



ON THE MOVE

A Needs Assessment of Guys in the Sex Industry

Working in Québec-Montréal-Ottawa-Toronto

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Context:

Men who engage in commercial sex in Canada are a heterogeneous group of people with a diverse range of reasons for getting involved in the industry (Dorais 2005; Logan 2017). Some men work for organized commercial establishments like escort agencies, massage parlours, porn studios, and strip clubs, while others work independently doing massage, escorting, street hustling, and webcams amongst other activities. It's estimated that men make up nearly a quarter of people working in the industry, but solid numbers are difficult to ascertain nationally and inevitably vary by region (Allman 1999; Hanger and Maloney 2006). Men who do sex work (MSW) are primarily seeing male clients, although not all men who work in the industry identify as gay or bisexual and a few studies have reported that some workers see female clients (Chabot 2012). Gendered assumptions about who performs commercial sexual labour as well as the conflation between sex trafficking and consensual commercial sex codified in the Federal Government's 2014 *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* renders most men, transmen, and gender non-binary people non-existent or unseeable within the industry (Chabot 2012). Where representations of male sex workers do exist, they most often rely on stereotypes that depict these men as either hypersexual libidinal machines to fetishize or tragic drug-addicted street hustlers to pity (Lay 2008). The reality of male sex workers' lives are varied and often not significantly different than those of workers in any other type of service industry save the social stigma, illegalization, and medical pathologizing sex workers face.

Anecdotally, we know the public health framework of disease containment has further contributed to the stigmatization and overall negative health outcomes of men in commercial sex industries. Where past interventions targeting sex workers of all genders as a "priority population" have focused solely on sexual health—and HIV in particular—the mental, physical, social, and spiritual health of these men is largely ignored or of tertiary concern (Bimbi 2007). Furthermore, the development of the few outreach programs in Canada for men working in the commercial sex industry have focused almost exclusively on men involved in the street-based sex trade, a population that is estimated to make up less than 20% of all sex workers (Allman 1999; Weitzer 2007). While it is important to keep these most marginal of sex workers at the centre of our work, the sole focus on this subset of male sex workers further obfuscates the reality that most men working in the industry do not and would not access the outreach services that have been developed in their name. The overemphasis on street-based sex workers also

reinforces misconceptions about the industry and the lives of the men involved in it. The connection between HIV incidence and sex workers of all genders in Canada remains tenuous at best (Cohen et al 1988; Allman 1999; Dorais 2005; Sorfleet 2018) and ignores decades of evidence indicating that sex workers have been and continue to be at the forefront of safer sex activism within their own communities, largely without the help of formal health institutions or government funding (Scott 1984; Cockerline 1990; Stamos 2016; Sorfleet 2018).

It is in this context that MAX Ottawa hired a peer outreach worker, developed a workplan in collaboration with male sex workers, and partnered with MIELS (Quebec City), REZO (Montreal), and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT). Through these partnerships MAX has conducted a needs assessment to better understand the experiences and working conditions of guys in various commercial sex industries in Canada's busiest corridor. Key findings and data from this survey must inform programs developed in partnership with guys in the industry.

Survey Objective:

We were interested in surveying guys (cisgender, transgender, and gender non-conforming) who do sex work in one or more cities in the Québec City-Montréal-Ottawa-Toronto corridor in order to identify the needs and concerns of male sex workers. This survey data will be used by sex worker-supporting organizations to properly inform the development of programs with/by/for guys who do sex work.

Study Design & Limitations:

In this survey we define sex workers as those who engage in, but not limited to, modelling, stripping, dancing, adult-entertainment performers, escorting, erotic massagers, and "sugar babies".

The survey consisted of 89 questions that pertain to the needs, safety, and concerns of guys who do sex work through the lens of physical, mental, and financial wellbeing of these workers. The results of the survey were collected from sex workers through online dissemination and in-person questionnaires in Québec City, Montréal, Ottawa and Toronto. A total sample of 50 respondents are represented in the data we've collected, so what we can extrapolate is limited, but not insignificant. The full survey and data can be accessed in full after the summary of key findings.

Furthermore, the response was collected throughout the late 2019 and early 2020 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this data and report will not reflect the shifting priorities that pertain to sex workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Findings:

1. **Most male sex workers start in the industry in their early twenties with a majority reporting it as their main source of income.** 48% of respondents indicated that they started working as a sex worker between the ages of 18-25 with 43% reporting starting sex work as their main

source of income while 10% started sex work to finance their post-secondary education.

2. **Male sex workers feel like they face bias and judgement with traditional healthcare providers** with 48% of respondents said they rely on walk-in clinics as their primary health service provider as it gives them peace of mind in a non-biased and non-judgmental space.
3. **Male sex workers reported challenges with stigma and their ability to live a “normal life,”** highlighting trouble dating as well as making and maintaining friends. Half of the respondents face challenges with mental health, including depression, anxiety, body image, and relationship problems as a result of their work. With 31% of respondents indicating that they sought support from friends, only 8.6% reached out to outreach workers and 3.4% reached out to a therapist. A majority of respondents expressed interest in having group discussions or meetings on Facebook, e-mail, or in-person to connect with other sex workers in the city.
4. **Sexual health is top-of-mind for male sex workers.** While 65% of respondents aware of their HIV status and over 50% reported getting tested for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) at least once every three months, some respondents reported hearing generalizations from others that male sex workers carry Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and STBBIs.
This finding demonstrates that most male sex workers are on top of their sexual health much like activists have argued for decades.
5. **Male sex workers think that the criminalization of sex work puts the community’s safety at risk.** 38% of respondents said that Canada’s current legislation on sex work infringes on individual freedoms and puts those involved in the industry at risk with 20% of respondents indicating that decriminalization would make sex work safer. Many stressed that “sex work is real work” and expressed that the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* encourages the social stigma that male sex workers are lesser than equal to workers in other industries and are not entitled to the same protections or safety. Two in three male sex workers depended on their income from sex work to pay for their rent, mortgage, utilities, and/or living expenses.

Male sex work is real work and all Canadians deserve the equal rights and freedoms and safety. Further steps are required for the advancement of health and safety programs and services as well as an informed evidence-based approach in the development of intervention programs for this underrepresented group.

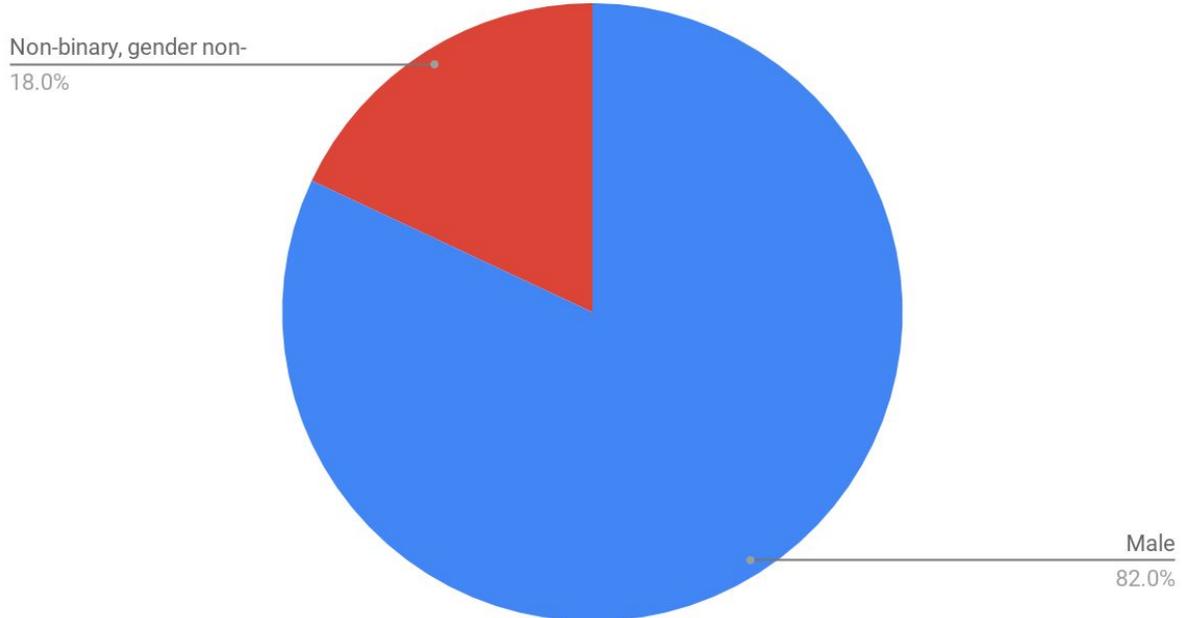
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*Cover image from *Hustler White* (1996). Courtesy of Toronto's own Bruce LaBruce.

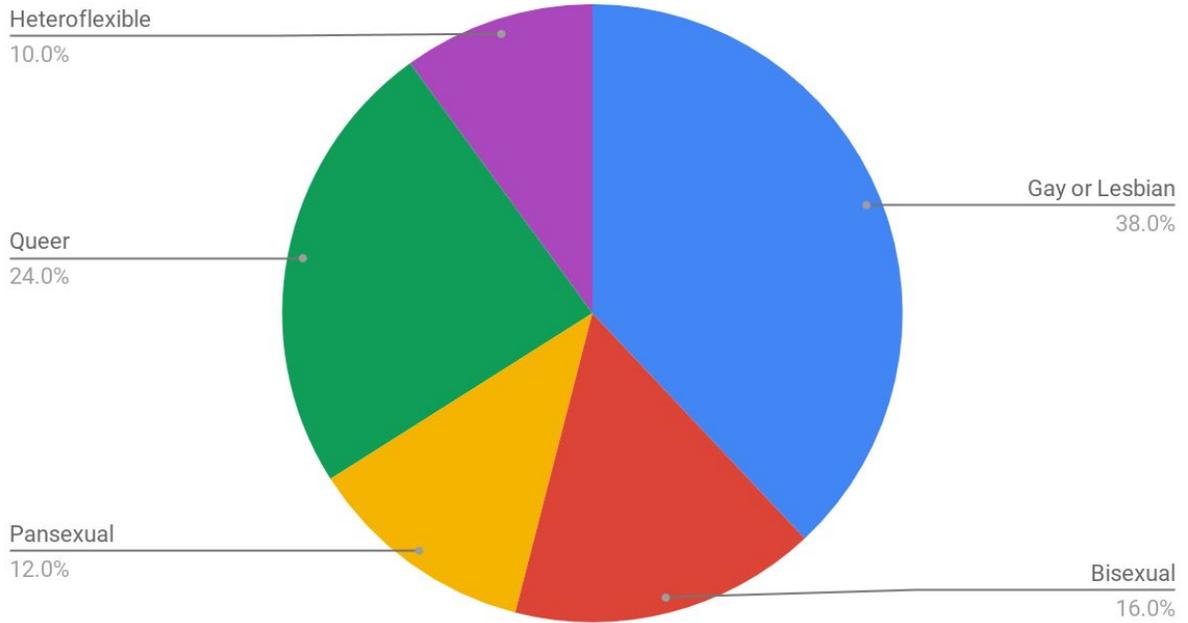
Survey Data:

DEMOGRAPHICS

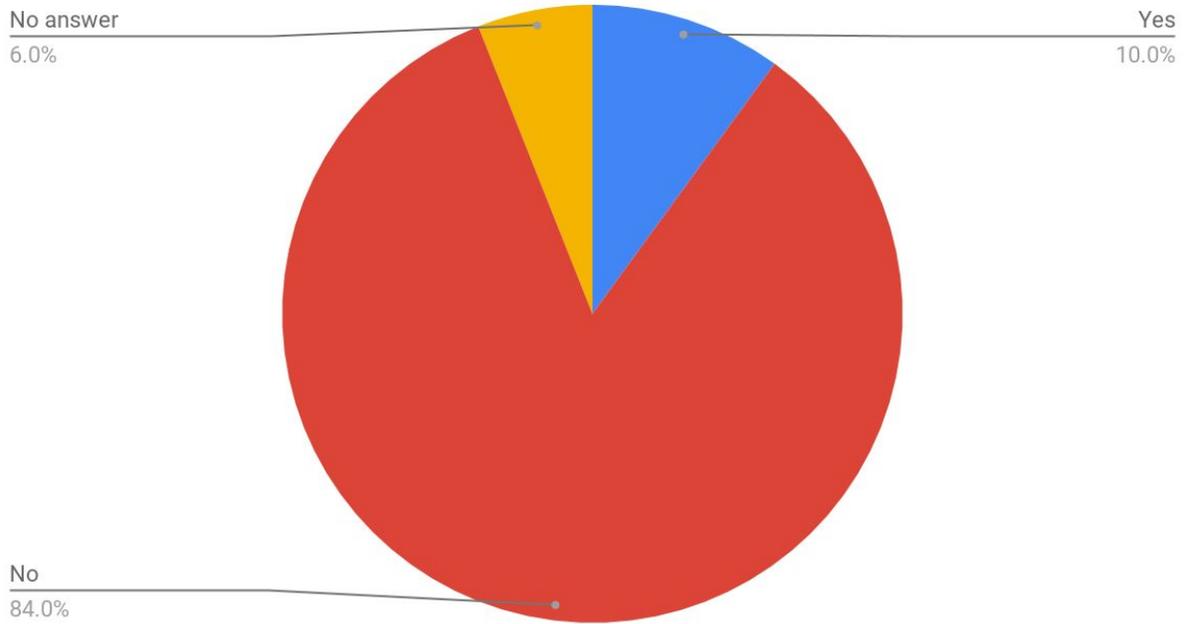
Q1: Gender



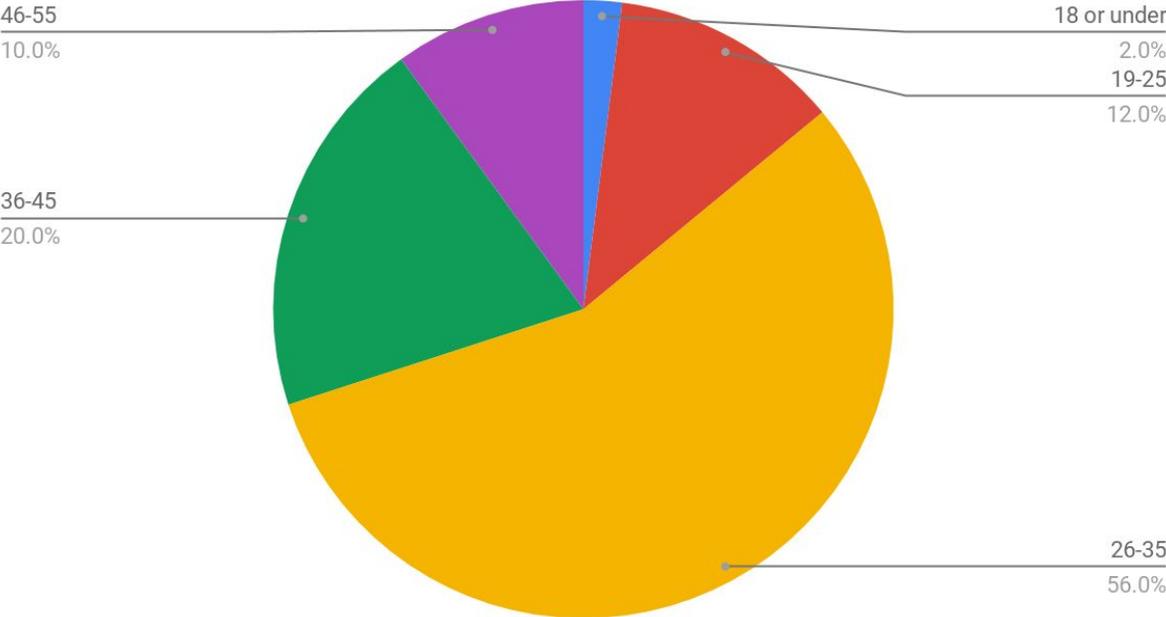
Q2: Sexual orientation



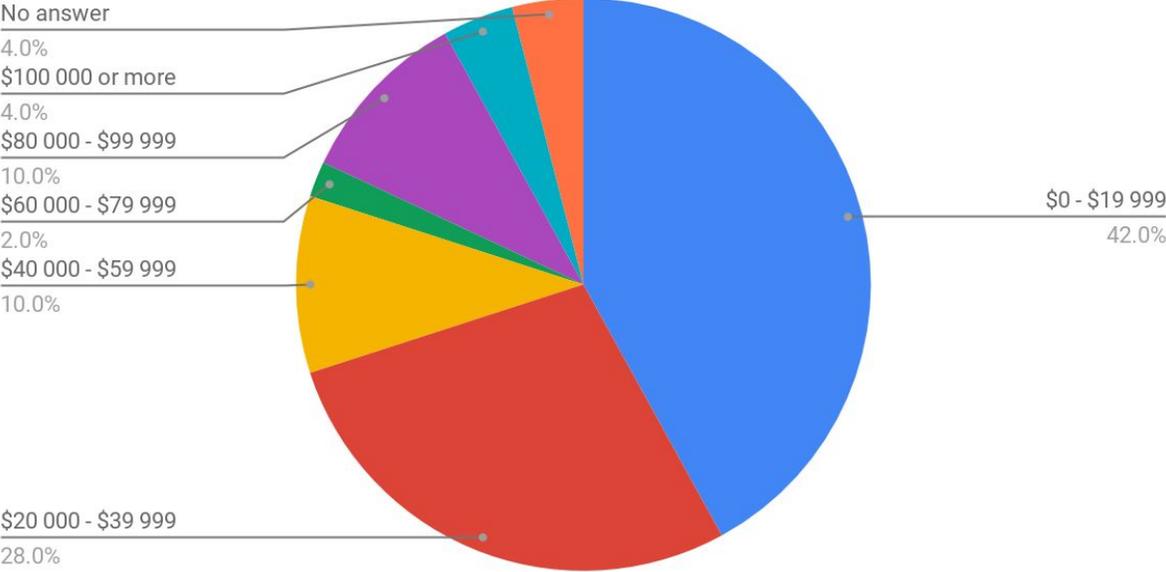
Q3: Do you identify as trans?



