

Sex and the City

Changes in the local governmental approach to female sex workers and its consequences for the labour conditions of unlicensed working female sex workers in Rotterdam

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Preface

Finally, I can show you the research I have been working on in the past year. I knew beforehand that it would be a challenging subject, with many different points of view, interests and at some points, even conflicts. The sex industry, and especially the *unlicensed* sex industry, is a dynamic theme that is always subject to change and where the moral debate is highly involved. The pandemic made it extra challenging to conduct this research, but at the same time, it highlighted its importance. I would like to thank my supervisors from the universities, Richard Staring and Rachel Seoighe, for their guidance and support. I am thankful to Esmee Boerema, my supervisor, and everyone from the Municipality of Rotterdam for my internship because they offered me an important peak behind the scenes. The support of my parents, my partner, my friends, and my fellow IMARC-students, should be mentioned as well. Finally, I explicitly want to thank all respondents who were willing to take part in this research. I know for some of them, the stakes were high and I want to thank them for their trust and openness. I realize that I still have a lot to learn, but this research journey taught me incredibly much about the process of doing research and made my interest and passion for science even larger. I hope this study gives an insight into a world that remains hidden for many and offers tools for the future.

Nina Eggens

Rotterdam, May 13, 2022

Abstract

This study aims to understand how the local governmental approach to unlicensed working female sex workers in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, has changed since 2000 with the lift of the brothel ban, and how this has impacted their labour conditions. In total, 38 qualitative in-depth interviews with 40 respondents, including sex workers, social workers, and authorities, and 17 observations have been conducted. In general, the Rotterdam municipal approach to its sex industry has become stricter. The number of licensed sex businesses in Rotterdam is decreasing, and sex workers indicate that it has become less appealing to work licensed. Moreover, the requirements to work licensed have become stricter, which makes certain groups of sex workers, including sex workers below the age of 21 and migrant sex workers without a working license, automatically dependent on the unlicensed industry. With the rise of the internet, sex workers can now easier work unlicensed, which has advantages in terms of efficient and flexible working hours and income. This improves their agency, but also their autonomy since they no longer need third persons to arrange meetings with clients and a workplace. Regarding safety and reaching out for help, it strongly depends on how a sex worker has arranged her work and what measures she takes. Working unlicensed, thus, does not necessarily have to mean working unsafely. Because unlicensed working sex workers feel that they cannot rely on authorities, they take measures themselves and do not report abuses. There have been positive developments as well, such as the opening of Door2Door with the confidential counselor, which is appreciated by sex workers. Unlicensed working sex workers are a heterogenous group in terms of age, experience, financial situation and level of integration in Dutch society. How one has arranged her work, and thus the level of agency, autonomy, health, safety and contact with other sex workers, can vary widely. This study argues that future research and policies should take this into account. Despite the positive developments, policies should be designed for specific groups of sex workers rather than making the general approach stricter. Finally, sex workers have often more agency than authorities would expect, and therefore they should be more involved in the development of policies. This could make them feel taken seriously, it would enable them to have a say in their own industry and it could improve the relationship between government and sex workers.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The importance of this study

In May 2020, the Dutch online magazine *Vers Beton* addressed the current changes in the Dutch sex industry (Van den Braak & Dupont-Nivet, 2020). According to this article, both national and local policies on sex work have become more and more strict, and the number of licensed places to work safely in Rotterdam is decreasing. The article states that, therefore, Rotterdam sex workers are increasingly going 'underground' and out of sight by the authorities; they meet their clients in their houses, but also in hotels, Airbnbs and even allotments gardens. Consequently, according to the article, these sex workers are subsequently more at risk of blackmail, theft, assault, rape, and human trafficking. This alleged development is remarkable because, in its most recent policy note *Policy Prostitution and sex industry* (2015, p.5), the Municipality of Rotterdam explicitly expresses its desire to "tackle and prevent abuses in the sex industry through prostitution policy and to strengthen the position of the sex worker". This paradox raises the question: what exactly has changed in Rotterdam, and how did this impact its sex industry?

In 2000, the Netherlands officially lifted its brothel ban (Kazemier & Rensman, 2015). Sex work itself was not illegal but facilitating or organizing it, for example by operating a brothel, was prohibited (Vanwesenbeeck, 2011). With the lift, the organization of sex work has been officially legalized in the Netherlands (Wijers, 2017). Another consequence of the lift is that the responsibility of sex work policies and laws shifted from the national government to local municipalities (Jans et al., 2013). In this way, municipalities in the Netherlands became responsible for their policies regarding sex work (Post et al., 2019). To the Municipal Law (Dutch: *Gemeentewet*), Article 151a was added, which provides the legal basis to develop a sex work policy (Jans et al., 2013). Although municipalities are authorized to shape their own policies, the national legislator did set 'boundaries': for instance, the minimum age to perform sex work in the Netherlands is eighteen years, and migration law still applies, such as having a permit which allows labour (Government of the Netherlands, 2015). When the brothel ban was lifted, the national legislator made clear that a total ban (Dutch: *nuloptie*) on sex work is legally not possible because this would be contrary to the constitutional right of

free choice of employment (Jans et al., 2013). However, several municipalities circumvented this by simply not issuing licenses, and therefore a total ban can still exist (Van Wijk et al., 2014).

Policies are a tool of authority to regulate the sex industry, and they have concrete, real-world consequences when it is operationalized and implemented (Wagenaar et al., 2017). In the past decades, a trend in politics and policies has developed in which sex work is almost automatically linked to human trafficking (Snippe et al., 2018). Siegel's study (2015) on the closure of the window area in Utrecht ('het Zandpad') in 2013 shows why it is problematic when legislative and policy decisions are made while a clear overview of the local sex industry is lacking. They argue that in Utrecht, this has led to policy decisions that have exacerbated rather than alleviated existing problems, including the growth of its unlicensed¹ sex industry. Siegel (2015, p.143) refers to a "human trafficking hype", an exaggerated and intensive promotion of negative images of sex work. However, a variety of studies show that human trafficking and sex work are not the same phenomena, and a clear and careful distinction should be made (for example Oude Breuil et al., 2011; Weitzer, 2011). Still, the 2020 annual report of the Municipality of Rotterdam refers to "human trafficking and prostitution policy" as a thematic approach to subversive crime (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2021, p.5). Besides Utrecht, similar studies have been conducted in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands (for example Verhoeven et al., 2011; Aalbers & Sabat, 2012), and The Hague (Rijnink & Van Wijk, 2020). It is therefore remarkable that only a little attention has been paid to sex workers in Rotterdam, since this is the second-largest city in the Netherlands. The article at the beginning of this introduction is not unique; the rise of unlicensed brothels because of a stricter approach has been highlighted in many more news items (for example Ligtoet & Van Westing, 2021; Den Tek, 2021). Several new items (for example Boere, 2021; Moonen, 2021) also link this rise to the pandemic, because sex workers were not allowed to work during the lockdowns (De Wildt, 2021). According to Goderie and Boutellier (2006), if the desired supply is not available in the legal sector, clients will go to the unlicensed industry. The fact that no studies have focused so far on this

¹ This study uses the term unlicensed rather than illegal sex work. To avoid misunderstanding and to maintain clearance, the definition is explained in Chapter 1.4.2.

development makes research on the link between changing policies and unlicensed sex work in Rotterdam even more relevant.

Although sex work has been legalized for over twenty years, there is still a debate going on whether sex work could be considered a normal profession, including prejudices and stereotypes (Siegel, 2015). For instance, Dutch media often represent sex workers as victims of human trafficking, which opens the door to a more restrictive policy (Duits & Boschhuizen, 2021). Documentaries, newspaper articles and movies repeat these kinds of images, to evoke and anchor disgust and even anger about the sex industry in the public's opinion (Fairclough, 2003; Wagenaar et al., 2017). These prejudices and the stigma by society may have an impact on policy and law-making, and these entrench in public discourse and knowledge (Benoit et al., 2018). According to Weitzer (2012), politicians and policymakers regularly make statements that are not based on (all the) facts, and they often rely on studies with a poor methodology, for example an incomplete database or conducted by researchers who did not include one sex worker at all. Moreover, conventional sex work research rarely includes the voices of sex workers themselves (Van der Meulen, 2011). Sex workers should be included in studies to raise awareness and tackle prejudices and misconceptions (Graça et al., 2018). This study will therefore include the perspective of sex workers, aid agencies and authorities to gain a holistic view of the changes in the Rotterdam unlicensed sex industry and the consequences for the labour conditions of its sex workers.

1.2. Research question and overall aims

An overview of how the changes in the local governmental approach since 2000, the moment local governments became responsible for their local sex industry, have impacted sex workers in Rotterdam is lacking. Consequently, it is unclear how the labour conditions of unlicensed working sex workers are shaped. Therefore, the key question in this research is as follows:

How has the local government approach to female sex workers in Rotterdam changed since 2000, and how have these changes affected the labour conditions of unlicensed working female sex workers in Rotterdam?

A thorough understanding of the unlicensed sex industry in Rotterdam could play an important role in the local legislative and policy decisions. This explorative research aims to understand the current labour conditions of female sex workers working unlicensed in Rotterdam, and how this has changed in the past two decades in response to legal decisions and policies. It will be explained from the point of view of the female sex workers themselves and how they perceive the changes in their work regarding their safety and the (lacking) opportunities to work legally. As Desyllas (2013) notes, much research on the sex industry focuses on violence, mental health, drugs and alcohol use and STDs. Consequently, they argue, there is a disproportionate focus on the harms of sex work instead of the empowering or strength-based aspects of the labour. Vanwesenbeeck (2001) advocates for a more balanced perspective, in which harms and abuses can be discussed, but there should also be attention to the independent worker and entrepreneur. Thus, they argue, researchers should “make serious work of adequate differentiation” (p.297). This study aims therefore to include both positive and negative sides of working in the sex industry, with an eye for nuance. If the municipality is willing to incorporate the results of this study in its local policies, it can improve the positions of the sex workers in the unlicensed industry by improving the opportunities and conditions in the licensed sector.

As a last remark, it should be noted that this is a qualitative study. Although attempts have been made to estimate the number of sex workers in the Rotterdam unlicensed sex industry (for example Goderie & Boutellier, 2006; RIEC, 2012) and to develop more precise measuring instruments (for example Smit et al., 2018), the dark number is inevitable. This study, therefore, does not aim to estimate the number of unlicensed sex establishments or female sex workers in the unlicensed industry but rather focuses on the stories and experiences of these sex workers, and how they perceive the changes and the consequences for their labour conditions. Respondents from authorities and aid agencies are also asked for their experiences, opinions, and expectations.

1.3. Theoretical starting points

Although sex work has been legalized in the Netherlands, it is often still not considered a conventional profession (Snippe et al., 2018). Neither does legalization mean that sex work is always allowed; municipal policies and by-laws

can still prohibit specific forms of sex of sex work, or circumstances in which sex work takes place (Bleeker & Van den Braak, 2021). Specific forms of sex work may thus be prohibited, but for many women, unlicensed sex work is still their source of income (De Wildt, 2021). In *Crime as work*, Letkemann (1973) takes an occupational perspective, and emphasizes the “work” of crime and its similarities to “conventional” careers. By using occupational terms such as profession, apprenticeship, specialization, and skill, they argue (pp. 5-6, 163) that criminals need necessary skills to be successful in their work, the possibilities to acquire these skills, the effects of technological developments, the financial rewards and the potential costs and dangers. By conceptualizing criminalized behavior as a “job”, a nonnormative space can be created in which actions, motivations and techniques can be analyzed without stigma (Caputo & King, 2011). Lucas (2005), for instance, applied this perspective and examine sex worker’s views of sex work, which is criminalized in the United States, as paid work. They argue that “simply deviance does not adequately explain variations in attitudes and experience” (p.540), and that sex work is in some ways very similar to other work, such as service sector work and self-employment. For instance, there is a problem of uneven demand, there are periods of financial insecurity, and some forms of self-employment offers flexibility and autonomy. Caputo and King (2011) therefore argue that rather than distinguishing different forms of work based on illegal or deviant aspects of behavior, it can be distinguished based on “nuances of the particular occupation – the setting, the informal and formal rules, the environment, the economic impact, technology, the risk negotiated, and so on” (p.174).

When it comes to describing illegal activities, one should address the role of gender. Steffensmeier and Terry (1986) describe how women tend to be relegated to subservient roles because it is perceived they would lack certain social and personal capital, which limits their actual or perceived ability to perpetrate crimes. These authors call this “institutional sexism in the underworld” (p.319). Miller (2002) argues that although there are structural inequalities in society, women involved in illegal activities can have agency. By researching unlicensed sex work in terms of labour conditions, thus, an insight in how these women shape their occupation can be gained.

1.4. Important definitions and demarcation

1.4.1. Sex work: a broad concept

In general, the Municipality of Rotterdam uses the term 'prostitution' rather than 'sex work' and defines it as "making oneself available to perform sexual acts with another person for payment", as described in Article 3:2 of the Municipal By-law. In line with the legal definition, the Municipality of Rotterdam (n.d.) distinguishes four forms of sex work: sex businesses with a license, working from home (Dutch: thuiswerk), escort companies and window- and street-based sex work. The latter is explicitly prohibited in Rotterdam (Municipal By-law, Article 3:17). Sociological definitions, that focus on the context and organization of sex work (Weitzer, 2009) may differ from strict legal definitions. Auguston and George (2015, p. 230), for example, describe sex work as "the exchange of sexual acts for pay", and the sex industry as "a broad range of sexual services including pornography, phone and internet sex". Weitzer (2009) describes the variety of types of sex work and focuses on direct, offline sex work. He distinguishes call girl, escort, brothel worker, massage parlour worker, bar or casino worker and streetwalker. However, sex work takes place online too, for example webcam and pornography (Grubb, 2020). In conclusion, there are many forms of sex work and it depends on how one conceptualizes it. This study focuses on direct, offline sex work, without specifying a specific form.

1.4.2. Licensed, unlicensed and illegal sex work

In legislative terms, the Municipality of Rotterdam distinguishes three forms of sex work: licensed, unlicensed and illegal sex work, as listed in its Policy Prostitution and sex industry (2015). The first form, licensed sex work, focuses on sex work that requires a license. In Rotterdam, this includes location-based sex businesses (such as clubs, private homes), escort agencies that mediate between sex workers and customers, businesses that offer broader sexual services such as peep shows, and businesses that offer erotic imagery, such as sex cinemas (Municipality of Rotterdam, n.d). A license is required when the activity has a 'business-like appearance' (Dutch: bedrijfsmatig karakter). This includes, among other things, advertising, multiple persons working at the same address, the degree of organization and the scope of the services offered (Municipality of Rotterdam, n.d.). Secondly, unlicensed sex work refers to working from home. In Rotterdam, this is allowed if the person is registered on the address, works alone, and does

not have a business-like appearance (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015), as described above. Here, a license is thus not required. Thirdly, sex work is considered illegal when a license is required but has not been requested, or it has been requested but has not been granted by the municipality. Unlicensed sex work is, thus, not the same as illegal sex work (Timmermans et al., 2018). For example, a club or an adult cinema that does not have a license is considered illegal. Two forms of sex work are prohibited under all circumstances: window-based and street-based sex work (soliciting), as stated in Article 3:16 of the Municipal By-law. When a sex worker is working in places that are not intended for sex work, such as Airbnbs or industrial areas, it is considered illegal as well.

Finally, there are three situations in which sex work itself is not illegal, but the circumstances make it so. Firstly, a law called Rotterdamwet, requires a license to live in specific neighbourhoods in Rotterdam to combat nuisance and improve the living conditions. In case a sex worker lives in such a neighbourhood and works from home without complying with the Rotterdamwet, she is thus working illegal. Furthermore, in the Netherlands, there are requirements to perform labour. In general, if the sex worker is from one of the countries of the European Economic Area² (EEA), she can work in the sex industry³ (Government of the Netherlands, 2015). Sex workers from outside the EEA may only work as self-employed (freelancer) and they need a valid residence permit with the status 'freelance work permitted', which means that they are allowed to work (Government of the Netherlands, 2015). In other words, sex workers from, for example, Latin America without a work license, are thus working illegally. Finally, the minimum age in Rotterdam to work in the sex industry is set at 21 years of age (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015). In case a sex worker is between 18 and 21 years of age, it is considered illegal sex work. In case the sex worker is a minor, it is considered human trafficking, which is criminalized in Article 273f of the Dutch Criminal Code. Minor 'sex workers', therefore, are not included in this study.

² The European Economic Area (EEA) includes the 27 countries of the European Union (EU), Lichtenstein, Norway, and Iceland (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). The Netherlands is a member of the EU.

³ Citizens of Croatia are only allowed to work as self-employed (freelancer) (Government of the Netherlands, 2015).

