



Curtin University

SEXUAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AND WELLBEING OF SEX WORKERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE LASH 2.0 STUDY

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LASH 2.0 STUDY OVERVIEW

Aim: To investigate the impact of the law on WA sex workers; their health and safety; and the intersections between WA sex workers, service providers and police.

Objectives:

- Describe the size and types of sex worker services in WA including parlours, escort services, private workers, workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, male and transgender workers.
- Assess the health of sex workers including sexual health, mental health, injuries and violence.
- Assess the access of sex workers working in a range of settings to health promotion and health and safety resources.
- Enumerate and describe police and court charges for sex workers, their managers and their support services
- Describe the interactions and experiences of WA sex workers with service providers and the police.
- Compare the situation in 2016 to what was described in the 2007 LASH Study.

RESEARCH TEAM & FUNDING

- **Associate Professor Linda Selvey:** School of Public Health, Curtin University (now UQ)
- **Dr Roanna Lobo:** School of Public Health, Curtin University
- **Dr Jonathan Hallett:** School of Public Health, Curtin University
- **Ms Kahlia McCausland:** School of Public Health, Curtin University
- **Professor Basil Donovan:** Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales
- **Ms Julie Bates:** Principal of Urban Realists

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METHODS

1. Environmental scan
 - Perth, Bunbury & Kalgoorlie
 - challenges
2. Sex worker survey – 354 participants, 52 men
 - peer researchers
 - survey translation
3. In-depth interviews
 - key advisors
 - sex workers – 17 participants
4. STI/BBV prevalence study
 - retrospective data
 - prospective data
5. Venue audit
 - OH&S
6. Police charges and court outcomes
 - DotAG

ROLE OF PEERS

- Peer member of the research team
- Nine peer researchers employed
 - One male
 - Five Asian women (2 Thai, 1 Korean, 2 Chinese)
- Peers' roles:
 - Study recruitment
 - Identification of and visits to parlours/brothels
 - Visits to areas where street-based sex workers work.
- Growth opportunity

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Characteristic (number responding to this question)	Number	Percent
Sex assigned at birth (354)		
Male	68	19.2
Female	286	80.8
Gender identity (351)		
Male	52	14.8
Female	283	80.6
Genderqueer	11	3.1
Age group (349)		
18-30 years	183	52.5
31-50 years	148	42.8
Country of birth (353)		
Australia/New Zealand	139	39.3
China/Hong Kong/Taiwan	53	15.0
Thailand	29	8.2
Korea	15	4.3
Malaysia	14	4.0
Other	73	21.0

DEMOGRAPHICS continued

- 46% have worked in the sex industry for 2 years or less

Work settings

- 55% do at least some private work
- 34% work in a massage shop (at least some of the time)
- 24 respondents (7%) did at least some street-based work

Income

- Sex work was the main source of income for 66% of respondents

English language skills

- 52% reported having good English language skills

KEY FINDINGS – WELL BEING

Confidence

“...and I don’t know when it started I started appreciating my body a lot more, which was really interesting” (ID03, female)

Connection

“I really enjoy the connection I have with people, and being able to take them on adventures” (ID05, female)

Financial

“...like being, for the first time ever being the breadwinner of the house” (ID06 female)

Freedom

“I like being my own boss” (ID17 female)

	N (%)
Enhance	99 (40)
Hinder	51 (21)
Both enhance/hinder	49 (20)
Neither enhance/hinder	46 (19)

Table: Reported impact of sex work on well being

33% Asian workers reported that sex work hindered their well being compared to 16% of non-Asian workers (p=0.005)

KEY FINDINGS – CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY

Increase in private work vs brothel/parlour

- Use of internet to promote services
- Potential increase in vulnerability for new workers
- More difficult for outreach and support

Increase in workers from Asian countries

- Language challenges
- Racism

Decrease in demand for services due to economic downturn

- Increased stress for workers
- Potential increase in risk taking (condomless sex, choice of clients)

KEY FINDINGS – STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

- 27% experienced stigma, discrimination or negative treatment from Police officers at least once
- 18% experienced stigma from General Practitioners at least once
- Stigma and discrimination major impact on SW's lives
 - Disclosure
 - Relationships
 - Isolation, particularly Chinese workers

KEY FINDINGS – IMPACT OF THE LAW

Overall negative impact

- Outreach difficult – particularly small private brothels
- Some clients' perception of illegality gave a license to treat SW badly
- Street-based sex work more underground and less opportunities for safety
- Distrust of police even when work is legal

Less policing in WA

- May reflect increase in private sex work
- Police generally 'disinterested' in policing sex work
- BUT, many have had bad experiences with the police

KEY FINDINGS – HEALTH AND SAFETY

Drugs and alcohol

Current drug use	N (%)
Smoking	155 (44)
Binge drinking daily/weekly	110 (34)
Marijuana	40 (11)
Methamphetamines	30 (9)

Current use of marijuana and ecstasy more common in males than females

Threats and assaults

From clients at least once in the last 12 months	N (%)
Threat	173 (35)
Assault	71 (22)
Pressure to do something they didn't want to do	153 (47)

49% reported being uncomfortable about going to the police if robbed, assaulted or threatened

CONCLUSIONS

- Sex work can be beneficial for some workers
- Current legal framework is harmful
- ‘Swedish model’ would reduce demand with harmful effects
- Changes in industry has challenges for health and outreach services
- Stigma and discrimination and the current legal framework are major barriers to access support, police, health care