

FROM THE CURB

Sex Workers' Perspectives on Violence and Domestic Trafficking

A British Columbia Consultation Document:

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**Data Collection By:
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Dedication

From the Curb: Sex Worker's Perspectives on Violence and Domestic Trafficking report is dedicated to all sex workers living within BC. We thank the 112 of you who shared stories and thereby contributed to enriching and unifying our voices around issues of violence and domestic trafficking. We, the British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women, commit to ensuring that this report is used to increase your control over your lives.

Acknowledgment

We wish to acknowledge and appreciate the hard working women of Status of Women Canada and the Vancouver Agreements' Women's Task team, without whom this report and the BC Harm Reduction Consultation it supports would not be possible. We also would like to send a special thank you out to Esther Shannon, for all of her support. Lianne Payne, thank you for your support of the author.

Map of British Columbia



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British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women

The British Columbia Coalition of Experiential Women (BCCEW) 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. We operate under the principle that members commit to creating an environment of inclusion.

We support diverse perspectives and experiences except where they contribute to harm toward sex workers. The BCCEW does not support enforcement or rehabilitation models that either promote continued criminalization or create sex worker dependency on social programs.

Our Mission

The BCCEW is a mechanism for the voices of experiential women to:

- Influence federal and provincial legislation and policies at all levels;
- Advocate for peer-driven programs and services; and
- Work for the elimination of the oppressive systems and forces that create harm within the sex industry and the women's movement.

The BCCEW may also serve as a:

- Consultive body of expertise on sex work issues;
- Host organization for sex worker workshops, events and initiatives; and
- Research and data collection body.

Philosophy and Values

- Supporting and promoting experiential leadership, the development of essential services and a continuum of services for active sex workers through class advocacy, media response and public awareness;
- Creating a supportive network for sex worker activists to have opportunities for leadership and action on issues that impact their lives and the well-being of their communities;
- Ensuring the fundamental recognition of human rights for sex workers including dignity, safety, equality and empowerment;
- Supporting and advocating for enhanced prevention, education, health and healing for women in and from the sex industry.

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles complement the collective and longstanding activism of BCCEW members who have worked and will continue to work to eradicate racism, poverty, sexism and violence by every practical and political means possible. BCCEW principles are built on our experiential analysis of sex work issues and are intended to advance dialogue and activism within the coalition and within our communities.

- To value, embrace and utilize the authentic experiential knowledge and skills of women in the sex trade as the vehicle toward change;
- To ensure equal opportunities for self-advocacy among women in and from the sex trade in all communities within BC;
- To open dialogue for the reduction of harm and the abolition of the social, economic and political conditions that lead to the survival sex trade;
- To insist that eliminating sexual exploitation must be a joint effort of individuals, communities and governments worldwide;
- To recognize and mobilize the leadership strengths, capacities and abilities of BCCEW members;
- To provide access to our expertise and our published materials to the BC community and beyond.

Purpose of the Consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to develop a BC perspective on two important issues: Violence, and Domestic Trafficking. To date, sex workers in the region have had little input into informing these issues, much less an opportunity to work in collaboration with other stakeholders to address them.

The 17th Annual Harm Reduction Conference presents an ideal gathering at which to share these findings as it provides an opportunity for sex workers to share the realities of violence and domestic trafficking with Canadian researchers, decision-makers and the public and with activists working on these issues internationally. We also look forward to the Conference as a way to develop international ties with other activists working on harm reduction with respect to sex worker and related issues.

Process Background / Methodology

The *From the Curb* consultation was designed, delivered, documented and disseminated by women in and from the sex industry. Seven members of the BCCEW were contracted to facilitate two distinct workshops with sex workers from across BC; one focused on violence, the other on domestic trafficking within their home communities and throughout the BC. Each contractor consulted with sixteen sex workers over February and March 2006.

The inquiry questions were designed to be administered as one-on-one interviews or through focus groups, depending on the population of sex workers targeted and their level of comfort with group process. Data was collected in Prince George, White Rock, Vancouver, Kamloops, Guildford and Surrey. (See Appendix A for complete list of inquiry questions.)

The experience in the sex industry of those interviewed varied. Some were actively involved in the industry, others recently transitioned out of sex work. Their history in sex work ranged from on-street to off-street within licensed and non-licensed venues, to off-

street independent workers and active and former dancers. All consulted had experience in the street-level industry in Canada as well as in other countries. Their years working in the industry also varied ranging from two to 19 years of experience. For example, a 20-year old sex worker had 8 years experience in the sex industry and a 47-year old had 3 years experience. This range of experience in life and as sex workers contributed to the richness of the data collected. (See Appendix B, Note from the Author.)

Demographic information was provided voluntarily by respondents. Sex workers consulted ranged in age from 16 to 47 years of age. Information related to race or ethnicity, typically traditionally used to profile sex workers, was deliberately excluded from data collection. Our purpose in this was to make the statement that sex working populations are as diverse as the community at large because sex workers are members of the community.

We note that not all of the individuals consulted answered all questions. Some respondents who felt emotionally triggered were able to skip questions that had the potential to re-victimize them.

Ethical Considerations

This inquiry was designed in keeping with research guidelines, entitled *Research Ethics: A Guide for Community Organizations*, which were developed by sex workers and researchers.¹

Informed Consent

All potential participants were briefed on the BCCEW and the purpose of the consultation. Information on the consultation's funding and the destination and intended use of the information collected was also shared. Individuals were told about the potential risks of participation and were free to withdraw their consent at any time in the process.

Confidentiality

To reduce the potential risks related to participation, no names or identifying information was collected. To increase protection, all data collected from the various cities within BC was summarized to ensure that the respondents who worked in locations with small street-level sex working populations could not be identified. This report also excluded the names of cities, police officers, community groups and individuals identified in direct sex worker quotes to reduce the fear and/or risk of retribution.

Raw data was not shared with any person or entity outside of the BCCEW.

¹ Bowen et al, 2006. Available May 2006 from PACE Society www.pace-society.ca.

Remuneration

Participants were paid for their time in interviews or focus groups. Payment was provided in advance to ensure the research principle of free and informed consent. Payments were provided in advance rather than at the end of the interviews so as not to hold sex workers hostage for their personal contributions. Where possible, participants were provided with nutrition.

Analysis

As this consultation was entirely qualitative, Grounded Theory was applied to identify consistent concepts and themes.²

² Bryman and Teevan, *Social Research Methods*, Grounded Theory: “An approach to the analysis of qualitative data that aims to generate theory out of research data by achieving a close fit between the two.” p. 383, 2005

The Findings: Part One

Violence: A British Columbia Perspective

Inquiry Question 1:

How would you define violence against sex workers?

This question provided sex workers a place to share the true breadth of violence in their lives and to define it collectively. The list was extensive.



Sex Worker Responses:

Sex workers who participated in our consultation listed the following acts as violence:

- Physically beaten, raped or assaulted by dates, pimps and drug dealers;
- Being ignored, belittled, humiliated, sworn at and publicly shunned by the public, for e.g. being called “Dirty Ho” or “Slut;”
- Being thrown out of cars or restrained against their will in vehicles by customers; and
- Having items thrown at them out of vehicles (very common).

Sex workers commented that even children throw garbage at them. People in cars throw beer bottles, pennies, pop and hot coffee. One respondent lost a large piece of her ear because a non-sex working woman threw a beer bottle at her while she was working on stroll at night. Sex workers in our consultation expressed even the pain of being “beaten down by words.” Experiences of robbery were also very prevalent among respondents. Women felt that they were in more danger after they turned their first trick and had money.

Their Words:

- “Any type of mistreatment is violence, because people don’t care what happens to our kind.”
- “Being looked at like you’re less than.”
- “Saying no to allowing us to use their phone or washroom – it leaves us depending on dates and other people who like to hurt us.”
- “Being mistreated by the public.” [Having things thrown at you and yelled at as they drive by].
- “People laugh at me.”
- “It’s like they take this beautiful thing we have...the ability to give love, and they destroy it.”

- “Johns demean you like you are merely flesh that doesn’t deserve respect like anyone else.”
- “It’s dangerous for us out there, especially recently with incidents of getting stripped, ripped off, pushed out of the car naked and being hit.”

Summary Inquiry Question 1

Sex workers defined violence as activities ranging from public humiliation and social exclusion to more extreme incidents of beatings, sodomy, rape, extreme violence and the abduction and murder of their associates.

Sex workers described the power dynamic that money, and their lack of it, creates when they deal with customers stating “They use money to control the situation.” and “They have the control.” and “They pay us and they think they own us.”

Sex workers described incidents of being robbed, being assaulted with metal pipes and being thrown out of cars. Sex workers described being punched, thrown around, whipped, detained, mistreated by police, and robbed by other sex workers. “There is every kind of violence out there.” Said one worker.

Women also spoke to violence from pimps, including being forced to meet quotas, control issues, being isolated, beaten, manipulated and forced to work when they did not want to or when they were not well. Pimps also control and take all of their earnings. Women defined this as violence.

Some of the activities of law enforcement officers were seen as violent with woman stating, “Police force us to work in isolated areas and then harass us.” and “They ignore the bad dates reported by the girls.”

Inquiry Question 2:

What conditions create environments for violence against sex workers where you live?