Furthermore, there have been three lockdowns in the Netherlands in which sex work was completely prohibited: 23 March 2020 to 1 July 2020 (1), 15 December 2020 to 19 May 2021 (2), and 19 December 2021 to 15 January 2022 (3) (RIVM, 2022). Working during covid measures could lead to a fine of up to 4000 euros (OM, 2020). In this study, the lockdowns are not considered a change in local governmental approach to the Rotterdam sex industry. The pandemic was an exceptional situation in which measures focused on public health and not the sex industry itself. However, as the results will indicate, the lockdowns have impacted the labour conditions of unlicensed working sex workers in several ways that cannot be ignored. Almost all respondents referred to the pandemic at least once during the interviews, an indication that the pandemic plays a large role in their life. Where relevant, therefore, the pandemic and the consequences for the unlicensed working sex workers will be discussed.

A debate exists regarding the terms illegal sex work and unlicensed sex work. Although the municipality distinguishes three forms (licensed, unlicensed and illegal), over the course of this study it became clear that the category unlicensed does not have meaning in practice because these requirements are so strict that most sex workers fall under illegal sex work. In legal terms, the sex workers included in this study can be considered working illegally because they frequently advertise. A variety of social workers (A1, A4, A7), several sex workers (S6, S8, S14) and the Dutch alien policy AVIM (2020) explicitly state that the term 'illegal sex work' is stigmatizing and technically not correct, since sex work is considered a legal profession in the Netherlands. Although one should be aware that in legal terms, unlicensed and illegal sex work are two different categories, this study uses the term unlicensed sex work, which could be described as offering sexual services in return for money or goods, that is not in line with the requirements of licensed sex work. Quotes, for example from literature or respondents in this study, are an exception to this terminology to maintain accuracy.

1.4.3. Labour conditions

Different studies (for instance Adriaenssens et al., 2016; Orchiston, 2016; Gilmour, 2016) define 'labour conditions' in different ways. In other words, there is no standard overview of the different aspects of labour conditions. For this reason, the labour conditions and definitions mentioned in various studies will be

combined. Firstly, Adriaenssens et al. (2016) state that labour conditions include issues such as income, job security, social protection and contractual dimensions, which are often called employment relations. 'Income' is the amount of money a sex worker makes, after deducting costs such as rent and equipment. Since sex work is considered a job, or at least an income-generating activity (Adriaenssens et al., 2016), income is an important aspect of working conditions. As Bonnet and Venkatesh (2016) point out, little is known about pricing, how much sex workers earn and what they do with these earnings. 'Job security' can be defined as "the security of staying in the same job with the same employer" (Zekic, 2016, p.548). Since sex workers working unlicensed often move and thus do not work at the same place for a very long time (Goderie & Boutellier, 2006), it can also be described as the guarantee of ongoing work (Adriaenssens et al., 2016), and thus the guarantee of income. Thirdly, 'social protection' includes health care, pension coverage, paid sick leave and unemployment (McCann & Fudge, 2017). Obviously, not everything is applicable to unlicensed working sex workers, but health care and being able to stop working in case of illness for example, are included labour conditions. Fourthly, contractual dimensions refer to the employment relationship a sex worker professionally has (Adriaenssens et al., 2016). Again, unlicensed working sex workers do not have a formal employment relation. Therefore, informal or verbal agreements (for example about the rent) are also included.

According to Adriaenssens et al. (2016), labour conditions also refer to matters of work content and organization; in other words, intrinsic dimensions of quality of work. This includes autonomy, control, working conditions, quality of social relations and union support. Firstly, both 'autonomy' and 'control' can be over their commercial everyday sex work patterns and client interactions (Sanders et al., 2016). Autonomy refers to working independently and being economically independent (in other words: no need for others) and control is more about agency, the ability to make decisions, for example about working hours (Gilmour, 2016). Moreover, Orchiston (2016, p.177) includes safety, breaks and appearance requirements, such as a dress code as labour conditions. Safety can be physical and mental. Regarding physical safety, protection against violence and abuse is important. Mental (or emotional) safety refers to psychological distress, which can also be a consequence of physical violence and abuse. Another working condition is the circumstances of the place in which the sexual service takes place, such as

its facilities (for example the amount of workspace, the presence of an alarm button), privacy, and hygiene. Since sex work entails physical contact, health care and protection against STDs should be considered as well. Moreover, Orchiston (2016, p.193) refers to 'quality of social relations', which includes stigma, (dis)trust of government authorities and fear of prosecution. For instance, this author describes that sex workers perceive government agencies as 'whorephobic' and judgmental about sex work. Finally, regarding 'union support', sex workers can find empowerment and a collective voice (Sanders et al., 2018). Union support can be defined to "bring together a range of sex workers to have increased lobbying and political power" (Van der Meulen, 2012, p.160). This is an important aspect of labour conditions because unionization advocates for shared agreements on for example better access to resources and services, and therefore increase individual worker agency (McMillan & Worth, 2015).

In conclusion, this study focuses on nine aspects of labour conditions (in random order): income (1), job security (2), social protection (3), contractual dimensions (4), autonomy (5), control (6), working conditions (7), quality of social relations (8) and union support (9). These labour conditions are often intertwined, and each chapter of the result section will discuss an aspect. The labour conditions are listed in the topic list that was used during the interviews, see Appendix A.

1.4.4. Female sex workers

Finally, there are female, male, and transgendered sex workers. However, it is indicated that most sex workers in the Rotterdam sex industry, both licensed and unlicensed, are female (RIEC, 2012). Regarding characteristics of these sex workers (such as age, nationality, residence status), no further distinction will be made. Thus, all female sex workers working unlicensed in Rotterdam will be included.

1.5. Previously conducted studies

Although the signals of abuses in the Rotterdam sex industry discussed at the beginning of this introduction need to be taken seriously, it is hard to find academic literature that supports these claims. Most studies focus on the Netherlands in general or other Dutch cities such as The Hague, Amsterdam or Utrecht (for example Siegel, 2015; Verhoeven & Van Straalen, 2015). Furthermore, many

studies focus on sex work in relation to sexual exploitation or human trafficking, and not so much on the labour aspect (for example Bolhaar et al., 2020). According to the Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety (CCV), explorations (Dutch: verkenningen) have been carried out, but these are not scientifically substantiated (N. Eggen, personal communication, September 22, 2021). The Municipality of Rotterdam itself conducts research as well, but these studies mainly focus on the specific group with a Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) in relation to human trafficking (for example Nanhoe, Van de Looij-Jansen & Van Horssen, 2019; Nanhoe & Kreijen, 2019; Nanhoe & Brand, 2019). In other words, studies specifically focusing on the changes in the governmental approach to sex work, and the consequences for unlicensed working female sex workers, remain rather limited. There have been studies conducted that have interfaces with this topic, and these will be presented in these paragraphs.

Pitcher and Wijers (2014) consider the impact of different regulatory models on the employment rights, safety and welfare of sex workers by comparing the legislative backgrounds of the Netherlands and United Kingdom (UK). These authors argue that in the Netherlands, the lift of the brothel ban in 2000 did not lead to improvements to sex workers' labour positions, but rather "increased controls within the legitimate sector and created a dual system whereby illegal workers have become increasingly disenfranchised" (p.560). According to these authors, the lift created a constricted legal market which excludes undocumented workers who cannot, but also women that do not want to comply with the strict conditions imposed in the licensed industry. In other words, these sex workers' agency has been limited due to restrictions by policies. Vanwesenbeeck (2011, p.23) adds that the development of new legislation specifically for the sex industry "(re)creates illegal categories and further inequalities". She therefore argues that mandatory registration is short-sighted, non-effective and destructive. Another study by Bleeker et al. (2022) focuses on different legislative models of sex work and the known consequences of each model. Although it does not specifically focus on Rotterdam, one important conclusion is that large differences in sex work policies exist in the Netherlands. It suggests that a licensing system, which is also the case in Rotterdam, may lead to an increasing impact on operators of licensed sex businesses, and that sex workers will increasingly work from home. This could

mean a shift in agency: from a lack of due to operators, to an increase when working from home, where one can decide their own conditions.

Goderie et al. (2002) point out that in the sex industry, shifts and movements often take place due to increased enforcement. For instance, they conclude that sex workers have shifted towards escort, non-official workplaces (such as pubs, forests and industrial areas), street-based sex work and virtual intermediation or organization via the internet. Especially sex workers that do escort would be lost out of sight by authorities and aid agencies because it enables sex workers to adapt in response to policy changes and increased enforcement. An evaluation by the Municipality of Rotterdam (2004) indeed shows that authorities are aware that escorts do not always fulfill the requirements. A later study by Goderie and Boutellier (2006) shows that sex workers are increasingly working as escorts, and that the internet enables sex workers to find clients via advertisements. Indeed, Vanweesenbeeck (2011) describes that because of the internet and mobile phones, a broad range of options became possible for clients and sex workers to meet. A more recent study by Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) confirms these conclusions, by arguing that the internet enables sex workers to advertise and find clients by themselves; location-based sex businesses, thus, are no longer necessary. These authors also mention that sex workers work from Airbnbs because they want to continue working despite the decrease in licensed workplaces. Consequently, they argue, this had led to more invisible forms of sex work. The study by Ferwerda and Rijnink (2020) confirms that sex workers are increasingly using Airbnbs as workplaces. The decrease of licensed sex businesses was already noticed by Goderie et al. (2002) and RIEC South Holland South (2011). Since the lift of the brothel ban, Goderie et al. (2002) state, only half of the licensed sex businesses were still around. These authors argue that this decrease is a consequence of the strict licensing system and that several sex businesses had to stop, although it does not explain exactly how it has become stricter.

Several studies describe the different forms of mobility sex workers have. RIEC South Holland South (2011) indicates that sex workers often work in a region, rather than in a specific city. Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) also mention this mobility, by describing that sex workers tend to move from place to place to increase their income, but they also move to a more hidden industry. Although

Bleeker and Van den Braak (2021) did not focus specifically on the Rotterdam industry, it describes a different form of mobility in the industry, namely entering and leaving the industry, and that this happens on a large scale. Several studies have also paid attention to mobility in terms of national borders. Goderie et al. (2002) argue that most sex workers in the Netherlands come from abroad, and that Dutch women are not that interested to work in the sex industry. A later study by Goderie and Boutellier (2006) indicate that sex workers in Rotterdam are from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania, Latin-American countries such as Ecuador and Peru, and Asian countries including Thailand. Although the conclusion of Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) refers to the industry of The Hague, they also note that many sex workers are from Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Several studies implicitly pay attention to sex workers' agency. Goderie et al. (2002) states that sex workers are a heterogeneous group, and that they all have different reasons to do sex work. These authors also point out that sex workers differ in their experiences in terms of violence and abuse. The study by Bleeker et al. (2014) argue that it is indeed a varied group. These authors point out, for instance, that some sex workers only do sex work because of financial needs, for example debts, while others do so because they enjoy their work. This study shows that sex workers find it important to determine which clients they accept and what prices they ask for their services. It also explains that in general, sex workers are satisfied with aid agencies in the Netherlands, although the way social organizations treat sex workers can be improved. Bleeker et al. (2022) later state that although required, many sex workers will not register themselves due to loss of anonymity and the risk of stigmatization. In terms of social position, moreover, Bleeker et al. (2022), point out that unlicensed working sex workers are not entitled to support from the government and will less encounter for example health care, assistance and judicial authorities. This also worsens their working conditions, which leads to violence, lower prices and a higher threshold to visit the clinic for health check-ups. Pitcher and Wijers (2014) argue that decriminalization should be a first step towards human and labour rights of sex workers. These authors also point out that sex workers have "considerable knowledge of professional and effective practice in sex work" (p.560) and therefore these authors think that sex workers should be involved in development of policies

affecting them. Vanwesenbeeck (2011) agrees and states that repression and prohibition of sex work only creates room that criminals need. This author (p.3) argues that sex work is an extremely controversial area, with "an interplay of moral judgementalism, political incompetence, criminal opportunism, and subsequent human suffering". Therefore, this author argues, the empowerment of sex workers is the only answer, and their emancipation can bring down the stigma and motivate them to claim their rights. Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) point out that the struggles sex workers on a national level face, are also applicable to sex workers in The Hague. These struggles include difficulties with getting a mortgage and having a bank account, and that it has to do with the stigma on sex work.

Besides the general studies, there have also been studies conducted on the specific situation of Rotterdam. Goderie and Boutellier (2006) conducted a study on the Rotterdam unlicensed sex industry. They explain that right after the national brothel ban was lifted in 2000, the Municipality of Rotterdam introduced a licensing system which aims to regulate the sex industry, similar to the hospitality industry. The idea was, according to these authors, to treat sex work as labour. In 2004, the Municipality of Rotterdam (2004) conducted an evaluation of its sex work policy at the time, the Rotterdam Prostitution Policy 2000. Although one could argue that that is the fox guarding the henhouse, it concludes that the licensing system is working as it was supposed to, and that it has both a regulating and a remediating function. It does point out that normalization of the profession still needs to be improved. Moreover, Goderie and Boutellier (2006) explain, in a metropolis like Rotterdam, there seems to be a demand for a varied range of services and sex workers, in terms of appearance, price, sexual preferences, age and nationality. These authors argue that when clients cannot find this in the licensed industry, they will move to the unlicensed industry. This study estimated that in 2006, the unlicensed sex work industry of Rotterdam was probably larger than the legal industry. The study by RIEC South Holland South (2011) shows that unlicensed sex work is indeed frequently offered in the region. A later study by RIEC (2012) on the unlicensed sex industry of Rotterdam shows that although there is a large dark number, there have been 69 administrative reports written in 2011. This study also indicates that the reported cases of unlicensed sex work are much higher than of licensed sex work, which implies that the demand for sexual services is larger than the licensed industry can offer. Consequently, this study suggests,

the supply in the unlicensed sex industry is increasing, for example in alternative locations such as massage salons. Both RIEC South Holland South (2011) and RIEC (2012) point out that unlicensed working sex workers frequently use advertising websites such as Kinky.nl. RIEC South Holland South (2011) adds that unlicensed working sex workers have lower prices because they do not have the costs of taxes and requirements regarding licenses and hygiene.

There are also studies that describe how sex work takes place, without describing how sex workers specifically shape their work. Goederie & Boutellier (2006) note that home-based sex workers are constantly moving, which makes it hard to estimate its scope. Sex workers who used to work in brothels before the lift of the brothel ban were now found working as sex workers from home. They found Dutch unlicensed working sex workers, but also women from East European countries, South and Central America and Asia. These signals are in line with the studies of Goderie et al. (2002) and Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) as discussed above. The authors also address the problem of terminology, which means that the form of sex work in practice does not always match with the category mentioned in the license. Goderie and Boutellier (2006) also found signals that may indicate human trafficking, for example because sex workers worked under the influence of drugs and alcohol and they ask far less money for their services. However, as Lensvelt-Mulders, et al. (2016) point out, in the study of Goderie and Boutellier (2006) the research question is not clearly stated, the method for its data analysis is not addressed and only a little attention has been paid to validation and reliability. Together with the fact that this study was published sixteen years ago and, as other studies indicate, the sex industry has rapidly changed, it is thus questionable to what extent value can be attached to this study.

Studies on a specific intervention in Rotterdam have been conducted as well. Goderie et al. (2002) note that for some sex workers, a streetwalking zone named the Keileweg, was the only way to work because of the requirements to work legally and its law enforcement in other cities (such as Amsterdam and Utrecht) became 'too' strict. After its closure in November 2005, the municipality stated that no signals were received that street-based sex work has continued elsewhere in the city and the police in Rotterdam were extra vigilant about soliciting outside

the zone (Hulshof & Flight, 2008). These authors also state that the Municipality of Rotterdam wanted to prevent the spreading in the city and a shift to other forms of sex work (for instance unlicensed brothels) and therefore paid attention to social help, including help with drug addictions and housing. In the beginning, there was no sign of spreading out, but after six months there was an increase in street-based sex work in one other neighbourhood (Barendregt & Van de Mheen, 2009). Other cities, including Utrecht, noted a large increase in the number of sex workers from Rotterdam after the closure (Hulshof & Flight, 2008; Verhoeven & Van Straalen, 2015). Moreover, Hulshof and Flight (2008) noted that directly after the lift of the brothel ban, several sex workers preferred street-based sex work rather than the licensed sex businesses, including brothels. Interestingly, according to RIEC South Holland South (2011), street-based sex work does not seem to take place on a large scale.

Finally, since this study takes place during the pandemic, several studies regarding the impact of Covid-19 have been conducted. De Wildt (2021) notices that a substantial number of sex workers have continued working; there was still demand from clients, even though the sex workers knew it was unlicensed and consequences could follow if they were caught (De Wildt, 2021). According to Bleeker and Ven den Braak (2021), the second lockdown in November 2020 led to both an increase and decrease in advertisements, which probably indicates that sex workers moved from the legal to the unlicensed industry (the increase) and sex workers stopped working (the decrease) during the lockdown. The results also show that in larger cities, including Rotterdam, more advertisements are uploaded than in smaller municipalities. In the 2020 annual rapport, the Municipality of Rotterdam (2021) notes that it is indeed plausible that the unlicensed industry has remained active despite the Covid-19 measures. Still, since the pandemic is not completely over at the time of writing (April 2022), the studies remain rather limited.

