



Press Release

Six in Ten Ontarians Oppose Decriminalization of Prostitution, Including Pimping or Sex Buying

Three-Quarters Consider Prostitution Harmful to Women and Girls

Toronto, ON, July 4, 2018 — In 2014, Canadian lawmakers rewrote prostitution legislation, making it illegal to purchase sexual services, however legal to sell them. Despite this recent shift, few Canadians fully understand the laws surrounding prostitution, as found in a new Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of the London Abused Women's Centre Ontario (LAWC) in collaboration with their international partners, Equality Now and Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW).

Most Ontarians oppose (58% bottom 3 box) any changes to prostitution legislation which would decriminalize all aspects of the trade, including pimping, brothel ownership, and sex buying. Among whom, four in ten (38%) say they strongly oppose these changes. By comparison, 30% say they would be supportive (top 3 box). Among the minority of Ontarians (40% men, 20% women) who are supportive of the decriminalization of all aspects of prostitution, the largest proportion (31%) say it's because they think these changes would create a safer environment for sex workers.

Most Ontarians Do Not Consider Prostitution a Job Like All Others

Majorities agree that prostitution is harmful to women and girls – three-quarters (75% top 3 box) indicate such. The same proportion (77%) also agree that most women and girls do not want to have repeated sex with random men. Further, most Ontarians would *not* support (85% bottom 3 box) prostitution as a job for their daughter, sister or family member, nor would they support (78% bottom 3 box) their son, brother, husband or family member paying a prostitute for sexual services. Ontarians do not view prostitution as a regular job – just 28% agree that it is a job like all others. Few (16%) also would be okay if a brothel or strip club opened in their neighbourhood.

Men and women tend to vary slightly in terms of their support for various aspects of prostitution. Men are more likely to view prostitution as a regular job (36% vs. 21% of women), as well as showing higher support for a brothel or strip club opening in their neighbourhood (26% vs. 9% of women). While still a very small proportion, men also show higher levels of support for a female family member of theirs working in prostitution (12% vs 6% of women), as well as their male family members purchasing sexual services (19% vs. 8% of women). Conversely, women are more likely to agree that prostitution is harmful to women and girls (81% vs. 70% of men), and that most do not want to have repeated with random men (83% vs. 71% of men).

Ontarians Don't Fully Understand the Laws Around Prostitution

Canada currently has prostitution legislation called the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) that decriminalizes prostituted persons (sex workers) but makes pimping, brothel ownership and sex purchasing (johns) illegal. However, when Ontarians were tested on their knowledge of this legislation, few could answer correctly. Most Ontarians (67%) said that all aspects of prostitution are illegal; just one in ten (13%) know that, in fact, only sex buying, and brothel owners are the illegal aspects of the trade.

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Ontarians Agree with PCEPA

When prompted with PCEPA, three in four (76%) Ontarians admit to knowing little about the legislation (34% not much/41% nothing at all). A minority said they were familiar (24%) with the legislation, including just 3% who said they knew a lot about PCEPA. It's young adults who are most knowledgeable with the legislation (40%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who are knowledgeable about the Act, were also more likely to be able to correctly identify the illegal aspects of prostitution (27% vs. 9% of those who said they knew not much/nothing at all). Few Ontarians (18% bottom 3 box) disagree with this Act, most agree (58% top 3 box) or are neutral (24% midpoint).

About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between June 25 to 27, 2018. For this survey, a sample of 801 Ontarians and aged 18+ from Ipsos' online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 4.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Ontarian adults been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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