This question was intended to explore existing working conditions and offer sex workers an opportunity to discuss whether and/or how these conditions contribute to on-street violence.



Sex Worker Responses:

- The lack of proper lighting in areas where sex work is located like dark alleys and industrial areas;

- ‘Concerned citizens’ who “... cruise the streets like vigilantes with dogs and chase girls away.”
- When there is nowhere to go that is safe, e.g. inside a store or a drop in that is open at night;
- Sex workers are not allowed to work in high traffic areas, where they are more visible;
- The lack of hotels to work out of that leave sex workers conducting business inside customers’ cars or homes;
- The lack of phones on strolls and in de facto working areas;
- Cold weather makes women more willing to take risks when there is money involved.
- Pimps and other members of organized crime institute quotas that set the minimum amount of money a sex worker must make before they can return home;
- The mental health issues and alcohol and drug abuse by customers;
- Isolated areas and working out of vehicles with extended cabs and dark windows. One woman stated “Nobody can see us or we can’t see people hiding in [side] them.”
- Customers who do not drive women back to stroll after their transactions increase sex workers’ risk of violence. Women walk alone at night for long distances in an attempt to return to more familiar and better lit areas.

Their Words:

- “Women and residents can be the worst. I had one woman stalking me on-track and then I saw her on the news with her husband who is a circle jerk (meaning he drives circles around working areas masturbating) then her and her husband were in the newspaper saying we need to get rid of prostitution.”
- “Myths that are perpetuated and stereotypes that are supported within society when speaking about sex workers - vulnerable, drug addicted, pimped, diseased, co-dependent.”
- “When the community is not working together. They need to see that we are people too and deserve the same protection as anyone instead of stereotyping us.”
- “Poverty and patriarchy.”
- “Sex workers robbing the johns- making them distrustful and violent.”

Summary Inquiry Question 2

In addition to physical environments, sex workers expressed concern about the social environment. They drew reference to the way they are treated by the general public as one of the most prevalent contributors to on-street violence:

“The people don’t care – they don’t respond to the women that have been killed here in town ... that creates more violence...dates aren’t stupid you know.”

Women felt that the general public didn't care about them and treated them like sub citizens. They also overwhelmingly believe that customers will continue to violate sex workers because they see that the public provides no protection.

Sex workers stated that other workers who "rip off" or rob dates create environments of increased violence. When some sex workers rob customers, other sex workers experience retaliatory violence. "They come back to stroll looking for the girl that ripped them off. If they don't find her, anyone of us will do." (Author's note: It should be recognized that sex workers who rob dates are often in exceptionally desperate and experience extreme poverty, are experiencing withdrawal from substances, have quotas that they must meet etc.).

Women referenced risk behavior: "The more desperate you are, the more likely you are to take risks." and "The colder it gets, you will do anything." There appears to be a direct link between unsafe environments or conditions and risk behavior that stems from desperation and violence against sex workers.

Some sex workers made reference to their drug use as creating environments for violence. One woman stated, "You're vulnerable because you are too high." and "You have to be high to cope with all your pain and do this job."

Women stated that drug dealers and addicts prowl the streets at night, through alleys and in and out of crack houses and that they are targets for both robbery and violence when their activities are monitored by these individuals.

Women also talked about undercutting. When prices are set for a particular stroll, some workers may reduce their prices due to desperation in order to make money. As with any business, if prices are reduced workers will have to turn more dates, work harder for longer hours to make the same amount of money. Workers felt that this increases violence because the longer you are "out there" the more risky it becomes. "We risk our lives every time we get into cars: more cars, more risk."

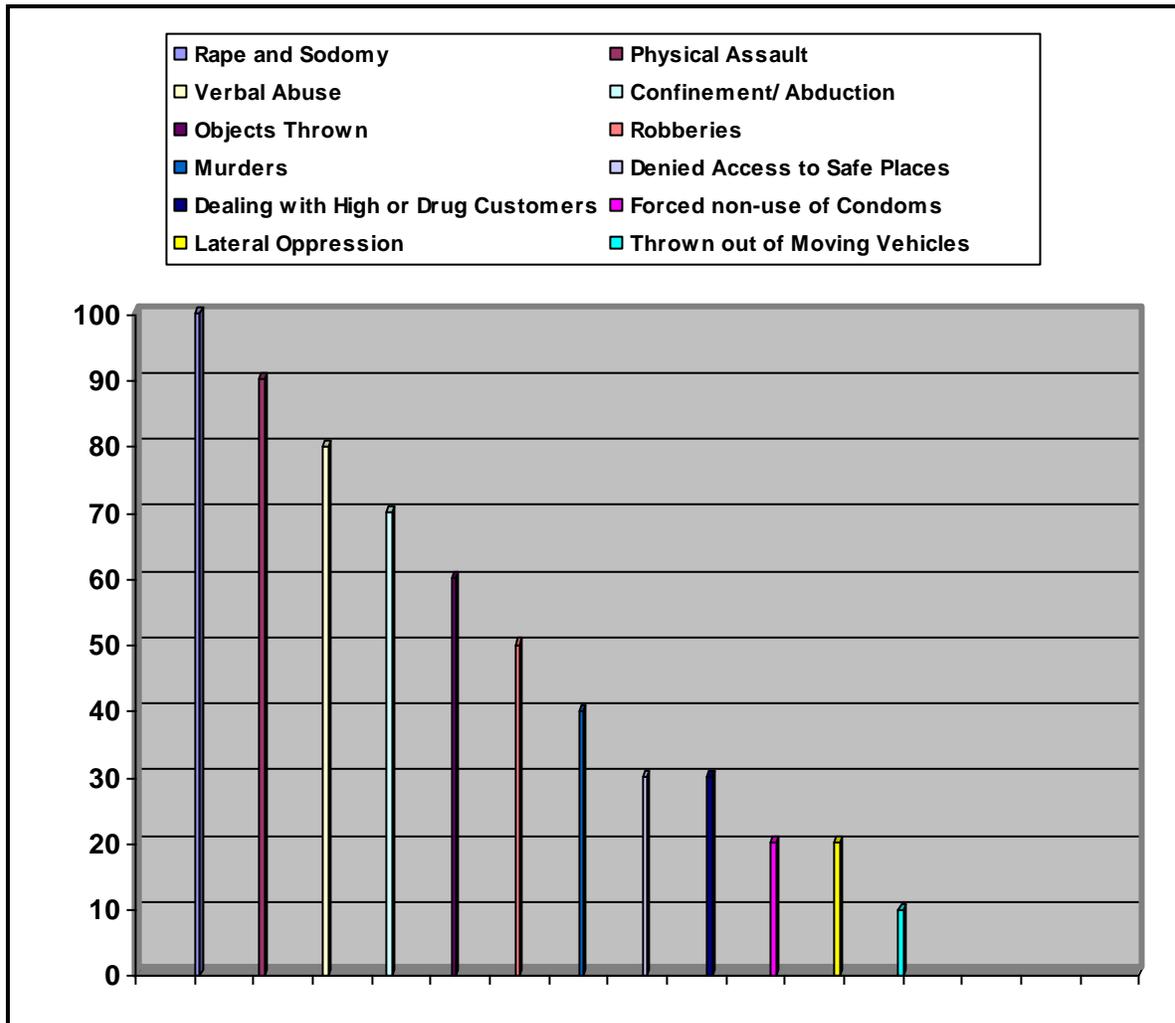
Inquiry Question 3:

What do you think are the most common acts of violence committed upon sex workers?

This question was asked to get an idea of the range of violence committed against sex workers. There was a wide range of common acts of violence against sex workers. Responses were coded and ranked. On the following page, a chart recording their responses is provided.



Sex Worker Responses:



Their Words:

- “It’s not usually about sex. They get off on dominating women.”
- “I was shot in the neck with a .22.”
- “We are being killed and fed to pigs.”
- “I’m sick of being tied up and raped.”
- “I was drugged.”

Summary Inquiry Question 3

Women shared horrific incidents of violence in response to this question. The most common acts of violence appear to be all acts of violence.

Inquiry Question 4:

Who do you believe commits these violent acts?

This question supported sex workers in describing their assailants.



Sex Worker Responses:

- Pimps that own you.
- Drug users and dealers.
- Other sex workers.
- Police- the ones that pretend to want to help you.
- Partners/spouses
- Teachers
- Lawyers
- Judges
- Neighbors
- Counselors
- Foster parents
- Doctors
- Criminals
- The mentally ill
- Men who hate women.
- Men who hate sex workers.

Their Words:

- “There needs to be something done about how sons are raised, it’s the guy next door.”
- East Indian men are very violent to me, especially when they pick you up, after they cum they really want to hurt you because it goes against what they believe in to pick up a prostitute and they feel guilty and take it out on you.”
- “People rob you while you are sleeping in shelters and on the streets, very hard to get a good nights rest...one eye open.”
- “Men – could be a priest, lawyer, all walks of life. Women do it too.”
- “Video games where you beat and rob prostitutes don’t help.”

Summary Inquiry Question 4

Some women were very specific about who commits violence against them. Others had comments like “Fuck, who doesn’t.” indicating that they are at risk of violence from anyone and everyone. Sex workers also stated that their intimate partners committed violence against them, especially in situations where their partners were drug users.

