



# **Street-based Sex Work in Christchurch**

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## Background

In 2003 sex work in New Zealand was decriminalised. The Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) provides protections for sex workers to safeguard their health and safety as well as their human rights. This applies to all sex workers, including those who work in brothels, work privately, work on the internet, or work on the street. Studies carried out subsequent to the implementation of the PRA have shown the positive gains made for sex workers in all sectors through the change in legislation (Abel, Fitzgerald et al. 2007, Abel, Fitzgerald et al. 2010, Armstrong 2010, Armstrong 2014, Armstrong 2017)

This research project, funded by the Lotteries Grants Board and with ethical approval from the University of Otago Ethics Committee, has focussed on street-based sex work which is acknowledged as being the most vulnerable sector of the sex industry (Lowman 2000, Kinnell 2006, Abel, Fitzgerald et al. 2010). Street-based sex workers tend to experience more violence, are more likely to be involved in drug use and are less likely than their 'indoor' counterparts to use condoms in every commercial transaction (Benoit and Millar 2001, Plumridge and Abel 2001, Vanwesenbeeck 2001, Sanders 2004, Abel, Fitzgerald et al. 2010). Street-based sex workers are also likely to be less educated, of lower socio-economic status, more likely to report behaviour disorders in childhood and adolescence and more likely to have been sexually abused prior to entering the industry than 'indoor' workers (Vanwesenbeeck 2001).

There have been attempts since the PRA was passed to address the perceived public nuisance effects of street-based sex workers to residents and business-owners in the vicinity of where they wait for clients. The earthquakes in Christchurch caused a disruption to street-based sex work. Prior to this, most street-based sex work was confined to the area in Manchester Street between Lichfield Street and Bealey Avenue, as well as around the Latimer Square area. After the February 2011 earthquake, cordons came up around the city and some street-based sex workers ceased to work, others moved to working in Ferry Road, and some moved to work in the residential zone of Manchester Street north of Bealey Avenue. As the cordons retreated, most sex workers moved back across Bealey Avenue but some persisted in working in the residential zone. This has caused much tension and unease for residents in this area.

Previous research conducted in the United Kingdom has demonstrated that the best solutions to community tensions are those which are developed in consultation with all involved, i.e. sex workers, community, agencies, councils and police, so that the needs of different groups can be balanced (Pitcher, Campbell et al. 2006). This research therefore sought to better understand how street-based sex workers and outreach workers perceived the tensions with community members in which they work, and equally what the community (residents and/or business owners) perceived as the key tensions with sex workers. In addition, we looked to explore local council perceptions of the regulation of street-based sex work in their localities.

The study also aimed to develop a reference group consisting of representatives from all groups to work through possible options for a solution. The Christchurch City Council, however, set up a Collaborative Working Group in October 2017 which effectively has taken

the place of the proposed reference group. This report serves to outline the findings of the research to inform discussion in the Collaborative Working Group.

## The Study

Between July and September 2017, interviews were undertaken in Christchurch with:

- 13 street-based sex workers;
- 5 outreach workers;
- 4 council staff and 1 city councilor;
- 10 residents.

Further interviews were carried out in Wellington and Auckland but are not reported on in this report.

All participants received an information sheet giving details on the study and were interviewed at a place of their choice. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed for this report using a content analysis and the following topic areas will be discussed:

- Street-based sex workers' experiences of violence;
- Street-based sex workers and the community;
- The community's perceptions of the key tensions in having street-based sex workers in their neighbourhood;
- Street-based sex workers' needs;
- Location of work.

The results indicate a community where residents are somewhat divided in their acceptance of street-based sex workers in the community and who experience mild to severe aggravation caused by having street-based sex work in the vicinity of their homes, and a street-based sex worker community who experience violence, abuse, discrimination and scapegoating.

