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# REPORT QUESTIONNAIRE 2001 IN BELGIUM

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This study is part of the health and infection risks survey of EUROPAP 2001. This survey comprises a consecutive serum sample of 100, and a questionnaire.

## 1. The questionnaire

In total 83 questionnaires were completed. Women were selected to convenience, and cannot be considered as representative of the whole sex workers population in the region (2.000.000 inhabitants, estimated number of sex workers 2.000).

Table 1. Nationality

	Frequency	Percent
Belgian	63	75,9
French	10	12,0
West European	4	4,8
African	3	3,6
East European	1	1,2
South American	1	1,2
Asian	1	1,2
Total	83	100,0

Most sex workers in the region are of Belgian nationality (66% in the outreach project over the last ten years), but in this survey they are slightly over represented. The percentage of French sex workers is like the overall data available.

Table 2. Age groups

	Frequency	Percent
19-24 yr	21	25,3
25-29 yr	20	24,1
30-35 yr	22	26,5
>35 yr	20	24,1
Total	83	100,0

All age groups are represented.

Table 3. Age when left FT education

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
12-15	10	12,2	12,2
16-17	20	24,4	36,6
18	28	34,1	70,7
19-21	16	19,6	90,3
22-26	8	9,7	100,0
Total	82	100,0	

More than 70% of the sample had left school before the age of 19.

**Table 4. Year entered prostitution**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1981-1997	26	31,7	31,7
1998	10	12,2	43,9
1999	11	13,4	57,3
2000	14	17,1	74,4
2001	21	25,6	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

One quarter of the sample just recently entered prostitution. About a third had worked for four years or more.

**Table 5. Circumstances of first work**

	Frequency
Financial	28
Introduced by peer	27
Financial and relational problems	15
No other job opportunities	3
Other reasons	7
No specific reasons	1
No information	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

The reasons or circumstances in which women indicated to start working in prostitution are varied. Two main elements emerge: financial and relational problems (43=51,8%), often in combination. In 27 cases (32,5%) another person was directly involved in introducing her in the job. A choice based on a positive factor is rather exceptional.

Some examples of answers covered under the topics in the table above:

**Financial**

- ‘Financial problems.’
- ‘For living, for the money.’
- ‘For luxury goods.’

**Introduced by peer**

- ‘Own initiative, I could not earn enough money with a normal job, a friend, my ex father in law worked in a bar.’
- ‘Financial problems by starting loans for my boyfriend who worked independently. A girlfriend of mine does this work and advised me to do the same to make money.’
- ‘Through my partner ended in the profession.’
- ‘My husband took over a bar with girls. One day there were no girls, and I took over....’
- ‘Simply because of a female friend who did the same. I have no prejudices against this profession.’
- ‘A friend pushed me. But now I am working voluntarily.’
- ‘Through a bet with friends. In the window you were allowed to work for 14 days in a temporary contract.’

**Financial and relational problems**

- ‘Divorce with financial problems.’
- ‘Financial reasons. Loneliness and relational problems. Disappointment in relations.’
- ‘Financial, was kicked out of family.’
- ‘My partner kicked me out of the house.’
- ‘Shortage of money - stress - boredom – loneliness.’
- ‘Needed money, was alone with children.’

### No other job opportunities

‘Could not find another job, just cleaning. Did think for three months before starting sex work. There was no other job because I could not yet speak the language.’

### Other reasons

‘Drug dependence.’

‘Incidental, after my news shop closed I started a job as a waitress, which turned out to be sex work.’

‘To experiment, out of curiosity.’

**Table 6. Main working place of respondents**

Working place	N	%
Window	13	15,7
Bar or brothel	24	28,9
Personal advertisement/flat	22	26,5
Sauna/massage	21	25,3
Escort	1	1,2
Peep show	2	2,4
	<b>83</b>	<b>100%</b>

Typical for the area is the absence of street work. However, the area covers two provinces, and the absence of street work underlines the fact that sex work cannot be seen only as inner city street work with all its difficulties, as often evocated by the media. Most sex work is inside houses, and does not cause hinder.