There are a wide range of perpetrators of violence against sex workers with even women having been identified as perpetrators. There is a common sentiment that men or people who hate sex workers commit acts of violence. Sex workers also note that some of these individuals are mentally ill or have extreme anger issues.

Inquiry Question 5:

Why do you believe these individuals commit violence against sex workers?

This question gave sex workers opportunity to discuss the motivations of violent perpetrators.



Sex Worker Responses:

- Women stated that they felt disposable and that society does not take the violence they experience seriously;
- They believe that customers see them as lower class and therefore not deserving of rights or respect.
- A significant number of respondents felt that hurting sex workers made men feel superior and that it was easier to get away with hurting sex workers.

Their Words:

- “If it wasn’t for us, so many more women would be abused. We’re taking the hits for you.”
- “Some have issues with their mothers and unresolved power issues in their past.”
- “They pick up working girls because we’re lower class. Otherwise they’d do this to their wives.”
- “They abuse us because of things sex workers have done to them before.”
- “We’re easy targets, easy access.”
- “No one cares about us – who cares? We’re sluts in their eyes.”
- “It’s easier to get away with hurting sex workers, we are not worth anything.”
- “No one is going to do anything about it, and that’s why it continues.”
- “They think/know they can get away with it.”

Summary Inquiry Question 5

Women gave a wide range of reasons why they are the victims of constant violence. Most highlight that violence against sex workers is perceived as something that can be done with impunity: an attitude which encourages more violence. This question sparked enormous anger among many of the sex workers interviewed as they indicated their belief that men who are violent use them as their targets rather than taking the risk of targeting their wives and girlfriends.

Sex workers in our consultation felt that they were modern day “whipping boys.” They strongly believe they bare the brunt of male violence against women. Sex workers indicated that their mere accessibility makes them targets of violence and that if the larger community does not take action against the violence they experience, it will continue. While there were a myriad of responses to this question, the theme that underlined responses was that violence is pervasive because, generally, those in the larger community allow it by ignoring it or staying silent about it. Sexual predators get the message that sex workers are not socially protected individuals. Overall, sex workers expressed nihilistic feelings such as, “People believe we are not worth protecting and shouldn’t be alive.”

Inquiry Question 6:

Where can sex workers go for help in your area? What kind of help do they get there?

This question was asked to get an understanding of the services that sex workers identified and accessed.



Sex Worker’s Responses:

Health Services:

- Some hospitals, particular hospitals in the Greater Vancouver Regional District were identified as ones that should be entirely avoided;
- Outreach nurses provided supplies, first aid, supportive contact, the use of phones and general advocacy;
- Various AIDS services were used for bathrooms, phones, supplies and advocacy.

Sex Worker Organizations:

A number of these were named. Sex workers stated that above the expected supplies and resources, they received love. Some individuals working within these organizations were also named. Their names were excluded from this report.

- PEERS Vancouver
- PACE Society
- WISH Drop in Center
- SHOP
- The Front Room
- MAP Van (An overnight mobile outreach program in Vancouver)

Faith Based Services:

- The Mission
- Servants Anonymous Society
- Some churches

Other Services and Supports:

- Police (named officers that they trust)
- Native Friendship Centers
- Various recovery houses
- Street nurses

Some women, including those who lived in areas where there were no organizations dedicated to providing services to sex workers indicated that there was nowhere to go for help in their community.

Kinds of Support:

Respondents listed the kinds of supports that they receive, ranging from food clothing and supplies to bathrooms, phones and make-up. Others expressed that they received love and a sense of purpose. Services such as advocacy and health testing were also noted.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Emotional support | Information |
| Shelter | Stress relief |
| Showers | Food |
| Clothing | Trust |
| Sharing | Medical |
| Transportation | Needles |
| Condoms | Beds |
| Referrals | Help filling out forms |
| Educational | Guidance/support |
| Love | Substance abuse support |
| Safe/healing environment | Outreach |
| Bus tickets | Understanding |
| Information | |

Their Words

- “The hospital just gave me medication and let me go. I was more at risk because of the drug.”
- “The Church sometimes gives us food, bus tickets and clothing.”
- “I have nowhere, can’t call the cops.”
- “I rely on me, myself and I.”
- “Depends how much you want to sell out.”
- “There are a few places but they all close at 5 pm, not much help in a situation at 3 am.”
- “We can go to outreach workers on the street.”
- “We rely on ourselves and our lived experiences to help us be self reliant.”

Summary Inquiry Question 6

Sex workers named services throughout the region and described the kind of supports that were available. Organizations were named in this section.

It was clear that there were some services in particular locations within the regions that sex workers accessed. While there are not many sex worker- specific organizations in BC, where they do exist, they were identified by sex workers. Other respondents stated that there were no services or safe places and that they had to rely on themselves for support.

Inquiry Question 7:

How supportive have the following been in addressing violence against sex workers- Law Enforcement, Courts and Health Services?

This question was intended to provide more specific details on provincially and federally mandated services and the level of access and treatment experienced by sex workers.

Law Enforcement



Sex Worker’s Responses:

- A general sentiment was that officers uphold the Criminal Code provisions with respect to prostitution and until the law changes they will continue to criminalize sex workers.
- Some felt that officers don’t know how to address violence effectively.
- Workers from small towns in BC felt that officers were of no support;

- There was a consensus that support from officers is contingent upon: either providing information on crime families and pimps or sexual services to avoid arrests or charges;
- They also believed that treatment from officers depended on who you are. If you are aboriginal or have previous charges or are of color you will be treated more harshly.
- Sex workers stated that officers in particular cities treated them better than in other cities. Some of these officers were very supportive and sex workers have developed good relationships with them.
- It is interesting to note here that some women compared officers, including RCMP officers, in other parts of the region to the Vancouver police with some stating that Vancouver police care more about their safety, “Cops get really carried away out here, not like Vancouver cops.”

Their Words

- “[One officer] in VICE is brutal, made up charges and said ‘We are going to get you out of this one way or another...even if we have to arrest you over and over again’. Do they think this is going to mean that I can suddenly stop working...cause she arrests me? I have to work more when she arrests me.”
- “They uphold the law, until legislation changes they will continue to criminalize us.”
- “They do not attempt to investigate crimes against us.”
- “They want sexual favors for help sometimes (one met me after hours).”
- “The walking cops are good.”
- “One cop made me give him head without a condom in the back of squad car in return for not getting charged.”
- “Vancouver cops are way better.”
- “I think they’re supportive.”
- “They take your clothes off and leave you under the bridge.”
- “They broke bones in my face.”
- “They think we’re fucking crack whores.”
- “They stop and see how we are.”
- “They don’t touch me because they know I am HIV.”

Court:

This question was meant to explore the relationships and experiences sex workers had with the legal system



Sex Workers' Responses:

- Credibility: Sex worker's shared experiences of pressing charges against bad dates and pimping families. They indicated that they often were not believed by the courts and that the perpetrators either went free or received short sentences. There was also concern that the perpetrators were an increased threat to their personal safety when released.
- The length of perpetrator's sentences seems to correlate to occupation. Sex workers believe that if they were not involved in the sex industry, sentences would have been much longer for the perpetrators and the courts would then send a message that sex workers are worth protecting.
- Those that entered the justice system through the criminalization of sex work shared the correlation between criminal charges and jail time, which increased their dependency on sex work, "They convict us and make it harder to exit the trade."
- Others noted that discrimination based on race and drug addiction was prevalent.
- Respondents also indicated that judges should assess the community resources like recovery houses and detoxes that they are sending sex workers to, and that there should be greater regulation of these services.

Their Words:

- "I have had some good experiences, one judge joked 'You should go back to selling drugs, you're no good at solicitation'."
- "They do not believe sex worker testimony and often dismiss charges against the people who commit violence against us."
- "Not long enough sentences for people who are violent against us."
- "They don't support anyone, they aren't supposed to."
- "I haven't been harassed by the courts."
- "I am in the process of charging a very bad date and I am very scared, I have never done it before."
- "They find a reason to drop charges when you're trying to charge a bad date."
- "It depends on the judge."
- "They are the same as police."
- "I have been re-victimized in court."
- "I've never had a big problem with the court itself."
- "Men get less time in jail if any at all."

Health Services

This question was intended to explore sex worker experiences of health services in the BC.



Sex Workers' Responses

- Disclosure: Some respondents stated that if they disclosed they were sex workers, the quality of service diminished. Others stated that hiding the fact they were sex workers ensured that they were treated with dignity.
- There were a large number of respondents that praised the services of street nurses. Sex workers believed that they could trust the nurses and those they were provided with more than adequate supplies, support, treatment and information.
- Particular hospitals in the region were identified as ones to avoid. The experiences of women there were of abandonment, judgment and discrimination.
- There was a prevalent underlying theme of “They are trying to kill us.”
- Medical supports provided within sex worker friendly community organizations or environments were highlighted as very encouraging.

