Wales, it is estimated that 16% of sex workers are students (SSPPAC, 2004). Substance use can also be a factor influencing entry into sex work, however the relationship between sex work and drug use is complex (Johnson, 2004; Maher, 2000; Perkins, 1991; Surratt, Inciardi, Kurtz & Kiley, 2004). Research suggests that male sex workers engage in sex work in quite different ways from female sex workers (Boyle et al., 1997). These different circumstances affect the extent to which people identify as a 'sex worker'.

Such diversity shows that there is no discrete group of 'sex workers' separate from the rest of the community. At the same time as engaging in sex work, women raise children, attend school or university, or try to maintain independence as a minor without family support. Sex workers are members of the community as residents, colleagues, peers, patients and citizens rather than some 'other' category of people. Yet their experiences of sexual assault in both their work and private lives are often questioned, derided, ignored or silenced. As victim/survivors of sexual assault, they are often disbelieved and seen as undeserving of support or legal justice *because* they are sex workers. The recent high-profile murders of sex workers in the UK and Canada (Miles, 1998), and the murder of sex workers in Australia (for example, in Queensland five sex workers have been murdered since 2001), show the lethal consequences of this perception. Indeed, sex workers are over-represented among female murder victims (Treleaven, 1995, p. 302). As this paper demonstrates, the idea that sex workers somehow bring sexual violence upon themselves, or should expect it given their occupation, deeply influences social and legal responses to them as victim/survivors of sexual assault.

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Sex trafficking is not a specific focus in this paper. 'Trafficking' refers to individuals entering countries (destination countries) by illegally supported means in order to work, often in what would be regarded as exploitative conditions. Such exploitation can range from having to repay 'debts' incurred for migration, to being deceived about the nature of the work. This could mean that a woman thinking she will work as an exotic dancer in a Sydney club instead finds herself in a brothel, or could mean deception about working in the sex industry itself.

As an issue, trafficking is both complex and controversial (see Fergus, 2005). Some have argued that sexual trafficking is sexual assault and that trafficking is "nothing more or less than globalized prostitution" (Leidholdt, 2003, p. 177). Others argue that the language of sexual trafficking can obscure and collapse a range of complex issues involving immigration laws, globalisation, and labour (Murray, 1998; Scarlet Alliance, 2003). It is argued that the exploitation of illegal immigrants (often perceived as arriving from south east Asia) does not just happen in the sex industry but also in the hospitality, textiles and clothing manufacturing sectors (Scarlet Alliance, 2003). Some organisations we spoke with observed that debates about 'sexual servitude' can obscure the issues faced by migrant sex workers, which are not exactly the same issues around trafficking.

Nature and extent of sexual assault against sex workers

It is impossible to know the actual number of all the women who have experienced sexual assault (Lievore, 2003; Phillips & Park, 2006). Sexual violence is often unreported; some victim/survivors may never disclose to anyone their experiences of violence (Ahrens, 2006). Like other victim/survivors of sexual assault, sex workers may be similarly reluctant to speak out. As this paper discusses, where sex work is criminalised or stigmatised, workers are less likely to disclose incidents of sexual assault. An additional factor hampering adequate knowledge about sex workers' experiences relates to the limited nature of available research. As a consequence of the variously illegal and socially

marginalised position sex workers are forced to occupy, conducting high-quality, in-depth research with sex workers is full of challenges that keep samples rather small and localised (Shaver, 2005). There is also a tendency within the literature to collapse the contexts in which sexual assault occurs, with private and work contexts often blurred. The following section is largely concerned with the sexual assault of sex workers in work contexts, however sexual assault in non-work contexts is also examined.

Sexual assault of sex workers in their private lives

The available demographic information on sex workers shows that, as a population, they share many of the characteristics of the most likely victim/survivors of sexual assault: the majority are below the age of 44, with many between 18 and 34, and the majority are Australian born (Woodward, Fischer, Najam & Dunne, 2004). Finding from the Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006) show:

- almost 1.3 million women (16.8%) have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15;
- in the 12 months prior to the survey, 101,600 or 1.3% of women over 15 years have been sexually assaulted;
- younger women between 18 and 34 are most likely to be victim/survivors of sexual assault (of the women sexually assaulted in the last year, 28.2% were between the ages 18 and 24, 29.2% were between 25 and 34, and just over a quarter (25.4%) were between 35 and 44);
- almost 1 million women (956,600) experienced sexual abuse *before* the age of 15 (40.7% were 5 to 8 years of age; almost half were between the ages of 9 and 14 (48.7%)); and
- 81.3% of victim/survivors of sexual assault were Australian born (see Morrison, 2006).

