.⁹ John Lowman's analysis of the number of homicides of sex workers in Canada between 1960 and 2000 reveals a frightening escalation of violence since the Communicating Law¹⁰ was enacted in 1985.

Years	Number of homicides of sex workers
1960-1964	0
1965-1969	0
1970-1974	0
1975-1979	3
1980-1984	8
1985-1989	22
1990-1994	24
1995-1999	55*

*The true number is unknown because not all of the women who went missing in this period have been found.

Additional studies have shown a strong correlation between the criminalization of sex work and the violence perpetrated on sex workers.¹¹

Studies through the years have attempted to address these concerns, but have usually failed to make any recommendations for reform to the criminal law relating to adult prostitution. The Federal/Provincial/Territorial Task Force on Prostitution's report of 1997 concluded that something should be done to stop the sexual exploitation of children and youth, and to stop the violence and public nuisance associated with street level sex work. However, no consensus about how to reform adult prostitution laws was achieved.

In 2003, Pivot Legal Society developed *Voices for Dignity*, a report expressing concern about how the criminalization of sex work contributes to the harms experienced by sex workers. These concerns have been expressed across the country. *Voices for Dignity* argues that current laws violate the human rights of sex workers and that ending the criminalization of sex work is a vital step toward ending the marginalization that sex workers face daily.¹²

In response to renewed public interest, in 2004 the federal government convened a Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws (SSLR) to review and recommend changes to the prostitution-related sections of Canada's Criminal Code to improve the health and safety of sex workers and the communities where they live and work. With representation from all parties, the Subcommittee travelled across the country, meeting with diverse groups and individuals to look at the effectiveness of the Communicating Law in ensuring health and safety for all community members. Over 300 witnesses testified before the Subcommittee.¹³

After extensive consultations and over three years of work, the Subcommittee issued its report, *The Challenge of Change: A Study of Canada's Criminal Prostitution Laws*, in December 2006. Although the Subcommittee did not come to agreement about specific recommendations

for reform to the criminal law relating to adult prostitution, or recommend decriminalization, a majority did conclude that paid or unpaid sexual activities between consenting adults should not be criminalized, and that enforcement should focus on exploitation and violence, and not on consenting adults. The NDP and the Liberals recommended that government engage in a process of law reform with a view to changing existing laws, and all parties agreed that what exists now is not working. Three parties on the Subcommittee agreed that the contradictory nature of the laws contributes to the harms caused, and that the conditions under which sex work can be practised must be stipulated. These are the same conclusions that the Fraser Committee reached 22 years ago.

Disappointingly, the report does not fulfill the Subcommittee's mandate to examine how enforcement of the Communicating Law pushes sex workers into more vulnerable situations, putting their health and safety at risk.¹⁴ Instead, it focuses on human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and, issues not included in the Committee's mandate, which are addressed in other sections of the Criminal Code. Regrettably, it appears that no government is able to achieve consensus about concrete kind of change is necessary, however, the government needs to be held accountable to the conclusions made in the report, including the harmful nature of the current laws.

Municipal Laws

Although a number of the activities associated with sex work are illegal in Canada, as described above, municipalities continue to license businesses where it is generally believed that sex work may take place. The City of Vancouver licenses escort services, massage parlours, health enhancement centres, and body-rub parlours.





Coming to Terms with the Impacts of Sex Work in Vancouver

1

SECTION

Vancouver's first brothel was opened in 1873 by Birdie Stewart in what is now Gastown.

History of the Sex Industry in Vancouver: 1800s to Present

Sex work has always been entwined with Vancouver's history, shaped in part by the legal status of adult prostitution, but also by economic, political, and social conditions. Birdie Stewart opened Vancouver's first brothel in 1873 at the corner of Water and Abbott streets in Gastown. At the time, a significant population of Chinese and Japanese women worked in the area. They had been lured from their homelands by promises of a prosperous new life abroad. This foreshadows contemporary stories of trafficking from abroad.

A brothel-style Red Light district thrived on Dupont Street (now East Pender, between Cambie and Main) and in the area around Chinatown until after World War II. At that time, the brothel style of sex work was replaced by a more decentralized model in which sex workers met their clients at clubs and hotels.¹⁵ The only stroll, an outside area where sex workers worked, was in the Downtown Eastside. Many of the women there were addicted to heroin.¹⁶

The raid of the Penthouse in 1975 was pivotal in the history of sex work in Vancouver. At the time, 30 to 150 sex workers worked from the Penthouse on Seymour Street each night. Once indoor sex work was displaced to outdoor venues, street-based sex work increased dramatically.¹⁷ The women who had worked at the Penthouse worked on the streets of the West End until residents' protests led to a court injunction banning soliciting west of Granville.¹⁸

Since then, sex workers have worked throughout the city, changing neighbourhoods in response to pressure from police, residents, and businesses. Escort services and massage parlours have continued to operate in less visible locations and have flourished due to their low profile. Male sex workers have had a stroll in Yaletown for several decades.

The Demographics of Sex Workers

The sex worker population spans socio-economic groups, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. In Canada, the majority of sex workers are women, but 20-25 per cent are male or transgendered.¹⁹

Reasons for participating in sex work are tremendously varied. For many, sex work is neither their long-term profession nor their main identity.²⁰ Rather, sex workers exist along a continuum, from individuals who occasionally engage in some form of sex work for survival, to others who depend wholly on it for their income (see page 70 for the Sex Work Continuum Diagram). Individual sex workers need to be thought of as whole people rather than being identified solely by their work.

It is important to recognize the varying degrees of choice and empowerment sex workers experience in the continuum of sex work. Survival sex workers, such as homeless youth and women living in poverty, may have few other options for survival. Trafficked persons may work in slave-like conditions with little, if any, freedom or mobility. Other sex workers may engage in sex work as an occupational choice among a range of opportunities open to them, operating their own profitable businesses. Most sex workers exercise some degree of choice, although they may not choose the conditions within which they make those choices.²¹ Exploitation, abuse, and violence may also occur across the continuum.

The Parliamentary Subcommittee found that individuals typically have their first experience with prostitution between ages 14 and 18, though the average age of entry is difficult to determine.²² Because children and youth are invariably in exploitative situations when they are selling sex for money, food, drugs, shelter, etc., many people are being sexually exploited during their first experiences of sex work.

People begin engaging in commercial sexual services for a variety of reasons. For many, it is a matter of economic hardship – the need to pay the rent or to buy groceries. For others, it may be due to having experienced abuse, being forced to by a third party, or needing to cope with a drug addiction. However, it is important to remember that while some sex workers struggle with addictions, stereotyping all sex workers as addicts is inaccurate, and leads to further stigmatization and marginalization.

Where Sex Work Takes Place in Vancouver: Indoor and Outdoor Venues

Strolls, where street-based sex work takes place, are usually on streets or in parks. Over the past 20 years, there have been over 20 different strolls in Vancouver. From 1982 to 1994, there were 17 different strolls in the city, of which four or five were active at any one time.²³ Pressure from local residents' lobby groups, police, and politicians forced sex workers out of certain neighbourhoods, leading to displacement from Mount Pleasant to Strathcona and the Downtown Eastside, to the industrial areas north of Hastings and up the Kingsway corridor.

Although street-based sex work and where it takes place are constantly changing, particular features are associated with specific strolls. A *high track* is an area where female sex workers work and charge high amounts of money for their services. Most of these women are in pimping situations and are not actively addicted.²⁴ In contrast,

the so-called *low track* of the Downtown Eastside is home to many women who are engaged in survival sex work. Due to poverty, addiction, mental illness, predatory violence, and discrimination,²⁵ they may be unable to refuse sex work in dangerous situations. Although their earnings may be taken by their boyfriends, they usually do not identify themselves as being in a pimping situation. A high percentage of these women are Aboriginal.

Other neighbourhoods where sex workers work include the Kingsway corridor, Mount Pleasant and the light industrial area north of Hastings. The area where young girls are exploited, some as young as 13, is called *Kiddie Stroll*. *Boystown* is the area of Yaletown where many male sex workers are found. The *Tranny Stroll* is an area where transgendered persons work in the Downtown Eastside.

In a less visible way, massage parlours and escort services have continued to operate throughout the city. Indoor venues differ substantially in terms of control of earnings, the pace of work, clientele, sex activities performed, and the health and safety conditions that workers experience.²⁶

Escort agencies are licensed by the City of Vancouver for an annual fee of \$958. To be licensed, individuals must be associated with an escort service. They are required to pay a \$128 fee to the City. Eighty escort services were listed in the 2004-05 Vancouver Yellow Pages. The conditions of work as an escort are dependent on a number of factors, but little is known due to lack of research and the challenges of accessing individuals who work in escort agencies.²⁷

Under City of Vancouver by-laws, the “body-rub parlour” classification limits the advertising of “sexual entertainment” but does not limit sexual





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entertainment itself. The licensing fee for a body rub parlour is \$8,108 per year, the third highest licensing fee of any business. Only one business in this category currently operates in Vancouver. Massage parlours and bathhouses, which commonly provide sexual services to customers, usually operate as “health enhancement centres,” paying an annual licensing fee of \$198. Bathhouses may be venues for same-sex sexual services provided by males (*hustlers*).

Working conditions in a massage parlour vary significantly according to who owns the business. The Orchid Project, which does outreach, provides support, and carries out research in indoor venues, has found that although indoor venues may be safer than outdoor venues, health and safety conditions are not necessarily better for indoor workers. There are still many barriers to healthcare access, risk of HIV and STIs (sexually transmitted infections), and challenges because of different cultural backgrounds and contexts.

Massage parlours are commonly venues where immigrant and refugee women work who have limited knowledge about Canadian culture, the English language, available supports, and other options. Although the risks of working outside are very high, women working in massage parlours may face heightened risk because they are isolated and extremely vulnerable. Access to supports is further complicated by the fact that these women often move among massage parlours, and may move between indoor and outdoor venues.

Trafficking

Some individuals working in indoor venues have been trafficked to or within Canada. Their working conditions involve coercion, deceit, and in some cases virtual slavery. Those who are from outside Canada face even greater cultural and language barriers in terms of accessing police protection, social services, education, and health information.

The United Nations’ *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* defines trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Global economic forces play a role in trafficking. People with few economic opportunities may have little choice but to migrate for work, which may lead to being trafficked. As a wealthy nation providing social and economic opportunities, Canada is a sought-after destination. While individuals may know that they are coming to Canada and may even know the kind of work they will engage in, the levels of control, threat, coercion, and isolation many experience are serious human rights violations.

Though there is little accurate information on the extent of trafficking in Canada, it is known that Canada is a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficked persons. Although many trafficked persons are trafficked for the purposes of sex work, trafficking occurs for many other purposes including domestic and factory labour, and marriage, and involves both women and men. Trafficking also happens domestically, within provinces and across their borders. Individuals, most frequently young women, are moved on circuits from city to city.

“[My hotel] is one big party area. I want to cook breakfast and people are crashed on the floor. [It’s] not safe there anymore – the landlord is a slum landlord.”

Living in Community focus group participant

In November 2005, the federal government passed Bill C-49, which criminalizes the trafficking of persons across and between borders. The issue of trafficking has only recently been addressed, and government and non-government organizations are currently working together to try to determine what kind of protection needs to be offered to trafficked persons, and who determines what form that protection takes.

Socio-economic Context of Sex Work

Socio-economic factors play a fundamental role in contributing to Vancouver’s extensive sex industry. High levels of poverty, the lack of safe and affordable housing, decreases in funding to social services, and cuts to income assistance all create a climate in which fewer supports are available to vulnerable individuals. Since 2002, the number of street homeless and those staying in shelters has doubled from 600 to 1300.²⁸ Paying bills, buying groceries, providing for one’s children/family, supporting a drug habit, and the lure of big money can all contribute to an individual’s entry into sex work. As well, there are many barriers to accessing higher education, which would open the door to more opportunities. Comprehensive and integrated interventions are needed to change the conditions that make sex work the only option for many.

The City of Vancouver has begun to recognize the need to address systemic issues. The City is working on implementing with its partners *A Framework for Action – A Four-Pillar Approach to Drug Problems in Vancouver*

(2001) to address the negative impacts of substance misuse on neighbourhoods and citizens through prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement services. *The Homeless Action Plan*, released in June 2005, recognizes the need to address the serious issue of homelessness in the city with three components: 1) reducing barriers to income assistance and creating jobs for the homeless; 2) increasing housing; and 3) increasing addiction and mental health services. These are important initiatives to address some of the macro-socioeconomic processes that impact sex work, but there are many other opportunities for governments, in partnership with communities, businesses, and residents, to work towards systemic changes to improve the health and well-being of all citizens.

Sexually Exploited Children and Youth

As previously discussed, commercial sexual exploitation refers to the “sexual abuse of children and youth under the age of 18 through the exchange of sex for drugs, food, shelter, other basics of life and/or money.”²⁹ The terminology *sexually exploited child/youth* is used instead of “child prostitute” or “youth prostitute” to recognize the high level of exploitation involved. Rather than criminalizing the young person, this term places responsibility on those who purchase sex or procure children and youth.





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“I am concerned about the very young children who are in the sex trade. How is it that we all have known that there are children in the sex trade for so many years and they are still there?”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

The Criminal Code makes it illegal in Canada to obtain or attempt to obtain the sexual services of someone who is under 18 in exchange for money, clothes, shelter or anything else of value (section 212.4). The age of consent in Canada is 14, making it illegal for an adult to have sex with someone who is under the age of 14 (sections 150 and 151 of the Criminal Code).

The occurrence of commercial sexual exploitation in Vancouver and across the country is difficult to estimate because much of it is hidden due to its illicit nature. Most studies estimate that girls represent 75-80 per cent of sexually exploited children and youth.³⁰ However, estimates of the number of boys being sexually exploited may be inaccurate because the experience may be more difficult for boys to disclose.³¹ In addition, sexual exploitation has traditionally been viewed through a “female lens,” so very little is known about the young men involved.³² Street-involved youth are particularly at risk. Studies have shown that 10 per cent of homeless youth under 19 years of age engage in sex work as a weekly source of income and 31 per cent have traded sexual favours at some point.³³

Entry into sex work usually occurs in the mid-teenage years.³⁴ The majority of youth who are being sexually exploited are 15 to 18 years of age. With less than 20 per cent of commercial sexual exploitation taking place on the streets,³⁵ children and youth are exploited in venues including massage parlours, nightclubs, escort agencies, and even their own homes. The advent of new

technologies contributes to the problem. The Internet is increasingly becoming an entry point and a vehicle for a billion dollar global exchange of pornography exploiting children. Movement of sexually exploited children and youth in established circuits, from rural to urban locations, across provinces, and even across national borders³⁶ makes the extent of the problem difficult to track.

Though there is little information on the ethnicity of sexually exploited children and youth overall, the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth has been well-documented.³⁷ Their entry into sex work at an average age of 14 years is often predicated on the need to survive.³⁸ Historic racism and cultural fragmentation have created social and economic conditions that impair the development of a healthy sense of self and create tremendous discord in their lives, leading to high levels of sexual exploitation.³⁹ In some communities across Canada the percentage of Aboriginal children and youth who are sexually exploited is as high as 90 per cent.⁴⁰

Individual factors, such as childhood sexual abuse, isolation, a dysfunctional family situation, running away from home, leaving home at an early age, dropping out of school, drug misuse, and disability increase the risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Children and youth in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development face particularly high barriers. However, it is also important to recognize the structural factors that play a large role: poverty, homelessness, youth unemployment, gender inequity, socio-economic marginalization, and other forms of discrimination.⁴¹ There is a need for both prevention and intervention services that target not only individual and family factors, but also the larger socio-economic systems that allow commercial sexual exploitation to thrive.

Colonization and Aboriginal Women

The legacy of colonialism in contributing to the social and economic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, particularly Aboriginal women, cannot be overestimated. Although the experiences of all Aboriginal women before the arrival of the Europeans cannot be generalized, it is agreed that women had much greater autonomy, influence, and status before colonization.⁴² From the early days of colonization, government policies were destructive to First Nations families and communities. The Indian Act of 1876 defined who was a “status” Indian and imposed patriarchal marriage and property rights that denied Indian status to women who married non-status Indians or white persons, as well as their children, while giving status to any woman who married a status Indian.⁴³ The removal of children to residential schools and the loss of a landbase aimed to foster assimilation.⁴⁴ These assimilationist policies and the implicit systemic bias have contributed not only to the erosion of cultural identity and loss of self-worth among First Nations communities, but also to high rates of poverty and homelessness. Displacement and migration to urban centres are also contributing factors to their vulnerability and isolation.

Aboriginal peoples are vastly over-represented within the sex industry. A PACE study in 2000 found that 30 per cent of the sex workers in the Downtown Eastside were Aboriginal, although Aboriginal people make up only about 3 per cent of the Canadian population.⁴⁵ While rates of violence are extremely high for all street-based sex workers, the entrenched stigmas and stereotypes regarding Aboriginal women provide a rationale for men wanting to perpetuate violence.⁴⁶ Moreover, because of high levels of poverty and vulnerability, and low levels of self-esteem, Aboriginal children disproportionately end up in the sex industry as a means of survival.⁴⁷ Although Canada thrives as an affluent, “First World” country, Aboriginal peoples, particularly women, continue to face significant marginalization and discrimination.