**Table 7. Condom use in the last week**

	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never	Not done
Vaginal sex	80				3
Oral sex	51	20	7	5	
Anal sex	18				65

Condoms are always used for vaginal and anal sex. During oral sex condoms are not always used.

**Table 8. Condom break/leakage last 6 months**

	Frequency	Percent
Once	17	20,5
More than once	16	19,3
Never	50	60,2
Total	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

As can be seen in table 8, condom failure is not exceptional, supporting the need for easy access to STI-screening services.

**Table 9. Lubricant use**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	66	79,5
No	17	20,5
Total	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Lubricants are widely used, and are all water-based. However, there is still a significant minority not using lubricants.

**Table 10. Ever other paid work**

<i>Ever other paid work</i>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	76	91,6
<b>No</b>	7	8,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<i>Current paid work</i>		
<b>Yes</b>	13	15,7
<b>No</b>	70	84,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Most women did have another job before, but have currently no other job than sex work.

**Table 11. Number of sexual partners last year**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>0</b>	10	12,3
<b>1</b>	55	67,9
<b>2</b>	10	12,3
<b>3</b>	1	1,2
<b>5</b>	5	6,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Slightly more than 80% said to have had 0 or 1 sexual partner in the year before the interview. A minority did have several partners, and has run a risk for sexually transmitted diseases, since most do not use condoms in private life, as can be seen in table 12. Of those with 5 partners, 4 said to use a condom sometimes, and one said never.

**Table 12. Condom use with partners**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Always</b>	9	12,5
<b>Almost always</b>	2	2,8
<b>Sometimes</b>	10	13,9
<b>Never</b>	51	70,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Table 13: Marital status**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Married</b>	15	18,1
<b>Single</b>	23	27,7
<b>Legally separated</b>	11	13,3
<b>Divorced</b>	10	12,0
<b>Cohabiting</b>	21	25,3
<b>Widowed</b>	3	3,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

More than half were living single, or are separated or divorced.

**Table 14. Health status**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Very good</b>	37	44,6
<b>Fairly good</b>	29	34,9
<b>Average</b>	17	20,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Most women consider themselves in good health.

## 2. Sexually transmitted infections

About 30% of the women reported ever having had a sexually transmitted infection. Chlamydia was mentioned most times, followed by genital warts and herpes.

**Table 15. Cervical smear ever**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, in date (< 3 years)	74	90,2
Out of date	6	7,3
Never	1	1,2
Don't know	1	1,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100,0</b>

A majority had a cervical smear, but most of them had a smear in the health project of PASOP. In 12,8% an abnormal smear was detected, according to the woman interviewed.

**Table 16. Contraception**

	Frequency	Percent
Combined pill	38	46,9
Progesterone only pill	3	3,7
IUS	3	3,7
IUD	2	2,5
Depo provera	10	12,3
Sterilization	4	4,9
Sterilization partner	2	2,5
Condom	12	14,8
None needed, pregnant	1	1,2
None needed, infertile	5	6,2
Other	1	1,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,0</b>

A minority is only relying on the condom as a contraceptive, thus risking an unwanted pregnancy in case of condom failure.

More than 82% of the women had ever been pregnant, and 70% of them has one or two children. There were 14 women who had a miscarriage, and 24 women had an abortion. Seventy-one women visited the general practitioner in the past 12 months. In only 38% the woman will tell her doctor the kind of work she is doing. Fifty-four women visited a gynaecologist, and 30 (55,6%) of them did discuss their profession with the doctor.

Smoking is done by 63 (76,8%) women, and drinking by 59 (72%). These figures are much higher than can be found in the average population.

One item on the CAGE questions (*problematic alcohol use*) was positive for 18 women, and 4 scored 2 or 3 positive questions. Around 15 women smoke marihuana. Five women say to use cocaine, 4 women mention current use of speed. In total 31 women (39,4%) said ever to have used drugs, of whom 4 used heroin.

Nineteen women, or 22,9%, ever experienced (*sexual*) assault at work.

