

# Center for Problem-Oriented Policing

## Street Prostitution *2nd Edition*

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Translation(s): [Prostituição de Rua \(Compreender e Combater o Fenômeno\) \(Portuguese\) \(/PDFs/portuguese/Prostituio%20de%20Rua.pdf\)](#) PDF (Portable Document File)

## The Problem of Street Prostitution

### What This Guide Does and Does Not Cover

This guide addresses the problem of street prostitution, focusing on female prostitutes and male clients. It begins by describing the problem and reviewing factors that contribute to it. It then identifies a series of questions to help you analyze your local problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem, and what is known about them from evaluative research and practice.

Street prostitution is only one of a number of sexual activity-related problems the police must address. This guide is limited to addressing the particular harms street prostitution creates. Related problems not directly addressed in this guide include

- consensual, unpaid sex in public places, including meeting places for anonymous sex among homosexuals
- homosexual prostitution, also known as hustling (young homosexual prostitution is also known as the chicken hawk trade)
- illegal immigration and forced prostitution (international trafficking in women and girls)
- juvenile runaways drawn into prostitution
- organized crime connections to prostitution
- prostitution at truck stops or motels
- prostitution through call girls, escort services, internet listings, and massage parlors, and at bars, hotels, and conventions
- serial murders of prostitutes
- solicitation by leaving calling cards in conspicuous public places (e.g., phone booths)
- strip clubs in which strippers also engage in prostitution
- transvestite prostitution.

Some of these related problems are covered in other guides in this series, all of which are listed at the end of this guide. For the most up-to-date listing of current and future guides, see [www.poppcenter.org](http://www.poppcenter.org) (<http://www.poppcenter.org/>).

There are widely different perspectives on prostitution. Some view the prostitutes as primarily responsible for the problem; some view the clients as responsible, and the prostitutes as victims. Others view prostitution as a private matter in which the state should not intervene. Community morals and beliefs about how the law should regulate morality will affect how any particular community addresses street prostitution. This guide does not adopt any particular moral perspective: It is intended to objectively inform you and other policymakers about the effectiveness and consequences of various approaches to controlling street prostitution. Before discussing response options, a general overview of the problem is provided.

For example, in Sweden, prostitution is officially considered a form of sexual violence against women. Prostitutes do not risk legal penalties. The public strongly supports this policy, with an 80 percent approval rate (Eckberg 2004).

The information in this section is drawn from many sources, not all of which are cited. Among the sources most heavily relied on are Benson and Matthews (1995); Cohen (1980); Matthews (1993) [[Full text \(/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/cpu43.pdf\)](#)]; [[Briefing note \(/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/cpu43b.pdf\)](#)]; May, Edmunds, and Hough (1999) [[Full text \(/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/fors118.pdf\)](#)]; [[Briefing note \(/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/brf118.pdf\)](#)]; Sterk and Elifson (1990) [[Full text \(/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/Sterk&Elifson\\_1990.pdf\)](#)]; van Gelder and Kaplan (1992); Weidner (2001); and Weitzer (2000).

## Harms Caused by Street Prostitution

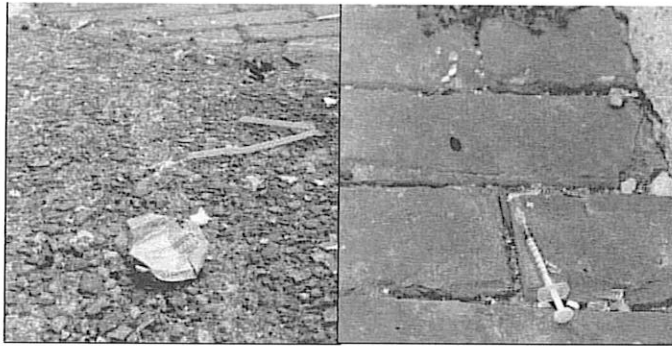
Street prostitution varies across the individual prostitutes involved and their commitment to prostitution, the market size, the community's tolerance levels, the degree to which prostitutes are organized, and the relationship of prostitution to drug use and trafficking. Street prostitution accounts for perhaps only 10 to 20 percent of all prostitution, but it has the most visible negative impact on the community.

The following are among the many reasons why the police should be concerned about street prostitution. [1] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote1](#))

## Moral and Nuisance Concerns

- Prostitution offends some citizens moral standards.
- Prostitution is a nuisance to passersby and to nearby residents and businesses.
- Prostitutes and clients offend uninvolved people in the area when they solicit them.
- Juveniles, less capable of making informed choices, may become prostitutes.

## Public Health Concerns



Used condoms and syringes commonly found on the ground in street prostitution areas are unsightly and potentially hazardous. Photo: Bob Heimberger

- Prostitutes and clients may spread sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, herpes, and AIDS.
- Used condoms, syringes, and other paraphernalia left on the ground are unsightly and potentially hazardous.
- Prostitutes who do not have access to proper facilities may urinate, defecate, or bathe in public.

Contrary to popular belief, prostitution has not been demonstrated to be a primary means of HIV transmission, at least not in the United States, largely because most street prostitution sex acts are oral rather than vaginal (oral transmission is less likely), most prostitutes insist that clients use condoms (less true of drug-dependent prostitutes), and transmission is more difficult from female to male. Of course, fear of contracting HIV has likely changed the sex practices of some prostitutes and clients. HIV transmission among prostitutes is more likely to occur from sharing needles for drug injections (Weitzer 2000).

## Personal Safety Concerns

- Clients may harm prostitutes.
- Clients or prostitutes may be defrauded, robbed, or assaulted.
- Pimps may financially and physically exploit prostitutes.

## Spillover-Effect Concerns

- Street prostitution and street drug markets are often linked.
- Prostitution may provide the seedbed for organized crime.
- Prostitutes create parking and traffic problems where they congregate.
- Prostitution attracts strangers and criminals to a neighborhood.

## Economic Concerns

- Legitimate businesses may lose customers who avoid the area because of prostitution.
- Prostitutes presence may negatively affect the area economy, reducing property values and limiting property use.

## Civil Rights Concerns

- Prostitutes, as citizens, have rights that need to be protected.

## Police Integrity Concerns

- Policing prostitution creates special opportunities for police officers to engage in unethical conduct, such as taking payments in exchange for nonenforcement, because prostitutes, pimps, and clients are in weak positions to complain about police misconduct. [2] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote2](#))

## Factors Contributing to Street Prostitution

Understanding the factors that are known to contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select an appropriate set of responses for your particular problem. The literature on street prostitution provides a general picture of street prostitutes, clients, pimps, sexual transactions, areas where street prostitution thrives, and links between street prostitution and drugs.

### Street Prostitutes

Street prostitutes have lower status than indoor prostitutes. They are often in some state of personal decline (e.g., running away from abusive situations, becoming drug-dependent, deteriorating psychologically, and/or getting less physically attractive). [3] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote3](#)) Most have social, economic, and health problems. Most first turn to prostitution at a young age, often before they are 18. [4] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote4](#))

Street prostitutes are not equally committed to prostitution: some are deeply committed for financial and lifestyle reasons; some are committed only due to drug dependency; and some are weakly committed, engaging in prostitution because it is the easiest way for them to make some money. Their inability to find adequately paying work elsewhere is the most common reason prostitutes give to explain their choice to work on the street. [5]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote5) Many prostitutes try to leave the streets, although they often return and then leave again. Most return to prostitution because their limited education and lack of skills make finding employment very difficult. Without a means to support themselves and their children, they may think staying on the streets is less risky than leaving prostitution. [6] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote6)

The typical street prostitute works six to eight hours a day, five to six days a week, and has three to five clients a night. [7]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote7) Street prostitutes lives are organized principally around prostitution itself, and around maneuvering through the legal system. It is a cycle of engaging in prostitution, getting arrested, going to jail, paying fines, and returning to the street.

Some street prostitutes are highly mobile, traveling from one city to another, sometimes on a regular circuit, or when they think the risks are too high in one city or the money is better in another.