The WISH Drop-in Centre Society in partnership with Vancouver Native Health has been looking into how to better mobilize resources for Aboriginal women who are sex workers, an especially vulnerable group. Their symposium with Aboriginal women identified four areas where there are gaps in service: housing; engagement and support; health and safety; and employment and training. Their ongoing work is important to improve the women’s health, safety, and well-being.

Male and Transgendered Sex Workers

Although it is commonly assumed that sex workers are female, many are male or transgendered. Much less is known about their experiences and how they differ from those of women. Sex work among males, or *hustling*, may take place in a number of venues, including on the street, in cars, hotels, apartments, at truck stops, in parks, and in bathhouses. More male hustlers than female sex workers work in off-street venues. Moreover, there is little involvement of pimps, and more contact with “sugar daddies,” individuals with whom males exchange sexual services for a place to stay, food, clothing, etc.

Few studies have been done with male sex workers and there are many gaps in research and understanding. One recent study on the sexual exploitation of young men by Sue McIntyre provides some insight.⁴⁸ This study of 40 young men in Vancouver and Victoria revealed histories of sexual abuse among young men who were hustling comparable to those of young women: three-quarters stated that they experienced physical aggression or sexual abuse and/or witnessed violence while growing up. More than half of these young men began working when they were under 18 years of age,





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starting younger than females and working for longer. Although their reasons for becoming involved in commercial sexual activity were varied, for many, their first contact with hustling was for survival after having run away from home.

Despite the stereotype that all male hustlers are gay, there is a wide range of sexuality expressed. Violence is a common experience of both male and female sex workers. However, while the source of violence for women is usually from customers, the main source of violence for young men is gay bashing, fueled by homophobia and the assumption that all male sex workers are gay. The fear of gay bashing was prevalent at all times for the young men in McIntyre's study, and the experience of physical assault and humiliation was a common experience for about half.⁴⁹

Although the population of male sex workers is very diverse, a highly disproportionate number of young Aboriginal men are in the sex industry. Fifty-four percent of the young men in McIntyre's study identified as Aboriginal. Once again, this exposes the high levels of social and economic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

There is even less information about transgendered persons working in the sex industry. A transgendered person is an individual who lives life as a member of the opposite sex. There are particular areas in Vancouver where transgendered persons work the streets, but they also may work in indoor venues. While some transgendered sex workers live their lives as women, others may only cross-dress while working in the industry.

Sex Work Customers (Johns)

There is comparatively little research available on the people who purchase sex services. Such information is a vital link in understanding the sex industry in Vancouver and in increasing health and safety for sex workers and community members. Almost all sex work customers are male. They come from diverse backgrounds and professions, representing all socio-economic groups, ethnicities, and cultures.⁵⁰ No single type of person buys sex. They give various reasons for why they purchase sexual services from sex workers, including loneliness, sexual problems at home, curiosity, desire for specific sexual acts that a spouse or partner would not or could not do, desire for a sense of domination or power over another person, sexual addiction, closet homosexuality, and the desire to avoid the "hassle" of a more typical relationship.⁵¹

In general, the men who purchase sexual services from indoor sex workers come from a higher socio-economic group, because they have a greater desire to keep their activity secret.⁵² Indoor sex workers do not necessarily share their feeling of safety in less visible venues; behind closed doors, they are very vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.⁵³

Female sex workers, particularly street-based survival sex workers, often experience violence at the hands of the customers. Customer violence can be broken down into situational and premeditated violence.⁵⁴ In situational violence, a dispute arises during an interaction between the sex worker and customer and escalates into violence. Predatory violence is premeditated, such as a planned robbery, and/or may be misogynist, sexual, or serial. Street-based sex workers are a particularly easy target for predators, a reality that is borne out by the missing and murdered women of the Downtown Eastside. Advocacy organizations emphasize the need to make a distinction between the paying customer and the predator.

“I don’t want to displace our problems onto other communities...”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

Pimps

A pimp is someone who lives on the earnings of a sex worker or sexually exploited child or youth. However, the stereotype of what a pimp looks and acts like is inaccurate, and not all sex workers are in pimping situations. The relationship with a pimp can take on various formats, from “boyfriend” to a family member.⁵⁵ Pimping relationships may involve manipulation, threats, and violence so that sex workers are forced to continue working. Although in some cases pimps do protect women from violent customers, the pimp may also be the perpetrator of severe forms of violence.⁵⁶

Although there has been very little research into this group, some of the limited research shows that pimps beat “their” women for not meeting quotas, for suspicion of talking to police, for trying to exit sex work, or for no reason at all.⁵⁷ This research also suggests that pimps use a variety of recruiting techniques, in particular: using brute force to put new women on the street; pretending to love a young woman, providing drugs and/or clothing under the guise of giving gifts and later telling her that she has accumulated debt she must pay off; and playing off someone’s addiction to coerce her into selling sex.

Law Enforcement in Vancouver

Law enforcement consists of the various activities carried out by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD), the court system, regulatory agencies, licensing authorities, and other sectors. Police have a challenging role to play in reducing the negative impacts of the sex industry on sex workers, residents, and businesses, balancing their responsibilities to protect citizens, ensure public safety, and enforce existing laws. There are various sections of Canada’s Criminal Code that make it illegal to communicate for the purposes of prostitution, to operate a bawdy house, and to live on the avails of prostitution. However,

the VPD believes that these laws should be enforced in a manner that is constructive rather than punitive, particularly when dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The Vice Unit of the VPD is responsible for investigations into prostitution-related offences, pornography, and other forms of sexual exploitation. Police report rarely using the Communicating Law (section 213) to charge sex workers, unless there is disruptive or problematic behaviour in neighbourhoods or around schools. In response to public complaints, the police have, in the past, put pressure on sex workers to move out of an area, which has led to the movement of the strolls throughout the city. Because of the visibility of street-based sex work, and the level of complaints from businesses and residents, law enforcement focuses on street-based sex work and the majority of the focus of enforcement is on sex work customers. According to Vice Unit statistics, in 2004, 39 female sex workers were arrested along with 267 male customers, 167 of whom were sent to the Prostitution Offender Program, a pre-charge diversion program for prostitution offenders. All of the men who attended the Prostitution Offender Program (“John School”) were there on charges related to street-based sex work, not massage parlours or escort services.

The role of courts is to interpret the law, set standards, and raise questions that affect all aspects of Canadian society. The separation between Crown Counsel and the police is fundamental to the protection of the rights of all citizens and ensure objectivity in the enforcement of the law. The police investigate and lay charges when they believe on reasonable grounds that an offence has been committed.





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Crown Counsel's job is to review charges and to prosecute only where there is a reasonable chance of conviction and when prosecution is in the public interest.

The ways that the courts engage the laws and that the police enforce them have a great impact on the experience of sex workers. In general, there is a lack of trust between sex workers and the justice system at large. Most research has shown that Canadian prostitution laws actually contribute to making sex workers more vulnerable and contribute to the violence they experience.⁵⁸ A 2001 PACE study of sex workers in the Downtown Eastside showed that 76 per cent of women who have been physically assaulted did not make any report to the police.⁵⁹ Sex workers report being harassed and abused by police.⁶⁰ They often do not report assaults, harassment, or robbery, in part because of the fear of further stigmatization by the police, but more importantly, because it would require that they admit to engaging in an illegal activity.

The levels of violence experienced by all sex workers, male, female, and transgendered, are of concern to the VPD; further relationship-building is needed to increase reporting of these crimes. It may be difficult to get sex workers to testify against pimps, customers, or traffickers because of their fear of further violence.

Law enforcement is extremely important in stopping and intervening in sexual exploitation, and in situations of violence and assault. Children and youth are especially vulnerable, because of age discrepancy, lack of understanding and education, and naiveté. Children and youth involved in sex work were formerly viewed as "child and youth prostitutes." However, there has been an increasing recognition that children and youth are always in a position of imbalanced power and exploitation. Stopping the sexual exploitation of children and youth, the timely prosecution of offenders, and early police involvement are priorities for the VPD. The City of Vancouver also plays a role in enforcement through by-laws and the licensing of business in which sex work may take place.

3 Impacts of Sex Work

Sex work has an impact on individuals, community groups, and on the social system at large. Each group feels the impacts differently. As the community has worked towards developing an Action Plan to increase health and safety, looking at the issue through the eyes of other groups has helped to increase mutual understanding and to develop a consensus about appropriate recommendations. The following information is drawn from the *Living in Community* Community Engagement Process and from research.

Impacts on Sex Workers

Violence

Sex workers are at risk of violence and danger on a daily basis, though the levels of violence are dependent on the type of venue in which they work, among other factors. Harassment, abuse, and violence are integral to street-based sex work in Canada.⁶¹ Sex workers work in the most dangerous environments and experience by far the highest homicide rates of any occupational group. Much of the violence is at the hands of sex work customers. Studies have shown that 98 per cent of female sex workers on the Downtown Eastside have been victims of violence as a result of "bad dates."⁶² A 30-year study of female sex workers in Colorado Springs, Colorado identified a mortality rate of 391 per 100,000 compared to the standard mortality rate of 1.9 per 100,000. The workplace homicide rate for female sex workers was found to be 50 times higher than that of the next highest occupational risk group – female liquor store employees.⁶³ Indoor workers may also experience violence and abuse in their workplace.

“Sex workers are forced to work in unsafe areas due to pressure from hostile neighbours, cops, etc., and are at higher risk of violence as a result.”

Living in Community online survey participant

Health Impacts

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”⁶⁴ Following from this definition, sex workers inherently face several health risks, including general health concerns, mental health issues, and sexual health. In many cases, these concerns are exacerbated by poverty, addiction, and mental illness. Sex workers are at risk for STIs, including HIV and Hepatitis C; those who are injection drug users face greater health complications if they use dirty needles. Although use of condoms varies among sex workers, most report using them. It may be difficult for sex workers to negotiate condom use because of difficult customers or the demands of pimps.⁶⁵ Anemia, malnutrition, insomnia, and tuberculosis are also common. Sex workers also say they experience high levels of fatigue and low self-esteem. Many barriers prevent sex workers from accessing services, including isolation and cultural factors.

Healthcare accessibility and health knowledge remain barriers for sex worker populations. The Street Nurse program of the BC Centre for Disease Control in Vancouver has found that healthcare is generally not accessible for many sex workers. In addition, sex workers fear disclosing the kind of work they are involved in for fear of stigmatization. Those who do disclose often face great discrimination.⁶⁶ Safe-sex campaigns and condom social marketing are based on harm-reduction principles, but harm reduction has not been applied in the same way as it has to addiction.⁶⁷

The mental health of sex workers may also be impacted by their work, due to its particular conditions. The high levels of violence that sex workers experience produce not only physical, but also mental and emotional harm. A 1998 study of sex workers found that 68 per cent met the full criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder.⁶⁸

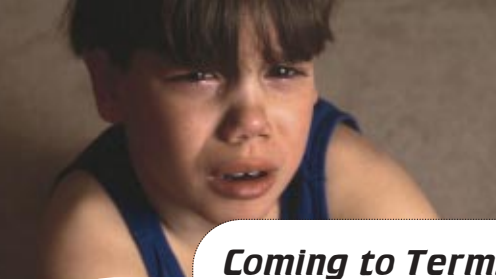
Stigmatization of Sex Work

The stigma associated with sex work has serious repercussions for sex workers, leading to further marginalization of a population that is the most socially, legally, and economically marginalized in Canada. Most discussions about sex workers focus only on the sexual nature of their work, excluding the factors such as poverty, homelessness, and race that leave individuals with fewer options.⁶⁹ The stereotypes are harmful to the self-esteem of individuals and may serve to justify the exploitation that sex workers face. Stigmatization also exacerbates the hidden nature of sex work, and therefore increases the potential for violence.

John Lowman⁷⁰ illustrates how this stigma is perpetuated in the media by the characterization of attempts by residents, police, and politicians to “get rid of street prostitution.” This “discourse of disposal” defines sex workers as a problem to get rid of and contributes to the high levels of violence experienced by this group. In addition, the legal distinction of sex workers reinforces their marginal status, decreases their quality of life, and creates further challenges for them to exit.⁷¹

In the 1980s, sex worker rights organizations began to mobilize and to challenge stereotypes of sex workers as immoral, addicts, and social misfits. The sex worker rights movement focuses on reclaiming the basic human rights of all sex workers. It bases its activism on the real experiences of sex workers.⁷² The sex worker rights movement sees sex work as a form of labour and





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believes that sex workers should have the same rights as other labourers in other sectors. Sex workers themselves, rather than others, determine what concerns and needs they will base their activism on.

Impacts on Children and Youth

Children and youth who are recruited into sexual exploitation face all of the same health risks, levels of violence and abuse, and stigma as adult sex workers. However, their vulnerability and level of exploitation are often greater because of their age, developmental stage, and innocence.

Recruitment of children and youth is a growing issue. A pimp may isolate the child or youth from any other social supports and beat or rape him or her, increasing the level of violence and the young person's fear, and reducing his or her chances of exiting.⁷³ A pimp may also encourage addiction to keep a young person in a position of sexual exploitation, raising their risk of contracting HIV and STIs. There have been reports in some Vancouver schools of teenage pimps attempting to recruit girls as young as grade 6. This is a current risk in certain neighbourhoods.⁷⁴

There are also risks associated with street-based sex work for children and youth who are not themselves sexually exploited. Dirty needles and condoms in neighbourhoods, in streets, and in playgrounds pose serious health and safety hazards. The potential impact on children and youth's development from exposure to street-based sex work is also a community concern.

Impacts on Businesses

The sex industry, particularly the survival sex industry, affects businesses in Vancouver in numerous ways. In general, the impacts fall into four categories: problems associated with the related garbage; the impact on the reputation of businesses and areas in which they operate; impacts on safety and violence; and concern for sex workers. For most businesses, the problem is not sex work, but rather the public nuisance and disturbance associated with it.

Street-based, survival sex work has by far the greatest impact. The presence of condoms, condom wrappers, and drug paraphernalia outside and around businesses not only creates a distasteful mess that business owners and operators feel forced to clean up, but also affects the reputation of the business and the area. Although not all sex workers have addictions and not all people with addictions are sex workers, there is a general perception that the public mess is caused by survival sex workers. Many business people say that street-based sex work is entwined with increased crime and drug dealing. The street-based sex industry brings increased public disruption by drug dealers and pimps, and their occasionally violent interactions with sex workers. Some sex workers act as the point-of-sale person for drug dealers. In response, some businesses put in extra gates, locks, and bars to deal with their safety concerns. This becomes an added cost for the businesses.

With the presence and the perception of violence, it becomes difficult for businesses to attract employees. Businesses in the Powell Street light-industrial area report difficulty, particularly because many people who do shift work are women. Women may feel especially unsafe in the area because of the levels of crime and violence, and because they fear being perceived as a sex worker and being approached by a customer or a pimp while going to or from work.

“There are sex workers who work in front of my business. People are afraid to come into my store when they are there and this hurts my business.”

Living in Community focus group participant

Businesses report having difficulty attracting customers. Customers may feel uncomfortable or unsafe entering businesses when sex workers are standing outside, or going to areas that they perceive to be crime-ridden. They have expressed concern about being perceived as sex work customers if they are seen to be driving around the area. Customers are also reluctant to bring their children to areas of the city they perceive to be violent. Many businesses believe the presence of sex workers outside their business is an intimidating deterrent for customers, especially when sex workers are intoxicated and their behaviour is unpredictable. There have been reports of sex workers getting into cars waiting outside of businesses and threatening not to get out unless the person in the car gives them money. Pimps can also be particularly intimidating. Businesses with rental suites located above street-based activity find that the presence of the sex industry, crime, drugs, and high levels of noise make it difficult to keep tenants. The potential loss of revenue is a serious concern for them.

Whether or not the perceived level of crime matches the reality, the reputation of a street or business area has a significant bearing on the ability of businesses there to thrive. A business located in an area of high crime may be assumed to be involved in shady activities. A poor reputation may erode a strong business presence, creating vacancies or discouraging other businesses in the area. There is also concern about the concentration of sex industry-related businesses in certain neighbourhoods.

Although concern for the success of their businesses is foremost, business owners also express concern for the safety and well-being of sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth, but feel powerless to help. Although they have complaints about condoms, needles, and crime, many business owners and employees have developed informal, positive relationships with sex workers. Some understand that many sex workers are victims and have difficulty seeing them experiencing violence at the hands of their pimps. Usually, business people feel their only option is to call the police; however, this only succeeds in pushing workers into other areas.

Municipalities have not always taken into account the impact of their responses on businesses. For example, traffic blockades in the Hastings North light industrial area have made deliveries to businesses very difficult and make employees and business owners feel barricaded.

There is a need for more research into the influence of the sex industry—especially the survival sex industry—on the success and well-being of businesses. However, anecdotal evidence bears out the negative economic impacts on businesses and loss of empowerment and self-esteem by staff and customers. It is obvious that the business experience forms a key link in the development of a holistic approach to healthier and safer communities.





