

RhED From March to September 2008 **Vox Pop** RhED asked the sex industry in Victoria various questions relating to the Prostitution Control Act (1994), about the way that it works and **2008** about the way that it effects workers.

126 people answered some or all of the questions.

67 respondents were sex workers currently working in brothels.
8 respondents were sex workers currently working privately.

36 respondents were owners or managers of brothels.
15 respondents worked somewhere else—on the street, in massage parlours, or unspecified.

What is this information telling us?

Most people who responded agreed that sexual health testing should be conducted less frequently due to negative results, cost, discrimination and human rights. Those who disagreed were concerned about their own peace of mind, maintaining their health and public safety.

Almost everyone who responded agreed that establishments should be able to advertise for staff as legitimate businesses, to gain quality staff and for safety. Those who disagreed were concerned about normalising the industry for those who are not involved in it.

Most people agreed that private workers should be allowed to work from home for safety, independence and control over their income. Reasons for disagreeing were stated as safety, promotion of illegal brothels and unfairness to brothels.

The majority of respondents preferred to use the term “service provider”, followed by “sex worker”, “other”, and last of all prostitute.

There were lots of suggestions regarding ways that the Prostitution Control Act (1994) can be changed to better the industry. Many people stated that brothels should be allowed to have more rooms and that laws should be consistent throughout Australia. Other concerns revolved around advertising and sexual health checks, as well as discrimination, anonymity, migrant sex workers, illegal brothels, licensing fees and regulatory bodies.

What is RhED going to do with this information?

RhED is using this information to inform discussions with Members of Parliament, the Government, regulatory bodies and the media regarding the proposed changes to the Prostitution Control Act (1994). We are going to use this information to make sure that the voices of the people most affected by these proposed changes are heard.

We're also using the information to inform our own work so that we can better meet the needs of the whole industry in Victoria. We've learned about people's understandings of the Act, as well as people's concerns about working in the industry. We are going to reflect these issues throughout our education, advocacy, training and support to the Victorian Sex Industry.

Thank you to everyone who participated.

We asked the sex industry in Victoria:

Do you agree/disagree that law change should be made to set testing at three monthly for swabs and six monthly for bloods?

91 agreed. (72%)

126 people answered the question.

"I think swabs & bloods should be left to each worker to control, rather than there being another form of legal control over workers' bodies"

"if testing at these intervals protects the service provider appropriately then I agree"

"I believe this is a waste of money and doctors' services when we already have a shortage of GPs, etc and taxpayers' money."

"three monthly for both"

"monthly tests are prejudiced and wrongly assume that sex workers are unsafe"

"even the health clinic agree it should be every 3 months"

"For those who practice safe sex fine. Junkies should go monthly – bit hard to enforce I guess"

"yes I agree, very good idea"

"YES"

"it is pointless having medicals every month"

"I'm STI aware and assume other sex workers are so 3 monthly should be enough"

"I believe that every month is too much. Every 3 months is a lot better for swabs."

"It is a pain in the ass to get them done and I avoid it at every chance"

"yes I do agree. It's a very good idea."

"I do mine every month"
"as brothels practice safe sex with condoms this will be a good idea"

"common sense"

"results always negative"

"it is more realistic for the health and wellbeing of the clients and workers"

35 disagreed. (28%)

"yes I agree that testing should be as often as STIs and other diseases show up"

"better safe than sorry"

"I think that monthly encourages us to maintain our own health as well as others"

"the more often the better"
"because if there is a condom breakage and I forget to follow it up - it would be detected sooner rather than later"

"getting it monthly is good peace of mind for me"

"I do agree with blood and swabs testing in case a condom breaks, etc. You need to know if you are safe."

"they should stay as monthly for swabs and 3 monthly for bloods"

"Need regular check-ups. Sooner the better"

"Like monthly testing for safety reasons."

"I strongly believe girls should be tested monthly"

"once a month ladies must have checks to keep themselves healthy and to keep the public safe too."

"swabs - monthly, bloods every three months"

"swabs every month"

"not enough get it done now"

"keep the same current law"

"service providers should be diligent about their health. So therefore, the time frames should stay the same."