Although most sexual encounters do not involve violence, most street prostitutes report having been criminally assaulted at least once by clients. [8]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote8) A small percentage of clients are likely responsible for most of the violence committed against prostitutes. The pattern of violence in pimp-prostitute relationships is similar to that of domestic violence. Prostitutes do not report most assaults to the police because they either fear retaliation by pimps or believe the police will not take the matter seriously, or will charge them for soliciting. [9] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote9)

Both prostitutes and those who assault them may believe prostitutes are not entitled to the criminal justice systems normal protections. [10] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote10)

## Street Prostitutes Clients

Prostitution clients, typically referred to as johns or tricks, are attracted to the illicit nature of the encounter, desire sex acts that regular partners do not provide, view sex as merely a commodity, and/or lack interest in or access to conventional relationships. [11] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote11) Others are drawn to the fact that no commitment is required, and view these interactions as less risky than having an affair. [12]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote12) Clients decision to solicit a prostitute is influenced by availability of prostitutes, knowledge of where to find them, access to money, perceived risk of getting caught or contracting disease, and ease of securing services. Clients gather such information in a variety of ways: from trial and error; from personal recommendations from others (including friends, bartenders, taxi drivers, and hotel workers); and, increasingly, from information posted on internet websites.

Somewhere around 10 to 20 percent of men admit they have paid for sex, but only about 1 percent pay for sex regularly. [13]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote13) While this is still a large number of potential clients, it is considerably lower than some earlier estimates based on flawed research methods. The characteristics of men arrested for soliciting vary considerably and do not form any clear patterns. [14]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote14) Many seek to rationalize their conduct to themselves and others. When stopped by police, clients often try to justify their behavior by telling a sob story of personal loss, or will admit to cruising but not soliciting, stating they were just curious. [15]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote15) Others resist the idea that prostitution is immoral.

Clients are more easily deterred than prostitutes. [16] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote16) They are more readily ashamed of their behavior, and fear harming their public reputation or their standing in their personal lives. Consequently, they fear being identified publicly more than being fined for their conduct.

## Pimps

It is unclear what percentage of street prostitutes have pimps; prostitutes are reluctant to talk to anyone about their pimps, and it is difficult for police to make cases against pimps. Pimps recruit and socialize prostitutes into the prostitution subculture by appealing to either their desire for money or their desire for what they believe will be a glamorous and exciting lifestyle. [17] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote17)

Pimps seldom procure clients for prostitutes, because clients do not typically want to associate with anyone other than the prostitute. Pimps do not offer prostitutes much protection against client violence, but do offer them protection against assault by other pimps. Although classic pimp relationships still exist in both the United States and the United Kingdom, many men with serious drug addictions force their girlfriends into prostitution to support their drug habits. [18] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote18)

One study found, however, that women with pimps experienced higher levels of client violence than those without pimps. Women with pimps tended to work in more dangerous areas and take more risks because of pressure to earn a certain amount of money (Norton-Hawk 2004).

Pimps use violence and drug dependency as means to control prostitutes. Many pimps resemble the batterers in domestic violence situations, and women under their control often react similarly to domestic violence victims. [19] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote19) They may express love and admiration for their pimps and may feel they deserve the violence. Pimps control both their freedom and their finances. By some estimates, pimps take 60 to 70 percent of prostitutes earnings.

## Sexual Transactions

The prices for sex acts vary a little from community to community. Depending on how desperate the prostitutes are for money, they typically charge \$20 to \$50 for oral sex, and \$50 to \$100 for sexual intercourse. Among crack-addicted prostitutes, the price can be as low as the market price for a single rock of crack cocaine. The typical sexual transaction takes around 10 minutes in a vehicle (usually for oral sex), and around 25 minutes indoors.

## Areas Where Street Prostitution Exists

Street prostitution markets go through stages of development they emerge, expand, stabilize, and disappear. [20] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote20) Sometimes they emerge by accident, when a few prostitutes happen upon a new location; sometimes they emerge because of changes in an areas traffic or commercial patterns (e.g., new roadways or new businesses such as adult entertainment establishments); and sometimes they emerge because police enforcement displaced them. It is important that an area be known for street prostitution so clients will know where to look.

Street prostitution is more prevalent in run-down neighborhoods. Those that are populated heavily by unattached males are more vulnerable to street prostitution than those with a lot of women, families, or elderly residents, because the likelihood of vocal community opposition is lower. For street prostitution to thrive, the surrounding neighborhood cannot be too crime-ridden or appear too threatening to potential clients. Consequently, it is often found in areas that are marginal or in

transition, rather than in thoroughly blighted areas. However, the emergence of street prostitution will almost certainly speed up decline. Neighborhood redevelopment or gentrification frequently prompts strong community opposition to street prostitution, and clearly drives much of the pressure on the police to control it.

Street prostitution areas are typically small, less than a square mile. Larger cities usually have several such areas. They are typically industrial sites; declining residential areas; those near major thoroughfares, including tunnels, bridges, or airport access roads; or those near transportation hubs, such as train and bus stations. Street prostitution flourishes around convention centers and hotels, especially when mostly male conventions are held.

Street prostitution thrives in areas where it does not conflict with legitimate business, but rather, supports and is supported by that business. The following foster street prostitution:

- places where sexual transactions can occur, such as cheap motels and hotels, dimly lit parking lots, alleys, and abandoned buildings



Street prostitution often thrives in areas where there are cheap motels and hotels. Photo: Bob Heimberger

- places where prostitutes can take a break, such as coffee shops or bars
- places near a street drug market, so prostitutes and clients can readily buy drugs
- places offering escape avenues from the police and dangerous clients
- roads that allow drivers to slow down or stop, ideally where the drivers side of the vehicle is closest to the curb.

Prostitutes usually take clients to places that minimize the risk of violence and ensure that transactions occur without incident. [21]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote21) These places are often near the street where the negotiation occurred so that the amount of time required for each transaction is limited. Most are out of sight of passersby but not so secluded that prostitutes will be unable to attract attention if they need help.



Street prostitution thrives along roads where prostitutes can talk to drivers from the curbside. Photo: Bob Morris

## Links Between Street Prostitution and Drugs

Street prostitution and street drug markets are often closely linked, supporting and reinforcing one another. [22] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote22) Many street prostitutes use illegal drugs, mainly methamphetamine, cocaine, or heroin. Many female serious drug users turn to prostitution at some point to finance their habit. Some prostitutes develop drug habits before turning to prostitution, while others start using drugs as part of the street prostitution lifestyle. Prostitutes are a significant customer base for street-level drug dealers.

Crack cocaine markets drive down the price of street prostitution, as some prostitutes, desperate to buy drugs, sell sex cheaply. Other prostitutes resent them for driving down prices or permitting sex without condoms, and pimps punish them for withholding their earnings to buy drugs. Drug-dependent prostitutes are more vulnerable to violence and more likely to rob their clients. In summary, where drugs and street prostitution are linked, street prostitution becomes less predictable and more dangerous.

## Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of street prostitution. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Analyzing the local problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy.

## Stakeholders

Police are not solely responsible for addressing this problem. In addition to criminal justice agencies, the following groups have an interest in the street prostitution problem, and you should consider the contribution they might make to gathering information about the problem and responding to it:

- elected and appointed local government officials
- public health agencies
- prostitutes support organizations
- social service agencies
- business associations
- tourism and convention promotion bureaus
- neighborhood associations
- traffic engineering departments.

## Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of street prostitution, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

There are many ways to enlist community members in the task of gathering information to document the problems scope. [23]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote23) These include using handheld video cameras to record activity, taking guided walks with police to identify areas where residents feel unsafe, highlighting trouble spots on neighborhood maps, and using data collection forms to record the date, time, and nature of events they witness.

## Police and Community Members

- How concerned is the police department about street prostitution? How concerned is the community? What groups are particularly concerned, and why? What specific concerns do they express?
- How organized and active are community members who oppose street prostitution? What street prostitution level are they willing to tolerate?