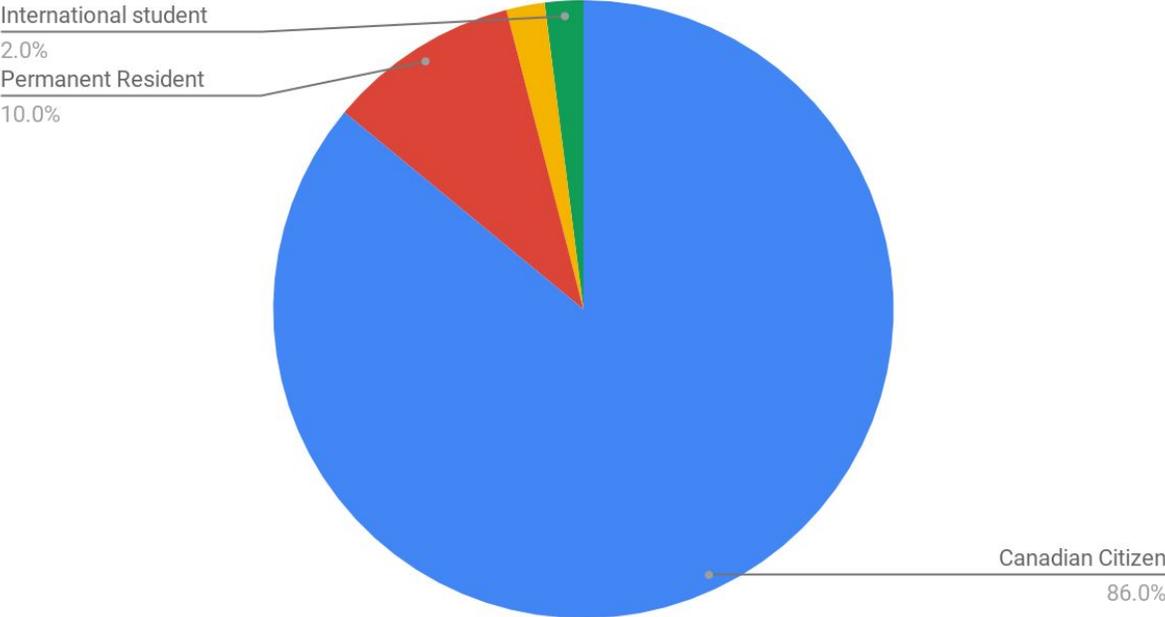
Q4: Age category



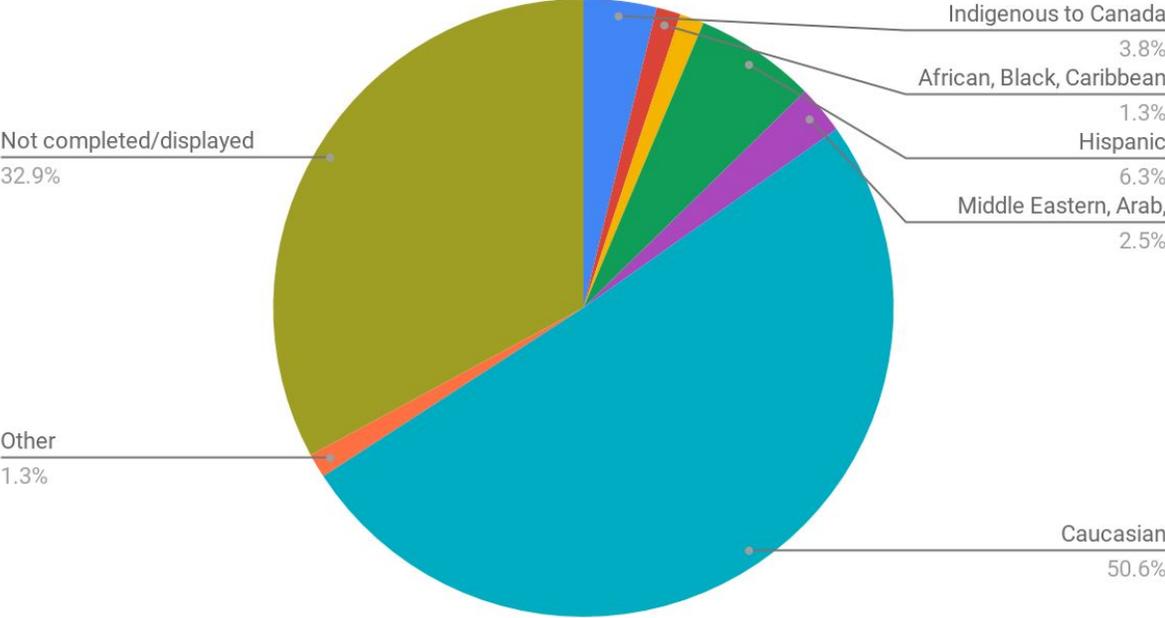
Q5: My yearly income is (Include all forms of income including salary, pay, student loans, other form of payments)



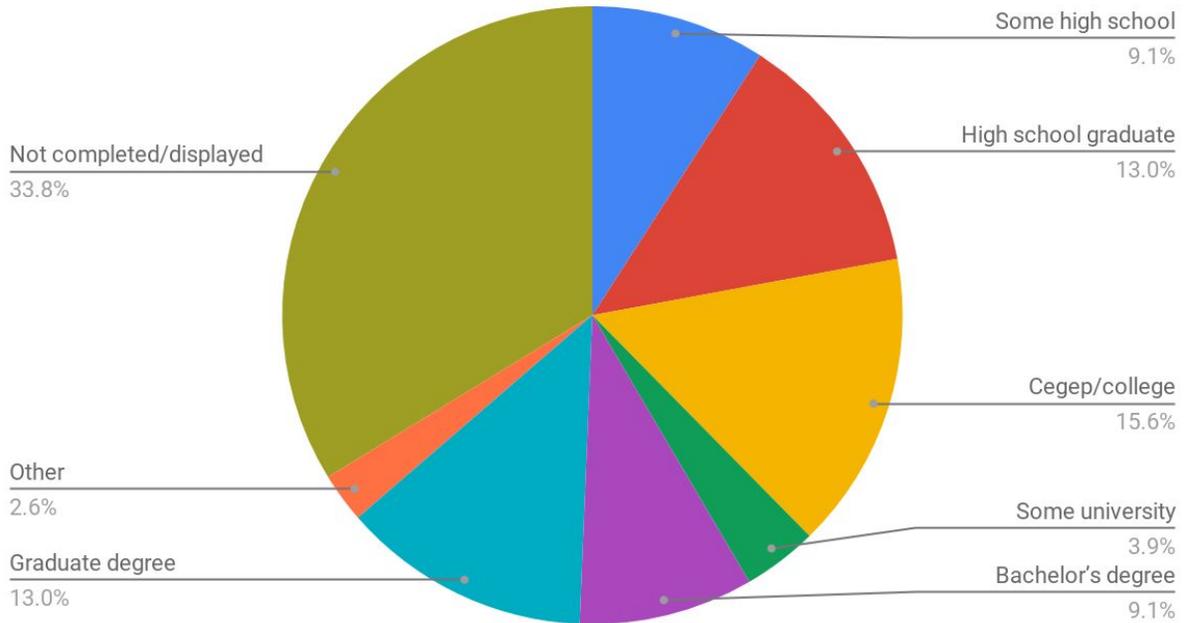
Q7: Residency status



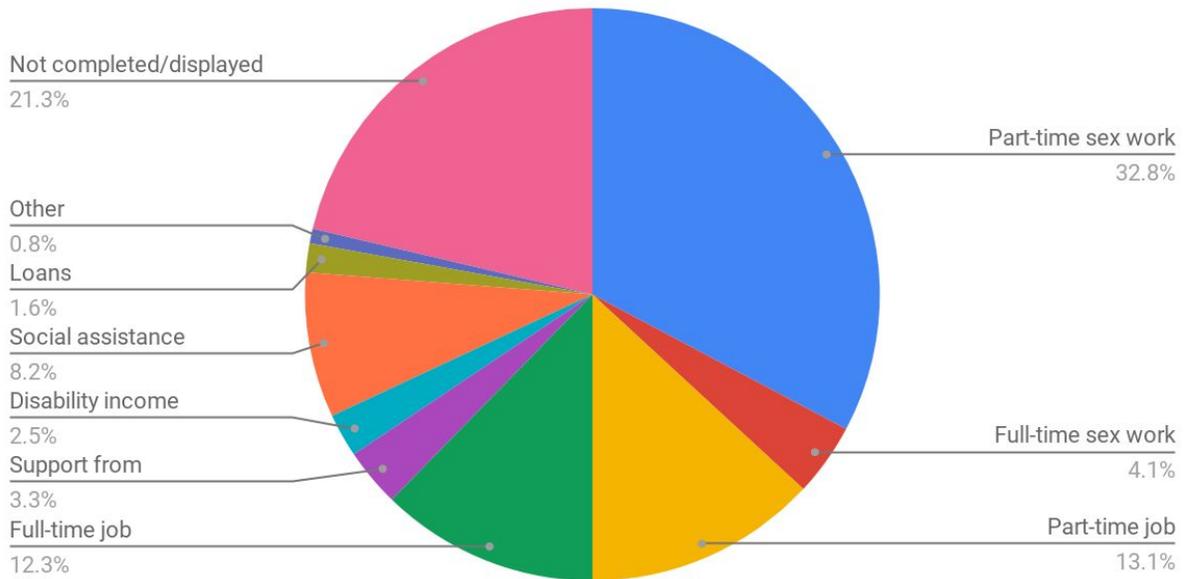
Q6: Ethnicity



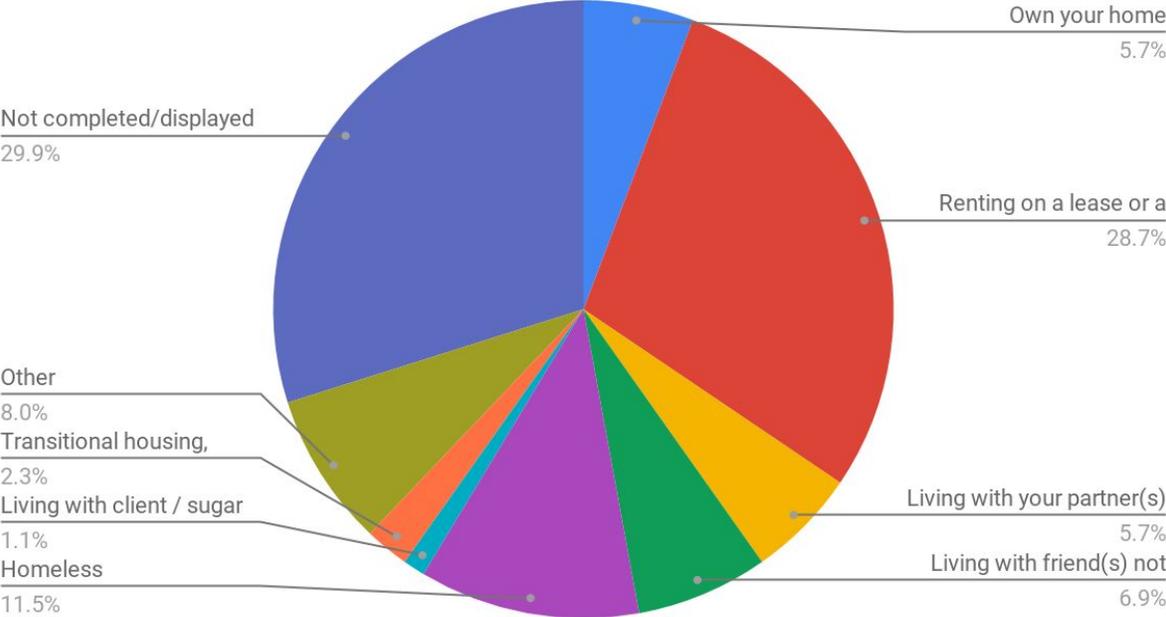
Q8 What is your highest level of education?



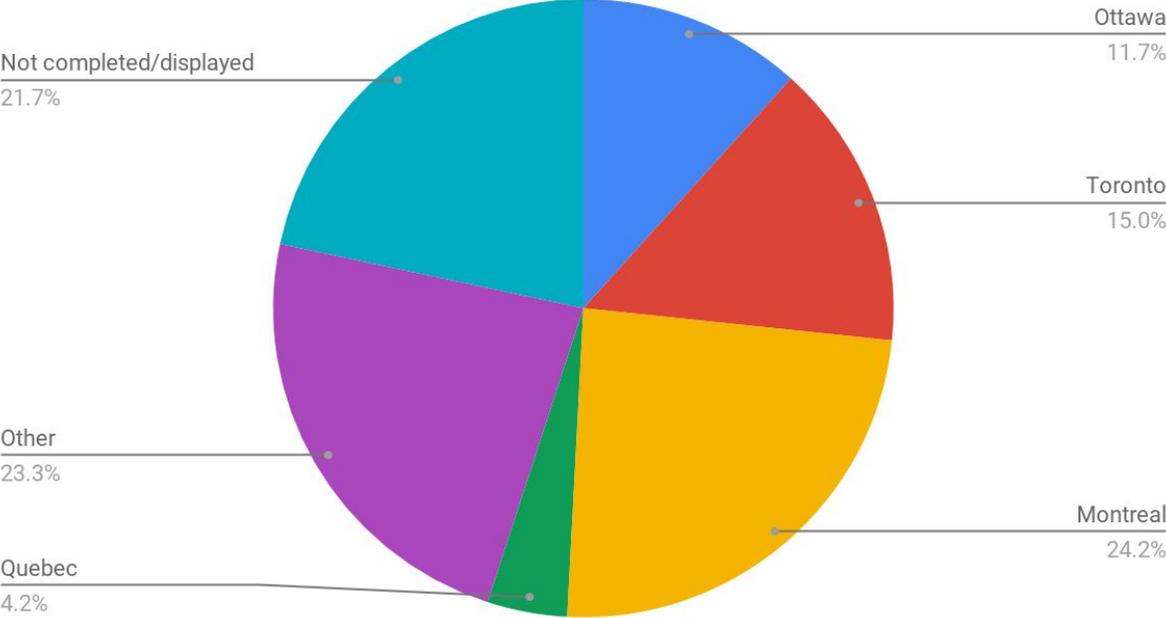
Q9: What are your sources of income?



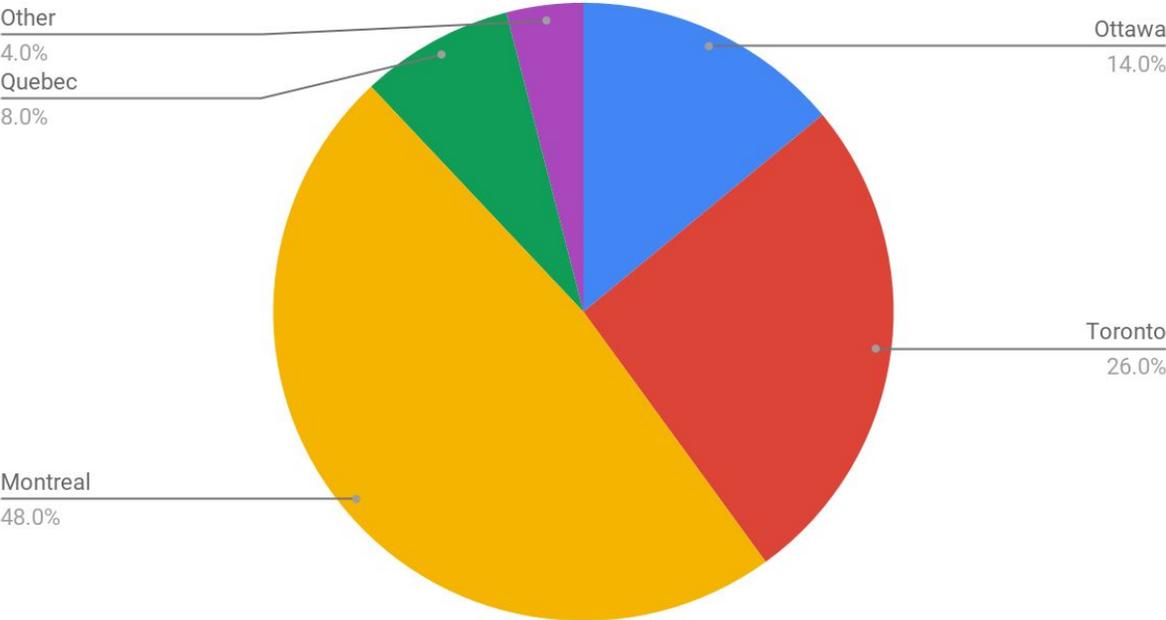
Q10: What is your current housing situation?



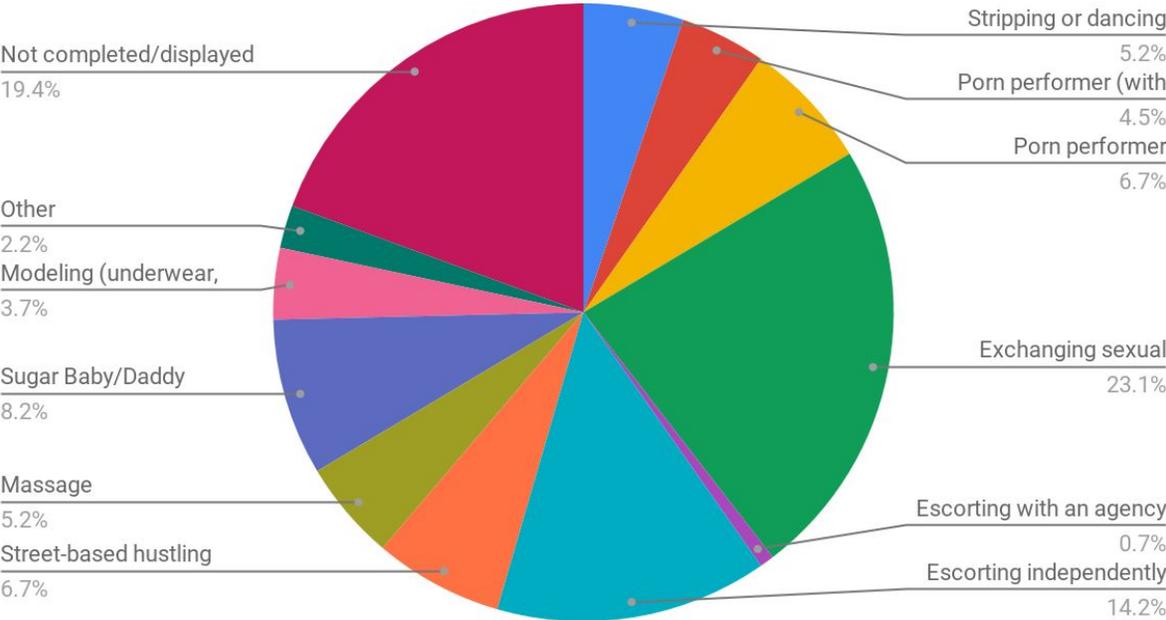
Q11: Which cities do you work in?



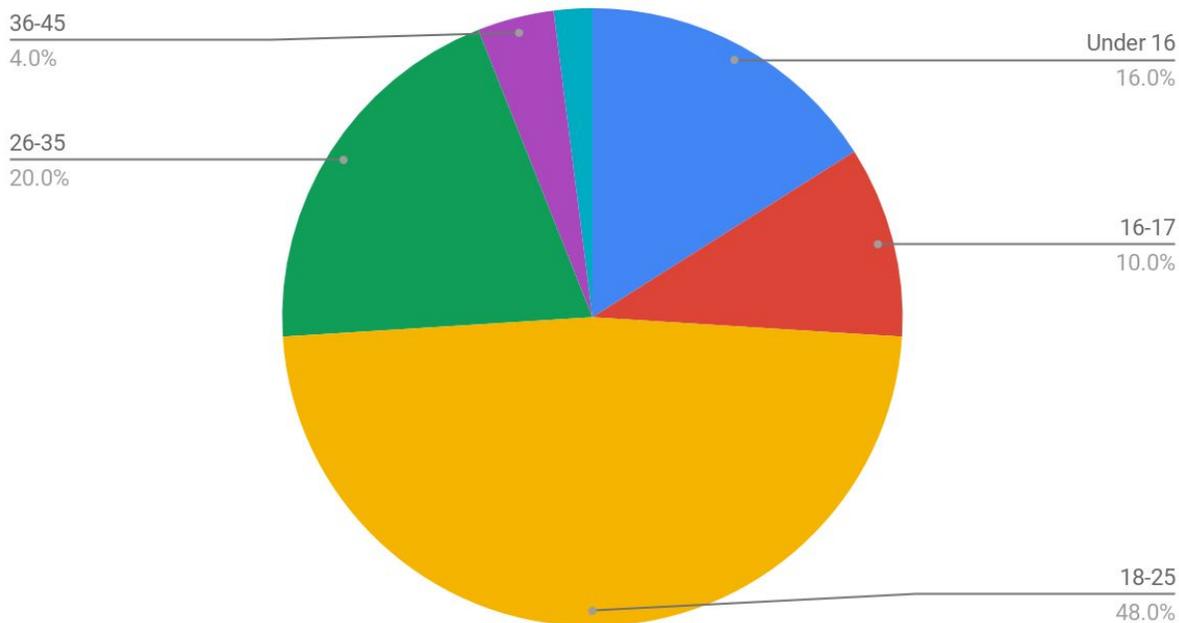
Q12: Which city do you primarily reside in?



Q13: Which of the following describes your engagement in sex work?



Q14: At what age did you start working as a sex worker?

