

People in Alaska's Sex Trade: Their Lived Experiences And Policy Recommendations



Officers wiping a woman's hands after she interacted with an undercover officer during an Anchorage prostitution sting. Photo from the Alaska State Troopers Reality Show.

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Acknowledgements

A couple years ago I wandered into Dr. Kayt Sunwood's office at the University of Alaska Fairbanks with this huge research project I wanted to do. Without her support and encouragement, I never would have made it through the registration process. Dr. Jean Richey took the helm as my committee chair, taught me how to do ethical qualitative research, and expertly guided me through the whole process. Dr. Brian Jarrett understood all the theories that explained the realities I was investigating.

Want to know more?

This report is a summary of the main points of a huge amount of data. If you have questions or want to read the whole thing, email me at: sextraffickingalaska@gmail.com

Research Context

In 2012 a task force, a working group, and a round table were established to discuss prostitution and sex trafficking in Alaska. The task force and working group made recommendations that shaped Alaska's new sex trafficking law, passed in 2012. People with first hand experience in Alaska's sex industry, including sex trafficking victims, were excluded from the groups and the process. Instead, the state turned to law enforcement and non-governmental organizations who profit from the criminalization of every aspect of prostitution.

The resulting law, passed in 2012, broadly redefined most adult consensual prostitution as sex trafficking. The only two people to be charged in the first two years of the laws existence were alleged prostitutes who were caught in ordinary prostitution stings and charged with facilitating or aiding prostitution (sex trafficking in the fourth degree) and felony sex trafficking charges like owning a place of prostitution (sex trafficking in the third degree) and receiving money from prostitution.

This legislation was followed by the creation of a state wide investigative unit targeting people in Alaska's sex trade and funding for conferences and prevention programs. On the other hand, I had received information from victims of force, fraud, and coercion within the sex industry that they were prosecuted for prostitution or trafficking themselves, and were regularly denied access to crisis shelter and counseling.

This research came from a desire to fully understand and quantify the effects of Alaska's sex trafficking and prostitution policies on all people in Alaska's sex trade. I was especially concerned about people's ability to access equal protection under the law, health care, and emergency shelter. I wanted to know what was working, what wasn't working, and what they thought would work better.

The Research

Although sex workers and sex trafficking victims are constantly talked about in the media and public policy, stigma and criminalization often prevent them from speaking for themselves in media and legislative processes. As Alaska creates more and more policies that affect people in Alaska's sex trade, it becomes crucial to create a means to bring their knowledge to the table. Participants' voices are foregrounded in this report because they have been so absent in other reports about sex trafficking and sex work in Alaska.

Rather than presenting participants in the context of their full lives, as is customary in social science research, I've done everything possible to protect their anonymity. That includes forgoing the use of pseudonyms and presenting some stories in pieces rather than with full context. All participation was voluntary and unpaid.

The Participants

Surveys: Forty-one people who self identified as having worked in Alaska’s sex trade or having been profiled as a prostitute took the survey. One answered “erroneous data– please disregard” to all questions and was deleted, leaving 40 survey participants. The survey participants had from one to more than 31 years of experience in the sex trade, with the most common responses being 10 to 30 years. There was one male survey participant and the rest were female. Participants were white, Alaska Native, Native American, Black, Latino, and Creole. There were no Asian participants.

Interviews: Seven people who had recently retired from Alaska’s sex trade and one elder with significant knowledge of the history of prostitution and related policy in an Alaska Native community were interviewed. Interview participants were white, Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic. They included a transgender person, an undocumented immigrant, formerly homeless youth, and people with graduate degrees. They had from two to 44 years in the sex trade and had worked as independent escorts, street-based workers, exotic dancers, massage parlor workers, and pornography performers and producers. They had worked in Asian massage parlors, and legal brothels. They had worked on a circuit, for pimps and agencies, made pornography, had survival sex as street-involved youth, and been pimped as a minor by a guardian. Four of them had significant experience and/or education in a helping profession. None of them thought of themselves as sex trafficking victims. According to an attorney who works with sex trafficking victims with whom I consulted, three definitely met the federal definition of a sex trafficking victim and one probably did.

Public Records: Indictments, affidavits, court transcripts, press releases, and more were examined to contextualize the experiences shared by participants.

