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**HOW TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF  
STREET SEX WORKERS IN THE  
OTTAWA-GATINEAU REGION**

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# **HOW TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF STREET SEX WORKERS IN THE OTTAWA-GATINEAU REGION**

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The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the funding agencies.

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# INTRODUCTION

In Canada, sex workers constitute a marginalized population that is highly stigmatized. Those who work in the streets are often the targets of social and legal reactions and have specific needs that are poorly documented in research. The sex workers' needs, especially those of street sex workers, are urgent, and require analysis and action without delay.

In Ottawa, sex workers who frequent the *Centre espoir Sophie*, a drop-in centre for the region's marginalized women, confirmed that resources to meet their needs are inadequate. Some of these women are of Francophone and/or of aboriginal origin and they cannot count on services tailored to their needs when they access Anglophone services provided for the majority.

For these reasons, the *Centre espoir Sophie* decided to form a partnership with researchers at the University of Ottawa and, with financial support from Status of Women Canada, Women's Program and from the University of Ottawa, to undertake an action-research project to study the needs of street sex workers and services for street sex workers in the Ottawa – Gatineau (Hull sector) region. One of the goals of the research was to identify the needs of street sex workers, the resources available to them and the services they would like to see established to better respond to their needs. With the assistance of an advisory committee composed of regional community agency representatives, we decided to conduct interviews with both Franco-Ontarian and Anglophone sex workers from Gatineau (Hull sector) and Ottawa. We held a total of 19 semi-directive interviews. We also held two group interviews, one with Francophone support workers and the other with Anglophone support workers, to identify what they perceive to be the needs of their clients, street sex workers, and the services available to them or services required to adequately meet these needs.

In the sections that follow, we will first present a literature review on needs of and services for sex workers. In this section we initially deal with the needs related to the recognition of sex work as a profession and the rights of workers, then we identify the specific needs and services related to the daily exercise of their work. We then briefly outline the theoretical framework and methodology we have chosen. In the third section, we present the results of the research that involved sex workers and two groups of support workers in the region. Finally we make some recommendations.

**Note:** In the English translation of the text the term 'sex workers' without gender qualification refers to female sex workers.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Today there is abundant literature on sex work. Since the beginnings of contemporary Western feminism and the creation of organizations representing sex workers, many researchers and activists have examined the question. In the 1990's the problem of AIDS transmission renewed the debate and gave rise to a significant number of studies related to protecting the health of male and female sex workers (Bruckert, Parent and Robitaille, 2002). Paradoxically, however, there are still few studies that deal with the needs of sex workers, presently available services and services required to adequately respond to their needs. Why is this the case?

First of all, because some practices associated with sex work are illegal in Canada as in other Western countries, sex workers are generally very discrete about their work habits, difficult to reach and only accept to participate in research when they are satisfied as to the goals and intentions of the researchers. Empirical studies are also difficult to carry out; but this does not seem to be the most significant factor in explaining the state of research on this matter.

For a large number of researchers, whether feminist or not, sex work is fundamentally associated with the victimization of women; they view the workers' needs from the perspective of facilitating women to abandon this type of work. With this vision, needs and appropriate services are seen in a more limited context. Vanwesenbeek (1994:10) emphasizes, and rightly so, that when reference is made to intervention in the matter of "prostitution", the concern is rarely the sex workers' well-being:

*The focus of debate or intervention has hardly been on the well-being of prostitutes. (...) So far, appropriate political analyses are clearly hindered by a lack of knowledge of the actual well-being and risks of the prostitutes and the factors which determine them. It has been noted that also*

*feminist analyses often get stuck in a lack of insight in whether prostitution is in fact beneficial or detrimental to the women involved (cf. Shameem, 1993). Not only should their well-being more explicitly be a topic of debate and a political goal in itself, but any intervention in prostitution should take the consequences for their well-being into account (Vanwesenbeek, 1994: 10).*

In government reports and analyses that draw from comments from social sector players (police officers, residents, representatives of sex workers), the needs of the sex workers are situated in the context of legal and social regulation, and where solutions are directed toward the needs of the sex workers, they also take into account the dominant social views of sex work and the concerns of the authorities. The needs of sex workers, or at least those that are retained, are considered within the existing legal framework. The experience of sex workers is but one analytical element to consider among others.

Beginning in the 1970's<sup>1</sup>, in this climate unfavourable to research on the needs of sex workers based on participation by the workers themselves, various groups were established throughout the world to defend the rights of prostitutes through which sex workers were able to publicly express their needs. In the document entitled *Sex Workers' Manifesto*<sup>2</sup> they declared that it is imperative to perceive sex workers as persons in their own right, who have an entire spectrum of emotional and material needs, who live within a specific social, political and ideological context that determines their quality of life and their

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<sup>1</sup> In this period we find the beginnings of sex worker organization in a number of countries. For example: in the mid 1970's, Gresélidis Réal, a Swiss sex worker, created the *International Prostitution Documentation Centre* in Geneva; in England, Helen Buckingham founded PLAN (Prostitution Laws are Nonsense) in 1975; in 1980, HYDRA was formed, the first organization for the defence of the rights of sex workers; in 1982 in Italy, Pia Covre and Carla Corso, two sex workers, founded the *Comitato per I Diritti Civili Delle Prostitute (Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes)*; also in 1982, in Geneva, social workers, sex workers, lawyers and feminists created ASPASIE to defend the rights of sex workers; in 1983 in Geneva, Odile, a French sex worker, founded ANAIS, only for prostitutes; in 1983 in Canada, Peggy Miller, a prostitute founded CORP (*Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes*) in Toronto; in the same year in Australia, Kerrie Carrington, an ex-prostitute founded the *Australian Prostitutes' Collective* whose goal was to decriminalize prostitution; also in 1983 in Austria, Frau EVA founded the *Austrian Association of Prostitutes* and in Switzerland, prostitutes created the *Group O*; in the Netherlands in 1984, ex-prostitutes Inge, Ans van der Drift, Margo Alvarez and Joke founded *De Rode Draad (The Red Thread)*, an organization for prostitutes and at the same time Martine Groen and Gail Petherson created *De Roze Draad (The Pink Thread)*, a sister organization for all women; in February 1985, the first international congress of prostitutes, the *World Whores' Congress*, took place: during this meeting a Charter for Prostitutes' Rights was developed and the *International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights (ICPR)* was created (since then, this committee has initiated many international meetings); in June of 1987 the First National Conference of Prostitutes was held in Brazil; at this meeting Brazilian prostitute, Gabriela Silva Leite announced the foundation of the National Association of Women Prostitutes with headquarters in Rio de Janeiro (Petherson, 1989: 5-7).