In conclusion, although there has not yet been a study conducted that specifically focus on the labour conditions of female sex workers in the unlicensed sex industry of Rotterdam, several studies did explain developments in the Dutch sex industry. Several studies have pointed out that both on a national and local level, the number of licensed sex businesses, and thus licensed workplaces, is decreasing.

At the same time, there seems to be a shift to less visible forms of sex work, including escort and working in alternative places, for example Airbnbs. Here, the technological developments such as internet and mobile phones seem to play an enabling role.

1.6. Reading guide

This chapter provided the importance of this study, the research question, the aims of the study, theoretical starting points, relevant definitions and demarcation, and a literature review. The second chapter describes the methodology. Chapter three to seven focus on the results. The changes in the governmental approach will be discussed in relation to the labour condition(s) it has impact on. This implies that there is no separate policy chapter, and the changes will be discussed non-chronological. Sometimes, labour conditions are directly impacted by changes in policies and laws, such as agency. Other labour conditions, such as health, income and safety, are rather indirectly dependent on the governmental approach. Labour conditions are highly intertwined and impact each other; the empirical chapters should therefore be read as a coherent whole, and not so much as separate chapters. This study ends with conclusions in which an overview of the changes in the governmental approach will be presented. In the discussion, the strengths and limitations will be discussed and recommendations for future research and policy will be made.

Methodology

2.1. Research design overview

The research took place from September 2021 to mid-May 2022, and data was gathered from November 2021 to April 2022. The research was combined with a research internship at the Municipality of Rotterdam, Team Policy and Interventions (Dutch: *Beleid en Interventies*) at the Department of Public Safety, during the whole research process. This internship offered an insight into the municipality as an important organization in the context of sex work policies. It also helped build up a network of contacts that could be approached for participation in this study. As the next paragraphs in this chapter will discuss, the internship also presented challenges that needed careful reflection. Still, the internship has been of great value during the research in understanding the dynamics of policymaking, politics and the different interests and parties involved.

This study will be an extended case study, in which information will be collected from various sources around a specific process in which the phenomenon manifests itself (Leys, Zaitch & Decorte, 2016). This study is a combination of desk research and qualitative empirical research. The desk research focuses on academic studies, but also legal documents, reports and evaluations that are mainly conducted by research agencies. Especially the first part of the research question, namely the changes in the local approach, can be addressed here. Because of the internship, sparring about policies and regulations became easier, which led to a better understanding of the local approach. The second part, empirical research, consists of a variety of empirical research methods, entailing qualitative, semistructured in-depth interviews and observations. Sanders et al. (2018) argue that qualitative studies are likely to generate more in-depth data on the characteristics and experiences of sex workers. Since this research will focus on sex workers, it was aimed to have a significant number of interviews with them. As Sanders et al. (2018) note, formal interviews with sex workers are not always the most appropriate way to collect data; informal conversations and observing the working environment can generate in-depth data as well. Therefore, observations have been conducted in a variety of locations, including fieldwork with different

organizations. Due to the internship, joining meetings with authorities was possible as well. This offered a better insight into the daily practices of these authorities.

Several steps have been taken to ensure the quality of the research. Firstly, measures have been taken for internal validity: triangulation, member validation and falsification (Maesschalck, 2016). Siegel (2015) notes that there are many prejudices about sex work and that many rumors in the industry can make it harder to gain reliable information. Therefore, they state, data should be gathered from different sources and in different ways. By combining interviews and observations, method triangulation is ensured (Carter et al., 2014). Since this study only uses qualitative methods, it can therefore be considered within-method triangulation, which crosschecks for the internal consistency and thus the internal credibility of the research findings (Hussein, 2009). Moreover, data source triangulation is accomplished by collecting data from different groups (authorities, aid agencies and sex workers), which enriched the data with multiple perspectives (Carter et al., 2014).

During the research, I noticed that sex workers often distrust outsiders, including students, researchers and journalists, because they were afraid that their stories would be told wrongfully. In terms of member validation, therefore, all sex workers have been asked to provide feedback on their quotes. This allowed respondents to check whether they can find themselves in the description provided (Maesschalck, 2016). It also allowed Dutch respondents to check whether their quotes have been translated well. The feedback provided by these respondents was taken very seriously. Eventually, one sex worker noticed that a term was misspelled, one pointed to Ugly Mugs, which was already included in the analysis and one added that a year should be adjusted. Not all sex workers provided feedback, but many stated that they appreciated the gesture.

Thirdly, it is aimed to search for falsification to avoid the problem of anecdotalism, the focus on telling examples that are not necessarily representative of a population, and the tendency to look for confirmation of hypotheses (Silverman, 2013). For example, Vanwesenbeeck (2001) points out that much research on sex workers tend to generalize the striking examples of violence and abuse to all sex workers. One way to overcome anecdotalism is comprehensive data treatment, in

which it is tested whether the generalizations made in this study apply to all aspects of the data (Maesschalck, 2016; Silverman, 2013). If a deviant case was found, it has been researched how it relates to the generalizations. After all, sex workers form a heterogeneous group with both similarities and differences. Finally, regarding the internal and external reliability, an audit trail has been made. By systematically documenting all methodological choices, other researchers can check and understand the process of this research (Carcary, 2009). It also had a psychological effect during the research by creating awareness of the importance of substantiation of every methodological step taken (Maesschalck, 2016). The audit trail is incorporated in this methodology section, which explains the lengthiness of this chapter.

2.2. Study respondents and data resources

2.2.1. Researcher description

As Sanders (2006) describes, the sexual subtext of the environment when researching the sex industry is impossible to avoid. Especially the interviews and observations with sex workers often produced data that was very detailed, including much information about one's sexual orientation and sexual preferences. This study is the first study that I conducted on the sex industry. However, because I have worked several years in a lingerie store, intimate stories from 'strangers' were not completely new to me. Moreover, during the process of data gathering, I noticed that the fact that I am a woman could also have a role. Several sex workers commented on the lines of: "oh, you are a woman, you know how it feels" when talking about sexuality or gender-related matters. I also think that my age, 22/23 years at the time of the research, has been an advantage. At some points, I thought that sex workers and aid agencies explained the way things work or the rationale of their thoughts more extensively because I would be a newcomer. Although these thoughts about my gender and age are only assumptions, I think these factors played a role during the process of data collection.

From the very beginning of this research, I realised that I was an outsider. Dewey (2013) describes that the distrust of sex workers by outsiders can be based on the perception that someone who has not participated in something so stigmatized could never really understand what it entails. Although I agree with this statement, I still found it very important to immerse myself in the subject by reading blogs

(for example Redinsight.org) and books written by sex workers (for example Majoor, 2003; 2020) and listen to podcasts (for example Onder mijn rode paraplu [Under my red umbrella]). I found it sometimes difficult to preserve a position as neutral as possible. The stories of respondents, and especially the stories of sex workers themselves, about marginalization, stigmatization and discrimination at some points evoked a form of frustration. Taking care of my mental health as a researcher was, therefore, important.

2.2.2. Respondents of interviews

In the next paragraphs, the different actors that are involved in this study will be discussed. These actors are categorized into four groups: authorities, aid agencies, sex workers and others. It should be noted that there is a tension between transparency on one hand, where respondents are described as precisely and clearly as possible, and anonymity on the other hand. Regarding authorities and aid agencies, the number of people working for these organizations in the region of Rotterdam is rather limited. Recognition by others is therefore very plausible, and since confidential information has been shared in some interviews, the respondents cannot be described too much in detail. It is the same case for sex workers; it is reasonable that sex workers will recognize each other. In fact, it happened several times that different respondents told the same stories. Therefore, all respondents of the interviews have been labelled with a code name. Sex workers are labelled with S1, S2, which stands for Sex worker 1, Sex worker 2, et cetera. The other respondents are labelled the same way, but with different letters. In Appendix A, all respondents have been written down in a table, including their code name, their country of origin, the date of the interview and where the interview took place. During the research progress, it was noticeable that there are many opinions that sometimes contradict. In the result section, therefore, statements will be sustained by the labels of respondents.

Group 1: Authorities

In total, ten respondents from six different governmental organizations have been interviewed. Firstly, the Municipality of Rotterdam is included. Besides designing legal frameworks and local policies, the municipality issues licenses, supervises the legal sex industry and directs enforcement (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015). Three different persons from three different departments have

been interviewed (in random order): one from the Department of Public Safety (Dutch: Directie Veiligheid), one from the Social Development (Dutch: Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling) and one City Marine (Dutch: Stadsmarinier).⁴ Another formal actor is the Rotterdam department of the Aliens, Identification, and Human Trafficking Unit (AVIM), which is, among other things, responsible for the enforcement by checking online advertisements and making appointments to combat unlicensed sex work and aims to signal human trafficking (Bleeker & Van den Braak, 2021). Thirdly, a Public Prosecutor (Dutch: Officier van Justitie) has been interviewed to understand how, and under what circumstances, unlicensed sex workers are prosecuted. Moreover, the two national ministries that deal with sex work policies have been interviewed since national laws and policies determine the frames in which municipalities design their policies and approach. These are the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Dutch: Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid) and Ministry of Justice and Security (Dutch: Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid). Lastly, a policymaker from the Municipality of Antwerp, Belgium, has been interviewed. While gathering data, the link between Rotterdam and Antwerp was often brought up by different respondents and therefore more data was needed.

Group 2: Aid agencies

Secondly, ten interviews have been conducted with six different aid agencies. These social workers are important because they often have other interests and other experiences with sex workers than authorities. One important actor is Humanitas, which offers support to (ex-)sex workers and victims of human trafficking (Van den Dries, 2018). Field workers of Humanitas visit all places in Rotterdam where sex work takes place (Humanitas/ESSM, n.d.). Secondly, Door2Door is the information and service center for and by sex workers who work or live in the region of Rotterdam (Door2Door, n.d.). Although Door2Door is formally part of Humanitas, it has a separate building with its own focus and activities for sex workers. Thirdly, Soa Aids Nederland has a special 'team sex work' and researches sex work in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the GGD (Municipal Health Service) is included as well, since they have a special department for sexual health where information and education are given to sex workers, where

⁴ These translated terms are in line with the terms used by the Municipality of Rotterdam.

sex workers can test anonymously and for free for STDs, and where sex workers can get a vaccination for hepatitis B. Finally, two Christian aid agencies have been interviewed: The Salvation Army (Dutch: Leger des Heils) and De Haven. These organizations might offer a different perspective because they might see another population than the aid agencies described earlier.

Group 3: Female sex workers working unlicensed

In total, sixteen female sex workers have been interviewed. Five of them (S1 to S5) worked in a licensed sex business in Rotterdam, such as a massage salon or a club. Interviews with these women provided data on why these women decided to work licensed (rather than unlicensed), how they perceive the licensed and unlicensed industry and the overall trends and developments in both industries. The licensed and unlicensed industries are namely quite intertwined, and in this way, an understanding of both industries was possible. One woman has stopped doing sex work because there have been too much violence and abuse (S10). However, she did have much information about the Rotterdam unlicensed industry, and her story offers an insight into the decision making of leaving the industry. One sex worker (S14) does not necessarily work in Rotterdam, but rather in the South of the Netherlands. Encountering her happened by chance, and because she was able to provide important background information about the sex industry in general and she did know sex workers from Rotterdam, she was included in this study.

As Appendix A shows, the nationalities of the interviewed sex workers vary broadly. In total, nine Dutch sex workers have been interviewed, one sex worker is from Greece, three from Thailand, two from Romania and one Dutch-English sex worker took part. Although many female sex workers working unlicensed that are found in Rotterdam by authorities are from Eastern-European and Latin-American countries (A9, Po1, Mu2), there is also a significant group of Dutch sex workers. Covid-19 made it more difficult to approach sex workers because there was put a large fine for working during the lockdown, in which these sex workers had even more to lose and thus their distrust was even larger. Moreover, many migrant sex workers returned to their homeland due to the insecurities of the pandemic. It became therefore even more difficult to approach and include sex workers from abroad. Still, indirect data about this foreign group could be gathered because sex

workers know many other, foreign sex workers and aid agencies and authorities could provide information as well. For the foreign sex workers, the time they have been in the Netherlands varied, from only a few months to over decades. In terms of age, the interviewed sex workers were between 21 and 61 years of age. They vary in education (from none to university) and the experience they have in the sex industry; for instance, one sex worker started only a few months ago, while another was doing this work for over 30 years.

The sex workers varied in the type of sexual services they offered as well. Distinguishing based on the type of sex work is rather difficult because most sex workers offer a variety of services, which is often rather fluid, based on their mood (what they want to offer at one point), occasion and wishes of the client. Neither their legal status is black and white: many sex workers in this study work partly licensed and partly unlicensed, and many sex workers used to work licensed and work now unlicensed or the other way around. Licensed forms of sex work by the sex workers in this study include clubs, licensed escorting, massage salons, private homes, and windows.⁵ The unlicensed forms of sex work present in this study are working from hotels, Airbnbs and holiday resorts, frequently from home,⁶ sex cinema's,⁷ unlicensed escort and sugaring.⁸ Some sex workers also work at sex parties, as a dominatrix (BDSM) and/or provide services in the context of fetishes, such as Big Beautiful Women (BBW).⁹

Group 4: Other

Finally, five respondents that have been interviewed could not be categorized in the three groups described above. They can provide relevant information to gain a thorough understanding of the unlicensed industry of Rotterdam, however. It includes two employees of the Regional Information and Expertise Centre (RIEC). Two employees of Motus have been interviewed as well. Motus is a department of the Dutch police that focuses on property used for criminal activities, and it also

⁵ As explained in Chapter 1.4.2., windows are prohibited in Rotterdam. Sex workers who work or used to work behind windows usually do that in other cities such as The Hague and Amsterdam.

⁶ As explained in Chapter 1.4.2., this is considered a brothel and thus needs a license. None of the included sex workers had this, which makes it automatically unlicensed.

⁷ Although sex cinemas are licensed in Rotterdam, they are only allowed to display erotic imagery. Offering physical sexual services is prohibited, or a license is needed to do so.

⁸ Sugaring is a beneficial relationship between a 'sugar baby' and a 'sugar daddy', and where a sugar baby offers dating and companionship in exchange for financial support (Upadhyay, 2021).

⁹ BBW focuses on people, in this case women, that have a significant corpulent figure (Jones, 2019).

registers the buildings in which the police have found unlicensed working sex workers. Finally, a member of The Association for Women and Law (Dutch: Vereniging Vrouw en Recht) has been interviewed. This association is a platform for lawyers with an interest in women and law in the Netherlands and has often written articles and speeches about the (Dutch) sex industry from a legal perspective.

2.2.3. Researcher-respondent relationship

Conventional research on sex work sometimes tends to pathologize female sex workers by studying them as victims who cannot make informed decisions about their lives and work (Van der Meulen, 2011). I, therefore, found it very important to approach and treat sex workers on the same level, or "at eye level", as a police officer (Po1) described it. I emphasized at the beginning of each interview that nothing was weird to me and that I found it important to listen to *their* experiences and opinions. I found it sometimes difficult to find a balance between gathering enough data for this study and having a respectful attitude towards the sex workers in terms of asking too much. However, I did notice that respondents often seemed to appreciate the questions I sometimes just asked straight forward. I kept emphasizing that they were not obligated to answer, and if they did not feel comfortable, we could change the topic of conversation. Finally, I underscored that respondents could always text or call me on the phone number that I made especially for this study. In case they had doubts or questions afterwards, they could always contact me. Eventually, several respondents texted me weeks or months after the interview took place with a link to a news article or just checking in on how the research was going.

2.2.4. Observations

In total, 17 observations have been done. 10 observations were possible due to the research internship at the municipality, which are marked with a * in Appendix B. Some observations were with municipalities and/or with other authorities, such as the Tax and Customs Administration, the police and ministries. Other observations were information meetings including webinars or a conference, and some observations were with aid agencies and sex workers themselves. Although human trafficking is clearly something different from unlicensed sex work, many authorities often deal with these themes at the same time. To gain a better

understanding of the associations with human trafficking when discussing the (unlicensed) sex industry, some observations on the theme of human trafficking have been conducted as well. Four observations (Observations 1, 6, 11 and 16) were made during national meetings with various municipalities to discuss trends and developments in both the licensed and unlicensed sex industry. This provided an insight into the Dutch sex industry in general. Moreover, as the results will indicate, many sex workers work in more cities than just Rotterdam; by participating in these meetings, a broader understanding was possible. There have also been national meetings on human trafficking (Observation 4) and observations with other large cities (Observation 15 and 16). Secondly, two meetings between authorities in specifically Rotterdam, including the Municipality of Rotterdam, the Public Prosecutor, the police and RIEC, have been observed (Observation 3 and 9). Thirdly, information presentations and webinars were attended as well, such as webinars about human trafficking (Observation 2, 7 and 8), a meeting with local organisations for undocumented migrants in Rotterdam (Observation 13) and a conference where different speakers were invited to talk about sex work policies (Observation 14).

