

workers in Australia and overseas highlights, strangers who may specifically target sex workers (see Kinnell, 2001 in Penfold et al., 2004).

Incidents that receive a great deal of media coverage (such as the murders in Ipswich, UK, or those in Queensland) can foster the belief that violence is perpetrated by serial killers—psychologically unstable repeat offenders. Lowman (2000, p. 998) argued, however, that rather than dealing with single aberrant offenders, “we are dealing with a systematic pattern of violence against prostitutes perpetrated by many men”, some of whom may specifically and repeatedly target sex workers, especially street-based workers. The available research on clients suggests that few support violence against sex workers (Busch, Bell, Hotaling & Monto, 2002), or accept rape myths more than the general male population (Monto, 2004). The number of client contacts that a worker would have over a year arguably increases the likelihood of sexual assault occurring, especially where the risk of being caught is diminished. Lowman suggests a distinction between ‘situational’ (in the context of the transaction) and ‘predatory’ (premeditated) violence (of course always acknowledging that, no matter what the context, perpetrators are always fully responsible for their actions).

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Despite the inability to make any conclusive statements about perpetrators, there are some factors that can legitimise and foster opportunities for violence. These include:

- *Geographical and social isolation.* Physical isolation provides concealment for those that plan violence against sex workers. It can also provide situational opportunity for a client in that unplanned violence becomes less risky. The perception that sex workers are socially isolated and without family or other support networks (often erroneous) can also decrease the perception of the risk of being caught;
- *Misunderstanding about what payment for sex entitles clients to.* Whittaker and Hart (1996) note that male client violence seems to occur as a result of conflicting notions about the exchange. Because a payment has been made, some clients believe this entitles them to control over the sex worker’s body—to services they have not paid for or that a worker will not do as a matter of course, or to be as rough as they want (Monto, 2004; O’Neill, 2001; RhED, 2002); and
- *Anti-sex worker sentiment and initiatives promulgated throughout communities.* Various studies have noted a correlation between anti–sex work rhetoric that sees street-based workers as a nuisance or threat to public order and an increase in violence against workers (Lowman, 2000; Penfold et al., 2004). This has been described as a “discourse of disposal” in that women who visibly engage in sex work are seen as something to “get rid of” (Lowman, 2000, p. 988).

Clearly, broader beliefs about gender, sex and masculine entitlement inform the perpetration of sexual violence against sex workers, just as they do the perpetration of sexual assault generally.

### Identifying risk factors for sexual assault against sex workers

Workplace violence against women is a common experience. The Department for Victorian Communities (2005) found that 62.1% of women had experienced some form of workplace violence in the last five years. This included being sworn at, bullying, physical attacks, sexual harassment, stalking and rape. Chappell and Di Martino (2000) identified several ‘at risk’ workplace scenarios:

- working alone (in small business, from home, community care and domestic workers);
- providing care, advice or training (nurses and other health workers, social and community workers);

- handling money or valuables; and
- working with mentally disturbed, drunk or potentially violent people (mental health, hospitality) (as cited in Department of Victorian Communities, 2005, p. 16).

In sum, women who work alone, attend to the needs of others, or deal with difficult people are more likely to experience violence in the workplace. One of the core factors in workplace violence is having face-to-face contact with clients or customers (Mayhew & Chappell, 2005). The forms of violence experienced by women involved swearing or shouting (48.6%), hostile or aggressive behaviours (46.7%), bullying or mobbing (22.4%), and physical attacks including punching and kicking (11.6%); only a small percentage of women (0.2%) have been sexually assaulted at work (Department of Victorian Communities, 2005). It is possible that the sexual assault of sex workers is a part of a continuum for women fulfilling the expectations of others and who are in close physical proximity. Face-to-face contact, the expectation of a physical or emotional 'attentiveness' (Hoschschild, 1989; Wood, 2001), and organisational and environmental design (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer & Higgins, 2006) are relevant factors in sex workers' experiences of sexual assault.

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However, there is also a range of specific conditions that affect sex workers' vulnerability to sexual assault. These conditions include the nature and location of the work environment, the laws regulating sex work, the extent of police powers, homelessness or 'sleeping rough', heavy substance use, youth, and inexperience. These issues are examined below.