Perkins' (1991) research with Sydney-based brothel workers compared the working and personal lives of sex workers with two other groups—health workers and students. Her study found that of the 128 sex workers interviewed, 80% of them had not experienced rape in a work context. In situations outside work however, sex workers had higher levels of sexual assault than the two non–sex worker groups, with 46.9% being victim/survivors of rape, compared to 21.9% of health workers and 12.7% of students. A study by Roxburgh, Degenhardt and Copeland (2006) found that of the 58 female sex workers who had experienced sexual assault, 44% had been raped outside work. Like other victim/survivors of sexual assault, Perkins found that sex workers were mostly assaulted by those they knew (see also NSW Rape Crisis Centre website). Only 22.1% of incidents were perpetrated by lone strangers (excluding clients), a finding consistent with other research on perpetrators of sexual assault (ABS, 1996, 2006; Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], 2004b). Perkins suggests that sex workers were "very likely most often attacked by men who knew that they worked as prostitutes, and the men assumed they had sexual access to them at any time", based on the perception that sex workers have forfeited their rights to sexual autonomy (1991, p. 224).

It has been a long-standing concern in the literature to examine the relationship between child sexual assault and entry into prostitution. Research carried out in the 1970s and 1980s in North America tried to establish a link between early victimisation and sex work (Bagley & Young, 1987; James & Meyerding, 1977; Silbert, 1982; Silbert & Pines, 1983). Studies of juvenile sex workers over this period indicate that rates of intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse varied between 31% and 73% (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Recent research has found that significant proportions of sex workers surveyed experienced sexual abuse in childhood (Dalla, 2000; El-Bassel et al., 2001; Farley, Baral, Kiremire & Sezgin, 1998; Farley & Barkan cited in Campbell, 2003; Widom & Kuhns, 1996).

Debates about sex work

'Sex worker' is used throughout to describe those who engage in sexual acts for payment. Sex work can be a complex issue for communities, governments, service providers, feminist researchers and sex workers. This is especially the case for feminist activism and women's policy, where the subject has become a crucible of the key issues for women's rights: gender, sexuality, power, choice, economics and violence (Bernstein, 1999; Outshoorn, 2004). At times, these debates have become polarised. The seemingly irreconcilable differences stem from the way in which prostitution has been a *symbolic* battleground, where the terms of the debate have less to do with prostitution per se and more to do with what it symbolises about women's social, civil, political and human status. There is not room in this paper to examine these in great depth (but see Duggan & Hunter, 1995; Valverde, 1989; Vance, 1992). However, this dialogue is important. Naming commercial sex as a form of work, rather than a form of victimisation, inevitably invokes these debates. Accordingly, it is important to at least gesture to the ideological, political and philosophical backdrop informing conceptions of sex work.

During the 1980s feminist politics was embroiled in debates—characterised as 'wars'—over the nature of women's oppression and the role sexuality had to play. For one 'side', sexuality in a patriarchal, capitalist world could not be anything but exploitative (Kathleen Barry, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon are exemplars of this perspective). Commercial sex was an extreme manifestation of women's endless sexual availability and masculine entitlement—the reduction of woman to absolute object. These ideas inform an 'abolitionist' stance on sex work. Some adherents to this view use 'prostituted woman' to name those involved in the sex industry as a way of designating the 'object' and victim status of those being 'prostituted'. It is argued that 'sex worker' neutralises the violence, abuse and coercion involved in the sex industry, assumes that women can make informed and free choices in a world characterised by male oppression, and legitimises men's right to 'buy' women (Jeffreys, 1996; Raymond, 1998; Sullivan, M., 2007). For the other 'side', sex and sexuality could be sites of contestation and resistance and offer women ways of experimenting with power, choice and desire. Accordingly, sex workers should be seen not as objects but as agents who have a degree of control that is usually denied to women (Califia, 1994; Rubin, 1984).