Survey Demographics

- The average age of entry into prostitution was 19 years old (excluding one participant who didn't give a specific answer).
- The majority of participants had spent between 10 and 30 years in the industry.
- All had graduated from high school and 81% had pursued other education, ranging from advanced degrees to vocational schools.
- 48% entered the industry independently. Following entry, 89% went on to work independently in the industry.
- 7% reported being forced and 11% reported being coerced or manipulated when they entered the industry. 30% reported being coerced, manipulated, or forced at some point within the industry.
- 26% listed their age as less than 18 when they entered the industry.

Mobility

Participants reported substantial change in their working conditions in the sex industry. While a little less than half of the participants did not enter the industry working independently, about twice as many went on to work independently. These numbers are very similar to statistics reported in research done at John Jay College with youth in the sex trade, and echoes their conclusion that people in the sex trade have agency and act to change their situations.

Although only 18% entered the industry being forced, coerced, or manipulated, an additional 12% went on to be coerced or manipulated in the industry. Participants reported being unable to go to the police when they were victimized in the industry and believed that lacking access to protection under the law made them vulnerable to

What is sex trafficking?

It depends who you ask! According to popular opinion it might be an eight year old kidnapped and kept chained to a bed, or it might be everyone in the sex industry.

Under federal law, sex trafficking is (a) any minor working in the sex industry in any way or (b) the use of force, fraud, or coercion within the sex industry for financial profit.

Under Alaska state law all prostitution is framed as sex trafficking. In one case, a woman was charged with sex trafficking herself when the state alleged that she "instituted or aided" in her own prostitution.

The people who participated in this research are sex industry experts. None of them identify themselves as victims of sex trafficking. 30% of the survey participants checked boxes that, under federal law, identify them as sex trafficking victims.

Seeking Shelter

The Numbers:

19% of survey participants had sought shelter.

83% of them were denied shelter.

50% of those who met the federal criteria for sex trafficking victims had sought shelter

100% of them were turned away.

Participant's advice for shelters:

"don't discriminate"

"it shouldn't matter what we do for a living or where we met the person we need protection from"

"All people deserve a warm safe place to sleep, whether you approve of their choices or not."

"To educate staff about the realities for people involved in the sex trade. It is not helpful to judge nor to refuse services because you do not approve of other people's choices."

"Let them work"

How do shelters interact with sex workers?

"they let me stay for a while and then I wasn't allowed to come back"

"I decided the streets offered more of a future"

"[They] said I wasn't the right kind of victim"

"[The shelter] wouldn't let me in when it was forty below, wouldn't give me shelter in general."

"I chose the streets over the shelter system, that was a very, very clear choice. I tried the shelters, I realized that I would not be able to maintain a place in that construct and so I chose going back out onto the streets [as a juvenile]."

Why were so many unable to access shelter?

Survey participants did not offer much information about why they were unable to access shelter. Most seemed to feel that some discrimination was involved.

Since 2011 I've been aware of adults and minors (outside of this research) not being able to access shelter in Alaska because: they were underage and wouldn't give their parents' phone number (with good cause), they weren't willing to name the person who had abused them, they didn't have an ID, they were transgender, they were on felony probation, and they were not victims of domestic violence.

The Sex Worker and The Force of Law

Sex workers reported an alarming amount of police violence. When they tried to report being a victim or witness of a crime most of their reports were not taken; some were arrested or threatened with arrest when they had been the victim or witness of a crime. In the interviews, 75% of those who meet the federal definition of a sex trafficking victim reported being assaulted by police before ever becoming involved in the sex industry, compared to 0% of those who did not have trafficking experiences.

The numbers:

52% of participants had tried to report being a victim or witness of a crime while working

The police took 44% of their reports. They arrested 6% of them and threatened 33% with arrest when they were trying to report being the victim or witness of a crime.

80% of participants who had been manipulated or coerced in the industry had tried to report being a victim or witness of a crime. When they did the police took 20% of their reports, threatened 60% with arrest, and arrested 20%.

Firsthand experiences:

“I myself have had them pose as customers and actually complete a sexual act with me and then try to arrest me however I didn’t touch the money so they couldn’t arrest me and, um... I felt raped after. Completely raped.”