## Experiences of violence

The literature confirms that street-based sex-workers experience higher rates of violence compared to indoor sex workers (Church, Henderson et al. 2001, Abel, Fitzgerald et al. 2007, Harris, Nilan et al. 2011, Deering, Amin et al. 2014) and the general population (Salfati, James et al. 2008, Simic and Rhodes 2009). The number of street-based sex workers who have experienced violence has been cited to be as high as 100% (Sanders and Campbell 2007), and street-based sex workers themselves consider the risk of violence to be unavoidable (Harris, Nilan et al. 2011, Sanders 2016). Violence towards sex workers is also seriously under-reported (Van Doorninck and Campbell 2006) and overlooked in international agendas to prevent violence (Deering, Amin et al. 2014).

There have been debates as to whether violence has reduced since decriminalisation especially in the light of four well-publicised murders of street-based sex workers in Christchurch since the law change. Over half of the street-based sex workers interviewed in this study reported experiencing violence while working. Some accepted violence as an unavoidable occupational hazard:

*You should be prepared that [violence] is a possibility. [Sex work participant 1]*

*We knew what comes with the street...its putting yourself at risk. [Sex work participant 2]*

Sex workers are often victims of gratuitous violence (Lowman 2000) and one worker described several instances where she experienced unprovoked violence on the street:

*I got assaulted four times and knocked out twice...I got my head pushed into those containers...one was actually choking me. [Sex work participant 4]*

An outreach worker described a 19 year old worker who was “gang raped and then dumped away from Manchester Street” by a group of men in a work van [Outreach worker 1].

There is a perception that violence stems from stigma towards sex workers. Street-based sex workers are often stigmatised to such a degree that they are seen as a ‘disposable population’ (Lowman 2000) which makes them targets for violent attacks. A sex worker described a client’s response after she refused to engage in anal sex with him:

*He thought he had the right to throw a beer bottle at me...cause I was trash on the street. [Sex worker participant 5]*

Outreach workers often have to deal with the aftermath of violent incidents and they also remarked on the fact that because street-based workers are stigmatised, they are vulnerable to violence:

*Someone who’s feeling like beating up a woman or raping her, they’ll go and seek someone vulnerable like that out I feel. [Outreach worker 2]*

Lowman (2000) classifies client violence as either 'situational' (when a dispute arises with a genuine client) or 'predatory' (where the client approaches the encounter with violent intentions, in other words is posing as a client). The source of physical and sexual violence experienced by street-workers, however, is not limited to clients or men posing as clients, but also includes pimps (Sanders 2001), partners/boyfriends, police officers (Shannon and Csete 2010), street associates and other street-based sex workers (Armstrong 2014) as well as other members of the public (Pitcher, Campbell et al. 2006, Armstrong 2014, Sanders 2016). Links have also been made between high-profile anti-sex work campaigns and sex workers' experience of violence (Lowman 2000, Kinnell 2008). Homelessness, substance abuse problems and enforcement-based policing have also been found to contribute to violence (Shannon, Kerr et al. 2009).

The most frequent examples of violence against street-based sex workers in this study were perpetrated by people driving past them while they stood on the street. Street-based sex workers and outreach workers in this study described how missiles of various sorts were often thrown from vehicles in addition to the use of abusive language:

*I got bottled in the face one time I was out there...someone yelled out something and this bottle just shattered on my cheek bone. [Sex worker participant 6]*

*It's usually other people in cars screaming and yelling out abuse and sometimes I've had bottles thrown at me and I've had eggs thrown at me [Sex worker participant 7]*

*You've got more sinister things like throwing objects and blood and shit and rotten eggs. [Outreach worker 2]*

*We were out the other night and just for 20 minutes there was, what, three cars that went by, chucking abuse. [Outreach worker 4]*

Street-based sex workers with substance abuse issues are more vulnerable to violence (Day and Ward 2007, Harris, Nilan et al. 2011). Outreach workers in this study estimated that the majority of street-based sex workers face substance abuse issues:

*The majority have taken something...maybe 70 or 80%. [Outreach worker 4]*

*I would say 70% would be [taking something], yeah, alcohol, drugs. [Outreach worker 2]*

A relationship of trust between street-based sex workers and Police would encourage more reporting of violent incidents. There is an improved relationship between street-based sex workers and police since decriminalisation, especially in Christchurch (Abel 2010) and sex workers are more likely to approach police, but a reticence to report violence remains as well as a perception of bias:

*I called them about a dodgy vehicle once....I don't know if they took the complaint seriously, cause I called them a couple of times.... you kind of take things into your own hands...I think we are judged for working in the sex industry by the police. (Sex worker participant 5)*

*The reason why I didn't go to the police was because I always had it in mind that that sort of stuff was illegal, even though laws had changed by then. (Sex worker participant 8)*

*So I felt as by myself, [the police] may not be doing anything, but I found when I actually spoke to the NZPC about it that they, when they ring the cop, police, that's when there was a bit more action. (Sex worker participant 7)*

*I probably should have gone and reported it, but it was more of the shame of I put myself in this situation. (Sex worker participant 6)*

Street-based sex workers are more stigmatised than their indoor peers because of their visibility (Harris, Nilan et al. 2011). There are strong correlations between sex worker stigma and risk of violence (Scambler 2007, Harris, Nilan et al. 2011) and stigma is also a contributing factor to underreporting of violence (Shannon, Kerr et al. 2009).

## Street-based sex workers and the community

The public nature of street-based sex work means that street-based sex workers have many more interactions with other members of the community than indoor-based sex workers. Community tensions and vigilante group action can force sex workers to work from dangerous, isolated locations (Sanders 2001). Whilst some members of the general public would prefer that sex work be limited to indoor-based, this is not an option for many sex workers (Pitcher, Campbell et al. 2006). Many sex workers prefer to work from the street for various reasons (e.g. greater autonomy, more flexible hours, potential to earn more money and more control over their services), regardless of the higher incidence of violence (Abel and Fitzgerald 2012, Armstrong 2014).

Most street-based sex workers reported abuse from passers-by while they were working.

*I get abused every time I'm out there from drunken girls with their boyfriends – 'oh you slut.' [Sex worker participant 6]*

Residents also said that they heard the insults of passers-by:

*They're yelling at them 'filthy sluts' and yeah, all sorts of language. [Resident 1]*

As well as direct violence and abuse from passers-by, street-based sex workers experienced more subtle forms of disdain from the community as a whole. They felt stigmatised and judged:

*You get a bit disrespected...we're looked down [on] as lower class...it's not fair. [Sex worker participant 6]*

*It's not a nice feeling...you're not out there to hurt anybody. [Sex worker participant 9]*

Interviews with Manchester Street residents confirmed that the stigma felt by sex workers is not imagined:

*I don't want to go near them.....it's a filthy profession...they probably don't pay any tax...they're not very attractive....some of them I find quite sort of disgusting...they're scumbags. [Resident 1]*

*I've heard this called slimy city, not flower city. [Resident 2]*

*They don't care about their survival instincts or anything like that. [Resident 3]*

Transgender workers faced a double stigma at the community level:

*There was this one instance where I got pulled up and um this cheeky young cop...he pulled me up and he's like 'Oh, where do you work?' and I say 'I'm on the benefit' and he goes 'Oh, what's your sickness?' and I said 'Excuse me, that's none of your business'. And then, um, you know, I was clearly dressed as a woman and he goes and writes out a ticket, and as I get the ticket, he ripped out the ticket and he handed it to me and goes 'Here you go, sir'. [Sex worker participant 3]*

*I have seen him or her...and I looked twice when I first saw it and thought 'good grief'. [Resident 1]*

*You have men in short dresses. [Resident 3]*

Experiences of stigmatisation prevail amongst sex workers, brought about through negative social reactions to their occupation (Vanwesenbeeck 2001). Moral discourses place sex workers in the category of 'deviant', not conforming to the norms of society. Stigmatisation and discrimination are considered to be important contributors to health disparities (Stuber and Meyer 2008). Stigma can have an impact on social interactions, quality of life, self-esteem, mental health, and employment and income, and in so doing affect the life chances of those who are stigmatised (Link and Phelan 2006).

