



SEX INDUSTRY REVISITED

Provincial policy recommendations for BC
MLAs and MLA candidates on support
for persons in the sex industry.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
A WORD ON LANGUAGE	2
WHEN AND WHY DO BRITISH COLUMBIANS ENTER THE SEX INDUSTRY?	2
TOP LISTED NEEDS RELEVANT TO PROVINCIAL SERVICES	3
ARE THE NEEDS THE SAME FOR THE STREET-BASED AND INDOOR SEX INDUSTRIES?	3
NEEDS WITHIN THE INDOOR SEX INDUSTRY	3
HOW DOES BC STACK UP?	4
1. Exiting Services	4
2. Substance Use Treatment	5
3. Job Skills Training and Education	6
4. Selling Sex for Student Aid	7
5. Housing	8
6. Counselling	8
7. Health Care	9
8. Legal Assistance	10
9. Poverty Reduction, Child Well-being, and Income Inequality	10
REFERENCES	13



INTRODUCTION

As noted in sex industry literature, researchers typically examine the issue of prostitution on a spectrum between oppression and empowerment,¹ with an anti-violence against women lens on one end and a labour-regulation lens on the other.

Advocates, including those who are currently or formerly in the sex industry, are similarly divided. While federal governments are required to engage in full decriminalization versus [Nordic Model](#) (decriminalizing sale while criminalizing purchase) debates, provincial bodies have largely avoided discussing how services under provincial jurisdiction may impact sex industry populations. Parties which have entered into the discussion have opted to look at the issue exclusively through a labour-regulation lens.² The labour-regulation approach has gained popularity after being adopted by several progressive-leaning organizations like PIVOT Legal and the BC Centre for Excellence in

HIV/AIDS. However, it may be out of step with the needs of women, trans folk, and men selling sex – serving only to promote a political narrative without providing meaningful support for those impacted by sex industry issues. The social safety net that prevents individuals from being funnelled into the sex industry (and supports exiting) has eroded under the BC Liberals, and NDP policies supporting BC's most vulnerable are painfully underdeveloped. Not a single party within BC has considered policies which might broaden options for women and youth, decreasing chances that BC residents enter or stay in the sex industry due to social constraints.

HOW MUCH MORE FREEDOM AND EQUALITY WOULD BC RESIDENTS EXPERIENCE IF THEIR GOVERNMENT WERE TO SUPPORT AN OPTIONS-FIRST APPROACH TO SERVICE PROVISION FOR SEX INDUSTRY POPULATIONS?

Unlike federal bodies, who hold jurisdiction over prostitution as it pertains to criminal law, and municipal bodies who manage law enforcement, provincial bodies have an opportunity to provide vital services to individuals in the sex industry, including those who

¹ McCarthy, Benoit & Jansson, 2014, p. 1379; Bungay, Halpin, Atchison, & Johnston, 2011, p. 16

² BC Greens, 2016, p. 9

wish to exit, and those who are at risk for entry due to poverty and lack of access to resources – and they have the opportunity to do so in a manner that prevents and mitigates exploitation, without making demands on those who do not choose to leave. In short, provincial bodies are uniquely positioned to give this population (mostly women and girls) more choices. This report outlines policy recommendations for how to do this in a manner that addresses the lived realities of those in BC’s sex industry.

A WORD ON LANGUAGE

This report uses person-first language where possible, and cites the “sex industry” rather than “sex work.”

We do this to acknowledge that the terminology on this topic can be polarizing, with many experiential persons uncomfortable with the word “prostitution” and others challenging the notion that sex can be “work.” We use “individuals” when describing groups of people including women, men, and people who do not identify as either. However, readers should take note that the majority within the sex industry are women, followed by gender-diverse populations, and then men.

WHEN AND WHY DO BRITISH COLUMBIANS ENTER THE SEX INDUSTRY?

Whether one subscribes to the oppression or empowerment approach, it is undeniable that entry into the sex industry stems from a list of unique social needs, many or all of which are growing under the BC Liberal Party’s regime.

Much like the best way forward on sex industry issues, the average age of entry is disputed amongst researchers. A 2003 study by Farley et al. found that of 100 women in Vancouver’s sex industry, the mean age of entry was 18 years of age, with 54 percent entering before their 18th birthday.³ Lowman’s 2001 review for the Canadian Statistics Division cites that prostitution research consistently finds that 70 percent of those within prostitution started before their 18th birthday,⁴

and studies show that the majority enter before the age of 16.⁵ This should lead policymakers to question: What are the “push” and “pull” factors that are leading British Columbian children and youth into situations of commercialized sexual abuse?

