

Christchurch brothels more violent than Auckland, researchers say

SHELLEY ROBINSON | April 22 2015

Christchurch brothel and escort workers are more likely to experience violence than their Auckland counterparts, researchers say.

University of Canterbury economics and finance senior lecturer Dr Laura Meriluoto, with a team of researchers, analysed survey data on sex workers and found Christchurch brothel workers were more likely to be harmed than those in Auckland.

However, Christchurch street sex workers were less likely to face violence and theft than in Auckland.

Meriluoto said this could be because of the "compact nature of the street sector" in Christchurch.

Christchurch has been home to three horrific murders of sex workers: Mallory Manning in 2008; Suzie Sutherland in 2005; and a 24-year-old, who has permanent name suppression, also in 2005.

Meriluoto took data collected in 2006 by Otago University associate professor Gillian Abel and found elements of concern in the sex industry.

Abel surveyed sex workers across New Zealand, looking at physical and sexual violence, theft and threats by clients.

Sex workers addicted to drugs and alcohol, whether brothel or street based, were twice as likely to be "victimised", through violence, theft and even abusive text messages, she said.

Meriluoto said that despite the decriminalisation of sex work in 2006 there had been no "significant shift" of workers to brothels as hoped.

"There are things that pull them to the street. Flexible work hours, they get to keep the money they make, it is anonymous and good if you need quick money for drugs," she said.

New Zealand Prostitutes Collective Christchurch regional co-ordinator Anna Reed said much had changed in the industry since 2006.

"Since the earthquakes, a lot of people have relocated from larger brothels [and are] now working for themselves," she said.

Meriluoto said funding was being sought for a new survey.

"If there is anything we can do to highlight issues and make a safer environment, that is what we want. It is a sector that is not going anywhere," she said.

- Stuff

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