Other comments:

"The ladies I work with have no problem getting their DCs done for their own peace of mind but should be the same in every state. I think in Qld swabs are done 3 monthly."

"if a condom broke you would go and have blood test so every six months blood test. And swabs depending on how many shifts you work. Some girls only do one shift a week."

"I think it should be every 2 months for swabs - 1 month is too soon and 3 months is too long between doc visits"

"does it matter? It's so easy to get around them anyway."

"agree two monthly for swab test and six monthly for blood test. But those who offer extra fantasies like anal sex or girls with history of drug usage should have 3 monthly blood tests."

"Only in that my concern the government may cut funding so that girls who want a monthly check and 3 monthly bloods would not have that choice."

"Actually I'm not sure"

We asked the sex industry in Victoria:

Do you agree/disagree that owners and managers of brothels/escort agencies should be permitted to advertise for ancillary staff including managers, security, cleaners, etc?

126 people answered the question.

122 agreed (97%)

"yes absolutely. This will enable those in the industry to employ professional staff, not just ex-working girls"

"they are a legal business then should be able to advertise for staff"

"every other legal business has the right"
"yes. As with any business the ability to advertise for staff should be paramount."

"we are legal legitimate businesses who pay taxes same as the rest of the workforce"

"it should be okay"

"for their safety"

"a job working in a brothel is exactly the same as any other business. There are people looking for work with flexible hours who are not aware of this industry"

"any other business has the right to advertise for staff"

"and service providers as well. the government can recognise and legalise the service then why not allow advertising across the board - only people who want to work in the sex industry will apply and others will know it is not for them."

"it is a legitimate business and should be allowed to advertise"

"it's so hard to employ staff - not being able to advertise - it would make it much easier"

"cannot put everyone under suspicion. There should be "intelligence gathering" and "close monitoring" of antisocial elements once they are in and operating from day one - not to ostracise everyone in this group through "paranoia" by the BLA"

"there is a need for quality staff for main jobs ie reception, management and lack of staff for cleaning and security."

"we are being discriminated against by the law. We are a legal business but treated as illegal."

"definitely this is a legal business"

"if we were allowed to advertise for staff will allow this industry to employ professional reception, cleaners rather than ex service providers"

"strongly agree there should be normal advertising allowed (Herald Sun employment guide, etc)"

"of course. The owner should be allowed to advertise his/her business."

"they should be able to advertise for anything and anyone except for the working girls"

"they run a legitimate business and deserve to be able to be treated as one"

"These positions need to be filled like all others."

"yes I agree that advertising should be advertised"

"brothels pay tax like every other business so why can't they"

"I think prohibiting advertising for ancillary staff further stigmatises the sex industry"

"It's a business after all!"

"they should be able to"

"they should be able to advertise"

"it is a legalised industry people over 18 years of age can choose to answer adverts or not"

"it makes it harder to get good staff working in brothels."

"yes we should be able to advertise for all types of staff."

"I agree to advertising"

"every other industry is allowed to advertise so please explain - it is a joke."

"or if not allowed to advertise a database should be set up (maybe via RhED) where willing staff can leave their details and staff can be sourced using this database."

"the industry is discriminated against with current restrictions"

"it is a real job and industry isn't it?"

"totally - this will enable this industry to employ persons that are of higher standards"

"makes owners life hard searching for staff of lawful jobs"

4 disagreed (3%)

"Prefer 'industry connected' staff rather than no experience in brothels or workers in brothel. Adverts normalise the industry which is not normal or desirable career avenue for many."

We asked the sex industry in Victoria:

Do you agree/disagree that private workers should be able to provide their own accommodation to work from?

123 people answered the question.

88 agreed (70%)

"for security reasons"

"it all depends on what makes them comfortable"

"yes it is safer for the worker to be on their territory. It increases their safety"

"I think they should be able to. Maybe they can be subsidised for it through tax."

"as long as they submit for a permit"

"yes I agree if they want to."

"it is allowed in Canberra & WA so why not. Makes more money and girls don't have to put with boss taking half"

"as long as they are well aware of potential danger in conducting their business in this manner (this would be hard to police either way)"

"certainly"

"Safety yes, as long as environment is hygienic and no underage people are involved."