<sup>2</sup>Available at: <http://www.walnet.org/csis/nswp/conferences/manifesto/html>

health. Documents issued by organizations that defend the rights of sex workers are one of the main sources for this literature review.

On the other hand, as emphasized by Pryen (1999: 58), the new context related to the emergence of AIDS brought about a reformulation of the prostitution issue and the debate parameters. It forced the different social players to take into account “the living conditions of prostitutes and the conditions in which they carry out their activities with a view to preventing risks and to managing health in a global fashion” (Pryen, 1999: 58, liberal translation). Despite all the criticisms that can be made of this formulation of the debate on sex work, one cannot deny that it led to the implication of the sex workers themselves and to partnerships between social players from various fields (social workers, sociologists, epidemiologists, sex workers, etc). This formulation opened the door to studies that take the well-being of sex workers into account; we used these as points of reference in the context of this literature review.

Finally, we highlight here certain contemporary studies that speak of recognizing sex workers as belonging to another professional category, with specific problems and needs. More and more, activist groups and feminists seem to agree on this point (Bullough and Bullough, 1998).

We then present the major elements of this literature review by dividing the needs of sex workers into two major categories, on the one hand, that which recognizes sex work as a legitimate profession with the rights of sex workers that flow from this; and, on the other hand, that which is related to the individual needs of sex workers as they daily carry out daily their trade. Readers will note to what extent these categories are linked and overlap. This subdivision however will assist us in understanding the various levels of need and the necessity of considering some in order to achieve others. We will develop this point in the context of the overview that follows.

Finally we wish to note that even though our research specifically concerns street sex workers, we will also touch on the needs of sex workers in general and we will highlight when appropriate those that relate more specifically to those persons who work on the street.

## **A) *Recognizing sex work as a profession and the rights of sex workers***

In the literature on sex work, the question of the well-being of workers is closely linked with and connected to the struggle to recognize their rights. This on-going struggle can be analyzed according to different levels at which demands are being presented. The first level, the legal and political level, is related to recognizing sex workers' human rights. The objective is to include this type of work in the services sector as a legitimate work that should benefit from the protection normally accorded to other trades. At this level, sex workers themselves have begun to identify their needs and to propose solutions to their problems. The declarations of the *Second World Whores' Congress* in Brussels in 1986 summarize well the positions of sex workers' groups. We note that this congress brought together sex workers (who were central to presentations and discussions), feminist activists and researchers who work closely with sex worker groups. Many declarations were developed by the *International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights*<sup>3</sup> and include the following principal on-going declarations:

### **1. Prostitution and Human Rights**

\* Prostitutes, ex-prostitutes and all women, regardless of their profession, colour, class, sexuality, history of abuse or marital status should enjoy the same rights as all other citizens;

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<sup>3</sup> Henceforth ICPR

- \* prostitutes are excluded from the European Convention on Human Rights, because they are deprived systematically of freedom, security, equitable treatment in law, respect of family and of privacy, freedom of expression and of association; they are discriminated against in the workplace and with respect to housing and they are the objects of inhumane and cruel sentences;
- \* the demand articulated in the World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights is reiterated: that prostitution be defined as a legitimate profession and that prostitutes be considered as citizens in their own right.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Prostitution and human rights: violations

- \* Violation of the right to life : murder of prostitutes is a wide-spread phenomenon on a global scale;
- \* violation of the rights to liberty and safety of persons: criminalization of prostitution or activities related to prostitution threatens the physical safety of sex workers; legal consequences (fines, prison, etc.) discourage sex workers from contacting police when their safety is threatened or when they work under force; the imposition of medical examinations; in the case of illness, the absence of monetary compensation inhibits sex workers' access to health care; in some countries, obligatory registration for sex workers is an additional source of stigma, violates the right to privacy, the right to freedom and harms the social status of those who wish to change professions;

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<sup>4</sup> Following these declarations, the European Parliament adopted a resolution concerning violence against women containing a clause requesting member States to adopt legal measures with a view to: decriminalizing prostitution; according to prostitutes the same rights enjoyed by other citizens; protecting the independence, health and safety of persons who exercise this profession; supporting sex workers' support groups; making sure that police services and the legal system give better protection to sex workers who wish to press charges; intensify measures taken against those who commit acts against prostitutes.

- \* violation of the right to access justice: application of laws and rules against prostitution and related activities compromises this right on many levels (abuse of authority, discrimination in the application of the law, disproportionate sentences, etc.);
- \* violation of the rights respecting privacy, family life, protection of the home and correspondence: in some countries laws designed to deal with pimps are often used against the families of sex workers (ex.: U.S., France);
- \* violation of the right to freedom of expression (to hold opinions): the words of sex workers are neither taken seriously in civil society nor in the courts;
- \* violation of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (particularly the freedom to establish unions): the fact that prostitution is not recognized as a legitimate profession prevents prostitutes from creating professional associations;
- \* the right to marry and create a family: because in many countries, the spouse of a sex worker can be accused as a pimp, the family status of sex workers is more precarious than that of other women; they can also be refused custody of their children by the courts because of their profession;
- \* the right to enjoy material possessions: belongings of sex workers are often confiscated because they were obtained with money that is considered “illegal”;
- \* the right to leave a country: in some countries sex workers are detained at borders because their profession is identified on their passport or on identification papers; computerized police records are another method of restricting sex workers’ movements; etc.

The rights violations mentioned above are considered inhumane treatments toward sex workers. These workers want among other things recognition of forced prostitution as torture and they recognize that some categories of sex workers are particular targets of discrimination: sex workers of colour, foreign sex workers, street sex workers, juvenile sex workers and sex workers with substance abuse problems.

In Canada, some community resources and non-profit organizations have made the specific needs of sex workers part of their philosophy and their action. This is the case for such organizations as Stella, Maggie's, Pace, etc. As part of their mandate, these organizations fight against discrimination against sex workers and educate the public and community and institution support workers about the realities sex workers face in an effort to promote the adoption of better informed and more responsible public policy.

But apart from recognizing sex trade workers' rights, the participants of the Second World Congress also declared that their first concern was the health of sex workers. We note here that the more global question of recognizing sex work as a profession is closely linked with the specific needs of sex workers in the course of their daily work.<sup>5</sup>

In the following sections, we will examine the specific everyday needs of sex workers. We will begin by presenting the concerns for the health of sex workers as expressed at the Second World Whores' Congress; then we will review the needs identified in university and activist research.