**Table 17. Violent situations ever experienced**

	Frequency	Percent
No violence	64	77,1
A client has bitten in my genitals, it was bleeding.	1	1,2
A client threatened to slash the window.	1	1,2
A client who could not achieve orgasm, became angry and grabbed me at the throat.	1	1,2
A head boxing on my nose, sometimes pushing and pulling because a client wants more, and threats and being followed by clients.	1	1,2
A SM-client who went to far, I was in the non-dominant position.	1	1,2
An older client hit my head after having had sex, headache. Did not involve doctor or police.	1	1,2
Client tried to make me unconscious on 'poppers'.	1	1,2

Client who wanted more started to beat me up.	1	1,2
Client with gun, policeman.	1	1,2
Client with hand very roughly penetrating vagina.	1	1,2
In the beginning some clients who could not ejaculate, and later one client with a knife.	1	1,2
In the window, a drunk who strangled my throat - and in the erotic center, where my boss attacked me, throwing knives.	1	1,2
Murder attempt by client who smashed me at a bed, I was an escort, I could run away.	1	1,2
Once because I intervened in a fight between a colleague and a client.	1	1,2
Rape by former boss.	1	1,2
I was forcefully kept at the bed and penetrated without a condom.	1	1,2
Strangled by client in the window.	1	1,2
Violent client pulling my hair - frustrated client blackmailing me psychologically.	1	1,2
When I was an escort, and asked the client for my money, he squeezed my throat.	1	1,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Table 18. Changes in prostitution since respondent started**

	<b>Frequency</b>
No changes	33
Not much	4
Just started	5
No opinion	1
Clients behaviour	15
Less clients and lower prices	11
Personal change	8
Competition of others	3
Other	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

More than half of the women did not see much change, often because they just recently entered the trade. Of the women who noticed changes, it is mostly expressed in a negative way, with more demanding clients, lower prices and more competition. A few women remark their personal development.

Some examples of answers under the topics of the table above:

#### **Clients behaviour**

- 'Clients ask again for oral sex without condom - it used to yield more earnings.'
- 'Clients do expect more for less money.'
- 'More clients ask to have sex without a condom.'
- 'More difficult, clients more demanding and pervert.'
- 'Clients are too well informed by the media, all fantasies are gone, clients become too demanding.'

#### **Personal change**

- 'I changed myself, became more assertive, have more respect for myself.'
- 'I have changed, I hate men more.'
- 'I have more control myself.'
- 'I have more respect for sex workers now.'
- 'It changed myself, and my sexual life.'
- 'One is doing it more easy than before, it is less shocking, but I do not see changes since last year.'

#### **Competition**

- 'More girls work below price, also more young naive girls.'
- 'More private addresses, more competition.'
- 'More jalousie now - more girls work below prices - girls stay not long anymore.'

#### **Other**

- 'Better for the women, since there is specific care for sex workers.'

‘More regular clients.’

**Table 19. Changes respondents would like to see.**

	Frequency
No answer or opinion	23
Hygiene and safe sex	11
Societal change	9
More respect	9
Relation with employer	8
More money	7
Wish to quit	5
Price setting	3
Miscellaneous	4
No changes	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

No answer gave 23 women, mostly because they just recently entered the trade.

Some examples of answers:

### **Hygiene and safe sex**

‘Change work place into more hygiene - standard prices.’

‘Clients should behave more hygienically towards sex workers and their own wife.’

‘More safe sex, no colleagues who do unsafe sex because clients ask it.’

‘More strict control for safety, health, illegality and pimping.’

‘That men would always use a condom for all sex without protest.’

### **Societal change**

‘That prejudices would disappear, so that I could tell my parents.’

‘Stop double life, stop pretending that we are just drinking with the client.’

‘Take away taboo, more respect from society.’

‘Legalization.’

### **Respect**

‘Clients should have more respect for sex workers.’

‘More respect, less hypocrisy.’

‘More respect for the work, legalization.’

‘Less jealousy, more respect from clients and society.’

### **Relation with the employer**

‘50/50 share of income should be 30/70 (30% to the owner).’

‘Better position in relation to employer.’

‘I would like all girls to work for themselves.’

‘More understanding from employers for sex workers.’