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“[In my neighbourhood, there has been] a horrendous invasion of street prostitution and drug dealing... We have empathy for the street prostitutes but we have a problem with accepting their baggage. We have aggressive pimps, drug dealers, condoms and other drug paraphernalia in our streets parks and around our schools. Schoolchildren [are] being exposed to working prostitutes while coming and going from school, etc.”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

Impacts on Residents

Throughout *Living in Community's* Community Engagement Process, residents expressed many concerns similar to those of businesses – violence, health risks, increased traffic and noise, and loss of reputation. Sex work is viewed as bringing increased crime and violence into neighbourhoods, including drug dealing and gang activity. Residents express concern about the threat to personal security that the street-based sex industry poses to their neighbourhoods. Sex work-related litter not only poses a health and safety risk for individuals in the neighbourhood, but also stigmatizes the neighbourhood as unsafe and rife with crime. A study of escort services in Windsor, Ontario showed that the stigma of “prostitution areas” spread to non-sex worker residents as well.⁷⁵ There is concern that this may lead to decreased property values.

Recruitment of children and youth into sexual exploitation by teenage pimps remains a serious concern for neighbourhoods. There is also fear about the health and safety effects of dirty condoms and needles in parks, backyards, and alleys. The impact of increased drug and criminal activity on children and youth is also a concern. Residents report feeling unsafe walking at night in their neighbourhoods and being threatened or harassed by sex workers. Female employees and residents have been propositioned in their neighbourhoods, a situation they find very uncomfortable and threatening.

Residents are concerned about sex workers working in front of residents' houses, and about sex workers having sex with customers in public places. Parents report not knowing what to say to their children about the individuals standing on the street corners. A high level of discomfort about addressing the issue of sex work is common.

Within neighbourhoods, attitudes about the sex industry are diverse. Cultural dynamics affect how particular neighbourhoods, residents, and individual families perceive the existence of the sex industry and the health and safety risks it poses. Residents may themselves be sex workers, advocates, police officers, business owners, or customers. Many residents feel great frustration and helplessness, whether to help sex workers or to move them out of their neighbourhoods to reduce their impact. These varying roles and viewpoints are a challenge when working towards creating healthy communities with dignity for all members.

4 Current Programs and Initiatives in Vancouver

Peer/Advocacy Responses

Peer-based sex worker organizations are organizations that have been developed and are operated by and for sex workers, former sex workers, and their allies. Because of their in-depth understanding of the experience of sex work, these organizations are particularly successful at providing appropriate and respectful support and services to current, exiting, and former sex workers.

Organizations such as PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society) Vancouver, PACE (Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education) Society, the WISH Drop-in Centre Society, and SWAN (Sex Workers Action Network) operate in Vancouver to support the multiple needs of current and exiting sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth. Services include outreach, drop-in, advocacy, research, exiting programs, housing, job training, health support, and education.

The Orchid Project is a program of the Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS that takes a “peer-delivered” approach to providing culturally sensitive and language-specific awareness, education, and support related to HIV/AIDS and sexual health. The Orchid Project targets Asian women working in massage parlours and escort agencies in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Many of these women are extremely marginalized, isolated, and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. SMOKE (Strategy for Multicultural Outreach, Knowledge and Education) is a three-year project run by SWAN in collaboration with the Battered Women’s Support Services to develop strategies to address issues related to the sexual exploitation of women and girls in immigrant communities in the Lower Mainland.

One unique peer-run project in Vancouver is the Mobile Access Project (MAP), run jointly through a partnership between PACE Society and the WISH Drop-in Centre Society. The MAP project uses a converted ambulance that operates as a safe, mobile drop-in centre for sex workers. The van circulates through the Downtown Eastside and other areas where survival sex workers operate during the night, the most dangerous time for these women. The van is designed to be a place of respite and safety from violence for survival sex workers during hours when virtually no services are available to them.

Another innovative program is a self-defense program run by PACE in collaboration with the Vancouver Police Department. Police officers have worked with PACE staff to train sex workers in some basic self-defense training, an initiative that is now run solely through PACE. This program has been unique in its ability to build relationships between sex workers and police officers, groups that have often been at odds.





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A number of social service organizations support people in the sex industry as part of their focus on particular populations, such as street-involved youth, pregnant and parenting young women, women's organizations, safehouses, and shelters, detox and treatment facilities, mental health supports, neighbourhood houses, and community centres. By supporting the physical and mental health and safety of sex workers, they benefit all community members.

Law Enforcement

A number of initiatives by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) provide alternative approaches to the enforcement of prostitution laws. The Prostitution Offender Program is a diversion program that diverts from the court process offenders who have been charged with attempting to buy sex. Participants pay a \$500 fee for the day-long program, which endeavours to educate offenders about the legal ramifications of prostitution, health risks, and effects of prostitution on women, families and communities. This program almost exclusively targets customers who buy sex from street-based sex workers.

Although the program is supported by the VPD, critics point out that there is no parallel program for sex workers that is specific to their needs. Sex workers who are facing criminal charges and are approved for diversion enter the general alternative measure program.

Government Actions

The Assistant Deputies' Committee (ADM) on Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation group represents eight provincial ministries that focuses on sex work and on the sexual exploitation of children and youth. It funds local community organizations to build capacity throughout BC. The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT), funded by the ADM's Committee, is a collaboration of organizations that develop strategies to prevent sexual exploitation and to support youth who are being sexually exploited.

Neighbourhood Actions

Over the years, various neighbourhoods have struggled with the same issues and developed numerous responses to the impacts of the sex industry. In the 1980s, West End residents organized a "Shame the Johns" campaign in response to an active street-based sex work scene. Residents patrolled the streets, focusing on the street-based sex workers and pressuring them to move out of the neighbourhood. Similar actions have taken place in other areas. "John-watch" groups have been formed by resident groups to write down customers' license plate numbers and report them to the police. In the Kensington area, the Dickens Group of residents responded to the presence of the street-based sex industry and drug scene by organizing community clean-ups and patrols, standing on street corners to distract customers and phoning the police every time they saw a sex worker.

Businesses in neighbourhoods have felt that the sole response available to them when their area is impacted negatively by the sex industry is to call the police. Generally, the police crack down, pushing sex workers into other areas.

Other neighbourhood actions have been more focused on education, support, and relationship-building. Groups have hosted information sessions to increase knowledge and gain perspective on the issue. Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Collingwood Renfrew Community Policing Centre, in collaboration with other groups, instituted a breakfast and shower program for street-involved populations one day per week. This approach, which originated at Kitsilano Community Centre, is under consideration in other areas of the city.

The Wall Street Project is another unique community initiative aimed at capacity building to deal with crime and safety in the Hastings-Sunrise area. The project arose out of a community-level initiative supported by the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House and Vancouver Coastal Health to build a healthier, safer community. Residents decided to educate themselves about the impacts of the sex industry and drug trade and to build community. Advocacy, education, and practical strategies were developed through an inclusive approach during the three-year project. The Wall Street Project was one of the precursors to the *Living in Community* project.

5 Overview of Related Research

The issue of sex work and the sexual exploitation of children and youth has been examined by various groups, committees, organizations, and individuals in both academic and non-academic settings. Since the increase in street-based sex work in the 1970s, different reports have examined the legal framework related to sex work and the effectiveness of Canadian prostitution laws.

The Fraser Committee, which was set up by the federal government in 1983 to examine the body of prostitution law, found that Canadian prostitution laws were contradictory: although prostitution itself is legal, it is difficult to ascertain where it can legally take place. Recommending the partial decriminalization of prostitution, the Fraser Committee advised that legal reform was necessary to specify that prostitution would be permitted in certain places and under certain circumstances, including allowing small numbers of sex workers to organize their activities out of a place of residence. Despite these recommendations, the government enacted Bill C-49, the “Communicating Law” in 1985, which only tightened the prostitution laws.

With the failure of the Communicating Law to reduce the numbers of street-based sex workers, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Prostitution was established in 1992 to examine the sexual exploitation of children and youth, violence against sex workers, and the impacts of street-based sex work.

With regard to the sexual exploitation of children and youth, its 1998 report recommended further social intervention strategies and more effective measures to apprehend and prosecute





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offenders. The Working Group examined street-based sex work and concluded that the existing laws, particularly the recently enacted Communicating Law, were not effective and that violence against sex workers was continuing. Although the Working Group's public consultation process was unable to establish consensus on legal reform, it encouraged levels of government to discuss limited decriminalization and the regulation of bawdy houses.⁷⁶

Other reports and various academic sources have critiqued Canada's prostitution laws in a similar manner. Although the harms associated with sex work are undesirable, the laws actually drive sex work further underground and therefore increase levels of violence and risk.⁷⁷ Much research suggests that decriminalization reduces the harms associated with sex work.⁷⁸ The 2006 Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws' report, *The Challenge of Change*, came to the conclusion that the status quo is not acceptable for sex workers or for any other community members, and that legal reform is vital.

At the provincial level, the Ministry of Attorney General⁷⁹ formed the Provincial Prostitution Unit in 1996 to prevent the sexual exploitation of children and youth, to reduce violence towards sex workers, and to assist residents in addressing the impacts of sex work on neighbourhoods. Following public consultations, the Unit produced recommendations, including a focus on prevention and early intervention, education and youth involvement, a multi-service agency approach, and culturally relevant and appropriate programs. There were also suggestions that by-laws could be used to regulate "problem businesses" and to increase the age of consent to 16 years. These recommendations have been echoed in many other reports.

A number of reports by other groups have been undertaken in Vancouver and British Columbia. They have tended to focus on street-based sex work, particularly in the Downtown Eastside, and on sexually exploited children and youth. Recommendations common to the reports include:

- Public education/awareness programs
- Prevention, including prevention to address root causes
- Harm reduction approaches
- Programs to support leaving/exiting
- Early intervention/crisis intervention and exiting options with long-term support
- More safe and affordable housing, alcohol and drug treatment options, mental health services
- More effective legal/policy measures to deal with offenders
- Interagency, multidisciplinary approach
- 24-hour services (drop-in centres, help lines)
- Solutions coming from local communities
- Rights-based approach
- Law reform, because the harms associated with street-based sex work have persisted despite amendments over 25 years
- Experiential involvement/participation by those who are most deeply affected by the issue, applying experiential knowledge to the development and implementation of programs at all stages⁸⁰

Despite the support of numerous reports for these recommendations, the health and safety of sex workers and other community members has not improved.

There are many gaps in research and understanding of the issues. Evaluation of current services is scant, so their effectiveness is unknown. For example, the Downtown Eastside survival sex worker population has been over-researched, but little evaluation of the effectiveness of current services has been carried out. Meanwhile, sex workers continue to face grave threats to their safety.

In contrast, there has been less research on indoor sex workers, such as those in massage parlours and escort agencies, or on male or transgendered workers. This leaves a significant gap in understanding of the issues that these individuals face.

Most research has focused on the individual characteristics of sex workers, including family histories, abuse, age, and psychological characteristics. However, the political, economic, social, and structural factors that lead to sex work tend to be overlooked⁸¹; there is under-representation of minority groups who rarely work outdoors because of the cultural stigmas attached to sex work; and there has been little focus on the roles of gender, culture, ethnicity, and class in understanding experiences of sex work. Few reports mention the role of the community in supporting sex workers. There is only anecdotal information and no research on the impacts of sex work on the business community and residents. In addition, lack of recognition of men's and women's different needs and experiences is demonstrated by the fact that there are very few detox and treatment beds for women and none specifically for sex workers.

Despite these gaps, some excellent research and analysis of the issue of sex work in Vancouver is available. This body of literature has enabled *Living in Community* to develop its Action Plan based on well-documented facts. It has helped to ensure that all interests are taken into account in the progression toward healthy communities with dignity for all.

6 Sex Work in a National and International Context

The *Living in Community* project is taking place at a time when issues associated with sex work are gaining more attention across the country and around the world. Within Canada, there has been general recognition that the status quo is not working and that street-based sex work and violence against sex workers have not decreased, despite legal reform in the 1980s. Over the past 20 years, cities such as Vancouver and Edmonton have witnessed cases of missing and murdered women, many of whom have a history of working in the sex industry. There have also been cases of missing women in the Prince George area. As in Vancouver, this has prompted calls for social and legal interventions to improve the safety of such a vulnerable population.

The sex worker rights movement is becoming an increasingly visible civil society movement with advocacy organizations organizing across borders. The 2005 XXX (Triple X) Forum in Montreal is one example of sex workers from around the world coming together to discuss work issues as they pertain to their respective countries, focusing on laws, the sex worker in society, personal safety, and health. The BC Coalition of Experiential Women and Communities is a local example of this civil society movement.

The issue of trafficking has become a hot topic at the international and national levels over the past 10 years, with different advocacy groups involved in international discussions to inform approaches to combat trafficking in persons. The UN





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Trafficking Protocol, adopted in 2000, was the result of many countries, particularly developing countries, pressing the need to address the growing concern of human trafficking across international borders. Canada has recently responded with the adoption of Bill C-49 in November 2005, which criminalizes the trafficking of persons across and within borders.

Nationally, discussions have taken place about the impact of the Communicating Law on sex workers and other community members, and the need for law reform. These discussions are important because how sex work is treated under the law greatly influences sex workers, the issues that arise in relation to sex work, and the types of prevention and intervention programs that can be undertaken. However, as previously discussed, there does not appear to be sufficient will and/or ability at the national level to bring about legislative reform.

At an international level, sex work is addressed in a variety of ways. In general, there are three different ways of framing the legal status of sex work: prohibition, decriminalization and legalization, although there is a continuum of approaches within all of these models. A prohibition model is an approach that aims to eliminate all forms of paid sex through legal prohibition. Canada currently has a form of prohibition in which certain activities associated with sex work, including owning or operating a bawdy house, living on the avails, and communication for the purposes of prostitution are criminalized under federal law. Another type of prohibition, which has been adopted in Sweden, criminalizes the purchase, but not the sale, of commercial sexual services. In this system, criminal law regulates activities relating to prostitution, but does not distinguish between activities that are abusive and disruptive and those that are not.

In Sweden, sex work is generally perceived to be a form of violence against women. The Swedish move to a more stringent prohibitionist policy follows a history of the Swedish state enacting stricter laws where other countries have been more liberal and pragmatic, and less focused on moral authority.⁸² Supporters of this law say that the number of street-based sex workers has dramatically decreased. Critics say that the criminalization of sex work customers has merely forced sex workers into darker, more dangerous areas and increased the levels of violence and abuse they experience.

The only objective evaluation of the Swedish model, by the Government of Norway, concluded that although it had reduced the number of visible sex workers, the law had not achieved its intended effect of reducing violence against women.⁸³ The law also had a number of unintended effects, such as making women more vulnerable and access to support services more difficult because of fear of enforcement. Because clients are less visible, coercion, pimping, and trafficking in persons are also less visible, and law enforcement is difficult. The reason for the reduction in the numbers of street-based sex workers is unknown; there may actually be fewer, or they may have moved into less visible areas.⁸⁴

In general, Western countries have seen an increased drive to legalize prostitution.⁸⁵ Germany, the Netherlands, Greece, Australia, and New Zealand have all decriminalized, legalized or expanded the regulation of prostitution in the last six years. This shift has usually come about with the recognition that prohibition does not reduce the number of sex workers or the crime and disorder associated with sex work.

A legalization model accepts that prostitution is an inevitable part of society, but sees this activity as requiring special social controls and regulation. This model generally retains some criminal laws, usually the prohibition of street-based prostitution. Prostitution has been legalized in a number of jurisdictions, including Nevada, parts of Germany, Australia, and the Netherlands, though forms of regulation differ. They may include a state registry for sex workers, zoning, mandatory medical check-ups for sex workers, and involvement of police in the licensing of prostitutes to protect third parties from harm and make commercial sex services less visible to the public.⁸⁶ This can cause difficulty for individuals who do not pass medical exams because they test positive for STIs or HIV. Another criticism is that a two-tier system is created under which individuals who are unable to meet imposed standards end up working outside of the legal system, under more dangerous working conditions.

In Queensland, Australia, the 1999 Prostitution Act was brought in to regulate and license the brothel industry with the hope of reducing the links between prostitution and organized crime.⁸⁷ A recent evaluation of this law found no evidence of corruption or crime within the legal brothel industry or any effect on the community. All legal brothels had undertaken extensive community consultations with industrial neighbours, and some businesses had even benefitted from the presence of the brothels. However, the study also found that illegal brothels and escort agencies continued to thrive. Targeted and innovative police activity has succeeded in reducing the numbers of street-based sex workers.⁸⁸

Within the decriminalization model, all laws that criminalize the action of taking money for sex are repealed. This model regulates sex workers and sex work activities through provincial labour-standards legislation, occupational health and safety guidelines, zoning by-laws, human-rights standards, etc., but also recognizes labour rights and responsibilities. Only abusive and disruptive activities relating to prostitution are criminalized – such as intimidation, threats, and sexual assault – using generic criminal laws that prohibit assault, etc. Advocates of decriminalization regard commerce in sex as essentially similar to commerce in other personal services.⁸⁹

In 2003, New Zealand decriminalized sex work, which resulted in these changes: safeguard the human rights of sex workers, operators of brothels are required to be licensed, and to adopt and promote safe sex practices; soliciting is no longer an offence; and people under 18 years of age are prohibited from becoming sex workers and providing commercial sexual services. Advocates of this approach say that it has made sex work safer for workers, while critics point out that there is still a street-based sex industry.