PUSH FACTORS.

Lowman (2001) describes several reasons that youth may decide that commercial sexual exploitation is a preferable option to accessing resources in the family home, or from government care. One such reason is previous sexual abuse, which researchers site as a common precursor to commercial sex.⁶ Farley et al. note that of the 100 Vancouver-based participants of their 2005 study, 82 percent reported a history of childhood sexual abuse by an average of four perpetrators. Seventy-two percent reported physical childhood violence resulting in injury, and 86 percent reported past childhood homelessness.⁷ Particularly high levels of childhood violence were reported by First Nations participants: 81 percent reported childhood physical abuse, 96 percent reported childhood sexual abuse, 69 percent had been required to imitate scenes within pornography, and 65 percent had pornography made of them as children.⁸ Wilson and Wildom found that those with documented histories of child abuse and neglect were more than twice as likely than the control group to engage in prostitution.⁹ Compared with individuals in other forms of feminized “labour” – like serving at a restaurant or becoming a hair stylist – individuals in prostitution are much more likely to have been exposed to adverse circumstances:

“A notably greater proportion of people working in the sex industry had the following experiences prior to their 15th birthday: they had been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused; they had been the victim of a crime; they had lived in a foster or group home; or they had been homeless.”¹⁰

3 Farley et al., 2003, p. 40

4 Lowman, 2001, p. 2

5 McCarthy, Benoit & Janssen, 2014, p. 1382

6 Lowman, 2001, p. 2

7 Farley et al., 2005, p. 249

8 Farley et al., 2005, p. 249

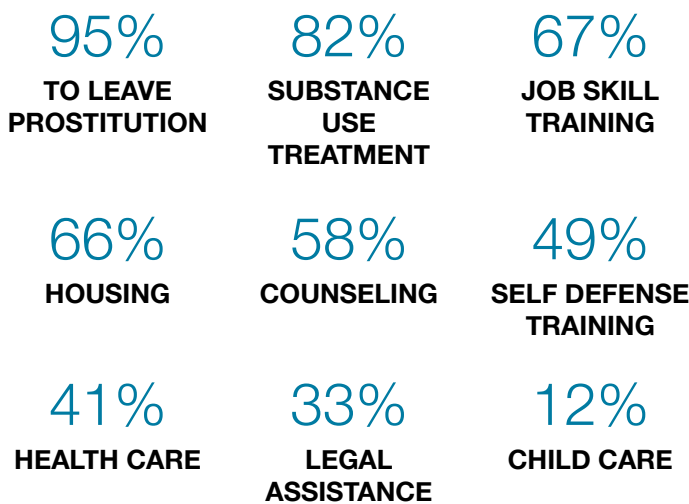
9 Wilson & Wildom, 2010, p. 221

10 McCarthy, Benoit & Jansson, 2014, p. 1385

PULL FACTORS.

The number one reason cited for reason of entry into prostitution when examining Canadian literature is need for money to survive, followed by lack of education, limited job skills, and a need to pay for substance use.¹¹

TOP LISTED NEEDS RELEVANT TO PROVINCIAL SERVICES¹²



*Note: 32 percent of women stated they would like “sex work” to be legalized, but given that this area is not under provincial jurisdiction, it has not been included.

Like the push factors, the need breakdown differs by race. First Nations women reported a significantly greater need for self defense training, peer support, job training, and counselling than non-Indigenous women. This may be due to the fact that Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately represented in street-based prostitution.¹³

ARE THE NEEDS THE SAME FOR THE STREET-BASED AND INDOOR SEX INDUSTRIES?

It is important to note that some have argued that Farley et al.’s needs assessment may not be representative of the majority of people in the sex industry, 80 percent of whom operate indoors.¹⁴

However, even in indoor-based studies where participants have been picked for an analysis on the “agency of sex workers,” a majority had left the industry, with the largest number of participants having no desire to return, citing the following reasons: falling in or out of love, wanting to eliminate harm, gaining control over one’s life, and a desire to live more happily.¹⁵ For those who considered the sex industry to still be an option, Bowen cites the following issues as “barriers” to their return: having a stable job, being in love, or concerns that re-entry would negatively impact their mental health or sobriety.¹⁶ Studies looking at the indoor sex industry highlight several specific needs.

