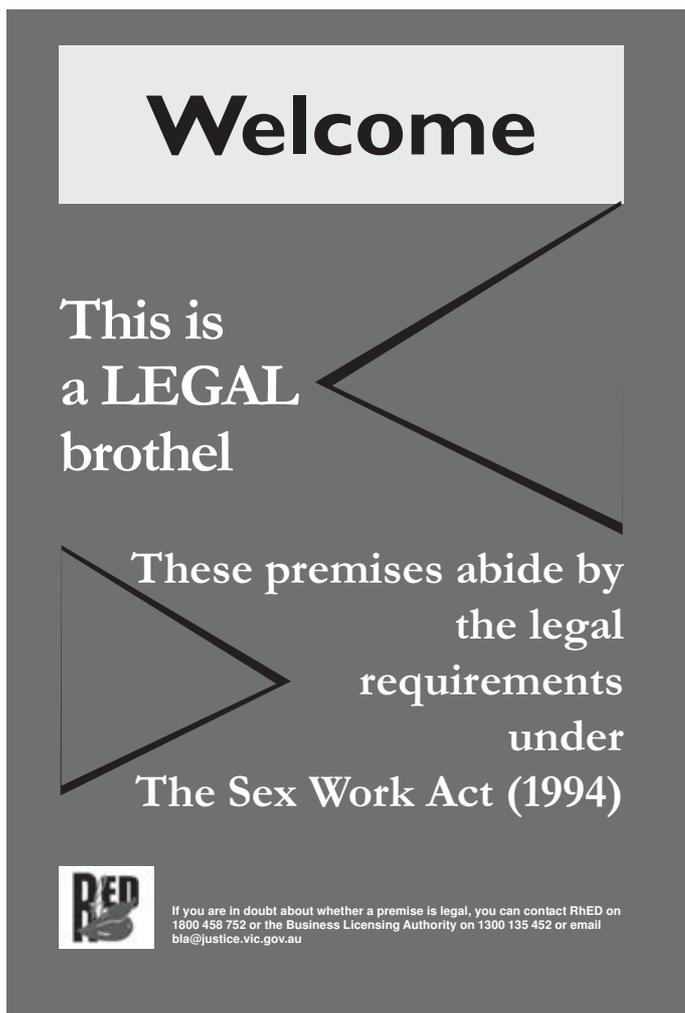


# Legal Brothel Signage



## Legal Brothel Signage Pilot Project Report

RhED outreach workers have been informed of the increasing number of clients requesting unsafe sexual services. These include oral without a condom and full service without a condom, including anal sex without a condom.

It is well known by people working in the regulated sex industry that there is another industry that operates outside the regulated area – the illegal brothel.

The exact numbers of unregulated brothels, is at best, always a guess. Because of persistent media reports that estimate anything from three to 400 illegal brothels, Consumer Affairs Victoria commissioned the Monash School of Political and Social Inquiry to undertake research into several areas. One of the areas that Consumer Affairs wanted information about was the illegal brothel sector in Victoria.

The research was based on interviews with regulatory and enforcements agencies, licensees and operators of brothels, support workers and sex workers. Clients were not interviewed. The only Victorian research on men who pay for sex in Victoria, "Project Client Call", was commissioned by Macfarlane Burnett Centre for Medical Research in November 1998.

The research said that gaining accurate numbers of unlicensed brothels is difficult to ascertain. One of the reasons they gave is a lack of integrated data being taken by key agencies concerned with regulation and enforcement. The research showed that Councils and Victoria Police offer relatively low estimates while industry representatives offer the largest estimates. Whilst the research participants did not agree on the size of the illegal industry, they did agree that it has been increasing steadily over the past 5-7 years. If you are interested in reading this comprehensive report, please telephone RhED on 1800 458 752 who can email you a copy.

Given that anecdotal reports of clients requesting unsafe sex have been steadily increasing, RhED developed a Pilot Project to inform and educate clients about whether the premises they are visiting are legal or illegal. In discussion with management and sex workers, it had become apparent that clients were not aware of whether they are on the premises of a legal brothel or an illegal premise (ie massage parlour that provides sexual services but which is not licensed under the Sex Work Act 1994).

The pamphlet and posters helped create an opportunity for both brothel management and sex workers to talk to clients about the differences between legal and illegal and also around safe sex practices. A condom keeps everyone safe.

Over the past ten years the number of illegal brothels has grown in proportion to the legal industry. Currently, there are 96 legal brothels in Victoria, the majority of which are in the metropolitan Melbourne area with three in Geelong and one in Morwell.

Brothel management and sex workers continue to inform RhED that they are asked for unsafe sex services being told they can "get oral sex without a condom" at "the place around the corner".

When brothel management and sex workers enquire further, it becomes clear that clients are visiting the unregulated industry.

Licensed brothels pay annual licence fees. They do inform Consumer Affairs Compliance and the Business Licensing Authority of illegal premises. However this does not address the issue of unsafe sex practices.