## Street Prostitutes

- Does street prostitution take only one form (e.g., female prostitutes and male clients), or are there several different forms (e.g., homosexual or transvestite prostitution)?
- What do you know about the prostitutes (e.g., age, gender, race, criminal history, social service history, substance abuse history, residence)?
- Do street prostitutes commit crimes against clients (e.g., robbery or theft)? Are street prostitutes crime victims?
- How committed are prostitutes to prostitution? How committed are they to a particular location?
- How many prostitutes have tried to leave the streets before? What drew them back? What additional services could have supported their decision to leave?

The Raleigh (North Carolina) Police Department conducted a problem-solving project using this guides first edition. Refer to [Weisel \(2004\)](#) (<http://www.pccccenter.org/Library/researcherprojects/streetProstitution.pdf>) for an excellent example of adapting the processes described here to local conditions. The report also contains useful sample survey tools for prostitutes and clients.

## Street Prostitutes Clients

- What do you know about the clients (e.g., age, race, occupation, socioeconomic status, marital status, criminal history, residence)?
- How committed are clients to prostitution? How committed are they to soliciting prostitutes on the street or in a particular area?
- How often do you rearrest clients for soliciting prostitutes?

## Pimps

- Do the prostitutes work for pimps who profit from their income?
- How many prostitutes do pimps manage?
- Are pimps well-known to police? If so, how many pimps operate in the jurisdiction?
- Is there pimp competition in prostitute control?

## Sexual Transactions

- How, specifically, do street prostitutes and clients negotiate and complete sexual transactions? Do clients solicit prostitutes on foot or from a vehicle? Where do the sexual transactions take place?
- Do prostitutes and clients take precautions to prevent sexually transmitted disease?

## Environment

- Does street prostitution take place in more than one area? What conditions make the area(s) attractive for street prostitution? If street prostitution occurs in several areas, how are they similar and different?
- What area businesses does street prostitution harm?
- What area businesses support and/or benefit from street prostitution?
- Is the street prostitution market in each area old or new? Has it changed in size recently? If so, why?
- Do street prostitution areas have a reputation as being dangerous or safe for clients?
- Are street prostitution areas isolated, or busy with other activities?
- What other types of crime occur in the area? How much is related to street prostitution?
- If street prostitution were forced out of a target area, where would you predict it might reappear, and why?

## Drug Links

- To what extent are street prostitutes, clients, and pimps engaged in drug sales or use?
- Are street prostitution and street drug markets near each other?
- Do street prostitutes exchange sex directly for drugs?

## Current Responses to the Problem

- What is the police departments current policy in dealing with street prostitution? What is the prosecutors current policy regarding prostitution-related offenses? What are the typical sentences handed out to those convicted? Do the prostitutes and clients complete those sentences? What effect, if any, does the imposition of a sentence have on subsequent prostitution involvement?
- What responses do police officers use, other than arrest and prosecution? Are any of these responses especially effective?
- What social, health, and substance-abuse treatment services are available to help prostitutes? Are prostitutes using available services?

## Measuring Your Effectiveness

You should take measures of your problem before you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and after you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. Measurement allows you to determine to what degree your efforts have succeeded and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. There are various ways to quantify the size and scope of the problem to establish a baseline. You could track the total number of police contacts with prostitutes in the past 12 months, the number of prostitutes regularly seen or cautioned in an area, or the average number of women working on any given night. These data will be useful for different purposes: to estimate social service needs, as a point of reference for enforcement operations, or as a measure of police effectiveness. [24] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote24](#)) For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, [Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers](#) ([/tools/assessing\\_responses/](#)).

The Deter and Identify Sex Trade Consumers database, accessed by 36 police agencies across Canada and the United States, provides information on prostitutes and clients to support police investigations [[Vancouver \(British Columbia\) Police Department Vice Unit 2002 \(/sites/default/files/library/awards/goldstein/2002/02-53.pdf\)](#)]. To be most effective, as many jurisdictions as possible need to use and receive information from multijurisdiction databases. In addition, data fields must be sufficiently detailed and data entry must be monitored for quality control.

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to street prostitution:

- reduced number of citizen complaints or calls for service about street prostitution
- reduced number of prostitutes visible on the streets at particular times
- increased transaction times for decoy officers trying to negotiate acts of prostitution
- reduced arrests of repeat offenders (both prostitutes and clients)
- reduced recidivism by both prostitutes and clients
- changes in service prices for prostitutes
- reduced traffic congestion in areas where curb-crawling (or kerb-crawling, in the United Kingdom) is a problem
- reduced volume of discarded condoms, syringes, and other prostitution-related paraphernalia
- reduced total reported crime in target areas compared with control areas (keeping in mind that changes may be due to other factors, and that reported crime does not always correlate with actual crime).

Depending on the response strategy, arrests (and rearrests) of prostitutes and clients may increase initially. Over time, if the responses are effective, you should observe a reduction in the number of arrests.

Responses that reduce the number of prostitutes working in an area tend to drive prices up, whereas responses that reduce the number of clients soliciting in a particular area tend to drive prices down.

## Responses to the Problem of Street Prostitution

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors that are contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's particular problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem. Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do to better address the problem: carefully consider who else in your community shares responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it. The responsibility of responding, in some cases, may need to be shifted toward those who have the capacity to implement more effective responses. (For more detailed information on shifting and sharing responsibility, see Response Guide No. 3, [Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems](#) ([/responses/responsibility/](#))).

## General Principles for an Effective Strategy

You should consider a few general principles when developing your response strategy. Which particular responses you adopt should depend on what you learn from a careful analysis of your local problem. The responses selected should be carefully focused on the angle of the problem that you are trying to resolve. Strategies seeking to reduce the harms caused by and experienced by prostitutes are more likely to work than those seeking to eliminate prostitution altogether. Strategies focused exclusively on arresting prostitutes are unlikely to be effective. [25] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote25](#)) At a minimum, both prostitutes and clients conduct should be addressed. An effective strategy not only must force prostitutes off the streets and get them to stop their offensive behavior, but also must give them viable alternatives: either to get out of prostitution altogether, or to operate in less-offensive locations, times, or ways. This usually requires greater cooperation between the police and various service organizations. [26] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote26](#)) The most effective responses to the problem of street prostitution rely heavily on social services for prostitutes to encourage their permanent exit from the street. Police must work closely with service providers to ensure the various enforcement- and treatment-based responses are well-coordinated. The transient nature of street prostitution and the fact that some responses may lead to displacement mean that jurisdictions must share information to make a significant regional impact on the problem.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Departments multiagency response to street prostitution required social service providers to ride with police officers in the patrol districts implementing the program. These ride-alongs helped to create mutual understanding and appreciation for each stakeholder's role in the program ([Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department 2003 \(/sites/default/files/library/awards/goldstein/2003/03-07.pdf\)](#)).

## Specific Responses to Address Street Prostitution

### Deterring Prostitutes and Clients

1. **Enforcing laws prohibiting soliciting, patronizing, and loitering for the purposes of prostitution.** The main strategy police use to control street prostitution is enforcing laws prohibiting soliciting, patronizing, and loitering for the purposes of prostitution. Enforcement strategies are expensive, each arrest costs thousands of dollars to process. By themselves, they are ineffective at either controlling street prostitution or protecting prostitutes from harm. [27]

(/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote27) Increased police enforcement temporarily reduces the number of prostitutes on the street, but they usually reappear in new areas. This may actually increase street prostitution in the long term by creating new opportunities for prostitutes and potential clients to meet. While the severity of the penalties against prostitutes does appear to affect the volume of prostitution, modest fines against prostitutes may actually force them to commit more prostitution to pay the fines. Prostitutes who are prosecuted are usually convicted, but many of them fail to show up for court hearings. Most prostitutes consider the costs of being arrested as a business expense and an inconvenience, and not as a significant deterrent.

See Response Guide No. 1, [The Benefits and Consequences of Police Crackdowns \(/responses/police\\_crackdowns/\)](#), for further discussion of how crackdowns work.

However, street prostitutes can provide valuable information to police about other crimes, and the threat of enforcement gives the police leverage for information. In some jurisdictions, controlling street prostitution is left to the vice squad. Limiting patrol officers involvement is intended to reduce corruption, but it can give the public the impression that only corrupt officers would ignore the problem. Whether using patrol or specially trained vice officers, police agencies should properly train, supervise, and monitor officers performance to reduce the likelihood of misconduct.

