

Issue 64 – December/January 2011-12

Seasons greetings from the PLA

The Prostitution Licensing Authority (PLA) would like to extend its best wishes to all its stakeholders for a peaceful and happy festive season, spent in the company of family and friends, and for a healthy and prosperous 2012.

Closure of Office of PLA over Christmas & New Year period

The Office of the PLA will be closed from Friday 23 December 2011 to Friday 6 January 2012 (inclusive) over the Christmas and New Year period. The office will reopen on Monday 9 January 2011.

Sex trafficking

The issue of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual servitude has received a lot of media coverage of late, following the recent *Four Corners* report on the issue. Deceiving and coercing persons to provide sexual services is an insidious practice and a gross violation of human dignity and trafficking and sexual servitude must never be tolerated. It is worth noting that in the 11 year history of Queensland's licensed sex industry, there has been no evidence of trafficking for the purpose of sexual servitude at any licensed brothel. Moreover, the PLA's probity and

compliance functions mean that there is a low risk of its occurrence and a high likelihood that it would be discovered. However, the Authority is not complacent and recently made it a licence condition that brothels must display multilingual signage about sex trafficking in the sex worker area and the client waiting area, which includes the Australian Federal Police phone number.

As terrible as human trafficking and sexual servitude is, it is important to maintain a sense of perspective. It is not systemic and is not representative of the experience of the typical migrant sex worker in Australia. Most migrant sex workers have travelled here voluntarily and have freely chosen to sell sex. They have not been trafficked and forced. This is confirmed by sex worker organisations, such as Scarlet Alliance. The Commonwealth Government has said that opportunities for trafficking to Australia are low because of our geographic isolation and strong border controls. Most migrant sex workers are what might be described as economic migrants. They have come to Australia voluntarily and freely chosen to sell sex in order to improve their own standard of living and that of their family in their country of origin.

This is illustrated by a 2009 report into Victoria's sex industry, *Working in Victorian Brothels*, by Sharon Pickering et al, which said that:

Workers stressed the importance of autonomy, and were concerned that discussion of coercion

would lead to perceptions that workers are 'forced' into sex work. This was a particular concern for Asian workers for whom the language of 'trafficking' was felt to reduce worker agency. Workers in all sectors (massage, brothels, escort, independent) expressed enjoyment of their autonomy. (p. 15)

The same report went on to state that:

among the worker group of respondents, many stressed the autonomy of overseas workers as global economic migrants, and noted the significantly higher levels of pay available for sex work in Australia. None of the workers from overseas directly described being coerced by brokers or agents but rather indicated that the drivers for entering sex work were social and economic. (p. 27)

A recently published report into the experiences of migrant sex workers in the United Kingdom, *Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry*, by Dr Nick Mai, interviewed 100 migrant sex workers. He found that:

Only a minority, amounting approximately to 6 per cent of female interviewees, felt that they had been deceived and forced into selling sex in circumstances within which they had no share of control or consent. (p. 4)

Dr Mai said that in most cases, the workers had identified a lack of opportunities in their country of origin, particularly regarding education, as the motivation to migrate (p. 4). For these workers, working in the sex industry was a way of avoiding

lower paid jobs with inferior working conditions (p. 4). Working in the sex industry, “is seldom the only or the last option for migrant workers” (p. 22). Most interviewees felt, “that by working in the sex industry they had better working and living conditions than those they encountered in other areas of employment ...” (p. 5). A key finding of the report is that:

By working in the sex industry, many interviewees are able to maintain dignified living standards in the UK while dramatically improving the living conditions of their families in the country of origin. (p. 5)

Dr Mai found that the, “stigma associated with sex work was the main problem for almost all interviewees ...” (p. 4). This finding is not exceptional. Stigma is frequently mentioned by sex workers as the main issue facing them, impacting on their social and mental wellbeing. The previously mentioned report into the Victorian sex industry stated that:

The single biggest issue for sex workers is the challenge of stigma. Workers resented perceptions of sex workers as diseased, criminal, victims, drug addicts, promiscuous and without a moral code or values. (p. 17)

Dr Mai’s research has identified the legal immigration status of migrant workers as the most important factor making them vulnerable to exploitation in the sex industry (p. 32). For migrants in the country illegally or working illegally, fear of deportation meant they were unwilling to seek the assistance of police, and they were also scared of the consequences if their plight was revealed to family and friends (p. 23).

Dr Mai’s research has an important message for sex trade abolitionists. Most of the sex workers interviewed expressed the view that criminalising clients (along the lines of the Swedish model) and closing down brothels would not be successful in abolishing the sex industry but would instead drive it deeper underground, further marginalising sex workers and making them even more vulnerable to exploitation (pp. 5 and 6). Dr Mai makes the valid point that:

This would discourage both migrants and UK citizens working in the sex industry, as well as clients, from co-operating with the police and sex work projects in the fight against actual cases of trafficking and exploitation. (p. 6)

This finding is confirmed by evidence given to the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly Committee on Justice and Community Safety inquiry into the *Prostitution Act 1992*, by Ms Fiona David, an academic and expert on human trafficking, when she said that:

In terms of thinking about policy responses, how can you assist people to address their vulnerability as much as possible? ... I tend to think that one of the ways to address vulnerability is to have situations in workplaces where people can come and go without fear of, for example, their clients being arrested or themselves being arrested, irrespective of what the model is, whatever name you want to give it. The thing that I have noticed, for example, around the research on trafficking in women for sexual purposes in Australia is that sometimes we have had clients come forward as the key informants in trafficking cases. (Transcript of Evidence, 13 July 2011, p. 98)

If you or someone you know is involved in sexual servitude you can get help by calling:

- The Australian Federal Police hotline: 1800 813 784

- The Queensland Police Service: 000.

Working in Victorian Brothels can be downloaded from: [http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/lookup/CAV_Publications_Reports_and_Guidelines_2/\\$file/CAV_Monash_Report_Brothels.pdf](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/lookup/CAV_Publications_Reports_and_Guidelines_2/$file/CAV_Monash_Report_Brothels.pdf)

Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry can be downloaded from: <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/Research/iset/Migrant%20Workers%20in%20the%20UK%20Sex%20Industry%20Policy-Relevant%20Findings2.pdf>

PLA fact sheets

The PLA fact sheet series has been revised and updated. New fact sheets are expected to be available in the New Year and can be downloaded from the publications section of the PLA website: www.pla.qld.gov.au.

2012 PLA meeting dates

The PLA Board generally meets on the first Monday of each month. Meeting dates for 2012 are: 6 February, 5 March, 2 April, 14 May, 2 July, 6 August, 3 September, 8 October, 5 November, and 3 December. There will be no meeting in June. *Whilst current at the time of printing, these dates are tentative and subject to change without notice.*

Vacancies for Approved Manager positions

Purely Blue: An approved manager required for busy brothel. Full-time shift work position available. Good working conditions. Please contact Debra on 3854 0366.

Please note that approved manager advertisements may be submitted at any time for inclusion in the next edition of the newsletter. They should be emailed to pladmin@iprimus.com.au.