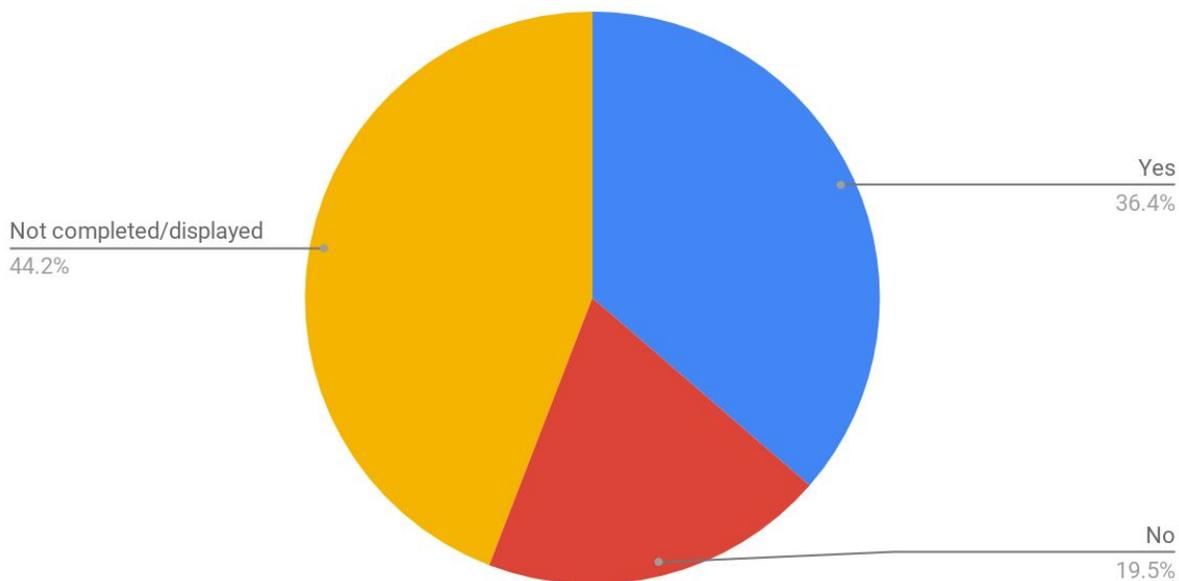


Q15:

What was your reason(s) to start sex work?

- 43% of respondents said the reason they started sex work was to make money (main income).
- 10% of respondents said the reason they started sex work was to make money to pay for school.
- 10% of respondents said the reason they started sex work was to make extra money (secondary income).
- No other significant responses to report.

Q16: Have you ever been stigmatized or shamed for being a sex worker?

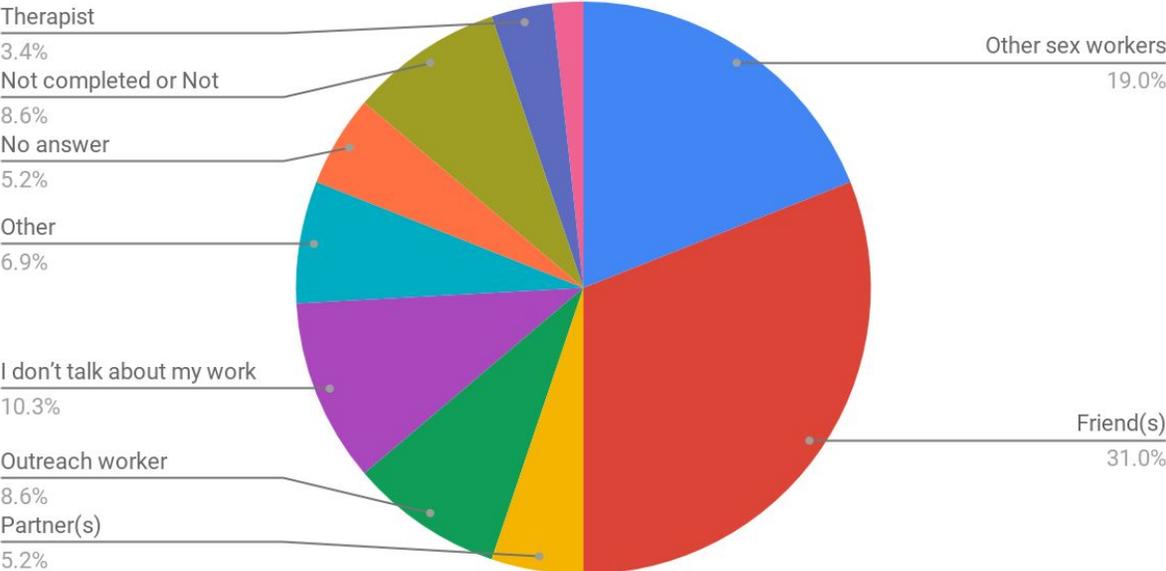


Q17:

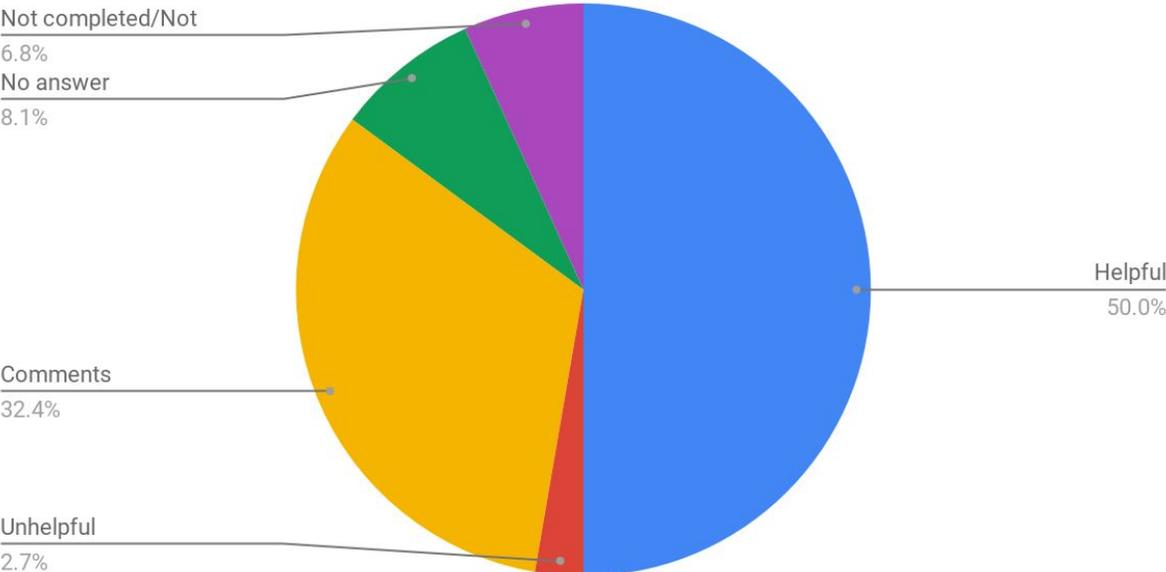
If you wish, please share an example of stigma that you have faced or currently experienced?

- No significant responses to report.
- All respondents however talked about the impacts of stigma on their ability to live a normal life. Some respondents discussed that they have trouble dating and keeping or making friends. One respondent expressed that people think they have AIDs and STBBI's.
- Many respondents expressed different stigma-related incidents like getting turned down from a job, being labeled as a drug addict, getting attacked on the street, having clients refuse to pay, being called gross or slut shamed, and not being taken seriously.

Q18: When you're having a hard time with work and want to talk about it, who are you most comfortable



Q19: When having a hard time, would talking to other people in the industry be helpful or unhelpful to you? How so?



- Additional responses listed reasons why sex workers found it helpful to talk to other sex workers: defence and protection, mutual exchange of knowledge, peer support and peer understanding (being able to talk to each other and understand what they are going through), and making friends.

Q20

How would you like to connect with other sex workers in your city?

- 39% of respondents said that having group discussion/meetings would be a good way to connect with other sex workers.
- 37% of respondents said that having online groups (via Facebook, email, none digital) would be a good way to connect with other sex workers so they can keep who they are anonymous.
- No other significant responses to report

Q21

What are you most concerned about when it comes to your safety?

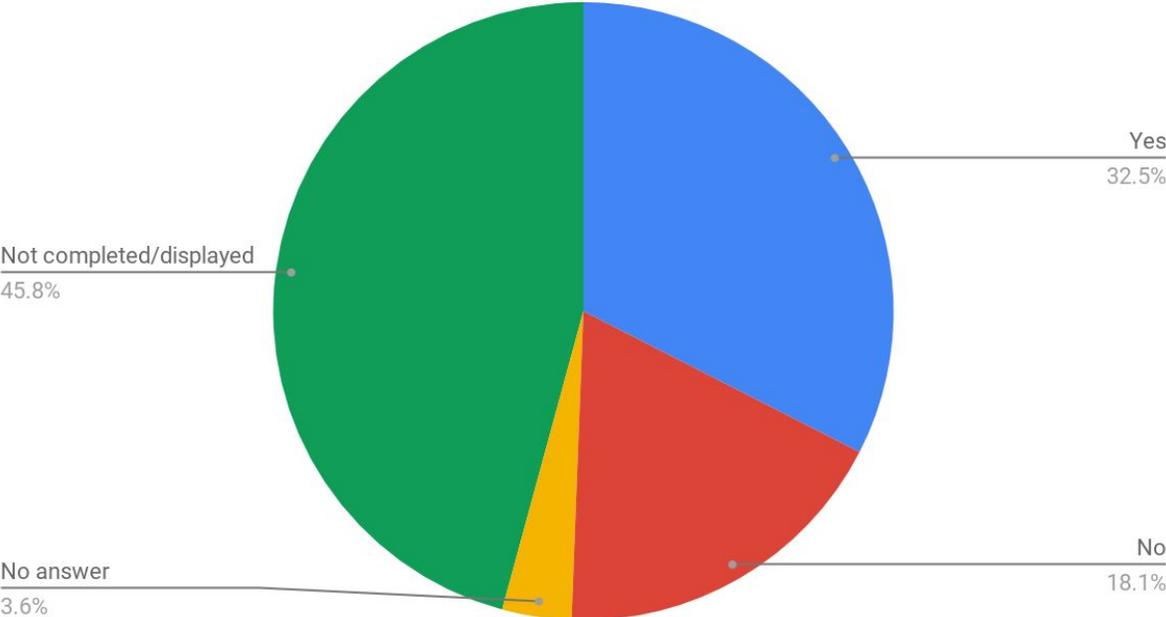
- 26% of respondents said that physical assault is what most concerns them when it comes to their safety.
- 18% of respondents said that their sexual health is what most concerns them when it comes to their safety.
- 13% of respondents said that being drugged (date raped) is what most concerns them when it comes to their safety.
- 8% of respondents said that legality (getting arrested) is what most concerns them when it comes to their safety.
- 8% of respondents said the intoxicated (aggressive) client is what most concerns them when it comes to their safety.
- No other significant responses to report

Q22

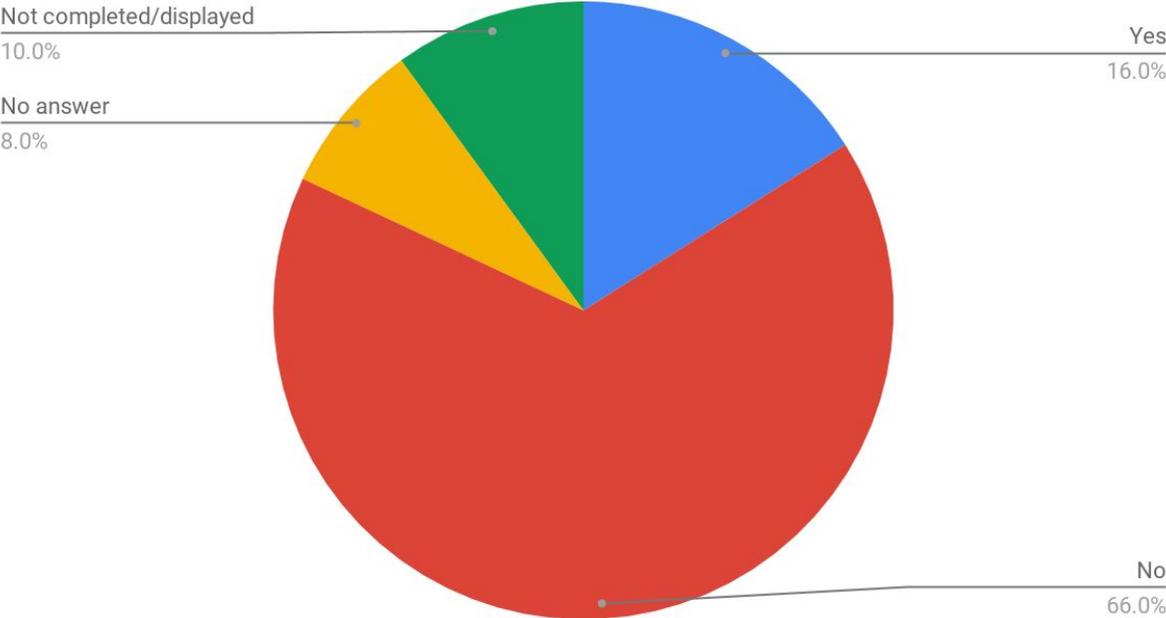
What steps do you take to ensure you're working safely?

- 30% of respondents said that notifying a friend, partner, or roommate of their whereabouts and phone numbers ensures they're working safely.
- 30% of respondents said that screening clients before meeting them can ensure they're working safely.
- 13% of respondents said that they carry a weapon to ensure they're working safely.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q23: Have you ever heard of a bad date list?



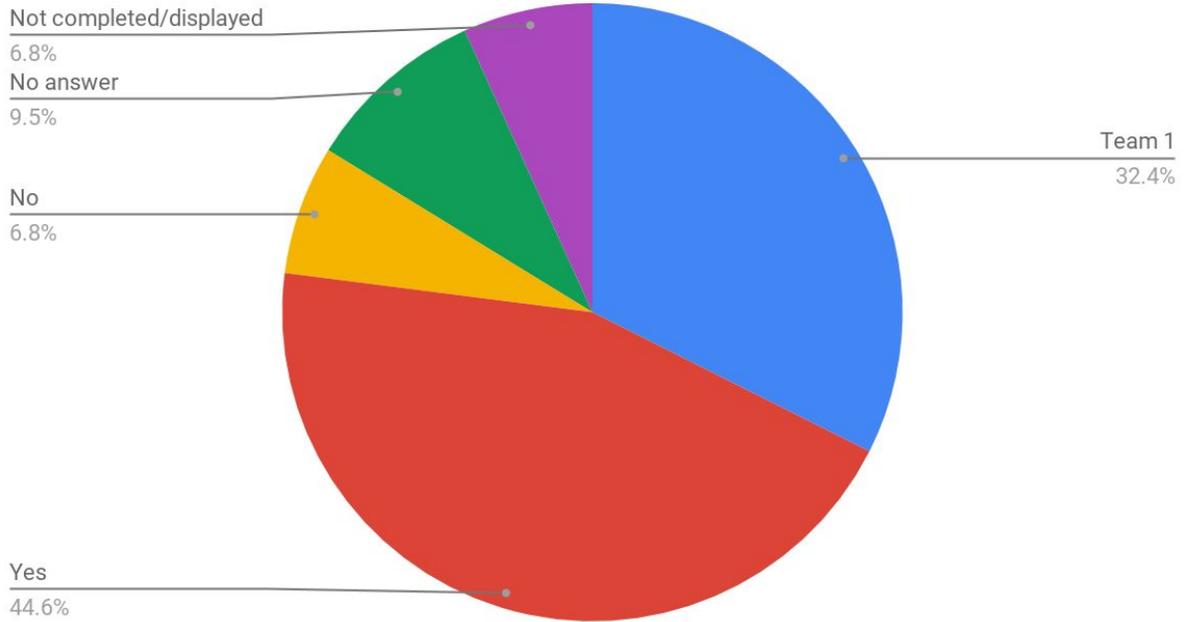
Q24: Do you know of any bad date lists in the area(s) you work?



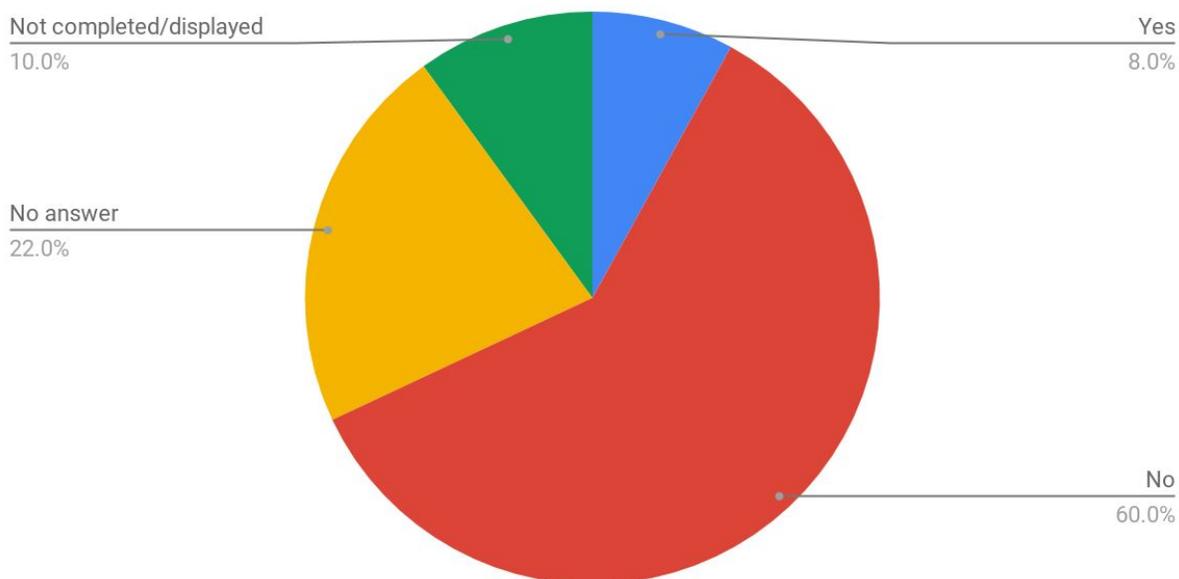
Q25
If yes, where have you obtained your bad date list from?

- No significant responses to report but the few that answered said the Ottawa Independent Companions, Maggies, Rezo, Stella and baddatecoalition.ca has one for the public.

Q26: If no, would you like to have one?



Q271: Have you referred others to a bad dates list when booking clients?



Q27

Does the criminalization of the commercial sex industry worry you or impact how you do your job? Why/why not? And if yes, how?

Yes's

- 29% of respondents said that criminalization of commercial sex fuels stigma.
- 13% of respondents said that criminalization of commercial sex increases their chances of getting a criminal record.
- 13% of respondents said that criminalization of commercial sex worries them of their safety
- No other significant responses to report.

No's

- 24% of respondents said that criminalization of commercial sex dose not worry them.
- No other significant responses to report.