Sex workers reported a mixture of positive and negative responses from residents living near where they work:

*[I] found that if there was any hassles that street corners [residents] would come out and assist us. The other one would turn the hose on us. .... As long as we were respectful, they were fine...we had a couple of girls who weren't respectful and that sort of stuffed it for us. [Sex worker participant 1]*

*Some are nice, some just don't talk to you. [Sex worker participant 12]*

Most sex workers interviewed expressed frustration about the anti-social behavior which had been displayed by other sex workers North of Bealey Avenue and expressed a desire to be detached from it:

*Its annoyed me that the girls have gone down to that end...I wouldn't want to go down where the residents were anyway...I'm one to stick to the law. [Sex worker participant 2]*

*You're always vigilant of it (not to annoy residents). [Sex worker participant 5]*

*I try and keep respect with the neighbours and keep noise down...I don't want to work around someone who's, you know, yelling and screaming all the time, because you can't get work. It just intimidates the clients.....(but) there's bad eggs in kind of any type of work environment. [Sex worker participant 7]*

There seemed to be a sentiment that the few who had created issues for residents had given the majority of street-based sex workers a 'bad name':

*If one person's doing something that isn't right, its not all of us, so don't persecute everyone for it. [Sex worker participant 2]*

*[It] only takes one to make us all look bad. [Sex worker participant 1]*

*A minority...are ruining it for the majority. [Outreach worker 2]*

Some of the sex workers were able to empathise with the residents:

*It's pretty disgusting actually with people outside their houses...you imagine you've got your little baby in bed and you've got a prostitute going off and people throwing bottles and stuff, it can be quite dangerous and nasty. [Sex worker participant 6]*

*I fully agree with [the residents]. I don't think anyone should work over that end of Bealey Ave...I fully agree with that because there is a preschool down there. [Sex worker participant 11]*

*You go in some places and its just like condoms, syringes everywhere and I mean I've got kids...just tidy up after yourself. [Sex worker participant 13]*

## Community perceptions of key tensions with street-based sex workers in their neighbourhood

Six of the ten residents interviewed lived North of Bealey Avenue and four lived South of this road. Acceptance of street-based sex work in their neighbourhood varied and was not necessarily dependent on which side of Bealey Avenue the residents lived on.

Residents confirmed that the road works and associated traffic flow had played a role in the displacement of sex workers following the earthquake, but that the situation had improved:

*In post-earthquake Christchurch it's been difficult for the sex workers to be in their normal environment because it's been like a bomb site down there. [Resident 5]*

*It's definitely quietened down since what it was like right after the earthquake, like when the inner city was cordoned off. ... As soon as the cordons came down, they did drift back [South] again. [Resident 6]*

*It's better now because we have a lock on our gate where I live...but it used to be quite bad. [Resident 7]*

*We don't have much yelling now at all. [Resident 4]*

They commented on the seasonal nature of street-based sex work and that there were times when street-based sex workers were less noticeable on the street:

*It's quieter during winter time than it is during summer time. [Resident 6]*

*In the summer time...the numbers will treble. [Resident 1]*

Residents reported a mixture of positive and negative interactions with sex workers:

*It's usually very pleasant. It's just hello, something like that. [Resident 7]*

*I...regularly say 'hello'. [Resident 4]*

*We don't really have that many interactions with them and they seem to kind of keep to themselves more or less. [Resident 8]*