Moreover, fieldwork has been done with Door2Door (Observation 5). During this fieldwork, several massage salons and a club has been visited in Rotterdam, which allowed talking with sex workers as well (S1 to S5). An afternoon was also spent with AVIM (Observation 10). Some sex workers pointed out that they find the checks carried out by the police often intrusive (S7, S8, S10, 15), but witnessing the methods and understanding the work of AVIM could provide better insight into the local politics and decision making. Finally, on the invitation of a sex worker I spoke earlier with but who could not be included in the research, I observed a protest for sex worker's rights as well (Observation 12). This illustrated the frustration sex workers have and provided insights from different speakers.

2.3. Respondent recruitment

2.3.1. Recruitment process

The groups of authorities, aid organisations and others were contacted via email or telephone. This happened in a rather formal way. The internship played a significant role here: rather than contacting a standard email address or telephone number, which often takes much time and does not always have a chance of

succeeding, the contact details of persons with the specific relevant tasks or knowledge for this study could now be found easily, which made contact in its turn easily and quickly. The snowball method has been used by chance; some respondents knew other potential respondents. They shared the contact details of these potential respondents, after which contact via phone or email was made.

The three other large cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague) have similar aid agencies as Door2Door in Rotterdam. In Amsterdam this is P&G292, in Utrecht it is Belle and in The Hague it is Spot46/SHOP. Since many sex workers work in different cities, including Rotterdam, they might also work in these other cities and therefore these three organizations have been contacted. Unfortunately, all three organizations stated that in most cases they do not know where a sex worker is from and thus they were unable to provide information about Rotterdam sex workers or the Rotterdam sex industry.

Sex workers were much harder to approach. Not only because they work unlicensed and are practically harder to find, due to Covid-19 there were indications that sex workers stopped working or decided to work even more invisible, for example by only seeing regular clients. In this way, these sex workers became even more isolated and harder to find. Moreover, there were also indications that foreign sex workers returned to their country of origin. Still, five interviews (S1 to S5) are conducted during the fieldwork with the aid agency Door2Door (Observation 5). Two interviews (S11 and S12) have been conducted during a check by AVIM (Observation 10). Although data collected via the police might not be fully reliable due to pressure or negative perceptions of authorities, it did provide an insight into the contact these women have with authorities. Other sex workers were recruited via sex workers-based organizations such as Prostitution Information Centre (PIC) and Soa Aids Nederland. Many other organizations by and for sex workers have been contacted as an attempt to find respondents who can tell something about the unlicensed sex industry in Rotterdam: sekswerkexpertise (sex work expertise), SAVE, Red Insight, Proud, Seksworks and Sexpower. Unfortunately, these organizations stated although they appreciated the research, they were unable to provide information about Rotterdam sex workers or the Rotterdam sex industry. They offered to keep their eyes and ears open, but unfortunately, no respondents could be recruited this way.

Finally, a part of the included sex workers was found via other sex workers, the so-called snowball method.

No incentives or compensation has been offered to any respondent. It was found important that participation in this research would be entirely voluntary, and to make the partial or full withdrawal possible without awkward situations.

The number of respondents or observations was not determined before conducting the data. As Sanders et al. (2018) note, the sample of interviews with sex workers may often be opportunistic rather than representative, due to the challenges of access to sex workers. Sex workers often do not want to be registered or known as such (Goderie & Boutellier, 2006). Estimating the number of respondents was also rather impossible because there was a lockdown during the fieldwork. Therefore, the determination of the number of interviews and observations was based on code saturation and meaning saturation. As Hennink et al. (2017) describe, code saturation can be defined as the point where no additional issues are identified, and the codebook starts to stabilize; meaning saturation sees on fully understanding issues where no further dimensions, nuances, or insights of issues can be added. During the gathering of the data, all interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, and questions that arose during the transcription were written down for the next interviews. In this way, questions could be answered, and pre-conclusions could be tested.

2.3.2. Participant selection

In general, all female sex workers working (both partly and fully) unlicensed in Rotterdam could be included in the study. However, since minor sex workers are considered victims of human trafficking, the minimum age for the respondents was set at 18 years. It turned out that this minimum age was not an issue while gathering the data; the youngest sex worker that could be approached for participation was 21 years old. Regarding authorities and aid agencies, everyone that could provide information about unlicensed working sex workers in Rotterdam and/or the Rotterdam unlicensed sex industry was approached for participation. It was aimed to include different organizations to understand the different perspectives and interests and to gain a more overall understanding of the Rotterdam unlicensed sex industry.

2.4. Data collection

2.4.1. Data collection procedure

The data for this research was collected between November 2021 and March 2022. For this study, qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations have been conducted, see Appendix A and Appendix B. Regarding the interviews, a topic list was made before the data collection started, which is listed in Appendix C. By listing a set of questions to be asked, consistency within interviews is ensured but there is also enough space in the conversation for variation, likely to change substantially between respondents depending on their role and expertise (Fylan, 2005). For the observations, there has not been made a checklist simply because most of the time it was unclear what would happen during the observation. The (potential) relevant data that could be gathered from these observations were noted as much as possible.

Sex work is often perceived as a sensitive topic (Ditmore, 2011) and therefore it was aimed to conduct the interviews face-to-face as much as possible. Non-verbal cues can be a valuable aspect of an in-depth interview because they can help both the interviewer and the interviewee in understanding each other (Ganguly, 2017). However, due to the lockdown, a part of the interviews has been conducted online, via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The interviews with authorities and aid agencies that could take place physically were conducted on location. For instance, the interviews with police officers (Po1, Po2, Po3) were conducted at the police station. Depending on their preference, interviews with sex workers were conducted at Erasmus University Rotterdam - since this is a rather neutral place - in shielded rooms, in public places such as a terrace or online (Zoom). These interviews took place in Rotterdam, but also in The Hague and Amsterdam because sex workers often live in another city than where they work. For example, a sex worker can live in The Hague and work unlicensed in a variety of places, including Rotterdam. In terms of duration, the interviews were held for 45 to 165 minutes, with an average interview time of 67 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in Dutch, and some were conducted in English. Two respondents have been interviewed twice (A1 & S8). The observations were held for 1 hour to 5 hours, with an average observation time of 1 hour and 54 minutes.

2.4.2. Recording and data transformation

At the beginning of each interview, after introducing myself and the study, every respondent was explicitly asked for permission to record the interview. For most interviews, audio recording has been used. In this way, the focus was on the conversation and it offered the opportunity to analyze the interpersonal interaction in an interview (Kvale, 2011). This recorder has a password, which means that in case of loss or theft, the data would be protected. It also has a headphone jack, so the recordings do not play publicly. During the interviews, notes were taken to ask later. Three respondents indicate that they did not feel comfortable with recording. In these cases, notes were taken with as many details as possible. During the fieldwork with Door2Door (Observation 5 with interviews S1 to S5) and the fieldwork with AVIM (Observation 10 with interviews S11 and S12), everything was noted down and nothing was recorded simply because there was not enough time, too much background noises, et cetera. The observations have been conducted the same way.

2.5. Data analysis

All interviews, both recorded and noted, were manually transcribed into verbatim text documents as soon as possible. Emotions, raising voices and other verbal cues were written down as well. During the transcription, thoughts, ideas and questions for the next interviews were written down in memos. In this way, every interview could already be useful for the next one. All notes of the observations were transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews and observations were given the label as used in Appendix A and Appendix B so errors by referring to the wrong interview or observation could be avoided. All transcriptions were then uploaded in Atlas.ti (desktop version) and coded manually. During the preparations of the fieldwork, a beginning of the codebook was made a priori, including numerous codes based on the themes worked out so far. During the coding, however, many codes were added, and already existing codes were adapted. It was thus a combination of predetermined and emergent codes. During the process of coding the transcriptions, code groups were made as themes and added to a network in Atlas.ti, to gain an insight into the relationship between the codes and the code groups. By using memos, it was aimed to clarify how the codes and consequently the interpretations are constructed and to make writing in the end easier and more consistent (Stuckey, 2015).

Not all the gathered data could be used for analysis because respondents stated that they did not feel comfortable anymore. Another reason was that, especially regarding the observations conducted via the internship, respondents or observations would give away enforcement strategies or other confidential information of authorities. To avoid harm to the respondents and these organizations, this information has been left out in this research or, in consultation with the relevant respondent(s), processed in such a way that it will not cause any problems.

2.6. Ethical considerations

Firstly, one important principle central to the ethical conduct of social research is the need for freely given informed consent (Easton & Matthews, 2016). As these authors explain (p.18), "[...] consent to participate should be informed, voluntary and continuing and that researchers need to check that this is the case and to explain to participants that they have the right to withdraw without any adverse consequences". Respondents should be as precise and as fully informed as possible; this refers to the goal of the study, but also how the interview or observation will be conducted, how the data will be used and their confidentiality assured (Sanders et al., 2018). When contacting the aid agencies and authorities, therefore, these elements were included in the email. Regarding the sex workers, these elements were put in the text and sent to them, or this information was given by phone before the interview. By having a phone call before the interview, sex workers could ask questions and express their doubts. During the fieldwork with Door2Door (Observation 5) and AVIM (Observation 10), the information about the research and researcher was given verbally. Informed consent was asked verbally as well, by explicitly asking whether they wanted to answer some questions and whether I was allowed to use the information they gave to the social worker (Observation 5) or the police officer (Observation 10) as data in this study. During these two observations, all sex workers were given a flyer with my name, the goals of the study and a phone number and e-mail address, so they could contact me afterwards in case they had questions or doubts. No sex worker has contacted me.

Secondly, all respondents, both sex workers, social workers and authorities, received my e-mail address and phone number in case they have questions or

concerns, or if they want to withdraw. Aid agencies received my e-mail address and phone by e-mail, and sex workers received them by phone or via Whatsapp. During all the observations, the role and intentions of me as a researcher were made publicly (overt observations). Here, my name and contact details were provided as well, in case a participant of the observation wanted to contact me afterwards. This did not happen.

Thirdly, the anonymity and privacy of respondents and confidentiality of the gathered data are worthy of ethical consideration (Siegel & De Wildt, 2016). Given their legal and social situation, absolutely no information could be included in the analysis that may reveal their identity (Sanders et al., 2018). All the information was saved anonymously, and potentially sensitive or traceable information was not transcribed or noted. This included standard information such as names, age, and addresses, but also information that indirectly might lead to recognition, for example specific places a respondent often visits (Kaiser, 2009). Anonymity was also ensured by using abbreviations as explained in Chapter 2.2.2. Regarding the internship, since the Municipality is a local government authority and closes unlicensed sex establishments, it would be unethical to upload any personal information of unlicensed working sex workers in the municipality's environment. Moreover, employees of the Municipality, but also other authorities and aid organizations that have connections with the municipality, have been interviewed as well and they needed to be able to speak freely; they needed the guarantee of anonymity too. Therefore, all documents and files (such as recordings) were stored on a private phone and private laptop, to which the Municipality of Rotterdam did not have access. All measures for anonymity and privacy were communicated to the respondents.

2.7. Conducting research in times of a pandemic

During the whole process of this study, the pandemic has been present. One question that needed to be addressed for each interview, was whether the interview would be conducted online or in person. The most important factor in this decision was the preference of the respondent. Most interviews were conducted in person. The First, Do No Harm principle (De Wildt, 2016, p.57) emphasizes that respondents should not be harmed during or after the participation. One could argue that this also refers to the respondent's health; if a

sex worker gets ill, she is probably not able to work and thus does not have an income. An infection, thus, can have a dramatic impact. Therefore, before every face-to-face interview took place, a Covid-19 self-test was carried out at home. These self-tests could be ordered for free via the university. Obviously, the results of all these self-tests were negative. I also brought a mask and sanitizing hand gel with me every time. However, between agreeing on a date and the actual interview, several respondents indicated that they would rather do it online. Therefore, the interviews with these respondents were no longer face-to-face, but instead a Microsoft Teams or Zoom meeting – dependent on the preference of the respondent - was scheduled.

Another point that should be discussed, is that the pandemic often changed the capacity of the organizations that were involved in this study. For instance, a few organizations and authorities indicated that because of the pandemic, a lot of meetings were cancelled and therefore they had more time. This made it easier to encounter these organizations and authorities, and an interview was easier to schedule. However, some organizations and authorities mentioned the exact opposite: because of the pandemic, their diaries were a lot busier and scheduling an interview had become harder. Because it was so different for each organization and authority, data collection was started in November 2021, so there would be enough time and space to schedule the interviews.

3. Agency, control and autonomy

In the Netherlands, sex work has been legalized. Local policies and laws specifically designed for the sex industry, however, determine under what exact circumstances it is allowed. In the past two decades, there have been important changes in the Rotterdam sex industry policy in terms of what is allowed, and under what circumstances. These developments, at the same time, also changed what is *not* allowed, and thus what is considered unlicensed. This chapter identifies these changes and describes how this has further limited the options sex workers can choose from, and thus how it limits their agency. As the results will indicate, unlicensed working sex workers shape their labour conditions in response to these restrictions. Agency and autonomy, thus, are important labour conditions in terms of how one can organize her work. This chapter explains that sex workers differ in the level of agency and autonomy and identifies several factors that can play a role in this as well.

3.1. Decreasing licensed workplaces, decreasing agency?

When discussing working in the unlicensed industry, respondents often mention the decreasing number of licensed businesses in Rotterdam (A1, A5, A6, A7, Po2, Pu, Mu3, S6, S14, S15, Observation 5). Goderie and Boutellier (2006) state that in 2006, there were 64 licensed businesses. They, unfortunately, do not provide further information. The Municipality of Rotterdam started to register the number of licensed businesses in 2014, and the most recent public documentation was from 2020.¹⁰ It distinguishes location-based businesses from escort agencies that only have a post address.

¹⁰ At the moment of writing (April 2022).

Table 1*Number of licensed workplaces in Rotterdam*

| Year | Licensed sex businesses (e.g. clubs, private homes) | Licensed escort agencies | Total licensed workplaces |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2014 ^a | 53 | 31 | 84 |
| 2015 ^b | 46 | 33 | 79 |
| 2016 ^b | 36 | 34 | 70 |
| 2017 ^b | 33 | 31 | 64 |
| 2018 ^b | 38 (6 of which also offered escort services) | 25 | 63 |
| 2019 ^b | 38 (6 of which also offered escort services) | 17 | 55 |
| 2020 ^a | 38 (6 of which also offered escort services) | 19 | 57 |

^aSource: Internal document of the Municipality of Rotterdam, not publicly accessible

^bSource: Municipality of Rotterdam (2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020).

As Table 1 shows, there has indeed been a decrease in the number of licensed workplaces in the past seven years. The decrease does not only take place in Rotterdam but also on a national level (A1, Mu1, Observation 11). When there are fewer licensed workplaces, the decision of working licensed or unlicensed becomes harder (A1). Sex workers are aware of the decreasing workplaces, and are trying to find alternatives: "A lot of people are afraid of losing their workplace, because where should you go? The workplaces are already so sparse. [...] That is why I always advise that the sex workers should have an advertisement. [...] Then you maintain the contact with your clients" (S6). For sex workers in a small niche, it becomes even harder to find a workplace. A sex worker that works as a dominatrix explains: "All the [licensed] places where I used to go, everything is closing down now. [...] At this moment, I wouldn't know where to go for my work in the Netherlands" (S14). The Municipality of Rotterdam is aware of the decrease but finds it difficult to explain the shift (Mu1). Determining a causal relationship is hard since this study does not have an experimental setting.¹¹ The next paragraphs,

¹¹ With experiments, the influence of other variables can be reduced. Therefore, experiments are the common method to determine causal relationships (Webbink, 2005).

therefore, will discuss three possible explanations that were often brought up by respondents.

3.1.1. Explanation 1: Stricter laws and policies

In 2000, the national brothel ban was lifted, and the organization of sex businesses was legalized. The Municipality of Rotterdam immediately introduced a licensing system, which made a distinction between unlicensed, licensed and illegal sex work as noted in the at that time Rotterdam Prostitution Policy (2000). This policy describes that the licensing system had three goals: protection of public order and the living environment, improvement of the position of sex workers and the perpetuation of the existing situation, which means that new businesses were not allowed. In 2015, a new policy for the sex industry (Policy Prostitution and sex industry) was introduced. These two policies form the most important policy documents for the Rotterdam sex industry. Several respondents state that they feel that laws and policies regarding sex work have become more and more strict (A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A7, S8, S9, S13, S14, S15, S16, O5). Licensed businesses need to comply with tax requirements, hygiene requirements, costs of a license, and several checks a year by the police and the GGD (A1). These requirements were already laid down in the Rotterdam Prostitution Policy of 2000, but the Policy Prostitution and sex industry of 2015 further tightened the policy by adding the requirement of having a business plan, requiring operators to attend meetings about signaling abuses and introducing work advices. The latter means that operators can be advised by the police to give a sex worker a negative work advice when there are signals that she has been victim of human trafficking. The 2015 policy (p.5) added these requirements with two goals: to tackle and prevent abuses and improve the position of sex workers (1), and because the Sex Work Regulation Bill¹² is delayed, the municipal council wanted to implement the desired changes through municipal regulations (2).