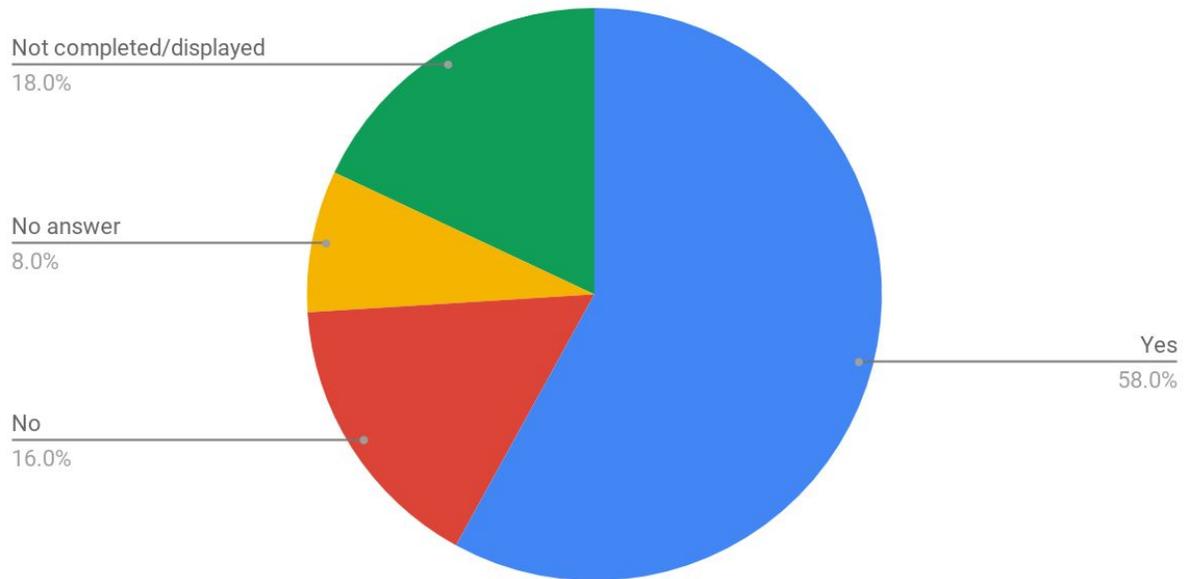
Q28

Are there changes you'd like to see regarding the legal status of sex work in Canada?

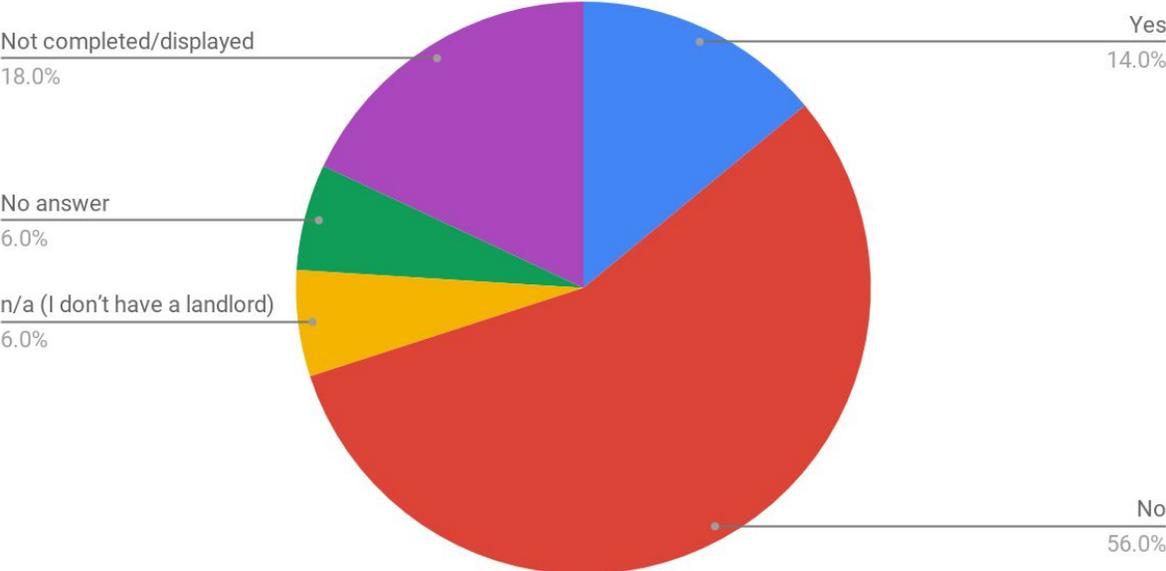
- 57% of respondents said that the change they'd like to see regarding the legal status of sex work in Canada is to decriminalize sex work.
- 14% of respondents said that the change they'd like to see regarding the legal status of sex work in Canada is to legalize sex work.
- 8% of respondents said that the changes they'd like to see regarding the legal status of sex work in Canada is to have equality for the sex worker and the client from a legal perspective.

- No other significant responses to report.

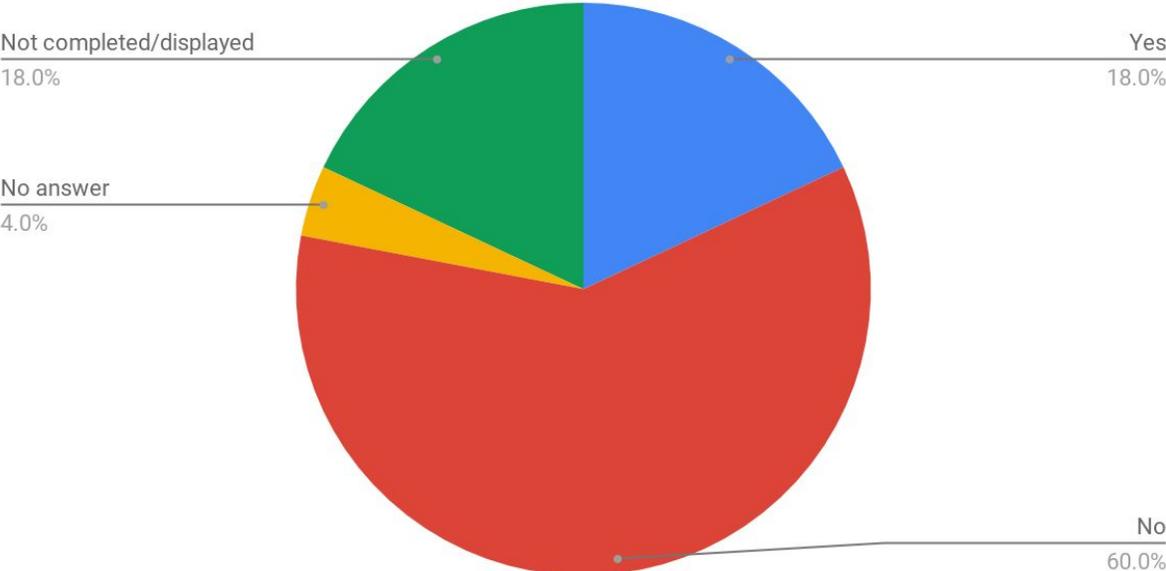
Q29: Do you use your income you make from sex work to pay for your rent-mortgage, utilities, and/or living expenses?



Q30: Have you ever been worried about being evicted by your landlord for seeing clients at your rented home/apartment?



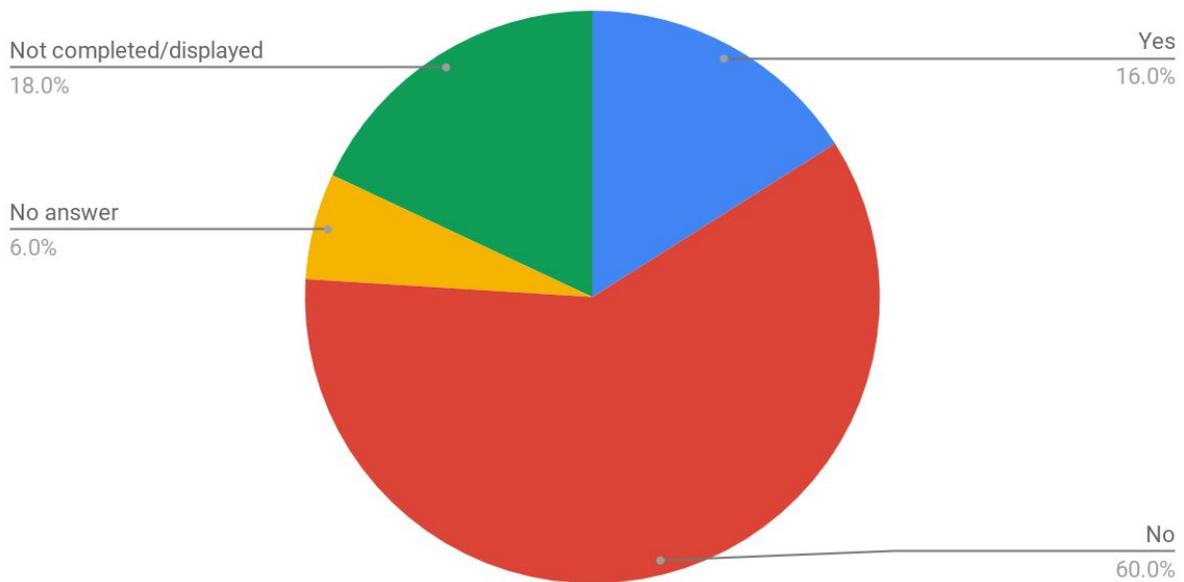
Q31: Have you ever been arrested, threatened with arrest, or convicted for a crime because of sex work?



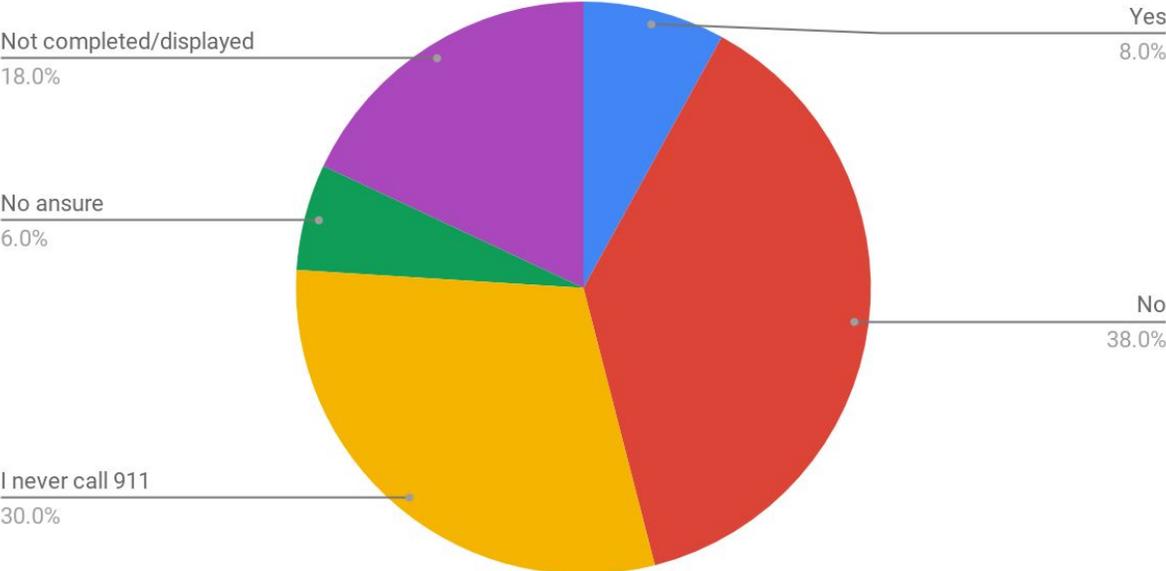
Q32
Can you describe what happened?

- 30% of respondents said that they have been told by police to get off the streets for solicitation.
- No significant data to report, however respondents highlighted that they were reported by their client because the sex worker didn't want to participate with what the client wanted. Some respondents said they were charged with possession of drugs instead of charges related to the sex work, that got them stopped by police. Some respondents said that they have been threatened and intimidated by police.

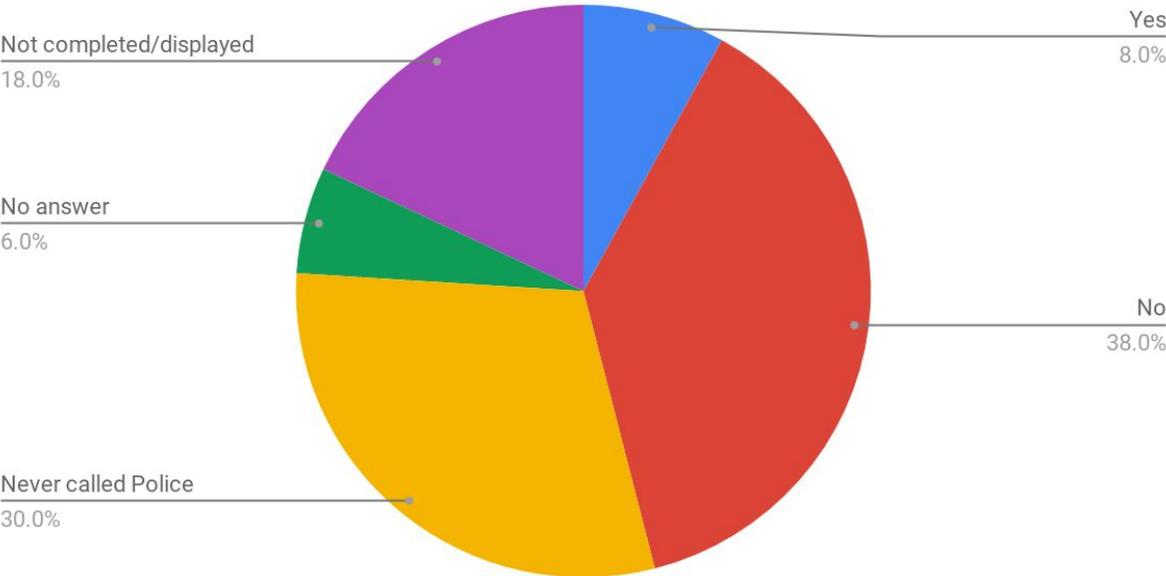
Q33: Have you ever been stigmatized or harassed by law enforcement because of past interactions for sex working?



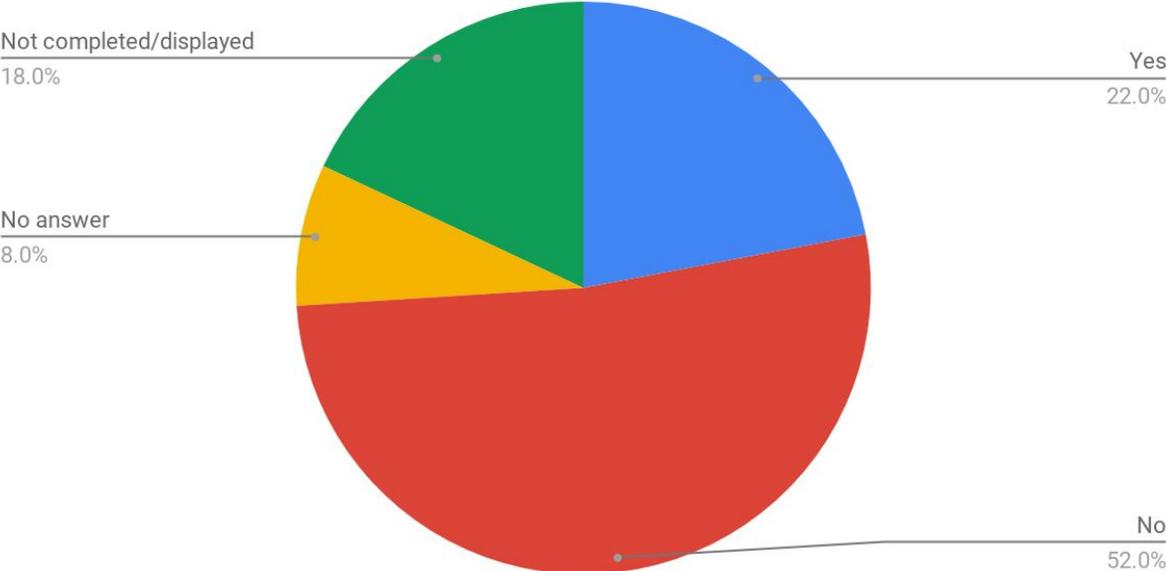
Q34: Have you ever had to call law enforcement and because of the situation with a client and then had a bad experience with the police?



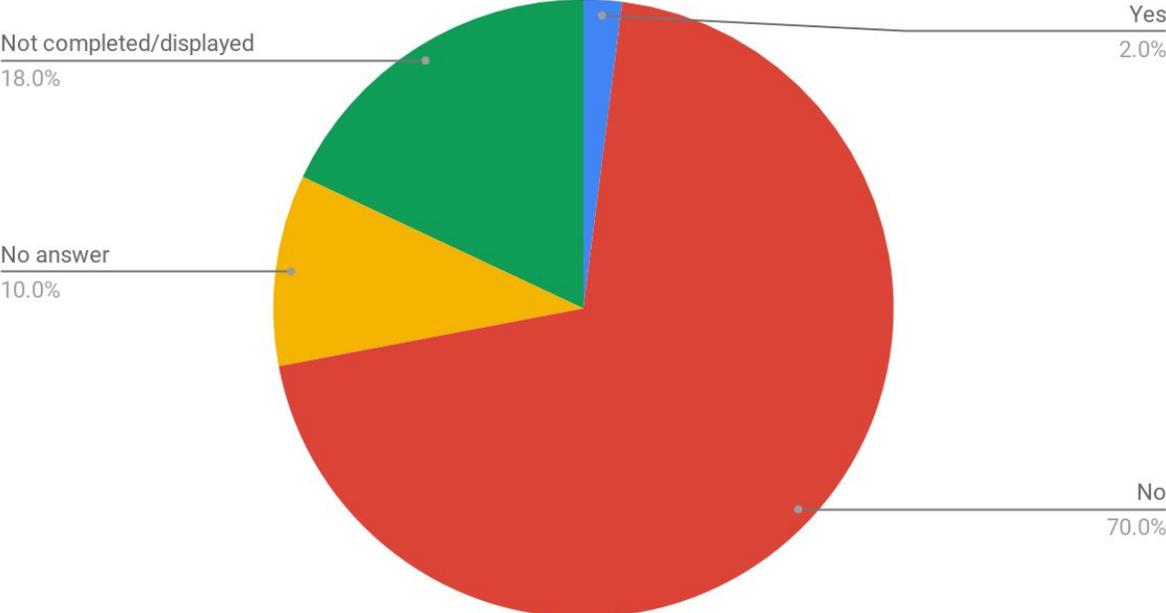
Q34: Have you ever had to call law enforcement and because of the situation with a client and then had a



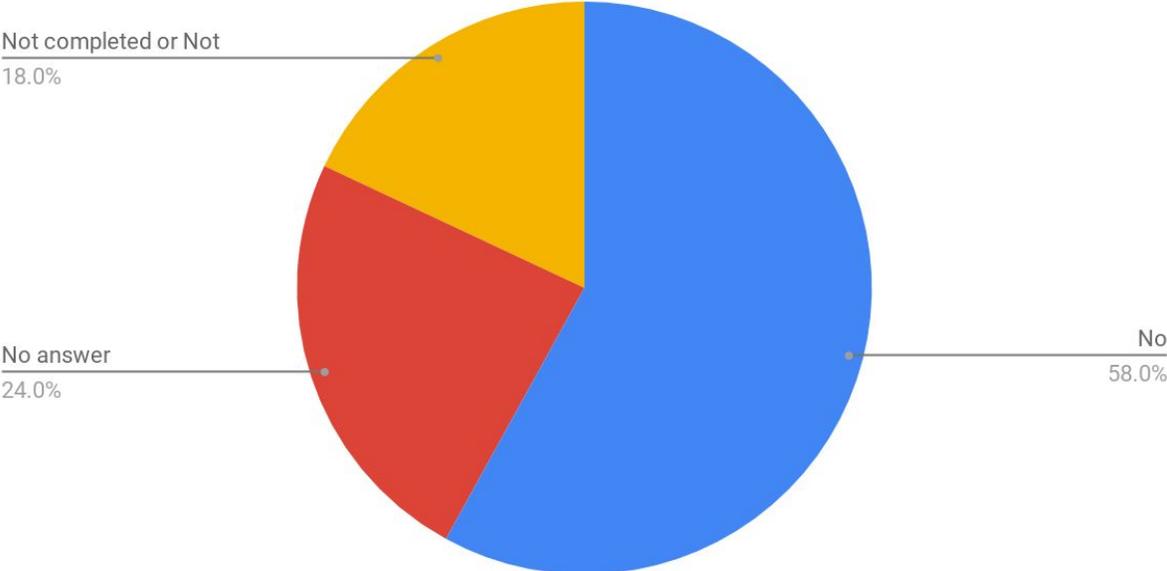
Q35: Do you know what a red zone is?