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<sup>5</sup> We note here that the concerns expressed in the context of this congress were also transmitted to organizations that defend the rights of sex workers who increase their efforts to offer services adapted to the needs of sex workers; their actions are designed to improve working and living conditions and mainly address physical and psychological health, education and development of social networks.

## ***B) Needs and services related to sex work***

### **1. The Second World Whores' Congress (Brussels, 1986)**

During the Second World Whores' Congress, problems related to sex workers' health and their access to health care given the social stigmas and legal discrimination attached to sex work were raised. There were connections made between recognition of sex work as legitimate and the specific needs of sex workers:

- they are not provided with working conditions that promote health;
- they are not given access to health care services;
- historically sex workers have been blamed for sexually transmitted infections (a myth that has been contradicted by a number of studies).

The ICPR responses since then have been at the legal and political levels. It is asking for laws that prohibit sex workers from choosing their own physician to be repealed, for the abolition of obligatory medical certificates, for access to health care services of their choice and that respect confidentiality, for employment insurance for medical reasons, etc. It also requests that the physical and psychological integrity of sex workers be protected by giving them the right to work indoors, to advertise, to solicit in the streets while respecting zoning regulations, etc.

The sex workers emphasized that criminalization of prostitutes for public health reasons restricts them to working in very difficult conditions that threaten their psychological and physical safety. In response to the problem, they requested the recognition of certain rights necessary to ensure safe and healthy working conditions: the right to work indoors, the right to advertise, the right to solicit in the streets while respecting zoning regulations, etc.

Concerning psychological and medical services, the following measures were proposed: that professionals receive training and education regarding health problems related to sex work in order to counter the prejudices and erroneous information that circulates in the medical field; that sex workers and ex – sex workers participate in information sessions; that it be obligatory to hire sex workers in health services in order to facilitate adoption of judicious public policies and the establishment of adequate services; etc.

With regard to substance abuse and alcoholism, it is explained that a minority of sex workers who are substance abusers join the profession to support their habit. For this group, the proposal is: resorting to solutions other than prostitution and adopting a clinical and social model to replace the criminalization model; adequate financing for treatment programs and research; establishing programs to distribute affordable needles to prevent transmission of infections; etc.

## **2. University and activist research activities**

University and activist studies, though few, have also highlighted a series of needs and services required to adequately respond to the needs of sex workers; some studies pertain specifically to street sex workers.

### **a) *Health needs***

From the beginning, research on this type of work has emphasized health needs and services required to adequately respond to these needs.

To this effect, in 1986, Caletti (1986: 97 in Gibson, 1993: 173) dealt specifically with the needs of sex workers. Among the 622 workers who were interviewed, 79% indicated health care needs for themselves and their children. In our area, Guénette and

Léveillé (2002) noted that sex workers in Downtown Hull have access to services at the walk-in clinic at the local community service centre but that not everyone is aware of this resource and that others who might have in the past been poorly received do not seem to want to use the service.

In addition, even though sex workers are no more at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI) than other sectors of the population (Pheterson, 1989; Gibson, 1993; Welzer-Lang, Barbosa, Mathieu, 1994), they are sexually active and consequently have specific needs regarding these infections, in particular AIDS. Prevention of STI is a subject dealt with both in contemporary research and in medical-social intervention regarding sex work. From the point of view of groups that lobby for sex workers, the greatest health risk is that of contamination of workers by clients. In response to this, these groups propose a number of strategies and in particular the systematic use of contraceptives. Some favour safe sex workshops to further sex workers' education in safe sex techniques (Gibson, 1993: 174). In the Netherlands, as a preventative measure for STI, sex workers wear a sticker or sign by way of indication that they only engage in safe sex practices (Sterk-Elifson, Campbell, 1993: 201).

Substance abuse problems are also a concern, particularly considering that according to research a higher percentage of street sex workers consume drugs than the other categories of sex workers<sup>6</sup>.

There is an initiative in France that seems to be showing encouraging results with regard to substance abuse. A grassroots organization, the *comité AIDES Nord-Pas-de-Calais* seeks to reduce harm by offering services at varied hours and late night hours, directly in the workplace, that is, the street. Among other programs they offer is *Réduction des risques (RDR)* whose goal is to “give to intravenous drug users the means to reduce the risk of HIV and hepatitis related to their drug use” (Pryen, 1999: 61, liberal translation). Mobile units park regularly in the districts and in squats; at the same time field work is done to identify

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<sup>6</sup> According to Sterk-Elifson and Campbell (1993: 200), between 50 and 80 % of sex workers consume drugs.

new persons and new sites. Hiring practices are based on the “autosupport” model: some members of the staff have been drug users; others are hired on the basis of competence in the health and social fields. The mobile units offer sterile injection material (such as needles, alcohol pads, sterile water, and citric acid), contraceptives, coffee and cakes, etc. They are social meeting places: when the “bus” or the “truck” parks in a prostitution district, it is mainly sex workers (whether or not they use drugs) who benefit from the services.

This program functions with certain fundamental principles such as “non-judgement, support without condemnation, respect of the user and his or her history” (Pryen, 1999: 61, liberal translation). Its objective is not the fight against substance abuse but, when needed, the support workers send users to institutions that provide services in this field: “the meetings provide opportunities for exchange (information, counsel, support, listening...) but also direction toward structures that are adapted to felt or expressed needs” (Pryen, 1999: 61, liberal translation).

Also in France, Cabiria, an association made up of health professionals, sex workers and researchers and whose composition is based on parity, launched a community health initiative in the prostitution district of Lyon. Inspired by a global approach to health, first and foremost are it offers front-line activities (night services from nurses, persons who do prevention, etc.), without sacrificing deeper reflection on the global needs of sex workers: prevention and health care, and help and direction on administrative and social questions and questions about human rights and the citizenship of sex workers. Much effort is given to the “creation of a network of resource partners, constantly changing according to the needs of the community” of sex workers as well as on “coordinating with existing organizations or groups doing identical work<sup>7</sup>”. The work done by Calabria is based on the respect and dignity of sex workers, on the development of solidarity, on cordial and community reception (and respecting confidentiality), on encouraging the skills, confidence and self-esteem of sex workers.

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<sup>7</sup> Liberal translation. See the Website of the organization: (<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/cabiria/cabiria.html>).

**b) Safety needs**

Safety is a particularly significant fundamental need of street sex workers. Studies show that these persons are more vulnerable to violence than the other categories of sex workers (violence from clients, police, pimps, etc.). The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics estimated in 1997 that “63 known prostitutes were found murdered between 1991 and 1995. Almost all of the murdered prostitutes were female (60 of the 63)” (Working Group, 1998, Part I).