Whatever model communities choose to embrace, experience in other jurisdictions indicates that even when there are regulated brothels, an illegal sex industry, some form of street-based sex work, and the many associated issues all continue. Any type of legal reform is a very long-term process. There are no magic answers to the challenging legal questions of prostitution. Discussion of legal frameworks provides an important backdrop to considering how all community and government groups can work toward healthier communities. The focus must be on reducing the negative impacts on all community members.





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Living in Community has always been committed to ensuring that its recommendations come from the communities that are impacted by the issue. Residents, sex workers, businesses, and others have all been affected by sex work in different ways. Their diverse needs and interests have, in the past, contributed to conflict and lack of communication among the various groups, hindering effective dialogue. The method and scope of the Community Engagement Process was therefore fundamental to the *Living in Community* project. The process provided a means of engaging diverse groups in non-judgmental, open, and authentic dialogue, and developing specific strategies reflective of the lived experiences of all groups most affected by sex work, including residents, business owners and employees, sex workers, and other community members.

1 Overview of Community Engagement Process

The goals of the Community Engagement Process were:

- to encourage community members to share their concerns about sex work and sexual exploitation in Vancouver and to openly discuss the issues;
- to brainstorm actions to make communities healthier and safer for all community members; and
- to provide feedback on the *Living in Community Draft Action Plan*

The *Living in Community Draft Action Plan*, which was released in September 2006, was developed based on research and initial community consultations. It provided background information on sex work and sexual exploitation in Vancouver, and offered a series of recommendations. Based on the information, feedback and discussions that took place through the Community Engagement Process, these recommendations have been redrafted to reflect the concerns that were echoed throughout the community. It is our hope that as the recommendations, as outlined in Section 3 (page 51), are implemented, neighbourhoods throughout Vancouver will become healthier and safer for everyone.

The Community Engagement Process consisted of three parts:

- Neighbourhood Dialogues
- Focus groups
- An online survey

In addition, *Living in Community* incorporated information from the consultations carried out by its parallel project, the Community Initiative for Health and Safety (CIHS) Toolkit project. It is important to note that this project did not carry out formal research to gather quantitative data, but rather provided an opportunity to engage and involve the community in identifying issues and developing ideas for change.

Although diverse viewpoints were represented within the *Living in Community* project, there were also many commonalities expressed across all groups and consultation methods. The clearest message was that the current situation is unacceptable, and that sex workers, residents and businesses continue to face serious health and safety concerns on an ongoing basis. It is evident that the status quo needs to change immediately.

The top concerns expressed in all stages of the Community Engagement Process included:

- Sexual exploitation and recruitment of children and youth
- The need to move street-based sex work out of neighbourhoods
- Violence against and marginalization of sex workers
- Dirty needles and condoms in neighbourhoods and playgrounds
- Poverty, homelessness, addiction, and mental health
- Personal safety for residents, sex workers, and employees
- Residents being mistaken for sex workers
- Stigmatization of and taboos against sex work
- Health and safety of indoor sex workers
- The need for enforcement against sex work customers





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“It is we collectively who can make the agreement as to how we will live together, and that only happens when we talk about it.”

Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter

The following sections provide further information on the methods used to collect information and feedback.

2 Neighbourhood Dialogues

The objective of the Neighbourhood Dialogues was to get diverse groups of people to come together to discuss the issues. To accomplish this, *Living in Community* used the World Café format. The basis of this format is the assumption that no matter who they are, people have the capacity to work together. The innovative design of the World Café enables groups to participate in evolving rounds of dialogue in small groups while at the same time remaining part of a single, larger, connected conversation. Small, intimate conversations link to and build on each other. Through this, the collective wisdom of the group becomes more accessible, and innovative possibilities for action emerge. Participants also had an opportunity to rate the Draft Action Plan and provide feedback about their degree of support for the recommendations.

In the fall and winter of 2006-07, *Living in Community* held a series of 12 Neighbourhood Dialogues across the city, in community centres and neighbourhood houses:

- Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
- South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
- Strathcona Community Centre
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- Sunset Community Centre
- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- Gordon Neighbourhood House
- Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House
- Britannia Community Centre
- Ray-Cam Community Centre
- Roundhouse Community Centre
- Kitsilano Community Centre

The Neighbourhood Dialogues were a great success and had an excellent turnout with a total of 190 participants. There tended to be much higher turnout in neighbourhoods where there is more visible, street-based sex work, with 20-30 people at most sessions.

Regardless of the number of participants, rich and interesting conversations occurred at each location. Ongoing coverage by the media, particularly by the Vancouver Courier, the Georgia Straight, and the WestEnder, assisted in promoting the dialogues and raised the public profile of *Living in Community* and the issues associated with sex work and sexual exploitation.

“I am concerned about the harassment of an elderly neighbour by an abusive sex trade worker. I am concerned about [the] safety of sex trade workers as they... are forced to move from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. I am concerned about respect for community members (especially children) due to disrespect shown by some sex trade workers.”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

A feedback form was handed out at the end of each Neighbourhood Dialogue to determine how effective the marketing and the format of the consultations were. The question format ranged from open answers to a rating scale. A total of 145 people completed the form. Following are the successes of and challenges from the process, based both on the feedback forms and our own observations.

Successes

A high percentage of respondents liked the format of the World Café. Respondents liked the open discussion, the opportunity to hear different points of view, the safety of the discussion, and interaction between community members.

A high number of respondents were very satisfied with the facilitation of the event, felt they had an increased understanding of the issues at hand, and felt the information was presented in a clear manner.

When asked about specific actions respondents would take as a result of the consultation, comments included “further educating myself,” “continue discussions at home, workplace with friends,” “encourage people to come to dialogues,” and “keep updated on project.”

Challenges

Despite strong marketing and promotion of the Neighbourhood Dialogues and somewhat diverse representation, *Living in Community* faced a challenge common to most

community engagement processes – lack of representation by some populations. To compensate, focus groups specific to the business community, sex workers, and culturally diverse groups were held.

Accessibility for non-English speakers was also a challenge. Translators were available at all of the dialogues based on the dominant languages in the individual communities, but their services were only used once.

The format and public nature of the dialogue may have been factors in the lack of ethnic diversity that was represented.

The length of the dialogue and the time of the day in which it was conducted presented a challenge for some people. From the feedback received, some people would have liked to see a longer dialogue, while others felt it was too long and at an inconvenient time.

Dialogue Findings

At all of the dialogues in neighbourhoods with visible street-based sex work, concerns were expressed about visual impact, drugs, health and safety, and garbage, such as used condoms, needles, latex gloves, etc. These neighbourhoods also had a higher level of concern





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about personal safety and about how to talk to their children about sex workers in the neighbourhood.

In general, the vast majority of the focus of the discussions was on women sex workers who work on the streets, as well as on sexually exploited children and youth. Male and transgendered sex workers were mentioned infrequently, despite the number of male and transgendered sex workers in Vancouver.

Recurring themes throughout the dialogues:

- Concern about youth involvement in the sex industry, and younger youth being sexually exploited
- Concern about dirty needles and condoms in neighbourhoods, and how they affect health and safety, particularly of children
- Personal safety concerns – concern about female residents being mistaken for sex workers, concern about being harassed and followed by customers
- Concern about the stigma attached to sex workers, and to neighbourhoods where street-based sex work occurs
- Concern for vulnerability of youth and children to sexual exploitation and the drug trade
- Concern about the connection of the sex industry to drugs and gangs
- Concern that the determinants of health need to be addressed, including health, education, housing, and a liveable income
- Concern about violence against women, and about the exploitation and deception involved in recruitment
- The opinion that this culture does not deal well with sexuality

- A general feeling of helplessness and increased frustration – that parents do not know how to speak to their children about the situation, particularly in neighbourhoods with a lot of street-based sex work, and that people do not know what to do when they see a woman being assaulted

Actions for Change

In response to the Draft Actions that *Living in Community* developed, there was strong support for prevention, education and intervention initiatives, but less agreement about what kind of legal responses would be most appropriate. There was general agreement that the current laws, enforcement and justice system are not contributing to individual or community safety, but there was less agreement about the kind of change that was needed. Some people spoke about the need to decriminalize sex work, while others thought the Swedish model of criminalizing the purchase of sex to be the answer.

Although there was a definite consensus about the need for change, there were fewer ideas about what specific actions would actually bring about wider societal change. There was general consensus about the need to pick a few key action items that would have an immediate impact and also focus on longer-term goals.

Prevention and education activities were overwhelmingly supported at all of the dialogues. There was a focus on the need for prevention activities embedded within school curricula and in other community settings to educate not only children and youth, but also parents and those who work with children and youth. This education needs to be age-appropriate and to focus on healthy sexuality, positive self-esteem, and how to avoid recruitment. Education and sensitivity training for community members, including

“I like the idea of focusing on education in schools, etc., around sex work. Although sex work happens around the world, the media that we are saturated with in North America provides a certain view of sex, which no doubt contributes to a link between violence and sexuality and exploitation of women... Having a healthier view of sex in general in society would contribute to reducing the negative impacts of sex work.”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

residents, business owners and employees, sex workers and particularly customers, was also seen as an important step in shifting stigmas, attitudes, and understanding. While the rights of all community members were recognized, balancing rights with responsibilities was identified as critical so that each group understands its impact on the well-being of the community.

Participants at all of the dialogues recognized the need to address larger social issues, which are the root causes of many of the negative impacts of sex work: welfare rates need to be raised; there needs to be access to affordable housing; there needs to be more addiction treatment facilities, especially those that cater to the needs of women; and society’s ongoing racism and oppression need to be addressed. However, these were recognized as very long-term goals.

Widely divergent political and moral beliefs about sex work were expressed throughout the dialogues. Some people viewed all sex work as a form of sexual slavery. Some saw sex work as an inherently immoral activity. Some people felt it was important to recognize commercial sexual activity between consenting adults as a valid form of work. Others saw the need to support sex workers at whatever stage they are. These views, of course, affected responses throughout the dialogues, but the danger of being caught up in philosophical differences while people

continue to die and communities suffer was recognized. Recognizing and embracing the range of perspectives while working toward finding common ground was considered paramount.

Although most participants agreed that pushing the street-based sex industry from neighbourhood to neighbourhood is not the answer, there was still anger about its visibility in communities. It was clear that residents and businesses felt that visible, street-based sex work in neighbourhoods is unacceptable, particularly near parks and schools. Many others acknowledged that pushing it from neighbourhood to neighbourhood is ineffective and that communities need to shift their “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) attitude.

No one seemed to have an answer as to how to balance these perspectives. There was general agreement about the need for stronger law enforcement over recruiters, pimps, clients, and all of those who are exploiting and taking advantage of sex workers. There is a strong need for enforcement to protect children and youth from sexual exploitation.





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Other suggestions included:

- The need for the media to take responsibility
- Cleaning up neighbourhoods, providing more garbage cans and needle boxes
- More police sensitivity training and accountability
- Continuing the process of dialogue to build understanding and forge new relationships
- More policing because seniors and other groups feel unsafe, especially in areas where there is an active street-based sex industry
- A more comprehensive addictions approach
- Starting to see sex workers as human beings with needs and wants just like everyone else and thinking of what services they deserve – human-rights focus
- Balancing the human rights of sex workers with the human rights of residents/businesses to live in healthy, safe environments
- Ensuring that service-provider organizations are more educated and sensitive about sex work, especially with immigrant services
- Changing the hours of community services such as neighbourhood houses to make them more accessible for sex workers
- Continuing the dialogue: start talking to other people, build awareness with neighbours, friends, children etc., and keep the conversation going
- Taking an ongoing role in the next steps of this project, including volunteering, lobbying politicians, getting further involved in the community, and addressing immediate needs for safe shelters, more financial support, etc.
- “No-go zones” around community centres, family housing, and schools to make it safe for children and families to walk in neighbourhoods

3 Focus Groups/Other Consultations

As part of the Community Engagement Process, a series of focus groups and other consultations were held to ensure that diverse groups impacted by the sex industry who could not be accessed through the Neighbourhood Dialogue process were included.

Focus groups/consultations were held with the following groups:

- Chinatown Revitalization Committee
- Ray-Cam Mothers’ Drop-in Group
- Ray-Cam Chinese Seniors Group
- Vancouver Board of Trade – Downtown Eastside, Crime, and Safety Task Forces
- Sex work customers
- Gab Youth focus group
- Boys R Us
- Sex Workers Action Group
- Street Nurses
- Strathcona Residents’ Association

Living in Community used two methods for the focus groups, tailored to the needs of the group being accessed: an open dialogue focused around specific questions, and a brief overview presentation of the project, followed by a question and answer period.

Findings

In the consultations with business, resident and youth groups, *Living in Community* heard many of the same issues as in the Neighbourhood Dialogues: concern about the sexual exploitation of children and youth, and society's complacency about it; the safety of residents; the need for the media to take responsibility for its messages about sexuality; the need for early prevention programs in schools; the need for more specialized health and support services; and the need for more exiting services.

Participants who are male and transgendered sex workers spoke of the violence and homophobia they experienced from residents and others in areas where they work. They also spoke of the few supports that exist for gay or transgendered persons who are in violent relationships. The need to build better relationships with police was emphasized, as was the need for education to dispel societal stereotypes and myths. As with all sex workers, the lack of safe and affordable housing and appropriate health services remains a serious gap.

Among the survival sex workers, the biggest concerns were about the frequency and type of violence that they experienced, both from customers and partners. They spoke of the lack of adequate shelters and housing that address the specific needs of women. Shelters were generally seen as unsafe places to go. Many of the participants also spoke of the challenges of drug addiction and how it kept them in the downtown area. For some, the police were a support, particularly female officers, but many also spoke of being harassed by officers, or of not being taken seriously when they tried to report assaults. Safety measures are needed; screechers, panic buttons, cell phones with free 911 calls, and safe sex sites were all discussed.

The sex workers also spoke of the need for real job training that would help them to transition out of the street-entrenched life, and the need for significant support along the way.

The focus group with sex work customers reflected similar information to what research has shown. The participants were a very diverse group of men from different socio-economic groups, going to both indoor and outdoor workers, some buying sex more than once a week and others very infrequently. Many had been buying sex for a number of years, one individual for 37 years. For some, buying sex was just a normal part of their lives, while others spoke of experiencing guilt and shame every time they bought sex. Some talked about the ways they tried to help the women and others felt they had been "ripped off" too many times by workers. It was agreed by all participants that law enforcement only succeeds in making the situation worse and unsafe for everyone, but does not deter the purchase of sex. There were some health and safety concerns expressed, and the majority of the participants spoke of insisting on condom use. Participants agreed that the worst safety risk for sex workers is getting into strangers' cars.





Community Engagement Process

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SECTION

4 Online Survey

An online survey was developed as an additional opportunity for community members to provide input about the effects of sex work and ideas about what tools and strategies could help make communities healthier and safer for everyone. It also allowed community members to provide input about how effective our draft recommendations would be at creating healthier and safer communities.

The survey was promoted throughout the Neighbourhood Dialogues, meetings, and e-mails. It was available for public input from October 2006 through March 2007. The use of several answer formats – multiple choice, short answer, and rating scales – ensured the survey tool would elicit a range of responses.

Participants' Demographics

A total of 104 people completed the online survey. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were female; most lived on the East Side; most were between the ages of 26 and 59. Only 7.1 per cent of respondents had worked or currently work in the sex industry. There was no typical respondent in terms of socio-economic status or profession; answers came from women's shelter staff, professional dominatrices, health workers, postal workers, and retired persons.

- 76.9 per cent of respondents live on the East Side; only 9.6 per cent were from the West End and the other 12.5 per cent were from the West Side.
- 88.1 per cent were between the ages of 26 and 59.
- 64 per cent of respondents were female; 36 per cent were male.

One question in this survey asked what supports respondents had contacted to deal with their concerns about sex work. Nonprofit organizations had the highest response (52.4 per cent), followed by police (50.8 per cent) and then friends and family (49.2 per cent). Survey respondents did not often contact government services, community policing centres, or business improvement associations when concerned about sex work in neighbourhoods.

Impacts and Concerns About Sex Work

It is important to note that despite respondents' lack of shared background, their concerns and the impacts they experienced were very similar. This could be due to the high response from people living in the East Side of Vancouver, which has a higher number of visible street-based sex work areas.

The top four concerns cited by respondents in regard to the impact sex work has on their community were:

1. Increased garbage in the neighborhood (46.5 per cent)
2. Increased crime (40.7 per cent)
3. The reputation of the neighborhood had dropped (38.4 per cent)
4. Increased traffic (38.4 per cent)

Other concerns included being mistaken for a sex worker while walking down the street, children being recruited or approached by pimps, and the control of gangs or pimps increasing fear for personal safety. Respondents with experience in the sex industry expressed concern about stigmatization, mental well-being, and sexual exploitation.

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to provide further comments about the impacts of sex work on them personally, or on their family and community. The comments primarily addressed two areas of concern: the health and safety of the women themselves, and the negative impacts of garbage, pimps and sex work customers. Other comments expressed concern for children, and the lack of basic needs such as affordable housing, which is linked to the issue of survival sex work.