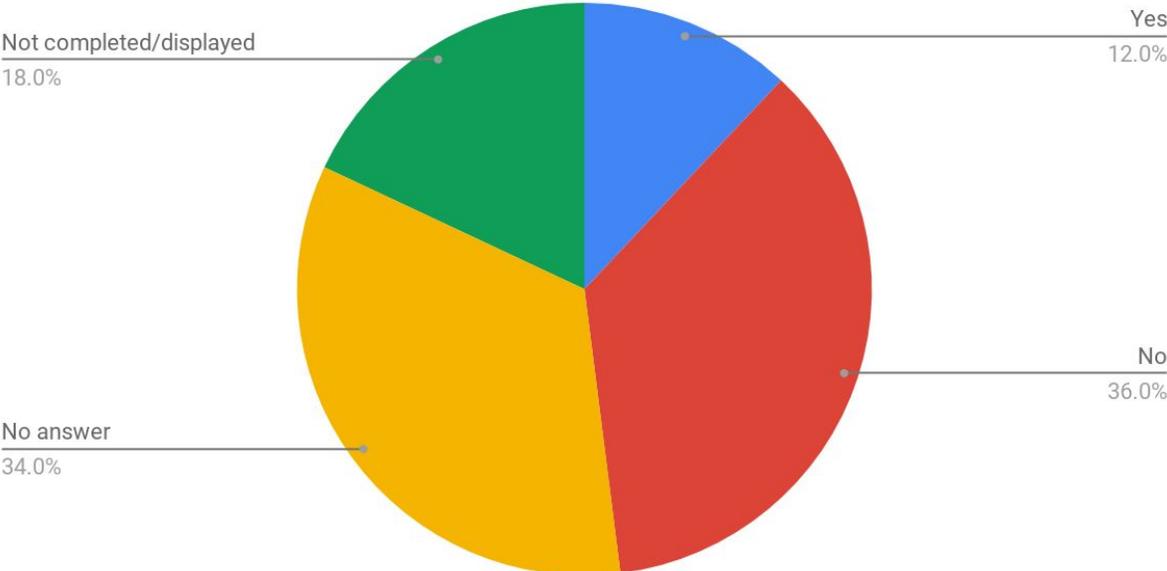
Q36: Do you know where the red zone(s) are in your city?



Q37: Have you ever been removed from a red zoned area while trying to seek aid for your health and wellness?



Q38: Are any health and wellness organizations that you utilize in a red zone area?



Q39
Which ones?

- 33% of respondents said REZO in Montreal.
- 33% of respondents said that there isn't a red zone in Montreal.
- 17% of respondents said that they go to the sexual health clinic.
- 17% of respondents said that street spectres is their aid for health and wellness.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q40

The current laws in Canada criminalize the purchase of sexual services. Do you feel this respects your rights to freedom and safety as defined by our constitutional charter of rights? Explain.

- 38% of respondents said that they feel this doesn't respect their rights to freedom and safety as defined by our constitutional charter of rights because it is an infringement on individual freedoms and puts those involved in the industry at risk.
- 14% of respondents said that they feel this doesn't respect their rights to freedom and safety as defined by our constitutional charter of rights because it creates stigma that they are lesser than equal.
- 14% of respondents said that they feel this doesn't respect their rights to freedom and safety as defined by our constitutional charter of rights because they don't have protection or safety.
- No other significant responses to report, however some respondents said that they feel this doesn't respect their rights to freedom and safety as defined by our constitutional charter of rights because sex work is a personal decision and not political. Respondents also said that it ultimately makes sex workers as guilty as the solicitors and forces the industry underground.

Q41

Can you picture a future where sex work is completely decriminalized and you can freely start a business, hire security, unionize, work with other sex workers, and be able to pay your taxes? What would you do, or what would sex work look like to you if it was completely decriminalized?

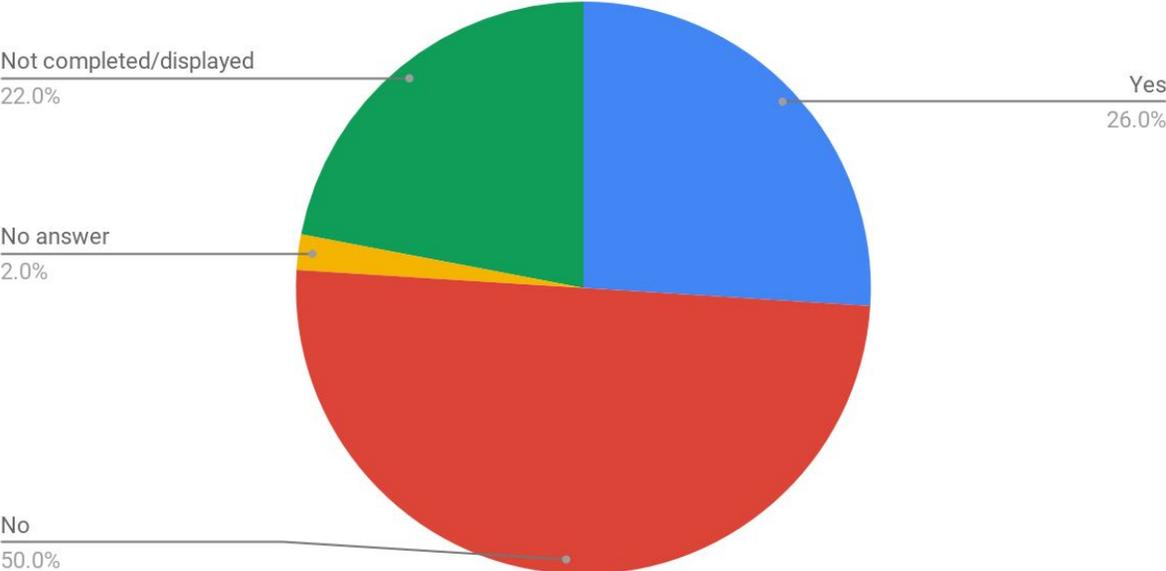
- 31% of respondents said yes.
- 20% of respondents said no.
- 23% of respondents said that if it was completely decriminalized they would open a safe space business.
- 17% of respondents said that if it was completely decriminalized, stigma would decrease
- No other significant responses to report.

Q42

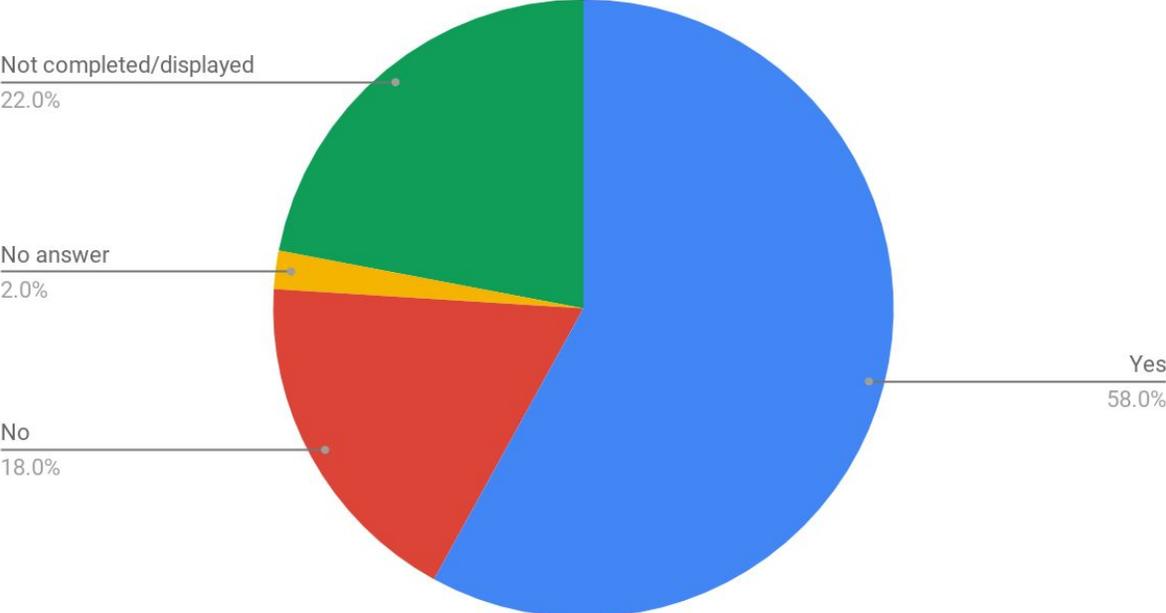
What would you like the municipal, provincial, and /or federal government to know about the work you do that they may not know?

- 20% of respondents said that they would like the government to know that decriminalization would make sex work safer.
- 14% of respondents said that they deserve respect like every other worker because sex work is real work.
- No other significant responses to report.

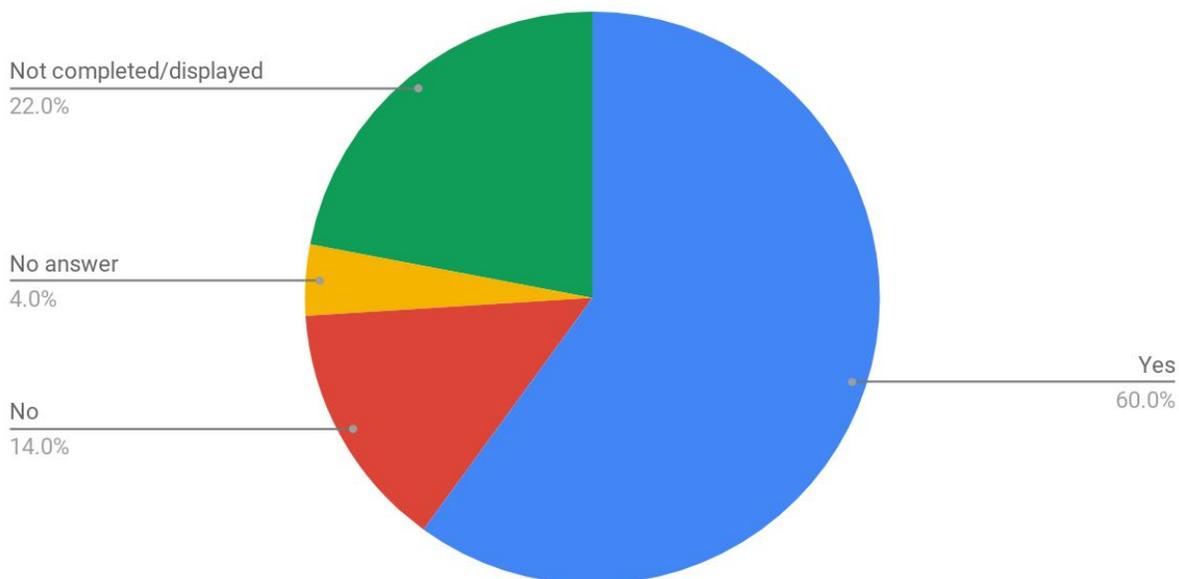
Q43: Do you use your credit card/identification to create advertisement for promoting your work?



Q44: Is data privacy something you worry about?



Q45: Do you use an alias when advertising for your work?

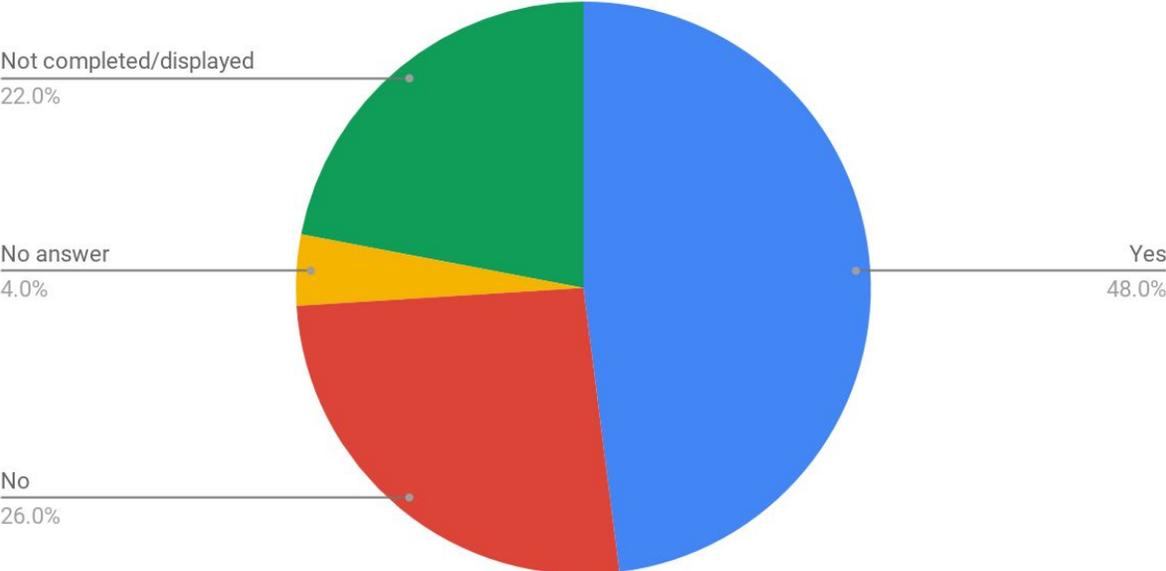


Q46

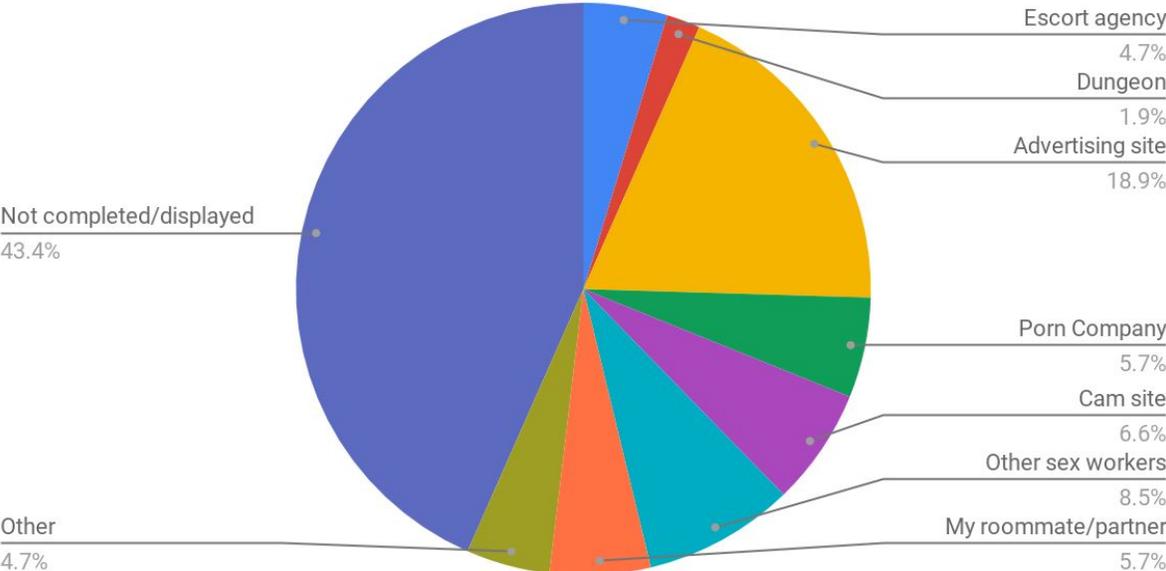
Why?

- 45% of respondents said that the reasons why they use an alias is for confidentiality, and data analysis.
- 21% of respondents said that the reason for using an alias is to keep clients from stalking their personal life.
- 15% of respondents said that the reason they use an alias is because they like to differentiate between their recognized profession and their sex work.
- No other significant responses to report.

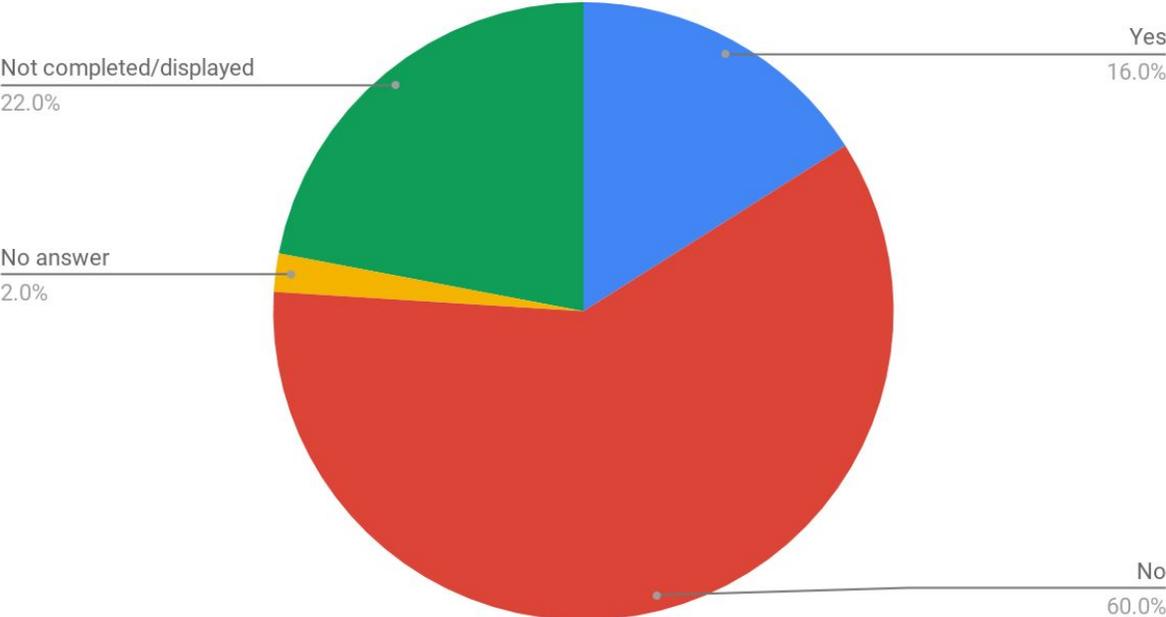
Q47: Do you work with 3rd parties (ie. an agency, pimp, dungeon, an advertising website, porn company, security, etc.)?



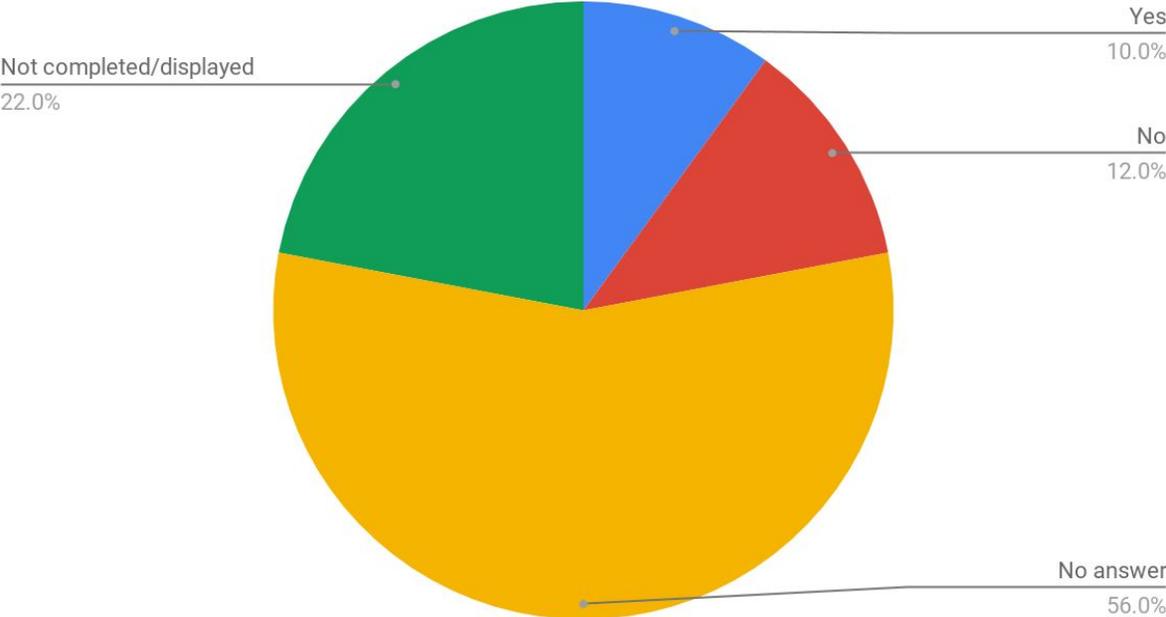
Q48: If yes, which kind?