An operator of a massage salon explains that she has to pay many bills, including taxes, and that these requirements are strict, perhaps too strict (S2). Some operators complain and point to the unlicensed industry: "Operators say: we have to abide by all these rules, we have to pay a license, we are no longer allowed to

¹² See Chapter 7.2.1.

advertise unsafely, blah, blah blah, and it all happens around the corner, unlicensed" (A6). A police officer points out that licensed businesses have difficulties with these stricter requirements: "I think the rules for licensed operators have become much stricter, but there is nothing in return. Bibob,¹³ business plan, all tough rules. [...] While they already had a lot of trouble with the illegal industry" (Po2). Respondents also mention the decreasing number of locations where a sex business can be founded; in several neighbourhoods, new sex businesses are not allowed due to the development plan (Dutch: bestemmingsplan) (A1). Residents often do not want new sex businesses to be situated in their neighbourhood (Mu3). In some neighbourhoods, once a business is closed, another one cannot be opened again; the so-called extension policy (Dutch: uitsterfbeleid) (A1). There are places where new sex businesses can be found, but these are secluded from the city center and therefore of no use (Mu3). According to a police officer, there used to be abuses after the lift of the brothel ban; he suggested that the Municipality therefore could find it difficult to assign licenses (Po3). At the same time, according to the municipality, there are not that many requests for a license (Observation 1, Mu1). This makes it unclear whether there are simply fewer requests for a license, or there is demand but people do not want or cannot do it via the licensed industry.

Working from home, which is classified as unlicensed by the municipality, is allowed as long as it does not have a 'business-like appearance' (Dutch: bedrijfsmatig karakter).¹⁴ Here, several factors play a role, which include but are not limited to: the frequency of advertising, the appearance of the workplace (e.g. signs), the level of organization and the number of sex workers that are working at the place (Mu1). For instance, a sex worker is allowed to advertise once every thirteen months (A1). Most sex workers indicate, however, that they advertise much more often, since it is their way to meet clients and thus generate an income. And, as a police officer points out, advertisements should be uploaded regularly because otherwise it will end up in the bottom of the website, and clients will not find the advertisement (Po3). The municipality emphasizes that every situation is different and determining whether it has a businesslike appearance is often a

¹³ Bibob is a Dutch act that gives administrative institutions (such as municipalities) the opportunity to revoke or reject licenses when there is suspicion of criminal involvement (Ferwerda & Kleemans, 2019).

¹⁴ See Chapter 1.4.2.

cumulation of factors (Mu1). Other respondents indicate that they find it confusing (A1, Po2). Sometimes, sex workers do not even know if they are working unlicensed or illegal in legal terms (S8, S9). The decision to work unlicensed or illegal, thus, is not always a conscious decision. A sex worker explains that she thinks there is hypocrisy in the policy regarding working from home: "When I'm a slut, I can receive ten men in one day in my house to have sex with. That's okay, there's never been a problem with that. [...] But as soon as I say: now you have to pay 200 euros, suddenly it's a problem" (S16). There also seems to be a loophole in this policy: on one hand, working from home is not allowed as soon as it has a business-like appearance. At the same time, sex workers are obligated to pay taxes, but to do this, they must be registered at the Chamber of Commerce, which has a business-like appearance as well (Po2). Therefore, if the sex worker is registered at the address of the house she is working in, and she does not cause nuisance, the police do not immediately start an administrative report: "We are trying to fight excesses" (Po1).

Another important change is that the minimum age to work in the licensed industry in Rotterdam was raised from 18 to 21 years in 2016 (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015). The Municipality listed four reasons for this change: to protect vulnerable, young women and men because they find it harder to stand up for themselves in dealing with clients and operators (1), relatively many young women and men are victims of abuses (2), persons aged 21 would have a greater chance of obtaining a qualification, which would give them an alternative to working as a sex worker (3) and the age of 21 is an age limited that is used often, for example also for operators and managers (4) (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015, p.20). Licensed sex businesses are strictly checked on this minimum age by AVIM (A1, Po1). Several social workers indicate that sex workers younger than 21 did not stop however, but continued working (A1, A7). The group of young sex workers, thus, did not disappear, and is now automatically dependent on the unlicensed industry. In other words, the agency of young sex workers is limited.

Respondents also mention that there is more enforcement (A1, A7, A8, S8). The policy regarding enforcement has been updated in 2005 and 2012 (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2006; 2014). In 2015, the enforcement policy was changed again by creating the opportunity for the municipality to close buildings where unlicensed

sex work has been encountered faster. The goal was to tackle unlicensed sex work from houses and massage salons (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2016). Authorities indicate that there is a conflict of interest: on one hand, the government has a task of preventing abuses (Mu1, Po1, Po2). "Under criminal law, you could give the ladies a ticket for violation of the Municipal By-law. And then? I sit for three hours typing [points to computer] and the whole system gets dirty. They never pay because they are gone by the time, they receive the fine. It [the measures] also contradicts preventing secondary victimization" (Po1). The consequences, another police officer explains, can have a large impact on sex workers: "What are the consequences of that? She will be evicted from the house, that is one consequence. [...] And then we say: Hi, we're from the police, we want to help you. Oh, you don't need any help? Then we're going to throw you out of the house. This is very complicated work" (Po2). On the other hand, authorities wish to tackle unlicensed sex work because they fear nuisance and an uncontrolled industry (Po2). Closing the building in which unlicensed sex work is constated and giving the facilitators (such as landlords) fines is a measure that is regularly imposed, and even increased in the past years, although it should be noted that the number of checks fluctuates (Mu1, Po1).

3.1.2. Explanation 2: Fewer forms of sex work allowed

In 2005, the Municipality of Rotterdam closed the streetwalking area named Keileweg. The Keileweg was situated in an industrial area, where around 250 sex workers used to work (not all at the same time) (Blokland & Van Wijk, 2002). It was closed because many sex workers dealt with addictions and the nuisance of cars and clients was often reported (Hulshof & Flight, 2008; Mu3, Observation 13). The Municipality of Rotterdam no longer wanted to facilitate "degrading conditions" in which the sex workers had to work (Oostveen, 2005). A social care program and shelter were offered to the sex workers, but it remains unclear how many accepted this assistance (Snel & Engberse, 2009). According to a social worker, this program worked well: "In the end, it did bring some good results, that those women ended up in the right places and they received good guidance and came to view. You sometimes see an old sex worker still soliciting, you know; these are the old hand in the trade. But I think it did a good job" (A6). Today, although residents sometimes report 'suspicious' situations, there are no serious indications that street-based sex work occurs on a large scale in Rotterdam (Mu2), although one

social worker mentions she has clients that do car dates (A4). Since the Keileweg was closed, street-based sex work has been prohibited, and thus the number of licensed workplaces decreased again (A1, A8). For some sex workers, the Keileweg was the only place to work because in other cities, the requirements to work had become too strict (Goderie et al., 2002). Several respondents point out that because street-based sex work and windows are prohibited, the Rotterdam sex industry has become more invisible (A8, Mu2, Mu3). Another consequence is that because the Keileweg was such an isolated area, maintaining an overview of soliciting in the city has become more difficult (Mu2).

3.1.3. Explanation 3: Lockdowns

Several respondents think that the lockdowns could have been an extra boost in which sex workers moved from the licensed to the unlicensed industry (A1, A7, A8, Po1, Po2, Po3, Mu3). It seems that during the first lockdown, sex workers and clients were scared and awaiting: "A large part was very scared, in the first corona period we were all very scared. Even if those escort agencies had remained open, there had been little demand" (S15). In the second and third lockdowns, however, many sex workers started working again: "I was already working anyway, so what's new? I no longer adhered to this lockdown. No [financial help], so I couldn't stop working. That was just a foregone conclusion for me" (S8). Although it is hard to determine (Po2), it seems that many sex workers did not return to licensed businesses once a lockdown was over (A1, A8, S6, S15). During the lockdowns, sex workers often did not have a choice because of the need for an income; once working unlicensed, it seems, some sex workers 'discovered' the advantages of working unlicensed and did not return (A1). For some sex workers, thus, the lockdowns were a turning point.

3.2. Agency and control

One advantage of working unlicensed is that sex workers can determine their working hours (A1, A6, S6). Rather than sitting in a club all day and waiting for clients, unpaid, sex workers can now decide when they want to work and how many clients they want to receive: "So, I left the clubs. I now literally determine my own working hours, and I can also just schedule appointments. [...] You don't necessarily have to be present at a location for eight hours" (S6). A sex worker in a massage salon explains that she wants to stop with the salon and start working

from home so she can work with appointments (S2). When a sex worker can determine her working hours, she can combine her job with other activities such as informal care or another job (A1). At the same time, a social worker points out, it should be noted that having control can have consequences (A3). One debate that often occurs between sex workers and clients is whether a condom should be used. Sex workers state that they prefer protected sex, thus with a condom, but that clients do not always accept that (S10, S15). Most clients accept penetration with a condom but demand oral sex without one: "I did it [oral sex with a condom] for a while, in the summer of 2019. I was very strict at that point and I just wanted to do everything with a condom, but I only had ten to twenty per cent of the clients I normally had. Because then they all went to someone else" (S10). Here, the sex worker refers to the competition among other sex workers.¹⁵

Sex workers indicate that they feel that they are often denied agency by society. A social worker says that discussions are often *about* sex workers, and not so much *with* them (A1). Another social worker suggests that due to the association with human trafficking, sex workers are perceived as victims and perhaps incapable (A7). A sex worker agrees: "You will never hear a social worker say: oh, you are pathetic. But we have described way less agency" (S8). Sex workers find the denial of agency frustrating, and although they understand that there are vulnerable sex workers as well, it should not be generalized to everyone working in the sex industry (S8). Another sex worker thinks it happens on a larger scale, not only to sex workers: "It's a bit patronizing, actually. [...] You know, let people make their own choices for once and take their responsibility and be careful themselves, instead of just imposing everything. You are no longer allowed to smoke, and meat should not be advertised anymore. It's getting more and more patronizing, you know" (S14).

3.3. Autonomy

A social workers explains that sex workers often rely on someone or something else, but that doesn't mean they cannot be independent; they often need someone else that helps them, such as a babysitter at night because they have to work, or they need a driver for an appointment (A3). Another social worker adds that this

¹⁵ See Chapter 4.3.

is not different than with other jobs (A2). During checks, AVIM often tries to understand whether a sex worker is working independently or not. Sometimes, AVIM encounters sex workers that arrange their advertisements and choose their own clients, and everything seems to be fine (Po1). For example, one sex worker states that she has an accountant, but for the rest, she does everything herself: clothing, advertisement, scheduling appointments and driving (S13). But sometimes, AVIM gets indications that a sex worker is not as autonomous as it seems (Observation 9). "Not everyone will be a victim of human trafficking, but they are very dependent. [...] We often see that they don't even know where they are. [...] Someone else takes care of the advertisement, someone else arranges the driver, someone else picks up the phone for them" (Po3). As this police officer indicates, this might lead to miscommunication between sex worker and client: "We also see that women don't even know what's in their advertisement. I ask: do you do anal? No, no, I don't, they say. But it's in your ad? That's a signal to me" (Po3). A social worker says she sometimes notices this as well (A4).

The rise of the internet led to a situation where sex workers can have much more autonomy. Some sex workers find working licensed too complicated, and therefore start advertising online (A1, A4). Indeed, sex workers often make their own advertisements (S6, S10, S11, S13, S16). One advantage of advertising is that it is much more anonymous, for both sex worker and client (A8). Sex workers can upload their own photos, and thus decide what is shared with the world and what is not. For example, one sex worker states she wears wigs so she will not be recognized (S16). The internet has also become a medium on which supply and demand can find each other faster and easier (A1); it appears to be a filter on the side of both client and sex worker. Clients can select their wishes and demands (A8). This is especially helpful when a client is searching for a specific niche (S9, S14, S16). For sex workers, this can also help in selecting clients: "I find private homes more suitable for younger girls. At one point, a lot of new, young girls arrive. Then you just don't earn anything, the competition is that great. If I put an advertisement online on Kinky, just for myself, you know that the client is calling especially for you" (S6). In advertisements, sex workers can indicate which services they provide and which ones they do not (S14). Moreover, they often only give their address when they indeed want to schedule an appointment (Observation 10). In this way, they can also select which clients they accept.

Besides advertising websites, social media such as Telegram, Messenger and Instagram are also been used; it seems that these are often group chats, in which both sex workers and clients are in (A8, Po2, Mu1, Mu2). These are much more isolated, and for authorities, these are much harder to have an overview of: "You used to have those standard sites where everyone was on, but nowadays you have so much more. [...] Everyone knows that we do the checks through the main, major sites. So, they find other ways. [...] It makes it more difficult to get into that, so a lot more is happening that we actually can see" (Po2). The municipality indeed indicates that only little is known about social media and group apps in relation to its sex industry (Mu3).

The internet also enables sex workers to find a workplace. Online, they can book houses or apartments, hotel rooms and holiday resorts (Po1, Po3, S6, S10, O5). This makes third parties no longer necessary. Especially the websites Airbnb and Booking are popular (Po1, Po3, O3, O4). Sex workers also use social media to find accommodation (Po1, Mu1); one sex worker explains that she got the apartment in which she was working from someone she met online via Snapchat (S11). That sex workers search for a workplace online has perhaps to do with the tight housing market (Po3) and that Rotterdam is a popular destination for tourists, so there are more Airbnbs and hotels available (Mu2). A sex worker explains that she was checked by AVIM once, and that she started working with Airbnb: "I realized that if I would be checked again at the same address, then it's done for me and then I'd lose my house and a large amount of money that I invested [in the house and deposit]. So, I had to get creative. It [Airbnb] is an app. And I just do a search, and then I do homes with their own entrance, you can select that. [...] Because if you share a hallway with others, it's striking when two, four, five, unknown men walk in and out every day" (S10). This sex worker also indicates that many other sex workers find their workplace this way too (S10). For authorities, this is problematic because these websites are also been used by for example tourists, and therefore it is hard to tackle the problem; once a building is closed by the municipality because unlicensed sex work has been found, sex workers simply move to another accommodation without being imposed measures (Po1, Mu1, O3, O4). Sex workers know that: "If you are caught, you just pack your suitcase and then you go to the next. You don't have that much to lose. But if you are registered at the address, and you get checked, you'll get a warning. And if you do it again,

there will be consequences. But if you do it through Airbnb, nothing really happens" (S10). In case a sex worker has to find new accommodation, she can repeat the process by searching online again or she can find new accommodation with the help of others in group chats (Po2).¹⁶ Moreover, renting a workplace is much more flexible, because one day a sex worker can work in Rotterdam, and the next day in Amsterdam (S10).¹⁷ However, it should be noted that most websites only accept online payments. Sex workers who only use cash cannot buy or order online (S16), and thus it is plausible that they are depending on other persons. Still, there are no indications that there is a large network of people that arrange the accommodations in Rotterdam (O3, O4).

3.4. Factors in agency and control

Sex workers are a very heterogeneous group in terms of age, experience, education, and nationality (S8, Observation 12). It seems that several factors can play a role in the extent of agency and control.

3.4.1. Debts and financial need

The financial situation differs from sex worker to sex worker, a police officer explains: "There are people who save neatly, they have a goal in mind and put money aside neatly. That's perfect, the best thing. But not everyone is like that. A lot of people do this job precisely because they are in financial trouble. That's why if they can't work now, that doesn't mean they're going to stop" (Po2). One's culture can play a role in whether one saves money or not, a Romanian sex worker explains: "I didn't have ... how to say ... I just wasn't prepared. I'm from Romania, we were not taught about saving in our culture. I didn't learn that when I was young" (S10). Some sex workers are in the position that they do need the money but have enough 'room' to say no sometimes: "If you go purely for the money, I think you take risks faster. Because if I hear on the phone that you're drunk, I'll send you away. [...] And I understand that if you need money, you're more likely to think: well, let's do it. I've done that in the past, but then you always find the wrong clients. Luckily, I'm strong enough, I get up and go home again. But a lot of people just don't dare. Or they think: but I need the money" (S6). Indeed, one sex worker explains that she had debts and really needed the money, and

¹⁶ See Chapter 7.3.1.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4.3.

therefore sometimes had clients that were violent or used drugs (S10). Another sex worker stated that she wanted to pay off the debts caused by her ex-partner, and sex work was the easiest way to do that (S14). Besides debts, the financial need to buy alcohol or drugs can blur the line of having control (A8, Mu2). Sex workers that do not have financial needs can refuse clients easier (S9, S13, S14). A sex worker explains that she has no financial need, and therefore can say no if she does not want to work (S9). Another sex worker explains that she has another job besides sex work, and therefore can decide to work whenever she wants (S14).