Sample comments included:

“I am concerned for the safety of the sex workers (mostly those) on the streets of my neighbourhood and city. In relation, I believe that the lack of better organization and safety for sex workers makes for a less safe environment for the people, and in particular, women and children in the neighbourhood.”

“Hookers use drugs openly and discard needles, etc. including in elementary school parks, alleys, on the sidewalk, etc. Hookers urinate and defecate in public areas in our community.”

“Where is the focus on the men who solicit sex? Prostitution and its inherent dangerous conditions would not exist were it not for the demand, so why is [the] sole focus on sex trade workers, and the industry’s impact on community and business when it may be helpful to discuss what is at the root of the demand, not taking the industry for granted, so to speak.”

Other common themes included:

- Wanting street-based work eliminated
- The need for better education in schools
- The need for exiting help
- The need for education and better enforcement for sex work customers
- Considering prostitutes to be neighbours and members of the community, and not having an issue with them living in the community, but wanting them to work elsewhere
- The need for increased welfare rates and adequate housing to deal with root issues
- The need for safe places to work that would provide condoms, etc.
- The need for more resources into preventative programs for pre-teen girls
- The need for increased responsibility by businesses to provide employment opportunities for youth at risk
- Support for “no-go zones” around schools, bus stops, etc.
- Concern about lack of responsibility for their actions by sex workers

It is important to note that very few responses conveyed a “not in my backyard” attitude. This supports the *Living in Community* project’s approach of searching for a solution that will include all community members.





Community Engagement Process

2

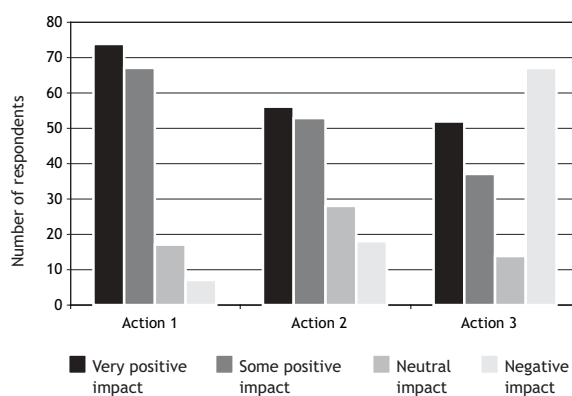
SECTION

5 Feedback on the Draft Action Plan

The online survey also provided an opportunity for community members to provide feedback on *Living in Community's Draft* recommendations, which addressed the following areas:

- Community development
- Prevention/Education
- Research and ongoing building of knowledge
- Intervention
- Exiting
- Legal responses

The full text of the draft action plan is available at www.livingincommunity.ca. The current Action Plan has been significantly revised from the earlier Draft Action Plan based on the feedback received. The following chart shows participants' responses to Draft Actions 1-10, which pertain to community development, prevention/education, research, and the ongoing building of knowledge.



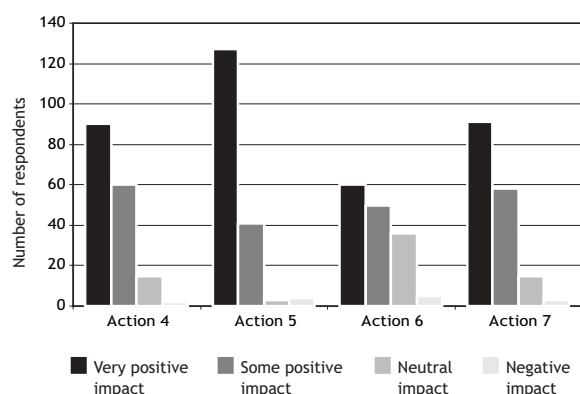
Actions 1-3: Community Development

These actions included the creation of community-based teams with diverse representation, to develop strategies for improving health and safety (Action 1); funding by the City of Vancouver of a *Living in Community* development position to implement the plan (Action 2); and development of “safe zones” for sex workers, similar to Block Watch homes (Action 3).

As shown in the above chart, most responses to the actions are positive, with the exception of Action 3, the recommendation for “safe zones.” This negative response could be correlated to high media coverage misrepresenting “safe zones” as workplaces for sex workers.

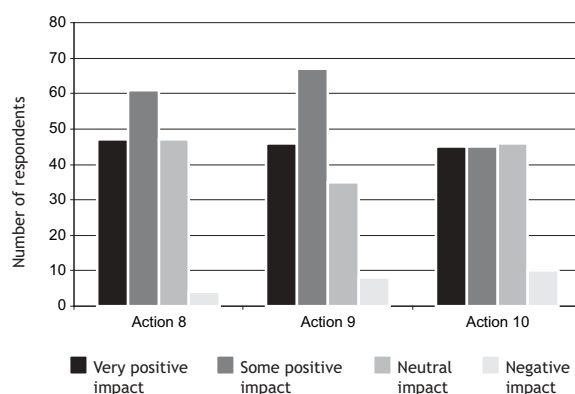
“As principal of [a local elementary] school, I am concerned about the exposure our students have to sex trade workers on a daily basis.”

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant



Actions 4-7: Prevention/Education

These actions include the development of a comprehensive and standardized prevention program to be delivered through schools and community organizations (Action 4); addressing of the larger issues such as poverty, welfare rates, housing, childcare and employment through increased government funding (Action 5); development of a public education campaign to reduce the impact of sex work on the community (Action 6); and development of a standardized curriculum for all professionals who may work with sex workers, such as police, justice, doctors, nurses, ambulance attendants, etc (Action 7). As shown in the chart, Action 5 – addressing larger-context issues such as poverty, welfare rates etc. through increased government funding – received strong support, while the development of a public education campaign was not as strongly supported.



Action 8-10: Research and Ongoing Building of Knowledge

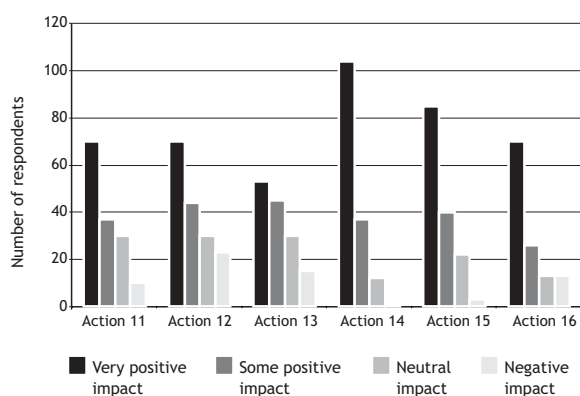
These actions include the establishment of partnerships between community-based organizations and academic institutions to increase the translation of research into action (Action 8); increasing the body of knowledge regarding lesser-groups such as customers, pimps, indoor sex workers, etc. (Action 9); and encouraging the adoption of a standardized code of ethics regarding research, ensuring it benefits and protects the rights of research subjects (Action 10).

As shown in the chart, these actions received generally positive feedback; however, more responses for these actions were neutral than for most of the other recommendations.



Community Engagement Process

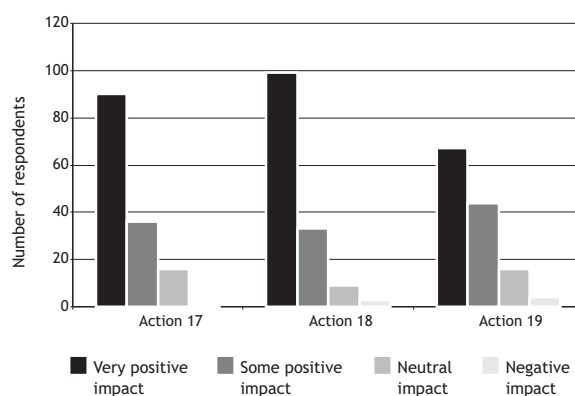
2 SECTION



Actions 11-16: Intervention, Exiting and Legal Responses

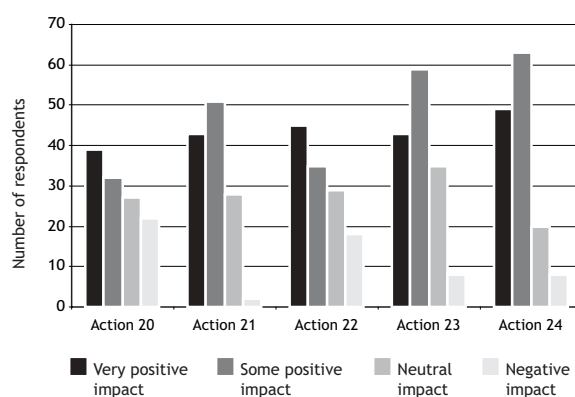
These actions included implementation of a city-wide team with the purpose of building stronger relationships between community members, responding to crises and providing critical care to sex workers (Action 11); development of safety and respect guidelines for community members, including “no-go zones” in parks and schools (Action 12); education of sex workers about the impacts on the communities in which they work (Action 13); creating an innovative, specialized drug treatment approach for sex workers (Action 14); providing daily outreach services to sex workers, both indoor and street-based, that build on those provided by existing services (Action 15); and providing increased access to supportive housing for sex workers (Action 16).

As shown in the chart, Action 14, regarding innovative drug treatment and Action 15, outreach services, received strong support.



Actions 17-19: Exiting

These actions included funding for a long-term recovery facility (Action 17); development of employment opportunities (Action 18); and building on and expanding existing models of exiting programs led by experiential people (Action 19). As shown in the chart, there is strong support for Actions 17 and 18, which address recovery and employment.



Actions 20-24: Legal Responses

These actions included supporting and monitoring the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws while it was in session (Action 20); developing a mechanism to improve communication between law enforcement and the Crown (Action 21); instituting a community court system for sex offenders (Action 22); expanding the self-defense for sex workers program (Action 23); and developing a problem-solving mechanism to enable diverse groups such as police and sex workers to work together (Action 24). As shown, there was less consensus regarding these recommendations.

When I worked at a school in the northeast area of Vancouver, we had a continuous problem with used needles left on the school ground. I went to a rep from VANDU [Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users] who put the word out through his networks to stop using our grounds for shooting [up]. During this conversation I learned a bit about the area and sex trade workers and why they used our school ground. He also seemed to really listen to our concerns (as a school). Community engagement here worked to resolve and reduce this problem. Needles and condoms found decreased. DEYAS [Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society] also got involved. Community engagement to problem solve worked. I want to ensure... safety for all."

Living in Community Neighbourhood Dialogue participant

Overview of Community Initiative for Health and Safety (CIHS) Consultations

The Community Initiative for Health and Safety (CIHS) staff held a series of community consultations during the summer and fall of 2006 to discover what kinds of information, tools, and resources various community groups need to better equip themselves to address the negative impacts of the street-based sex industry. The CIHS team held 14 consultations: a Neighbourhood Dialogue at the Roundhouse Community Centre and focus groups with sex worker organizations, the police, Aboriginal groups, healthcare providers, sex workers, residents, business representatives, and others.

There were many recurring concerns about how sex work impacts various groups. The many suggestions about what kind of information and resources would be useful included:

- Who to call when there are sex workers working in front of your house or business
- Safety training
- How to approach sex workers
- Dispelling myths and stereotypes about sex work
- How to feel safe in your own neighbourhood
- Information about recruiting
- Sensitivity information for sex workers, residents, and businesses
- Information about how to be a good customer
- Information about pimps and recruiters

Based on this information, CIHS developed *Tools for Change* – an informational and educational website, www.livingincommunity.ca/toolkit. The printed version, EPIC (*Evolving Partnerships in Community*), was co-developed with CIHS by the Environmental Youth Alliance and is being distributed through community and business organizations. The purpose of these materials is to build understanding, relationships, and solutions within communities impacted by street-based sex work.

Summary of Community Engagement

The *Living in Community* Steering Committee believes that the project has been successful in engaging diverse community members in a nonjudgmental, open, and safe dialogue.

Sharing of stories of change was also inspirational, because it demonstrated how change can occur when communities begin to build relationships of trust between different groups.

Section 3 outlines *Living in Community's* set of recommendations about how to create healthier and safer communities based on the information collected from individuals and communities throughout Vancouver.





Living in Community Action Plan

3 SECTION

The Living in Community Action Plan was developed through an extensive, city-wide Community Engagement Process, research, and consultation with key experts in the field. The recommendations have been redrafted from the original Living in Community Draft Action Plan that was distributed in September 2006. The result is an Action Plan that attempts to take into account the perspectives of individuals, communities, and society in general, from a balanced approach that considers human rights, harm reduction, and prevention.

1 Statements and Assumptions

The following statements and assumptions provide a context and foundation for understanding the recommendations:

- The negative impact of sex work on communities in Vancouver is unacceptable. Residents, businesses, and sex workers are negatively affected by the lack of legislation, policies, funding of services, and a coherent, coordinated strategy within government and the community to address the issue of sexual exploitation of children and youth, and adult sex work in Vancouver, Canada and, ultimately, worldwide.
- The term “sex work” does not apply to those under 18 years of age because they are inherently exploited. Society must not tolerate the sexual exploitation of children and youth. Laws dealing with the sexual exploitation of children and youth need to be strictly enforced.
- The root causes of poverty, addiction, mental illness, history of sexual abuse, lack of safe and affordable housing, criminalization of sex work, discrimination, and stigmatization must be dealt with so that individuals are able to make healthy, safe and informed choices in their lives. These root causes leave individuals vulnerable to the exploitative and dangerous conditions of sex work. While working toward the shorter-term recommendations in this report, a longer-term commitment to societal change must be made and acted upon by governments, communities and individuals.
- The status quo is not working. Current laws continue to contribute to violent, unsafe, and unhealthy conditions for all community members. There is an urgent need for immediate action.

- Prevention should be applied as a fundamental principle when dealing with the negative impacts of sex work and sexual exploitation. This is especially applicable with regard to children and youth.
- The exchange of sex for money between consenting adults in Canada is not illegal, but most of the activities surrounding it are, such as communication, owning or operating a bawdy house and living on the avails. These laws are contradictory and contribute to the harm experienced by sex workers, residents and businesses. Consequently, law reform is necessary.
- Survival sex work, defined as the lack of opportunity to consistently exercise the right to refuse to work in dangerous circumstances due to addiction, mental health issues, poverty, predatory violence, and so on, is unacceptable. The government and society at large need to immediately address the extreme violence and marginalization experienced by survival sex workers.
- Services to address the impacts of sex work should be located in communities affected by sex work activity and where sex workers live.
- Sex workers are a part of the community and should be included in all relevant discussions, because the negative effects of the current situation and the instability of the sex industry directly impact them.
- Sex workers are very diverse; they come from a wide range of backgrounds and socio-economic situations, and work in a variety of settings, both on- and off-street.
- Vancouver has a very diverse multicultural population. Immigrant and multicultural populations need culturally appropriate programs and health and safety services and resources in multiple languages.

2 Principles

The following principles guide the recommendations:

Human Rights

A rights-based approach provides important principles for the development and implementation of strategies to improve the health and safety of communities. Taking this approach, all community members, from sex workers to business owners to school children to local residents, are active holders of rights and freedoms. Health, safety, dignity, and respect are basic human rights. Rights must be mutually supportive; the right to a safe community, for instance, cannot come at the expense of another's rights. Each and every individual in the community (sex workers, residents, business owners/employees, sex work customers, etc.) deserves to live in a healthy, safe environment where human rights are respected and upheld.

Canada has signed many international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These outline various rights signatory countries are expected to uphold and guarantee to their citizens. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) sets non-negotiable standards for the basic human rights of children, including protection from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation (Article 34). By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the CRC, Canada has committed itself to protecting and ensuring children's rights, and has agreed to be held accountable for this commitment.





Living in Community Action Plan

3 SECTION

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction refers to initiatives that are intended to reduce the dangers and health risks associated with sex work. A harm reduction approach is a useful and pragmatic framework to apply to sex work because it is intended to reduce the harms associated with sex work to all community members, from individuals who are engaged in sex work or being sexually exploited, to residents and businesses. These harms may be physical, psychological or economic, and may affect individuals, communities or the entire social system. Interventions should contribute to the safety of the entire community and not support one group at the expense of another.

Integrated Community Development

Integrated community development recognizes that sex work and sexual exploitation of children and youth affect our entire society, and asserts that social change will only come about through a combination of individual and collective action. Integrated community development also takes into account community culture, social systems, and physical environment, and the personal and social values, needs, worldviews, and self-esteem that inform our opinions and decisions. Personal growth, individual action, and self-development are interwoven with working collaboratively and developing a common vision for healthy, safe communities.

Integrated Community Development

From: Gail Hochachka, (2005) *Developing Sustainability, Developing the Self: an integral approach to international and community development*. Victoria: University of Victoria, (2005). At www.drishti.ca.

As the above diagram shows, each area brings with it different needs, perspectives, and possibilities for change. If only the contributions of government are taken into account, the contributions of communities themselves working toward social change will be missed. Likewise, if the focus is solely on how individual sex workers create problems in neighbourhoods, the roles of poverty, mental illness, and addictions may be overlooked. This means that there are roles for individuals, communities, and governments to develop healthy communities that contribute to the health, well-being, and human development of all individuals.