A new strategy was needed to enable brothel management and sex workers to inform and educate clients of the sex industry. The key contributing factors that impact on the sex industry are the continued requests for unprotected oral, vaginal and anal intercourse. Sex workers have to continually field and refuse requests for unsafe sex, often resulting in a loss of booking/s.

Brothel management then have to intervene and manage both the outcome for the sex worker (loss of income), the outcome for the brothel (loss of income), and educate the client.

Confusion may arise when a new sex worker is unsure of the legislation and is informed by the client, that he can obtain unprotected oral, vaginal and anal intercourse. They may proceed with the service without using safe sex practices. When the sex worker is aware that she or he has offered an unsafe service, they may become



distraught by the impact on their physical and mental health. Comments such as "I should have known better" are reported. There can be a sense of shame and anxiety.

The illegal unregulated sex industry is unlikely to replicate either the signage or the brochures as most do not want to bring attention to them.

Research shows that clients who purchase services in brothels go to many different establishments. This project will go some way to informing clients whether they are in a legal or illegal brothel.

## Who will benefit

### 1. Sex workers

Sex workers who work in brothels will benefit from this project as they will be supported by management in minimising requests for unsafe sex from clients who visit illegal premises.

Sex workers in brothel range from 18-60+ (Working Girls in Melbourne Brothels, 2006).

- 34 per cent of surveyed participants were in long term relationships with 15 per cent married. The majority identified as single. The major difference between day and night workers are that day workers were mainly unsupported sole parents needing the flexibility the industry offers, whereas night workers tended to be single with no children
- 65 per cent had completed up to and including year 12.
- 42 per cent had completed some form of higher education.
- The area of need is that 72 per cent of sex workers surveyed want their work to remain anonymous and are anxious about being "caught" by family or friends. Most have experienced discrimination and judgemental attitudes from the community including health professionals.

### 2. Brothel owners/management

Brothel owners and management who often have to mediate between sex workers and clients when unsafe sex practices are requested will benefit.

Brothel management is often undertaken by people who have not obtained management skills outside the industry. This is due to the inequity of brothel owners not being able to advertise for brothel management (contravenes Section 18, PCA (1994)).

Brothel owners have to recruit from the industry or from friends. This can limit the qualifications of brothel management and support systems that other areas of management have access to. (This is due to stigma and discrimination from the general community).

Often, brothel management are not skilled in conflict resolution. This can be problematic when disputes arise between clients who request unsafe sexual services and sex workers who feel pressurised to perform an unsafe service and/or seek management support in the conflict.

Management will be able to provide clients with information about health matters and differences between illegal premises, thus supporting the sex worker, educating the client and being supported by the RhED program.

### 3. Clients

Clients are aged between 14-85, the majority are married, with 80% employed and income in excess of \$40,000 (Project Client Call 1998).

- 85 per cent of respondents had accessed the services

of sex workers through a brothel and 38 per cent at "massage parlours".

- The reason they visit sex workers is for good sex (32%), convenient sex without commitments (20%), companionship and intimate contact (15%), sexual frustration (13%), fantasy/bondage and discipline (2%), peer/social pressure (2%), physical/sexual disability (1.5%), question sexual orientation/identification (1%) and thrill of illicit/unconventional sex (0.5%).
- The services they pay for are receiving oral sex (91%) and vaginal sex (89%), and relief (65%), giving oral sex (47%) and anal sex (19%). Other services range from talking/kissing to fantasy services (spanish, golden showers, fetishes, sixty-nine, etc).

Statistical analyses were carried out to determine differences between condom users and non condom users.

- Non use of condoms was found to be related also to the choice of venue where clients accessed sex workers from.
- Non using clients were also found to have infrequent sexual health checks (less than once a year) and to perceive their risk for HIV as higher than their condom using counterparts.
- 59 per cent of the sample were having sex with a regular female partner who was not a sex worker.
- 23 per cent of the same were also having sex with casual partners who were not sex workers.
- 15 per cent of the same had ever had sex with a male partner.
- 11 per cent of the sample had ever had sex with a transgender partner.

A recommendation from the research was that education campaigns be targeted specifically for clients of sex workers. Clients will benefit if they are provided with information and education about the differences between legal and illegal establishments.

## The Pilot Project

This project ran for two weeks in October 2010.

The aims of the project were:

1. To educate clients about legal and illegal premises
2. To support sex workers to educate clients about safe sex
3. To support management in conflict resolution between sex workers and clients
4. To raise the profile of the RhED program in the sex industry

Four brothels in the eastern, western, northern and southern areas of Melbourne took part in the project. They displayed laminated posters in reception areas or at the front door as clients walked in, informing clients they were in a legal brothel.

There were pamphlets placed at specific areas (of the brothel's choosing) – in the reception area, the introduction rooms, the front desk.