Their Words:

- “A nurse called the cops when I went there because she went through my purse and found 4 needles. Even the police felt stupid when they showed up and had to ask her why she had been going through my purse.”
- “They treated me like I was dirty.”
- “They provided me with coffee and safe sex supplies and comfort.”
- “They have been great.”
- “Street nurses are out and about talking with women.”
- “They are the only help I see that cares.”
- “The hospital here can be okay depending on the person.”
- “If I don’t identify myself as a hooker or a junkie I get treated okay.”
- “Depends on where you go and who you get. They don’t know how to treat hookers.”
- “There is no walk-in clinic downtown cause they don’t want to be flooded with our kind.”
- “Emergency at hospital X is the worst place to go to because they discriminate in all ways: sex work, drug addict, race, HIV/AIDS, mental health, etc.”
- “X Hospital hates us and wants to kill us – won’t even give Tylenol to an addict.”
- “Don’t disclose [sex work] to these professionals, not their business and I think that the delivery of their service would change.”
- “They call us frequent flyers.”
- “The ambulance took 4 hours because I was a street person.”

- “It’s population control.”
- “They are trying to kill us.”

Summary Inquiry Question 7

In general, some respondents shared that they didn’t know how supportive any of such services and agencies are because they have never received support and only have had experiences of enforcement. Overall, respondents overall had much to say about these services: some feel they have had no luck receiving support, others feel that their dignity is rarely preserved and still others indicated that the treatment they receive depends on the individuals they encounter.

Law Enforcement

Although responses varied in this category, it is clear that the treatment sex workers receive from law enforcements depend on two important factors; who you are demographically and socially (race, age, addiction, previous relationships with law enforcement, length of time in the sex industry) and which officer you encounter (those with compassion, those that uphold the law first and those with goals toward exploitation and humiliation). Younger respondents (under the age of 21) appeared to have better relationships with law enforcement. Overall, experiences varied with some women indicating that law enforcement officers have been supportive and have even shared information about violent dates.

Additionally, respondents shared information about specific areas where harassment or ill treatment by police is far more prevalent. These locations were not identified in this report, but the information collected will be used to direct relationship building and education initiatives in the future.

The Court System

It must be noted here that a large number of respondents entered the criminal justice system as victims bringing charges against violent predators. Others consulted have had no experience with the court system due to never being charged with offences or never pursuing criminal charges. Overall, for those with experience of the court system, treatment and relationships depended on the individuals encountered, leaving no predictable standard of behaviour with the result that sex worker’s expectations of protection and support were rarely met

The court system’s treatment of sex workers, similar to law enforcement, depended greatly on demographics and the individuals encountered. A proportion of respondents entered the legal system as victims pursuing charges and felt that their credibility was often questioned due to their involvement in the sex industry. There were a number of concerns about perpetrators going free and short sentences handed out to those who committed offences. Some respondents who have had no experience with the court system see them solely as an enforcement body instead of one that offers protection and justice.

The Health Care System

Health care professionals play a large part in the continuum of services with respect to care for those who are victims of violence. There were a many responses that shared sentiments of judgmental service provision in hospitals and by nurses. Other responses indicated that street nurses and First Nations' health services were extremely supportive. According to sex workers, cities within the region where street nurses are available or where medical services are located within sex worker organizations and/or First Nation services appeared to provide the highest quality of service.

Mainstream hospitals are a venue where women commonly encountered medical staff they experienced as judgemental. A number of respondents shared incidents of being ignored or treated like 'vectors of disease' (author's term). Others found health services to be supportive though this was often dependant upon the individuals encountered and whether involvement in the sex industry was apparent, perceived or disclosed.

Inquiry Question 8:

If these services have not been supportive, why do you think that is?

In this question, sex workers who believed that law enforcement, the justice system and health services were unsupportive could expand on their experiences.



Sex Worker Responses:

- Responses revealed the theme of social exclusion: respondents felt that if they were seen as equals in society (e.g. if they paid taxes), their treatment would improve as is evident in responses such as, "Most of us are on welfare."
- There were a number of responses that highlighted the fear that service providers have regarding contact with sex workers. Respondents expressed that stereotypes and the lack of experience in dealing with sex workers who have been traumatized leads service providers to be judgmental and practise discrimination.
- The lack of awareness about the context within which sex workers experience violence is also regularly noted by respondents. Some sex workers feel that drawing knowledge about violence from books is not adequate to truly address the issue in their lives.
- Other comments expressed the belief that sex workers were devalued victims of violence and spoke to their belief that some individuals delivering services to sex workers believed sex workers desire the violence they experience.
- Some respondents noted that law enforcement, the courts and health services are at a loss and don't know how to support them.

- There were also comments that service providers were ashamed of sex workers.
- Some respondents named service providers that were very supportive of them during violent incidents.

There Words:

- “The wrong kinds of individuals are providing support services to their populations.”
- “They think we choose to be the way we are.”
- “They need us to educate them or experience one of their own kids being a sex worker.
- “They think we deserve to be treated like this cause we choose to grow up to be a hooker.”
- “They’re learning from a book, not the street.”
- “Its not relevant to their lives, they keep it in the closet, we’re a waste of skin.”
- “The courts just listen to what the cops say.”
- “Professionals believe what they have been taught, they believe the stereotypes.”
- “Sex workers are viewed as the bad girls of society, the home wreckers and husband stealers.”
- “They just give up, see it as impossible, they are at a loss as to what to do
- “They don’t look at the real issues, they think we are criminals, they see us as lesser people.”
- “I think they are scared they will get something from touching us.”
- “They think their intentions are good but they don’t understand us at all.”
- “They don’t understand how we live, no home, no money, living on welfare that doesn’t pay a sustainable amount.”

Summary Inquiry Question 8

Sex workers shared sentiments of alienation and described a lack of sensitivity, compassion and education from many of the individuals who provide services. As a result, there were a number of heavily charged emotional statements provided in response to this question. It is clear that sex workers feel that they are mistreated due both to their involvement in the sex industry and the lack of experience or exposure to sex working realities on the part of service providers. Sex workers expressed the reasons for their maltreatment in four major categories:

1. Social exclusion and the devaluing of the lives of sex workers;
2. The lack of knowledge and lack of experience on the part of service providers;
3. Blatant discrimination; and
4. Fear and hopelessness on the part of providers.

Inquiry Question 9:

Do you think that Canadians care about violence against sex workers? Why? Why not?

This question was asked to determine whether sex workers feel that the Canadian public cares about them.



Sex Worker's Responses

- All respondents who answered this question believed that Canadians either were not aware of what is going on in the lives of sex workers or that they just didn't care. Others commented that the media does not portray sex workers as human beings and this contributes to the public's ambivalence and/or the lack of concern.

Their Words

- "No. If they cared, we'd be on the front page of newspapers when someone is killed instead of page 10."
- "The system sucks, we don't matter, they don't care."
- "No. But Canadians are better than Americans."
- "No. Look at the Pickton case."
- "Only educated Canadians do."
- "No, violence continues, if they cared it wouldn't."
- "No, a guy was just driving around and attacking sex workers because he hates them. He stabbed one girl I know just because she was a sex worker. He wasn't even a trick."
- "No, if they cared they'd have a place that was safe for us."
- "Some do if they've been there before...like you guys." (Referring to former sex workers providing services).

Summary Inquiry Question 9

Overall, sex workers felt that they are not valued by the Canadian public and that, if they were, violence against sex workers would not continue or would be greatly reduced from the current high levels that exist.

The majority of sex workers in our sample experience social isolation and abandonment. They do not feel cared about or protected by Canadians in general. Some have gone as far as to say that even the Canadians who work in areas such as law enforcement, nursing, emergency response (ambulance staff), social work, etc.,- those who are paid to protect and care for them - do not.

Inquiry Question 10

What are the key things you believe can be done to reduce the risk of violence upon sex workers?

This question provided a space for sex workers to interpret the violence they have experienced and suggest strategies to reduce violence and predation.



Sex Worker Responses

- Safe locations: There were a large number of respondents indicating that there is a lack of safe spaces that sex workers could access without judgment or without having to meet some requirement for service (e.g. disclosing personal information, praying before meals, etc.) Some listed were safe houses, supportive living environments; drop in centers attached to female-provided outreach services and safe injection sites for women.
- Hours of Operation: Sex workers indicated that the hours of operation of sex worker serving and sex worker friendly organizations need to be expanded, stating, “We need late night programs.”
- Suggestions on how sex workers can better protect each other were prevalent as respondents suggested buddy systems, taking license plates, only performing doubles (two workers per customer)
- Better lighting and alley patrols.
- A group of respondents suggested that bad dates should be put on television in a high profile way similar to that of *Crime Stoppers*.
- Sex worker led education programs for the community at large and various service providers were recommended.
- Respondents also advised that perpetrators of violence be given more severe sentences and that the evidence provided by sex workers should not be dismissed based on judgmental opinions about her occupation.
- Sex workers also recommended safe intercourse sites (SIS), similar to the safe injection site (SIS) in Vancouver and places such as brothels where sex work can take place and where they and their customers are seen by others and not left alone. Sex workers stated that dates should undergo training on how to be serviced by sex workers.
- Respondents also commented on the sections of the Criminal Code pertaining to prostitution (Section 210, 213). Their comments ranged from support for decriminalization to calling for the legalization of prostitution. It is worth noting that not only does criminalization of sex work lead to enforcement by officers, but pimps and members of organized crime also use the threat of Criminal Code sanctions to keep women trapped, saying things like “If you tell anyone anything, you will be the one that goes to jail.”