### **Other**

‘Only steady clients and champagne drinkers.’

‘Would like to have to drink less Champaign.’

‘Stop the media and sex work.’

**Table 20. Advice to sister or daughter if they would decide to start sex work.**

	Frequency
Negative	34
Not daughter	4
Negative, but with advice if she would	14
With advice	29
No recommendations	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

In total 52 women (62,7%) are negative about it, and would not recommend family to start working like them. Twenty-nine women (34,9%) on the contrary would give kind of advice, about safety, and taking decisions in own hand.

**Some examples of the advice women would give:**

- ‘Advice on the work place - better not start if it is not really necessary, it is difficult to leave the job circuit.’
- ‘Don't do this job too long. Use condoms, whatever the client says.’
- ‘I would not allow her, but if she would, I would take care she would have the right place, no pimp, no drugs.’
- ‘I would not recommend it - if you do it, be smart, and ask enough money.’
- Do not humiliate yourself, know your limits and own set of rules, do not let yourself be influenced.’
- ‘No problem, but I would check whether she knows what she is doing, such as safe sex and good organization to make enough money.’
- ‘Do not start a relation whilst in the job - do not go out to avoid dangerous contacts - safe your money.’
- ‘Take care, play it safe. Privately working is the best.’
- ‘Keep self respect and own value, don't work below prices, respect your own limits, don't sell your soul.’
- ‘Keep yourself to your own decisions, don't let you convince by others, take distance.’
- ‘Never kiss, never finger in, check the condom.’
- ‘She should decide for how long, and should not do it longer. She should always work safely.’
- ‘Think about yourself, respect yourself. Know well what you are doing.’
- ‘To make as much money as possible.’

**Table 21. Worst things about working.**

	Frequency
Diseases	7
Alcohol	4
Client behavior	26
Society and private life	17
Work conditions	16
Miscellaneous	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

Seven women have fear for diseases, and 4 women have problems with drinking. Most mentioned is client behaviour (26 women), society and private life (17 women) and work conditions (16 women).

**Some examples on client behavior:**

- ‘Bad smelling clients, no hygiene, rough behavior clients.’
- ‘Clients phone, but do not come. Profession is not recognized. A lot of social work.’
- ‘Clients who do not behave and show no respect.’
- ‘Drunken men.’
- ‘Clients demanding unsafe sex, anal sex, things I don't want to do.’

**Some examples on private and social life:**

- ‘Double life: family and friends don't know anything.’
- ‘Difficulty in private life. People who know what you are doing look differently at you. To have to deal with men you would never chose. Doing harm to your body in one way or another.’
- ‘People in society consider you abnormal.’
- ‘The degout you get for men, the mistrust you get towards your own partner regarding cheating, the clients without respect, the consequences in the family: conflicts and breaks.’
- You feel less pure, less proud. We have to play games. Sometimes we are paid to be misused. As a private worker you give more your body, and in a club your personality, your charm. Drinking is not pleasant.’



‘Psychological pressure: what am I doing, how long do I still have to do this, so many blokes on my body.’

‘My libido decreases, not good for relationship.’

‘To play comedy, to be somebody else. Difficult clients. Psychologically tiring.’

### Some examples on work conditions

‘Long days, many working hours, not enough leisure time.’

‘Long waiting times for clients.’

‘Irregular life style, night life, difficult for a relationship.’

‘You are not allowed to refuse anybody.’

‘Pressure to drink alcohol from the management.’

‘Jealousy between the girls.’

**Table 22. Best thing about working?**

	Frequency
Money	49
Colleagues	10
Social contacts	10
Sex	2
Miscellaneous	3
No opinion	4
Nothing	1
Missing value	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>

The vast majority is mentioning money at the first place as the best thing about working. Making good money is often linked to other advantages like flexibility, more leisure time, being independent. Contact with colleagues and good atmosphere (*10 women*) and social contacts (*10 women*) are mentioned as best things in the second.

### Some examples of answers mentioned under social contacts:

‘Getting to know people, conversations you have.’

‘I learned many languages and cultures and people.’