Historically, the police have arrested far more prostitutes than clients, although many police agencies have shifted toward a more balanced enforcement strategy, targeting clients as well as prostitutes. To promote a consistent response and improve the chances for successful prosecutions, police agencies should prepare written guidelines governing how and under what circumstances they will enforce prostitution laws.

The Cleveland (England) Police Departments Middlesbrough Police District scheduled all defendants charged with soliciting for court on the same day. Concentrating the cases in this way helped judges to become aware of the problems scope, ensured consistent sanctions, and raised media interest and, as a result, public awareness (Cleveland Police, Middlesbrough Police District 2000 (<http://www.ppccenter.org/Library/awards/Tilley/2000/00-05.pdf>)).

- a. **Enforcing laws prohibiting prostitution and the solicitation thereof.** Enforcing laws prohibiting prostitution usually requires undercover police officers to pose as clients to gather the necessary evidence, which can be difficult to get from street-savvy prostitutes. Enforcing prostitution laws against clients typically requires the police to pose as prostitutes to get evidence. Some police agencies still do not have enough female officers to conduct effective solicitation enforcement campaigns, and these assignments are typically not popular among officers. [28] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote28) Moreover, decoy arrests of clients are open to legal entrapment defenses if officers are not careful.

The particular statutory and evidentiary requirements vary across jurisdictions. United Kingdom police do not use this strategy because neither prostitution itself nor proposing the exchange of sex for money is illegal. Prostitutes use a variety of methods to determine if a prospective client is an undercover police officer, including exposing themselves or asking the client/ officer to expose himself. The city of St. Petersburg, Florida passed an ordinance that specifically mentioned prostitutes efforts to identify police officers as among the behaviors that constitute a verified pattern of solicitation activity.

- b. **Enforcing laws prohibiting conduct associated with prostitution and the solicitation thereof.** Many jurisdictions have enacted laws that prohibit conduct associated with prostitution and the solicitation thereof, such as loitering for the purposes of prostitution, loitering in search of a prostitute, and curbs-crawling. These laws are designed to let the police charge prostitutes and clients without having to prove there was a proposed or actual exchange of money for sex. Charges of loitering for the purposes of prostitution are difficult to prove in some jurisdictions, so even if arrest rates are high, prosecutions may not be.

- c. **Intensively enforcing prostitution laws against prostitutes and/or clients for short periods.** In addition to routinely enforcing prostitution laws, the police often conduct intensive arrest campaigns against prostitutes, clients, or both. These campaigns significantly increase the risks of arrest, at least temporarily, bringing large numbers of prostitutes and clients into the formal justice system. When combined with media coverage, the campaigns are intended to deter those arrested from re-offending, and to deter potential clients. The campaigns deterrent value wears off after time, however. In high-volume arrest campaigns, the chances that police will arrest innocent people increase, unless they take special precautions. Without some follow-up court intervention or measures to change the environment, intensive enforcement campaigns only temporarily interrupt street prostitution, or move it elsewhere; they do not shut down a street prostitution market entirely.

Intensive arrest campaigns may inadvertently increase the risk of harm street prostitutes face. [29] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote29) To avoid police detection and to compensate for the reduced number of men soliciting services, prostitutes may work longer hours in more isolated, unfamiliar, or unsafe areas. The clientele in these areas may be unfamiliar, and yet the prostitutes may not take their usual safety precautions. As a result of increased competition for fewer clients, some prostitutes lower their prices, and thus must work in these conditions for longer periods to earn the same amount of money.

2. **Establishing a highly visible police presence.** A highly visible police presence, typically with extra uniformed officers, is intended to discourage area street prostitution. Extra police presence is expensive, of course, and is effective only if the police follow it up with more permanent strategies. It can also create the perception that the area is unsafe. Alternative methods to establish a police presence are to open a police station (e.g., a storefront office, mobile office, or kiosk) in the area, or affix antiprostitution warning signs to police vehicles patrolling the area. Private security forces might also be deployed to supplement a police presence.

See National Research Council (2004) for further discussion of the effectiveness of so-called hot-spots policing.

3. **Relaxing the regulation of indoor prostitution venues.** Whether changes in enforcement levels against indoor prostitution (e.g., massage parlors, call girls, bar girls, and escort services) will affect street prostitution depends on how easily prostitutes can move back and forth between the streets and indoors. The conventional wisdom is that there is little movement between them, mostly due to the high proportion of street prostitutes who are heavy drug users and thus not likely to be hired by indoor venues. [30] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote30) But, within limits, prostitutes do have some mobility. The laws related to indoor prostitution are likely to affect the degree of mobility (it is legal in the United Kingdom, and illegal in the United States). Indoor prostitutes seem more easily able to work on the streets when they have to than street prostitutes can move indoors. [31] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote31) Relaxing the regulation of indoor prostitution may be perceived as condoning prostitution; in addition, indoor venues are of serious concern to police because of their role in the sexual exploitation of trafficked women.

See Problem-Specific Guide No. 38, [The Exploitation of Trafficked Women \(/problems/trafficked\\_women/\)](#).

4. **Enhancing fines/penalties for prostitution-related offenses committed within specified high-activity zones.** Some communities have enhanced penalties for prostitution-related offenses committed within specific areas. These penalty enhancements are intended to move the street prostitution market to other locations so the target area can be redeveloped. You should be careful that the problem is not displaced to areas where the impact will be even worse. Research evidence about this responses effectiveness is lacking.

5. **Banning prostitutes or clients from certain areas.** Many courts order prostitutes and clients to stay out of specifically defined areas where street prostitution is prevalent, as a condition of either bail or probation. [32] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote32](#)) This practice is commonly referred to as mapping offenders out of areas. Enforcing the orders requires that police have good physical descriptions of the offenders and know the specific parameters of the orders. [33] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote33](#)) This practice may, however, displace prostitutes to more-remote areas outside the prohibited zone, areas which may prove more hazardous to the prostitutes. In addition, forbidding their entry into certain areas may sever ties to the only social support networks they may have. [34] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote34](#))
6. **Using community justice panels and community service sentences in lieu of incarceration or fines.** Instead of traditional criminal justice sanctions, prostitutes and clients can be required to appear before community justice panels that focus on restoring the harms the community suffers. Community service sanctions, when properly monitored and enforced, have been shown to be more effective than jail time or fines alone. [35] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote35](#))

In San Diego, California, men charged with soliciting are required to appear before a panel consisting of community members, prosecutors, public health workers, social service staff who work with prostitutes, and police ([San Diego Police Department and San Diego City Attorneys Office 2003](#) ([/sites/default/files/library/awards/goldstein/2003/03-38.pdf](#))). Men charged with soliciting in Indianapolis, Indiana, are required to return to the community in which the offense occurred to publicly face area residents and to perform community service work there ([American Prosecutors Research Institute 2004](#) ([/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/APRI\\_prostitution\\_2004.pdf](#))).

7. **Enlisting community members to provide surveillance or to publicly protest against prostitutes or clients.** Direct community activism in the form of organized marches, rallies, or confrontations of prostitutes and clients has proved effective in disrupting and moving street prostitution markets. [36] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote36](#)) Neighborhood associations can also post warning signs on buildings and utility poles indicating their intolerance for street prostitution in their community, warning prostitutes and potential clients that the area is under surveillance, and indicating the applicable penalties. [37] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote37](#)) This response is intended to intimidate prostitutes and clients, and to demonstrate the community's resolve against street prostitution. You must guard against overzealous community conduct that violates prostitutes' rights. In addition to the risk of vigilantism, police should recognize that some community protests do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the entire community, but instead represent the preferences of those who participate. [38] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote38](#)) Police should maintain close involvement with community groups to ensure proper oversight and supervision.
- Local street patrols conducted by community members can also provide valuable information to police. By recording the nature and volume of activity, these patrols can help police decide where to target their efforts. Effective patrols are difficult to establish and maintain without a highly committed leader to recruit, organize, and mobilize members. [39] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote39](#))

See Campbell (2001) for specific guidance on developing community leadership skills to address prostitution and a variety of other nuisance problems.