Their Words

- “It’s a big world, we just want a small corner.”
- “We need to know where we are taking dates and watch out for each other more.”
- “Find a way for us to report dirty cops.”
- “More shelters and programs run by the girls.”
- “Education/awareness and prevention education, people understanding why we work and understanding who we are.”
- “People in the law taking us more serious like when my old man beats the shit out of me.”
- “A place for sex workers to take their customers that’s safe and protected.”
- “Attitude change, educate the public to reduce stigma around sex work.”
- “Buddy system will work for us.”
- “Throw the book at predators.”
- “We need brothels – our own houses, not the government acting as our pimps.”
- “Try to ease the competitive atmosphere in the sex trade through tolerance and understanding.”

Summary Inquiry Question 10

Respondents suggested a wide range of service and ways sex workers could collaboratively reduce harm and they described various strategies to reduce their risks of violence. Strategies included watching out for each other and suggestions for service creation and improvement were noted including advertising bad dates in main stream media similar to Crime Stoppers.

Inquiry Question 11:

Is there anything you would like the world to know about the violence you have experienced?

It must be noted here that some respondents did not answer this question. They felt that answering the question would re-victimize them by bringing up harmful memories better left submerged.



Sex Worker Responses

- Overall, sex workers want the world to know that they are human and engage in sex work to survive. They shared that being discriminated based on their occupation increases their susceptibility to harm and violence.

- Some respondents exhibited extreme resilience with statements referring to their survival in spite of all odds, their pride and their inherent value as human beings, as women and as sex workers.

Their Words:

- “Words cannot express the violence I have experienced over the past ten years. I’m 27 and have been tortured for hours. My head was shaved once; I’ve been stabbed numerous times especially on my face because they wanted to make me ugly so I can’t work. Raped so many times I can’t count, I mostly try to block that out. I’ve had guns pointed at my head 4 times and have been purposely burned with lit cigarettes. I feel I’ve almost lost my life 10 times to tricks who I believe genuinely wanted to kill me. I’ve had johns ask me numerous times to help them find a 10 or 11 yr. old girls. This is unbelievable to me and has to change!”
- “I was raised in this lifestyle – peoples' negativity just pushes me back into the darkness.”
- “I never asked for it and because I am a sex worker it does not make it acceptable.”
- “The world needs to know that we are important.”
- “How would you like your daughter subjected to what we go through – think next time.”
- “I wouldn’t want the world to know anything because I don’t have any good memories—all bad.”
- “The experiences we face are horrific and mental anguish that never go away.”
- “Some of us are native they think that we are stupid.”
- “Sometimes I wonder why I am really here. Am I really worth it?”
- “We don’t deserve it and we want a different life too”
- “It’s the oldest trade in the world and without it our streets would be less safe – there would be more sexual predators out there preying on other women.”
- “We are just like you, we cry, we have children, we have mothers, we were babies.”
- “The world should hear our stories – maybe Pickton would not have had the chance to kill our sisters.”³
- “We are not throwaways or disposable.
- “Its your dad, your brother and your husbands who are abusing us, its not just some guy...the one who looks like a creep...it’s the straight looking johns.”
- “Last Christmas I had a date with a john who had two young kids and presents in the back of his mini van. He wanted a blow job from me. Its everyday guys.”

³ The individual charged with the murder of 26 Vancouver women, almost all of whom worked as sex workers. Originally charged with the murder of 27 women but, in March 2006, the judge presiding over the case dropped one charge ruling that he could not be tried for killing an unidentified victim. In Vancouver, at least 61 women involved in sex trade work have been found to be missing and presumed dead since 1983. In Canada’s largest serial killer investigation, 27 of these women have been identified as the victims of murder. The Missing Women case, as it has come to be known, left families of the victims and the broader community questioning whether the authorities took seriously the reports of missing women. Many felt that because these women were sex workers the authorities did not think them worthy of protection or even attention.

- “The violence I have experienced makes me feel hopeless.”
- “I am proud of who I am and most of my choices have been good ones, I have found my success.”
- “You don’t feel like a real person after being raped, but we can heal.”
- “It is people in power that abuse and kill us.”
- “Doesn’t matter how many times you get beat up, nothing gets done about it.”
- “The emotional violence gives me nightmares.”
- “The violence against us should be treated the same as if it was my grandmother, treat people equal, we are all human.”
- “We deserve to be treated like people! We have feelings, thoughts, dreams and talent. We are your daughters!”
- “We are intelligent!”
- “I’m afraid at work because I almost died by strangulation. I have survived violence but worry for the next time!”

Summary Inquiry Question 11

Based on the level and range of violence experienced by sex workers, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that street-level sex work is the world’s deadliest profession. Sex workers sharing their experiences through this question were open about the need for the world to see them as human beings who deserve the same protection from violence as any other person. They rejected the notion, held by some, that violence is an occupational hazard of sex work. Their words speak for themselves.

Inquiry Question 12:

Hate Crimes are defined as *an offence committed against another person, with the specific intent to cause harm to that person due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or culture, etc.*

Would you consider violence against sex workers as a hate crime?

This question was asked to explore whether sex workers would classify the violence they experience daily as a hate crime.



Sex worker’s Responses:

- Sex workers identify themselves as a unique subculture with specific norms, values and practices. Respondents indicated that these sub-cultural identities and behaviors mean that they should be considered targets of systemic discrimination.

- Others noted that violence against sex workers should be included as violence against women and that, in itself, is a hate crime.
- The impact of racial discrimination as respondents indicated that when race is compounded by involvement in sex work, violence, social stigma and social abandonment exponentially increased.

Their Words

- “Yes – sometimes I think us Indian girls are more hated with the shit people yell when they drive by – also sometimes the stuff bad dates say when they are fuckin’ me up is racist.”
- “It should be seen as hate crimes against women and sex workers should be included as women.”
- “Well some guys really get off pushing the natives and coloreds around and trying to abuse and discriminate against us when all we’re trying to do here is make a little money and live.”
- “It is a hate crime – I forget that we are just disliked, we are hated.”
- “Maybe if people knew they were committing a crime they might think twice.”
- “We are humans and don’t deserve to be beat, hit, yelled at or neglected because of what we do to survive.”
- “Absolutely! Sex workers have our own culture!”
- “Yes, sex workers become someone’s victim because they are sex workers.”

Summary Inquiry Question 12

Overwhelmingly sex workers agreed that violence against sex workers should be considered a hate crime. They also noted that doing so puts their violent experiences into a deeper context. They expressed that violence against their population is done with the “specific intent to cause harm” due to their social identity and compounded by their sheer accessibility.

It must be noted here that some respondents did not believe that violence against sex workers was a hate crime because they indicated that they have begun to believe that they deserved the violence they experience. Others wanted violence against sex workers officially designated as a hate crime and punishable accordingly.

Findings: Part Two

Trafficking: A BC Perspective

This section of the consultation was focused on exploring sex worker experiences of domestic trafficking and the effect that being domestically trafficked has on the lives of sex workers within the BC.

Inquiry Question 1:

If we loosely define trafficking as the “forcible movement of sex worker(s) from one region/province/location to another unfamiliar location,” in what ways has trafficking occurred in your lives?

This question was asked to provide an opportunity for sex workers to describe their experiences of trafficking with the application of the above definition. The above definition was chosen over other available definitions because of its simplicity. Other definitions of trafficking do define forcible movement across international boundaries as sex trafficking.



Sex worker's Responses:

- Sex workers in this consultation identify that police and community and resident groups force their movement from one area to another.
- Other participants indicated that their movement by members of organized crime and pimps was driven by economic drivers like fairs, exhibitions, social gatherings, etc.
- A small percentage of our participants indicated that they have been involved in street-level survival sex as minors and that they were moved often in response to law enforcement pressure.
- Sex workers addicted to substances revealed that they moved within city boundaries, from stroll to stroll, mirroring the movement of street-level drug dealers in order to stay in close proximity to the drugs that they required to stay “well.”
- Sex workers also referred to the contracts that they have signed with organized crime members stating that they were not forewarned that their contracts included being sold to other crime families and being moved within and outside of Canada.
- Others consulted noted market issues like competition and the saturation of sex workers on particular strolls throughout BC forced pimps and crime families to

move them or forced sex workers to 'choose' pimps (leaving one pimp for another after paying a fee) they knew would increase their mobility.

- Sex workers who were not pimp-controlled identified poverty as a trafficker of sex workers and as the primary reason for forced migration.
- Sex workers also stated that the practice of charging the buyers of sex forces them to move or be victims of trafficking. As paying johns are criminalized and moved, sex workers must also move to survive because paying johns rarely return to areas where they have been charged. (Author's note: This practice of displacement is common in cities within Canada.)
- Respondents also stated that criminalization led to their forced migration or susceptibility to traffickers. They shared experiences of being charged for communicating for the purposes of prostitution and being given court-sanctioned "no go" area restrictions. Such restrictions remove access to sex workers' support networks, limit areas where they are permitted to work, access community services and sometimes can even include the area where they live. For example:
 - "I have a 'no go' for the block I live on; if I step onto the edge of the edge of the walkway I am breaking the law."
 - "I can't go to the library [due to no go] the wave pool, the grocery store, all the things that could help me improve my life and make me a better person."
 - Sex workers shared that they cannot just walk on to any stroll and start working. They have to obtain permissions by pimps and crime families in order to do so and that the courts have no understanding of how the street level sex industry works.

