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One year of COVID-19 pandemic in sex work. Exploring work-related victimisation and drug use in a regulatory framework

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Introduction: Sex work

- Sex work **diverse** in nature and legal frameworks.
 - Prohibitionism/abolitionism/regulationism/pro-rights movement
- Sex work as a **risky job** (Deering et al., 2014).
 - Prevalence of workplace violence 23%-55%.
 - SW at higher risk of murder.
- Sex work as a **stigmatised work** (Sprankle et al., 2018).

Introduction: Swiss context (1)

Federal level

– Art. 195¹3. Exploitation de l'activité sexuelle / Encouragement à la prostitution

3. Exploitation de l'activité sexuelle

Encouragement à la prostitution

Est puni d'une peine privative de liberté de dix ans au plus ou d'une peine pécuniaire quiconque:

- pousse un mineur à la prostitution ou favorise la prostitution de celui-ci dans le but d'en tirer un avantage patrimonial;
- pousse autrui à se prostituer en profitant d'un rapport de dépendance ou dans le but d'en tirer un avantage patrimonial;
- porte atteinte à la liberté d'action d'une personne qui se prostitue en la surveillant dans ses activités ou en lui en imposant l'endroit, l'heure, la fréquence ou d'autres conditions;
- maintient une personne dans la prostitution.

¹ Nouvelle teneur selon l'annexe ch. I de l'AF du 27 sept. 2013 (Conv. de Lanzarote), en vigueur depuis le 1^{er} juil. 2014 (RO 2014 1159; FF 2012 7051).

– Art. 196¹3. Exploitation de l'activité sexuelle / Actes d'ordre sexuel avec des mineurs contre rémunération

Actes d'ordre sexuel avec des mineurs contre rémunération

Quiconque, contre une rémunération ou une promesse de rémunération, commet un acte d'ordre sexuel avec un mineur ou l'entraîne à commettre un tel acte est puni d'une peine privative de liberté de trois ans au plus ou d'une peine pécuniaire.

Cantonal level

LOI sur l'exercice de la prostitution (LPros)

du 30 mars 2004

LE GRAND CONSEIL DU CANTON DE VAUD

vu les articles 189, 193, 195 et 199 du Code pénal suisse du 21 décembre 1937^[A]

vu la loi du 29 mai 1985 sur la santé publique^[B]

vu le projet de loi présenté par le Conseil d'Etat

décrète

- › **Chapitre I** Définition, but et champ d'application
- › **Chapitre II** Recensement
- › **Chapitre III** Exercice de la prostitution sur le domaine public,
- › **Chapitre IV** Prostitution de salon
- › **Chapitre V** Prévention
- › **Chapitre VI** Dispositions diverses
- › **Chapitre VII** Dispositions finales

Communal level

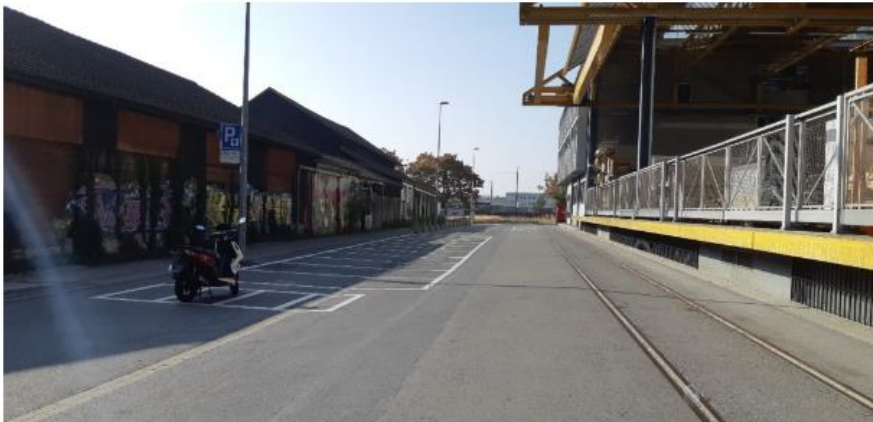
Quartier de Sévelin

Dès le 15 avril 2018 22h-5h 365 jours/an

NOUVELLE ZONE DE PROSTITUTION



Introduction: SW in canton of Vaud



Introduction: Sex work during the COVID-19 pandemic

- **Flexible general framework** regarding Covid-19
- **Sex work banned** from March to June in 2020 in canton of Vaud and indoors prostitution especially regulated until the end of 2020