NEEDS WITHIN THE INDOOR SEX INDUSTRY

“The money’s really good and I am a single mom . . . to support my kids and the things they need. The [non-sex work] jobs that I applied for before; they’re all minimum wage. I don’t really have a lot of education to go work for a big company. I used to be a resident care attendant, but I got really burnt out. I can’t do that kind of job anymore.”¹⁷

Much like the street-based sector, entry into the indoor sex industry is fuelled largely by economic constraints. However, it should be noted that amongst this demographic, researchers stress that the following needs are of heightened importance:

1. **Need for child care**
2. **Need for English language proficiency skills**

Women within the indoor sex industry stress that lack of ability to access ESL training does not just impact their choices when it comes to how they gain an

11 Lowman, 2001, p. 3; Wilson & Wildom, 2020, p. 214–15; McCarthy, Benoit & Jansson, 2014, p. 1385; Bowen, 2014, p. 439

12 Farley et al., 2005, p. 253

13 Farley et al., 2005, p. 254

14 Bungay et al., 2014, p. 16

15 Bowen, 2015, p. 439

16 Bowen, 2015, 439

17 Bungay et al., 2011, p. 20

income; it also makes them uniquely disadvantaged within the indoor sex industry as they are not able to communicate easily with buyers and will often get left out decision-making when it comes to the types of sexual activities they will engage in, and how much money they will receive in exchange.¹⁸ This makes women with communication barriers particularly vulnerable to “managers” and buyers.

“I walked out of the room and talked to the manager. The manager said ‘you didn’t do anything for the customer, just return the whole hundred.’ I did twenty-five minutes. She [the manager] said I can keep the forty dollars and give the customer back sixty dollars. And the customer and the boss were talking and I didn’t know what kind of things they were talking about. The manager asked me, ‘give all the money back.’ ... returned all money... They were talking in English, so I could not get involved and get my money back. I cannot talk on behalf of myself.”¹⁹

HOW DOES BC STACK UP?

When it comes to preventing coerced entry into the sex industry and supporting exit for those who wish to do so, BC’s provincial services are woefully inadequate, creating an environment with an unnecessarily high level of both push and pull factors for BC’s women and youth:

1. EXITING SERVICES

Despite having one of North America’s largest populations of people within the sex industry, Vancouver does not have a single public exiting program. Vancouver’s last transition service, PEERS Vancouver, closed in 2011 due to a restructuring of government employment services. They were encouraged by the province to join a consortium of harm reduction service providers, who would then bid on a five-year project around the issue of exiting prostitution. PEERS declined, believing that the consortium model would never work for the population the organization served.²⁰

“For women who want to change what they are doing and get assistance from the government in doing that, that service will be provided,” former Minister of Social Development Stephanie Cadieux told the *Globe*.²¹

To date, no programs specifically for the purposes of exiting have been implemented to replace PEERS Vancouver, leaving the sex industry population without any transition support for a full six years.

“We’re supporting street-based sex workers all the time,” Mebrat Beyene of the WISH Drop-in Society told The Province in January of 2017. “But what we are able to do through our programs and services now doesn’t leave us nearly enough room to focus on exiting or transitioning or retiring out of sex work.”²²

A five-year project called “Transitions,” funded by the Ministry of Public Safety, is due to commence in the near future, provided by the following consortium of agencies: Battered Women’s Support Services, WISH Drop-in Society, Aboriginal Front Door, HUSTLE, and PACE Society. While multi-agency partnerships are considered a best practice approach when it comes to supporting those within the industry,²³ research also shows that perceptions from friends and acquaintances who are currently active in the industry can be a barrier to exiting²⁴ and that many long-term exits begin with a withdrawal period where the individual can have space

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Fund long-term exiting and transitioning services**
- **At least one service should exist in BC which supports exit without simultaneously exposing participants to buyers and sex industry activity**
- **Exiting service approaches should be led (on a paid basis) by those who have, themselves, made long-term exits**
- **Transition services should make substance use treatment an option, and should have a medical professional available on-site to assist**
- **Due to the fact that the exiting consortium currently receiving funding recommends not intervening in cases where children and youth are being exploited (Ouspenski, p. 21), child and youth advocates should be in continual dialogue with the agencies**

18 Bungay et al., 2011, p. 20

19 Bungay et al., 2011, p. 20

20 Matas, 2011, globeandmail.com

21 Matas, 2011, globeandmail.com

22 Lindsay, 2017, theprovince.com

23 Ouspenski, 2014, p. 48

24 Bowen, 2014, p. 54

to think, plan, and develop skills.²⁵ Fifty-six percent of those who had exited long-term received support from agencies like the ones listed above.²⁶ At the time of Bowen's study, however, all agencies combined harm reduction services with exiting.

2. SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT

A review of Canada's substance use treatment funding found that 73 percent was used on enforcement and only 14 percent was spent on treatment.²⁷ Even as deaths from fentanyl were declared a public emergency by the BC Government, with more than 600 fentanyl-related deaths and 914 drug overdose deaths in 2016 alone, the province budgeted just \$5.77 million to address the issue. To put this in perspective, the Government of BC allocated 10 times more to curb the swine flu at the height of the epidemic.²⁸ Drug treatment beds for youths are down 25 percent since 2013²⁹ with only 24 high-quality beds to serve all of BC's youth as of May 2016 according to Mary Turpel-Lafond. The BC Government disputes this figure, claiming that there are 203 treatment beds for youth. However, the quality of this treatment is questionable given that many don't include outpatient counselling, day treatment, or medically monitored withdrawal management. Further, an in-depth study by the *CBC* was only able to locate 117 publicly listed youth beds, and only six of these were located north of Williams Lake. The *CBC* was able to locate 101 drug treatment

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **All youth treatment facilities should be required to provide outpatient counselling, day treatment, and medically monitored withdrawal management**
- **High-quality youth treatment facilities must be increased in Northern BC**
- **The intensive residential treatment option within BC Women's Hospital's Aurora program should be covered by MSP**
- **The province should explore the creation of women and girls-only treatment facilities to prevent exposure while transitioning to pimps and buyers who may encourage drug use to keep women in the sex industry**

25 Bowen, 2014, p. 49–50

26 Bowen, 2014, p. 51

27 Ouspenski, 2014, p. 30

28 Clancy & Dufresne, 2016, globeandmail.com; Merali, 2017, cbc.ca

29 Rankin, 2016, cbc.ca



facilities within BC for adults, with roughly 75 percent accepting male patients, but only 50 percent accepting female patients. Roughly half of treatment facilities did not allow Methadone or Suboxone, and less than 20 percent reported having medical staff on site.³⁰ The recommended six-week intensive residential treatment option within BC Women's Hospital's Aurora program is not funded by MSP and costs a total of \$2,730, or \$65 per day.³¹

3. JOB SKILLS TRAINING AND EDUCATION

“Low educational attainment puts individuals at a disadvantage in terms of getting jobs, and those with interrupted or incomplete education and history of school problems may be more likely to turn to prostitution out of financial desperation.”³²

WorkBC lists nine essential skills needed for employment: reading, writing, numeracy, document use, computer skills, oral communication skills, people skills, “thinking” and “continuous learning.” Provincial government resources dedicated to building essential skills outside of formal education and the workplace are limited to downloadable tip sheets, binder inserts for portfolios, and a linked list of self-assessment checklists on WorkBC's website. In 2014, the province axed its Education Guarantee program, meaning adults who have graduated from high school will have to pay fees to upgrade education as an adult. A report presented at the Vancouver School Board's Management Coordinating standing committee on January 4 noted that enrollment in Adult Education programs had halved since introducing fees to the upgrade process. For the 16 to 19-year-old population, the age category where the majority enter the sex industry, enrollment decreased by two-thirds after introducing fees.³³

Access to free educational upgrades is particularly important in preventing commercial sexual exploitation of youth, given that research shows that a majority of those within the sex industry enter before the age of 18, and that the majority of youth exploited for commercial sex report serious problems with finishing high school education.³⁴ A 2016 Vancouver study confirms this, citing that only 51 percent of

30 McElroy & Clancy, 2016, cbc.ca

31 British Columbia Medical Association, 2009, p. 24

32 Wilson & Widom, 2010, p. 214–15

33 Patti Baccus, 2017, vancouverobserver.com

34 Wilson & Windom, 2010, p. 214–15



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Provide free on-site CALP and ABE options within low-barrier exiting services**
- **Explore re-implementing the GED**
- **Offer funding and tax incentives for low-barrier women-led NGOs to offer job and life-skills training programs**

those surveyed had a high school level education.³⁵ The Ministry of Education discontinued the General Education Development certificate in 2014, which would allow those who do not qualify for the Dogwood Certificate to get credit for high school equivalency. Enrolling in the BC Adult Education Program (ABE) requires a past transcript which is an administrative burden many of those currently within the sex industry will not be able to overcome, if they can afford the program at all. Administrative burdens are similarly high to apply for Community Adult Literacy Programs (CALP).