“When I was a kid I was in a park with a friend of mine, yeah we were underage and drinking beer in the park which we shouldn’t have been doing, but they beat my friend into a coma.”

“She came to my house in handcuffs, I helped cut her out of handcuffs. She got away from a policeman who was going – he threatened to throw her in the [river] if she didn’t perform oral sex on him.”

“They always treat you like you’re stupid, that you must have a pimp, you must be on drugs, that you need to get a job. This is my job. Let’s see what else... Um, it’s never been a good encounter but I’ve never experienced violence or sexual harassment. Thankfully.”

“Just from what I’ve heard from everybody else, that if something bad was to happen to not trust law enforcement to carry out any justice. You know that’s why it’s so important these days to communicate with others that are in the field so you can know who the client is. I mean, if I were looking to screen a client I wouldn’t look to make sure they’re not law enforcement, I’d make sure that they’re not, you know, domestic violence, that they haven’t racked up a bunch of assaults and robberies, they don’t have any weird drug charges or kidnapping charges and make sure that it’s a safe environment, because I know that if it wasn’t I couldn’t just call the police and know that everything would be okay. I couldn’t call the police and be treated like a typical public person.”

Numbers:

74% of participants had been a victim or witness of a crime that they didn't report because they thought they would be arrested, they didn't think the police would do anything, they didn't want to draw attention to themselves or their coworkers, or other reasons.

26% of participants had been sexually assaulted by an officer.

60% of those who had been coerced or manipulated and 50% of those who had been forced had been sexually assaulted by an officer.

9% of participants had been robbed or beaten by an officer.

40% of those who had been coerced or manipulated in the industry and 50% of those who had been forced had been robbed or beaten by an officer.

Firsthand Experiences:

"I ended up going to a girls home from 13 to 14 and, we were bad kids, we tried to escape, they ended up beating us up and throwing us in solitary confinement until our bruises healed so then nobody could see that and nobody would believe us because we were bad kids."

"It was in the middle of the day. I was walking by the police, I was walking to catch a bus. And because I was in the area that I was in and I had an acid wash miniskirt on and a little tank top, they wanted to see whether or not I was, I was trans. And they ripped my underwear off. One of them put his hand up my skirt and ripped my underwear off. He slammed me down on the car, he injured me. Um, left me with some broken fingertips, broken toes, fractured cheekbone. And they felt perfectly okay with this because there was no law to protect me..."

I mean, when you deny a certain group of people their protections or rights, or say... you're saying that it's okay to abuse these people. I mean, you set a precedent. You know what I'm saying? You set a precedent. I mean, there are plenty of people that hate Black people, but they would never act on it because it's against the law to discriminate and it's against the law to harm them now. So therefore people who would harm them or discriminate against them keep that under wraps because they know there's laws against it and there's consequences. These officers didn't feel like there was any consequences to doing that. They left me there in a 7/11 parking lot. I was bleeding, I had my skirt ripped. I basically looked like a rape victim or an assault victim and people were just mortified because they'd seen a teenage girl get assaulted by a police officer, two police officers. And yeah, these guys didn't feel like there was any consequences."

Trying to Report Sex Trafficking: A Firsthand Account

The use of force to harbor people for commercial sex work is considered sex trafficking under federal law. So is fraud (the bad check).

Supplies: probably things like shampoo, make up, condoms, and food.

According to Wikipedia, NHI “is a dehumanizing police term used to describe or reference crimes committed against such victims as prostitutes...”

80% of those who had been manipulated or coerced in the industry had similar experiences when they tried to report being a victim or witness of a crime to the police.

“[In the 90’s I] went to the FBI in Manhattan and I reported part of a syndicate after I was beaten up and given a bad check from the legal company that was a front for illegal activity. There were some things building to that, but the reason that I was beaten up was because the workers were locked in on a premise and we needed to get supplies because the house was selling our supplies at like 100% markup and all of the workers needed supplies and I was voted as being the person who had the most self-confidence and ability to try to communicate that, and it ended up with me being beaten up and potentially put into it an even more detrimental situation. I had to think about that long and hard because other people supported my doing it. The problem at that point was that it would take hundred calls to vice and in an area of the country each from separate people who all were willing to identify themselves with their full legal name, and until there were 100 complaints put in an investigation could not be opened up. And if anything happened to you at that point in time if you were a hooker or defined as an aberrant of any kind you would get a stamp on your file that said that you were not a human investigation. The NHI stamp was for people who were sex workers, drug pushers, gang people, and if you got offed there was no investigation. So there was a lot there...”