8. **Educating and warning high-risk prostitute and client populations.** Working with other institutions, you can target education and warning messages to groups especially likely to become involved in prostitution, as either prostitutes or clients.
- Certain groups are especially vulnerable to being recruited or drawn to street prostitution, among them juvenile offenders, juvenile runaways, and juveniles in group homes (residential custody). Young people at high risk for being recruited into prostitution usually have multiple critical social and psychological problems that require attention if they are to be kept out of prostitution. Addressing them requires that police develop effective partnerships with schools, the juvenile justice system, and child welfare systems.

Among the high-risk client groups are male conventioners, male soldiers, and previously arrested clients. The education and warning information can be conveyed through letters, lectures, video presentations, billboards, warning signs, or media outlets. A growing number of jurisdictions have established court-ordered education programs for convicted clients. These so-called john schools confront prostitution clients about the consequences of their behavior. [40] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote40](#)) They usually include information about the legal and health consequences for clients, the impact of street prostitution on the community and local businesses, and the negative effects of prostitution on prostitutes. Many programs have led to positive changes in attitude among participants and enjoy substantial support from participants, stakeholders, and the public. The program fees charged to clients are often used to support services designed to help prostitutes to leave the trade. Recidivism rates for clients who participate in court-ordered education programs are low (around 2% to 7%). [41] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote41](#)) It is less clear what added deterrent value there is in the education program beyond what is achieved by any official intervention, from a warning to an arrest. [42] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote42](#)) Further, official recidivism statistics may not reflect actual behavior because they are driven by the enforcement level, which varies over time. [43] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote43](#)) Finally, john schools do not specifically target potentially violent clients and therefore may deter only those least likely to victimize the prostitutes they solicit. [44] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote44](#))

## Targeting Prostitutes

9. **Serving restraining orders/civil injunctions against habitual prostitutes.** A small percentage of prostitutes and pimps may be responsible for most of the complaints in a prostitution area. If you can establish this, you might more productively target your efforts at those few, rather than at the larger population of offenders. In the United Kingdom, Antisocial Behavior Orders (ASBOs) are used against habitual prostitutes to forbid a range of prostitution-related behaviors. [45] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote45](#)) ASBO violations carry stiffer penalties than prostitution charges.
- In several jurisdictions, the police have coordinated with merchants whose business is negatively affected by street prostitution to obtain restraining orders against prostitutes, prohibiting them from engaging in specific behavior within a specific area. [46] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote46](#)) In San Bernardino, California, certain existing municipal codes have been incorporated into court-ordered civil injunctions against known prostitutes. Violations of the restraining orders result in jail time and fines that exceed the usual penalties.

The specific prohibitions mentioned in the San Bernardino restraining order are:

- approaching or signaling to any vehicle in any street, alley, or other public passage area, thus causing the vehicle to stop, unless a legitimate emergency so requires
- blocking the passage of any person or vehicle in any street, walkway, sidewalk, driveway, alley, or other public passage area
- being on, or causing others to be on, private property, except (1) with the property owners prior written consent, or (2) in the property owners presence and with his or her voluntary consent
- being on the premises of an uninhabited or abandoned building



- making, causing, or encouraging others to violate noise restrictions
- fighting in public or any place open to public view or hearing
- drinking any alcoholic beverage in public or any place open to public view
- urinating or defecating in public or any place open to public view
- littering, including discarding cans, bottles, cigarettes, condoms, or hypodermic needles other than in a proper trash can
- damaging or vandalizing another's property, including any light fixture, fence, gate, wall, or window
- applying graffiti to any public or private property, including any building, fence, wall, garage door, street sign, tree, pole, or vehicle
- congregating in any public place for the purpose of engaging in any conduct prohibited by this injunction, or any criminal activity
- intimidating, provoking, harassing, challenging, or carrying out any acts of retaliation, including, but not limited to, using abusive or vulgar language to harass any person ([San Bernardino Police Department 1999 \(/sites/default/files/library/awards/goldstein/1999/99-55.pdf\)](#) ).

You should consult with legal counsel about the requirements for obtaining restraining orders. It may also take a lot of time and effort to obtain the documentation necessary for a restraining order.

10. **Mediating conflicts between prostitutes and the community.** While negotiating with offenders is not common for the police, street prostitutes have responded positively in several communities where the police and community have requested that they stay away from certain areas or reduce their nuisance behavior in exchange for some tolerance. [47] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote47](#)) In one Vancouver, British Columbia community, community groups posted signs and maps requesting that prostitutes stay out of certain areas. [48] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote48](#)) Obviously, it can be difficult to get prostitutes to comply with agreements.
11. **Imposing curfews on prostitutes.** Curfews can be imposed on prostitutes as a condition of either bail or probation. The purpose is to deny prostitutes the opportunity to work during peak hours. To be effective, police or corrections officials must monitor and enforce the curfews.
12. **Helping prostitutes to quit.** Enforcement strategies will not be successful without an array of social services to help prostitutes leave the streets. It is particularly important to break the connection between drug use and sex work. Moving toward and finally leaving the streets is a long and complex process, and services must be provided at the right time and in the proper sequence. [49] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote49](#)) For example, meeting the basic needs of child care, housing, public benefits, and drug treatment should come before intensive job training or employment programs. Services should be easy for women to access and should have flexible appointment times, reasonable wait times, extended hours of operation, and record-keeping practices that are sensitive to many prostitutes' concerns for confidentiality. [50] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote50](#)) They should also be specifically designed to address the women's needs in the context of their work as street prostitutes.

The Prostitution Empowerment, Education, and Resources Society (PEERS) in Victoria, British Columbia helps women quit street prostitution in favor of mainstream employment. The program was specifically designed by and for women involved in prostitution who were deterred from using other non-prostitution-specific services (Rabinovitz and Strega 2004).

Key services include the following:

- *Drug and alcohol treatment.* Outreach on the street is essential to funneling prostitutes into needed services. Fast-tracking placement into residential treatment is also critical when women indicate their readiness for change. [51] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote51](#))
- *Mental health treatment.*
- *Housing.* While housing is an obvious need for homeless prostitutes, many other prostitutes live in environments that put them at continued risk for drug use and violence. An array of housing options, including short-term shelters and long-term stable housing, is needed. [52] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote52](#))
- *Peer support systems.* Women wishing to leave prostitution need to develop new identities and need skills to access, establish, and maintain networks of peers who are not involved with prostitution. [53] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote53](#))
- *Child care.* Many women involved with prostitution are also single parents. Childcare is a critical issue to address for both treatment and employment objectives. [54] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote54](#))
- *Job training and employment.*
- *Health care and confidential testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.*
- *Transportation.*
- *Legal aid.*

Some communities offer a service-and-support network through either precharge or postcharge diversion programs, and some even offer these programs on the street, with no formal connection to the criminal justice system. [55] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote55](#)) Although these programs do not necessarily persuade many prostitutes to quit, they are essential for those motivated to do so, and they can be effective in reducing some of the risks to street prostitutes, such as sexually transmitted disease and assault. [56] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote56](#))

13. **Encouraging prostitutes to report serious offenses to the police.** Police in some jurisdictions work hard to develop a good rapport with street prostitutes to persuade them to report juvenile prostitutes, violent clients, client robbery, etc., and to give evidence against pimps. Outreach workers can also be instrumental in convincing prostitutes to cooperate with police on serious matters. Prostitutes who help the police may require extra protection because they risk violent retaliation.

Merseyside, England police developed a computer application to systematically collate reports of crime committed by clients so that this information can be used across the region (Penfold et al. 2004).