4. SELLING SEX FOR STUDENT AID

Research in the UK shows that as tuition fees rise, so, too, does student engagement in the sex industry and that over one fifth of students had considered the sex industry to meet their needs while pursuing higher education, while a much lower – but still significant – number, 4.8 percent, actually went through with it.³⁶ It should be noted that the students within the UK study have some advantages over Canadian students, with their cost of living being significantly lower, and the time it requires to obtain an undergraduate degree being 25 percent less than that of Canadian students. The number of students selling sex to pay for school could, therefore, be higher in BC than that in the UK. While academic research into the number of students within British Columbia turning to the sex industry to support themselves through school is lacking, studies by popular media suggests the number is on the rise, particularly when it comes to the “sugar baby” phenomenon, where young women pair with a much older and wealthier man for an allowance.³⁷ BC’s students do face disproportionately high rates of many factors that drive individuals into the sex industry.

In 2015, Advanced Education Minister Andrew Wilkinson claimed: “We see that 70 per cent of students

35 Duff et al., 2016, p. 368

36 Sagar, Jones, Symons, Tyrie & Roberts, 2016, p. 700

37 Sundstrom, 2016, vancitybuzz.com



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Provide university and college education free of cost to Canadian citizens and permanent residents**
- **Reduce administrative barriers for access to provincial disability funding for post-secondary students**
- **Raise minimum wage to \$20.64 per hour living wage within BC**

go through their higher education with no debt whatsoever. [...] That's either through family means or from working part time. That's a very healthy figure,"³⁸ Wilkinson also claimed those who did finish university with student debt had an average of \$20,000 upon completion. In fact, these numbers contradict research done by BC Stats, the BC Student Outcomes Report, which finds that 49 percent of students leave school with debt, and that the \$20,000 dollar figure is the median and not the average.³⁹ The report is likely to be skewed downward due to the fact that it is a voluntary survey in which those who dropped out of school due to student debt are not included. It is further misleading due to the fact that it does not take students who couldn't afford education in the first place into account.

5. HOUSING

As discussed by a consortium of agencies providing care to marginalized women, "the rates of homelessness in Vancouver (as well as Canada in general) contradict the image that Vancouver and Canada enjoy internationally as a well-developed, industrialized nation with a high quality of life."⁴⁰ The average rental price for a one-bedroom unit in Vancouver at the time this report is written is \$1,944 per month. The average price for a two-bedroom dwelling in Vancouver is \$2,827 per month, and a three-bedroom dwelling, \$3,990 per month.⁴¹ When we look at BC's Mainland more broadly, we see that the rent is lower than it is in the City of Vancouver, but still hardly affordable: the average one-bedroom is \$1,079 per month, a two-bedroom is \$1,368, and a three-bedroom is \$1,615.⁴²

38 Wilkinson, 2015, cbc.ca
39 BC Stats, 2016, bcstats.gov.bc.ca
40 Ouspenski, 2014, p. 42
41 Rentboard, 2017, rentboard.ca
42 Family Navigator, 2017, familynavigator.ca

A single parent with one child working minimum wage full time for the full year would earn just \$18,655, more than \$9,500 below the poverty line for a family of this type in 2014. Shelter rates for individuals on income assistance are at just \$375 per month for a single person, \$570 per month for a family of two, and \$660 for a family of three.⁴³ Given this disparity between the income of many BC residents and the price of rental housing, it is not difficult to see how lack of affordable housing may drive BC residents into the sex industry, which pays considerably better than minimum-wage jobs.⁴⁴ Vacancy rates are less than half the healthy rate across the province for bachelor, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom dwellings, with Metro Vancouver's vacancy rate being roughly one sixth the healthy rate.⁴⁵ Safe, accessible housing is consistently cited as an urgent need for those within the sex industry.⁴⁶

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Follow through with the BC Government's current promise to create 3,000 more social housing units⁴⁷**
- **Invest in women-only housing to ensure that women transitioning are not exposed to buyers or pimps in their place of residence**
- **Allow individuals on Income Assistance and Disability to access BC Housing's Rental Assistance Program**
- **Fund a housing liaison staff within low-barrier "sex work agencies" to assist with administrative processes associated with housing support**

6. COUNSELLING

Without a doctor's referral, no counselling or mental health support is provided free-of-charge in BC. Roughly half of participants (47.6 percent) in a 2015 study of persons in the sex industry reported having a mental health issue (27.6 percent higher than the general Canadian population).⁴⁸ Lack of low-barrier access to mental health support and counselling should be particularly troubling to policymakers given