Q49: Do you have a shared workspace with other sex workers?



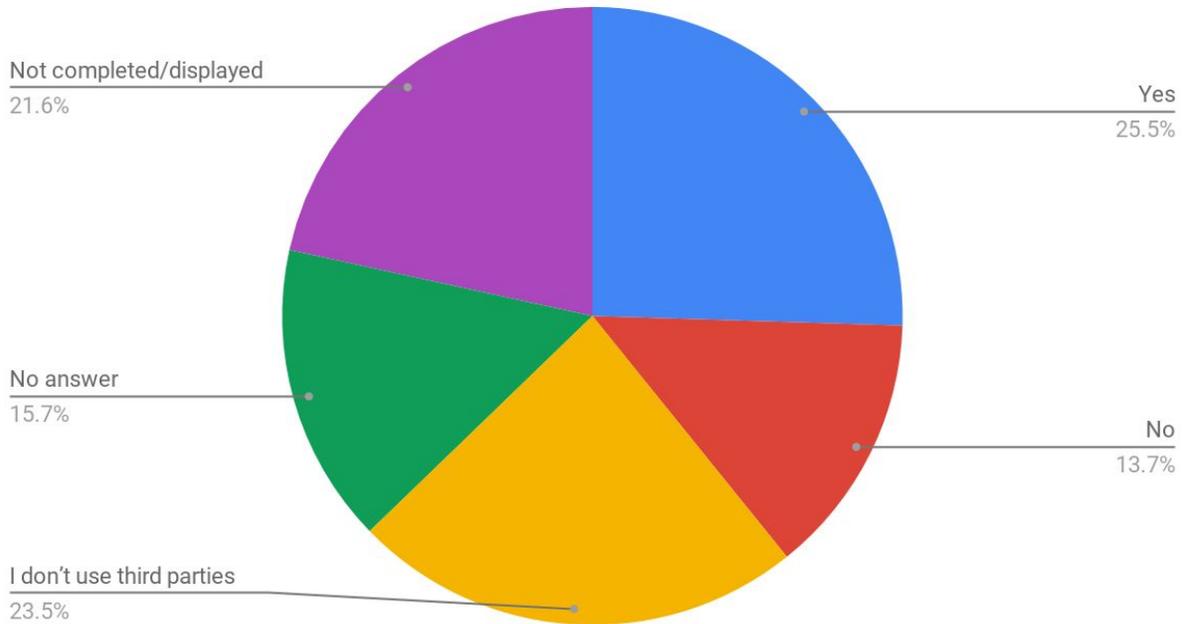
Q50: Do you find the shared workspace a safe place to work?



Q51
Can you describe your shared workspace and why you find it safe or unsafe?

- 57% of respondents said that they work in commercial shared spaces (strip club, bar, hotel) because they have security/bouncers or staff on site.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q52: Are you satisfied with the people you work with?

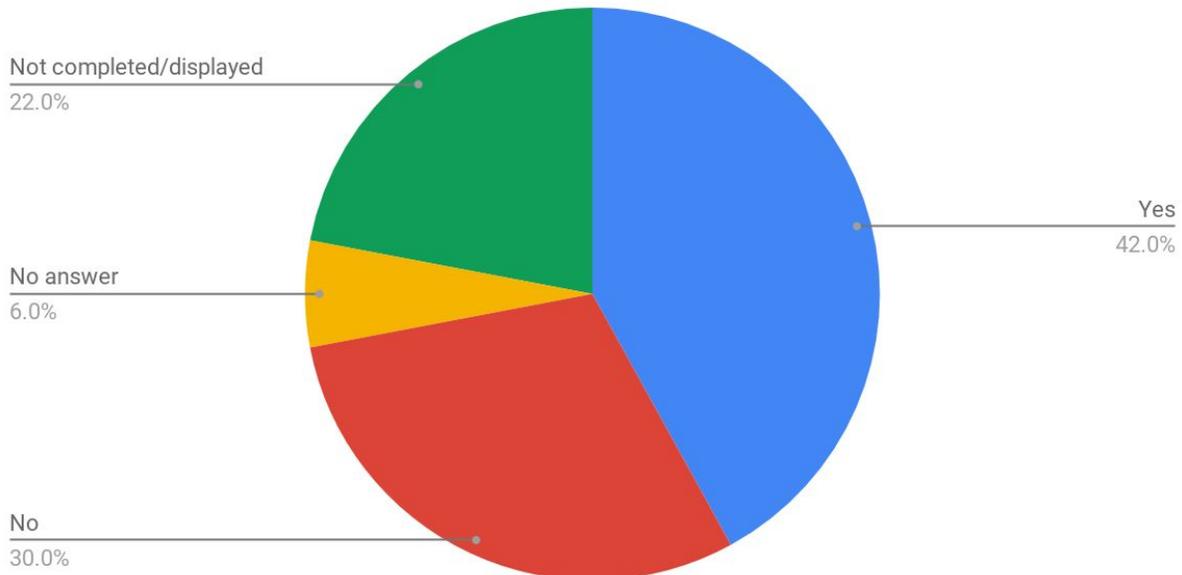


Q53

Why / Why not?

- 23% of respondents said that they are satisfied with the people they work with because it makes it straightforward and simplified.
- 23% of respondents said that they are not satisfied with the people they work with because it makes for more competition and can be unsafe.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q54: Do you discuss your rates with other workers or compare your rates to others online to ensure you're getting a fair wage for your



Q55

If your client(s) don't pay you the full rate you set, or refuse to pay at all, what do you do?

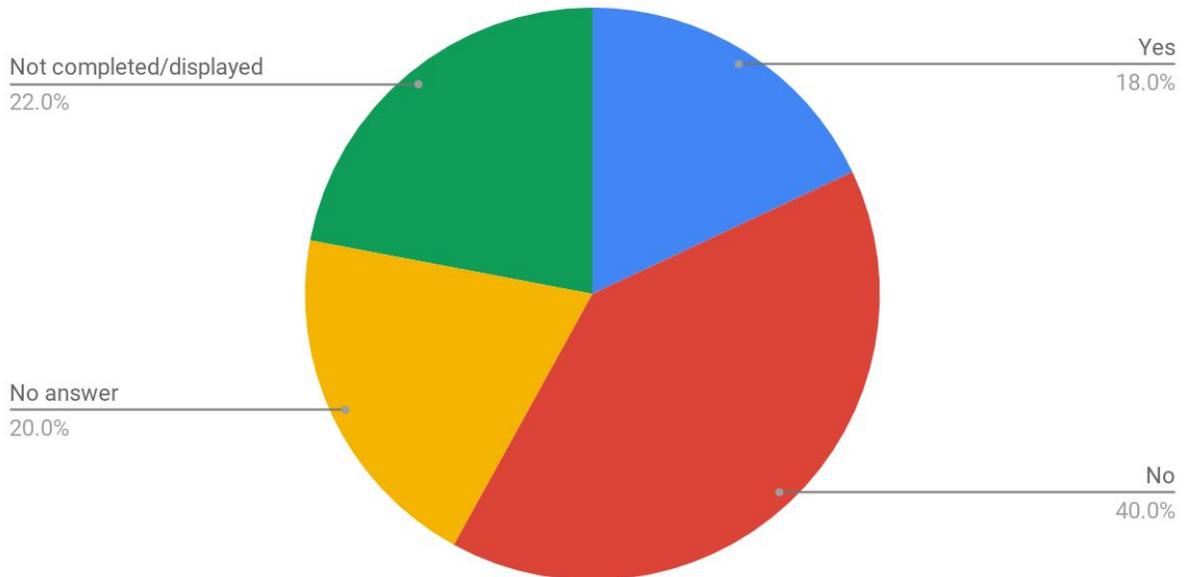
- 24% of respondents said that they make sure to get the money upfront.
- 22% of respondents said if their client(s) don't pay them the full rate they set, or refuse to pay at all, they would remove/block the clients contact info.
- 16% of respondents said that this has never happened to them.
- 16% of respondents said that if their client(s) don't pay them the full rate they set, or refuse to pay at all, they will threaten their client.
- 14% of respondents said if their client(s) don't pay them the full rate they set, or refuse to pay at all they let it go.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q56

When screening potential work, do you negotiate what you will and will not do, or do you have a strict limit on what you're willing to do regardless of your work's interests?

- 52% of respondents said yes.
- 34% of respondents said that they do negotiate what you will and will not do.
- 26% of respondents said that they have a strict limit on what they're willing to do.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q57: If you work internationally, do you worry about security at the border?

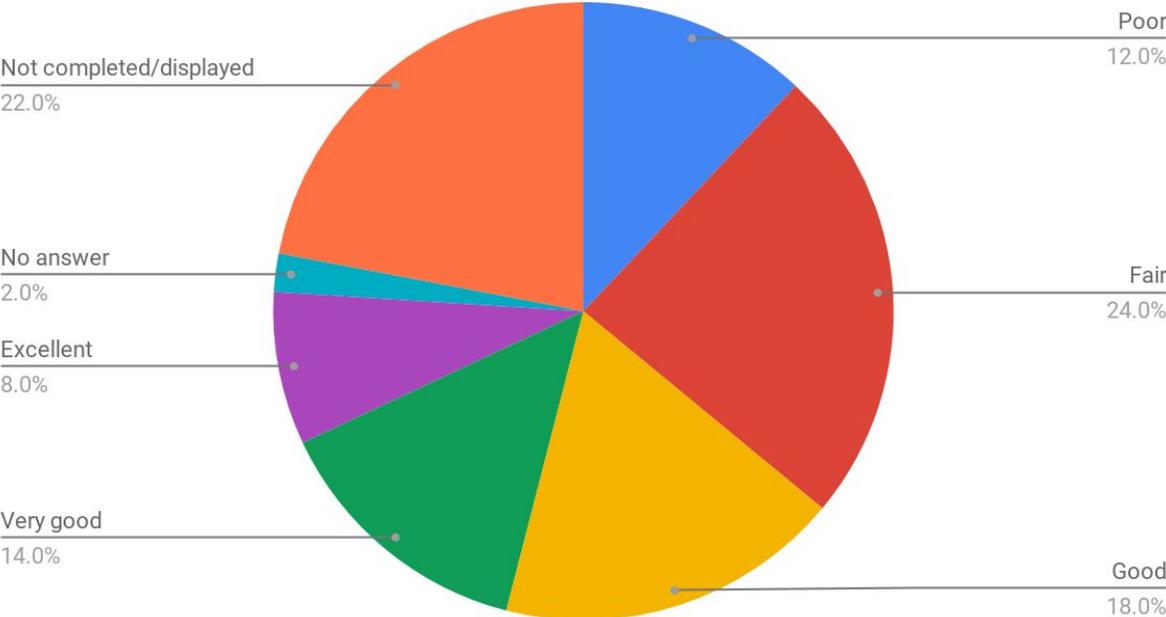


Q58

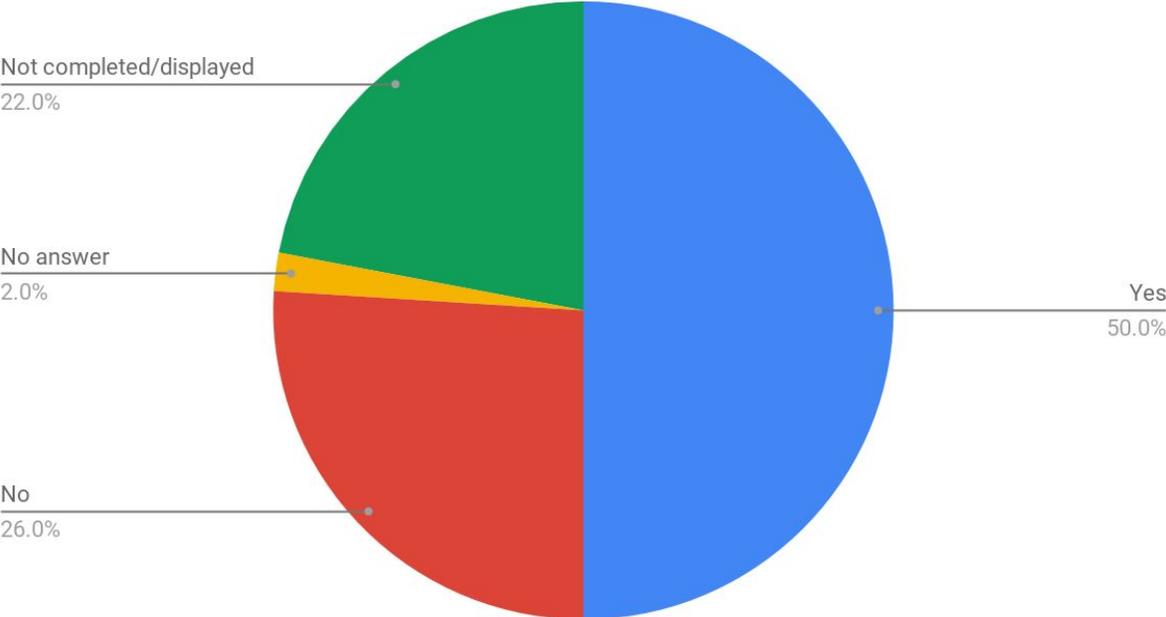
If yes, what are your worries about coming back after international work?

- 40% of respondents said that their worry about coming back after international work is getting questioned.
- 27% of respondents said that their worry about coming back after international work is getting their phone searched.
- 20% of respondents said that their worry about coming back after international work is getting arrested.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q59: Overall how would you say your mental health is?



Q60: Do you think or feel your work affects your mental health?

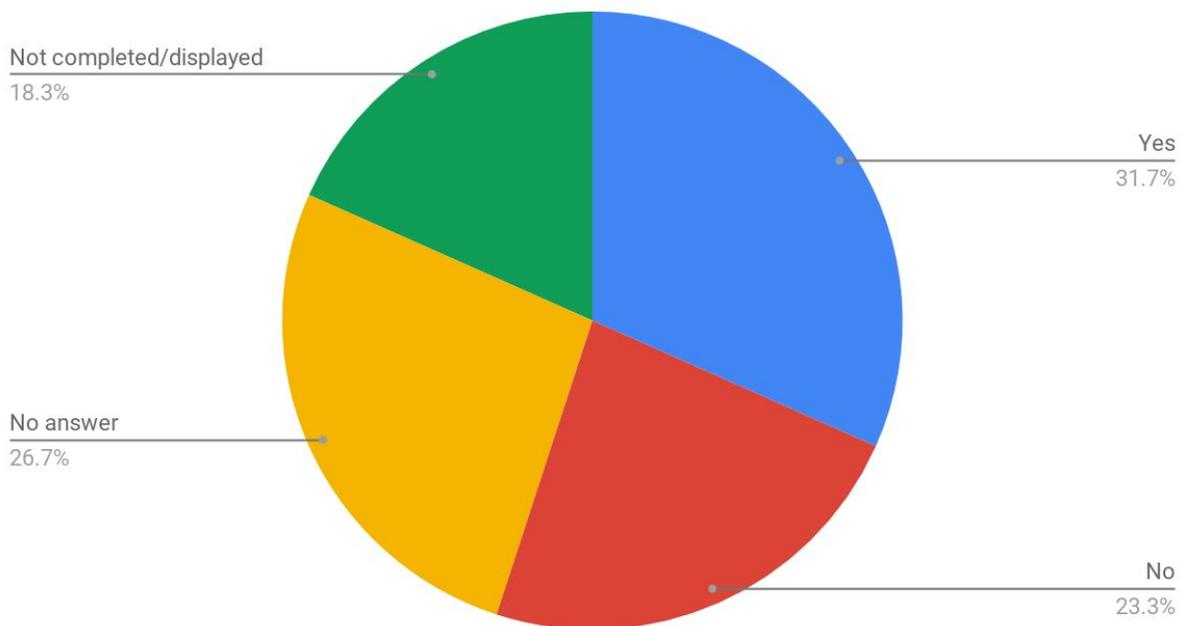


Q61

Can you describe how?

- 21% of respondents said that they feel depression.
- 21% of respondents said that they feel the stigma affects their mental health.
- 21% of respondents said that they feel that their mental health is empowered by their work.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q62: Would you say that depression affects your ability to work?

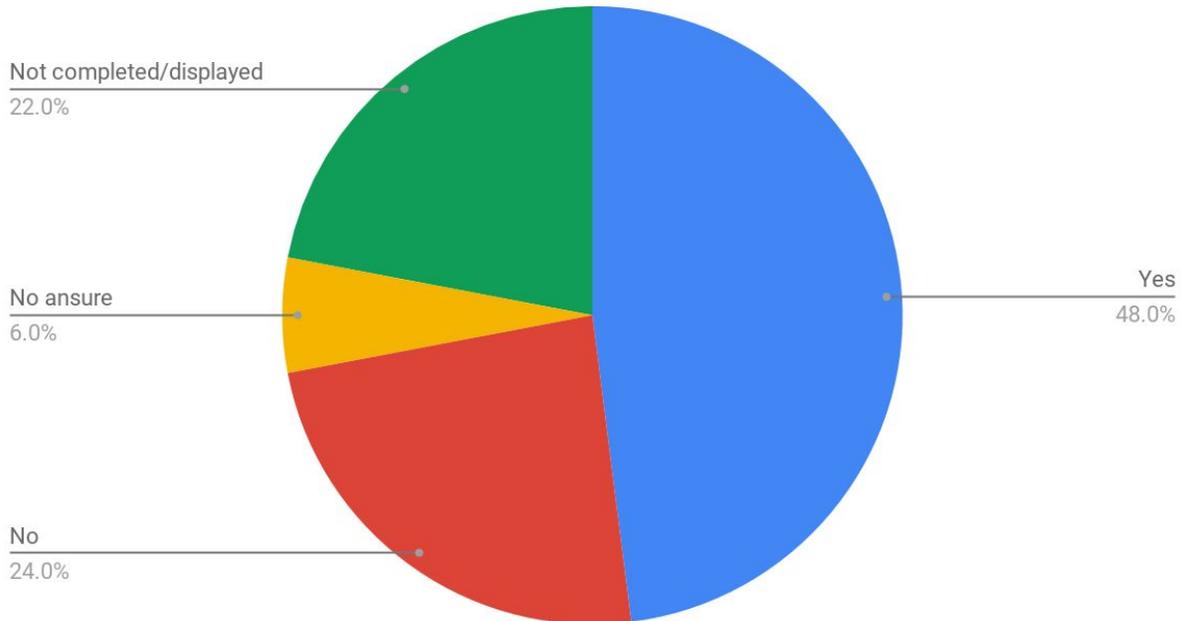


Q63

If yes can you tell me why you think that is?

- 30% of respondents said that depression makes them not want to work.
- 20% of respondents said that depression affects their ability to work because they have trouble getting out of bed.
- 15% of respondents said that depression affects their ability to work because of a loss of libido.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q64: Would you say that anxiety affects your ability to work?