Discussions with Vancouver sex workers in 1988 lead one to believe that street prostitution is generally more dangerous than prostitution that is practised elsewhere (Lowman and Fraser, 1995). A significantly greater proportion of street prostitutes reported having been robbed, sexually assaulted, beaten, strangled or kidnapped and they were more likely to have been threatened by a weapon or to have been a victim of attempted murder. By way of contrast, victimization of sex workers in other locations dealt mainly with “refusal to use a condom”, “threats and acts of intimidation” and “general harassment” (Working Group, 1998, Summary).

Miller, Romenesko and Wondolkowski (1993: 320) refer to the survey done by Mimi Silbert in San Francisco: 70 percent of the 200 sex workers who participated in the survey had experienced rape or other types of abuse by their clients. The majority of these women had been victims of assault, robbery, physical and verbal violence. Two-thirds of the women in the sample population stated that they had been victims of violence at the hands of their pimp.

Abuse of authority by members of the police force must also be mentioned; street sex workers experience this more often than other types of sex workers. According to Miller, Romenesko and Wondolkowski (1993: 320)

*Prostitutes are also frequently abused in similar ways by police officers and other officers of the court. In all these cases, prostitutes find it*

*almost impossible to press their cases because of their vulnerability to prosecution and because of their lack of resources. If they do press their cases, it is doubtful that they will be believed. For instance, it is often said that “a prostitute cannot be raped”.*

Guénette and Léveillé (2002) report a number of complaints of police harassment against Downtown Hull sex workers.

Remedies to respond to this need vary depending on whether they are proposed by government authorities or by sex workers' associations. Proposals from government authorities tend to be as concerned for public order as for the protection of the sex workers and seek solutions that address these two concerns. They are rarely supported by representatives from organizations that defend sex workers, for whom these solutions do not truly address the marginalization of sex workers<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, as an immediate response to an urgent problem, representatives of sex workers propose measures, first and foremost the establishment and maintenance of a list of bad clients.

### **c) Housing needs**

Specifically examining the needs of street sex workers, many researchers indicate that they have an urgent need for subsidized housing where they would feel safe (Rabinovich and Strega, 2004; Dalla, 2002; Benoit and Miller, 2001; Pyett and Warr, 1999, Benson and Matthews, 1995; Lowman, 1986-87).

Thukral and Ditmou (2003:10) proposed the creation of shelters for street sex workers in New York using a concept borrowed from shelters for women who are victims of

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<sup>8</sup> On of the proposals suggested by the Working Group (1998) to meet the safety need of street sex workers was the creation of “safe walkways”, well lit and police protected” (liberal translation). This measure would provide a safe climate within these zones and would prevent prostitution activity from taking place in residential neighbourhoods (1998: Part III). Measures tried in the U.S. have also been analyzed: in Nevada, different security measures (proximity to sheriff's office, fences, security barriers, etc.) protect persons who prostitute against threatening or violent clients. However the sex workers have less freedom, they are regularly required to undergo health controls, hand over 40 % of their revenue to the brothel owner and have no social benefits. Similarly, see Gemme (1998).

spousal abuse. In these temporary shelters for workers, the mandate of the support workers would include assisting them to find more permanent housing and to relocate.

**d) Education needs**

Many authors also emphasize sex workers' need for education and job training (Surrat et al., 2004; Dalla, 2002; Norton-Hawk, 2001; Benson and Matthews, 1995; Lowman, 1985-1986). Benson and Matthews (1995) report that 57 % of sex workers interviewed (48) in their survey stated that they would quit the trade if they could find work recognized as legal that pays well.

Elsewhere, a study conducted in Ottawa on street sex work shows that women do not search for regular work and when they do, it is without result, often due to their lack of education (Working Group, 1998: Part III).

Some training programs are established to enable those sex workers who so desire to change professions. For example, in 1989, Option Youth Society of Vancouver established a restaurant and training centre for young street prostitutes who wanted to work in the hospitality sector. They received training, a structured environment and the benefit of a placement service; this resulted in the opening of café Picasso.

**e) Service coordination and social support needs**

Sex workers and in particular, street sex workers who are more visible are a stigmatized and marginalized group and because of this they find it more difficult than the general population to access services. Moreover, they can less easily rely on social settings that provide support and relationships than other sectors of the population.

Empirical research highlights the lack of social services adapted to the needs of male and female street sex workers. Even though some services of this nature exist, it is known that sex workers cannot have recourse to services used by the general population either because they are not aware of them or because they have difficulty accessing them (hours of operation, etc.), or because of social or cultural reasons (they do not speak the language in which the service is offered, etc.). Another point to consider is the fact that sex workers feel judged by medical workers or police officers who for the most part have not received adequate training to take into account the specific needs of street sex workers (Working Group, 1998: Part III).

To respond to this problem, many authors speak of the necessity of a global approach imbedded in the perspective of the complete realization of the citizenship of sex workers (Pryen, 1999). This would be an alternative to limited approaches in terms of public health, law and order or morality.

In order to change the outlook considering the needs of the sex workers as the starting point, we must rethink the institutional landscape and its networks in order to adapt it to the concrete work realities of street sex work. One must ask, suggests Pryen, what are “the main relationships of institutions and persons who prostitute”? (1999: 51, liberal translation). Persons who prostitute are exposed to what type of logic? According to this author, the institutions and associations seem to be confronted with the social tensions that are part of the sex work issue: between risk reduction and reinsertion, between management of living conditions and exiting slavery, between the reasoning of law and order and that of health or social action (Pryen, 1999). The research into the generalist social service network available to persons who prostitute in Lille in France “showed that social workers have a strong feeling of incompetence in matters related to prostitution. They did not consider it relevant to their mandate. They mostly felt inadequate when dealing with persons who prostitute” (1999: 52, liberal translation). This reality is a serious obstacle to the well-being of the sex worker and her enjoyment of rights and social services because of

daily conflicting reasoning, victim and/or delinquent, socially inept and/or public nuisance, possible change from victim status to subject status seemingly unthinkable on the part of institutions...” (1999: 56, liberal translation).

In addition, as the Working Group indicates (1998), better coordination between government and community policies and organizations seems to be necessary. Emphasis should be given to equitable community action plans that accentuate respect, mutual assistance and support for persons who are involved in sex work.

