RED #25 a magazine from Resourcing Health & Education (RhED) in the Victorian Sex Industry.

RED #25 ฉบับสารจาก แหล่งข้อมูลสุขภาพและการศึกษา (RhED) ในอุตสาหกรรม mạiซื้อผิด
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Immigrant and migrant sex workers talking about Competition & Cooperation in the Sex Industry

By: Julie Ham, Monash University

In 2013 and early 2014, I spoke to 85 immigrant, migrant and CALD sex workers in Melbourne, Australia and Vancouver, Canada about their experiences in the industry. Unfortunately, in Australia, a lot of the research and policy literature still fixates only on how CALD workers’ differences from ‘Australian culture’ make them more ‘vulnerable’.

In my research, I wanted to focus instead on the expertise, strength, and strategies of immigrant, migrant and CALD workers in the Australian sex work sector.

One of the areas I’m interested in is how women balance the need for cooperation but the realities of competition in sex work. The workers I interviewed had different opinions. Some felt that it was important for workers to support each other because the stigma against sex work often makes it hard to get support from people outside the industry. Others felt that it was more important that workers protect themselves, even against other sex workers. And some felt it varied from workplace to workplace and depended on how the other workers felt in any given brothel.

Workers talking about cooperation

[If we same country, same language, yeah can be friends, yeah, yeah, can be friend. I maked some good friends from this business as well. It’s depend on everyone I think. Most girls are nice, talk to each other, we share food, taking and we go out sometimes as well. And some girls are really, really jealous if you get more job than, yeah. But most girls are good, even work this job, I think most girls they got a good heart... I think some [work] friends I see them every week, it’s more than my normal friends outside, from outside of the work.... We can complain to each other about this work cause no busy, no money, things like that, all about bad girls (laughs) or bad customers.

We’re just like family... That’s why girl like come here, because this shop very protect the girls, yeah.

Thai, Korean, Chinese here. We get on, no fighting, just work, then go. Depend on where you go, if you go work in mixed shop, too many nationalities, can be problem. Here, no problem, it’s good.

Workers talking about competition

No, I don’t trust anyone. I don’t trust anyone because I don’t believe what no one say... Only because you don’t know much anyone who working here.

But I saw too many times happen, girl by girl they’re fighting, yeah, everywhere happen. Some people mental. Some people not want everyone go ahead more than them. Hard to say.

Unless, like, we know each other from outside and then we came together, we work here – then we can be real friends. But if we know each other from this kind of circumstance, it’s very hard. Because it’s always competition. And but, but, like the girls do quite, do talk quite a lot... So they do try and exchange quite a lot, lots of information... like that shop is very busy, boss is nice, the customer is nice, always generous customer, like this thing, yeah. But we never say what I do in the room with customers, it’s quite private. And they don’t want know – because some girls are quite popular, always wondering ‘why is she so popular, always customer wants her’. Like of course, girl will never, ever tell you (laughs). That’s her way to make living, that’s her secret to make money, so of course, she never tell you.

What’s next?

This is just a small part of my broader PhD research. I’ll be submitting my PhD thesis in early 2015 and plan on publishing a book from this research in 2015. If you’d like more info, you can reach me at julie.ham@monash.edu and/or 0406 864 695. For more info about this project, you can visit http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/thebordercrossingobservatory/research-agenda/internal-border-control/sex-work-migration-and-agency/. If you’d like to see other research I’ve done, you can visit http://monini.academia.edu/JulieHam

I’d like to give my deepest thanks to everyone who spoke to me for sharing their insights and knowledge so generously!