

# What REALLY happened in New Zealand after prostitution was decriminalised?

Sex trade lobbyists claim that decriminalising “sex work”, like they did in New Zealand (NZ), makes “sex workers” safer, improves health outcomes, increases their power and ability to assert their rights, and does not result in an expansion of the industry or more child sexual exploitation or sex trafficking.

Let’s look at what the NZ government’s official reports show happened after NZ passed its Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) in 2003.



## What is decriminalised in New Zealand?



Selling sex



Buying sex



Pimping



Unlicensed small  
brothels (<5)



Licensed large  
brothels (5+)

### Safety: The claim



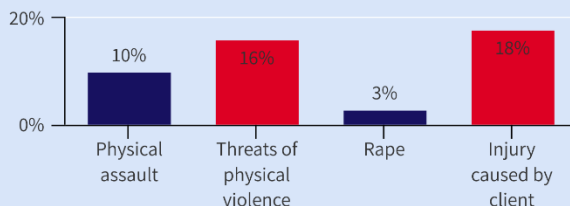
Decriminalisation is safer for sex workers.

### What the data actually shows



*“The majority [of respondents\*] felt the PRA was able to do little about the violence that occurred in the sex industry.”*

Percentage of respondents\* who experienced violence in prostitution during the previous 12 months



\* People involved in prostitution who responded to the research survey.

*“Most of the injuries were sustained through violent altercations with clients, or clients who had been too rough, causing vaginal or anal trauma.”*

# What REALLY happened in New Zealand after prostitution was decriminalised?

## Health: The law mandates



Regular health inspections of brothels with more than four women.



Compulsory condom use.  
Penalty for not using a condom:

**\$2,000**

Payable by **both** clients & women.

## What happened in practice

Total number of brothel inspections 2003-2015 : **11**

Brothel licences granted 2004-2012 : **914**

Public money allocated for brothel inspections : **\$0**

*“Key informants were not aware of any substantial change in the use of safer sex practices by sex workers as a result of the PRA.”*

Men *“always or almost always”* ask for unprotected sex.



Prosecutions for not using a condom 2003-2008 : **1**

## Asserting rights: The claim



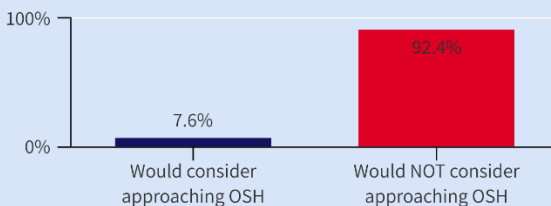
Sex workers can assert their rights and report problems to the police and other authorities.

## What the data actually shows



In practice, few respondents\* felt able to exert their rights or to report incidents to the Police or Occupational Safety & Health (OSH).

Percentage of respondents\* who would consider approaching OSH for help



**The official explanation for the violence & lack of reporting**

**STIGMA**

*“Stigmatisation plays a key role in the non-reporting of incidents.”*

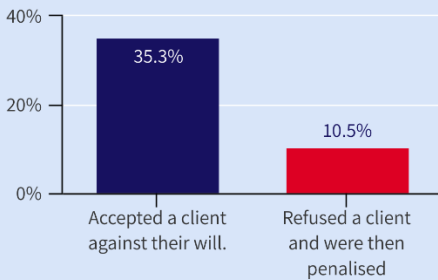
# What REALLY happened in New Zealand after prostitution was decriminalised?

## Refusing clients: The claim



Sex workers have the legal right to refuse clients or specific services.

What happened to respondents\* in the last 12 months?



## What the official report says



*“There are still some sex workers that are being required to provide commercial sexual services against their will.”*

*“One 18 year old worker had just finished a job. A big Samoan guy was waiting who she had not even had a chance to check out. He was really rough with her, held her down by her throat. She went out to complain to the manager who told her to ‘go back in’.”*

## Under the PRA, sex crimes against children are minor offences, comparable to liquor & tobacco offences.

Most people convicted of sex crimes against children under the PRA have faced only community service.



## Sex trafficking: The claim

# 0

cases of human trafficking in the prostitution industry 2003-2023

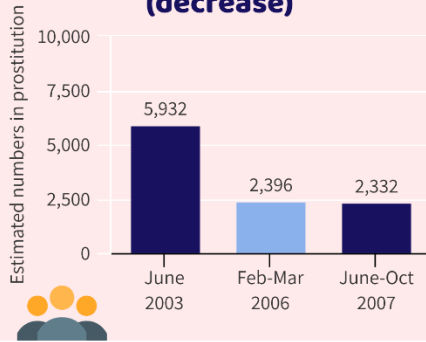
## What the data actually shows

# 133

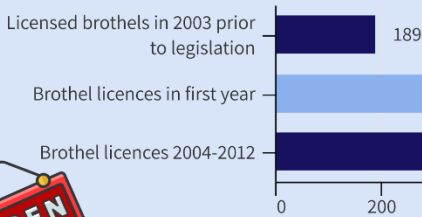
cases that meet the international definition of human trafficking 2003-2011 (NZ recorded crime data)

# What REALLY happened in New Zealand after prostitution was decriminalised?

## Industry expansion: The claim (decrease)



## What the data actually shows (significant increase)



A significant INCREASE in the size of the industry is supported by the number of brothel licences granted



*“Decriminalisation has **not** become a significant factor in people’s decision to enter the sex industry.”*

Total population of New Zealand:  
2003 ≈ 4 million; 2023 ≈ 5.1 million

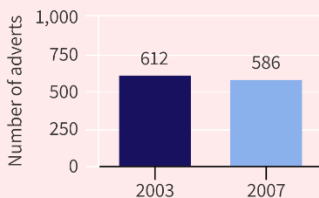


But... **41%**

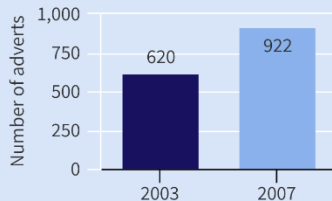


of survey respondents who entered prostitution after the PRA said they did so because it was now legal.

## Prostitution advertising: The claim (decrease)



## What the data actually shows (significant increase)



These infographics are based on data in two official reports published by the New Zealand Prostitution Law Reform Committee (PLRC) in 2005 and 2008 and three additional reports provided to the PLRC by other bodies. For more information and full references, please scan the QR code or go to: <https://wp.me/p7kKHZ-5dS>



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