43 Government of BC, 2017, gov.bc.ca
44 First Call, 2016, p. 17
45 CMHC, 2016, p. 1
46 Bindel et al., n.d., p. 3; Farley et al., 2005, p. 253; Ouspenski, 2014, p. 42
47 Dhillon & Bula, 2016, globeandmail.com
48 Deerning et al., 2015; Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017, cmha.ca



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Provide funding for on-site counselling and mental health support for “sex worker agencies” and other exiting services**
- **Increase funding for mental health mobile outreach teams**
- **Cover clinical psychology in addition to psychiatry under MSP**
- **Allow Nurse Practitioners to make referrals for mental health care**

that untreated mental health issues are cited by those within the sex industry as a barrier to accessing physical health care including HIV testing and screening for cervical cancer, two conditions where sex industry populations are at disproportionately higher risk.⁴⁹

7. HEALTH CARE

A 2016 study of 723 women in Vancouver’s sex industry

49 Socias et al., 2016; Deerning et al., 2015; Duff et al., 2016

showed that 70.4 percent reported institutional barriers to accessing health care, with the most common being long wait times (54.6 percent), limited hours of operation (36.5 percent), and perceived disrespect by health care workers (26.1 percent), barriers related to mental health, lack of a health insurance card, and barriers related to gender identity or sexual orientation.⁵⁰ Fifty-five percent of participants in a study of the indoor sex industry cited having health concerns, and 45 percent cited having a disability.⁵¹ A 2015 study in Vancouver notes that just under half of participants had contact with the BCCDC Street Nurse program, that 87.4 percent had undergone an HIV test

50 Socias et al., 2016, p. 1

51 Bowen, 2014, p. 32

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Provide funding or increase funding to provide more on-site access to community nurses and nurse practitioners at “sex worker” agencies and exiting services**
- **Increase funding to street-nurse programs to allow for increased staffing**

in their lifetime and that 76.1 percent had done so in the past year. Those with language barriers to health care were the least likely to have been tested for HIV.⁵² Access to outreach and street services increase access to health care within this demographic by 35 percent.⁵³ Additional barriers to accessing health care, particularly sexual health care, include language barriers, fear of disclosure of sex industry involvement or HIV status, distrust of authority figures, limited hours of operation, and displacement from areas where health services are being offered.⁵⁴

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Increase number of Legal Information Outreach Workers**
- **Call on Canadian Federal Government to erase prostitution-related offenses on criminal records for those (self) selling sex**

8. LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Having a prostitution or non-prostitution-related criminal record makes the process of exiting nearly impossible as it serves as a barrier to “square” work.⁵⁵ Legal Information Outreach Workers in BC are only available in three locations (Terrace, Prince Rupert, and Vancouver), and their hours of operation are extremely limited.⁵⁶ Access to a duty counsel lawyer requires visiting a courthouse and only applies to individuals who are currently charged (but not yet convicted) of a crime.

9. POVERTY REDUCTION, CHILD WELL-BEING, AND INCOME INEQUALITY

“Kids are hungry and once again, the inadequate income assistance check has not made it past the middle of the month. Lack of education and work experience leads to lack of jobs. Besides, the first paycheck doesn’t come in for two weeks and kids are hungry now. Predatory men can sense women and girls desperation, put a monetary value on it, and offer it up to women in order to buy their consent. Women walk away with multi-layered traumas about the whole event and the much cherished cash needed to fill empty bellies or pay bills.”

52 Deerning et al, 2015, p. 501

53 Duff et al., 2016, p. 370

54 Duff et al., 2016, p. 371

55 Duff et al., 2016, p. 371

56 BC Legal Aid, 2017, lss.bc.ca



The asterisk indicates the most recent rate table change

Support Rate									Shelter Maximum
Unit Size	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	*\$235.00	\$262.92	N/A	\$531.42	N/A	N/A	N/A	*N/A	*\$375.00
2	\$307.22	\$452.06	*\$375.58	\$700.56	\$643.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$396.22	*\$570.00
3	\$401.06	*\$546.06	*\$375.58	*\$794.56	*\$1043.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$490.06	*\$660.00
4	\$401.06	*\$546.06	*\$375.58	*\$794.56	*\$1043.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$490.06	*\$700.00
5	\$401.06	*\$546.06	*\$375.58	*\$794.56	*\$1043.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$490.06	*\$750.00
6	\$401.06	*\$546.06	*\$375.58	*\$794.56	*\$1043.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$490.06	*\$785.00
7	\$401.06	*\$546.06	*\$375.58	*\$794.56	*\$1043.06	*\$672.08	*\$423.58	*\$490.06	*\$820.00