3.4.2. Experience

A social worker explains that when a sex worker has more experience, she can screen clients better and take measures (A1).¹⁸ One sex worker explains that the more experience she gained, she found it easier to say no (S13). Another sex worker explains that sex work taught her much about setting boundaries and laughed when asked about the ability to say no: "I have to say that since I work, instead of being a slut, I'm in control. I have the power, I have the power over those men. They are scared and shy when they come in. Some have a big mouth, but then I also have a big mouth. No, they really don't have any power" (S16). At the same time, when a sex worker does not know how to organize her work, for example because she is relatively new in the industry, this can make her vulnerable (A7, Po3). A sex worker explains that when she started, she was young and inexperienced: "I was 21 when I started, and I was so naive. [...] When I started working in a private home, and you gave a blow job without a condom, you got fifty euros extra. Wasn't that dangerous? No, because there is a greater chance that you will win the lottery, they said. And me, with my stupid head, I believed that. Because yes, I hadn't experienced any bad things, I had no distrust of people. So, I thought, well, if he says so, it must be true" (S14). In other words, the experience can make one more independent because she knows how to organize her work.

3.4.3. Age

¹⁸ See Chapter 6.2.

Moreover, age can also play a role. The police state that they often encounter young sex workers (Po3). Some sex workers start young (A7, S10, S11, S14, S16), while others start later in life (for example S9, S13). In Rotterdam, the licensed businesses are being checked by AVIM regularly, thus it is unlikely that they will let sex workers below the age of 21 work (A1, A6). Aid agencies think it is unlikely that these sex workers have stopped working, or waited so they can work licensed (A1, A7). Although advertising websites have a minimum age of 21 years, this can easily be avoided by uploading an identity card of someone else (A1). One sex worker says that she didn't even upload one, and her account is still working (S16). Respondents think differently about the change of minimum age.¹⁹ "It's an issue, people don't look at how things work in practice, and what the impact is. [...] It's precise with these groups that we know that they start young, that they sometimes start at the age of 15. I think banning things, especially in sex work, make things worse" (A7). Another sex worker states sarcastically: "I think it's bizarre. I mean, you can join the army at the age of 18 but you can't do sex work? It's a typical measure that says: no, we don't think that sex work is like other professions. Sex work is not work, sex work is exploitation and abuse. We have to protect our poor 18 to 21-year-old females" (S15). At the same time, several respondents indicate that they find 18 years a young age, an age where one could make other decisions than they would do when they are older (A6, Po2, Mu2). For example, younger sex workers may use more drugs, and they can find it harder to negotiate about services (for example with a condom or not) and prices (A7). A sex worker notices that younger sex workers ask for lower prices (S10). Finally, older sex workers would make choices easier (Mu3). A sex worker explains: "You know, it's the age. I'm 50 so yeah. The older I become, life becomes better, I think. I don't have to be pigeonholed" (S13).

3.4.4. Integration and finding one's way

A fourth factor is how well one is integrated into the country one is working in (A4, A9). A social worker explains that she sometimes encounters women that do not speak English or Dutch, and that she wonders how the women communicate with clients (A4). There can be a miscommunication about the services a sex worker wants to offer or not (A4). When a sex worker doesn't speak Dutch or English, she

¹⁹ See Chapter 3.1.1.

gets isolated easily (Po1). A sex worker confirms: "If you don't speak the language, Dutch or English, it can be a problem. I think many of them don't have internet access. [...] I think it's really difficult, perhaps you had to flee from your country, and you have to build a life. Then you just start because you have to pay rent and food" (S6). This could make one vulnerable: "Many are not so much victims of human trafficking but are exploited on many sides. For example, they find an accountant, and they have to trust that that accountant does exactly what he promises and that he does the right thing. Accountants at the top of the market don't feel like having sex workers as customers. So, a lot of these women meet a bit shady accountant, who doesn't do his job right, and who does she call on that?" (A9). At the same time, sex workers that do speak Dutch, English, or both, find their way in society easier. During the period in which the GGD offered covid vaccinations, a social worker encountered sex workers from Asia: "Then you see that they are integrated into the Dutch society quite well. They don't always speak Dutch, but they have a general practitioner, they are registered here. I think that those women [who are staying in the Netherlands for a longer period] can easier find their way to health services" (A5). It should be noted that this is not only applicable to sex workers with a migration background; sex workers with a Dutch passport sometimes are not aware of the help they can get either. For instance, a Dutch sex worker did not know she could go to the GGD for free, and that there are aid agencies such as Door2Door and Humanitas that can help and advice sex workers (S11).

3.5. Conclusion

The number of licensed workplaces in Rotterdam is decreasing, and the requirements to work licensed has become stricter. Consequently, sex workers have less licensed options to choose from. For certain groups of sex workers, such as sex workers below the age of 21 years and migrant sex workers without a working license, it makes them automatically dependent on the unlicensed industry. Stricter laws and policies, thus, limits their agency and thereby their autonomy. At the same time, working unlicensed offers opportunities in terms of agency: determining working hours -and thus efficiency-, selecting clients and determining prices. The level of agency and autonomy vary widely among sex workers; some sex workers choose and arrange everything by themselves, while others seem to be much more relying on other persons, which could make them

more vulnerable. The internet offers sex workers more autonomy: third parties are no longer needed because a sex worker now can maintain contact with clients and find accommodation herself. Still, it seems that several factors can play a role in the extent of agency and autonomy one has: debts and financial needs, experience and confidence, age and the level of integration in Dutch society and know their way to authorities and aid agencies. Together, these factors can make a sex worker more vulnerable, more dependent on other persons and therefore less able to make her own decisions.

4. "It's all about the money"

By introducing a licensing system in 2000, the Municipality of Rotterdam aimed to have an appealing and well-arranged licensed sex industry. Several studies (for example Goderie & Boutellier, 2006; RIEC 2011) indicate, however, that there are still many sex workers working unlicensed in Rotterdam. As the previous chapter illustrated, for several sex workers, such as sex workers under 21 years of age and migrant sex workers without a working permit, the licensed industry is simply not an option; they are automatically dependent on the unlicensed industry. For other sex workers, the licensed industry could be an option, but they still decided to work unlicensed. This raises the question why these sex workers continued to work unlicensed, while there is a licensed industry available where operators are regularly checked for safety and hygiene. As the results will illustrate, for many sex workers, both those who have a licensed option and those who do not, money is the most important reason to work unlicensed. Income, thus, forms an important labour condition for these sex workers. This chapter illustrates the importance of making a living, and thus the role of money. It also discusses the factors that play a role in sex workers' income, and how they try to increase it.

4.1. Income in the unlicensed industry

For many women, money is the most important reason to do sex work (A1, A5, A9, Po1, S11, S13). For migrant women, the role of money can be different than for Dutch sex workers. Many sex workers in Rotterdam are from Eastern Europe, Latin-America, and Asia (Po1, Po2). For these sex workers, working in the Netherlands often makes more money than in their country of origin (Po1, Po3). On the question of why Romanian women often decide to work in the sex industry, a Romanian ex-sex worker responds: "Poverty. Food is very expensive there [Romania], more expensive than here. And the salary is yes, two, three hundred euros a month. So lack of, yes, education, lack of culture, lack of ... a lot" (S10). Sometimes, the women from outside the Netherlands have children; (a part of) the money they earn with sex work is sent home to support their families (A1, A4, Pu, Mu1, S13); these women sometimes maintain a whole family by themselves (A9, Po3, O2). They therefore might not have alternatives, because those jobs simply don't have the same income as sex work has (S15).

Overall, the income by working unlicensed is higher (A1, A9, Po1, S15). In licensed businesses, sex workers sometimes have to hand over half of their earned money

to the operator of the business; when a sex worker works unlicensed, she can keep this money herself (A1, A4, Po3, Mu3, S14, S16). A sex worker talked about the time she used to work in a licensed business: "27,50 euros for half an hour, and 45 euros for an hour. And you have to pay taxes, which will be paid by the operator if you work in a private home. So, there is only little left. I started to feel a little dirty" (S6). When working self-employed, for example as an independent escort, a license is required. To arrange this, several things need to be organized, which A1 explains as a financial consideration. A self-employed sex worker needs to rent an office building, pay for a license, and do the administration for tax authorities. Some sex workers therefore think it is a large investment (A1). According to A1, most people work in the sex industry because they need that money. The question is, thus, what the benefits are of working licensed if one can do the same work unlicensed, which saves money and thus the income is higher (A1). Moreover, when working licensed, for example in a club, no work means no income, for example in case a sex worker is not able to work (A2). Sex workers do not get paid while waiting for a client (A1, A2); they can be present all day in a club but earn only a little bit of money because only one client has visited (A2). S2 explained that she had to be present in her massage salon all day to not miss any client and thus income (Observation 5). Finally, there are also indications that organizers of licensed businesses do not always do the business administration properly, and the loan of sex workers is incorrect, which disadvantages them (A4). One sex worker found out that the club lied to a client that she was not available while she was, and therefore she missed the income; when she found out, she immediately left (S6). When working unlicensed, one can schedule appointments by herself, which makes it much more efficient, and the income increases.²⁰

Although both licensed and unlicensed working sex workers have costs to perform their job, the costs are different. Sex workers need to pay for necessary supplies such as condoms, lingerie, towels, and bed lining (A2, S6, S14, S16). In licensed businesses, sex workers can purchase these supplies there, although S16 points out that buying it yourself is often much cheaper. Sex workers who work unlicensed purchase these supplies by themselves (S16). Secondly, sex workers sometimes have a driver, a telephone operator and/or an accountant who needs

²⁰ See Chapter 3.2.

to be paid as well (A2, Po1, Pu, Mu1). Moreover, when a sex worker works from hotels, houses or Airbnbs, these workplaces need to be paid. One sex worker says that she always pays for the accommodation because she thinks it is not polite to let the client pay (S13), while others do so (S16). Renting a hotel room by yourself, however, brings the risk that the client can track down the identity of the sex worker, and thus it could be safer to let the client pay (S15). When a sex worker pays for her own workplace, hotels and Airbnbs have a price range and thus a sex worker can partially determine these costs. The prices of houses that are only used to work from, can be enormous (Po1, Po2, Mu1, Observation 16): "For example, if you rent a room or apartment that would actually be worth less than 400-500 euros, they [sex workers] will pay three times as much. And then they also have to pay in advance, also a deposit" (Po2). The rent for these houses can often be paid in cash, while Airbnb for example requires money via the bank (O3, O4, S16). Sex workers that do not have a bank account and only have cash, thus, are depending on the landlords that accept cash. A police officer explains these landlords often abuse the lack of alternatives for these sex workers: "Well, those amounts are way too high, but the people who rent out those properties usually know that they [sex workers] will be checked [by AVIM] within two or three months and then they have to leave. They [sex workers] are not going to get the money back" (Po2). It seems that it is often the same landlords that rent these houses to sex workers (Po2, O3, O4). When a sex worker works from home, she already paid the rent for living there; she then does not have extra costs for a workplace, which saves money (A1).

4.2. Taxes: to pay or not to pay?

Sex workers are in principle obligated to pay taxes (Vanwesenbeeck, 2011). Although it might seem paradoxical, unlicensed working sex workers can pay taxes when they are registered at the Chamber of Commerce. This registration is independent of the licensing system of municipalities, which determines whether a sex worker works licensed or unlicensed. Two sex workers, although they work unlicensed in terms of law and policies, do pay taxes (S9, S10). S10 explains that she used to work black but started paying taxes after a while because she noticed that working white could have advantages, for example when she was searching for a house and she needed to prove her income. One sex worker explained that she did pay taxes, but she was not registered as a sex worker at the Chamber of

Commerce, but she paid taxes via her pole-dance school to avoid stigma (S14). Other sex workers indicated that they do or are considering doing the same thing: paying taxes to avoid fines, but under another label (S8, S15, 16), for example, health care (S8) or tutoring (S16). S16 mentioned that she even knows a sex worker that pays taxes under the name of an undertaker. Although working white has advantages, it does have a price, namely (partly) giving up anonymity. The Business Register, in which self-employed sex workers are registered, is publicly accessible; it displays personal information, such as company name and address (Netherlands Chamber of Commerce, n.d.). Some sex workers do not want their job to be public due to stigma, for example because of their family or jobs in the future (S14).²¹ They also point out that clients with bad intentions, for example stalkers, can find their information as well (S9, S15, S16). Renting an office to have a business address costs money, and in case a sex worker does not want or cannot pay for these costs, she has to register at her home address (A1). For these reasons, many sex workers do not want to be registered at the Chamber of Commerce and thus do not pay taxes. Two sex workers indicate that they did register (S9, S13), but one regrets the decision because she received unwanted mail and some clients wanted to visit her (S9). Although there are sex workers that do not want to pay taxes anyway (A1, Mu1, S16), there are also sex workers who do not have the intention to work black per se but simply do not want to be publicly registered (S15).

For the sex workers that do not pay taxes, the income is higher. Several sex workers indicate that the money they earn is completely black (S11, S12, S16). "I also know people who work completely unlicensed, so invisible without tax. For example, people who are under administration [Dutch: onderbewindstelling] and work like this. Because who can do groceries for an entire family with 50 euros a week these days? Nobody. [...] They choose to go for the unlicensed industry instead of licensed because otherwise you will be cut on your benefit [Dutch: uitkering]. Most also say: We don't have to earn a lot, but just that we can feed our family. And when you have a birthday party, you can also buy a present for your child. I think it is very clever how they do it, with the minimum to get by" (S6). S16 is an example of a woman working under administration. She explains

²¹ See Chapter 7.1.1.

that it causes much stress: "It makes me anxious, especially with UWV.²² As soon as a letter comes from UWV, I google it ... I see in my PostNL app which letters I'm about to receive. And if it says UWV, then I think: they know, they caught me. And that is not the case at all, but then I immediately look up: fraud, what will happen? Really, really frightening" (S16).

Although cash is much more anonymous for both sex worker and client (A3, S10, S13, S15), it does have several disadvantages. In the past years, banks have become stricter in monitoring transactions because they have been fined for money laundering (Min1). This stricter approach made it more difficult to pay with black money. One sex worker points out that the advantage of cash is that, if the authenticity is checked, she is sure she receives it; clients cannot send fake screenshots of bank transfers or withdraw transferred money (S10). But, at some point, the bills are stacking up (S13, S15, S16). Whether one can deposit the cash on a bank account or not, sex workers think differently. Some sex workers say it cannot be deposited because they are afraid that the bank will start asking questions (A3, A7, S8, S15, S16). Aid agencies sometimes recommend stating that the disposed money is a gift, so authorities will not sift through (A4). Not being able to deposit the money is problematic, because the number of places that accept cash is decreasing, for example, gas stations, public transport and pharmacies (A7, S8, S15, S16). Moreover, several bills such insurances and rent need to be paid via a bank account (A3, S10). In other words, fewer purchases can be done with black money. Several sex workers (S6, S8, S13, S15) therefore work partly white and partly black; by working white, they can explain to the bank where the money is from and pay bills that need to be paid via the bank. The part that they earn black is used to pay for things that can be paid in cash, for example groceries or dining in a restaurant. The sex workers that indicated that they did deposit money and banks did not ask questions about it, were (partly) paying taxes (S10, S13). Working completely black is, thus, extremely difficult because there is not much that one can do with only black money (A7).

4.3. Clients and competition among sex workers

²² UWV is the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency that takes care of the payout of insurance.

The income of a sex worker depends on the prices one asks. A sex worker explained that she finds it difficult to determine her price because there is no standard: "I find it very difficult. You try to estimate how much money new customers have. What are you used to paying? But the problem is, customers who complain that it's too expensive will always do so" (S15). One's income is also dependent on how many clients she has. Several sex workers indicate that they only want to have a few clients (S12, S14, S15, S16). Other sex workers prefer having many clients in a short period (S10, S11, S13): "Some girls have 9 to 10 clients a day, that's true. Then they have 1500 euros" (Po1).

One way to increase their income is by working in several places rather than staying in one place: mobility (S6, 13, S14, Observation 14). By travelling to other cities than only Rotterdam, a form of 'scarcity' is created: "You want to spread your chances. [...] If you spread the places you work, you will have many more clients because these clients then think: oh, she's here now, then I'll go. And if you stay in the same place, you can go tomorrow or next week, because you will be there anyway. You earn more, just by moving around" (S14). Whether a sex worker works like this, depends on several factors such as having a car or being dependent on public transport; smaller municipalities are often harder to reach by public transport and therefore, sex workers that do not have a car often only work in places closer to home, or places that are easier to reach (S14, S15). Another factor can be having to take care of children or pets; this also limits sex workers to work far from home because they have to be home often (S14, S16). Finally, sex workers in a rather small niche move more often because their clients are spread across the country (S9, S16).