14. **Helping prostitutes avoid dangerous clients and situations.** Police in some jurisdictions distribute so-called bad dates (or dodgy punters in the United Kingdom) lists to street prostitutes, warning them to stay away from clients known to assault prostitutes. Police can also post descriptions of dangerous clients and their vehicles on bulletin boards, newsletters, and leaflets. In other places, the prostitutes themselves or outreach workers circulate this information. These lists have led to increased reporting of violent crime against prostitutes. [57] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote57](#)) Police might also support efforts to promote caution in dealing with clients by prostitutes who insist on continuing their trade. This might include encouraging prostitutes to do the following:

- control the locations where they take clients for service, avoiding dimly lit and unfamiliar places
- control negotiations with clients, setting clear limits for accepting or rejecting clients
- maintain prices and safe-sex practices
- work with a partner, copying down license plate numbers and agreeing to seek help if the other does not return within a specified time

- refrain from using drugs when working on the street (drug use reduces awareness, control of self, and control of the situation)
- carry a whistle or other attack prevention device
- not carry drugs or excessive cash. [58] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote58)

The New Westminster (British Columbia) Police Service developed a voluntary forensic identification registry for prostitutes. In the event that women working the streets are abducted or go missing, police have a photograph, fingerprints, DNA sample, and physical description to use when investigating the disappearance. This effort greatly improved relations between police and prostitutes by demonstrating police concern for prostitutes safety. The strategy also increased prostitutes willingness to provide information on various crimes. The medias interest in this initiative may have also deterred potentially violent clients. [59] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote59)

Obviously, some people will object to police efforts to protect prostitutes, believing that doing so condones prostitution.

## → Targeting Clients

Clients are generally more easily deterred than prostitutes. [60] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote60) Almost any form of official or community intervention in clients behavior is sufficient to deter most clients from patronizing street prostitutes, at least at a particular location. This offers some justification for focusing responses on clients. However, since there are many more potential clients than street prostitutes, deterring individual clients does not necessarily reduce the overall demand for street prostitution. [61] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote61) To deter potential clients, they must believe there is a high likelihood they will be caught and publicly identified.

15. **Exposing clients to publicity.** Community groups have organized to expose prostitution clients identity to either the general public or the clients families or employers. This can be done by photographing or videotaping clients, calling clients families or employers, writing down license plate numbers of vehicles seen driving around prostitution strips, mailing warning letters or postcards to registered vehicle owners, or posting clients names or photographs on street posts, billboards, telephone hotline fliers, and internet sites. Some police agencies have sent official letters or postcards warning prostitution clients about the legal and health consequences of patronizing prostitutes. [62] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote62) In some instances, they send these warnings only to those arrested for soliciting prostitutes; in other instances, they send them to the registered owners of suspicious vehicles seen driving through street prostitution areas. In some areas, police use closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras to discourage potential clients from hanging around. [63] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote63)

Some police agencies and local governments have publicized the names and photographs of clients who are either arrested for and/or convicted of prostitution-related offenses. The names and photographs may appear on television, in newspapers, or on internet websites. Many media outlets, however, refuse to participate, deeming it unnewsworthy and not wanting to appear to be an agent of the government. Some local governments have purchased advertising space to publish the information. There should be safeguards so that innocent people are not unfairly implicated or accused in illegal activity. Further, once a client has faced publicity from an initial arrest, he has little to lose, and subsequent threats of publicity are unlikely to be effective. [64] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote64)

In 2003 in Omaha, Nebraska, billboards with the slogan If you are convicted of soliciting a prostitute, you will see your name here publicized the names of six to 12 offenders at a time (Hughes 2004 (/sites/default/files/problems/street\_prostitution/PDFs/Hughes\_2004.pdf) ). In Akron, Ohio, the Operation John Be Gone website, which posted the photographs of men charged with soliciting a prostitute, drew more than 100,000 hits in its first year online (MacMillan 2005).

See Persons (1996) for a thorough discussion of the effectiveness and legality of publicizing prostitution clients names.

16. **Notifying those with influence over clients conduct.** Employers, schools, the military, convention organizers, and other individuals or groups often exert significant informal influence over prostitution clients conduct. You can leverage this influence by seeking such third parties cooperation to discipline clients who come to police attention. This strategy is not intended merely to shame clients, but rather, to change their behavior through disciplinary systems outside the formal justice system. Keep in mind that some forms of discipline, such as employment termination, can be severe.
17. **Restricting clients ability to drive.** The city of Portland, Oregon is widely credited for pioneering the use of vehicle forfeiture laws against prostitution clients. In Portland, most vehicles were returned to the owners under deferred prosecution arrangements, with low levels (about 1%) of clients re-offending. [65] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote65) Some jurisdictions have passed laws that allow judges to suspend or revoke the driving privileges of those convicted of patronizing prostitution. [66] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote66) This approach is intended to deter both potential clients and those who regularly search for, and have sexual transactions with, prostitutes in cars. Many drivers continue to drive without valid licenses, however, so some enforcement will likely be necessary.

## Changing the Environment

18. **Closing streets and alleys, diverting traffic, or regulating parking.** Traffic flow and patterns influence potential clients perceptions about their chances of negotiating a transaction and their risks of getting caught. Traffic-related factors are especially significant where sex acts take place in vehicles. Many clients stop to solicit prostitutes while on their way somewhere else commonly to or home from work. Responses that make it more difficult or risky for clients to negotiate a transaction will either discourage them from soliciting street prostitutes or encourage them to seek indoor prostitutes. [67] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote67) For example, throughways can be closed at one end, two-way streets can be converted to one-way streets, speed bumps can be installed, and right turns can be prohibited to prevent drivers from circling the block. [68] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote68) Under some circumstances, the traffic changes may lock the problem into an area rather than force it out. You should also be careful that any traffic changes do not cause undue harm to residents and legitimate commerce in the area.

See Response Guide No. 2, Closing Streets and Alleys to Reduce Crime, for further discussion of how this response works.

19. **Enforcing zoning, nuisance abatement, and business license regulations against properties used for prostitution.** As noted previously, street prostitution markets depend on other businesses to support them. The police and other enforcement agencies can exert pressure on those businesses to discourage their support of street prostitution by enforcing civil laws and business regulations. Some communities prohibit motels and hotels from renting rooms for short periods (i.e., at hourly rates), and require them to record guests identities through positive proof of identification, thus discouraging their use by prostitutes and clients. [69] (/problems/street\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote69) Zoning regulations that restrict the sorts of businesses that support street prostitution, such as adult entertainment, can be effective. Zoning restrictions have been key in the major redevelopment of Times Square in New York City, where street

prostitution has significantly declined. [70] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote70](#)) The police and private parties can file nuisance abatement actions against businesses that support prostitution. You should get advice and support from legal counsel to pursue these options.

20. **Warning property owners about the use of their premises for prostitution.** Many property owners unwittingly support street prostitution because they do not appreciate how their business practices enable it to flourish. You can remind them of their legal obligations, and provide them and their employees with specific training to help them prevent their properties from being used for prostitution. [71] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote71](#))
21. **Redeveloping the area economy.** Because street prostitution markets flourish under marginal economic conditions, economic redevelopment is often necessary to permanently eliminate street prostitution from the area. New businesses emerge to replace those that supported street prostitution. Economic redevelopment usually requires a substantial investment of government and private resources. Street prostitution may be displaced to even more vulnerable areas.
22. **Securing abandoned buildings.** Street prostitutes and clients sometimes use abandoned buildings for sexual transactions. If rehabilitating or demolishing the buildings is not feasible, securing them can help reduce street prostitution and other offenses in the area. [72] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote72](#))
23. **Enhancing surveillance with improved lighting and CCTV.** Improved lighting reduces the attractiveness of certain areas for street prostitution because it reduces the privacy prostitutes and clients seek to negotiate and complete their transactions. [73] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote73](#)) Motion-sensitive lighting is useful for secluded areas like alleys and doorways. CCTV can also deter some prostitutes or clients who want to avoid detection and simultaneously enhance the general public's perception of area safety, thereby drawing more legitimate activity there. [74] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote74](#))

See Response Guide No. 4, Video Surveillance of Public Places, for further discussion of police use of CCTV.