Key		Effective April 1, 2007, rates for:
A	Employable singles, couples, and two-parent families where all adults are under 65 years of age.	
B	Singles, couples, and two-parent families where all adults meet the Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB) criteria and all are under 65.	
C	Employable one-parent families where the parent is under 65.	
D	Singles, couples, and two-parent families where one adult is aged 65 years or older.	
E	Couples and two-parent families where both adults are aged 65 years or older.	
F	One-parent families where the parent is aged 65 or older.	
G	One-parent families where the parent meets the Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB) criteria and is under 65.	
H	*Couples and two-parent families where one adult meets the PPMB criteria and all are under 65.	



Poverty rates are dismal under the BC Liberals, particularly for children.

As indicated in the 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, BC child poverty rates continue to be one in five (19.8% in 2014), representing 163,260 British Columbian children. BC's overall poverty rate is 1.6 percent higher than the national average and the child poverty rate (ages 0-17) is 1.3 percent higher than the national average. Of Canada's 10 provinces, BC has the fifth highest child poverty rate.⁵⁷ Child poverty is particularly severe for Indigenous children, who have 13 percent higher poverty rates than the overall child population in Vancouver. This percentage increases in suburbs like Surrey, where Aboriginal children have 26 percent higher child poverty rates than the non-Indigenous population.⁵⁸ More than half of children living in single-parent families were living in poverty as of 2014 (50.3 percent) as opposed to only one in eight children living in two-parent families. Between 2000 and 2014, the single-parent family poverty rate decreased just four percent, the third lowest decrease in the country – by comparison, Newfoundland/Labrador decreased 20 percent, while Quebec and Nova Scotia decreased 16 percent. Eighty-three percent of single-parent families are female-led, and for female-led single-parent families, the median income was \$37,140 – 65 percent less than male-led single-parent families.⁵⁹

Beyond poor – the desperately poor.

Many families are not just living below the poverty line, they are desperately poor – the median after-tax income for single-parent families below the poverty line with one child was \$14,590, with two children, \$19,070. Poor couple families with one child under the poverty line had a median after-tax income of \$18,340, with two children, \$24,760. In 2014, 33 percent of children in lone-parent families were in core housing need, and rental prices have risen since then. In 2014, homelessness counts recorded 255 homeless children and youth (under 24 years old) in Vancouver alone. In 2011-2012, 24 percent of single parents with children under 18 faced moderate to severe food insecurity. In 2016, 103,464 people used the food bank in BC – up 33 percent since 2008, with 32 percent of these people being children.⁶⁰

The working poor.

A single parent with one child working minimum wage full time for the full year would earn just \$18,655, more than \$9,500 below the poverty line in 2014 – it has since risen just 60 cents. A single parent with two children working minimum wage full time for the full year would make \$15,500 less than the poverty line in 2014. Further, 42 percent of the working poor have dependent children, with nine percent of those being single-parent families in Metro Vancouver in 2012

57 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p. 7-9
 58 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p. 10
 59 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p.13-14

60 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p.15-17

(2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p.17). Fifty-one percent of poor children in the province live in metro Vancouver – 82,960 children – with most severe rates in north-east Vancouver, Guilford, Newton, and Whalley.⁶¹

Child care expenses.

Between 2007 and 2014, cost of childcare has risen 34 percent, rent is up 26 percent, basic family costs are up eight percent, and income is up just 10 percent. In BC, childcare is the second largest expense for families, next to housing. There is only space for 20 percent of daycare-aged children, leading to long wait times for access.⁶²

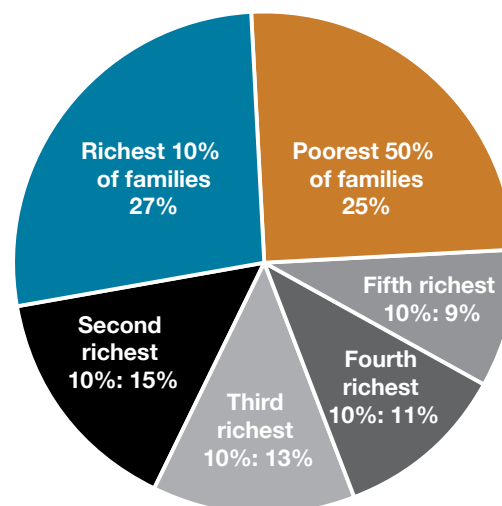
Welfare rates.