All of my contact with law enforcement has been so ridiculously clearly defined by what their present administrative goal directive is as opposed to what the actual needs of people are that you realize that you have to understand more about what's going on from the national and state perspective politically before you go to the police. It's not about a crime or a moral code or ethics it's about the political framework, the contextual framework, the political structure of the administration that is existent in the time that you are potentially experiencing a problem. That's not how law enforcement is defined to you when you're a child but now I get that. So, you know, if you see something bad happening you have to take into consideration whether or not the time period, the belief of the time period that you're in, is going to wind up understanding the nature of the crime.

I realize now that it wasn't ridiculous that I went to the FBI but it was ridiculous that I would believe that anybody would care if there was no money attached to them caring about something. There has to be like some kind of cookie that they're getting.”

People who've had experiences like this trying to report sex trafficking in the past now fear being charged with trafficking themselves or their coworkers in Alaska.

56% of those who tried to report a crime to the police did not have their reports taken:

“I have a friend that was walking on Spenard a couple years ago and a guy in a truck had raped her and she already knew who it was and she reported it to the police. Other girls had reported the same thing happening and he’s still driving around doing what he does... They ignored her. They didn’t do anything at all. I don’t know the specific details but I know that she was really frustrated about it and she didn’t feel safe at all.”

It is not illegal in Alaska for police officers to have sex with people before arresting them:

“I knew a couple ladies who went to go see a guy together who turned out to be a police officer. He gave one of the girls that was only 19 at the time alcohol he also received oral sex from one of the ladies and then arrested her and said that he had seen her reviews online and wanted to see for himself what it was all about. She got a prostitution charge.”

“I know another lady who went to see someone who was supposed to be a customer who ended up being a police officer and they had sex to completion, he tried to make her take the money but she did not take the money. He told her he was going to arrest her and she informed him that he couldn’t because they had not broken any law. He then proceeded to say, “You’re a very wise woman and I’m proud of you,” and proceeded to walk her downstairs where there’s two other officers standing there waiting and he shook his head no at them.”

Would you call the police if you became a victim of a crime (like rape or sex trafficking) while involved in sex work?

“Oh, you’re on your own here, pretty much. You’re on your own. No I wouldn’t go to the police if I were a victim of a crime.”

“Sex trafficking, yes, because there’s someone to snitch on basically. Every time I’ve encountered the cops that’s what they really want. They didn’t really want me they always wanted someone bigger than me that they can get to give a felony charge to. If I were raped? Jesus Christ it depends on the area honestly like and how it happens. Unfortunately, because of the nature of my work people don’t view rape the same way always. I mean if I were absolutely like violently attacked, if someone came in here or I was just walking around someone raped me, yeah. But if someone’s in my work space and they forced me to have sex with them. It would be the same emotionally psychologically for me, but legally proving that that’s what exactly incurred - or someone saying that actually theft, which is insulting. Because might my work is about consensual sex it’s not about nonconsensual sex and so... would I pursue it? Yeah I would, just to see what would happen, honestly. To tell you the truth because I want to make the systems better.”

“Not necessarily, no. Because I think that if you were a victim of a crime that’s truly a crime at that level you need to deal with politicians, not law enforcement. Like you cannot call 911. At a base level it’s bullshit.”

74% of survey participants indicated that they had been the victim or witness of a crime they had not reported. 39% didn’t believe the police would do anything, and 30% believed they would be arrested if they tried to report.

Force, Manipulation, Underage Work, and Police Violence

I compared the responses of people who reported experiencing force or manipulation within the sex industry and those who reported working underage (the federal standard for sex trafficking) with the general survey results. Those who had experienced force or manipulation within the industry were completely unable to access shelter, and reported a much higher rate of sexual assault, physical assault, and robbery by police officers. There didn't seem to be a difference in their ability to access medical or mental health care. Working underage didn't seem to be related to significant differences.

I compared people who reported having been assaulted by police to those who hadn't, and found some differences.