Their Words:

- "I always moved to the city the money was in. Like the stampede [in Calgary, Alberta], or Klondike days [in Edmonton, Alberta]."
- "I was driven from Quebec by poverty and ended up in Vancouver. "I have no id and this movement has left me no choice but the street."
- "... the stroll moves where ever the dope is, you have to move with it to make money."
- "I moved to Vancouver for the Indy."
- "They lure us to a "better" place with lies."
- "I was forced from city to city, Vegas, LA, Miami etc."
- "I was sold to different pimps and went to different cities."
- "With the bikers we were moving or being moved cause I was underage and the heat [police enforcement or monitoring] was too much."

Summary Inquiry Question 1

Sex workers discussed a range of issues that contribute to their experiences of forced movement or trafficking. Notably, some individuals did not differentiate between trafficking and forced migration. External forces such as poverty also were identified as being pressures that forced women to move, creating a result that is no different from the experience of being trafficked by organized crime families and/or pimps.

Other respondents highlighted the business aspect of sex work, in which economic drivers and their proximity to them, competition and the saturation of supply were determining factors in their experiences of trafficking and/or forced migration. It is clear from the responses that the factors that contribute to the movement of sex workers in general and their movement in particular relation to domestic trafficking need more exploration.

Inquiry Question 2:

Who does the moving?

This question was asked to obtain a clear understanding of the players involved in trafficking.



Sex worker's Responses:

- Respondents identified police and neighborhoods as traffickers.
- Sex workers identified pimps, members of organized crime, boyfriends and partners as traffickers.
- Some named drug dealers (especially those that they owe money to), as traffickers noting that while they do not take sex workers to new places by force, they do determine where sex workers can work, thereby forcing their movement.

Their Words

- "I never wanted to move and leave my kids, I had to."
- "Who moves us...pimps and the economy."
- "Organized crime, they may threaten us, beat us or even both. If you wanna live, you move."
- "Media because we're trying to get away from them—less visible locations."
- "Drug dealers", "Cops", "Neighbors", "Organizations", "City bylaws."

Summary Inquiry Question 2

It must be noted here that sex workers consulted interpreted trafficking domestically as forced migration. While the external forces above may not fit traditional descriptions of traffickers, these forces and individuals do play a significant role in the migration and trafficking of sex workers within BC. Sex workers identified that many different types of individuals were directing and/or involved in their forcible movement.

Inquiry Question 3:

Why do you think sex workers are “moved” and how do you think the moving occurs?

In this question, respondents express the underlying reasons for ‘movement’ and how this movement occurs.



Sex worker's Responses

Why movement occurs:

- Respondents noted issues of power in the hands of the pimps who have complete control over their lives.
- Also noted were isolation control tactics. Sex workers expressed that sometimes they are moved to ensure that they do not develop relationships with other sex workers, friends and/or sex worker organizations.
- Others noted that they are moved away from their children, families and support networks to ensure that they must rely on traffickers and/or those pimps engaged in trafficking them for their survival.
- Sex workers also stated that they are moved because the community does not want them around and that their existence reduces property values and increases crime rates in neighborhoods.

How movement occurs:

- Sex workers stated that movement occurs quietly. They are unknowingly put in cars and taken on ‘road trips.’
- Others stated that greyhound bus tickets or plane tickets are bought and they are escorted to their destinations by traffickers and pimps or other sex workers who are also being trafficked.
- Many explained that they were manipulated into participating in their movement with promises of a better life and better opportunities.
- Sex workers also shared that at times they have been drugged, bound and kidnapped by rival pimp families find themselves waking up in a new location.

Their Words

- “We are moved because people can’t keep their eyes on their own lives. People don’t like what they see but are unwilling to help.”
- “We are moved by land and air.”
- “I was moved so not to get attached to friends and agencies.”
- “Can’t have girls working where their family is, have to isolate them.”
- “We are moved to make city council happy... “See we’re cleaning it up” This way it appears they have reduced prostitution when they have just moved us to a new location. When the city finds us, it’s the same thing all over again.”
- “They move us as a demonstration of control and isolation.”
- “They move us with manipulation to get us away from family and supports.”
- “Moving happens quietly and without warning.”
- “The young girls in city X and city Y are lured and kidnapped by city pimps.”
- “It’s not always that organized, we have left at a moments notice before.”
- “Sometimes the girls are drugged or fed drugs.”
- “They use fear and move us by force.”
- “They’re lying to us to get us to move.”

Summary Question 3

Sex workers expressed the various reasons related to why and how they are moved. Some noted social rejection and the lack of places where street level sex work can take place. Others shared that pimps and crime families move them to demonstrate power and control over their lives or to ensure isolation and inhibit their ability to develop relationships with those who care about them or those who may support them in leaving their traffickers.

Inquiry Question 4:

Have you taken part in migration (voluntary movement from one place to another) for trade shows, football games, etc., please explain.

This question was asked to explore voluntary migration within street level sex work and the factors that contribute to decision-making around movement.



Sex worker's Responses

- Many respondents stated that they have taken part in voluntary migration for a number of reasons including moving to escape harmful relationships or to be closer to family and children or to move away from family. Overall, sex workers in our study moved around in search of a better life, to enter detox and treatment centers, and to be closer to the 'regular' customers who offered a more predictable and steady revenue stream.
- Others stated that they moved as a business strategy to be close to economic drivers like hockey games, football and golf games, and for other social events that would draw large crowds. Some respondents moved to oil rigs and other areas in the country where there is potential for an ongoing pool of customers.
- Those consulted also stated that they moved to avoid street-level enforcement and high crime areas.
- It was noted that climate was a big factor in the voluntary migration of sex workers into BC, particularly to settle in the Greater Vancouver Regional District.
- A small number of respondents indicated that they have not taken part in migration and continue to work in the street-level sex industry in their home communities.

Their Words

- "I moved to a new city for new customers."
- "Yes, [I moved to] run away from my life or problems I guess I should say. Hoping my life would get better and maybe I could find myself. No luck, still searching. [It] seems I always end up in Vancouver with my boring life...Me, the drugs, and the corner."
- "[I] left shitty relationships, I was tired of being beat and shit."
- "I move to different parts of town depending on if there is a hockey game or something."
- "I was always on the move – even within the cities."
- "I used to always go where the money was. In the summer I would go to Calgary, winter – Vancouver."
- "Yes, Expo 86, I came here from Edmonton."
- "Yes to get clean and to try to get my kids back."
- "I've gone up north to work near the oil rigs."
- "Business prospects."
- "Yes, I've moved to try to be happy, moved for a fresh start."
- "not any more – money can be shitty everywhere these days."

- “Yes, from Alberta, I was told BC was prosperous...it isn’t!”
- “I go to the states often.”
- “To Calgary for the Stampede.”

Summary Inquiry Question 4

Movement within the street level sex industry appears to be highly common practice. Sex workers move within cities, provinces and countries. Sex workers indicate that they move for the same reasons that most others do. They are in search of a better life, improved business opportunities and an opportunity to remove themselves from criminal environments and harmful relationships. It is interesting to note that the same market pressures that influence the actions of traffickers also influence the decisions that sex workers make when they are voluntarily moving from one location to another.

Inquiry Question 5:

Do you think that Canadians care that sex workers are trafficked? Why? Why not?

This question was asked to explore the level of compassion experienced by sex workers from the Canadian public.



Sex worker’s Responses

- Although most consulted felt that Canadians do not care about trafficking, others indicated that they don’t care because they are not aware of the issue at all or, if they are aware, they are not aware that trafficking is an issue within Canada,
- Some stated that the movement of sex workers in and out of neighborhoods throughout the country may contribute to the non-caring attitudes of Canadians.
- Others, from communities where sex worker serving or friendly organizations exist, indicated that Canadians do care because there are places they can go for help.

Their Words

- “No. They want us to disappear. They choose not to deal with it.”
- “No. They want it out of their communities. Out of their backyard.”
- “Oh they care, they care that you’re in their neighborhood.”
- “It brings in a bad crowd. Crime follows us.”

- “They do more now because the government was caught red-handed trafficking dancers and giving them work visas. These cases had exposed the prostitution ring and that it happens in supposed legit cases the government was involved in.”
- “If more people knew about it, more would care.”
- “Canadians don’t care out of ignorance.”
- “No, they aren’t affected by it, they only care when it impacts their lives.”

Summary Inquiry Question 5

Sex workers generally believed that Canadians do not care about the violence they confront daily. Sex workers expressed concern that their ability to live in their community is compromised if they work in the neighborhoods where they live. They also indicated that sex workers do not create the strolls they work on...displacement does.

Inquiry Question 6:

What do you believe needs to be done to reduce harm for domestically trafficked sex workers? (Domestic –within Canada’s provinces and territories)

This question was asked to explore solutions to reduce harms associated with trafficking and/or forced migration.



Sex worker’s Responses

- Respondents stated that there needs to be increased protections to reduce the factors that contribute to trafficking.
- They also stated that Canadian society needs to address the root causes of trafficking including: poverty, inequality, lack of opportunity, reduced access to training and education for the poor to increase their ability to get good paying jobs.
- Also suggested was to get rid of the exploiters within the sex industry. It should be run by sex workers.
- Sex workers also wanted to develop more meaningful relationships with law enforcement.
- Sex workers also suggested greater education for service organizations, the community and law enforcement to increase their knowledge around domestic trafficking and sex work in general.
- Those consulted also wanted to see higher fines and increased jail time for traffickers with an amnesty for individuals who have been trafficked to ensure they can safely provide information. Additionally, sex workers suggest that

whether information is provided to the police about traffickers or not, supports and protections should be put in place for victims. Sex workers are more than evidence, they are thinking, feeling human beings who have experienced trauma.