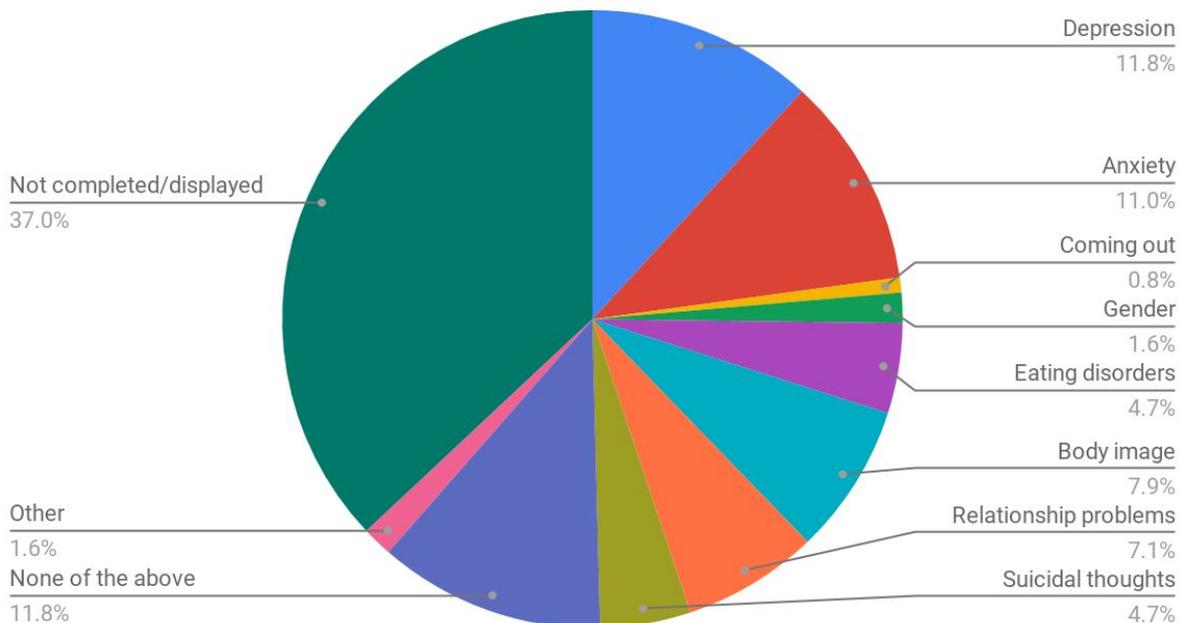


Q65

If you said yes, why do you think that is?

- 27% of respondents said that anxiety affects their ability to work because it makes them worry.
- 23% of respondents said that anxiety affects their ability to work safely.
- 14% of respondents said that anxiety affects their ability to be social.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q66: Do you want help for any of the following issues?



Q67

What are some of your concerns about your sexual health when dealing with your line of work?

- 66% of respondents said that their concern about their sexual health when dealing with their line of work is contracting and spreading STBBI's (STD's, STI's).
- 13% of respondents said that their concern about their sexual health when dealing with their line of work is not having access to PrEP due to it being too expensive.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q68

What kind of health and wellness services do you utilize as a result of your line of work?

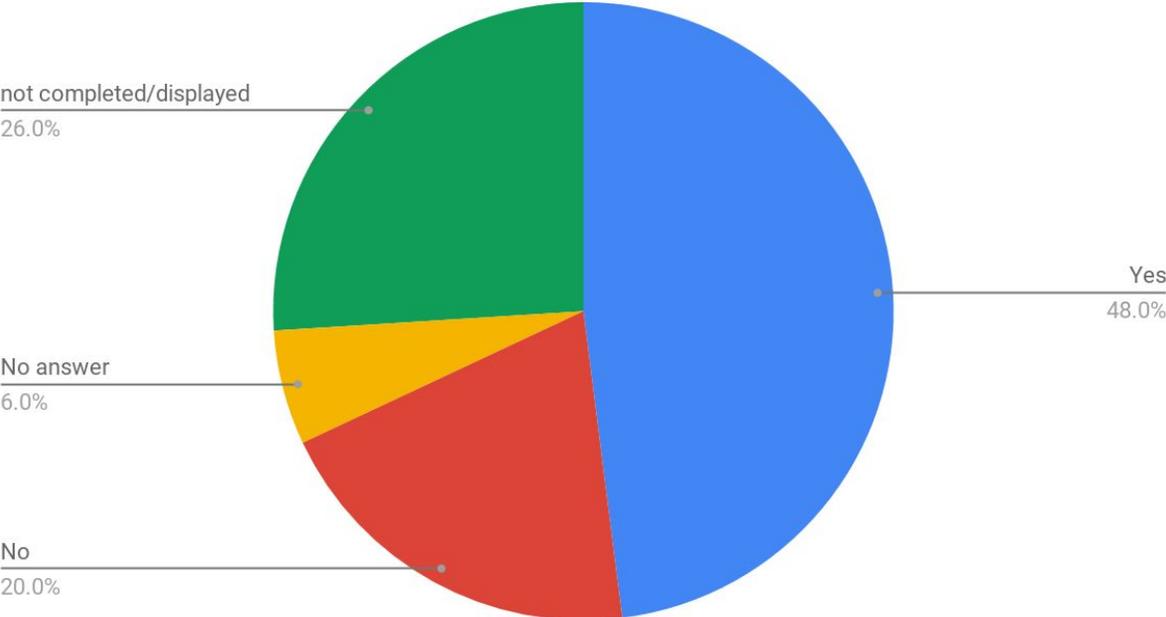
- 48% of respondents said the health and wellness service they utilize as a result of their line of work is the walk-in clinics.
- 12% of respondents said the health and wellness service they utilize as a result of their line of work is REZO in Montreal.
- No other significant responses to report.

Q69

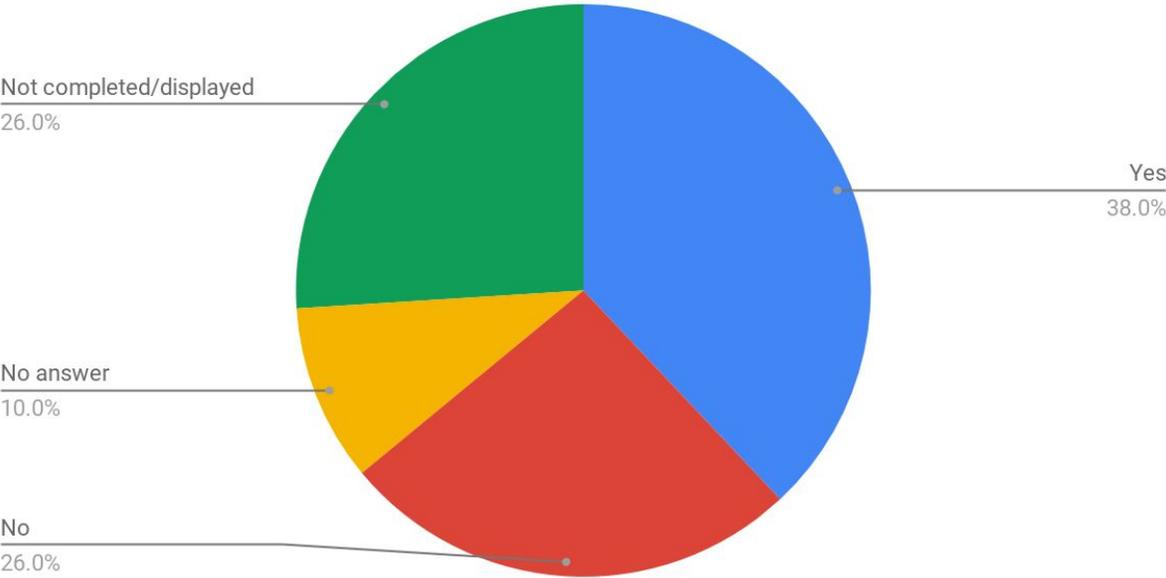
Have you found said health and wellness services to be of help? How/why?

- There is no significant data to report however many respondents said that it gives them peace of mind in a non-biased, non-judged space.

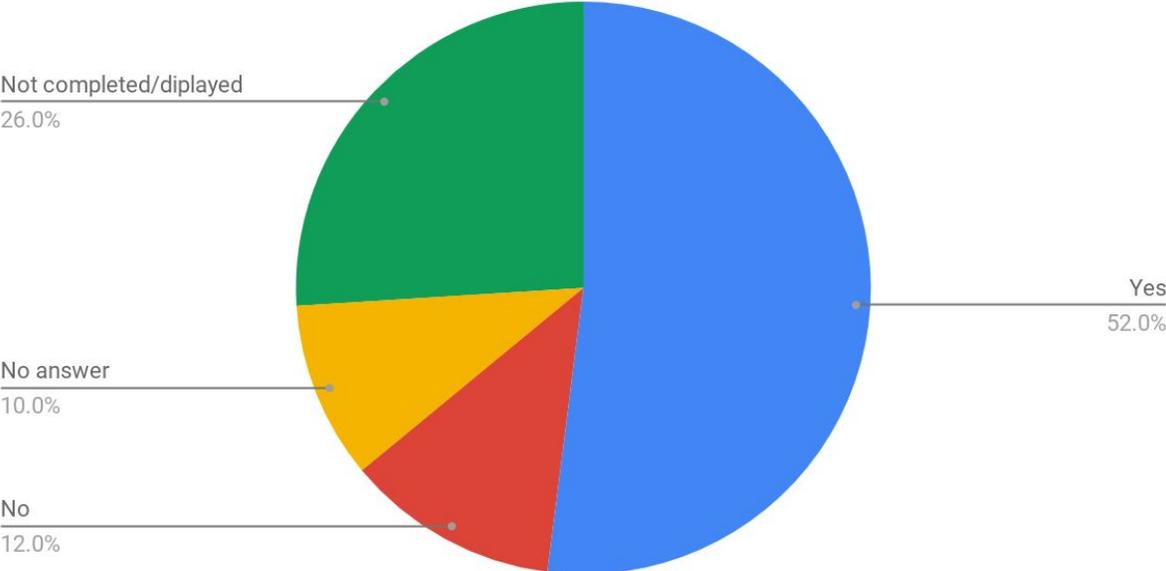
Q70: Do you have a family doctor?



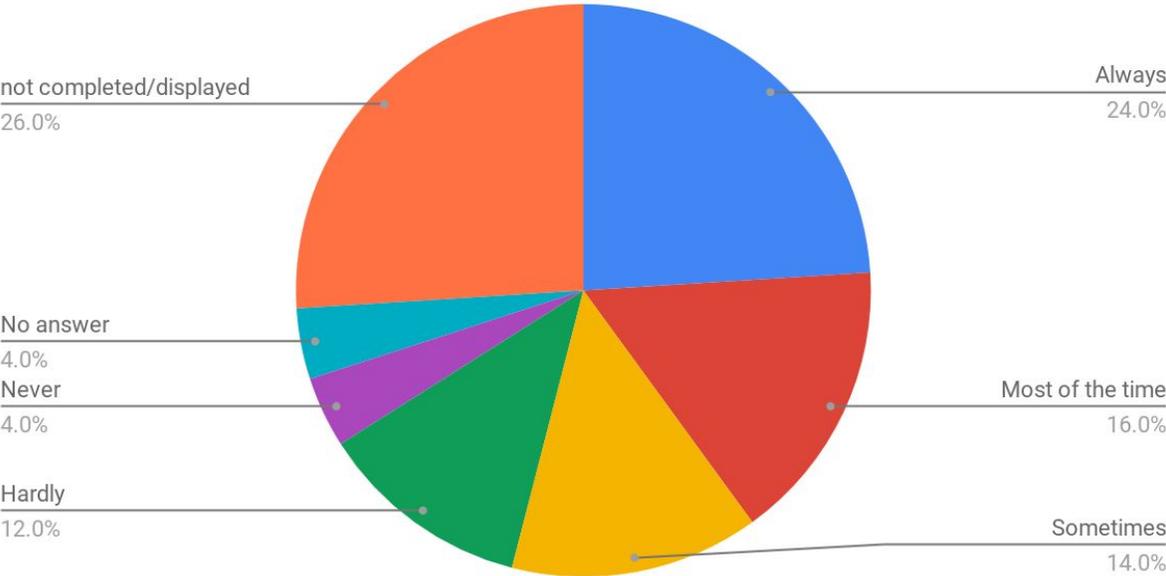
Q71: Do you disclose to your health care provider that you are a sex worker?



Q72: Is it important to you to tell your doctor that you are a sex worker?



Q7: If you have intercourse with your clients as a part of your work, do you use condoms?



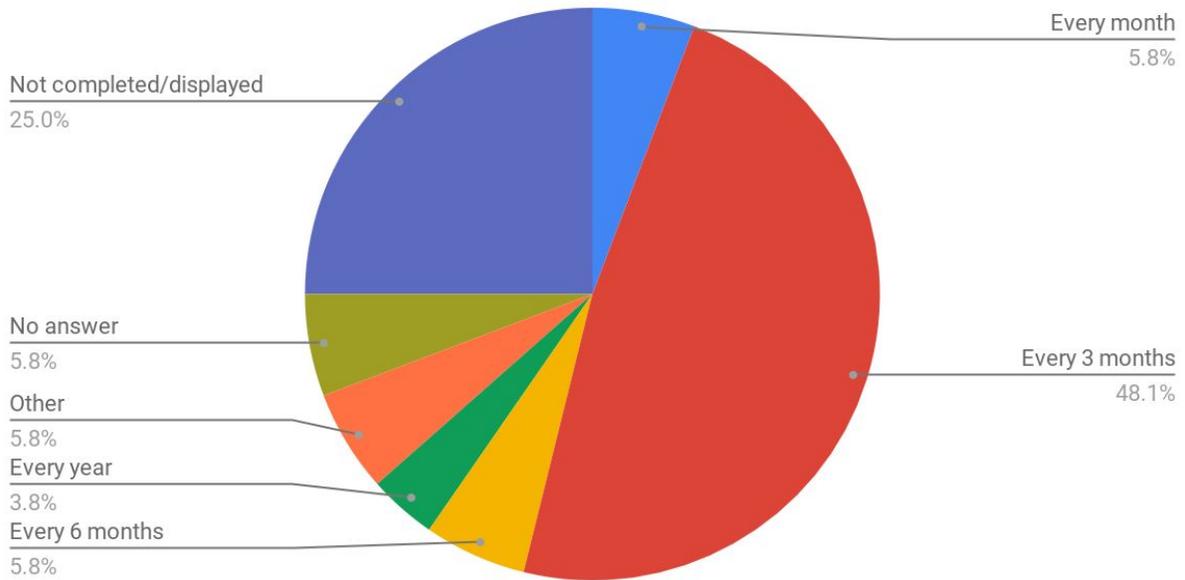
Q74

Can you explain why?

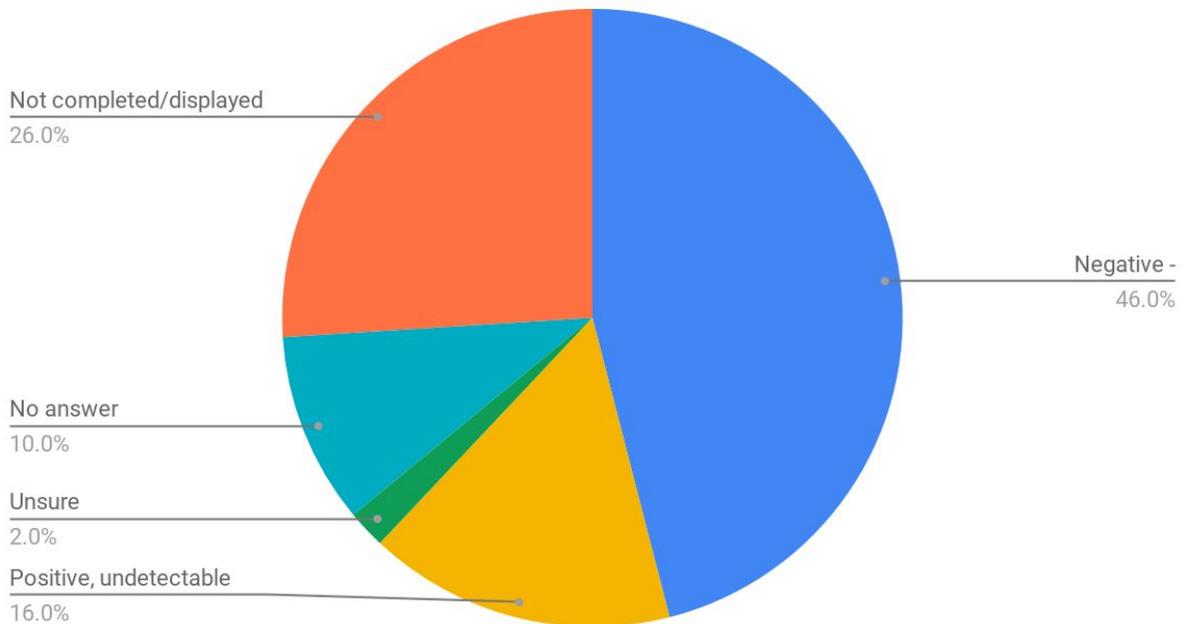
- 42% of respondents said they wear condoms with clients to prevent themselves from getting STBBI's~ (STD's, STI's) and passing them to their clients.

- 42% of respondents said they don't wear condoms with their clients because the client requested not to wear one.
- No other significant responses to report.

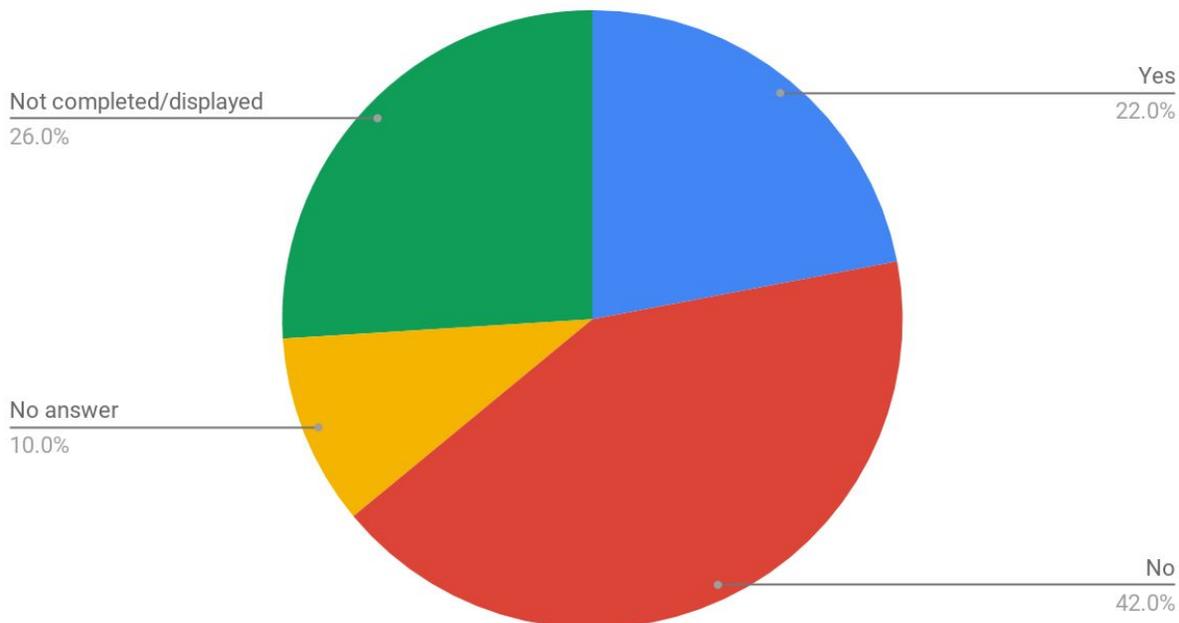
Q75: How often do you get tested for sexually transmitted or blood borne infections (ie. chlamydia, Gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV)?