*50% friendly, positive...just 'hello', you know, and I'd just say 'Hi, are you busy?' 'oh not bad, not bad'. Um and then just move on. And I'll just say 'Well have a safe night'. ... She was quite, you know, really friendly and she loved the dog [Resident 1]*

*There's a transvestite that has a go at me...I don't know what the heck I did to him, but he just really doesn't like me...he tells me to fuck off...calls me a bitch and all sorts of things. [Resident 3]*

*If you ask them to move on or be quiet, you'll normally just...be abused in return. [Resident 6]*

Residents' perspectives varied from modest intolerance to proactive tolerance or support. Those who were intolerant felt that:

*The street's just not the right place for prostitution. ...It is difficult to really have too much empathy for them because they're just such a nuisance, but I mean I do understand that they're...incredibly vulnerable and...they do need people to care that they're safe. But as a resident, whose life's been disrupted by them...it is easy not to care. [Resident 6]*

The majority of residents were sympathetic to street-based sex workers and showed tolerance, although somewhat limited:

*It's become...more confrontational with all parties involved. It's not just between the sex workers and the residents, but...between those who feel that people have the right to be there and people who feel that they don't. [Resident 7]*

*I feel sorry for them, you know, I really do sometimes. I mean when they're rude or, you know, drugged out, I can't be bothered with them. [Resident 1]*

*We accept that [they're vulnerable] to a point. But where it's at the point at which our vulnerable children are being affected...that actually trumps the prostitute vulnerability situation [Resident 10]*

Some residents exhibited modest tolerance and were fairly accepting of sex workers' presence on the street:

*I have a neutral view on them being there...I'm accepting of them being there. [Resident 5]*

One resident demonstrated proactive tolerance and support for sex workers:

*The community is diverse and interactive and supportive. [Resident 4]*

These findings are consistent with a British study into street-based sex work and community tensions, which found "a range of views that can be situated along a continuum of no tolerance or empathy, through some levels of sympathy towards the women themselves but low levels of tolerance to street sex work in the local area, to greater levels of tolerance and sympathy" (Pitcher, Campbell et al. 2006: 15).

It is often not the sex workers themselves, but associated parties who create issues for residents on Manchester Street. One outreach worker suggested that minders seemed to be of more concern to residents than sex workers:

*The word from the residents south of Bealey, the girls are no problem. It's the minders that are the problem...that's them that are causing the issues around town, you know, with the raising of voices. [Outreach worker 4]*

This view was certainly supported by comments from the residents:

*Certainly at times it didn't feel safe with the people that were kind of hanging about, not necessarily the prostitutes themselves, but their minders and their entourage. [Resident 6]*

*I don't really feel unsafe from the working, but...the people that are actually buying their services maybe aren't the best people...honestly I would be more concerned about that than the actual sex workers. [Resident 8]*

*Just the people they bring in, not so much the clients...just the people that run, I think there's gangs involved. .... The two biggest factors are the drugs in the background and the criminal gangs really. [Resident 1]*

*It's not just the girls as well. Like it's the pimps, it's the passers-by. ... Even if the girls behaved themselves incredibly, they're not the only ones...attracted to the activity. [Resident 9]*

*[We] get way more scared of the minders. [Resident 10]*

Some residents found the visibility of street-based sex work distressing, particularly for children:

*You don't want them [children] to be exposed to seeing...prostitutes standing on the side of the road...on their way to school. [Resident 6]*

*When we start a family, I don't necessarily want that to be what my kids first see when they leave our driveway. [Resident 8]*

*People get a bit worried about sex workers being in full view of their children. [Resident 5]*

Inaccurate stereotypes remained about the realities of street-based sex work. Many residents felt that street-based sex workers were forced to work by either pimps or gangs. These claims are not supported by any evidence:

*It's not really a choice...a lot of people are doing it because they're being made to do it by their pimps. [Resident 6]*

*I think [minders] tend to be drug or gang related [Resident 7]*

*I have this idea that women don't necessarily want to be doing it [Resident 8]*

The main complaints made by residents was the noise sex workers or passers-by made and litter, including condoms, used needles and faeces which they had to deal with in their gardens and surrounds:

*Particularly the noise. ...[Litter]'s my main one. [Resident 7]*

*We had to move out of that room and we went and used our back bedroom [because of the noise]. [Resident 6]*

*Number 2s [faeces] in our driveway, condoms on the doorstep. .... I can hear the loud noises late at night. [Resident 2]*

*Sometimes when I'm in bed asleep, I get woken up by activity...it disturbs my sleep a bit because I hear the noise. ... and occasional tissues...and cigarette butts. [Resident 5]*

*The big thing is noise...my [school-aged] daughter's not been getting sleep. [Resident 9]*

One resident reported safety issues for other members of the community:

*One of the contractors has actually stood on a needle [Resident 9]*

Most residents recounted at least one historic incidence of anti-social behavior that went beyond noise and litter:

*They would come into [a nearby resident's] front path, have sex in that area, and they actually had break-ins on occasion. [Resident 7]*

*I've been abused, threatened, touched...[a sex worker] slightly pushed me and called me an f\*\*\*ing F. [Resident 2]*

*A car's pulled up and asked me for anal sex. ... On Friday [a sex worker] was out there trying to kick cars. [Resident 3]*

*About two months ago the number plates were flogged from [my car]. [Resident 5]*

*I've had prostitutes telling me that they know where I live, they'll burn my house down. I've had pimps push me. ... [A neighbour] found that one of the girls had used their garden effectively as a toilet, number 2s, and then had grabbed the child's clothing off the line and wiped herself up. [Resident 9]*

Residents reported that sex workers did not respond well to aggressive approaches from residents:

*He went out and he had a yell out on the street with them and they got very aggressive. [Resident 7]*

And that they did respond well to polite or respectful approaches:

*I discouraged them from working from my entrance...just asked them to please not work from my entrance...they generally obliged. ... mutual respect...and trying to understand. [Resident 4]*

Despite the noise, litter and sometimes unpleasant interactions, most residents reported concern for sex workers' welfare:

*Sometimes it's bordering on violence when it's a bad night and...that's very scary ... No one wants to see anything happen to anyone [Resident 7]*

*There was a most pathetic little...slight girl...she looked frightened and upset...I was wondering what I could do...I swear she was 16 or less ... I'm all for protecting them [Resident 2]*

*I have seen a sex worker walking...obviously under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which disturbed me a bit in terms of her safety [Resident 5]*

## Street-based sex workers needs

There is potential that if there were better amenities for street-based sex workers in the area in which they work, it would alleviate some of the issues for residents. It would also encourage sex workers to move from purely residential areas to the commercial or business end of Manchester Street. For instance, nearly all street-based sex workers and some residents and outreach staff said that public toilets were needed:

*We need toilets desperately. [Sex worker participant 1]*

*There should be toilets...it's a hygiene thing. [Sex worker participant 7]*

One street-based sex worker reported relying on clients to drive her to toilet facilities:

*Normally I wait to be picked up from a client and then I'll say 'Can we just stop here and run in the toilet?'...about four times out of ten they'll take off on me...four times out of ten I'll get left behind. [Sex worker participant 6]*

Toilets were also supported by some residents, even those opposed to sex workers outside their homes:

*A toilet could be rented or built or installed or somehow put by the government...for the girls. [Resident 2]*

*Toilets are important and I was very sad that one hasn't survived [Resident 4]*

Only one resident was adamant that toilets should not be provided for sex workers:

*They want toilets... no, definitely not ... I don't think that would go down too well with the general populous, spending money on putting toilets in for prostitutes. [Resident 1]*

This same resident thought that more cameras in the area would be beneficial, not only for the safety of sex workers, but for "apartment people and the shops":

*I think the one thing that's needed is a camera near where we are...a better camera than what's being used currently. You know, higher resolution camera. [Resident 1]*