- There was also a call for increased services, safe houses for sex workers, 1-800 numbers for support and advice, and increased public awareness through campaigns and media regarding domestic trafficking including to educate the community on the signs of trafficking. (Author's note: Similar to billboards that exist in other countries warning traffickers that they are being watched.)

Their words

- "Teach girls how to contact police and other services, make those services safe."
- "Try some sort of 1-800-number they can contact in case of emergency."
- "More networking between community service providers."
- "More networking among sex worker organizations Canada/province wide."
- "More information online to keep us connected."
- "More education."
- "More attention in the news about people being bought and sold in Canada."
- "Heavier fines for people who traffick."
- "Women who are forced should not be the ones prosecuted, they have been prosecuted already!"
- "Laws that come with strict penalties so crime groups get charged."
- "It won't go away."
- "Police need to be more educated."
- "Continue to hold the government accountable."

Summary Inquiry Question 6

Sex workers recommended increased education and communication among service sector and public awareness campaigns focused on identifying the warning signs of trafficking and information on issues related to domestic trafficking. They also suggested support services, housing and increased fines and jail time for those who traffick in persons within the sex industry.

Inquiry Question 7:

What would you like the world to know about domestic trafficking in Canada?

This question provided those consulted with an area to share their thoughts about domestic trafficking within and outside of Canada.



Sex worker's Responses

- There were clear sentiments that Canadians need to understand the issue and that the Canadian government should continue to look to other countries for guidance in addressing domestic trafficking.
- Other thoughts expressed were that trafficking happens right under our noses and it is not safe for sex workers to come forward to report this to law enforcement. Sex workers stated that if traffickers and pimps saw sex workers working with officials to develop solutions, their risk of being trafficked would be reduced. Women in our study would like to work with officials to address this issue.
- Other responses spoke to the harms experienced by women who have been trafficked within Canada.

Their Words

- “The world needs to know who is involved and why. It’s not just on the streets, it’s not just underage girls, it involves violence and drugs at times.”
- “There are experts on the topic – talk to us.”
- “Street-proof your kids and make them feel good about themselves or they can end up here.”
- “Report your kid missing if you lose her.”
- “We are not a squeaky clean country...we have many injustices that have been imposed on women and sex workers like many other countries our country tends to point fingers at us.”
- “Trafficking has no face and wears many hats.”
- “When it is forcible – girls have no support or no way out.”
- “The moving makes it harder for girls to get out. We’re risking our lives whenever we’re moved.”
- “Keep us together to keep each other safe.”
- “It happens on greyhound buses and on cheap West Jet flights put in the girl’s name.”
- “Never assume we’re all bad. We’re humans, not garbage. Reach out. Be supportive.”
- “It’s so embarrassing to be out there, in any city, never mind when its right in front of some old ladies house or where children play.”
- “We are women providing for our families, we’re not all drug addicts, some of us even have jobs that just don’t pay the rent.”
- “Keep a good watchful eye on your kids; I was trafficked when I was 15yrs old.”
- “It’s hard to be a sex worker and be moved all the time and everywhere you go people treat you like crap.”

- “We need help and the Canadian government should try to look at how other countries deal.”
- “I want the world to know about my life and that if given a chance there are lots of things I regret and would change. I have lived a rough life and hope that my experience won’t be wasted so Canada, make some changes on our behalf and stop the cut backs so some of us can have a chance!”
- “It could happen to anyone, any place any time.”
- “Let us go back to our families when you find us.”
- “We want to escape but feel trapped financially.”
- “Canada is not exempt from this heinous human situation.”
- “The criminal element is using sex workers for their profit and pleasure.”
- “We are someone’s daughter, mother, sister and we need to be protected and accepted. [Sex work] is what we do not who we are.”
- “We are being moved to places that are not safe.”

Summary Inquiry Question 7

In response to this question, sex workers shared that Canada is not exempt from the buying and selling of individuals for profit. They shared their experiences of feeling unsafe and warned others to become informed and to support them in their circumstances and ending the cycles of poverty, exploitation and reduced choice for women.

From the Curb: Sex Workers Perspectives on Violence and Domestic Trafficking

Report Recommendations

1. Overall, sex workers urge an increase in public awareness around issues of violence and domestic trafficking. A public awareness campaign should be initiated by sex workers and allies to bring these issues to the forefront of public attention.
2. A moratorium on Sections 210 and 213 of the Canadian Criminal Code must be immediately enacted as a short term strategy to increase safety among sex workers and reduce exploitation from organized crime, pimps, customers, some law enforcement agents and some municipally licensed escort agencies. (See Appendix E, BCCEW position on decriminalization)

Under Section 210, it is illegal to work in or operate a common bawdy house. Sex workers who are excluded from or choose not to work at licensed escort agencies are forced to work on-street as independents or for organized crime and/or pimps. Off-street cooperatively run brothels, similar to those in countries where sex work has been decriminalized would be one solution (Countries using this approach include: Australia, New Zealand, Greece, Sweden, etc.). Sex workers are then free to work in safe spaces, have opportunities to rent rooms at reasonable rates and take part in sexual exchange in environments that are less isolated and therefore safer.

Section 213 makes it illegal to communicate for the purposes of prostitution in a public place or a place visible to the public. (Within this legislation a vehicle on a public street is a public place). The legislation makes it impossible for sex workers to negotiate the details of transactions with customers. They are reduced to making statements such as “Do you want to party!” rather than being able to negotiate location, sexual acts (what they will and will not do), price, duration and other key elements before entering into a customer’s vehicle. This criminalization of negotiation infantilizes sex workers: it tremendously increases their risk of situational violence particularly when customers, some of whom are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, react violently when their expectations for services don’t match the services offered.

3. Education and networking needs to take place among sex workers, law enforcement and other stakeholders to develop solutions to social concerns and to increase the meaningful participation of sex workers in the issues that affect their lives. Exclusionary approaches to problem solving on issues related to sex work must end.

4. Through dialogue and program enhancement, service organizations located in remote areas throughout BC must develop services that are either sex worker serving or friendly. While we understand that enhanced services are critical, individual community members who come into contact with sex workers also can be instrumental in creating acceptance and support for sex workers (e.g. .storekeepers, bus drivers, residents, etc.)
5. For those sex workers who wish to remain in and take control over the sex industry the provision of supports to create sex worker-run off-street venues which include accessibility to municipal licensing to enable them to legally operate off-street venues and an indication of where they can conduct their business in on-street areas that are free from harassment, well lit and phone accessible. While sex workers do acknowledge that working in communities is not ideal and also note that de facto strolls are created and moved by community pressure exerted upon law enforcement, for too long, communities have been telling sex workers where they can't be. Sex workers are now asking: where they can be?
6. For those sex workers who wish to transition away from street-level sex work or from other areas of the sex industry, the provision of a continuum of services including: housing, treatment, re- training opportunities, scholarships, and livable-wage employment is urgently required.
7. Sex workers should be provided with resources and training including training that that enhances their safety (e.g. self defense and de-escalation training, environmental scanning training that support sex workers in identifying vehicles and individuals.)
8. A higher level of focus from law enforcement agencies on domestic trafficking is required as those domestically trafficked routinely experience similar conditions of confinement, isolation and exploitation as that experienced by individuals who are trafficked across international borders.
9. An enhanced complaints system to better support complaints against law enforcement bodies and individual officers is required. Due to the high risk of retaliation and the lack of credibility afforded to sex workers, they tend not to file complaints. More work needs to be done to build relationships between law enforcement and sex workers to address this and other problematic impacts related to the unequal power dynamics between sex workers and law enforcement.

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Appendix A

Inquiry Questions

Violence: A British Columbia Perspective

- 1. How would you define violence against sex workers?**
- 2. What conditions create environments for violence against sex workers where you live?**
- 3. What do you think are the most common acts of violence committed upon sex workers?**
- 4. Who do you believe commits these violent acts?**
- 5. Why do you believe these individuals commit violence against sex workers?**
- 6. Where can sex workers go for help in your area? What kind of help do they get there?**
- 7. How supportive has the following been in addressing violence against sex workers:**
 - Police**
 - The courts**
 - Health services (doctors, nurses, hospitals)**
- 8. If they have not been supportive, why do you think that is?**
- 9. Do you think that Canadians care about violence against sex workers? Why/Why not?**
- 10. What are the major things you believe can be done to reduce the risk of violence upon sex workers?**
- 11. Is there anything you would like people to know about the violence you have experienced?**
- 12. Hate Crime is defined as an offence committed against another person, with the specific intent to cause harm to that person due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or culture, etc. Do you consider violence against sex workers to be a hate crime?**

Inquiry Questions cont.