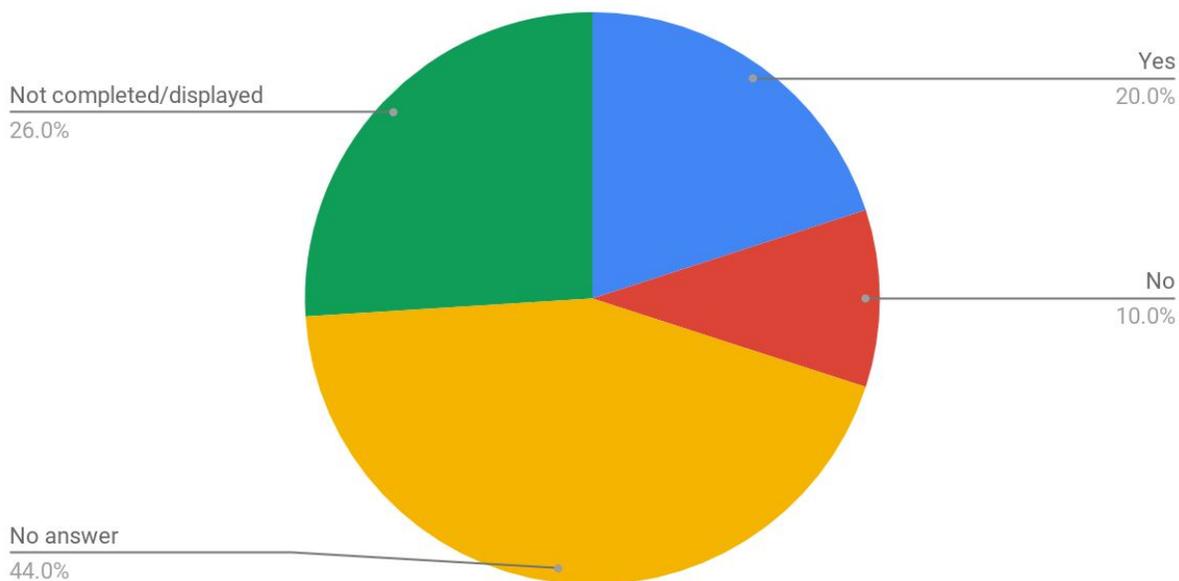
Q75: What is your HIV status? (optional)



Q77: Are you taking PrEP?



Q78: If yes, was your work as a sex worker the motivation for going on PrEP?



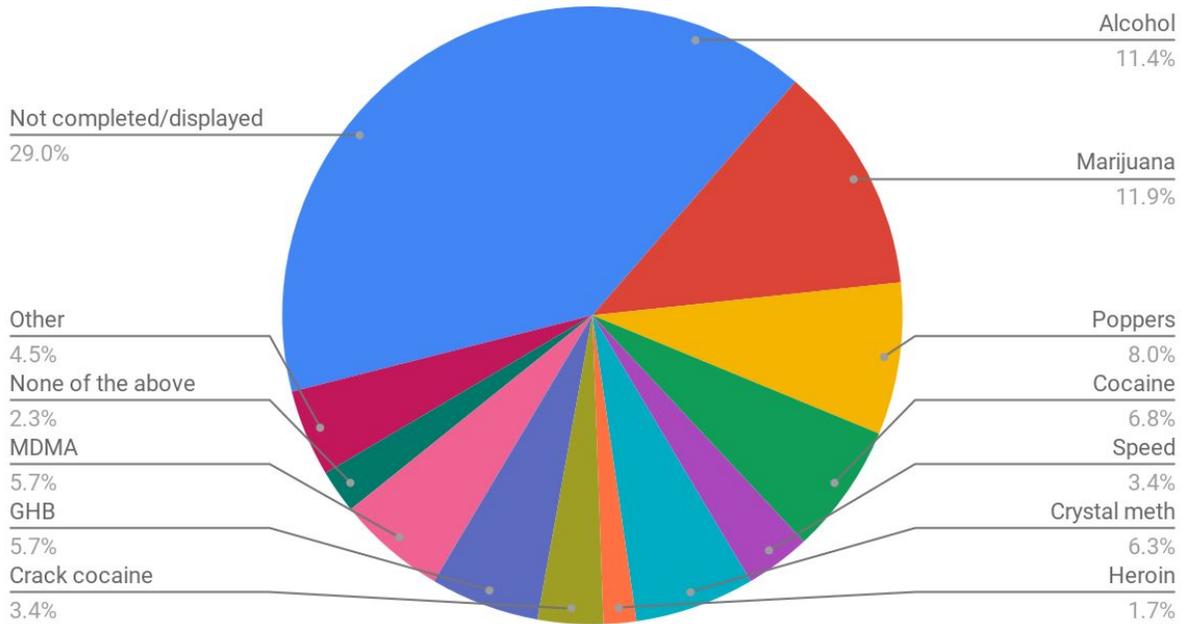
Q79

Can you explain why/why not?

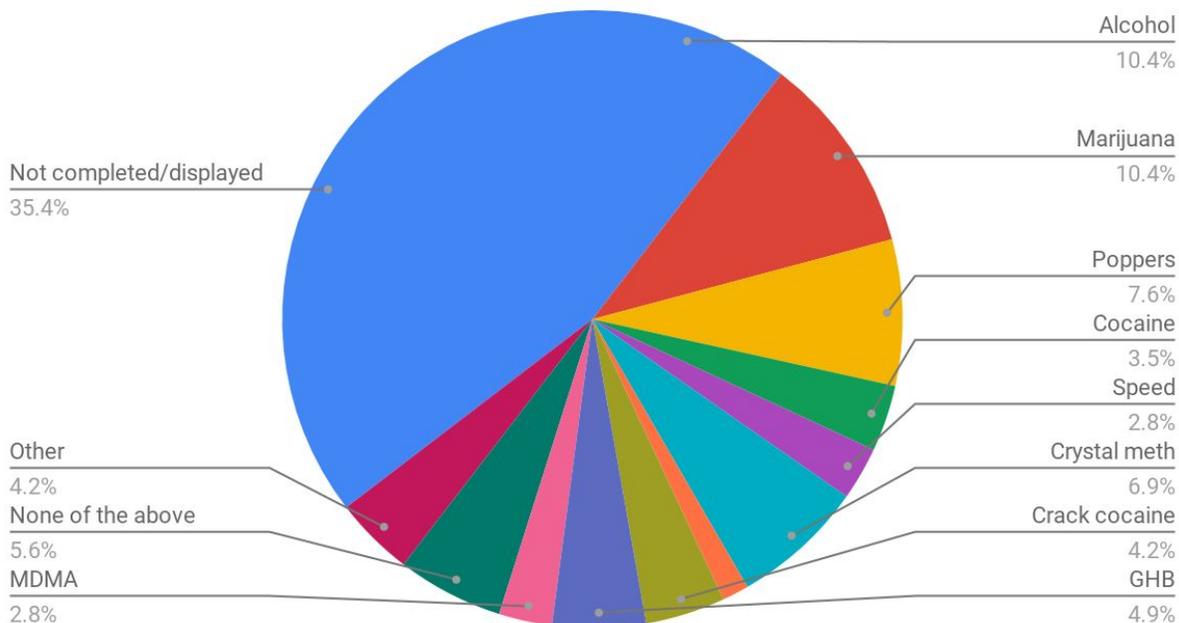
- 36% of respondents said that they are motivated to take PrEP to keep them and their clients safe.

- 21% of respondents said that they are motivated to take PrEP because it can prevent additional stress.
- No other significant data to report.

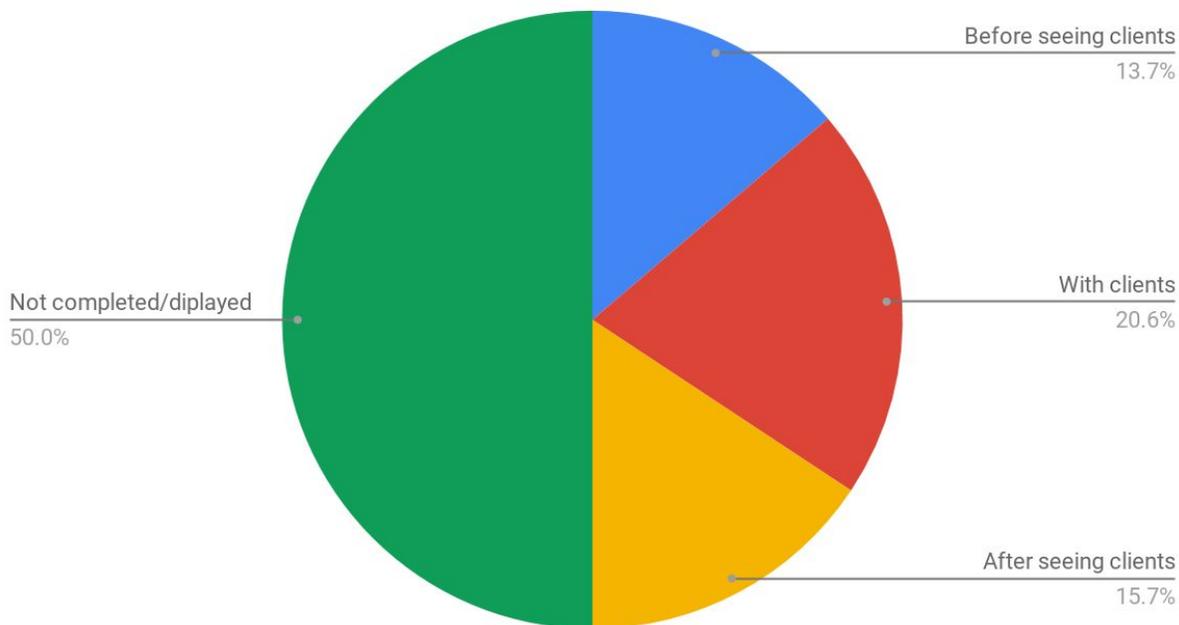
Which of these drugs do you use?



Q81: Which of these drugs do you use while working?



Q83: When do you use illegal drug(s)?



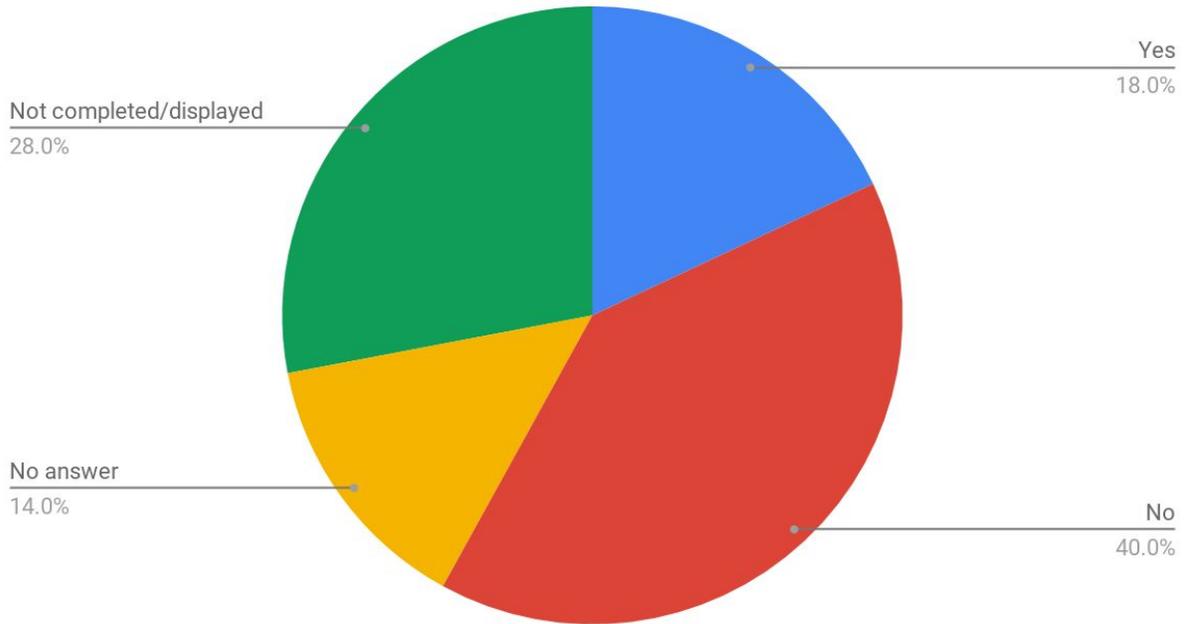
Q84

If yes, do you enjoy using illegal drug(s) while working? And why?

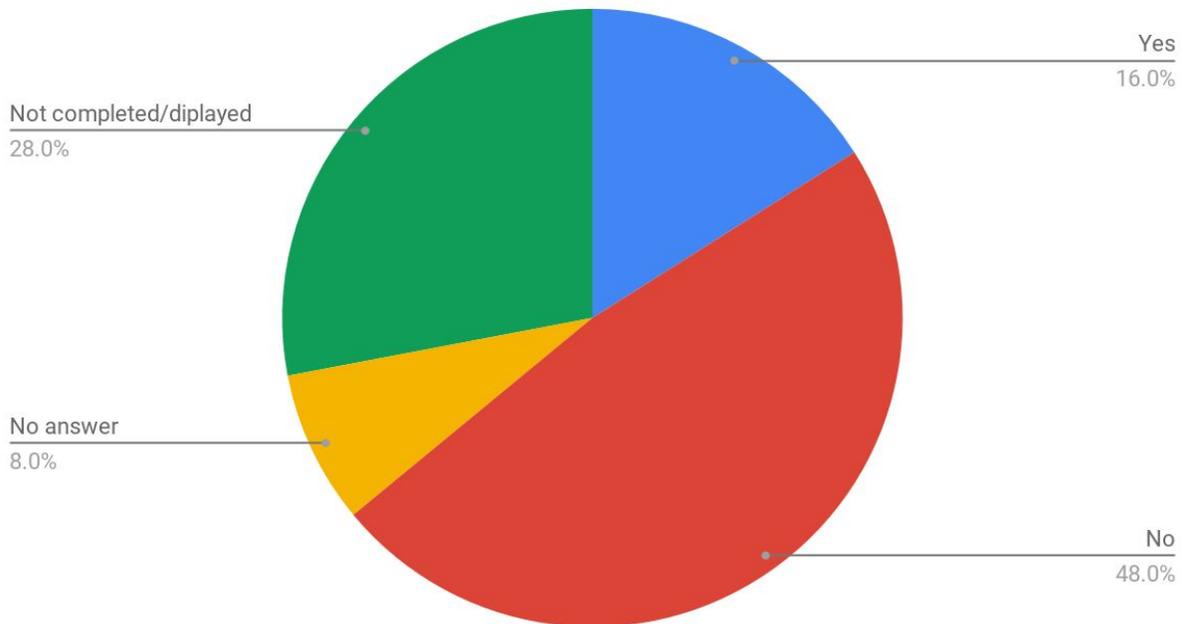
- 36% of respondents said they use illegal drugs with clients for better chemistry between them and the client.

- 29% of respondents said they don't use illegal drugs with their clients.
- 14% of respondents said they use illegal drugs to relax before and with clients.
- No other significant responses to report.

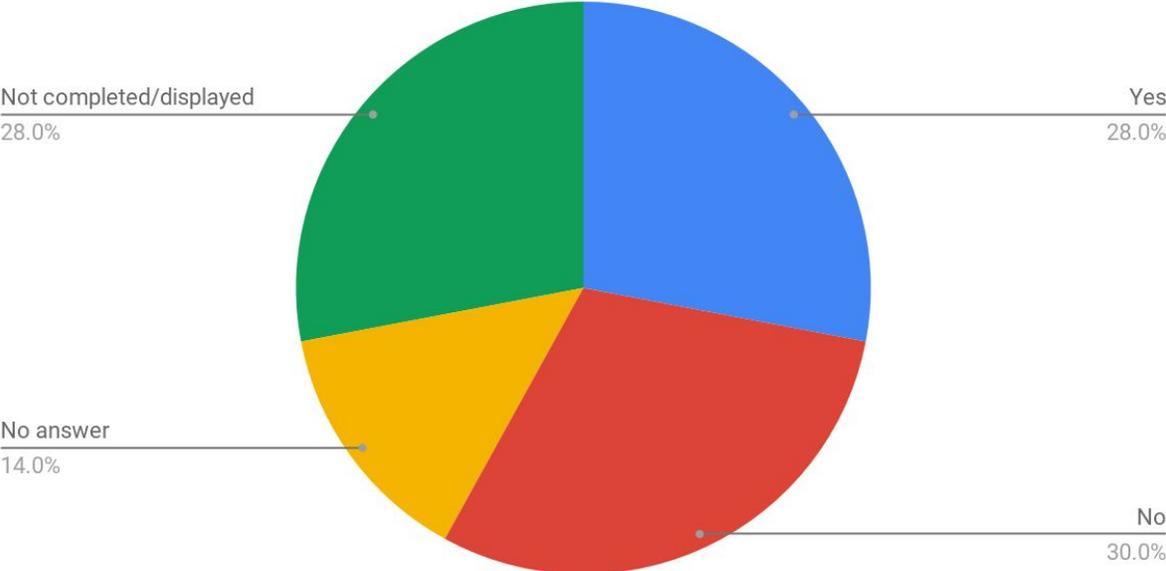
Q85: Did you start using illegal drugs during sex work?



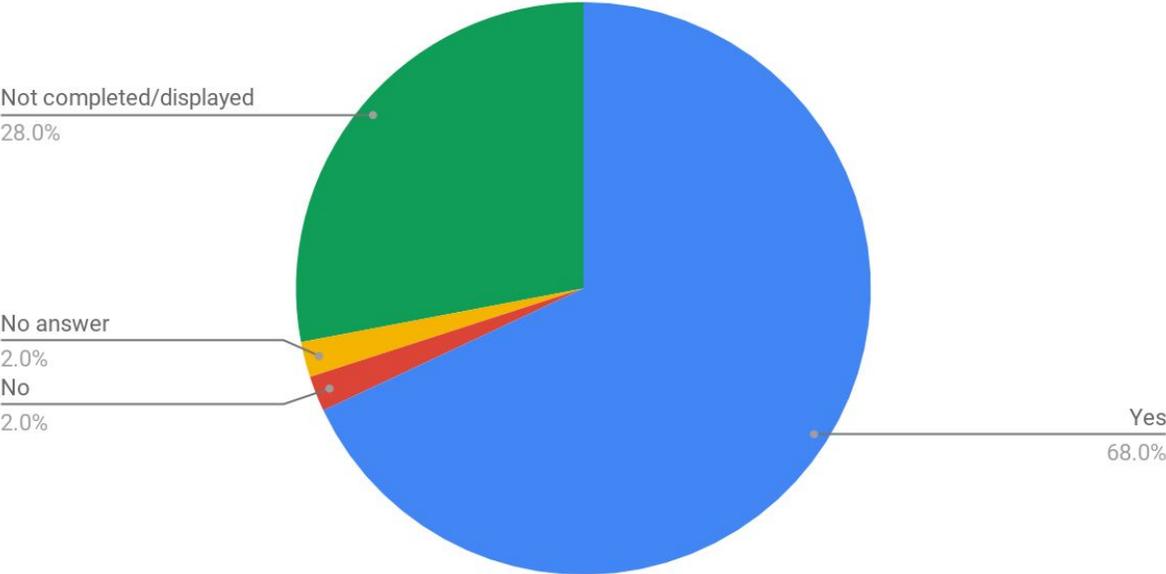
Q86: Do you exchange sexual services for illegal drugs?



Q87: Do you find that if you don't use illegal drugs, you will lose clients?



Q88: Did you find this survey asked the right questions to find the important facts and concerns needed to create a needs assessment?



Q89

If no, what are some things you would have liked to see in it?

- No significant responses to report, however some respondents said that they would like it to have less questions, and to have a less biased and assumed shared value-system.

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