The 2 people who had been beaten or robbed by an officer:

- Were both white and Alaska Native.
- Both reported entering the industry using sex for survival.
- Neither entered the industry working independently but both went on to work independently.
- Reported that criminal history and lack of job history would have made it difficult for them to leave the industry if they'd wanted to.
- Both had sought emergency shelter, in both cases the shelter was aware of their involvement in the industry, and both were ultimately unable to access shelter.
- Both had tried to report being a victim or witness of a crime, police took one of their reports and threatened both with arrest.
- Both reported having been the victim or witness of a crime they didn't report because they didn't think the police would do anything and they thought they would be arrested.
- Both had been arrested as adults, and both had been detained but not arrested as adults.
 - Both believed police are the primary threat to people in Alaska's sex industry.

Of those who reported being sexually assaulted by an officer:

- Half were Alaska Native and white, the other half were white.
- None entered the industry working independently. Following entry, all went on to work independently.
 - Half had sought emergency shelter, none were able to access it.
 - 93% reported being a victim or witness of a crime they didn't report.
- All but one believed police are the primary threat to people in Alaska's sex industry.

The Sex Trafficking Laws

Alleged prostitutes charged with trafficking: **3**

Non- prostitutes charged with trafficking: **3**

“Traffickers” charged with hurting prostitutes: **0**

“Traffickers” charged with pimping children: **0**

When I was first considering doing this research, I made a public records request to find out how the sex trafficking law had been used since its inception. That was at the end of 2013, and at that time only two people had been charged with sex trafficking. Both women were allegedly prostitutes who were charged with sex trafficking in the same case they were charged with prostitution of themselves. In one case the woman was charged with trafficking herself (“facilitating or aiding prostitution”) after she refused to agree to perform a sex act with an undercover police officer for money. In the other case a woman was charged with multiple counts of felony sex trafficking (maintaining a place of prostitution, receiving money from prostitution, etc) for sharing space with other sex workers when she booked a duo for herself and another worker with a police officer. The only people charged with prostitution under state law at that time were those who were also charged with sex trafficking and those who were allegedly victims of sex trafficking.

Since that records request four more people have been charged with sex trafficking. One is a woman who, in the charging documents, is accused of being a prostitute. Another is her husband, who is charged with receiving money from prostitution. The other two are men who are accused of things like maintaining places of prostitution and receiving money from prostitution. There have been no charges of violence, fraud, or coercion in any of the cases. In one case there was originally an allegation of a verbal threat, but that charge was later dropped. In none of the documents I’ve examined since the law’s inception has it been used to benefit a victim.

There is a big gap between the federal definition of sex trafficking, which requires minors or the use of force, fraud, or coercion, and the state definition of sex trafficking, which includes many strategies that sex workers employ to increase their safety, such as working indoors, working together, and facilitating or aiding their own prostitution.

What are the real risks to people in Alaska's sex trade?

“So many at this point. You know we can't, we're not supposed to get together, we're not supposed to talk about how to keep each other safe, we're not supposed to share spaces, we're not supposed to, you know, help with references or anything like that because we're worried about being arrested. So... and then not only that but people know that they can harm you and get away with it because you can't go to the police because you'll be arrested right with them. So you'll be victimized twice.”

“You can't really be honest on applications for loans or anything. Mainly, I mean, there is risk when you go to an outcall and what if there's guys hiding in a closet? You can't just finally make it out of there and call the police and say I was raped without questions, “Oh, well she's a prostitute” and then your labeled, maybe charged, and those guys aren't.”

I asked people in Alaska's sex trade what the primary threats that the law should be concerned with protecting them from are. In the survey:

35% named violence or coercion from police

30% mentioned not being able to access equal protection under the law if they were the victim of a crime

15% mentioned arrest or prosecution (things that can result in lifelong discrimination in accessing employment, housing, custody, education, social services, and financial instruments)

What *should* be the definition of sex trafficking?

Overwhelmingly participants thought it should be when someone was forced or coerced against their will to perform acts of prostitution. Many thought that most force, fraud, or coercion that happens in the industry would more properly be described and charged as domestic violence, assault, or labor abuses.

How common is sex trafficking, according to the different definitions?

71% of survey participants thought that sex trafficking, according to their own definition, happens **never or sometimes** (1&2 on a scale of 1-5) in Alaska.