To reach street sex workers, front-line work in the streets should be a priority. The use of mobile support units is a very interesting strategy because the units respond to the important criteria of flexibility, proximity and mobility in approaching street sex workers. In these mobile units, support workers can offer prevention, distribute educational material, offer psychological support, counsel, etc. It allows sex workers to have a break, to have tea or coffee, to discuss their problems, their needs or their experiences, to speak with others, to obtain condoms or needles or other supplies that improve working conditions, etc. In Europe there are also “boutiques”<sup>9</sup> that offer the same type of on-site services in street prostitution districts. Note also that the existence of these on-site locations<sup>10</sup> also tends to improve the safety of the street sex workers and lessen their isolation.

Day centres are essential resources for street sex workers who use them. They are places where sex workers can find respite and persons who welcome and listen to them; these places respond to their multiple needs, some practical and some related more to emotional and psychological well-being. As Guénette and Léveillé emphasize (2002), sex workers need to come together and to create a support network adapted to their culture.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.drugtext.org/library/articles/peddr003.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> The PEMP team is an example, for prostitution in Lyon, of on-site social action where “the living conditions and working conditions of those who prostitute are taken into consideration”, what is being said by the sex workers is heard first hand on location.

In Vancouver, the *Wish Drop-In Centre Society* (<http://wish-vancouver.net>) is an example of a resource that seeks to directly respond to the daily practical needs of street sex workers. In this day centre a number of services and supplies are offered: hot meals, clothing, makeup, showers and dressing rooms, on-site nursing care; referrals to other specialized services (such as detox centres, rehabilitation, etc.); a housing service for sex workers in need; transition programs for women who lack qualifications and wish to find other work; literacy programs for women who wish to upgrade their education (women are initiated on computers, work at crafts, borrow books, write or simply socialize with other women); beauty evenings with fashion professionals (these activities seem to provide the women with an opportunity to reconnect with themselves, to improve their self-image, etc.); organization members regularly engage in activities that provide moral support (such as visiting sex workers who are hospitalized, celebrating special events such as birthdays or other occasions to build a sense of belonging, etc.). Some organizations provide lists of bad clients to improve sex workers' safety. There are also activities related to prevention and to promotion of sex workers' health (distribution of condoms, needles, lubricants, etc.).

In summary, this type of service responds to street sex workers' daily needs by recognizing that social and criminal stigmatization is a daily occurrence; this stigmatization is partly responsible for their needs and affects their ability to access available services and an informal support network.



# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in many of the studies cited in the previous sections, we use as a reference point the comments of sex workers who claim that “prostitution” should be recognized as a profession. We consider their practices first and foremost as a type of female work and more precisely a non-institutionalized work in the service sector (Parent, Bruckert, 2005). A number of activities related to this work are considered illegal and on the whole sex workers are objects of stigmatization. The organization of the work and activities vary according to location and/or type of practice (massage parlours, erotic establishments, escorts, street sex work), but on the whole research suggests that women who are street sex workers are more exposed to violence and police intervention.

A number of studies show that a significant number of street sex workers explicitly consider their work as a profession (Pryen, 1999, McKeganey and Barnard, 1996). For some, the street is simply a workplace. They have their own home where they occasionally welcome certain regular clients. For others, the street is their workplace and living space; some, particularly, those who use certain drugs, engage daily in survival practices, among which prostitution is only one method used to procure drugs. Needs and use of available services may vary, as well as the services they would like to have.

To focus on the diversity of the needs of sex workers and services required to adequately meet these needs, our approach falls within the diverse framework of feminist studies that from the outset recognizes the significance of social gender relations in all spheres of life, including the production of knowledge. We favour an action-research project: the problem was first identified in the community and it is with the participation of this community’s representatives that we initiated the research. Additionally, as highlighted by

Barnsley and Ellis (1992: 9), an action-research endeavour emphasizes systematically collecting and analyzing data in order to make changes. We therefore relied on the words of sex workers (and support workers who work with them), and we were conscious of the importance of giving them a place in the discursive space and of producing knowledge that might be useful to them and that might be reflected in programs adapted to their needs.

As mentioned in the introduction, it was participants at the *Centre espoir Sophie* who reported on the insufficiency of services adapted to their needs. As a follow-up to the formulation of this problem, the *Centre espoir Sophie* in collaboration with researchers at the University of Ottawa initiated an action-research project on the needs and services of street sex workers in the Ottawa region, that is in Ottawa and Gatineau. The main purpose of this study is to identify and highlight the needs of both Francophone and Anglophone street sex workers of the region and to improve their access to resources adapted to their needs. In order to accomplish this, the action-research team gave itself four specific goals: i) identify the needs of both Francophone and Anglophone street sex workers and the services required to meet these needs; ii) list presently available resources and services in the region for Francophone and Anglophone street sex workers; iii) improve access to resources and services for Francophone and Anglophone street sex workers by developing a strategic action plan; iv) improve the safety of Francophone and Anglophone street sex workers and give them a voice in discussions by establishing a solid base for a stable and on-going group whose purpose is to defend the needs and interests of sex workers.

This report addresses the first goal of this action-research, that is to identify the needs of street sex workers and the services they use as well as those they would like to see to respond to their needs. To accomplish this part of the research, we established an advisory committee made up of six representatives of the region's Francophone organizations and one member of the community who has connections with sex workers.

Our objective was to interview 18 sex workers, that is, six Quebec workers who work mainly in the Hull sector, six Anglo-Ontarian women and six Franco-Ontarian women who work mainly in the City of Ottawa. We used the "snowball" sampling method. The advisory

committee assisted us in establishing contacts with sex workers. The members directed us to support workers or community members who were in contact with sex workers who in turn referred us to sex workers. Subsequently, some sex workers referred us to some of their work colleagues. In all we conducted 19 interviews, seven with Franco-Ontarian sex workers, six with Anglo-Ontarians and six with women from Quebec. We then held two group discussions, one in French, the other in English, with eight Francophone and nine Anglophone support workers from the region who are in contact with street sex workers. Research documentation (recruitment letters and consent forms) for sex workers and for support workers was available in French and in English. These documents are found in Appendix II and Appendix III of this report. Interviews were conducted in the interviewee's language and to protect anonymity, we present their statements using pseudonyms. The interview method is found in Appendix I of this report.



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# Part 1

## THE PROBLEM, THE SOLUTIONS FROM THE SEX WORKERS' POINT OF VIEW

### 1.1 Who are these workers?

**R**ecall that our sample is made up of seven Franco-Ontarian women, six Quebec women and six Anglo-Ontarian women from the Ottawa region. Our data, as our readers can judge for themselves in the following sections, indicate a fairly diverse group.