‘Lots of social contacts, and my role in society by providing psychological help for men.’

‘Meeting interesting people.’

‘To know all kind of people.’

‘Social contact with clients. Men have a lack of tenderness/attention. Well paid, but pleasant work, nice clients.’

The results of this first questionnaire will be compared with these of other European countries, and based on the overall results the agenda for future actions in the programme will be set.

## 3. Conclusions

Most interviewed sex workers were of Belgian nationality. More than 70% of the sample had left school before the age of 19. One quarter of the sample just recently entered prostitution. About a third had worked for four years or more.

The reasons or circumstances in which women indicated to start working in prostitution are varied. Two main elements emerge: financial and relational problems (*43=51,8%*), often in combination. In 27 cases (*32,5%*) another person was directly involved in introducing her in the job. A choice based on a positive factor is rather exceptional. Typical for the area is the absence of street work. However, the area covers two provinces, and the absence of street

work underlines the fact that sex work cannot be seen only as inner city street work with all its difficulties, as often evocated by the media. Most sex work is inside houses, and does not cause hinder. Condoms are always used for vaginal and anal sex. During oral sex condoms are not always used. As can be seen in table 8, condom failure is not exceptional, supporting the need for easy access to STI-screening services. Lubricants are widely used, and are all water-based. However, there is still a significant minority not using lubricants. Most women did have another job before, but have currently no other job than sex work. Slightly more than 80% said to have had 0 or 1 sexual partner in the year before the interview. A minority did have several partners, and has run a risk for sexually transmitted diseases, since most do not use condoms in private life, as can be seen in table 12. Of those with 5 partners, 4 said to use a condom sometimes, and one said never. More than half were living single, or are separated or divorced. Most women consider themselves in good health.

About 30% of the women reported ever having had a sexually transmitted infection. Chlamydia was mentioned most times, followed by genital warts and herpes. A majority had a cervical smear, but most of them had a smear in the health project of PASOP. In 12,8 % an abnormal smear was detected, according to the woman interviewed. A minority is only relying on the condom as a contraceptive, thus risking an unwanted pregnancy in case of condom failure. More than 82% of the women had ever been pregnant, and 70% of them has one or two children.

There were 14 women who had a miscarriage, and 24 women had an abortion. Seventy-one women visited the general practitioner in the past 12 months. In only 38% the woman will tell her doctor the kind of work she is doing. Fifty-four women visited a gynaecologist, and 30 (55,6%) of them did discuss their profession with the doctor. Smoking is done by 63 (76,8%) women, and drinking by 59 (72%). These figures are much higher than can be found in the average population.

One item on the CAGE questions (*problematic alcohol use*) was positive for 18 women, and 4 scored 2 or 3 positive questions. Around 15 women smoke marihuana. Five women say to use cocaine, 4 women mention current use of speed. In total 31 women (39,4%) said ever to have used drugs, of whom 4 used heroin. Nineteen women, or 22,9%, ever experienced (*sexual*) assault at work.

When asked about the change they have seen over the last years, more than half of the women did not see much change, often because they just recently entered the trade. Of the women who noticed changes, it is mostly expressed in a negative way, with more demanding clients, lower prices and more competition. A few women remark their personal development. The changes respondents would like to see are as follows: more respect (9 women), more money (8 women), societal change (9 women), hygiene and safe sex (11 women), the wish to quit (5 women), relation with employer (8 women) and price setting (3 women). No answer gave 23 women, mostly because they just recently entered the trade. Regarding the advice women would give to their daughter or sister, in total 52 (62,7%) women are negative about it, and would not recommend family to start working like them. Twenty-nine (34,9%) women on the contrary would give a kind of advice, about safety, and taking decisions in own hand. Worst things about the work: 7 women have fear for diseases, and 4 women have problems with drinking. Most mentioned is client behaviour (26 women), society and private life (17 women) and work conditions (16 women). The best thing about the work: the vast majority is mentioning money at the first place as the best thing about working. Colleagues (10 women) and social contacts (10 women) are mentioned as best things in the second place. Sex as best thing is mentioned at the first place by 2 women.

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