85% thought that sex trafficking, according to federal definitions, happens **never or sometimes** in Alaska.

73% thought that sex trafficking, according to state law, happens **most or all of the time** (4&5 on a scale of 1-5).

What should be the difference between prostitution and sex trafficking?

“When it’s not by choice of the individual. An individual should come forward to you just as if, there are some like places in the southwest, they’re like, cutting up chickens and stuff. Right, some of these big places. And they kidnap people from like Mexico and Central America and crap. They literally just kidnap them and enslave them and bring them up here to like pick tomatoes or whatever, horrible jobs. and that’s the same thing is taking someone and enslaving them into prostitution. you don’t take someone and force them to do anything that’s not by their choice. That’s slavery. That’s illegal. You don’t do it.

But if I wake up in morning and I make my breakfast and I make myself a beautiful breakfast every morning, I make myself a beautiful paleo diet breakfast, I have a mineral sparkling water and take my phone calls and my emails, and I set up a few appointments with some gentleman that I enjoy spending time with, and they pay me for that time, those two should not be considered the same thing. At all. It needs to stop.”

“The oldest profession in the world is prostitution. Sex trafficking to me is such a vile term, because that’s just sadness, I mean when someone’s being forced to do something that they don’t want to do against their will, that’s just horrible and I would definitely help somebody get out of that situation even if it put me at risk just because we’re human and I wouldn’t wanna see someone treated like that. But, you know I think there’s a big difference between doing it because you want to and doing it because you’re forced to.”

“I think they need to change the definition of sex trafficking, it’s a really bad definition. The whole trafficking definition and discourses is a bad discourse. I mean we don’t talk about labor trafficking in terms of, you know, construction trafficking. We don’t talk about trafficking or exploitation in industries specific to those industries and so singling out, you know, the sex trade when we’re already being exploited by the criminalization laws is an unfair business practice, actually is what it is. They need to remove, um, they need to remove all the sex trafficking laws specifically and they need to instead strengthen labor laws and make them actually enforceable because most of the labor laws on the books are not enforceable. Well the only way that they’re actually enforceable is if you go and have the means to hire your own private attorney to seek damages so... that’s not a fair equitable way to prevent. Laws have to be built around prevention not around prosecution of crimes that already happen after the fact, that’s totally useless.”

“Prostitution is consensual amongst adults. It is a negotiated understanding of time and action to dollar amount so that mutual expectations are satisfied. Trafficking - people in my view are either forced or coerced to work with the terms not being clear with the financial aspects not being fairly negotiated or implemented and their needs, whether that be healthcare or food, not met within the construct of the transaction. And sometimes trafficking can be agreed to because people don’t feel they have other options so it’s not always—like sometimes people agree to things that are beyond their understanding—but basically when you start taking a clear parameter of time, place, service offered, you don’t offer people clean hygienic places to eat, bathe, sleep, and [they don’t] understand what they’re in for.”

What laws would serve people in the sex industry?

Survey participants gave short answers: most people thought that decriminalization is the answer, particularly decriminalizing prostitutes working together, working indoors (in “places of prostitution”), sharing information with each other about clients, and having drivers. Others mentioned things like, “if [sex workers] could go to the police without being arrested,” and “consequences and public shaming for cops who take ad-

“I will say that maybe there is a need for there to be some kind of advocate-liaison that works between sex workers and law enforcement... If you have a sex worker who has been taken into custody either voluntarily or in some kind of a raid or situation, if they are able to have an advocate present—who hasn't just gotten a degree, but truly understands the industry from both an experiential and an academic perspective—to be there to help make sure the situation is correctly, uh transcribed or recorded, or that the rights of the person are clearly, like, that their situation, that their rights are clearly understood or any rights they're giving away are clearly understood. There aren't any lawyers that are sex industry specific and that's a problem. So whether it be having you know, these task forces, find people in the sex industry and pay for them to do you like the combination of a counsel and legal program to then be able to act as these interdisciplinary liaisons, because there's no there's no buffer, there's no objective buffer that I see.”