Most of the street-based sex workers also mentioned a need for rubbish bins and sharps disposal units, better lighting, and more cameras:

*Rubbish bins, cos there's nothing worse than carrying around. [Sex worker participant 5]*

*A bit more lighting, but not enough to scare [the clients] off. [Sex worker participant 4]*

*A few more extra cameras that are actually pointing down. [Sex worker participant 10]*

*I also think that there should be a receptacle for needles and, you know...so that they weren't getting put anywhere...where it could be at harm to someone else, especially like doing it in letter-boxes and stuff like I've heard. [Sex worker participant 7]*

One resident promoted the idea of using incentives rather than penalties to encourage sex workers to move back south of Bealey Avenue:

*Whether they can encourage more of the support services around the prostitutes in terms of mobile soup kitchens...just give the sex workers more support and safety where they can work further down Manchester Street rather than any coercive measures...I don't think that ...punitive measures...would be particularly useful. [Resident 5]*

Four sex workers raised the possibility of a central facility which could cater to sex workers' needs:

*Yeah I've always thought it would be cool to have just even a little building where you could go and maybe even something with a shower...not rooms necessarily, but it would*

*be good to get a brothel up...there's girls that are homeless and haven't had showers for weeks...the council seem to do a lot for heaps of other things, so why not? .... A powder room maybe where you can get changed...even if...we have to pay \$20 a week or something with a lock, you know?...people would pay that. I'd pay that. [Sex worker participant 6]*

*The girls don't have anywhere where they can take their clients to do jobs and stuff...there is a few carparks that's used around here and it's just dirty and disgusting. [Sex worker participant 11]*

*Like toilets, somewhere you can freshen up and stuff...somewhere just to go out for time out, maybe have coffee, you know, it would be great...I just really hope that...there's that opportunity of having a safe place for the girls. [Sex worker participant 9]*

*Maybe somewhere where there's condoms available that's nice and handy, cause a lot of the girls don't have transport, and when [NZPC] don't deliver them, some of the girls don't...if I don't have spares on me, I've seen them drive off to jobs without them...I've been known to give out my like second-class condoms just to make sure they don't. [Sex worker participant 1]*

One street-based sex worker thought that sex workers would benefit from specialized drug and alcohol services:

*I would like there to be some kind of a programme that helps some of the sex workers get clean [from drugs]. [Sex worker participant 7]*

A Council representative expressed an interest in a central facility for street-based sex workers:

*It would be good to have...some sort of a drop in centre in the CBD somewhere that would also support the girls, support the workers and be, you know, have a health focus and a support focus and provide some facilities. [Council 1]*

[Comment from Council representatives are based on personal opinion and not a Council position.]

## Location of work

Most residents agreed that street-based sex work should move back towards the central business district, but offered little insight as to the best way for this to happen:

*Back towards town. [Resident 7]*

*I would like...an area sorted out for the girls' sake...an area that's got factories in. [Resident 2]*

*Put them like in town...away from residents and away from schools. [Resident 3]*

*The sex workers used to be based further down towards the city on the other side of Bealey Ave...that seemed to be much more widely acceptable for the community as a whole. [Resident 5]*

Not all residents felt that sex workers need to move or be moved:

*Now that its decriminalised, you can't really tell somebody where they can work and where they can't work. [Resident 8]*

A few residents commented on the perception that the sex workers had rights which they did not:

*We don't appear to have any rights or an ability to demarcate appropriate locations where this activity should go. [Resident 9]*

Street-based sex workers were asked whether they would move or not should they be asked to relocate their place of work. Some sex workers indicated that they would change where they worked from if a by-law required them to:

*I would move even if I didn't like it. [Sex worker participant 12]*

*[I would] abide by [a by-law]. [Sex worker participant 6]*

Others indicated that they would not comply:

*For doing this kind of work, you have to go where you want...you want to feel safe, you know. [Sex worker participant 5]*