## The nature and location of the work environment

### *Indoor vs outdoor sex work*

Perhaps the most significant factor rendering workers vulnerable to sexual assault is working outdoors. As Table 1 showed, street-based sex workers experience the highest levels of sexual assault in comparison to indoor workers (for example, brothels, flats, or other private locations). Researchers conclude that this is because indoor environments are subject to a range of controls that inhibit the likelihood of violence. The environmental design of sex work premises (lighting, security doors, intercom and surveillance systems) can increase workers' ability to control the interaction (Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Whittaker & Hart, 1999) and increase awareness of encounters that are not going well. The simple fact of telephone bookings allows workers to screen clients. The presence and skill of other staff is another feature that increases safety. In brothels, the receptionist is a key 'gatekeeper' who can assess the potential danger a client might present (for example, if he is intoxicated), respond to violent encounters or monitor situations. British research examined the way women ('maids') employed by private flat-workers added to the safety of indoor work by making provisional assessments of clients before opening the door, being aware of the transaction details, the worker's sense of the client, and monitoring, as well as informing sex work outreach services of new flats they might like to visit (Whittaker & Hart, 1996).

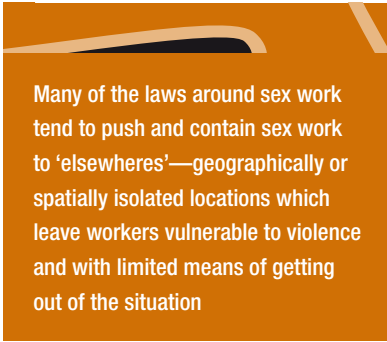
By contrast, outdoor work does not allow for this kind of control. Workers may have someone 'spotting' for them, but this is not always available, and is not present during the transaction. Depending on the laws, the actual location of the trade or whether a police crackdown is in effect, the place where services occur is frequently not in workers' control. Servicing clients in cars is a significant source of danger: "the problem of doing a car job is the guy can have a knife under his sock, or he can have a knife under the seat, he can slit your throat at any time. You can get bashed in the car, he can push

you out of the car ... “ (Cindy on Carrick, 2003). (It is important to note that Cindy is speaking of New South Wales where street-based work is legal, but where there were no safe houses for workers to take clients.) Abduction, kidnapping and forced detention are also common experiences among street-based sex workers who do car jobs (Bligh & Rasaiah, 2001; Church et al., 2001). As Kurtz et al. (2004) noted, getting into a client’s car “gives almost total control to the customer” (p. 375). The likelihood of sexual assault occurring in these circumstances is high.

It is important to note that while outdoor work has emerged as the most risky for sex workers, this does not mean that women should simply stop working in that sector. As Sanders and Campbell state: “the growing recognition that indoor work (if well managed) is safer than street work often leads to calls for legalisation of indoor sex work with an assumption that women on the street will be directed to working indoors. This assumption misunderstands the dynamics of street sex work including the advantages it has for some people (e.g., the lack of time and routine restrictions)” (2007, p. 14).

### **Location and isolation**

Many of the laws around sex work tend to push and contain sex work to ‘elsewheres’—geographically or spatially isolated locations which leave workers vulnerable to violence and with limited means of getting out of the situation (Godden, 2001; Rowe, 2003; Sanchez, 2001). Discourses of nuisance, public disorder, and disease control have influenced the official relegation of sex workers to hidden, industrial or isolated spaces since at least the nineteenth century (Frances, 1994; Walkowitz, 1989). When tolerance zones have been proposed in the context of street-based work (as they were in St Kilda, Melbourne) the nominated areas are often removed from central spaces (Rowe, 2003), leaving workers perhaps even more isolated.



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The danger of car jobs has already been mentioned. Escort workers are also isolated in that they must attend a booking on the client’s terms—either their home or a hotel. Treleavan (1995) noted that the escort industry did have a “very high rate of sexual assault and rape, even murder. Sex workers’ rights groups receive much anecdotal evidence of workers being assaulted and abused by clients and having to run naked through public places, such as hotel lobbies, across roof tops and over balconies, in order to escape with their lives” (1995, p. 300).

Organisations spoke of instances when an escort worker may step into a booking to discover there are four clients, not just the one who made the call. A scenario such as this has the potential to become extremely violent. Victoria’s laws for private (or exempt) workers means that they may be working in areas that have a low level of pedestrian traffic. It also means that if workers are working from home and do not have a permit, they are operating in an illegal sector and are therefore unlikely to go to police following an assault.

### **Legal contexts of sex work and the incidence of sexual assault**

Both the research on sex work and lobbying by many sex work organisations (in Australia and internationally) suggests that another relevant factor is the kind of legal framework they are working within (Alexander, 2001, 1998; Banach & Metzenrath, 2000; Bindman, 1997; Neave, 1994; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Rowe, 2003; Scarlet Alliance, 1999, 2000). As Table 2 shows, laws, restrictions and penalties that apply to sex work do not apply to any other form of work. Sex workers face obstacles that accountants, teachers, beauty therapists and so on do not. Although sex workers and others see their activities as work, it has yet to be treated in this way by various authorities (Banach & Metzenrath, 2000).