3 Action Plan

The recommendations within the *Living in Community Action Plan* are divided into five strategies representing the five recurring themes that came from the Community Engagement Process and resulted from research process:

- Community development
- Prevention/education
- Intervention/harm reduction
- Exiting
- Legal responses

The presentation of each strategy begins with a background section describing the context of the recommendations, which is informed by feedback from the Community Engagement Process.

Community Development

Background

Community development recommendations were very well supported throughout the Community Engagement Process. “Community development” refers to initiatives that communities can take to create healthier and safer communities. This is the cornerstone for building healthy communities that work collaboratively in a participatory and inclusive way to support safety, health, and positive choices for each and every community member. Community development initiatives emerge from grassroots communities and are based on issues that have been identified by the community, using community resources and implementing local solutions. These solutions build on existing community resources and may take shape differently in various communities and neighbourhoods.

Individuals, communities and the social, political, and economic systems play an important role in building on social, environmental and economic assets that promote health, well-being, and the capacity to develop to full potential. Different cultural values, worldviews, and experiences all influence the ways in which individuals engage in community. While this diversity can create challenges in developing collective solutions, it also brings great richness to coordinated responses at the grassroots, neighbourhood, and city levels.

Action 1: Fund a community based position to facilitate the implementation of the *Living in Community Action Plan* in collaboration with community members and groups, including sex worker, business, and government organizations.

Lead organizations: *Living in Community Steering Committee, Vancouver Agreement, private foundations, and community partners.*

We recommend that this *Living in Community* position specifically focus on:

- supporting ongoing dialogue about adult sex work and the sexual exploitation of children and youth among affected communities throughout Vancouver, and
- supporting existing multi-stakeholder teams in neighbourhoods to address ongoing concerns about sex work and develop appropriate local strategies to increase health and safety in communities.

Funding this position is key to ensuring that action is taken to address the concerns and ideas that have been expressed by community members and groups. The community development position should be supported by sustained funding from all three levels of government for a minimum of five years to facilitate ongoing change.





Living in Community Action Plan

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The position would be based at a community organization with funding from government organizations, including the three levels of government, Vancouver Coastal Health and the Vancouver Agreement. In order to maintain a connection to the communities out of which *Living in Community* developed, this position would continue to be guided by an advisory group comprised of sex worker, community, business and government organizations. In addition to its community development role, this position would work collaboratively with the City. Direct experience in sex work would be an asset for this position.

Throughout the Community Engagement Process, community dialogue about issues related to sex work was recognized as being very useful in building understanding. The need to include Aboriginal groups, immigrants, multicultural groups, and sex work customers in the discussions and education was underlined throughout the consultations, as was the need for forums for ongoing dialogue.

The other important issue raised in the Community Engagement Process was the need to deal with the impacts of sex work in ways that fit the communities affected. No single solution will work throughout the city. Too often, the issues of sex work have been viewed from a single perspective, whether that of sex workers, residents or business owners. Encouraging existing multi-stakeholder teams to address the issues that arise would allow for ongoing dialogue and a quicker response that takes into account the many ways sex work impacts communities.

The Vancouver Community Action Team (VCAT) which has been formed to work toward the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and youth, is an important group for *Living in Community* to partner with. VCAT is made up of a broad coalition of social service, government, and police organizations, and is funded by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Sexual Exploitation and Prostitution. A partnership with VCAT would be useful in assisting in-depth coordination and implementation, and public awareness.

Action 2: The City of Vancouver should commit resources equivalent to one full-time position to work with City departments and community members to develop a coordinated approach to issues associated with sex work.

Lead organizations: City of Vancouver, in collaboration with community serving organizations and teams.

The person(s) in this position would develop a coordinated approach to issues associated with sex work, taking into account the perspectives of various groups that are impacted by the sex industry throughout Vancouver. He/she would research, liaise, and consult with community members, and promote action by the City reflecting this input. He or she would liaise and coordinate between the City and the community and between City departments. The coordinator would prompt City staff and Council to reflect on decisions made by the City and their unintended potential effects on sex workers and communities, to more effectively inform City actions and to support positive social change. He/she or she would also work collaboratively with the *Living in Community* development position as outlined in Action 1. Neighbourhood Integrated Services Teams, Area Services Teams and Community Vision Teams could all be involved in this process.

Action 3: Strike a working group including representatives of City departments, provincial and federal governments, community members, and sex workers, to consider ways and means to ensure increased health and safety of sex workers and prevent sexual exploitation.

Lead organizations: Vancouver Agreement, in collaboration with Living in Community development position, sex workers, and community groups.

All levels of government have an important role to play in ensuring that policies and practices work to support the health and safety of sex workers and prevent the exploitation and abuse of children and youth. This requires that City departments, including the Vancouver Police Department, the Drug Policy Office, the Social Planning Department, and the Housing Centre, coordinate their efforts with other levels of government, community groups, and sex workers to respond to and address sexual exploitation prevention and the health and safety of sex workers.

Neighbourhood Integrated Services Teams (NISTs) bring together City departments to respond to community concerns in a more coordinated, effective manner. The current revitalization of NISTs presents an opportunity to put the issue of sex work onto their agendas. As well, the City of Vancouver's Project Civil City, which aims to eliminate homelessness, aggressive panhandling, and the open-drug market, may also provide the chance to address some of the concerns associated with the sex industry throughout Vancouver.

Education/Prevention

Background

The goal of prevention activities is to increase skills, knowledge, and opportunities for healthy choices and outcomes by building on the strengths of individuals and communities. Prevention activities can also reduce underlying issues, such as poverty and lack of affordable housing, that reduce people's ability to make healthy choices. Prevention and education activities need to target the whole community, from preventing the entry of children and youth into exploitative situations to supporting parents to develop positive parenting skills to making residential and business environments safer and healthier. To be truly effective, the coordinated implementation of prevention/education activities needs to target children and youth, sex workers, parents, teachers, child and youth workers, government workers, police and justice officials, healthcare professionals, and business owners/employees. The development of prevention approaches should be informed by evidence-based prevention research.

The entire community has a role to play in taking responsibility to promote the health and safety of all citizens. At every level, the development of prevention programs and educational materials should involve diverse groups, so a holistic understanding of sex work is conveyed. Using peer-based models to draw on the knowledge of people who have experience in sex work has been shown to be very effective at communicating a consistent message in an appropriate and empowering way. Prevention and education activities delivered through schools – in partnership with community-based organizations – can target individuals and groups in settings where they feel comfortable. Recognizing and providing for linguistic differences and how attitudes toward sex work vary among cultures can be critical to efforts to increase knowledge and understanding.



Living in Community Action Plan

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Action 4: Review, improve, and support existing programs that prevent sexual exploitation and recruitment, and develop a standardized curriculum for children, youth, and parents focusing on healthy sexuality, self-esteem, recruitment prevention, and positive parenting.

Lead organizations: *Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health and Living in Community development position in collaboration with sex worker and community organizations.*

The community expressed great concern about the vulnerability of children and youth to recruitment into the sex industry, how to talk to children about sex work, and how society deals with sexuality. Prevention and education activities were seen as most likely to make a difference. Currently, prevention programs focusing on healthy sexuality, positive self-esteem, and how to avoid recruitment are not consistently delivered to students. There is a need to ensure that information about the development of self-esteem, prevention tools and skills, positive sexual attitudes, and recruitment is standardized and universal throughout the school system. It is also vital that parents are included in this prevention work and are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to recognize and prevent sexual exploitation and to create supportive, healthy home environments.

The many programs that already exist can be broadened, strengthened, and supported to ensure more universal delivery. The Children of the Street Society, for example, is a non-profit that increases public awareness about sexual exploitation through education and prevention. Its series of workshops is presented to caregivers, youth, and service providers. Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver School Board, and the Justice Institute also have developed curricula focusing on sexual exploitation and sexual health.

A prevention curriculum would build on experiential knowledge using a peer-based model of delivery. It is also vital that these programs and materials are lingually and culturally specific and are accessible to multicultural and immigrant communities. The material would be age- and culturally appropriate, delivered by schools and by community organizations serving youth and families. The Vancouver School Board must incorporate this into its curriculum to ensure that the entire student population receives this education, and must ensure that parents are involved in this education process. Community organizations, such as neighbourhood houses and community centres, should also take on the responsibility of delivering this curriculum through their diverse programming to children, youth, and families.

Action 5: Sex worker organizations develop public-education campaigns to educate the community about sexual exploitation of children and youth and the realities of the sex industry, and work to improve the understanding and representation of sex work by the media.

Lead organizations: Sex worker organizations, in collaboration with media partners and the City of Vancouver *Living in Community* position.

Public education campaigns delivered by community based organizations and multicultural media are also important in raising awareness within the entire community, including parents, teachers, mentors, caregivers, sex workers, and the general public. The media, the music industry, and advertising play a large role in the portrayal and glamourization of the sex industry. This issue arose frequently in the Community Engagement Process. The media must be held accountable for contributing to the dehumanization of sex workers. It inevitably leads to the violence they face due to society's general view of them as less worthy of rights and respect.

Action 6: Promote public awareness of the educational and resource information contained in the Community Initiative for Health and Safety's Online Toolkit.

Lead organizations: Sex worker organizations, community policing centres, City of Vancouver, community resident groups, Vancouver Police Department, and schools in collaboration with other community and business partners.

The Community Initiative for Health and Safety (CIHS) is a project that grew out of *Living in Community*. Led by sex worker organizations, it addresses the community's need for information to understand and deal with the impacts of sex work on communities. Through a series of community consultations with diverse groups, CIHS developed an online health and safety toolkit to provide information about the sex industry tailored to specific groups, as well as some immediate solutions to deal with concerns that arise. The toolkit offers strategies for coping with difficult situations that arise between residents, businesses and sex workers. Use of these strategies can lessen the impact of sex work on residents and businesses and on sex workers themselves. By increasing its understanding and using the tools to address pressing needs and concerns, the community can reduce its reliance on enforcement while working toward solutions that benefit everyone. The toolkit can be found at www.livingincommunity.ca/toolkit. A printed version, "EPIC," is also available. It is important that the public be made aware of this information.





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Action 7: Develop a standardized curriculum and training to teach social workers, law enforcement staff, and health and justice professionals how to work with sex workers effectively and respectfully.

Lead organizations: *Living in Community development position, in collaboration with Vancouver Coastal Health and the justice system.*

Ongoing training for professionals who may come into contact with sex workers is an important step in increasing understanding about the daily challenges sex workers face. Police officers, justice officials, E-Comm employees, social workers, doctors, nurses, ambulance attendants, and other professionals who may work with sex workers need to be given comprehensive training about the realities of sex work versus the myths; what services and supports are available for referral; how to respond in safe and respectful ways; and strategies for developing positive relationships with sex workers and sex worker organizations. This curriculum should be incorporated into their standard orientation and in-service training. Experiential individuals and sex worker organizations should be integrally involved in the curriculum development.

Action 8: Establish ongoing partnerships between community based organizations and academic institutions to ensure continuous feedback between research, policy, and practice.

Lead organizations: *Living in Community development position; community-based organizations and academic institutions.*

Research and the ongoing building of knowledge form the foundation for practice, policy, and public education. A rich body of knowledge in the community can augment formal research by providing great insight into sex work-related issues and how to build healthier and safer communities. Vancouver has several excellent examples of initiatives that partner research with service delivery provided by community based organizations to build knowledge about under-researched areas. The MAKa Project, a partnership between WISH and the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, looks at how to deliver effective services to improve health and increase the awareness, prevention, care, and treatment of HIV/AIDS among female survival sex workers. The Orchid Project, a partnership of ASIA (the Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS) and the B.C. Centre for Excellence, uses a peer-delivered approach to provide culturally sensitive and language-specific awareness, education, and support related to HIV/AIDS and sexual health to Asian women working indoors.

Intervention and Harm Reduction

Background

Intervention and harm reduction strategies include actions, services, and programs that reduce harm and increase the health and safety of all community members. Some interventions might specifically target sex workers, but a holistic approach also provides interventions to support the entire community. Government and social-service organizations play an important role in delivering services that support the health and safety of sex workers, as well as other community members, but community driven initiatives may have the greatest potential to create change at the neighbourhood level. It is also important to acknowledge how the perspectives, worldviews, attitudes, and self-concept of individuals play a role in building healthy communities, and in influencing the ways that intervention strategies are carried out.

Intervention services for sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth that address the complexities of sex work by including health services, personal safety, housing, exiting and drug treatment/detox are most effective. The focus of these interventions should be on the most vulnerable populations, providing low-threshold services that provide a continuum of care. Although support services for sex workers may not directly target residents and businesses, their existence increases the health and safety of the entire community. It is vital that intervention strategies treat children and adults differently, with zero tolerance for sexual exploitation. Services for children and youth need to address their high level of vulnerability, taking into account their unique needs and providing age-appropriate responses and services.

The personal safety concerns expressed by many residents and business employees must be addressed so that people feel safe within the neighbourhoods where they work and reside. As pointed out during the Community Engagement Process, community members sometimes feel helpless and do not know who to call when a sex worker is working in the back alley, or if they see anyone beating up a sex worker. Community members conveyed that, in their experience, police response is sometimes unhelpful, and expressed the desire for a service to call for immediate response.

Action 9: Immediately develop and implement a strategy to ensure safety for street-based sex workers.

Lead organizations: Working group as per Action 3, Vancouver Agreement and the City of Vancouver.

In the current environment, where 67 women have gone missing, the trial related to their disappearance is ongoing, women suffer violence on the street every day and the immediate need for additional resources never abates, it is paramount to ensure that street-based sex workers are better protected from predators wanting to harm them.

Measures could include increased enforcement focusing on the protection of sex workers, better lighting in remote areas, more support services that reach out to sex workers where and when they work, the establishment of safe places for sex workers, and more “eyes on the street,” focused on safety for all. Strategies can be explored through a multi-stakeholder process and would be most effective if tailored to the varying needs of specific areas of the city.

Because the act of communicating for the purposes of prostitution is illegal, law-enforcement practices may drive sex workers into more isolated places. Such practices, as well as section 213 of the Criminal Code, must be examined to assess their impact on street-based sex workers.





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Action 10: Solidify sustainable funding for the Mobile Access Project Van, a partnership between PACE Society and the WISH Drop-in Centre Society, which provides overnight outreach and support services to women working on the street.

Lead organizations: Vancouver Agreement, City of Vancouver, and Provincial and Federal Governments.

The primary focus of the Mobile Access Project (MAP Van) is to increase the level of health and safety for vulnerable women working the streets in Vancouver overnight, when no other services are open. Van staff members provide brief respite from the street, coffee, juice, water, and supplies, including condoms and clean needles. They can provide information on services specific to the needs of female survival sex workers and referrals to shelters and emergency services. Van staff members make an average of 1,400 contacts per month. In a recent evaluation, 97 per cent of respondents said the Van's presence on the street made them feel safer. The MAP Van is an invaluable service that meets the direct needs of street-based sex workers.

For the past three years, MAP has been a pilot project funded through the Vancouver Agreement, related government departments, foundations, and community agencies. The service embodies the tenets of prevention and harm reduction. The MAP Van provides more eyes on the street and plays a significant role in the health and safety of communities across Vancouver. With the project's demonstrated success, it is crucial that sustainable funding be secured in order that WISH and PACE be able to continue to provide this vital service.

Action 11: Fund the expansion of service by the MAP Van (Mobile Access Project Van) to daytime hours to fulfill a Quick Response liaison and support role for sex workers and other community members impacted by the sex industry, to reduce reliance on enforcement and promote health and safety in the community.

Lead organizations: Vancouver Agreement, City of Vancouver, Federal and Provincial Governments, PACE, and WISH, in collaboration with community and business organizations.

The Mobile Access Project Quick Response Initiative would be an extension and development of the existing Mobile Access Project to provide service during the day. Its purpose would be to provide immediate response to specific incidents of community concern about the impacts of sex work. Some residents' concern is that there are used condoms and needles in their back lanes. For others, sex work activity in the vicinity of their businesses seriously affects their ability to do business, or the traffic associated with women working indoors impacts their homes. The Quick Response team would answer their calls and meet with them to resolve each situation through de-escalation and conflict resolution rather than violence and aggression.

This initiative is in no way intended to replace the role of the police in maintaining safety in Vancouver. However, many situations can be addressed through mediation and attention to individual concerns without drawing on limited police resources. Respectful dialogue and tangible action can replace community discord and improve the safety of all. The fact that this project would be associated with a Van means that response can be quick and a sex worker who is in immediate danger from a resident or business owner can be removed to a place of safety prior to any discussion about how to rectify a particular situation.

Because both the provincial and federal governments have responsibility for ensuring public safety and well-being, both should be involved in supporting this initiative.

Ministries with responsibility for public safety, prevention of violence, and health should all be involved in working to increase the health and safety of all community members regarding the impacts of the sex industry. The Quick Response Initiative would need to be supported by ongoing public-awareness campaigns so community members would know who to call with immediate concerns.

Action 12: Make communities visibly cleaner through various actions, such as increasing street-cleaning crews and providing garbage cans, street lighting, and needle-disposal services throughout the city.