24. **Providing trash cans.** Providing trash cans for the proper disposal of hazardous and unsightly items (e.g., condoms and lubricants) can both reduce the public health hazard posed by the items and reduce the number of resident complaints. [75] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote75](#)) The extent to which this will work depends on prostitutes and johns willingness to use the trash cans and on placing them near where sex acts occur.

## Responses With Limited Effectiveness

25. **Conducting sweeps.** Sweeps are large-scale arrest campaigns targeting suspected prostitutes, without the intent to prosecute. Sweeps have long been a police strategy to control street prostitution, particularly when they have had few legal alternatives for dealing with the problem, yet have been pressured to do something about it. There is little evidence that sweeps are anything other than temporarily effective at removing prostitutes from the street, and they do considerable harm to the criminal justice systems integrity. It is not uncommon for police to arrest innocent people during sweeps.
26. **Harassing and intimidating prostitutes.** When police have been placed under intense pressure to control street prostitution, yet have lacked adequate legal alternatives for doing so, some have turned to harassing and intimidating prostitutes, in some instances forcing them to relocate to another jurisdiction. There is no evidence that this is at all effective, and it undermines police integrity.
27. **Suspending or revoking government aid to prostitutes.** Many street prostitutes receive government aid in one form or another (e.g., for housing, dependent children, unemployment insurance, and/or disability), but would not qualify for such if they reported their prostitution income. You might share arrest and intelligence information with government agencies providing the aid. [76] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote76](#)) The threat of losing government aid might compel some prostitutes to quit. On the other hand, it might only deepen the financial plight of some prostitutes, further compelling them toward prostitution. For this approach to be viable, adequate social services must be available to help prostitutes. If you use this response, you should take care not to unduly harm any dependent children.
28. **Establishing formal or informal red-light districts where street prostitution is tolerated.** In most cases, the existence of red-light districts has not reduced the volume of street prostitution, the level of nuisance complaints, or the harm to prostitutes. [77] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote77](#)) Creating tolerance zones for street prostitution implies some official approval. As is true with respect to most vices, official disapproval has at least a marginal deterrent effect. In many jurisdictions, this response is not viable because of legal restrictions or public opposition. Most European countries have found that expanding the zones in which prostitution can occur legally is typically accompanied by an increase in activity outside of the approved zones, as sex businesses try to evade regulation and those women who are not suited for working indoors continue to work on the streets. [78] ([/problems/street\\_prostitution/endnotes/#endnote78](#))
29. **Legalizing and decriminalizing prostitution.** The two most radical responses to street prostitution are legalization and decriminalization. Whatever their merits and drawbacks, neither approach is likely to be politically feasible in the foreseeable future in the United States, United Kingdom, or Canada.

Legalization implies that the government will regulate various aspects of prostitution, just as it regulates other forms of commerce. Decriminalization implies no government regulation.

Prostitution itself is not illegal in either the United Kingdom or Canada, as it is in most of the United States, but nearly all forms of soliciting prostitution on the street are illegal, so the net effect is substantially the same—street prostitution is outlawed. Prostitution has been legalized in the Netherlands and recently decriminalized in New Zealand. In Sweden, selling sexual services is legal, but buying them is illegal. Some forms of indoor prostitution have been made legal in Victoria, Australia, but street prostitution remains illegal. The legalization of prostitution in several Nevada counties has not eliminated the problems associated with street prostitution in the cities of Reno and Las Vegas.

## Additional Resources

This [review of prostitution](#) ([/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/johnhow.pdf](#)) by the John Howard Society of Alberta discusses factors that lead to involvement in prostitution, legislative options for dealing with the problem, and alternatives to criminalization.

Department of Justice, Canada (1998). *Federal / Provincial / Territorial Working Group on Prostitution: Report and Recommendations in respect of Legislation, Policy and Practices Concerning Prostitution-Related Activities*. <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/1998/toc.html> (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/1998/toc.html>)

Prostitution Research and Education - <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/> (<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/>)

Gnagey, J.M. and Leonhard, C. (1994). Travel Restrictions for Convicted Prostitutes. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 36(6):16-26.

May, T., A. Harocopos, and P. J. Turnbull (2001). *Selling Sex in the City: An Evaluation of a Targeted Arrest Referral Scheme for Sex Workers in Kings Cross*. *Social Science Research Papers* ([/sites/default/files/problems/street\\_prostitution/PDFs/cpru.pdf](#)) PDF (Portable Document Format), No. 14. London: South Bank University.

In Tampa, Florida, the neighborhood of Southeast Seminole Heights has an organized grass-roots effort to combat prostitution in their community.  
<http://www.geocities.com/dbanghart/prostitution.html> (<http://www.geocities.com/dbanghart/prostitution.html>)

Police in Vancouver, Canada, successfully used a multi-jurisdictional database to track pimps, johns, and prostitutes.

In Fresno, California, johns arrested for the first time were permitted to take a one-day diversionary education program.

The West Palm Beach Police Department, in Florida, has two programs designed to target prostitutes and their customers.

P.R.E.P. Prostitute Relocation and Enforcement Program - <http://wpbpolice.tripod.com/prep.html> (<http://wpbpolice.tripod.com/prep.html>)

P.I.P.E. Prostitute Impact Prevention Education - <http://www.wpbpolice.org/> (<http://www.wpbpolice.org/>)

## Summary of Responses

The table below summarizes the responses to street prostitution, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

<b><i>Deterring Prostitutes and Clients</i></b>				
#	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
1	<a href="#">Enforcing laws prohibiting soliciting, patronizing and loitering for the purposes of prostitution</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r1</a> )	Temporarily removes prostitutes and clients from the streets	there are follow-up programs to help prostitutes quit or switch to indoor venues, and enforcement is combined with other effective responses	Strategy is expensive; has only a short-term impact; may increase prostitution by displacing the problem to new locations, and by compelling prostitutes to work more to pay fines
1a	<a href="#">Enforcing laws prohibiting prostitution and the solicitation thereof</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r1a</a> )	Temporarily removes prostitutes and clients from the streets; increases the costs of business; deters arrested clients from reoffending	a prosecution will result in meaningful/difficult sanctions against the prostitute, and the pool of potential clients is relatively small	Strategy is expensive; to obtain admissible evidence; jail time is usually limited or none; discourages prostitutes from calling police when they are victims; creates additional incentives to engage in prostitution to pay fines; prosecutors may elect not to prosecute; the population of potential clients is large enough that general deterrence is difficult to achieve solely by arrest strategies; arresting clients requires a sufficient number of female police officers; undercover assignment not popular among police
1b	<a href="#">Enforcing laws prohibiting conduct associated with prostitution and the solicitation thereof</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r1b</a> )	Deters prostitutes from soliciting and clients from searching for prostitutes on the streets, without requiring proof of actual sexual transactions	a prosecution will result in meaningful/difficult sanctions against the prostitute, and the pool of potential clients is relatively small	Legality (courts have struck down such laws for being either vague or overly broad); the population of potential clients is large enough that general deterrence is difficult to achieve solely by arrest strategies
1c	<a href="#">Intensively enforcing prostitution laws against prostitutes and/or clients for short periods</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r1c</a> )	Temporarily removes prostitutes from the streets; deters potential clients from frequenting the area	there is media coverage, and the campaign is followed by changes to the environment where the street prostitution occurs	Media coverage can have the opposite effect of promoting prostitution by advertising the location of prostitution prostitution strolls; may increase the risk of harm faced by prostitutes by forcing them to work in unfamiliar areas
2	<a href="#">Establishing a highly visible police presence</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r2</a> )	Discourages both prostitutes and clients from negotiations	it is followed by changes to the environment where street prostitution occurs	Labor intensive; creates the perception that the area is unsafe
3	<a href="#">Relaxing the regulation of indoor prostitution venues</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r3</a> )	Gives street prostitutes some incentive to relocate to indoors	...street prostitutes are able to work indoors	May be perceived as condoning prostitution; in concern to police for their role in sexual door venues are of serious exploitation of trafficked women
4	<a href="#">Enhancing fines/penalties for prostitution-related offenses committed within specified high-activity zones</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r4</a> )	Displaces the street prostitution market from a particular area	it is followed by changes to the environment where street prostitution occurs	Displacement may be to areas where the impact is even worse
5	<a href="#">Banning prostitutes or clients from certain areas</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r5</a> )	Reduces the opportunities for prostitutes and clients to solicit and patronize	there is adequate monitoring of bans and good physical descriptions of offenders	Requires legal authority; may displace prostitutes to new areas outside the prohibited zone, which, if remote, may prove more hazardous to them
6	<a href="#">Using community justice panels and community service sentences in lieu of incarceration or fines</a> ( <a href="#">/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r6</a> )	Creates meaningful consequences for prostitutes and clients offending; consumes prostitutes time	there is adequate monitoring of compliance with sentences, and community members are willing to serve on panels	Requires monitoring by the court and corrections officials