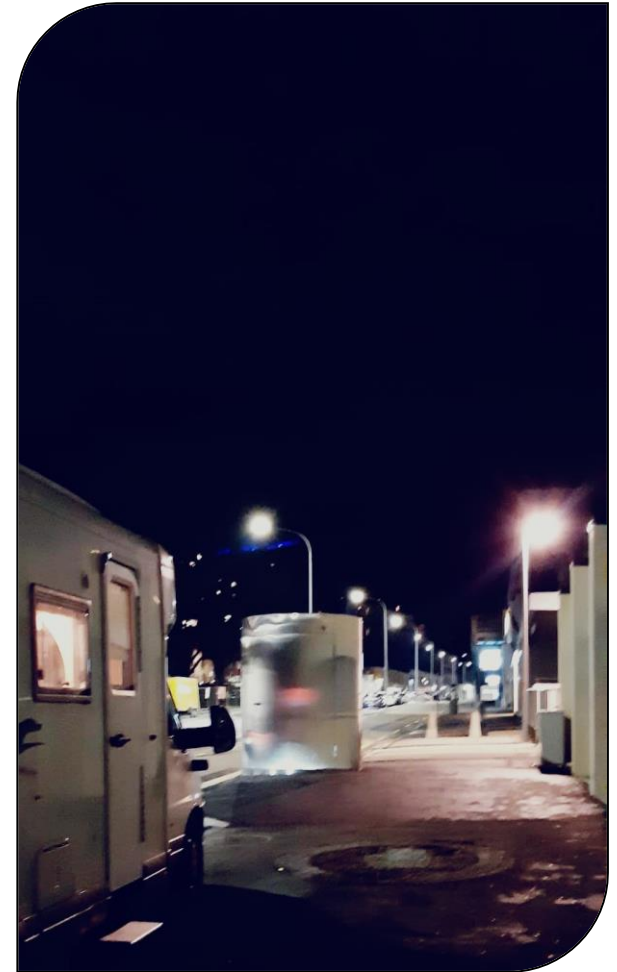
Method

Questionnaire 2020

- Field observation
- Feedback NGO

Field work (N=40) 2021

- Street, outdoors and NGO's office
- CAPI Face to face (n=33)
- Internet self-administered (n=7)



Description of the sample

- 39 cisgender women et 1 transgender
- Aged 20 - 60 y.o. (Median age = 34 y.o.)
- 13 Eastern Europeans, 11 Africans, 7 South Americans, 6 Southern-Europeans, 1 Swiss
- 20 in illegal situation

Results: Financial & psychological challenges

- **During the first year of pandemic:**
 - 33 SW reported that the pandemic had a **(very)negative impact on their lives**
 - 35 SW **spent almost all their savings**
 - 10 SW **worked during sex work ban**

 - 23 SW **ate less than before**
 - 20 SW requested **food vouchers** from NGO
 - 6 SW requested **allowance for loss of gains** for freelancers

 - 28 SW reported having **felt often/always sad**
 - 19 SW reported having **felt often/always anxious**

Results: Relations with customers

- 15 SW were **contacted by customers** during the **sex work ban**
- 30 SW report that customers **negotiate more the tariffs** than before the pandemic
- 15 SW report that customers **insist more to have unprotected intercourse** than before the pandemic

Results: Victimization

- **Victimization since March 2020:** prevalence 17/33 SW

Prevalence (n) Incidence (n) Report (n)

	Prevalence (n)	Incidence (n)	Report (n)
Theft	11	1	1
Fraud from customer	7	1.6	1
Physical assault	4	1	1
Sexual assault	4	1	1
<i>Other</i> : counterfeit banknote	1	1	0
<i>Other</i> : wrongful restraint	1	1	0

- **Variety = 2**

- 2 different offences = 2
- 3 different offences = 6
- 4 different offences = 1

Results: victims vs multiple victims (1)

- **Three groups:**
 - No victims (n=16)
 - Victims of 1-2 different offences (n=10);
 - Victims of at least three different offences (multiple victims) (n=7).
- **No sex/differences** between groups.
- *Multiple victims* are **younger** (average age = 28 years old).
- *No-victims* : more people in a **legal situation**.
- *No-victims* : consumed **more tobacco**, but **less alcohol** and **less illegal drugs** than before the pandemic. However, *1-2 offences group* consumed the most.

Results: victims vs multiple victims (2)

- More SW from *multiple victims group* were **impacted negatively** by the pandemic.
- More victims (overall) **worked face-to-face** during the prostitution ban.
- **More SW from *no-victims group* had their customers insisting to lower prices or to have unprotected intercourse.**

Discussion and conclusion

- Shed light on pandemic-related impacts in a hard-to-reach population in a particular context of regulationism.
- **However, need of a point of comparison:**
 - Compared to the general population, much higher rates of victimisation (e.g. physical assault 10% SW vs 0.6%, Caneppele et al., 2019).
 - Compared to other countries, much lower rates of victimisation and none committed by police officers.
 - Need for a victims' survey adapted to SW and conducted with a representative sample.
- Gaps: masculine SW, more transgender SW.



Thank you for your attention!

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