Lead organizations: City of Vancouver, and Vancouver Coastal Health, in collaboration with Business Improvement Associations and Community Policing Centres.

The mess created by street-based sex work activity was identified as a major concern in all of the Neighbourhood Dialogues. Used condoms, dirty needles, and other debris associated with the sex industry and other street activity are seen as making communities unhealthy and unsafe, especially for young children in parks, schools, and other public areas. The concern sex workers expressed about safe methods of disposing used condoms and needles could be addressed by providing more garbage cans and needle-disposal boxes, and by expanding the needle pick-up services that currently operate throughout the city. This issue merits further examination because of its direct impact, to ensure that communities are healthy and safe for all members.

Action 13: In collaboration with all stakeholders, develop and promote the implementation of health and safety guidelines and a code of conduct for all community members in neighbourhoods to reduce the negative impacts of sex work in a respectful, safe way.

Lead organizations: Living in Community development position, in collaboration with residents, businesses, sex workers, police, and other community organizations, and the Vancouver Agreement.

Multi-stakeholder teams – sex workers in collaboration with business, community, government, and police organizations – would develop guidelines and a code of conduct to establish standards of behaviour that individuals, communities, and organizations would be encouraged to adopt. For instance, “no-go zones,” where sex work activity would be disallowed, such as in schools and parks, could be established. The process of developing these guidelines would provide an opportunity to educate sex workers about their impacts on the community, and residents and businesses about how to better communicate with sex workers. This process would be undertaken on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis to ensure guidelines are specific to the needs of each individual community.





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Action 14: Strengthen the ability of sex worker organizations to provide crucial frontline support and outreach to marginalized sex worker populations.

Lead organizations: *Vancouver Agreement, and private foundations.*

One of the challenges that sex worker organizations face on a regular basis is the lack of core funding for organizational and administrative functions. This often leaves organizations working from project to project, spending much of their time writing proposals, with little opportunity to develop strategic and long-term plans. Strengthening their capacity to provide critical, frontline intervention and exiting supports would increase the health and well-being of those they work with and the communities in which they operate. This recommendation was well-supported throughout *Living in Community's* series of Neighbourhood Dialogues.

It is also vital that services currently available to sexually exploited youth continue to be supported and expanded – programs such as Onyx and the Vancouver Community Action Team on sexually exploited youth. As well, outreach services that focus on indoor workers, many of whom are from immigrant communities and have access to few supports, need to be funded. In particular, SWAN (Sex Workers Action Network) and the Orchid Project provide language- and culturally appropriate services to this isolated group.

Action 15: Redevelop Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels to provide safe, affordable and supportive housing to sex workers with a continuum of support services as required, starting with one hotel in 2007.

Lead organizations: *The Provincial Government and Vancouver Coastal Health (Supportive Housing Initiative), in collaboration with sex worker and community organizations.*

The need for safe and affordable housing was raised as an issue in all of *Living in Community's* Neighbourhood Dialogues. It has been repeatedly demonstrated to be a major factor related to the negative impacts of sex work. With increasing development and growth, there are fewer and fewer affordable units for low-income families and individuals, and what social housing does exist usually does not include funding for support services. The Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels in the Downtown South and Downtown Eastside areas that provide low-income accommodation are often unstable, aging, and poorly managed. The rooms are very small, often 100 square feet. Such an environment is not supportive for vulnerable people.

The Portland Hotel Society is an example of supportive and stable housing for individuals who need additional supports. The Government of British Columbia has announced it will spend \$80 million to buy 11 SRO hotels in Vancouver and Victoria, and to fund seven supportive housing developments that will provide 287 units of new low-rent housing for the mentally ill and people with addictions. The City of Vancouver's *Supportive Housing Strategy*, implemented in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health and B.C. Housing, is intended to develop more supported housing units for people with mental illnesses and/or addictions. It includes low-barrier housing for people who may not be actively engaged in treatment. However, there have been no commitments to fund housing developments supporting the specific needs of adult sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth.

The importance of stable and safe housing in the overall continuum of support services cannot be overstated. Recognizing the unique housing needs of these individuals is a vital step in addressing the specific challenges they face. These housing initiatives provide a unique opportunity to provide targeted housing that will increase health and safety for the entire community.

Action 16: Provide safehouses with adequate space for sexually exploited children and youth, and female, male, and transgendered sex workers.

Lead organizations: *Vancouver Coastal Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.*

There is a critical need for services to support vulnerable individuals involved in the sex industry. Safehouses (emergency shelters that provide a wide range of support to individuals in unsafe situations) can provide immediate support for dealing with violence and trauma, and support and referrals for addiction issues, pregnancy, legal problems, medical concerns, and finding accommodations, education, and work. These services must address the unique needs of individuals with varying experiences. Information and support need to be accessible in terms of culture and language.

Safehouses should be designated for different populations. Children and youth are always exploited through their involvement in sex work, but adults can face high levels of exploitation and abuse as well. Many do not have addictions issues, so their shelter and safety needs must be addressed separately from detox and treatment facilities. It is also important to ensure that those who are entrenched in sex work are not at the same locations as those with less experience and/or exposure to the industry.

Action 17: Provide a continuum of addiction withdrawal management services for female, male and transgendered sex workers, and sexually exploited children and youth, including dedicated counselling, detox, treatment, and recovery services.

Lead organizations: *Vancouver Coastal Health.*

Sex workers and sex worker organizations have repeatedly stressed the need for detox beds that are specifically designed to meet the needs of sex worker populations with substance addiction issues. Current detox facilities do not address the complexities of sex work, and may place sex workers in the same facilities as their customers or pimps. Dedicated beds would allow for the creation of programs that fit the needs of these individuals in safe and supportive ways, and could assist in the transition to appropriate treatment or other supportive long-term programs. As well, the need to deal specifically with the varying needs of sexually exploited children and youth, women, men and transgendered persons must be recognized.





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Action 18: Create and support innovative harm reduction programs designed specifically to support sex workers with substance addictions to increase their ability to make positive, healthy choices.

Lead organizations: Vancouver Coastal Health, Provincial and Federal Governments.

It is a common misconception that all sex workers are addicted; only a very small percentage are. However, among those with addictions, many are survival sex workers. They are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Many issues may be interwoven with addiction. Involvement in sex work may lead to addiction and, in turn, addiction may lead individuals to put themselves in very dangerous situations to get money for drugs. Harm reduction programs that address drug addiction, such as drug substitution and maintenance programs, outreach, safe-injection programs, and increased connection to health services for addicted sex workers would increase their capacity to address their addiction issues and to consider options for exiting the sex work environment.

Harm reduction is an important principle to apply to sex work in general, because it focuses on reducing not just physical harm, but also psychological, economic and emotional harm experienced by individuals and communities.

Exiting

Background

Intervention programs currently provide valuable services and supports to improve the health, safety, and working conditions of those who currently work in the sex industry. These programs need to bridge to other programs that support and assist individuals who wish to exit the industry. Community members at the *Living in Community* dialogues were very supportive of the need for viable alternatives and means of moving out of the sex industry for those who want to leave, and of creating awareness that exiting is an option.

Exiting services should not exist in isolation, but should be supported by a range of other services, organizations, and groups. Neighbourhood-based organizations and existing programs may also provide a wide range of supports to individuals who are at various stages of exiting. The most effective exiting strategies are developed with the involvement of current and former sex workers, and work collaboratively with multi-service agencies to provide a continuum of support.

Action 19: Develop and fund a continuum of safe spaces providing appropriate treatment and supports to individuals who wish to exit the sex industry, at all stages of recovery.

Lead organizations: Sex worker organizations and experiential people, with support from Federal and Provincial governments and Vancouver Coastal Health.

Programs to support exiting sex work must address the entire spectrum of related issues. Programs supported by broad representation from the community will be the most effective at providing the appropriate supports. Exiting facilities should be developed and staffed with representation of experiential people in partnership with economic development and employment service providers.

Providing sex workers and sexually exploited children and youth opportunities to make alternative choices when they are ready to exit is key. There are several steps to exiting, and individuals must be supported holistically along the way with housing, counselling, coaching, health promotion, drug maintenance and/or treatment, and health services as needed to increase their options for positive and healthy choices. Studies have shown that the majority of sex workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder because of stress, violence, and abuse that they face while working. Consequently, exiting programs need to take into account the full range of experiences and emotional well-being of individuals, in helping to assist them in developing the necessary skills to transition into other work and lifestyles.

Action 20: Expand employment opportunities in partnership with local businesses to provide training and ongoing support to individuals exiting sex work, as well as assistance to the businesses providing these opportunities.

Lead organizations: Sex worker and business organizations, with funding from Federal and Provincial Governments.

There are many challenges in regard to creating safe employment opportunities for sex workers who want to gain employment experience. To succeed, a continuum of effective support needs to be provided, both to businesses and to prospective employees. Many programs in the DTES and across Canada, such as the Skills Link program offered by PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society), can provide guidelines and best practices to strengthen and support existing programs by tailoring them to sex workers' needs. It is important to state that this is a win-win situation, providing businesses with a means to fulfill their corporate social responsibility and meet their need for employees, and providing sex workers with a viable exit strategy.



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Legal Responses

Background

The role of the justice system is to ensure public safety for all community members, through the activities of the police, courts, and corrections. Police and the court system also play an invaluable role in protecting the most vulnerable population groups, particularly survival sex workers, trafficked persons, and sexually exploited children and youth. Legal responses to sex work are governed by Canada's Criminal Code, which makes illegal communication for the purposes of prostitution; owning or operating a bawdy house; and living on the avails of prostitution. In general, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) enforces these laws constructively rather than punitively, particularly when dealing with those who are most at risk. The VPD focuses on safety concerns, making a practice of only charging sex workers under extreme circumstances.

Numerous studies have shown that the current laws are not effective, and in fact worsen unsafe conditions for sex workers, residents and businesses. Some members of the community support the Swedish model of criminalizing the purchasing of sex but not the selling of sex. However, the only extensive study of this model by the Government of Norway showed that the law had a number of unintended negative effects, making the situation much more desperate for street-based sex workers. During our Community Engagement Process, other community members spoke of the need to decriminalize sex work and create safe places for people to engage in sex work, demonstrating the lack of consensus about what kind of law reform is necessary. The current model makes it extremely difficult for sex workers to report violence while working, because to obtain help, they must admit to committing a crime.

Action 21: Support the call from sex workers for the development and implementation of a multi-stakeholder cooperative to provide safe indoor workspaces, a code of conduct, education, and training for the most vulnerable sex workers.

Lead organizations: British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women/Communities, with support from community and government organizations, including the Vancity Community Foundation, the Vancouver Agreement, and the Vancouver Police Department.

A safe place to work is needed immediately for the most vulnerable survival sex worker populations, who continue to work in isolated, dark and dangerous locations. Supporting sex workers to transition to less harmful conditions and non-exploitative environments, particularly from on-street to off-street locations, will reduce harm to them, increase their human rights, and keep neighbourhoods cleaner and safer.

The British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women and Communities (BCCEW/C) is a consortium of sex worker activists who work to eliminate the oppressive systems and forces that create harm for individuals in the sex industry. BCCEW/C has been working in partnership with community organizations and sex workers themselves to explore the creation of Vancouver's first sex worker cooperative: a massage parlour. Health and safety guidelines and a code of conduct for workers and for operating the establishment would help to ensure there would be no exploitation, safety would be maximized, and that the business was run in a way that was supportive of the health and safety of the entire community.

The cooperative would provide more than just a safe workspace for sex workers; it would provide health and safety education and act as a contact point for referrals and supports. It would also provide educational materials for people in the industry, such as the XXX (Triple X) Guide, funded by Quebec's Ministry of Health, which addresses various aspects of sex work and offers suggestions and references for living and working with dignity in a healthy and safe environment. The co-op would also support sustainable community development initiatives that increase health and safety for sex workers and the well-being of the entire community.

BCCEW/C has conducted extensive planning and research and the Vancity Community Foundation has been supporting BCCEW/C in the development of a business plan. Further start-up funding would be necessary but, eventually, the cooperative would be self-funded.

Current barriers to setting up a co-op massage parlour include section 210 of the Criminal Code, which makes the owning and operation of a space that may be used for the purposes of prostitution illegal. The harm reduction goals of a massage parlour are therefore limited by the current legal framework; this will need to be considered as the project moves forward.

As an important and innovative step in increasing the human rights of a very vulnerable group of people, and reducing harm to them and to the communities where they work, this exploration should be supported by community partners.

Action 22: Review City of Vancouver bylaws to ensure that they support the health and safety of sex workers in indoor venues, and ensure access to these venues for community health and safety support workers.

Lead organizations: City of Vancouver, in collaboration with sex worker and community organizations.

Current city bylaws have unintended impacts that work against ensuring adequate health and safety conditions for those working in indoor venues. Although many indoor sex workers are subject to unsafe working conditions, significant barriers prevent them from obtaining adequate health and safety information. This is especially true for immigrant workers due to language and cultural barriers. The BCCEW/C has conducted much research on these issues and has developed recommendations for changes to the current bylaws. SWAN and the Orchid Project also have extensive knowledge about how to best deliver services to indoor workers because of their ongoing outreach and research work in this area. We recommend a working group be established by the City, with input from sex worker organizations, to examine methods to increase health and safety within establishments where sex work currently takes place.

Current legislation that makes certain activities related to sex work illegal also makes it difficult to protect sex workers by applying health and safety regulations to their work. This obstacle bears further consideration.



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Action 23: Review the elements of the justice system – enforcement, support and prosecution – to ensure that those who buy sex from children and youth and those who recruit children and youth are prosecuted.

Lead organizations: Justice system, including the courts, Vancouver Police Department, etc.

Throughout the Community Engagement Process, concerns were repeatedly expressed about children and youth being recruited and sexually exploited and about the need for tougher approaches by law enforcement agencies against those who target and sexually exploit minors. Prevention work is key. Sustainable options need to be created for youth so that they do not fall into sexual exploitation.

Section 212.4 of the Criminal Code deals with obtaining or attempting to obtain the sexual services of someone who is under 18 years of age in exchange for money, clothes, shelter, or anything else of value. The message that “our kids are not for sale” needs to be demonstrated by the arrest and conviction of those who abuse children and youth. When arrests are made, pre and post-trial supports for the children and youth involved need to be comprehensive and address the trauma they experienced. Courts need to be held responsible for the delivery of adequate sentencing. As well, changes that would assist in the investigation and prosecution of these cases must be identified and implemented. Potential areas include legal reform, training, and supports for victims and witnesses.

Action 24: Move section 212.4 from the prostitution laws section of the Criminal Code to the violence/assault sections of the Criminal Code to demonstrate that children and youth under the age of 18 are not sex workers, but rather sexually exploited.

Lead organizations: Department of Justice.

Currently, section 212.4 is within the prostitution section of the Criminal Code. Too often, children and youth who are being sexually exploited are dealt with only through law enforcement using Section 212.4. Moving section 212.4 to the violence/assault sections would represent a significant shift in understanding and approach, because it would redefine these children and youth as in need of child protection for the abuse they have experienced.

Action 25: Enforce Restraining Order 98 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act.

Lead organizations: Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

MCFD has a duty to protect children who are experiencing abuse. Sexual exploitation needs to be addressed as a child protection issue by MCFD with regard to every child working on the street. Section 98 provides social workers with the power to apply for a restraining order against anyone exploiting children.

There needs to be zero tolerance in all parts of the system for child abuse and sexual exploitation, in whatever form, whether inside a child’s home or elsewhere. However, a restraining order can only be enforced at the request of the child or youth. In the enforcement of this policy, the best interests of the child must be considered, with adequate supports and services being made available throughout the process.

Action 26: Support the diversionary process when dealing with sex workers facing criminal charges.

Lead organizations: Vancouver Police Department and Crown Counsel.

The proposed Downtown Community Court in Vancouver will address crime in Vancouver's downtown core by taking an integrated case-management approach, linking community social services and health resources with the justice system. It will include the Prostitution Offender Program, a diversionary process currently available to sex work customers charged with communication for the purposes of prostitution. Instead of going to court, they attend a day-long program where they are educated about the legal ramifications of prostitution, its health risks, and the effects of prostitution on women, families, and communities. However, as previously discussed, there is no parallel diversion program for sex workers that is specific to their needs; some informal diversions currently used by Crown Counsel seem to have a higher success rate. Formal policies to encourage diversion of survival sex workers and to prioritize diversion regardless of any preexisting criminal record would help support sex workers' health and well-being and prevent criminal charges, which can present a significant barrier to exiting the sex industry.

Action 27: Strike a working group at the local level to review the impact of the enforcement of laws relating to prostitution and explore changes to the current laws that would make communities healthier and safer.

Lead organizations: Living in Community development position, in collaboration with government, business and community organizations.

Living in Community's Steering Committee agreed that current laws are not effective and must be reformed; however, it did not achieve consensus about what sort of legal reform is required. Studies have repeatedly shown that current prostitution laws have been ineffective at making communities healthier and safer; in fact, since the implementation of Section 213, the Communicating Laws, homicides of sex workers have increased dramatically.

