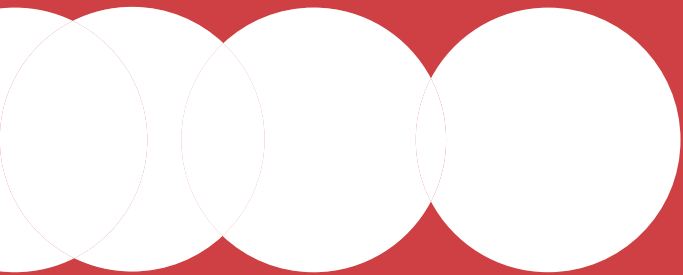


→ the **environment** in which we operate



# the environment in which we operate

## → selling sex in queensland

During the year we designed and funded a major initiative to inform ourselves and the Minister about trends and issues relating to the sex industry in general and to monitor the operation and effectiveness of the Act. Early in the life of the PLA we recognised the existing literature on the sex industry in Queensland was insufficient for our purposes, and the Minister, and for providing appropriate advice and information about prostitution. While some research had been conducted which had aimed to describe prostitution in Queensland, it was neither ongoing nor contemporary.

The monitoring program comprised four key research projects:

- a survey of sex workers
- a survey of clients of sex workers
- a community attitude survey
- collection of data on sexually transmissible infections (STI's) in Queensland.

The PLA selected a research team from the Queensland Alcohol and Drug Research and Education Centre (QADREC), QUT and UQ to undertake the four research projects. We also established a steering committee to oversee the conduct of the project, comprising members of the PLA, the CMC and the former PAC.

The four projects concluded at the end of 2003 and the results were reported publicly in the document *Selling Sex in Queensland*, released in June 2004. The four projects provide baseline data for monitoring and will be repeated again in 2007–08.

The research design was built on key prostitution related research conducted prior to the introduction of the Act, enabling comparison with data collected before the era of licensed brothels in Queensland.

Interviews were conducted with 247 women currently working in the Queensland sex industry. Of these, 101 were recruited from legal brothels, 82 were working privately (mainly sole operators) and a further 33 were street based sex workers.

Questions were asked about:

- social background and reasons for entering the sex industry
- knowledge of the legal framework of prostitution in Queensland and reasons for choosing to work in a particular sector
- sexual services provided to clients and workers' income
- sexual health and safe work practices
- experiences of sexual and physical violence and harassment
- drug usage
- contact with the QPS and the PLA.

Some of the data were able to be compared with a survey conducted in Queensland in 1991, when the legal status of sex work was in flux following the Fitzgerald Report and around the time when a sole operator only containment policy was imposed.

→ As a group, sex workers had experienced unwanted child sexual abuse clearly in excess of the rate reported by other women in the community.

## social characteristics – sex workers

The 2003 survey participants worked in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Cairns and Townsville. They were aged between 19 and 57 years (mean = 32 years). Over half of the sample had at least one child and almost one quarter were married or living in a long term relationship. Most were Australian born and had studied since leaving high school. Approximately one in four sex workers in licensed brothels and sole operators had completed a university degree.

These women had diverse motivations for entering the sex industry. Many stated they entered the industry for the money, flexible hours and to pursue a personal financial goal, although a significant minority (mostly street based workers) took up sex work to pay for their illicit drug use. About half of this sample had left the industry at some stage for more than six months. Reasons varied, although many took a break because they had “just had enough”, got a “good straight job”, became pregnant or were pressured by partners to leave. Return to the industry occurred primarily for financial reasons.

## knowledge and attitudes

In general the women had good knowledge of the legal requirements of the sex industry. This came from diverse sources, especially word of mouth and SQWISI. Street based workers had the most contact with the QPS and lawyers whilst few women generally had contact with the PLA.

Attitudes to sex work varied. Most perceived advantages to working in legal brothels, especially good security and working conditions, and the company and support of other workers. Private workers and those based on the street saw legal brothels as unattractive mainly because they had to share income with owners. Workers in legal brothels and private workers appeared quite satisfied with their jobs, with apparently few regretting their decision to work in the industry. The street workers, by contrast, were mostly dissatisfied.

01 WJ Carter QC launches  
*Selling Sex in Queensland*

02 Ms Charrlotte Woodward  
(QADREC)

03 WJ Carter QC,  
Professor Jake M Najman  
(UQ), Ms Charrlotte  
Woodward (QADREC),  
Associate Professor  
Michael Dunne (QUT) and  
Ms Jane Fischer (QADREC)



(Source: *Selling Sex in Queensland*)

## health

The assessment of the general physical health and wellbeing of Queensland sex workers was possible with a standard questionnaire used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and researchers worldwide. The physical health of these women appears comparable to the general female Australian population of the same ages. Mental health, on the other hand, is somewhat poorer, especially for street based workers. Usage of legal and illegal drugs (ever and recently) clearly exceeds the rates in the general community. While this is true of the sex workers as a whole, the real distinction is between street workers and others, with the former group reporting extremely problematic, health-compromising consumption of numerous drugs.