First we note that the age of our participants varies between 24 and 43 years, and that the average age is high, that is 37 years. Contrary to what is often believed, this type of work is not exclusive to very young women.

On the whole, education levels are low, with a majority not having completed high school. On the other hand, almost half of the women have work experience in an area other than sex work and most of them are experienced street sex workers; the average is 14 years.

Financially, revenues vary. Three of the women earn less than \$10,000 annually while six women report annual earnings of more than \$40,000. On the other hand, most of the women receive or have at one time received social assistance benefits; this indicates the social vulnerability of this group of women restricted to living at the margins of society.

## 1.2 What are the implications of street sex work?

### 1.2.1 A profession and its advantages

First we note that all the women appreciate the financial aspect of the work whereas no one considers the work itself as positive. In fact, it must be noted that for some the work and drug use are so strongly interwoven that one does not exist without the other. But for most, the work is a job and has certain advantages outside of drug use.

In this regard, many of the participants indicated that they appreciate the schedule flexibility that facilitates coordination of their work and their personal obligations. A few highlight the importance of establishing good relations with the clients. It is one of the dimensions that they greatly appreciate. Smiley indicates that she maintained relationships with clients who became friends who help her on occasion:

*Oh, yeah, I have customers that I've kept as like friendship. But they'd still pay but it would be more like for my time. Just time. Nothing else, nothing more, (...). And they'd say if you need anything. They'd call and say well, do you need anything and if I'm low on something, they get it for me and I say thank you very much and go to give them money, they say no, no, no. It keeps you home. (Smiley, p. 19).*

Others state that they draw on their work activities and services to their clientele for self-respect and self-esteem.

### 1.2.2 A profession with legal restrictions and subject to violence

We know that in Canada sex work is not prohibited but that many activities associated with sex work are prohibited. One of the violations that results most often in legal action is communication in a public place for the purpose of engaging in prostitution, by

virtue of article 213 of the Criminal Code of Canada. Since street sex workers recruit their clients first and foremost on the street, they are visible and are frequent objects of police surveillance. It is difficult for them to work regularly without being arrested and in particular charged with communication.

It is also not surprising that 18 of the 19 women interviewed reported having troubles with the law. In fact, most of them were charged in virtue of laws related to prostitution and for breach of probation conditions or parole violations. Many have had repeated legal problems. Wendy is an example of an extreme case; she was arrested more than 80 times and convicted 16 or 17 times. Note that some were also taken into custody for drug related activities.

Because of the legal ramifications of many aspects of their work, sex workers are very vulnerable relative to their clients and are often victims of their violence. Studies on street sex work consistently point to this aspect and our own research also demonstrates the gravity of the problem.

Almost all the participants, that is, sixteen of them, report having been victims of violence at the hands of their clients. Cocotte had accepted to accompany to his home a client who looked respectful and inoffensive. But what followed was a different story:

*When I was at his place I was locked in for two hours with a gun to my head. It was like...I was rescued by one of his friends, because one of his friends arrived (...) me I was there, I was crying. Then I told him: you can take me home. He said yes (...) (Cocotte. p. 3, liberal translation).*

Because of the legal ramifications of many aspects of their work, sex workers try to conduct their business discretely, but at the same time they become less visible, which increases their vulnerability. Even when they are victims, recourse to the police is not a solution: the only sex worker who went against this tacit rule found herself charged with an offence. In fact, Candy reports that a presumed client made her get in his car and when an agreement was not possible he refused to let her go and began to be violent with her:

*He won't let me go. He takes me down by the marina, down by Hull. Rips the buttons right off my dress, starts beating me up. Nothing sexual, he just wants to hurt me. Beating me up. Finally somebody calls the cops, they come. You know what? They arrest me! For prostitution! They let him go! And I – no bra or underwear, dress wide open, black and blue, bleeding and they arrested me! The Hull police. You know. Because – and I told them, yeah I was working on the Market and this guy picked me up and he's beaten the shit out of me. Fucking arrest him! I got rights. (Candy, p.12).*

In addition, not only do police officers not offer protection, but some of them have been violent towards sex workers. A significant number of the sex workers, that is, seven out of the nineteen women described incidents with the police. These incidents range from verbal abuse to assault. Naomi who had just been brutalized by a client and who was running away half naked into the street tells us:

*...and finally a car stopped and they called the cops and the cops came like quick, I guess they found a few women beaten or something up there and, but the cops treated me like total shit, eh. (Naomi, p.12).*

Some also reported incidents involving the community. Some participants informed us that citizens blasted them with insults as they walked down the street. For Wendy who is transsexual, the problems are even more serious. In her interview, she indicated that individuals insulted her and threw objects at her when she was on the street. Cocotte added that some neighbours told her to take her work elsewhere (Cocotte, p. 28).

### **1.2.3 The workers' health**

We often associate street sex work with drug and alcohol use. In our sample, all the participants spoke of problems of this nature at a certain period in their life. At the time of the interviews, six of the women were working without using drugs or consuming alcohol, seven were using drugs while they were working, six others no longer used and had quit street sex work.

On the other hand, once again, our data do not substantiate the automatic association between sex work and sexually transmitted infections. In our sample, four workers reported problems of this nature. One had contracted HIV and hepatitis C, another has AIDS and suffers from mental health problems. The other two women suffer from hepatitis C.

On the whole the workers do not report physical health problems but two of the women suffer from mental health problems.

### *1.2.4 Social relationships*

The choice of this type of work associated with drug use results in problems in the area of social relations. The sex workers in our sample are a marginalized group, considering their relationships with their families and friends. Many live in isolation.

In fact, the choice of work generally causes problems with the family. In some cases, relationships are mainly cold and hostile while in others contact is severed. Julie's experience is revealing in this regard:

*My family did not speak to me. My grandmother died four years ago, she told me she loved me but for the seven, eight years I was involved in prostitution she did not speak to me. Neither did my sister, she hardly ever speaks to me now. They are too disappointed. (...). My grandfather's love is unconditional. But the rest of my family hardly ever speaks to me. (Julie, p. 7, liberal translation).*

When they decide to stop using drugs and/or leave this work, some women succeed in re-establishing bonds with family members. Cocotte was rejected by her sisters, her father and all her relatives when they learned she was a sex worker.

*Now all my family comes to see me then they come to my house, my sister comes to my house, she comes to talk with me. My mother, she comes to talk with me. My father. It is all fixed because they talk with me. Everyone comes around. (Cocotte, p. 16, liberal translation).*

Note however that the majority of the women live alone without partners and without children. Many have lost custody of their children but six of the women have a male or female partner and four live with this person.