7	<a href="#">Enlisting community members to provide surveillance or to publicly protest against prostitutes or clients</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r7)	Creates the impression that offenders will be constantly monitored and reported; increases the pressure on public officials to address the problem	the community is willing to sustain protests and remain lawful, and police maintain supervision and oversight	Risks of overzealousness (vigilantism); displacement to other locations; street patrols require committed leaders to recruit, organize, and mobilize members
8	<a href="#">Educating and warning high-risk prostitute and client populations</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r8)	Deters young people from getting into prostitution; discourages potential clients; education programs for arrested clients deter repeat offending	there is evidence of the recruitment of prostitutes from target populations, the messages are carefully tailored to the target audience, and there are adequate resources to run education programs	Young people at seriously high risk usually have several critical social problems that require attention if they are to be kept out of prostitution; costs of running programs; adequate deterrence may be achieved by any form of official intervention; schools do not target clients at highest risk of violence

#### Targeting Prostitutes

#	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
9	<a href="#">Serving restraining orders/civil injunctions against habitual prostitutes</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r9)	Effectively controls and deters the activities of large numbers of prostitutes working in a particular area; conserves police resources by focusing on the most problematic offenders	complainants are willing to file for court orders, and there are small numbers of chronic offenders	Labor-intensive and costly to document people and activities; legality varies by jurisdiction
10	<a href="#">Mediating conflicts between prostitutes and the community</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r10)	Keeps prostitutes away from the areas of highest citizen complaints, or from engaging in the most offensive behaviors	the community is willing to tolerate some level of street prostitution	Difficult to get prostitutes to adhere to agreements
11	<a href="#">Imposing curfews on prostitutes</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r11)	Restricts prostitutes working hours	there are short periods during which street prostitution is most prevalent	Requires a judicial order as a condition of bail or probation; requires monitoring by police or corrections officials
12	<a href="#">Helping prostitutes to quit</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r12)	Provides prostitutes with support services to enable them to leave prostitution; health screening and education prevents the spread of sexually transmitted diseases	programs are prostitution-specific and easily accessible, and there are sufficient sanctions for noncompliance	Street prostitutes, especially juveniles and those managed by pimps, are difficult to persuade; privacy considerations; prostitutes can be hard to reach and/or reluctant to accept treatment (e.g., for fear of losing custody of their children)
13	<a href="#">Encouraging prostitutes to report serious offenses to the police</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r13)	Improves the police ability to investigate serious offenses that might otherwise go unreported and/or unsolved	police can establish a sufficient level of trust among prostitutes	Prostitutes giving evidence against pimps increases the risks of violent retaliation
14	<a href="#">Helping prostitutes avoid dangerous clients and situations</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r14)	Reduces the risk of physical assaults to prostitutes	police can establish a sufficient level of trust among prostitutes	Police can be accused of condoning prostitution

#### Targeting Clients

#	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
15	<a href="#">Exposing clients to publicity</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r15)	Shames clients to deter them from re-offending; discourages potential clients	the community and media support public shaming, and most clients solicit from vehicles	Media reluctance to publicize information deemed unnewsworthy; risks arousing suspicions against innocent people; legal restrictions; privacy concerns; the potential for geographic displacement; deterrent value is lost after first exposure
16	<a href="#">Notifying those with influence over clients conduct</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r16)	Creates meaningful consequences for clients conduct	clients are influenced by informal social controls	The penalty (e.g., getting fired) may be harsher than some believe is fair
17	<a href="#">Restricting clients' ability to drive</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r17)	Deters curb-crawling (driving at a slow speed with the primary purpose of observing and/or making contact with a prostitute)	...most clients solicit from vehicles	Legal challenges and restrictions; low rates of compliance with license suspensions and revocations

#### Changing the Environment

#	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
18	<a href="#">Closing streets and alleys, diverting traffic, or regulating parking</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r18)	Increases the difficulty for clients to find and negotiate with prostitutes	the community the changes affect supports them, and most clients solicit from vehicles	Potentially costly; can harm residential and legitimate commercial traffic; may lock the problem in rather than forcing it out, by creating an inaccessible enclave; slowing traffic may be conducive to curb-crawling

19	<a href="#">Enforcing zoning, nuisance abatement, and business license regulations against properties used for prostitution</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r19)	Restricts the availability of locations for sexual activities; discourages the use of motels and hotels for prostitution	sexual transactions take place on properties subject to regulation	Civil law processes can be cumbersome and unfamiliar to police; requires support from government lawyers
20	<a href="#">Warning property owners about the use of their premises for prostitution</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r20)	Improves property owners capacity or willingness to prohibit prostitution-related activities on their property	sexual transactions take place on those properties	Some property owners may feel they are being unfairly accused
21	<a href="#">Redeveloping the area economy</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r21)	Promotes legitimate activity to displace illegitimate activity	improvements will substantially change the conditions that allow street prostitution to flourish	Costly in the short term; potential displacement to more vulnerable areas
22	<a href="#">Securing abandoned buildings</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r22)	Keeps prostitutes and clients from having private places for sexual transactions	sexual transactions take place in abandoned buildings	Costs of securing buildings; potential displacement to other locations
23	<a href="#">Enhancing surveillance with improved lighting and CCTV</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r23)	Improves the areas appearance; improves natural surveillance to deter prostitution	lighting is inadequate, and sexual transactions take place in dark, secluded places	Costs of lighting; may backfire by increasing perceptions of safety and drawing more activity to the area
24	<a href="#">Providing trash cans</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r24)	Encourages the proper disposal of hazardous items	they are placed near where sexual transactions occur	Must be emptied regularly; police may be accused of condoning prostitution
<b>Responses With Limited Effectiveness</b>				
#	Response	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
25	<a href="#">Conducting sweeps</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r25)	Temporarily removes prostitutes and clients from the streets		Undermines the criminal justice system and police integrity; the risks of arresting innocent people
26	<a href="#">Harassing and intimidating prostitutes</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r26)	Discourages prostitutes from offending		Undermines police integrity; geographically displaces the problem
27	<a href="#">Suspending or revoking government aid to prostitutes</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r27)	Encourages prostitutes to quit	prostitutes are receiving significant amounts of aid without reporting prostitution income, and aid agencies are willing to take action	Implications for dependent children; requires adequate social service follow-up; may have opposite effect of promoting more prostitution to replace lost income
28	<a href="#">Establishing formal or informal red-light districts where street prostitution is tolerated</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r28)	Reduces nuisance complaints; increases the police ability to monitor street prostitution and related crime	the community is willing to tolerate some level of street prostitution, and the red-light district can be adequately policed and will not attract additional clients from other communities	Legality (ruled unconstitutional in Canada as a local option); the expansion of street prostitution out of the tolerance zones; lack of public support; ineffective in reducing nuisance complaints or harm to prostitutes under some conditions;
29	<a href="#">Legalizing and decriminalizing prostitution</a> (/problems/street_prostitution/3/#r29)	Legalization subjects prostitution to administrative regulation		Not politically feasible in foreseeable future in the United States, United Kingdom, or Canada

## Endnotes

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[2](/problems/street\_prostitution/#endref2) See Goldstein (1977) and Newburn (1999)[Full Text] (/sites/default/files/problems/street\_prostitution/PDFs/Newburn\_1999.pdf) for discussions of police corruption generally, and the special hazards of policing prostitution.

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