The research was also able to provide some indications about sexual health. The brothel workers were the least likely to say they had ever had an STI. They were also least likely to have unprotected sex and to engage in other practices (such as sadomasochism, bondage and discipline and submissive sex) that could lead to exchange of body fluids. More than 90 per cent of all workers said they regularly check clients for visible STI's. About half of all private and brothel workers report they rarely or never are asked by clients to accept extra money for sex without a condom, but more than half of the street workers said this happened most or all of the time. It is encouraging to see, however, that women in all three sectors reported they rarely or never agree to these clients' demands.

## sexual and physical violence

Most women in the sex industry have experienced sexual violence at some time in their lives. This begins early with childhood sexual abuse being clearly in excess of the rates reported by women in the general Australian community. Rape and other sexual assault during adulthood are also very common, especially among street workers, of whom more than three quarters have been raped. One important observation is that women currently working in legal brothels had a very low risk of being raped or bashed by a client. Private workers experienced slightly more violence, but again, it is the street workers who bear the brunt, with more than 50 per cent having been raped and/or bashed by a client.

Sex workers in all segments of the sex industry in Queensland reported that security and safety from violence is an advantage in the licensed brothels. The primary reason why sex workers did not wish to work in licensed brothels was financial. All sex workers (that is those working in licensed brothels, private sex workers and street based sex workers) did not believe that workplaces other than licensed brothels offered security and safety from violence.

On the other hand, however, the research pointed to the particular vulnerability and needs of street sex workers who are as yet unassisted by the regulatory framework. Given the unsolved homicides of three sex workers in Queensland in recent years, this would seem an obvious area for attention.

In sex work, the type of violence experienced may vary from the extreme (e.g. homicide) to more common and less reported forms, including harassment and aggression. While there is a potential for violence in any workplace, it is more likely in the retail and service industries where service providers come into direct contact with clients. Other factors associated with the risk of violence are the hours of work, with problems being more common outside normal business hours.

## conclusions – sex workers

Legal brothels, appear to offer health and safety benefits for sex workers and their clients, although the data from legal, private workers also indicates a fairly low risk for health problems and violent abuse. One strong implication for policy is that any future revision of the Act or its methods of implementation should retain, first and foremost, the practical focus on protecting health and welfare.

Street based sex workers have not gained from the changes that have been implemented. They are disadvantaged in multiple ways. Many have experienced sexual abuse as children, they are often assaulted or raped by clients, have poor mental health and extremely high rates of illicit drug use. They are often arrested and perceive police harassment. After incarceration or time out of the industry they return primarily because of persistent drug abuse. Street based sex workers have been stereotyped as “sinners” and “vectors of disease”. Such stereotypes are seriously flawed and counterproductive.

→ The Act provides for the proper regulation of licensed brothels. We now know that nowhere within the sex industry in Queensland is a worker

In reality, there are two sex industries, and workers in only one are currently being protected. New policies and strategies to support the health and human rights of street based sex workers are urgently needed.

## the community

Public attitudes to prostitution and the purchase of sexual services are important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they will impact on the political process, although there may be a need to weigh the weakly held preferences of a majority of the population against the strongly held views of what is a minority of the population. Secondly, to the extent that the public visibility and presence of sexual services may impact on public attitudes, such attitudes provide a measure of the changing impact of the selling of sexual services. It is likely to be important to monitor changes in public attitudes to prostitution as community standards of acceptable sexual behaviour continue to change. Such changes may reflect more generally prevalent changes in public views about sexual behaviour, or they may indicate more general changes in societal expectations about family life, sexual preferences and behaviours.

The purpose of the 2003 community attitudes survey was to sample businesses and residents in geographic areas in which licensed brothels were located and to compare these with areas in which there were no licensed brothels.

## community attitudes towards prostitution

Overall respondents report that the sex industry has no impact on their business or personal activities. Indeed it is clear that only 0.8 per cent reported their business or personal activities had been affected by the operation of a brothel. The overwhelming majority of respondents support a process whereby sex workers would be licensed and registered if prostitution-related activities were no longer against the law. Only one in 20 respondents rejected this policy. The vast majority of the community supports the location of brothels in designated geographic areas. The differences in response between those living in areas with brothels and those without brothels are minor. A little over four out of five respondents agree that a sex worker should not try to attract clients in a public place. The views of those living in areas with brothels are similar to those living in areas without brothels. Respondents, on the

whole, are not against the availability of prostitution. Indeed they appear to be supportive of prostitution as a facility, but they reject its public visibility.

## attitudes of persons in areas with and without legal brothels

Respondents were in universal agreement that prostitution exists in Queensland, with no differences between those living in areas with a legal brothel compared to those living in areas without a legal brothel.

Views about the extensiveness of prostitution were varied. Some 15.9 per cent of respondents reported that prostitution was widespread and 25.9 per cent that it was noticeable in their council area. Over half of the respondents living in areas with brothels reported that prostitution was widespread or noticeable compared with 30.3 per cent of those living in areas without brothels making the same claim.