Although the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws failed to recommend any concrete legal reforms, a majority of the committee did conclude that paid or unpaid sexual activities between consenting adults should not be criminalized, and that enforcement should focus on exploitation and violence rather than on consenting adults. Also, the NDP and Liberals recommended that government engage in a process of law reform with a view to changing existing laws, and all parties recognized the inadequacy of the status quo.

Throughout *Living in Community's* Community Engagement Process, the problems that neighbourhoods experience due to increasing street-based sex work activity were widely discussed. The recommendations outlined in the *Living in Community Action Plan* will bring change to the local landscape, but without legislative reform, such change will be limited. The need to advocate for change at the local, provincial, and federal levels continues.





Glossary



Bad date: a john/trick/date/client/sex work customer who becomes physically, mentally, and/or emotionally violent

Bawdy house/Brothel: a house or place in which sex work occurs or is planned to occur

Decriminalization: the removal of all laws that criminalize the act of taking money for sex

Exiting: the process of transition a sex worker undergoes while distancing him/herself from work in the sex industry

Experiential: descriptive of individuals who self-identify as people who currently support or have supported themselves in part or in full through paid sex work

Hustler: term often used for male sex worker

John/Trick/Date/Customer/Client: someone who buys sexual services

Legalization: the permitting of prostitution under regulated conditions

Pimp: a person who manipulates, controls and/or uses power over a sex worker for profit

Prohibition: a legal approach that aims to eliminate all forms of paid sex by making prostitution or certain activities associated with prostitution illegal

Sex industry: the industry formed of commercial enterprises that employ sex workers; encompasses all forms of sex work, including webcam performance, cybersex, dancing, massage, S&M and pornography; however, this project deals solely with the portion of the sex industry that involves the exchange of sexual services on a commercial basis

Sex work: the provision of sexual services on a commercial basis

Sex worker: someone who provides sexual services on a commercial basis

Sexually exploited youth: children or youth under the age of 18 involved in the exchange of sex or sexual acts for drugs, food, shelter, protection, other basics of life and/or money

Stroll/Corner/Track: a well-known area where customers go to buy sexual services; usually separated into female, male, youth/kiddy or transgendered; often subdivided into drug-using and non-using, high-track and low-track (high/low regarding the cost of the service)

Survival sex: sex undertaken by anyone who, due to the need for food, shelter, drugs, money or other necessities of survival, cannot exercise his/her right to refuse

Trafficking: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of one person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery.¹

Transgendered/Tranny/Trans: a person who has changed his or her gender from male to female or female to male by means of surgery and/or presentation

Trick pad: a place, often secluded and well-disguised and usually run by pimps, where someone is kept against will and forced to have sex with many different johns

Adapted from the Community Initiative for Health and Safety, 2006.

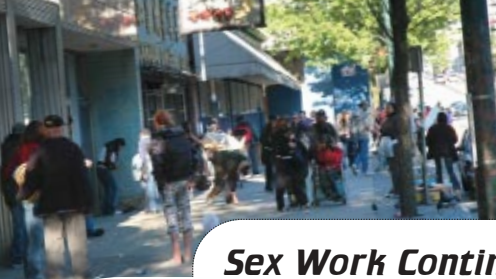
¹ The United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Facts About Sex Work

- Street-based sex work makes up only about 20 per cent of all sex work. The remainder occurs through independent escort agencies and in massage parlours, private residences, brothels, bars, clubs, trick pads, and bathhouses.
- Prostitution is not illegal in Canada for those 18 years and older. Within Canada, pandering, procuring, living on the avails of prostitution of another person, and controlling the movements of another person for the purpose of prostitution are illegal.
- The chances of a street-based sex worker being beaten, raped, murdered, kidnapped, or mutilated are 120 times higher than for any other demographic.
- Being involved in or having a history of sex work does not inherently make a person a bad parent, friend, lover, husband, wife, student, employee, or community member.
- Drug dealers and addicts often monitor the activities of sex workers and target them for robbery.
- People who commit acts of violence against sex workers rarely face any consequences.
- Street-based sex workers are often forced to work in isolated industrial areas at a heightened risk of violence due to lack of streetlights and pay phones, and little to no traffic.
- Many sex workers adopt the belief that their safety lies outside the law because they will not be afforded the same protection as mainstream citizens are by law-enforcement agencies or the court system.
- Sex workers often adopt a defensive attitude to protect themselves. This is a coping mechanism commonly used on the job or when meeting strangers to avoid appearing vulnerable or being attacked.
- Most sex workers do not report assaults or violence for fear of being criminalized.
- Sex workers are not necessarily from dysfunctional families. They come from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds.
- Sex workers are not all controlled by pimps.
- Large sporting events attract tourism and increase the sexual exploitation of marginalized peoples.
- Because of the misconceptions and overall stigma associated with sex work, sex workers generally are self-reliant and don't depend on others for support.

Adapted from the Community Initiative for Health and Safety, 2006.





Sex Work Continuum

Sex work takes many forms. The following diagram attempts to capture this, though there is overlap between and within categories:

WHO:

ANYONE

male/female transgendered gay/lesbian/
heterosexual all ethnocultural
backgrounds

WHERE:

MANY VENUES

massage parlours brothels homes cars on-street
(high track, low track)

WHAT:

SEX WORKERS MAY PLAY VARIOUS ROLES

escort masseuse survival sex
worker enforced slavery of
trafficked &
exploited persons on-street worker

WHY:

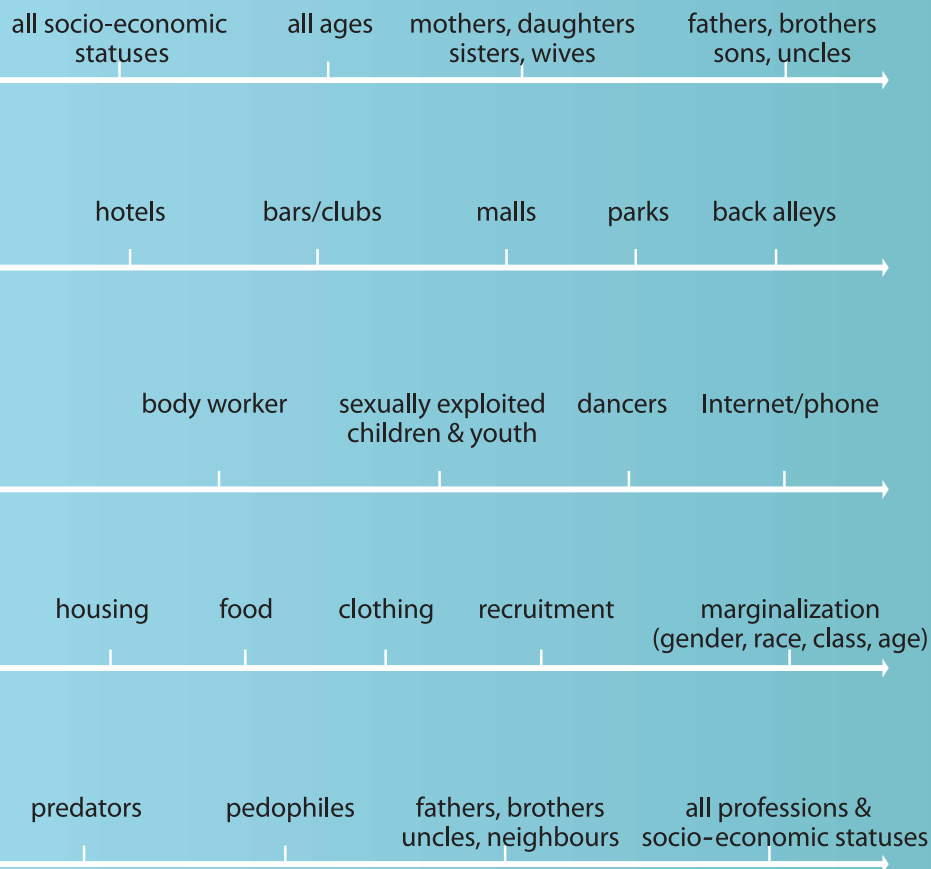
SEX WORKERS ENGAGE IN SEX WORK FOR MANY DIFFERENT REASONS

choice coercion/
exploitation poverty addiction

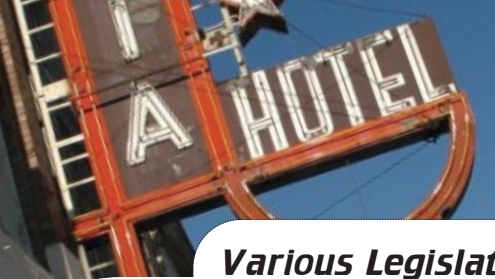
DEMAND:

DEMAND FOR SEX WORK COMES FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

"johns"/
clients male (very
few female) heterosexual/
gay all ages



Violence, exploitation and abuse can happen across the spectrum, though it is especially common in situations where individuals are more vulnerable (because of poverty, marginalization, mental health, addiction, etc.), and when people are working outdoors.



Various Legislative Approaches to Commercial Sex Work⁹⁰

	Prohibition	Legalization	Decriminalization
Moral framework of prostitution	Commercial sex services are not a socially desirable phenomenon. Some people see sex work as a form of violence against women.	Commercial sex work is an inevitable activity between consenting adults.	Sex work is a private matter between consenting adults.
Legislative approach	<p>REGULATES sex workers, customers, managers and owners/operators using the criminal law.</p> <p>May criminalize:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sale or purchase of sexual services • Soliciting for the purposes of prostitution • Living off the avails of prostitution • Owning or operating a bawdy house • Advertising commercial sex services • Procurement 	<p>REGULATES prostitutes and prostitution activities while using the criminal law.</p> <p>Current legalization practices include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police intervention in licensing of prostitutes • Compulsory medical check-ups for prostitutes • Bawdy houses registered and size limited • Maintenance of procuring and pimping laws • Limitations on street prostitution <p>May result in the creation of a Red Light district, an area where brothels can legally operate.</p>	<p>REGULATES sex workers and sex work activities without using criminal law while recognizing labour rights and responsibilities.</p> <p>Workers, managers, and business establishments are regulated using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour standards legislation • Occupational, health, and safety codes • Zoning regulations • Better business bureaus • Landlord and tenant acts • Unionization • Professional associations • Human rights codes
Types of activities regulated	<p>BOTH disruptive and non-disruptive activities and abusive and non-abusive behaviours are regulated using criminal law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prostitution remains within the Federal domain. May limit the type of legislation that can be developed by other levels of government. 	<p>BOTH disruptive and non-disruptive activities and abusive and non-abusive behaviours are regulated using criminal law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prostitution remains within the Federal domain. This limits the type of legislation that can be developed by other levels of government. 	<p>Only the MOST disruptive and abusive activities and behaviours would be regulated using criminal law explicitly designed to deal with them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of disruptive activities use sections relating to causing a disturbance; indecent acts; intimidation; extortion • In the case of abusive behaviour use sections relating to coercion; kidnapping; physical assault; sexual assault; theft

	Prohibition	Legalization	Decriminalization
Level of government jurisdiction	Prostitution remains within the Federal domain. May limit the type of legislation that can be developed by other levels of government.	Prostitution remains within the Federal domain. This limits the type of legislation that can be developed by other levels of government.	Prostitution remains outside the Federal domain. This may leave fewer limits on the type of legislation that can be developed by other levels of governments.
Where this model has been adopted in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada • United States • Sweden • Most of Latin America 	Prostitution activities have been legalized in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nevada, USA • Amsterdam, Netherlands • Some states in Germany and Australia 	Prostitution activities have been decriminalized in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New South Wales, Australia • New Zealand
What the supporters say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to combat violence against women, and therefore to increase equality between women and men. • Helps to protect sex workers and to motivate them to exit the sex trade without risking punishment because of their involvement in sex work. • Has significantly decreased street-based sex work, though not indoor sex work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases levels of organized crime and exploitation of sex workers. • Recognizes sex work as a valid form of labour. • Provides for health and safety standards and other labour rights for sex workers. • Provides for sex work to take place in a controlled environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes sex work as a valid employment choice. • Gives sex workers control over their work. • Other laws against fraud, abuse, violence and coercion can be used to protect prostitutes from abusive, exploitative partners and management. • Allows sex workers to operate without the threat of criminal charges and/or the state seizing their assets.
What the critics say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibitionist stance is not useful because sex work is very diverse. • Many sex workers reject the notion of being a victim. • Criminalizing the customer and not the sex worker may further marginalize sex workers and make work more dangerous. • Creates an incentive and opportunity for organized-crime gangs to become involved in commercial sexual exploitation. • Pushes the sex trade further underground. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex workers are vulnerable to state control. • Can create a black market for sex workers who don't meet regulations (e.g., migrant workers). • May make those who are unable to legally work more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. • The State becomes the "pimp," living off the avails of sex workers through taxation, licensing fees, etc. • May create "sex ghettos." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police have fewer tools for protecting sex workers from violence and abuse when there are no laws that deal with prostitution. • Doesn't help to reduce the exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, that is rampant. • An already vulnerable population has even fewer supports.



Summary of the Living in Community Action Plan



Community Development

Action 1

Fund a community-based position to facilitate the implementation of the *Living in Community Action Plan* in collaboration with community members and groups, including sex workers', business, and governmental organizations.

Action 2

The City of Vancouver should commit resources equivalent to one full-time position to work with city departments and community members to develop a coordinated approach to issues associated with sex work.

Action 3

Strike a working group including representatives of city departments, provincial and federal governments, community members, and sex workers, to consider ways and means to ensure increased health and safety of sex workers and to prevent sexual exploitation.

Education/Prevention

Action 4

Review, improve, and support existing programs that prevent sexual exploitation and recruitment, and develop a standardized curriculum for children, youth, and parents focusing on healthy sexuality, self-esteem, recruitment prevention, and healthy parenting.

Action 5

Sex worker organizations develop public education campaigns to educate the community about sexual exploitation of children and youth and the realities of the sex industry, and work to improve media understanding and representation of sex work by the media.

Action 6

Promote public awareness of the educational and resource information contained in the Community Initiative for Health and Safety's On-line Toolkit.

Action 7

Develop a standardized curriculum and training to teach social work, law enforcement staff, and health and justice professionals how to work with sex workers effectively and respectfully.

Action 8

Establish ongoing partnerships between community-based organizations and academic institutions to ensure continuous feedback between research, policy, and practice.

Intervention and Harm Reduction

Action 9

Immediately develop and implement a strategy to ensure safety for street-based sex workers.

Action 10

Solidify sustainable funding for the Mobile Access Project Van, a partnership between PACE Society and The WISH Drop-in Centre Society, which provides overnight outreach and support services to women working on the street.

Action 11

Fund the expansion of service by the MAP Van (Mobile Access Project Van) to daytime hours to fulfill a *Quick Response* liaison and support role for sex workers and other community members impacted by the sex industry, to reduce reliance on enforcement and to promote health and safety in the community.

Action 12

Make communities visibly cleaner through various actions such as increasing street-cleaning crews and providing garbage cans, street lighting, and needle disposal services throughout the city.

Action 13

In collaboration with all stakeholders, develop and promote the implementation of health and safety guidelines and a code of conduct for all community members in neighbourhoods to reduce the negative impacts of sex work in a respectful, safe way.

Action 14

Strengthen the ability of sex worker organizations to provide crucial frontline support and outreach to marginalized sex worker populations.

Action 15

Redevelop SRO Hotels to provide safe, affordable and supportive housing to sex workers with a continuum of support services as required, starting with one hotel in 2007.

Action 16

Provide safehouses with adequate space for sexually exploited children and youth, and female, male, and transgendered sex workers.

Action 17

Provide a continuum of addiction withdrawal management services for female, male and transgendered sex workers, and sexually exploited children and youth, including dedicated counselling, detox, treatment, and recovery house services.

Action 18

Create and support innovative harm reduction programs designed specifically to support sex workers with substance addictions to increase their ability to make positive, healthy choices.

Exiting

Action 19

Develop and fund a continuum of safe spaces providing appropriate treatment and supports to individuals who wish to exit the sex industry, at all stages of recovery.

Action 20

Expand employment opportunities in partnership with local business to provide training and ongoing support to individuals exiting sex work as well as assistance to businesses providing the opportunities.

Legal Responses

Action 21

Support the call from sex workers for the development and implementation of a multi-stakeholder cooperative to provide safe indoor workspaces, a code of conduct, education, and training for the most vulnerable sex workers.

Action 22

Review City of Vancouver by-laws to ensure that they support the health and safety of sex workers in indoor venues; ensure access to these venues for community health and safety support workers.

Action 23

Review the elements of the justice system – enforcement, support and prosecution – to ensure that those who buy sex from children and youth and those who recruit children and youth are prosecuted.

Action 24

Move section 212.4 from the prostitution laws section of the Criminal Code to the violence/assault sections of the Criminal Code to demonstrate that children and youth under the age of 18 are not sex workers, but rather sexually exploited.

Action 25

Enforce Restraining Order 98 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act.

Action 26

Support the diversionary process when dealing with sex workers facing criminal charges.

Action 27

Strike a working group at the local level to review the impact of the enforcement of laws relating to prostitution and to explore changes to the current laws that would make communities healthier and safer.



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Collingwood Neighbourhood House
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Vancouver Aboriginal Council
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SECTION



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