"they are getting paid more than brothel workers so they should be able to pay for accommodation"

"as long as it is away from family homes, children and in apartment blocks."

"similarly to ACT/NSW, workers should have the right and ability to work privately, if they so choose with minimal bureaucratic interference"

"It is a matter of safety that private workers should be allowed to provide their own secure working environments."

"yes we should be able to set up safe clean conditions for ourselves."

"as long as the address is approved by the BLA"

"totally - they can choose their own business - nobody else's"

"so workers have a choice not to pay room rental to a parlour."

"to do otherwise is an infringement upon the rights of sex workers"

"it's business"

"Yes I do. What is the alternative? Working on the streets? Working for someone else?"

38 disagreed (30%)

"no - unsafe, these people would not be paying taxes, GST, etc. It would open the gates for illegal brothels"

"this would be unfair to brothels that pay rent, huge outgoing licencing fees and pay tax"

"this will encourage more illegal brothels"

"no that is what brothels are for and pay fees"

"no they should not be able to - that's what brothels are for"

"no way. Firstly it is highly unsafe and it would promote illegal brothels to open and they wouldn't pay taxes."

"safety factor"

"too hard to control" "in a brothel"

"I think that someone should drop them off to the address and pick them up so it's safe"

"end of brothel industry and to make sure ladies have medical checks and safe place to work. Neighbours do not have a brothel next door. One girl can service up to 15 client a day"

"they we would be able to hand in our licences pay no fees and set up lots of little illegal brothels"

"that's what brothels are for - hard enough to get men through the door as it is"

Other Comments

"not sure"

"but not from private homes"

"neither agree nor disagree"

We asked the sex industry in Victoria:

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE IDENTIFIED IN THE Prostitution Control Act (1994)?

94 people answered the question.

14 identified Sex Worker

63 identified Service Provider

4 identified Prostitute

13 identified Other

“entertainer”	<i>“sensual health carer or sexual health therapist”</i>	“relaxation therapist”
“relaxation therapist”		“?”
		“working girl”
“working lady”	“sex therapist”	
“sex fairy”	“entertainer”	“entertainer”
“pleasure working girl”	“Whore - it's only a label. Whore, pro, cracker, who cares?”	

We asked the sex industry in Victoria:

ARE THERE OTHER CHANGES YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE MADE TO THE Prostitution Control Act (1994) OR IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY?

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“not familiar with the Act” 47 people answered the question.

“why is there a limit to only 6 rooms”

“Complete closure on repeat offenders of known unprotected sex where brothel owners are aware of such behaviour. More than 6 rooms to be available.”

“brothels should be able to advertise for business on newspaper and TV (including the ladies)”

“Get a union for managers”

“more rooms”

“I reception in a brothel and do escort privately on Mornington Peninsula. I visit them but a lot ask if they can visit me. No - not till this law gets changed - then it would be great”

“BLA should be replaced by a panel of more broader diverse persons from a wide range of backgrounds and skills in the area of human sexuality and sensuality psychology, metaphysics, morals and social interaction, empathy and understanding of this type of mainly female dominated business. Knowledge of sex and human behaviour an advantage.”

“more rooms for working and less brothels”

“I would like to see the laws changed so anywhere in Australia, the laws would be the same”

“I think it is ridiculous that we can only have 6 rooms. How is this beneficial to clients or sex workers? If anything it is detrimental.”

“private workers should be able to work together for their protection and security.
Max 2 to an apartment”

“get into the 21st century”

“I believe that brothels in the CBD should be able to increase from six rooms to nine rooms.”

“to choose own hours - more flexible”

“why are there a limit to 6 rooms with new establishments, when others are still able to trade with more, eg Daily Planet”

“an increase from 6 rooms to 8-10 would be applicable in Melbourne”

“complete overhaul of the outdated legislation. Special attention to illegal brothels and power to shut them down.”

“Owners' licences should be transferable to spouse if accident or death occur”

“brothel owners and approved managers go through rigorous STI training and knowledge (books are not enough)”

“should be easier to advertise and should be able to show more than above the shoulders.”

“the laws should be the same Australia wide - not different from state to state. Many ladies work all over the country - not just Victoria.”