## regulation of sexual services

Persons living in areas with brothels are more likely to agree that prostitution should be seen as an occupation like any other whereas persons living in areas without brothels, on balance, are more equally divided on this point. Over three out of four respondents share the view that prostitution should be legal, with those in areas with brothels more likely to have this view than those living in areas without brothels. Clearly the presence of brothels in particular geographic areas has not created a negative response to their operation.

## what determines attitudinal differences?

Respondents who report their spiritual beliefs as extremely or quite important tend to be more negative about the morality of the sex industry. They tend more often to favour regulation, restriction and control, and to be more often against the normalisation of prostitution. By contrast, respondents who report that their spiritual beliefs have only a slight or no impact on their lives (these constitute a little under half of the sample), tend to be less negative about the morality of the industry.

more protected from violence than within a licensed brothel. (Source: *Selling Sex in Queensland*)

## conclusions – community attitudes

Community attitudes to prostitution are overwhelmingly supportive, with the caveat that activities to attract clients or promote services should not impact on the public amenity of an area. Persons living in areas which have existing legal brothels appear to be little different in their attitudes and perceptions of the visibility of prostitution from persons living in areas without a legal brothel. Indeed the major determinant of attitudes to prostitution appears to be associated with personal religious preferences rather than direct experiences of and contact with prostitution related activities.

## the clients of sex workers in queensland

Little was known about the clients of sex workers and how they differ from men who do not buy sexual services. For this component of the study 200 male clients were interviewed sampled from three sources, legal brothels, private sex workers and “other” (mainly illegal) sexual service providers.

## characteristics of clients

Clients were disproportionately in the 24–44 year age group. Clients of legal brothels were slightly younger than other respondents. In addition clients were more likely to be single (51%) and to include a substantial proportion of men who had been divorced and/or separated.

## sexual services purchased

Most clients purchase sexual services between once a month and once every few months. The local newspaper was the most common method of locating sex worker services. One quarter of clients use the Internet to locate a sexual service provider. Many clients are using several sources of information to identify service providers.

Clients reported advantages in buying sex, including:

- sex is less complicated
- sex workers are professionals
- it is possible to talk openly with sex workers
- a preference for having sex with a variety of women

→ deriving stress relief from sex worker provided services.

There were some important differences between client groups in the services they preferred, with clients of private and/or “other” workers more often preferring “exotic” services.

## personal relationships

Just over 50 per cent of clients of sex workers reported they did not have a regular partner. Of those who do have a partner most are at least satisfied with the quality of the relationship they have with their partner. Comparison of the relationship quality of clients with a partner with the relationship quality reported by other Australian men suggests that the client sample has poorer relationships with their partners than do other men.

## health and related matters

Generally the clients of legal brothels were less likely to report having experienced an STI than were other men. The vast majority of clients reported using condoms most of the time. The majority of clients stated they had never offered a sex worker extra money to have sex without a condom.

## substance use

Rates of licit and illicit substance use by the client sample were generally higher than in the Australian male population. Generally clients of sex workers were likely to smoke cigarettes (about 38%), many had used cannabis, amphetamines and other illicit drugs such as heroin. This suggests that clients of sex workers are wanting to experience a wider variety of sensations than are sought by other men. Clients of “other” sex workers differ in the extent to which they are more likely to use several illicit drugs.

## conclusions – clients

While in many respects clients of sex workers are similar to other men, they differ in some understandable ways. These men tend to be concentrated in a younger age group, do not have a regular partner (or have a relationship with their partner that is not very positive) and seek out a variety of sensations, including illicit drugs.

→ Sex workers in Queensland’s licensed brothels have a very low risk of experiencing violence whereas half the street based sex workers have been

## what changes can we see since the survey in 1991?

Comparison with surveys undertaken of Queensland sex workers in 1991 and 2003 show that women in the most recent sample are older, left home at a younger age and are more likely to have had children. They are more likely to have an income in addition to their sex work, are somewhat more likely to be attracted to sex work because of the good money and conditions, and are less likely to say they entered because of unemployment. They were also more likely in 2003 to disclose to families that they work in the sex industry. Overall it appears that female sex workers these days are more integrated with mainstream family and employment structures and are perhaps more motivated by financial incentives.

Regarding sexual practices, there appears to have been an increase in the provision of “exotic” sexual services in 2003, including fantasy, sex toys, bondage, submission, lesbian acts and others. In fact, the only sex act that was significantly less common in 2003 than 1991 was unprotected oral sex. Contemporary sex workers appear to be more consistent in checking clients for STI’s. Sex workers in 2003 were also more likely to say they would report violence to the QPS. It should be noted that they were more likely in 2003 to say they had experienced violence at some time in their lives, although we do not have comparative data over time on rates of abuse by clients in the workplace.

raped and/or bashed by a client. (Source: *Selling Sex in Queensland*)



# three out of every four street based sex workers have been raped

*(Source: Selling Sex in Queensland)*