Trafficking: A British Columbia Perspective

Trafficking has been defined as: the forced movement of sex worker(s) from one region/province/location to another unfamiliar location”

- 1. Have you ever been trafficked? If yes, how have you been trafficked?**
- 2. Who does the moving? (members of organized crime, pimps, poverty, police)**
- 3. Why do you think sex workers are “moved” and how do you think the moving occurs?**
- 4. Have you taken part in migration (moving from one place to another in search of a better life) for trade shows, football games, etc.? Please explain.**
- 5. Do you think that Canadians care about that sex workers are trafficked? Why/Why not?**
- 6. What would you like the people to know about trafficking in Canada?**
- 7. What do you believe needs to be done to reduce harm for sex workers trafficked in Canada?**

From the Curb: Sex Workers Perspectives on Violence and Domestic Trafficking

Appendix B

A Note from the Author

This writer presents this work not as research that tests theories, but as an exploratory inquiry that proposes relationships among key themes that have emerged from dialogue with sex workers. Having applied 12 years' experience providing support to those involved, at risk of entry and transitioning from the sex industry and serving as Director of a Vancouver sex worker organization, fully positions the author as an activist. As no researcher is value-free, the background of the writer is worth mentioning.

Grounded Theory is used by qualitative researchers to support the generation of theory and was applied to help organize the data collected from sex workers in this consultation. A relationship has emerged through the review of data between social isolation and the prevalence of violence⁴. This writer does not support the notion that sex work itself increases women's risks of violence, but that social isolation, stigma and the exclusion of sex workers from protective societal institutions does. For example, if sex workers are not seen or treated as members of a community and the community then manifests and models these values through criminalization, displacement and relegation, all those that encounter sex workers, (health services, criminal justice, social services, law enforcement, violent customers), will repeat these practices until they become normative and/or systemic.

In the "broken windows" theory of urban decay, made famous in a 1982 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, by political scientist James Q. Wilson and criminologist George L. Kelling, they state "If a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken... one unrepaired window is a signal that no one cares". If the window is not fixed, vandalism will flourish, if it is fixed the message that vandalism will not be tolerated is sent.

In relation to sex workers, as violence continues to go unchecked and violent customers and predators get the message that the community does not protect sex workers and does not care, sex workers will be seen as disposable and violence against them will continue with relative impunity. This writer would like to see this "broken windows" theory applied to people. Let's begin to address the behaviors, environments and conditions that promote violence against sex workers and send the message that violence, like broken windows, will not be tolerated.

⁴ All contributions from participants, whether they proved or disproved the authors' theory of social isolation increasing violence were included in this document. Further deductive research is required to fully explore this relationship of concepts.

Appendix C

Canada: Criminal Code - Prostitution

Canadian *Criminal Code* Provisions pertaining to prostitution (1985)

Bawdy-house

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

(2) Every one who

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

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

(c) as owner, landlord, lessor, tenant, occupier, agent or otherwise having charge or control of any place, knowingly permits the place or any part thereof to be let or used for the purposes of a common bawdy-house,
is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

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

Procuring

212. (1) Every one who

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

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

(c) knowingly conceals a person in a common bawdy-house,

(d) procures or attempts to procure a person to become, whether in or out of Canada, a prostitute,

(e) procures or attempts to procure a person to leave the usual place of abode of that person in Canada, if that place is not a common bawdy-house, with intent that the person may become an inmate or frequenter of a common bawdy-house, whether in or out of Canada,

(f) on the arrival of a person in Canada, directs or causes that person to be directed or takes or causes that person to be taken, to a common bawdy-house,

(g) procures a person to enter or leave Canada, for the purpose of prostitution,

(h) for the purposes of gain, exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in such manner as to show that he is aiding, abetting or compelling that person to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally,

(i) applies or administers to a person or causes that person to take any drug, intoxicating liquor, matter or thing with intent to stupefy or overpower that person in order thereby to enable any person to have illicit sexual intercourse with that person, or

(j) lives wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution of another person, is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

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

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

(a) for the purposes of profit, aids, abets, counsels or compels the person under that age to engage in or carry on prostitution with any person or generally, and

(b) uses, threatens to use or attempts to use violence, intimidation or coercion in relation to the person under that age,

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

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

Offence in Relation to Prostitution

Section 213:

“Every person who in a public place or place open to public view

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

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

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

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

Appendix D

Canada: Trafficking Legislation

Canada: Criminal Code Sections related to Trafficking

279 (1): Kidnapping

279. (1) Every person commits an offence who kidnaps a person with intent

(a) to cause the person to be confined or imprisoned against the person's will;

(b) to cause the person to be unlawfully sent or transported out of Canada against the person's will; or

(c) to hold the person for ransom or to service against the person's will.

279 (2): Forcible Confinement

(2) Every one who, without lawful authority, confines, imprisons or forcibly seizes another person is guilty of

(a) an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years; or

(b) an offence punishable on summary conviction and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding eighteen months.

279.01 Trafficking in Persons

(1) Every person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person, for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation is guilty of an indictable offence and liable

(a) to imprisonment for life if they kidnap, commit an aggravated assault or aggravated sexual assault against, or cause death to, the victim during the commission of the offence; or

(b) to imprisonment for a term of not more than fourteen years in any other case.

Exploitation

279.04 For the purposes of sections 279.01 to 279.03, a person exploits another person if they

(a) cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service;

Canada: International Trafficking in Persons

In June 2002, the Canadian government passed new legislation, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which included sections related to addressing the growing phenomenon of international human trafficking, the Act makes trafficking in persons a new offence. It introduces severe penalties of up to life in prison and/or fines of up to one million dollars for people smugglers and those caught trafficking in humans. Penalties have also been introduced for fraud and forged documents.

Canada: *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*

Trafficking in Persons

118. (1) No person shall knowingly organize the coming into Canada of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception or use or threat of force or coercion.

(2) For the purpose of subsection (1), “organize”, with respect to persons, includes their recruitment or transportation and, after their entry into Canada, the receipt or harbouring of those persons.

United Nations Definition of Trafficking

1. “Trafficking in persons' shall mean 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;
2. The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
3. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;
4. 'Child' shall mean any person less than eighteen years of age.”⁵

⁵ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, G.A. Res. 25, annex II, U.N. GAOR, 55th Sess., Supp. No. 49, at 60, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (Vol. I) (2001), *entered into force* Sept. 9, 2003. The Protocol has now been signed by 81 countries, including Canada.

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Appendix E

BCCEW: Position on Reform of Canada's Prostitution Laws

The Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws (SCSL) was established by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Security and Emergency Preparedness in November 2004. The SCSL's mandate was to study solicitation laws in order to improve the safety of sex-trade workers and to recommend changes that would reduce the exploitation of and violence against sex-trade workers.

The SCSL was established, in large part, as a result of public reaction to Vancouver's Missing Women case which is now before the B.C. Supreme Court. At the time of the Sub-Committee's establishment, the federal Minister of Justice identified protecting the vulnerable as a key priority for the Sub-Committee.

Early in 2005, the SCSL held public hearings in across Canada including in Vancouver. At the hearings, the SCSL requested that those making submissions respond to the following two questions:

- 1). "What legislative approach should the federal government adopt to control the activities linked to prostitution (prohibitionist, criminalization, decriminalization, neo-abolitionism or legalization)?" (See Appendix A for an explanation of these terms.)
- 2) The legislative modifications adopted have to go along with social and educative programs able to tackle prostitution's subjacent problems. What are, in the participants' opinion, the initiatives that should be considered in this matter?"

Members of the BCCEW presented at Vancouver hearings on these issues along with Vancouver sex workers organizations, academics and community members. Through two local sex worker serving organizations (PACE Society and WISH Drop In Center Society) women were supported to spend an afternoon with SCSL members during their Vancouver visit. At great risk, women overcame their fears and opened their hearts and minds to the process. They shared their personal stories and urged members of the Subcommittee to change the laws and consider other options for regulating the sex industry aside from the criminalization of sex workers.

In its submission to the Subcommittee, BCCEW supported "decriminalization of Section 213 and 210 of the *Criminal Code*." BCCEW argued that "Street level enforcement ... leads to the displacement of sex workers to more remote times of day, areas of any given city and [therefore] isolates them from their selective kinships

making them increasingly susceptible to violence.”⁶ They also argued that “... the criminalization of negotiation [between a sex worker and her client] infantilizes sex workers and forces them to communicate services and boundaries in a non-verbal way which leaves the customer in a position of power.” BCCEW submitted that they were “... firmly saying no to the Swedish model as it makes it illegal to pay sex workers directly. Sex workers already have brokers, so this would just formalize the brokerage system, and we don't need that.”

The BCCEW submission also recommended:

- “The establishment of work/live municipal bylaws which include the selling of sexual services;
- The Charter of Rights and Freedoms be amended to include discrimination against occupation to provide an enhanced level of legal protection to individuals involved in the sex trade; and
- The establishment of cooperatively structured off-street venues where sex workers themselves create and uphold collective operating principles (including agreements on standards minimum charges for services, occupational health and safety guidelines, group benefits for maternity leave, etc.)”

It is our understanding that due to the 2005 federal election and the subsequent change in government, issues related to safety for sex workers in Canada are no longer a priority for the federal government. The BCCEW is urging that all those committed to creating safe, violence-free environment for sex workers, contact the federal government to advocate for immediate publication of the Subcommittee’s report so that the public discussion and debate on changes to Canada’s prostitution law can resume. As noted above, in this debate, the BCCEW will continue its advocacy for full decriminalization of prostitution in Canada.

⁶ From BCCEW submission to: Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Evidence Contents, (38 Parliament, 1st Session) , March 29, 2005