“private workers, escorts to have STI checks. Unprotected oral sex, unprotected vaginal/anal sex illegal”

“More rooms in bordellos catering for overflow of girls”

“manager's licence to be longer than 3 years”

“I think that people new to the industry should be informed more - details about STIs and what provides a proper service, eg what to do”

“managers' licences should be every 5 years not 3 years and after 10 years should be of no cost to manager. This is bull****, no one else has to reapply every 3 years just to answer phone, wash towels and handle money. It is discrimination. I am not a criminal.”

“if they allow private workers from home, the underground business would run out of control and brothels would not be able to get staff and some brothels would close down. Plus ladies working would be in danger.”

ARE THERE OTHER CHANGES,

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"I think we need more respect - we are human."

"changes could be made to receptionist in regards to renewing licence - once in system could be more simple, eg no need to always provide same ID and information time after time."

"absolute & total anonymity to all service providers"

"I don't agree with the decriminalisation of street work and I'm a street worker/ex brothel. Probably 10 years on streets."

"There should be equal opportunity laws to protect all girls wanting to work in the sex industry particularly those from the massage parlours to be able to choose from private worker at home (ie 1 girl, 1 house) or in brothels - system like in Queensland so RhED can reach out to these displaced girls from massage parlour for education, health and safety."

"remove advertising restrictions head and shoulder (full body). Increase room numbers from 6 to 8. Restrict the number of licences given out."

"I think something should be in place that the brothel can continue to run in the case of death or unforeseen circumstances with the service provider who holds the licence until the family or other arrangements can be put in place. This will stop the panic of ladies who have built up regular clientele and suddenly have to find alternate work placement. Or family trying to continue on before the business sells, etc."

"In other words, decriminalise only for those with citizenship or residence status and not for "overseas recruits" to work privately in their home."

"less discrimination"

"Environmental Planning Act to review, with councils given more education regarding sex, morals and be included in the new Prostitution Control Board."

"more rooms"

"I highly believe that brothels in the high density areas should be able to have more than 6 rooms"

"security person. Buzzers that are easy to reach."

"more working rooms to accommodate service providers' needs and to be able to compete on a level playing field to other establishments"

"The current BLA is far too insular and inward with officers too geared at "block and cordite" of administrative paperwork thereby letting cunning "cons and crooks" slip into the net, or owning more than one brothel for monopoly and thereby making a monkey out of the legislation. They have no sufficient commercial experience at a practical level. These administrative clowns are very focused on draconian, autocratic style of handling the industry. They need to concentrate on "first hand intelligence" gathering not only on "DOB in' mentality.

Discontinue exempt brothels - not safe for two workers in industrial site.

Kevin Rudd's words - social inclusion, workforce participation, fairness test, equal opportunity for girls from massage parlour to be included to be able to enjoy the education from RhED in Victoria."

"I'd like to see laws put into place about how much a brothel can take as their cut - 60-40 would be nice"

"BLA/Consumer Affairs/Police/Councils - one of the governing bodies to be made accountable for closing illegal brothels down. If this was in the legislation once and for all that body would be accountable - rather than the ambiguity we are currently stuck with NO ONE taking responsibility.

A ceiling on how much a manager's licence is. Currently it is over \$280 and to someone out of work for a while, this is an obscene amount of money to make one self employable. The managers are not out there like they use to be. Where you would get a few calls per month, now you are lucky to get a few calls a year."

"I would like to work my own hours but the bosses tend to enforce us to do a set amount of hours"

"any girl should be a resident of Australia for at least 12 months to help stop illegal workers"

"brothels in CBD should be permitted to have more working rooms"

"Advertising agency should also be made responsible to collect "health certificates" when due before next advertisement allowed to go through ie two monthly, or blood test three or six monthly. So the responsible advertisement agents need education and support from RhED to handle this. From the health certificate, genuine workers will then be screened for residency status and ATO to keep out illegal girls from free advertising and illegal operations, to prevent proliferation in community and to avoid unnecessary social impact and traffic build up. There would be time of operational restriction."

"get into the 21st century"

"medical certificates should not be handed over until workers' results are back to further ensure the prevention of spread of disease and to deter infected ladies from continuing to work."

"clear, concise tax info and easy access to ATO information for sex workers"