The social isolation is even more evident when the women speak about their friends. The Franco-Ontarian sex workers in particular are abandoned. Two of the women, Brigitte and Samantha, tell us they have no friends, no persons in whom they can confide and that their only support is that of the support workers whom they trust completely.

However, five of the six Anglophone street sex workers report that they can count on friends. Only one relies on professionals for psychological support. In Quebec, four out of the six women, who benefit from significant professional support, can count on friends. Daphnée in fact affirms: “You know, Madeleine, and me, I consider her not as a street worker, I consider her as a sister that I never had” (Daphnée, p. 21, liberal translation).

### **1.2.5 Housing**

Generally speaking, housing is a problem for women engaged in street sex work.

In fact, at the time of the interview, 16 of the 19 participants reported various problems of this nature. For six of the participants, the problem is serious: they simply have no housing. They live either in shelters for women or with a family member (with their parents or with one of their children). A few rent a room but must spend a significant portion of their revenue on it and do not benefit from the space nor the safety that lodging affords. Many, in a room or in lodging have serious problems either with the owner who wants to evict them or with roommates or neighbours who make their life difficult. It seems that their

choice of work, combined with drug use for some of them, is a source of conflict within their entourage and makes the search for long term safe housing more difficult.

## **1.3 Access to available services**

Our group of participants listed a series of needs related to services. We also concluded that they are well aware of a number of available services to serve their needs. They benefit from certain resources on a very regular basis. Among our participants, 14 have used food banks; a similar number frequent day centres and it seems that almost all those who use food banks use day centres. We also observed that 18 workers access health services and that eight of these take advantage of substance abuse resources.

We note that in general the women have access to many services although the list varies from one woman to another. For example in Quebec, women list numerous services such as the *CLSC*, the *Gîte-Ami*, the *BRAS*, *CIPTO*, the *Pavilion Jelinek*, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, *Entraide familiale*, the *Soupe populaire de Hull*, etc.; on the Ontario side, participants avail themselves of the Sandy Hill Community Outreach, the Sexual Health Centre, Site Van, Centre 454, Salvation Army, Oasis, the *Centre espoir Sophie*, etc.

All the women find support, psychological or emotional assistance from a support worker or from an employee from one of the available services. But not everyone uses the same service. It is interesting and reassuring to find that in frequenting these resources, the participants can find not only material assistance but also support from support workers who establish significant relationships with them that often are above and beyond their strict professional mandate. In this manner, for women who have few or no social relationships, these contacts are important reference points in their daily lives.

We find however that even though the participants use the services of a number of resources, these are mainly services mandated to serve the needs of marginalized sectors of the population, such as *Gîte-Ami*, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the *Soupe populaire de*

*Hull*, the Shepherds of Good Hope, the Salvation Army, The Mission, St. Joe, etc. They also access services where they feel welcomed like the Site Van, the Sexual Health Centre, the BRAS, etc. But they rarely refer and seem not to use a number of services destined for the general population, such as educational services, leisure activities, general work training programs, job search services, etc.

In summary, even though they are part of a marginalized sector of the population, we find that street sex workers manage to find their own solutions to their needs, at least to a certain extent. They target resources that at the same time respond to their needs and provide services free of negative moral judgement. Thus they protect themselves from the stigmatization that is too often directed at them. This capacity is particularly evident when we note that despite the absence of psychological support services designed for them, these women find counsel in support workers in existing services. Of course, as we expressed above, they need to find professionals who are open and sensitive to their problems.

## **1.4 Necessary services... imagine an ideal scenario**

In the context of this research, we asked participants which services they consider necessary to meet the needs of street sex workers and ideally which services should be established. We found that for the respondents, the two categories overlapped; so in the interest of clarity, we decided to group them together.

It is no surprise that we first found that four participants stressed the need for housing services. In the interviews, the workers spoke of this problem which they share with other marginalized groups in the Ottawa region. We also identified four women who, in response to the problem of safety to which street sex workers are confronted, suggested that a list of bad clients needs to be created.

The needs for education support were also highlighted: in order to return to school or to engage in job searches, some sex workers would need support, counsel, information and guidance; two participants spoke of this need. Smiley emphasizes this need and the lack of resources since the Ontario government made cuts to social programs:

*You know. They cut all those programs and with all those programs cut, there's girls out there saying let's go back to school, or let's be able to re-train on computers or something to go back to work. Instead of having to stand out there, to have a legit job, you know. But it's not covered.*

Finally, considering the marginalization of street sex workers, some women need social assistance benefits for certain periods; as is the case with all other social assistance recipients, they find that the payments are insufficient to meet their basic needs. In addition, one of the participants indicated the necessity of increasing these payments.

Even though the women obtain support from their relationships or often from certain support workers, psychological services for the most part are limited. One participant would like these services to be developed.

As a stigmatized group whose activities are criminalized, the sex workers also need legal representation services. One of the participants brought up the need to be able to count on a sympathetic professional, ready to listen without judgement.

Concerning criminal justice policy, it is no surprise that we found that women favour decriminalization or regulation of their activities. They were not specific as to which formula to use, but this is not surprising given that the experts in the matter do not agree on the parameters of each formula and debates and discussions on this question are always heated. On the other hand, what is clear is that they want to work in safety without worrying about constantly infringing on the laws and to benefit from the same protection given to all citizens. They request more police protection.

Regarding specific services, 12 participants would like a day centre. They specify that they want a place where they will not be judged, where they can access health services, psychological support and that would remain open in the evenings and during the night until three or four o'clock in the morning. This need was expressed by a large majority of the women. Some refer to this place as a space in which they can come out of isolation and to socialize. Julie and Samantha describe the needs that could be addressed by a day centre:

*That they would have a space just for girls, there (...) A place to get changed, to get dressed, to talk also (Julie, p. 22, liberal translation).*

*A place where there is coffee, doughnuts, where there are coffee breaks; where one can maybe find two or three support workers, and they have different types of expertise to help women. (Samantha, p. 23, liberal translation)*

Among our participants, seven spoke of the need for a workplace. For some, a district reserved for sex work would provide more safety, for others a work establishment seems to be a good solution. Smiley favours establishing work houses in order to protect the women from assault:

*One, I'd have bawdy houses, o.k., that would prevent the girls from getting hurt. The girls would always be checked, the girls would be making their own pay checks, I'd have day care for girls who have kids. (Smiley, p.28).*

Two sex workers highlight the need for mobile services to reach sex workers (support workers who travel in vehicles to offer medical and personal hygiene services, a trailer that would be open from 10 o'clock at night until 8 o'clock in the morning).