Twenty-one percent of BC's poor children were in families on welfare in 2014 – amounting to 33,536 children. Annual welfare income for a lone parent with one child in 2014 was \$17,277 after tax, \$7,677 below the poverty line. Total welfare income for a family of four (two parents, two children) was \$21,924 – \$13,724 below the poverty line. For a lone-parent family with one child, welfare rates have decreased by \$581 dollars, when accounting for inflation, between the periods of 1989 and 2014. For a family of four, this loss was at \$1,404 for the same period. From 1989, the federal share of welfare incomes doubled, while the provincial share decreased dramatically. In 2014, there was a total of 16,627 lone-parent families and 3,197 two-parent families on welfare. Sixty-five percent of coupled families and 68 percent of single-parent families were temporarily or permanently exempted from work due to disabilities, persistent multiple barriers, and medical conditions.⁶³

Aging out of government care.

Every year, 1000 youth age out of government care in BC. Almost half of former youth in care will go on income assistance within several months of their 19th birthday (see *On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care*, 2014). BC Youth in care are 60 percent Aboriginal⁶⁴ and they are exceptionally vulnerable to being drawn into the sex industry, or sex trafficked.

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL INCOME AMONG ECONOMIC FAMILIES IN BC, 2014



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 206-0031.

Income inequality.

Lack of adequate income in low-barrier work is consistently cited in the literature as a barrier to exiting.⁶⁵ Between 1989 and 2014, income for the richest 10 percent of British Columbians increased by 49 percent, compared with just eight percent for the poorest British Columbians. BC had the highest income inequality of all provinces in 2014.⁶⁶

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Raise minimum wage to \$20.64/hour living wage within BC**
- **Implement guaranteed liveable income by increasing welfare rates to above the poverty line for individuals and all family types**
- **Implement \$10 per day childcare option**
- **Extend assistance for youth in care to the age of 25**
- **Explore a task-force to reduce income inequality**

61 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p.31

62 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p.19–20

63 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p. 20–22

64 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p. 24–25

65 Bowen, 2008, p. 57

66 2016 Child Poverty Report Card, 2016, p. 33–37

CONCLUSIONS

As demonstrated by the material above, the erosion of social provisions by the BC Liberals threatens to drive vulnerable BC residents into the sex industry coercively. Lack of supports for women and youth (particularly Indigenous persons) are of concern given that these demographics are overrepresented in both indoor and street-based sex industries currently. While the policies of progressive-leaning parties may marginally improve outcomes for people in the sex industry (and those at risk to entry due to social constraints), the labour-first approach is unlikely to make meaningful change.

In order to better support BC residents within the sex industry, parties should consider an options-first mandate, aiding in the prevention of coercive entry, and allowing those who desire to leave to do so. Readers should be advised that this is a non-exhaustive and preliminary report. There are many additional ways in which sex industry populations are currently impacted by provincial services, and these should be explored by policy-makers. Further, privately-funded exiting services do exist in BC, and their leadership may be an additional resource to the Province as it considers how to best support individuals in the sex industry.

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OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- **Fund the staffing of an Indigenous Elder to support cultural competency in health care and health literacy services. This should be available in low-barrier support centres and exiting programs (Rempel, 2016, pp. 12-14)**
- **Ensure that partners, parents, children, and roommates receive priority status for substance-use treatment once a sex-industry person enters treatment (Ouspenski, 2014)**
- **Mandate training for cultural competency for health care and mental health care professionals before working in a low-barrier environment**
- **Revisit “home is best” health care approaches for vulnerable women as some will refuse health, mental health, and drug treatment for fear of burdening family members (Lombardo et al., 2014, p. 579)**
- **Consider implementing low-barrier dentistry services, accessible from sex-work agencies or exiting services**
- **Consider where liveable income could be a first approach before child apprehension. Advocates note that if the Province can fund the fostering system, it may simply be easier to give mothers resources to take care of their *own* children when poverty is an issue**
- **Explore links between domestic violence and sex industry entry and restore funding to women’s crisis centres**
- **Explore links between developmental disability and entry into the sex industry and raise monthly disability allowances**
- **Fund a staff competent in disability services at low-barrier agencies to support persons with developmental disabilities with administrative barriers to accessing care**

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