These positions have been characterised, perhaps simplistically, as 'anti-sex' and 'pro-sex'. This has meant highly polemical views about sex work/prostitution: either sex work is inherently exploitative and violent or it is a service like any other and possibly a form of subversion. Such debates have been at their most vehement in the North American context, and do not account for all perspectives on sex work. Most profoundly, these 'wars' failed to engage with sex work feminists in developing a conception of commercial sex. Feminists in the sex industry developed a sex work discourse in order to 'reclaim' their status as legitimate workers, and to dislodge the associations of disease, pathology and criminality that perpetuated women sex-workers' marginalised and stigmatised position in society (Delacoste & Alexander, 1987; Kempadoo, 1998; Nagle, 1997). This stigmatisation refers not only to a social ostracism but to the material injustices such exclusion causes. Many sex work feminists have argued that access to adequate health care, safe working environments (including freedom from sexual assault) and recourse to the legal system have been blocked by the social stigma attached to the woman who sells sex (Banach & Metzenrath, 2000; Pheterson, 1990, 1996). Project Respect points out that "media depictions of 'prostitutes' fail to provide the community with a realistic picture of women's complex lives, nor their hopes or aspirations" (2006, p. 2). More nuanced perspectives have examined: the relationship between sex work and labour opportunities (Fortunati, 1995; O'Connell-Davidson); the labour process under capitalism (Brewis & Linstead, 1998; West & Austrin, 2002); processes of consumption and globalisation (Augustin, 2002; Kempadoo, 2001; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998); and sex work in specific cultural contexts (Allison, 1994; Bishop & Robinson, 1998; Pope, 2005).

The politics of sex work in Australia has tended to take a more 'pragmatic' approach as a result of its colonial history, strong labour movement and the rise of the 'femocrats' in the Australian political system just when prostitution regulation was being formulated in the late 1970s and 1980s (Frances, 1994; Quadara, 2005, 2006; Sullivan, B., 1997; Summers, 1975). It has been argued that the term 'sex worker' prioritises the civil and human rights of people involved in the sex industry (Alexander, 1998b; Murray 2001; Perkins, 1991; Sullivan, B., 2003). There has been some accommodation of these views at a policy level. A view put forward by various authorities for regulating sex work points out that public health and law enforcement aims are easier to achieve when the industry is "out in the open" (see Sullivan, B., 1997 on these views in public policy). Community attitudes to sex work also reflect this view. Queensland research found that 77.7% of people in surveyed communities did not think that sex work should be banned. Many did not believe that prostitution encouraged crime, threatened family life, exploited women, or that equal opportunity would stop women entering prostitution (Woodward, Fischer, Najam & Dunne, 2004). Over half (51.2%) agreed with the statement that prostitution should be treated as an occupation just like any other.

In Australia, Roxburgh et al. (2006) also found high rates of child sexual abuse among sex workers in Sydney's Kings Cross, with 75% reporting some form of child sexual abuse. Over one-fifth (23.3%) of Queensland workers reported unwanted vaginal sex before 16, and 23.7% reported unwanted oral sex before 16 (Woodward et al., 2004). Widom and Kuhn's prospective study found that both childhood sexual abuse and neglect were associated with increased risk of prostitution for females (but not males) (1996, p. 1611). A study with young people (aged 12 to 23) living on the streets in Adelaide showed that 80% of young women and 27% of young men who were involved in sex work had a history of child abuse (Child Wise, 2004, p. 18). All 30 participants in another Child Wise study spoke of experiencing sexual or physical abuse or neglect at the hands of family members and within the state care system (2004, p. 37).

