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Executive summary

Part I: The sex industry in New Zealand

Introduction

This literature review was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and is intended to provide an assessment of the state of the sex industry in New Zealand in the years leading up to the passage of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003. It also examines overseas models of prostitution law reform and associated evaluations.

History of the sex industry in New Zealand

Accounts show that New Zealand has had a sex industry since the early days of European colonisation, when whalers and traders traded muskets and other goods for access to Māori women (Belich, 1996; Donne, 1927).

Prostitution flourished during the early years of the new colony and during gold-mining days when money and alcohol were abundant and women were few in number. The Contagious Disease Act 1869 was the first major legal intervention into prostitution in New Zealand, which sought to regulate prostitution by subjecting any woman deemed to be a 'common prostitute' to forcible medical examination and detention (Eldred-Grigg, 1984).

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the establishment of the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC) (Jordan 1991c, 1993c, Lichtenstein, 1997). A small group of sex workers started this initiative in 1987 as a means of providing support and education for those working in the sex industry, with the first office opening in Wellington in October 1988, followed by bases in Auckland and Christchurch (Saskia, 1989).

Size, structure and organisation

Sex workers participate in an industry organised to provide sexual services in a variety of ways. The main arenas evident in New Zealand are massage parlours, escort agencies and street prostitution with a range of other types existing to a lesser degree. A study conducted in Christchurch estimated that more than half of the city's sex workers (58%) worked in massage parlours, 28% on the streets and 14% from escort agencies (Plumridge and Abel, 2001). The authors of the Christchurch survey describe the sex industry as 'segmented' in the sense that relatively little cross-over appeared to occur between the street and indoor venues.

For many years the size of the sex industry was considered to be around 8000, a figure estimated by the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective. One of the more recent, rigorous