There can be much competition for clients among sex workers (A1, A4, S9, S10, S15, S16, Observation 6). Whether a sex worker faces competition, depends on the type of services they offer. For instance, S8 and S9 work mainly with clients in health care, and S16 focuses mainly on fat and food fetishes. Because these are rather small niches, there is not as much competition as in the broader, more 'standard' part of the industry. Competition can manifest in the prices sex workers have (A1, A4, Po3, S10, S15, S16). By offering services for lower prices, sex workers aim to attract more clients (A1, Po3). However, price competition can harm other sex workers: "Eventually, everyone has to go down, it's very helpful

to you as a community, well at least if we have a kind of bottom price and no one goes below that. Anyway, what else you offer for extra services is entirely up to you. But it's also terrible ... I think there are several districts where you can just visit for 30 euros? [...] then you have had sex with three people for 90 euros. I find that very bizarre" (S15). Another sex worker points out that the unlicensed industry is often blamed for the low prices, but she thinks that private homes maintain the situation because they have happy hours, in which a whole hour is offered for 60 euros (S16). However, as a sex worker notices, low prices can also have disadvantages for the sex worker herself: "I also hear from other people that the higher the prices they charge, the better the customers become. So that's also a thing, it's not always an advantage to ask for little" (S15). One sex worker explains that there is also competition in services: "What you often see is not only about the price, but also about the services. So, you will do more for less money, working unsafely" (S8). One sex worker confirms this: "What I notice is that the new sex workers work for little money. They do everything for fifty euros, even without a condom" (S10). A social worker notices the development as well: "Some sex workers take a lot of risks. I think because of the money, to receive more money by offering sex without a condom or whatever" (A5). Not all women offer these services voluntarily, some women only do it because of the extra money it makes (S6). However, this also occurs in the licensed industry, sex workers can offer it on their initiative, and thus the organizer is not always aware (A4).

4.4. Conclusion

Although the Municipality of Rotterdam aimed to have an appealing and well-arranged licensed sex industry, for many sex workers, both those who have a licensed option and those who do not, money is the most important reason to work unlicensed. In terms of income, working unlicensed has both advantages and disadvantages. Overall, the income is higher because the sex worker can keep the money herself instead of handing it over to the operator of the business, and she saves the costs of a license. This is especially relevant for sex workers who need money, for example because they have debts, or they have to support their family in their country of origin. In case an unlicensed working sex worker does not pay taxes, or only partly, the income is even higher. Although it seems paradoxical, sex workers can work unlicensed on one hand, and (partly) pay taxes on the other; The licensing system of the municipality, which determines whether one is working

licensed or unlicensed, is separated from the Chamber of Commerce, where sex workers can be registered to pay taxes. Some unlicensed working sex workers do not pay taxes at all because they are afraid that banks will ask questions or simply because they do not want to, while other sex workers honestly declare taxes because it enables them to prove where their money is coming from, which makes it more useful. However, most sex workers indicate that they work partly black and partly white because living with only black (cash) money has become hard since more transfers go through the bank. Sex workers try to increase their income in several ways, for example by asking lower prices and offering more services than colleagues, or a combination of the two, which leads to much competition in the unlicensed industry. Secondly, many sex workers work in various cities, thus not only in Rotterdam, which creates a form of scarcity for their clients. This also enables them a wider range of clients across the country. Therefore, it seems that municipal sex work policies do not make sense; sex workers do not take municipal borders into account.

5. Hygiene, health and help

The GGD (Municipal Health Service) and social aid agencies Humanitas and Door2Door frequently visit licensed sex businesses, and operators are checked on strict requirements regarding hygiene and health. This makes that in the licensed industry, the opportunity to ask for help and the level of hygiene and health is more ensured. In the unlicensed industry, these hygiene and health requirements do not apply. This chapter explains how unlicensed working sex workers perceive the role of hygiene and health, and how they shape these labour conditions. Moreover, in the unlicensed industry, sex workers need to take initiative to reach out to aid agencies because they are much more invisible, which makes it harder for aid agencies to find them. As shown by the results, social workers indicate that they are afraid that a stricter approach will only raise the threshold for sex workers to seek for help. This chapter addresses the question whether unlicensed working sex workers will still reach out for help and how they perceive the available help offered by aid agencies in Rotterdam.

5.1. Hygiene

In the licensed industry, sex businesses are obligated to fulfil requirements regarding hygiene, which is often checked by the GGD (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015; A1, A4). Obviously, these checks do not take place in the unlicensed industry. Both social workers and AVIM indicate that the degree of hygiene of sex workers working unlicensed can vary widely (A2, A4, Po1, Po3, Observation 10). For most sex workers, hygiene is very important (A4); sometimes sex workers include hygiene subscriptions in their advertisements, for example by stating that clients must shower first (A4). Another sex worker explains that when someone wants to participate in her job, she finds it important to teach them about hygiene as well (S14). But, as police officers indicate, they sometimes also visit houses where the hygiene is lacking (Po1, Po3); "There was [stool] everywhere. The rotting pizzas in boxes, half-empty cans of beer, the sprayed-on condoms. It was everywhere in the room. Too filthy for words" (Po1). An employee of the municipality indeed sometimes reads reports with this kind of description (Mu1). It seems that some clients value hygiene, while other clients seem to not really care about the hygiene of the sex worker and/or the workplace (A4). Two sex

workers explain that they had colleagues who did not take care enough of themselves and say that they dismiss that kind of women (S3, S4).

The ability to clean depends on the type of sex work one is doing, and the availability of facilities in the workplace. Escorts often work in houses or hotels that have a bathroom with a douche (A2, A4, O4). A sex worker explains that she always has cleaning wipes in her workplace, so she can clean her workplace, including the doorknobs (S3). But, as a social worker indicates, there are also sex workers doing car dates, thus only working in cars, and then there is no sanitary available (A4). One sex worker mentioned the time she worked in a room in a sex cinema and shop, but there was no douche, so she used baby wipes (S16).

5.2. Health and STDs

5.2.1. Condom use and STDs

Some sex workers take their (sexual) health very serious, while others seem to take more risks (A5). One reason can be because of the competition by offering services without a condom because this makes more money (A4, A5, S6).²³ Sex workers notice a changing demand: "I notice that nowadays I have many clients that ask for sex without a condom. Then they give me 50 euros extra. I wouldn't even do it for one million [euros] extra" (S6). Other sex workers (S8, S10, S13, S15) tell similar stories, that clients keep asking for sex without a condom. One sex worker explains that it can even go a step further: "Someone told me that there is an entire forum for clients, which is called, abbreviated: fucking without a condom. There's a whole forum for that! And sex workers who say they do it without and then want a condom on the spot, are all pilloried there. Pillory if you want to do it safely! Let that sink in, unimaginable" (S8). But, as another sex worker explains, giving in to the demand of not using a condom can have consequences: "Imagine: you pay me an extra thousand euros to fuck me without a condom. Okay, two days later I'm going to get tested and nothing is wrong. But you happen to write a review, on Kinky: I was the only one who fucked [name] without a condom. How many clients do you think I'll lose? How much income will I lose? I'm not stupid. But there are plenty of girls who need money and who fuck without a condom" (S13).²⁴ It seems that some sex workers have sex without a

²³ See Chapter 4.3.

²⁴ This sex worker refers to others who are in financial need, a factor discussed in Chapter 3.4.1.

condom because they think that testing and treatment are easy (A4, S16). Indeed, one sex worker explains that she knows sex workers, both men and women, that take PrEP²⁵ because they offer unprotected sex (S16). This implies that these sex workers are aware of the health risks, but they take measures to prevent them.

Some sex workers (S10, S11) indicate that they do not find their health that important: "Most clients do not accept a blow job without a condom. It happened twice that I had something in my throat. So, I'm not really worried about my health. [...] I was, however, afraid of the financial consequences, because I had to stop working for two weeks. And yes, two weeks without money. It was so much stress, every time I had to stop caused so much stress. And suddenly, they all wanted to visit, but I didn't want to infect others and I knew it could be dangerous to others because they have a family. I so didn't [work], but it was hard to stop" (S10). A sex worker that has mostly clients with mental and/or physical handicaps point out that her clients are already vulnerable, and thus the use of condoms is very important (S9). However, one sex worker explains that unprotected sex is not always something that is discussed beforehand: "Someone ripped off the condom, stealthing. I could feel it coming that he was going to do that, somehow. I get a ... you get a certain survival strategy for that. Sex is not sex, you are so careful what exactly is happening, and whether it goes according to the rules, your rules. So, I already put my foot against his shoulder, so the moment he pulls the condom off and wants to put it back in, I threw him right back off the bed with my foot" (S14). Another sex worker has a similar story (S16).

5.2.2. Testing for STDs

The GGD approaches unlicensed working sex workers via advertisement websites and houses consultation hours for all sex workers (A5). These services are completely anonymous (A5, A6). The GGD houses consultation hours also twice a month at Door2Door (A5). This could help to improve access (A6). The GGD also offers free vaccination for hepatitis B (GGD Rotterdam-Rijnmond, n.d.). Nurses ask visitors whether they have sex for money, so they can give advice, but it is up

²⁵ Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medicine that can be taken preventive, and it reduces the risk of contracting HIV. It is mostly prescribed to at-risk individuals, mostly men who have sex with men (Petroll et al., 2018).

to the person visiting to answer honestly (A6). The people working at the clinic do not ask whether one is working licensed or unlicensed (A5, A6).

Normally, for an STD test, one is supposed to go to a general practitioner (GP) (A5). The visit to the GP is free, but an STD test costs money. For high-risk groups, including sex workers, the GGD offer STD tests for free (GGD Rotterdam-Rijnmond, n.d.). One advantage of testing at the GGD is that they can test more often, while a GP could ask questions about why they want to be tested so regularly (A5). Moreover, as this respondent points out, not everyone has a GP such as sex workers from abroad (A5). Besides testing for STDs, the GGD also aim to provide clients with information and educate them. "The advice is to do everything safely. Oral, vaginal, anal. Do everything safely. [...] When I started this job, it was a bit of a trap for me to think that every sex worker knows how the condom works, what to do if it breaks, and stuff. But that is an assumption, it's not always obvious that every sex worker knows what is safe, what you are at risk for, what you should do if your condom breaks, and why condoms break. That's not for everyone ... it was an assumption of mine, they know how to do it. But that's not always the case" (A6).

An employee of the GGD states that she sees all types of sex workers and that there is no such thing as a standard group (A6). Most sex workers in this study explicitly indicate that they find testing for STDs important (S6, S8, S9, S13, S14, S15, S16). A sex worker explains: "My body is my working instrument. You must keep it in good shape. For me, it's a no brainer, it's part of my job" (S8). This sex worker also explains that testing for STDs has become easier, because nowadays self-tests can be done in a bathroom (except for blood tests), while there used to be a time that someone had to lie down, and a nurse had to do it (S8). An ex-sex worker states that she went every three months to the health services for a test because she did not want to infect clients (S10). But she also points out that she had to do it to protect her reputation: "Clients talk with each other. If you become well-known for an STD, then they'll stop coming and that has financial consequences. So, it wasn't really for my health, testing, but just to work neatly. Reputation, in fact" (S10). Some sex workers also indicate that the decision of getting tested depends on whether they offer services without a condom because as long as a condom is used, the risk of health problems is significantly lower (S9,

S16). One sex worker explains that she used to visit the GGD when she had a relationship because they were swingers; Now, as a sex worker, she visits the aid agency in The Hague (S13). For her, the threshold for a visit to the GGD seems to be lower because she already had experience with aid agencies. Another sex worker says she feels that the GGD is asking too many questions sometimes, and therefore she feels more comfortable at an aid agency: "How many sexual contacts do you have, do you use a condom or not, do you also have anal sex ... Well, I thought it was ... before I started doing sex work I sometimes got tested, and that was already very invasive and annoying, and it also made that I went less or even stopped testing" (S15). There are also sex workers who are not aware of the available facilities, and that it is anonymous and free (S11, S12). Sex workers who have lived here for a while and have access to health care, seem to visit the clinic easier, probably because they are more familiar with the Dutch health system (A5). Word to mouth stories play an important role here: "If you have done something very good for a person once or twice, your name will go around. That they have not been betrayed by the police, that you are helping someone who has no money. If you manage to get that right a few times, that's a lot. [...] Both positive and negative stories. But, if you go wrong, it could be chasing you for years to come" (A5).

STDs can have major consequences for sex workers. A sex worker explains that if she has an STD, she cannot work and thus misses her income: "If you have an STD and you must undergo treatment, you won't be able to work for six weeks. At least I think so, I don't want to risk infecting my clients. Then you already have to figure it out yourself. Fortunately, nowadays you have a lot of options. I'm equipped in that respect, I'm lucky. But not every sex worker is like that. [...] You have to come up with a plan yourself" (S6). One employee thinks that since the lift of the brothel ban, more attention and financial resources have been spent on the GGD, but, due to the high workload, people are often referred to their GP (A5). This happened to one sex worker: "They were full, they said. And they didn't want to schedule an appointment for over two, or three months. I thought it was weird and had no option at all. So, I had to go to the GP, but I didn't really like that. I had a Turkish GP, he's a bit old-fashioned and asked why I was doing this job. I had to answer many questions that were just not nice. The GGD took me seriously, but they were full" (S10).

5.3. Getting help: contact with aid agencies

In Rotterdam, there are two aid agencies for sex workers: Door2Door and Humanitas. Although Door2Door is formally part of Humanitas, it is situated in a separate building with other employees. Door2Door was founded in 2015, to support sex workers in Rotterdam. A confidential counsellor was appointed to help sex workers in both the licensed and unlicensed industries and provide information and advice (Policy Prostitution and sex industry, 2015; A1). The confidential counsellor of Door2Door answers questions about health, vaccines, housing, registering at the Chamber of Commerce, applying for a license and other practical and financial issues (A1). She can also refer a sex worker to other organizations, such as the police or GGD (A1). The confidential counsellor and Humanitas both also conduct fieldwork and speak in this way with sex workers as well (A1, A4, Observation 5). Both organizations indicate that the internet plays a role: sex workers can approach them online, but they also conduct online fieldwork (A1, A3). For instance, the organizations visit advertisement websites such as Kinky and Sexjobs and send sex workers a message in which they explain who they are and that they can reach out to them (A1, A4).

Several sex workers are aware or even contacted Door2Door and/or Humanitas (S7, S8, S9, S10). Three sex workers explicitly indicate that they value the work of Door2Door (S7, S8, S9), but there are also sex workers who are not aware of the presence of aid agencies, and how they can help them (S11, S12, Po1). The factors that may play a role in whether one can make her own decisions²⁶ seem to play a role here as well. For instance, one sex worker explains that when she started working, she had no experience and started all by herself and reach out to an aid agency later (S16). A social worker explains that especially sex workers from abroad may have difficulties with finding their way to aid agencies: a large group of sex workers comes from abroad, where the police is considered corrupt, and social workers have to explain that they are different (A4). This social worker also explains that sex workers are afraid of fines (A4). Another social worker points out that this might be explained by cultural differences and thus other expectations: she gives the example that in some cultures, it is normal that doctors wear white lab coats. When a sex worker visits a Dutch doctor, she might not trust

²⁶ See Chapter 3.4.

it (A3). Another issue with cultural differences is that Dutch people tend to be quite direct, while in some countries such as Thailand, people focus more on the community rather than on individual needs (A9). This can make it harder for sex workers to talk about their problems (A9). Here, language can matter as well. Although aid agencies often have interpreters and/or information documents translated to other languages (A1, A9, S8), language can still form a barrier and put a sex worker in isolation (A9). Cultural differences, and thus implicit expectations, may also have an impact on trust. Several social workers point out that although the distrust of sex workers is, in general, lower to aid agencies than to authorities, the distrust is still present (A2, A3, A4, A7, A9). "When we approach them [sex workers], we ask: do you have time for a chat? You try to do that in an incredibly accessible way and to feel like hey, who is this person, and can I build something of a relationship? So out-reaching, coming back again and again. Don't be alarmed when people say no, or when the figurative shutters go down in a conversation, that happens a lot. There is a lot of scanning, a lot of waiting, from do I dare to trust you, can I trust you? And by coming back again and again, you build that trust" (A9). Moreover, sex workers sometimes have expectations that aid agencies cannot always fulfil, for example when it comes to housing (A9).

In other cities, there are similar local aid agencies: Belle (Utrecht), Spot46/SHOP (The Hague) and P&G292 (Amsterdam). It seems that most sex workers visit the aid agency in the city where they are living, not necessarily where they are working (S8, S9, S13, S15, S16). Some sex workers also go to another city because the organization in their city does not have enough capability. A sex worker who lives in Rotterdam, explains: "I wanted to go to The Hague for a [STD] test, but you have to enter your postcode. If you enter your postcode, of Rotterdam, you will be refused. So, you must lie and say you live somewhere in The Hague to get tested. I found that ... awkward" (S10). This sex worker also explained that she went to Spot46 for advice, rather than Door2Door in Rotterdam because she felt more comfortable there (S10). Although it differs per sex worker to which aid agency in which city they go to, most sex workers indicate that they appreciate the aid agencies mentioned above because they know how to treat sex workers respectfully; these sex workers feel welcomed and taken seriously (S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S13, S14, S15, S16). One sex worker thinks everything is arranged quite well in large cities: "In the four large cities, I think we're good. I find Shop [Spot46]

and Rotterdam, Utrecht, I find it well arranged. There is no Christian party involved or whatsoever, only the municipality. I feel sorry for those outside the large cities. They have to go to a usual GGD, or some Christian organization" (S8). Several sex workers indicate that they do not understand why Christian organizations are involved in a moral subject such as sex work, and state that they don't feel comfortable going there (S6, S7, S8, S15, S16). At the same time, a Christian organization from The Hague, which also conducts fieldwork in Rotterdam, explains that they do notice a group of sex workers with a need for help (A9). Sex workers are a heterogeneous group, and it seems that different groups seek different care.