It is important to contextualise these figures, given the tendency in some research to see sex work as the consequence of sexual victimisation as a child (for example, Farley et al., 1998); this can inadvertently cloud discussions about the safety of women while at work. The Personal Safety Survey (ABS, 2006) shows that there are one million women who are survivors of child sexual assault. Those women who are sex workers and survivors of abuse comprise only a small proportion of survivors overall. The analysis of Branningan & Van Brunschot found that it could not be established that child sexual assault "contributes uniquely to the onset of prostitution" (in Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, p. 260). Comparing the rates of child sexual assault in work populations other than sex workers (as Perkins did, for example) would offer a better understanding of any possible relationship between sex work and child sexual abuse. Because this contextualisation rarely occurs, the research findings tend to operate in something of a vacuum (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). There are limitations in the studies that sample predominantly street-based sex workers. Although there may be a connection between child sexual assault, leaving or being removed from home and engaging in prostitution (or survival sex) in order to support oneself, this does not reveal a relationship between child sexual abuse and prostitution *per se*. It cannot explain why most victim/survivors of child sexual assault do not enter sex work; and this focused sampling cannot account for all women's entry into prostitution, which is made up of many sectors.

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Thus it sheds light only in the context of a narrow group of women in sex work for whom child sexual assault *or* neglect, removal from or leaving home, and the desire to avoid state care intersect (Child Wise 2004; Widom & Kuhns, 1996). Several factors associated with state care can make engaging in sex work more likely. These include: being placed in residential care with others also experiencing the same issues; exposure to drug use; being moved around the system and into different forms of care, which increased feelings of isolation; and being abused by care workers (Child Wise, 2004; Hancock, 1992; O'Neill, 2001; O'Neill, Goode & Hopkins, 1995). Leaving these situations for the streets was often seen as a safer option than remaining in abusive circumstances.

The role of state care in the connection between prior victimisation and sex work has tended to be overlooked. Further, the focus on child sexual assault explains little of the experiences of and factors for violence in brothels, escort agencies or private businesses. It can also potentially obscure the range of social factors that entrench psychological distress and poor mental and physical wellbeing among sex-working women who are survivors of sexual assault, and can short-circuit discussions about preventing the sexual assault of workers in their immediate environments. These factors can be forms of secondary victimisation, as examined later in the paper.

Sexual assault in work contexts

A consistent theme in the research literature indicates that the kinds of contexts and conditions sex workers operate in greatly influence their risks of sexual assault.

Those working in certain sectors of the sex industry can be at an increased risk of sexual assault at work. A consistent theme in the research literature indicates that the kinds of contexts and conditions sex workers operate in greatly influence their risk of sexual assault. Street-based sex workers experience the highest levels of sexual assault and other forms of interpersonal violence (Pyett & Warr, 1999; Rowe, 2003; Sullivan, B., 2003; Treleaven, 1996). The table below (table 1) summarises the key findings about the extent of sexual assault experienced by Australian sex workers according—where possible—to the sector. International research is also included.

In mapping the prevalence of sexual assault by sector, it is clear that very little is known about sectors other than the street-based trade. Few comparative studies exist, with the tendency to either collapse all industries together or to focus exclusively on street sex work. Available comparative research indicates that street-based workers are the most vulnerable to all forms of workplace violence, including sexual assault. They are more likely to experience:

- repeat victimisation;
- aggravated or particularly brutal sexual assaults (Lowman 2000);
- kidnapping and unlawful imprisonment (Church et al. 2001; Plumridge & Abel, 2001); and
- multiple forms of interpersonal violence while at work, including verbal abuse, physical assault, and other crimes such as robbery and non-payment.

Underage street workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault where inexperience can place them in dangerous situations, or where perpetrators specifically target younger workers, knowing their inexperience and their reluctance to go to police. At least 4,000 people engage in underage sex work in Australia (Child Wise, 1998, p. iii). Research with young people in sex work in Melbourne found that 16 out of 30 participants had been in the state care system, while 13 had left home because of physical or sexual abuse or neglect (Child Wise, 2004, p. 37). Nearly all of the participants in this study had experienced sexual assault or other violence "at least once" since they started working (Child Wise, 2004, p. 51). Underage sex workers are especially unlikely to speak out about sexual assault for fear of being sent back to their homes or to state care.