Brothel management be asked to monitor (on a shift basis – day and night) where the majority of flyers are being taken from and to observe how many clients read the information (as some clients may read only)

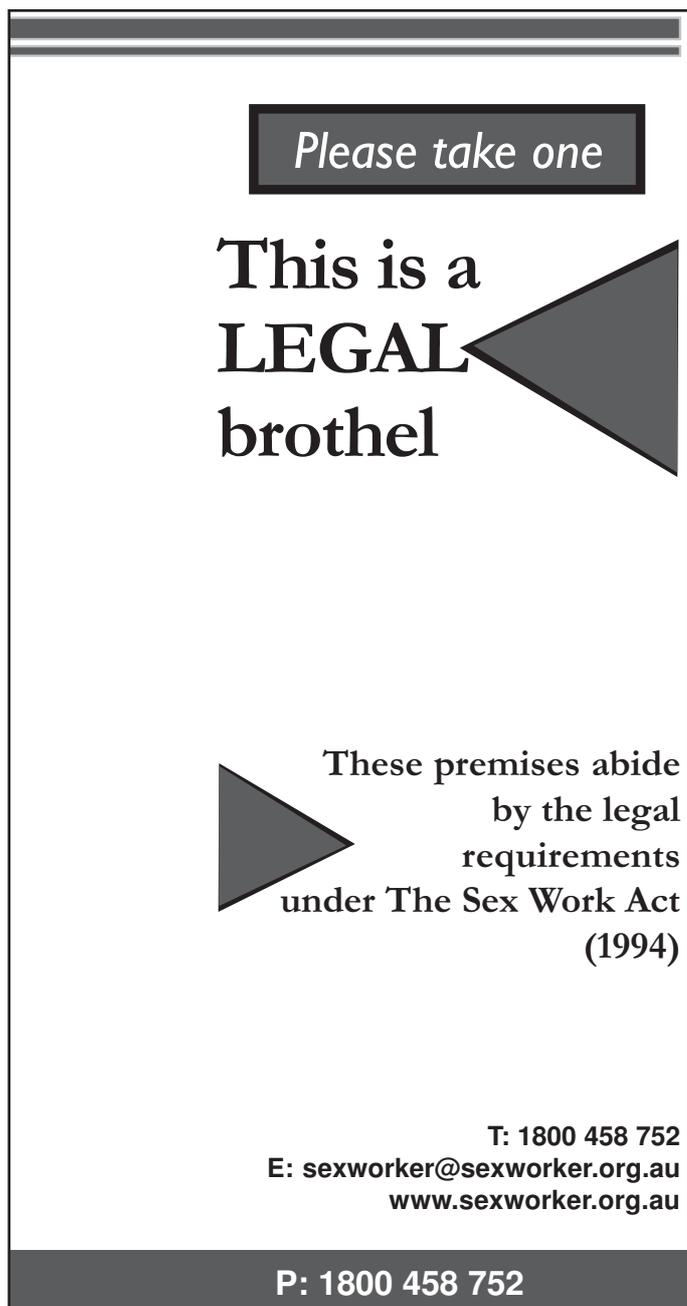
## Evaluation

Brothel management were asked to complete daily running sheets, noting the number of pamphlets taken, and/or read by clients. In addition, brothel management were requested to complete a one page evaluation form.

### Evaluation – materials

Three of the four brothels promoted the project by completing a total of 59 shift running sheets. It was noted that one brothel did not complete this section.

### Pamphlets



It was noted that 52 pamphlets were taken, with one brothel reporting an extra 25 pamphlets taken from the reception area.

In total, 80 pamphlets were read by clients. It was noted that one brothel did not complete this section.

Feedback comments included:

1. *Few people are aware of any difference between legal and illegal. All who have asked, especially girls, are surprised to learn sex work is illegal in any setting.*

2. *One already very informed customer read carefully and told me of his local illegal brothels - where they are and where they advertise, etc.*
3. *Very good idea.*
4. *Things I learnt from the brochure: hand relief is considered a sexual service, that there is an organisation named RhED. That there is a website [www.sexworker.org.au](http://www.sexworker.org.au). That PCA is an acronym for Prostitution Control Act.*

### Evaluation – management

Three of the four brothels thought that the project was “maybe” successful in meeting its aims with one brothel reporting yes, the project did meet its aims.

Three of the four brothels said it did create an opportunity to talk to clients and educate them about safe sex practices.

Brothel management said there was minimum verbal feedback from clients about how they received the information with one brothel commenting “gents who noticed were impressed”.

Regarding clients continuing to access illegal brothels, the feedback was that it may make clients think more carefully although it was noted that it is hard to compete with illegal prices.

The task of improving or redesigning the project brought forth comments that there should be more posters and flyers and to make the laminated sign bolder.

### Conclusion and recommendations:

Overall, the project was well received by the brothel industry. Comments have been received from other brothels as to why they were not included.

Although the size of the illegal industry cannot be established accurately, as above research shows, it is agreed that it has been increasing steadily over the past 5-7 years.

As clients are much under researched in the sex industry, the project outcomes indicate that clients are not always aware of the differences and therefore, education and information delivered by the sex industry to clients is important.

It has been recommended to RhED management that the project be extended to the whole brothel industry by way of delivering laminated signs and pamphlets. However, funding will need to be sourced in order for this to occur.

Brothels are welcome to develop their own resources which they can use to help inform and educate clients about the differences between legal and illegal establishments.

**Gabby Skelsey**  
**February 2011**