Interview participants had a lot more to say:

“Oh, decriminalization. Decriminalization would go a long way to doing that [ending violence] because if they are, if these transactions are occurring through legitimate means then clients don't feel like they necessarily... you know, again there's that invisible barrier of, it's the law and if I cross over this barrier and do something I'm not supposed to do there's going to be consequences, whereas when it is a criminal act and this client is feeling like this lady, the lady or gentleman that he's getting services from hasn't any recourse then he might feel a little more okay about doing whatever [to the sex worker].”

“It would be nice for the police not to victimize people that are victimized themselves and just because we're in this business doesn't mean that we're victims. I see myself maybe only made as a victim maybe only if somebody was to do something to me and then as a tax-paying individual because I pay my taxes, that the police don't do anything about it, then I'm a victim on both ends.”

“Oh yeah, I mean in a perfect world, my perfect world, this would be legal and then when there was somebody that was working that felt like they were being mistreated or the guys take all the money they would actually be able to reach out and get out of that situation without being labeled as a prostitute or labeled as a lost cause or drug addict or someone who's just screwed up in the head.”

“Stop pursuing us like hunted animals... If you stop pursuing the criminalization of prostitution, then I can come to you when I’m raped, then I can come to you when I’m robbed, then you can pursue violent crimes.”

“If consensual prostitution amongst adults who are mutually in agreement of wanting to engage in a situation was decriminalized. I think, you know, either [in] a private in-house situation or an outcall situation or combination of, but if consensual adult to adult prostitution was decriminalized then right there, there would be a platform for feeling more secure, with an ability to communicate if you see bad things happening to other people, or if you have a bad experience yourself, whether that be with a client who is violent or abberated or just really creepy or a house that is not acting ethically.

You are more inclined to also if you are in a decriminalized situation and there is a healthcare clinic that will see people who are in the sex industry just as there are GLBT specific healthcare clinics that have a grant structure to be able to allow people to receive services, treatment, testing treatment, and counsel for behavior related to homosexual relations. If there were something like that for sex workers where you could be honest about whether or not you use condoms for oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex and wanted to have testing done for STI's HIV, or if you're feeling burnt out and you needed to have just acute counsel or you know, kind of a grounding session so to speak to prevent volatile situations where often people reach out for drugs and alcohol if they don't have people who can help soothe and ground them. If you have places to go where you can communicate honestly without being punished for that sometimes that can prevent an escalation of volatile and negative situations right there. And also that way you can track healthcare issues in an area.

But decriminalization in my mind is definitely starting point for that. the other thing is that that way - there are people who are minors or who are obviously not mentally or physically competent to be working, that those agencies that are support systems to the industry can help get those people out of work situations and get the resources they need. If somebody is obviously [mentally ill] or they are suffering from a drug problem or they’re homeless and malnourished and they really shouldn’t be working. If you can refer them to places that can help them get some of the resources they need to help get them out of the work environment. That way workers don't have to - actual sex workers don't have to work with people who are not necessarily meant or able to be working.”

Summary of Recommendations

1. Institute immediate outside oversight of all interactions between police and those they believe to be sex workers or sex trafficking victims in order to prevent the sort of police misconduct that participants reported and that their reports are taken when they've been the victim or witness of a crime.
2. Institute regular accountability procedures for shelters and rape crisis centers to ensure that all victims have access to services. As shown in this report, arbitrary selection of who is "deserving" of services negatively impacts the most vulnerable among us.
3. Decriminalize prostitution so that sex workers, sex trafficking victims, and their customers must be able to go to the police and make reports without fear of arrest when they are victims or witnesses of crime.
4. Repeal Alaska's sex trafficking law and consult sex industry experts before making new laws that will affect them to prevent the dangerous effects that participants have reported.
5. Immediately discontinue the use of safety measures as evidence of prostitution or against alleged prostitutes or their clients. Safety measures include condoms, negotiating safer sex, screening, working indoors (in a "place of prostitution"), working together, and hiring someone to do security, screening, or booking. Making sex workers afraid to use condoms or screen clients should not be a goal or effect of prostitution policy.
6. Shelters and other non profits should institute non discrimination policies and seek training from sex workers.
7. Minors should never be turned away from shelter because their situations are too complex or because their parents can't be contacted.
8. Harsh criminal penalties for police who have sexual contact with sex workers or sex trafficking victims.
9. More research is needed to investigate the relationship between police violence and abuse within the sex industry.