*I'd try and not move if I could...only because there, there is no traffic. [Sex worker participant 8]*

Reasons for not moving included safety, security, lighting, traffic flow and opportunity to meet clients:

*Somewhere were you're under the light...[although] Salisbury was too bright for me. [Sex worker participant 13]*

*I do notice girls do go the other [North] side of Bealey, which to me is not as safe, because its darker. [Sex worker participant 4]*

*It's a good intersection...you actually get quite a lot of traffic. [Sex worker participant 7]*

Some sex workers had moved even though it was not in their best interests:

*I've lost a lot of my regulars because they don't want to pull up there. [Sex worker participant 1]*

Two sex workers observed that historically there were more clients on foot, whereas they currently nearly always travel in cars. This highlights the importance of traffic flow for street-based sex workers and their clients.

Council representatives noted that a place for street-based sex work had not been considered in the redevelopment/redesign of the city. [Comment from Council representatives are based on personal opinion and not a Council position.]

*The council...is not keen to look at it in terms of a 'where should they be permitted'...I don't think they want to be seen to be trying to consult with the public about where is an area that they can be located. [Council 2]*

*I don't know [if sex work is part of the future landscape of the city]...I personally can't comprehend that style of life...I just find it incredibly risky.... we couldn't say 'it can occur here, but nowhere else' because that would be seen as supporting it, promoting it and encouraging it. [Council 1]*

*The Dutch have got closest to sort of coming to a pragmatic workable solution, but I don't see that happening here. [Council 3]*

One resident made mention of Christchurch's 'perfect opportunity':

*Christchurch has got the perfect opportunity now with like the rezoning and the rebuild to – I mean we could manage a safe red light zone...something a bit like Amsterdam. [Resident 6]*

Several Dutch cities have benefited from making space for sex work (Van Doorninck and Campbell 2006). The cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague established official zones for sex workers in the 1980s with five other cities following suit.

## Conclusion

The research findings in Christchurch suggest a diverse and misunderstood population. Street-based sex workers experience a great deal of stigmatisation which makes them vulnerable to violence. There is a need to foster the relationship between them and police so that they are more willing to report incidents. In order for this to happen they have to believe that police will take incidents seriously. This in turn will send a message to the wider society that violence against street-based sex workers will not be tolerated. If, however, police are required to enforce bylaws which zone street-based sex workers into isolated areas, it will damage the relationship. Increased enforcement measures have been shown to increase the risk of violence towards street-based sex workers (Kinnell 2006, Sanders and Campbell 2007, Krusi, Pacey et al. 2014, Sanders 2016, Armstrong 2017).

Interviews with residents suggest a wish to move sex workers away from areas where they are undesired. However interviews with the workers indicate that they would respond more positively to incentives which draw them towards areas that are better suited to their working needs. A failure to consult sex workers on policies which impact them has led to problems in the past. Sex workers choices about where to work are not selected at random or driven by

malice, but are based on complex factors such as lighting, privacy and exposure to clients. Cities which have made space for street-based sex work in urban design have successfully created better conditions for street-based sex workers, as well as harmony for the communities they work in.

The situation that the Christchurch City Council finds themselves in is not unique to Christchurch. Cities in the United Kingdom have also had to grapple with tensions between sex workers and residents in the 1990s and 2000s, albeit in a criminalized environment. Researchers in those geographical areas found interagency collaboration led to greater community understanding about sex worker issues, greater awareness amongst sex workers of residents' issues, improved relationships, the resolution of outstanding issues and the establishment of mechanisms for change (Pitcher, Campbell et al. 2006). They suggest a policy response which incorporates the following:

- A point of contact for residents
- Resourcing of project work such as Outreach projects
- A communication strategy at a 'strategic partnership' level
- Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders
- A multi-stakeholder forum at local levels with formal links
- Piloting and evaluation of specific initiatives

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