Table 1: Sexual assaults of sex workers in different work contexts

	Percentage of workers experiencing sexual assault at work		
Study	**Street**	**Brothel**	**Other**
Australia			
(Qld) Boyle et al. 1997 230 participants			All sectors Ever: 29%
(Qld) Woodward et al. 2004 216 participants	Ever: 78.8% By client: 60.6% (27.3% once; 33.3% more than once)	Ever: 34.7% By client: 3 % (0% once; 3% more than once)	(Private) Ever: 37.8% (Private) By client: 13.4% (7.3% once; 6.1% more than once)
(NSW) Roxburgh et al. 2006 72 participants	33% rape 40% aggravated rape	NA	NA
(NSW) Perkins 1991 128 participants			All sectors: 19.5%
(NSW) Perkins & Lovejoy 2007 219 participants		6.5%	Private: 8.4%
(Vic.) RhED 'Ugly Mugs' 2001 101 reports	46% involved sexual assault 18% of these with a weapon	NA	NA
(NSW) SWOP NSW 266 reports between 2000 and 2006			All sectors: 13% of incidents
International			
New Zealand Plumridge & Abel 2001 303 participants	27%	8%	NA
UK Church et al. 2001 240 participants	'Outdoor' 22% raped (vaginal) 5% raped (anal)		'indoor' 2% raped (vaginal) 6% raped (anal)
US Kurtz et al. 2004 294 participants	13.9%		
Five-country study Farley et al. 1998 Total of 475 participants	NA	NA	South Africa 57% Thailand 57% Turkey 50% USA 68% Zambia 55%
Netherlands Vanwesenbeeck			40%

NA: Not applicable. The study did not ask about or did not specify sexual assault by sector.

Researchers have concluded that "there appears to be significantly different profiles of risk in the street and indoor sector" (Plumridge & Abel, 2001, p. 82). Plumridge and Abel were unable to say whether the differences between the two sectors related to differences in personal characteristics, personal behaviour or institutional and social arrangements. It may be that making a distinction between indoor and outdoor forms of sex work does not tell us enough about why women working in certain sex work contexts are at greater risk of sexual assault. That private workers are possibly between these two sectors suggests that the presence of others and/or control over one's working environment can minimise the risk of sexual assault. For example, Church et al. (2001) found that women working outdoors experienced more violence overall from clients, while indoor workers cited attempted rape, suggesting that the elements of indoor work might prevent sexual assault or interrupt it.

More comparative research is required, including more national research that goes beyond the eastern states. Collapsing sectors obscures their differences; the exclusive focus on street-based work engages with the smallest sector in Australian sex work—it is estimated that street-based workers comprise about 10% of workers (although it must also be noted that many sex workers who may now work in a brothel began work in street-based industry). Little is known about wider aspects of the sex industry. What is the extent and nature of sexual assault among tabletop dancers? Or telephone sex workers? Or those working in regional areas as opposed to urban/central areas? How do these differences correlate with social and cultural attitudes towards different categories of worker (see Lowman, 2000)? The current research cannot answer these questions, yet given the available comparative research it would seem that differentiating the prevalence of sexual assault by sector would be crucial in sexual assault prevention (see Sanders & Campbell, 2007).

Perpetrators of sexual assault against sex workers

Little research is available specifically about perpetrators. Much of it is embedded within more general discussions about violence against sex workers. This lack can be partly attributed to low reporting rates, in that statistical information is simply not available. In light of studies such as Perkins (1991) and Perkins and Lovejoy (2007), it is probable that sexual assault outside the work context is perpetrated—as it is for most women—by acquaintances, family members, partners and ex-partners. It can also be attributed to the legal issues associated with programs such as 'Ugly Mugs', which invites workers to report violent behaviour among clients and bosses to sex work organisations such as SWOP and RhED. The program reports can contain personal information about clients who have been named as violent or 'dodgy'. For these reasons, the information is not for public circulation but is used to inform sex workers about what is going on in their local area and of whom to be wary.

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In addition, there is some disagreement among organisations and researchers about the likely perpetrators. The source of tension here is to what extent clients are the main perpetrators, or, given that many workers see regulars for years and have minimal trouble with other clients (Perkins & Lovejoy, 2007; Sanders, 2004), whether perpetrators (not necessarily clients) specifically target sex workers. O'Neill (2001) suggested that clients, pimps and domestic partners account for most of the violence. However, it is argued that 'pimps' are not really a feature of the Australian sex industry (Banach, 2000). Those living off the earnings of prostitution are frequently family members and partners. Other perpetrators include: police (Dowd, 2002; Woodward et al., 2003); taxi drivers (Lantz, 2003; RhED, 2006); and, as media coverage of the sexual assault and murder of sex