



The Policing of Sex Work in London, Ontario

Instruments of Surveillance and Moments of Resistance

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**"There's a difference between *being*
safe and feeling safe"**

A presentation of findings from a
community based participatory needs
assessment with street-level sex
workers

Status of Sex Work in Canada



- Street-level sex work (SLSW) has been defined as the exchange of sexual services for resources related to basic survival, which may include money, shelter, illicit drugs or other commodities
- Within Canada, where selling sex is **legal**, it remains quasi-criminalized by virtue of the fact that associated activities are **illegal**:
 - communicating in public with clients, the purchase of sexual services by others,
 - profiting or benefiting materially from income obtained from others' sexual services
 - Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Acts, s.286.2, 2014

SafeSpace circa 2009

- A few women had a vision
- Lived and worked in a neighborhood where there was shaming of sex workers (cameras being installed, legislation being challenged in court system)
- Wanted a space for women where they would not be judged
- Confidential
- No Violence or Exploitation





But SafeSpace is so much more ...

- Women accessing the space
- Volunteers
- Students
- Allies
- Key Allies (i.e. ANOVA, MLHU)



Research Objective



To identify the health and safety needs of street-based sex workers in London, Ontario, as described by workers themselves.



Guiding research question: "What would assist you to live and work with enhanced safety and dignity in our community?"



Characteristic	Mean (Range) (N=24)
Age	41 years (24 – 57 years)
Length of time as a sex worker	9 years (Less than one month – 30 years or more)
	Percentage Response
Self-identified as belonging to a racialized group	33% 71% of women who identified as a minority, identified as Aboriginal
Housing: Apartment House Homeless Unknown	67% 9% 9% 14%
Past or present substance abuse: Yes No Unknown	71% 19% 9%
Self-Reported Health Issues: Yes No Unknown	67% yes 23% no 10% unknown/unanswered

Relationships



Women who access SafeSpace identified their needs for safety and dignity as shaped by their **relationships**:

- *Relationships to public space*
- *Relationships with community services*
- Relationships to SafeSpace
- Relationships to themselves and others



Relationship to Public Space(s)



Public spaces are subject to surveillance and publically policed:

- Formalized – systemic, regulated forms of policing
- Informal – citizen / informal policing

**RESTROOM
FOR
PATRONS
ONLY**

“I try to go and work on the street and it’s the cops that wreck our ability to be able to work properly. We have to stand out there a little extra longer because they feel like harassing us.”

“This place [London], I think it kind of forces people into that profession because honestly like trying to busk – going around trying to busk or anything like that, like I get a lot of criticism for that and I’m like okay. So great. So am I just supposed to go put a dick in my mouth for money, what am I supposed to do since I’m over 25 years old and, you know, in a jam somewhere where I don’t know anything and know anyone. That’s great. It’s like I’ll go do that then instead of play my guitar. *Excuse me.*”

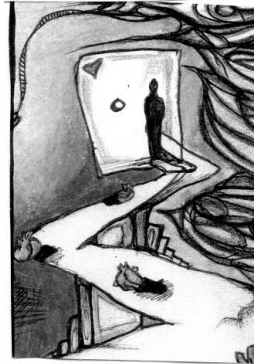
“A lot of the girls get a lot of criticism from like public places, restaurants, whatever and it doesn’t even matter. It seems so many people get hated on. Like even they go in to purchase something ... They’re riding them when they’re in the bathroom. It’s so rude that they can’t even put their makeup on, nothing.”

“...there is nothing worse than being on the street and you have a meltdown and right away the cops on you thinking you know you are out of control.”