We asked 15 of the workers if they were in favour of creating an organization of sex workers in the region and all responded in the affirmative. But the women themselves did not bring up the need for association.

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# Part 2

## THE PROBLEM, THE SOLUTIONS FROM THE REGIONAL SUPPORT WORKERS' POINT OF VIEW

**T**o review, we held two discussion groups, one made up of support workers who work first and foremost with Anglophone clients in Ottawa, and the other made up of support workers who mainly serve Francophone clients in Gatineau and in Ottawa.

The support workers made it clear from the start that a number of workers lacked socio-economic resources and were not able to enjoy decent living conditions given their revenue. As a result they identified the necessity of establishing services that meet their basic needs: social assistance benefits adapted to the cost of living, housing services, adapted health services. Finally they indicated that present housing resources are insufficient.

The participants also identified educational needs but they made it clear that priority must be given to initiatives that meet the basic needs of these women. Existing educational services are generally offered to a wide range of client groups and the sex workers cannot easily integrate into these programs and benefit from what they have to offer. Initiatives specifically for them are needed. For example, it is important to address the specific difficulties faced by sex workers who wish to change their occupation and who must face, among other challenges, the challenge of preparing a curriculum vitae.

The support workers also stated that many sex workers have substance abuse problems and need readily available services when they are prepared to deal with their dependence. One must also recognize and accept that they may seek these services more than once.

Sex workers are confronted daily by safety problems: their vulnerability to violence has been described. The support workers confirmed that sex workers not only can be victims of violence at the hands of their clients but that they also hesitate to seek health services when they are victims of sexual assault. They also stated that some sex workers are also victims of domestic violence.

As a short term solution to improve women's safety at work, they suggest a list of bad clients that is kept up to date (if not, this list only gives a false sense of security) and that is available on the spot through the use of cell phones.<sup>11</sup> The cell phone could also be used by individual sex workers to send to a colleague the vehicle license plate number of a client who requests services. Finally, ideally, a system of on-call support worker patrols could be established for rapid intervention.

The support workers identified, particularly among the Franco-Ontarian and Quebec sex workers, basic needs similar to those of other marginalized groups. These women, as we have seen in the previous section, have access to a range of services for marginalized groups in the region. But they also recognized that sex workers have specific needs that these services are not always able to address not to mention the possibility the sex workers could be rejected and stigmatized by other service users. Also according to support workers for Anglophone sex workers, these sex workers prefer not to frequent resources that are meant also for other groups of women whose needs are very different from their own (older women, women who have mental health needs). They have little in common with these women and do not wish to be exposed to their moral judgement. Moreover, the support

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<sup>11</sup> This solution could be implemented rapidly in Ottawa. In Gatineau, it seems that in certain cases, police officers confiscate cellular phones when they arrest sex workers. Police cooperation would first need to be obtained.

workers from the two groups reported that sex workers avoided resources where they feel judged either by other service users or by the service providers. With the information obtained in our individual and group interviews we can conclude that street sex workers share needs similar to those of other groups in the population; they only use services where they are not subject to stigmatization and moral judgement.

For the participants in the group discussion, one of the important needs of sex workers is that of recognition and respect from the community. We should help them to build self-esteem, give them a voice, allow them to speak for themselves, insure their visibility as citizens. Of course to meet these objectives, laws need to be amended and social prejudices against sex workers need to be broken. But, apart from the broader concerns whose solutions will take time, meanwhile we can find solutions that will assist workers to be restored, to relax and to support each other. It is in this spirit that many support workers indicated that a drop-in centre or a day centre could be an appropriate response.

This day centre, designed for sex workers, should have hours of operation adapted to the needs of sex workers and therefore should not close its doors before midnight. For some support workers, this centre should only serve sex workers, be a haven of peace, a space that protects them from judgements and from stigmatization. For others, the space designed for sex workers should be open to other client groups. Some participants stated that in Ottawa, Franco-Ontarians must be able to receive French language services.

The participants in the group interview also pointed out that existing services must be made more accessible: centres such as *Centre espoir Sophie* should offer extended hours of operation and have more personnel available to serve clients. As we stated earlier, such services as substance abuse services should be more readily available; there should be shorter waiting periods.

Finally, it seems that the best method to publicize services available for sex workers is through word of mouth. Since sex workers are discriminated against when they attempt to access services, reference from a colleague or a person in a position of trust is often necessary before they will approach the service.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Our interviews confirmed once again the negative impact of the present legal regulation of street sex workers. These laws contribute to further penalizing the sex workers. Decriminalization appears to be a necessary solution: as citizens in their own right, they would be better able to assert their rights and to ensure their safety. Decriminalization would offer possibilities for them to be heard and to assume their place in society.

But, until then, to ensure the safety of sex workers and to fight stigmatization, formation of an organization of sex workers would be appropriate. This organization could take on various roles depending on the priorities. It could serve to raise awareness and educate the public on the question of sex work and on the stigmatization of sex workers. It could lobby political authorities to abolish laws relative to prostitution. It could establish programs to improve the safety and the health of sex workers, for example the list of bad clients.

It seems important to provide a day centre for sex workers who too often live in isolation, who have specific health, counselling and other needs. This day centre should operate in a welcoming and receptive manner, free of negative moral judgement in regard to sex work and the sex workers themselves.

The fourth recommendation applies not only to street sex workers but also to marginalized persons who live in poverty and destitution. Inadequate housing, poor nutrition, difficulty in accessing appropriate medical services within a reasonable time frame and offered without judgement and criticism are conditions that affect sex workers and other groups within the population. For us it seems important that policies be developed for these groups as a whole in order to ensure safe and decent housing and revenues that allow them to adequately meet their basic needs.

Finally, we found that Franco-Ontarian sex workers and those who declared aboriginal status did not mention problems specific to their minority status. We believe that the severity of the obstacles and challenges these sex workers face and spoke about in the interview simply overshadowed the discrimination they face or the difficulties they encounter trying to access services adapted for them. In addition, we know that for the most part, Franco-Ontarians and aboriginal persons of the region do not insist on adapted services. Sometimes these services are simply not available or are only offered by one staff member, or insisting on this service results in such delays that the person prefers not to proceed. To analyze the obstacles at this level, it would be necessary to identify resources that offer bilingual services and the number of employees who are qualified to offer these services on a daily basis. We believe nevertheless that Franco-Ontarian street sex workers should have access to services in their language and that aboriginal sex workers should be able to count on the services of aboriginal professionals or on referrals to aboriginal resources where the particular elements of their problems can be understood and responded to in an appropriate fashion.

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