Relationship with Community Services

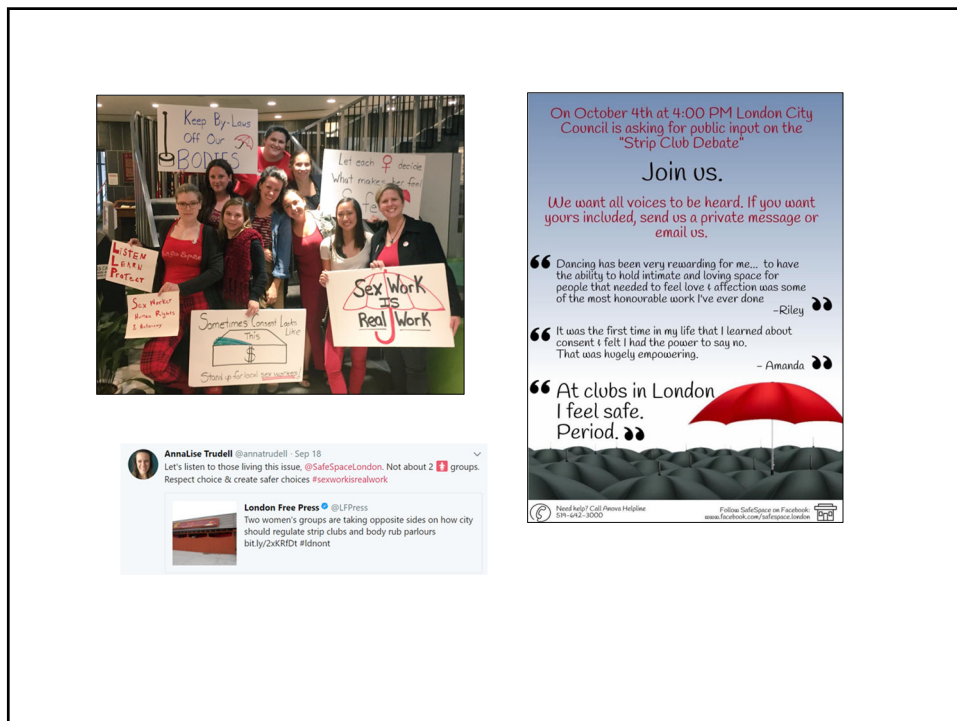


- Performing roles to access services
- Needing to know the systems to access the systems
- Being a 'statistic' to fit an agency's agenda



“Like a lot of the community resources, it keeps you on the same level. It doesn't – it's not actually to better you. It's just to kind of sustain a lifestyle that's not a healthy lifestyle at all.”

“I avoided most of them [community services] because between addiction and sex work and for the most part, being on street level, people are not pleasant so – unless I put on my articulate voice and – and sober enough to use it.”



London police to release names of johns charged with buying sex



Police say they won't do so in cases where naming could identify a victim or hamper an investigation

Paula Duhatschek · CBC News · Posted: Feb 21, 2019 7:31 PM ET | Last Updated: February 21



Police say they will begin releasing names of those charged with buying sex in cases where it's legally possible. (Evan Mitsui/CBC)

Sex workers, allies lash out at new London police policy to name sex buyers

JENNIFER SIEMAN · Updated February 22, 2019



Sex workers and their allies are blasting a London police policy change to release the names of men charged with buying sex, saying the new rules will put sex workers at increased risk by driving buyers further underground.

CRIME February 22, 2019 7:55 pm

SafeSpace London fears naming johns could increase danger for sex workers

Global News RADIO
980 CFPL



By Jacquelyn LeBel

News Announcer 980 CFPL

Earlier this year, London Police Chief John Pare announced his force will release the names of so-called johns.

"This is a warning to make better choices in life," Pare told a meeting of the London Police Services Board in February. "This is not a choice that you should be doing in purchasing sex and putting victims at the risk they're facing."

Help Make Sex Work Safer in London: Calling for the LPS to Reverse their Policy Direction



Safe Space started this petition to safespacelondon@gmail.com

Attention: Chief John Pare

582 have signed. Let's get to 1,000!



Help Make Sex Work Safer in London: Calling for the LPS to...

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Tweet to your followers

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LONDON POLICE NAME FIRST ALLEGED 'JOHNS' UNDER NEW POLICY



As part of their effort to combat human trafficking, London police have posted the names of four people accused of soliciting sex.

This is the first time police have released the names of alleged 'johns' under the new initiative, although they are usually part of the public record accessible at the London courthouse.

The men range in age from 18 to 70 years old, three are from London and one is from Toronto.

Police posted the names of the men in a news release on their website, sharing that link on their Facebook and Twitter accounts, though they did not repeat the names in the social media posts.

The 'john sting' was reportedly conducted Wednesday night at a London hotel, during which the men are alleged to have made contact with an undercover officer to purchase sex.

Each of the four men was charged with communication for the purpose of obtaining sexual services.

St. Thomas police turn to citizens to ask: Should we name sex buyers too?

St. Thomas police shouldn't put too much stock into the results of an online poll about whether they should release the names of people charged with buying sex, an expert cautions.

LAURA BROADLEY, ST. THOMAS TIMES JOURNAL Updated: April 26, 2019

St. Thomas police chief says no to naming johns



Police will not identify 20 men accused of trying to buy sex after prostitution sting

CBC News - Posted: Apr 25, 2019 12:57 PM ET | Last Updated: April 25

- We are visible in the media and in our joint projects with Maggie's Sex Work Action Project, Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Work Advocacy Network, and most recently the Canadian HIV AIDS Legal Network in their report *The Perils of Protection*, which was a research about the experiences of sex workers in Ontario with law enforcement. We are also in regular contact with the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, where we participate within information sharing and capacity building workshops on messaging and law reform advocacy at municipal, provincial, and national levels. Our use of social media allows us to connect with groups regionally and internationally.