Aid agencies do not focus on whether a sex worker is working licensed or unlicensed and provide care to sex workers in general. A social worker points out that stricter laws and policies can make it harder for aid agencies to approach sex workers (A7). For instance, with the increase of the minimum age from 18 to 21 years, she explains that younger sex workers will continue working, but then aid agencies will lose sight: "We will lose a group because if you're 18 years old and you're doing sex work, you're working illegal and that is not allowed. For us, it is already such a hard group to approach, but because of legislation, it becomes only harder" (A7). In other words, stricter laws and policies, that exclude certain groups of sex workers, make it harder for aid agencies to gain trust and provide assistance to sex workers.

5.4. Conclusion

In the unlicensed industry, the requirements regarding hygiene and health do not apply. However, this does not automatically mean that sex workers do not pay attention to this; in general, most sex workers find hygiene important. It often depends on the facilities of the workplace where one is working: in a hotel or a rented house, for instance, there are often douches available. But AVIM and social workers also indicate that they sometimes encounter workplaces where hygiene is lacking. In terms of health, most sex workers seem to be aware of the risks of unprotected sex and therefore find it important to use a condom. However, many sex workers indicate that more and more clients demand services without a condom. Some sex workers accept this, for example because they need the money, while others can refuse. This has also to do with the factors that play a role in the level of agency and autonomy, as explained in Chapter 3. Sex workers

consider treatment relatively easy and therefore do not consider it an issue very much. When it comes to testing for STDs, sex workers can go to the GGD or, on consultation hours, Door2Door and Humanitas. They can test anonymous and free, which sex workers find important. Specifically aid agencies are perceived as more anonymous and accessible. Most sex workers indicate that they find it important to test regularly for STDs. STDs can have major consequences because most sex workers cannot work in the meantime and thus miss their income. In terms of help, social workers indicate that they are afraid that a stricter approach will only raise the threshold for sex workers to seek for help; they fear that they lose sight of those who get criminalized. Sex workers have less distrust to aid agencies than they have for authorities. If sex workers reach out for help, they mostly do that in the city they live in. In general, the sex workers in this study indicate that they are positive about the aid agencies in Rotterdam because they treat sex workers respectfully. Sex workers differ in whether one would approach an aid agency. For instance, sex workers who just started working or sex workers from countries where the government is perceived unreliable, seem to be more isolated and do not ask for help easily.

6. Safety, human trafficking and the government

As argued in Chapter 3, the changes in local policy in the past two decades have led to a stricter approach to the sex industry. The goal of these changes is to tackle abuse in the sex industry and to combat human trafficking. At the same time, the requirements to work licensed have become stricter, which pushed certain groups of sex workers, including sex workers below the age of 21 years and migrant sex workers without a working license, to the unlicensed industry. Other sex workers, as explained in Chapter 4, choose to work unlicensed because of the higher income. As the results of this chapter will indicate, the unlicensed industry does not have the facilities the licensed industry has, such as bouncers or an alarm button. This chapter illustrates how unlicensed working sex workers take measures themselves to maintain safety. Moreover, it describes how stricter policies have a negative impact on sex workers' perceptions of authorities and how the label 'unlicensed' makes that sex workers are not willing to report abuses to the police. Finally, it also addresses the increasing emphasis on human trafficking in the design of policies and laws for the sex industry, and how sex workers perceive the association of human trafficking with 'their' industry.

6.1. Violence and abuse

6.1.1. Licensed versus unlicensed industry

Some respondents point out that the violence and abuse take regularly place in the sex industry, and that sex work can be dangerous (A8, Po3). Safety would be better maintained in licensed businesses, because of facilities (such as an alarm button) and colleagues that can keep an eye on each other (A1, A2, A4, A6, Mu3). There are often cameras and bouncers (A2, A4, A6, A8, Mu3). Several massage salons in Rotterdam also work with a doorbell, after which the door will be opened (Observation 5). But as one social worker points out, although an alarm button may be present, there can be social control in a club which makes that women are not allowed to use it, otherwise they have to find another workplace (A9). Still, some respondents think that working licensed is safer than working unlicensed (A9, Po2, Po3, Mu3). AVIM, therefore, advises unlicensed working sex workers to move to licensed businesses (Po2). However, several sex workers indicate that working licensed does not automatically mean it is safer: "I've worked from home

for 15 years, and I've been through all the shitty stuff in a club or private house. That really doesn't mean anything. [...] At home, things can go terribly wrong, but in licensed clubs, it can happen too. I've been raped in a club twice. And at home, nothing bad has happened" (S6). Moreover, a sex worker explains that in clubs, clients tend to use alcohol and/or drugs, which could make them unpredictable (S14). Furthermore, when something goes wrong in a licensed business, it is not always solved correctly, several sex workers explain (S7, S8, S16). For instance, a sex worker explains that she heard the story of a girl who experienced stealthing,²⁷ and the brothel operator did nothing because there was no proof, and the client was let in again (S16). Two sex workers talk about the time a girl was beaten in a club, and only flowers were sent to her afterwards (S7, S8). "If you complain, you will have to leave" (S8). A sex worker who used to work for an escort agency, says: "I always thought that they [the escort agency] wanted to have a copy of their [client's] passport. But it turned out, they don't do that at all. They call a hotel room to ask whether the client is there. Yeah, I can do that too" (S15). This sex worker also explains that the enforcement of licensed escort agencies is not always as good as it is assumed: "The police don't check high escort agencies, like there couldn't be any abuses. But yeah, there are only white girls, and the operators are white so they assume that everything is fine" (S15).

Several respondents point out that when laws and policies become stricter, safety will decrease (A7, A8, O5). "The law becomes more repressive, enforcing and enforcing, and controlling and controlling. I think sex workers are increasingly disappearing from us, into illegality. Vulnerability, more violence I think too. I think the risk of violence is going to increase. That it can backfire, sure" (A7). A police officer points out that although stricter policies could be made with good intentions, it can make it harder to maintain an overview: "Nowadays, when one wants to make an advertisement on Kinky, they have to show an ID. That is good, but it's doesn't make our work easier. We used to have a look on Kinky, and with certain advertisements, we could find minors, that's what we're looking for. But now, because everything has become stricter, we suddenly lost them. We had to look, they were no longer on Kinky, where are they? [...] Sometimes it's well-intentioned but not always helpful, that's what I mean. I can't say they [websites] shouldn't.

²⁷ See Chapter 5.2.1.

Sure, it's perfect what they do, but we lost them all and had to come up with something different. It's not that it disappears, it will always be there, but it becomes more hidden" (Po2).

One social worker points out that especially working from home can be high-risk because then clients know one's private address as well (A2). For this reason, sex workers indicate that they rather rent a workplace, because they are aware of the risk that clients can be stalkers (S10), can blackmail (S15) or have other bad intentions. This is also problematic for sex workers who want to register at the Chamber of Commerce (S8, S9, S15, S16). One sex worker talks about the moment she had a client who kept putting candles, flowers and letters on her door, for months (S10). One sex worker that regularly works from home, explains she lives in a building with cameras that record everything downstairs, and she has to open the door with a button in her home (S13). And, as another sex worker points out, an advantage of working from home is that one knows their way around the building (S16). "If you go to someone's place, you don't know whether they installed a camera, whether there are more people present. So yeah, I understand that people want to work from home" (S16).

6.1.2. Violence: the experiences of sex workers

Some sex workers explicitly state that they have not experienced violence in their job (S8, S13, S16). "I've worked with dangerous men. [...] And of course, mental patients, some of them are surely offenders, murders. So, I know what I'm dealing with. And I know that perhaps the most dangerous people are also the ones who feel unerringly whether you are real. And I'm not getting there with a play. I once had someone, yes, in drug trafficking or whatever, that said: there is a gun on the windowsill, does that bother you? I said no. I never felt threatened, not for a second" (S8). But this sex worker does say she is aware that there is a possibility she encounters clients with bad intentions: "Yeah, you should be aware because the human mind is complex, and people can be unpredictable. You don't know what can trigger someone" (S8). Another sex worker explains that she never felt threatened; she thinks that this is also because she is a little older and has people skills (S13). Other sex workers state that they only had a few incidents but mention

that it can also depend on one's screening method (S6, S14, S15).²⁸ One sex worker thinks there is often an emphasis on the things that go wrong: "Yeah, sometimes bad stuff happens. But that's not different from a jewelry store that is getting robbed. Or a supermarket where stuff is stolen, you know. Statistically speaking, I think, it isn't that bad, especially in the Netherlands. Of course, fucked-up things happen, absolutely, but there are way more good things than bad things" (S14). Another sex worker agrees: "Throughout the years, I've experienced several things. But in general, it's nothing compared to all the lovely, amazing, beautiful, exciting things, I have to say. I really want to emphasize that" (S9).

It should be noted that violence and abuse do not have to be physically visible: "When it comes to violence, people often think about a black eye, getting beaten. But [emotional and financial] is not visible, so [people think] it doesn't exist" (A7). One sex worker mentions that she thinks that fakers, clients who do not show up for an appointment, are also a form of violence: "If you go somewhere and no one is there, that's a terrible feeling. You've lost your money for your train ticket, your time and effort" (S15). Other sex workers have experienced clients making fake appointments as well (S8, S10). Besides not showing up, clients can also keep asking questions without making an appointment ('time waisters') (S8) and there are clients who only come to steal money ('thieves') (S10, S15). However, a client that does not show up is not automatically a faker: "Sometimes there is a reason one doesn't show up. Something happened, or their wife came home early, I don't know. I try to presuppose the positive" (S14). One sex worker says she did not experience violence by clients or the police, but she states that her surroundings were aggressive (S16). She tells about the time a distant relative found her advertisements online and threatened to inform her grandfather: "She said: what would your grandfather think of this? [...] I denied it and blocked her. I was very scared, and in the end, I called my grandfather to say that she is spreading lies about me. Of course, it's not a lie, but I was so afraid they were going to call my grandfather [...] Everyone is always talking about violence, this also falls under violence, and this is the most violence I've experienced. Not with my clients, no, my surroundings. That's where most of the violence comes from" (S16).

²⁸ See Chapter 6.2.1.

6.2. Taking measures

Unlicensed working sex workers cannot rely on the facilities as they would have had in the licensed industry, and thus they have to come up with measures themselves to protect themselves. They do this in different ways, and most of them use a combination of these measures.

6.2.1. Select clients

Although the internet offers sex workers more autonomy²⁹, it does have a major disadvantage: they do not know whether clients are honest about who they are and what they want, which can be dangerous. Many sex workers therefore work with the same clients, a client base (A1, A8, S6, S8, S9, S15). Because they have met these clients before, it feels safer because trust is gained already (A1, S9, S15). Sex workers can also recommend clients to each other, which makes them feel safer as well (S14, S15). Other sex workers indicate that they meet both regular and new clients (S8, S13, S15, S16). When a new client presents himself, sex workers sometimes screen clients beforehand, for example by googling their name and phone number (S8, S16). Sex workers also screen new clients by having a look at how they react (A1, S6, S8): "If someone says: hey, I'm blabla and I was looking for this and that, is that possible? That's fine. But when someone says: can you come tonight? That won't work" (S8). In this way, sex workers can indicate whether they are feeling comfortable with the client and consider whether they want to meet or not (A4). When meeting a new client, a sex worker explains that she prefers to meet in an area she is already familiar with (S15). She also indicates that she prefers to meet new clients in person first, because she finds it hard to screen her clients: "I don't know, I feel bad about it. I think I'm not doing it right. On one hand, I'm afraid of losing clients, and on the other hand, when they do give me information, I'm afraid that I'm too naive or too trusting" (S15). One sex worker explains that she did not screen her clients because she simply needed money and found it boring to constantly meet the same persons, but she points out that this led to more incidents, including violence and thefts (S10).

Sometimes, sex workers give the address they are working on to the client once he arrives in the street, so they can have a first impression (A4). At the same time,

²⁹ See Chapter 3.3.

social workers point out, this is not watertight; there can always be someone different behind a profile (A2, A4). It seems that sex workers are aware of these risks; they indicate that they find it scary sometimes and have a baseball bat, a knife (A2, Po3) and a pepper sprayer (A2) or a spray with a kind of paint (S13) with them. But, as a police officer explains, this sometimes creates a false sense of security: "Sometimes they have pepper spray or a baseball bat. Then I think: yes, that baseball bat is by the front door and you're in the bedroom. So, I say: the baseball bat is not going to help you when you need it. And that phone call to your boyfriend who's a few blocks away is not going to help your either when someone squeezes your throat" (Po3). Moreover, some sex workers avoid clients with certain ethnical backgrounds because they think it will cause problems (Po3). But one ex-sex worker explains that this was not always possible: "I had to deal with clients from countries that I didn't feel comfortable with. Morocco, for instance, I didn't like Surinamers either. There were certain types ... types of clients I didn't want. But yeah, I did it for the money" (S10).³⁰ One sex worker explains that she does not mind, but knows that other sex workers sometimes do: "Last week, someone asked me: is it discrimination to refuse Turkish and Moroccan boys? I said: no, that's not discrimination, you don't feel good about it so you shouldn't do it" (S13). Finally, some sex workers only work at certain times; this way, they avoid clients who are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs (Po3). A sex worker agrees: "In the past years, clients wanted appointments later in the evening, around 1 AM. They drank, they smoked, and they used drugs. They are intoxicated and get more aggressive" (S10). One sex worker does not accept intoxicated clients: "When I'm on the phone with someone and I think he's drunk, I'll send him away. Because I think he is not in his right mind, then" (S6). Another sex worker does not mind if it is not too much but does avoid working late during the week (S13). Three sex workers explicitly state that they do not drink or use drugs, or only a tiny bit, so they keep an overview of the situation (S13, S14, S15); by using drugs or alcohol, one can become more vulnerable (S15).

6.2.2. Warn each other

On Kinky, one of the largest advertisement websites in the Netherlands, there used to be a 'blacklist', or a so-called 'fakers list', where sex workers could put unreliable

³⁰ This sex worker refers to the need of money, a factor that plays a role in whether a sex worker can make her own decisions, see Chapter 3.4.

clients on to warn each other; clients who keep asking questions but never come to an appointment ('time wasters'), clients that do not show up to an appointment ('no-shows') and clients who abuse, assault, rape and steal from sex workers were listed here (SW Digitaal, n.d.). By the end of 2020, this list was no longer online because it violated the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Pringels, 2020). After the list was removed, many sex workers felt unsafe and panicked about how they should handle their safety from then on (S8, S15, S16). "It's very unfortunate that that Kinky's fakers list has disappeared. Not only were fakers listed there, but also people who were aggressive, or who stole money, or otherwise whom you do not want as a client" (S15). After the list of Kinky got removed, a sex worker started her own website to list fakers, time wasters and other unreliable clients. But, as one sex worker explains, the founder of this website asked for a fee: "She [the founder] asked for money to realize the website, it was so-called needed to build it. But now she started asking fifty euros a year to use it. I find it so nasty to ask colleagues for money for their safety. I don't want to give her money. And I think the Data Protection Authority (Dutch: Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens, AP) hasn't permitted so it can be deleted soon" (S16). One sex worker indicates that she is using this website because she thinks it offers some security at least (S13). However, one sex worker thinks faker lists give a false sense of security because it works with the name that the client provides; next time, he can pick another name, telephone number and e-mail address and thus avoid the list (S14). In April 2022, Soa Aids Nederland introduced a new, approved system called Ugly Mugs. It is an initiative to prevent violence and improve the position of sex workers (Min2). But, as one sex worker points out, not all abuses are listed here: "What I find a pity is that it concerns violent crimes, so yes, time wasters or haters or people who commit the small transgressions, they are not listed there. That's still difficult. But I do think that such a list is really important" (S15). Sex workers indicate that it is at least something (S8, S10, S15).

Another way to keep each other updated and warn each other is by group apps, for example on Whatsapp and Telegram, by informing each other which clients are good and which ones are not (A4, Po3, Min2, S15, S8, S16). Banning the list was thus only of little use because it still happens via other media (Min2). Some group chats have 100 to 150 members (S8, S13, S16). At one point, three different group chats were made: a Dutch, a Spanish and an English one (S8, S16). There are

chat groups, in which sex workers warn each other about checks and give each other advice, and there are fakers groups, in which they warn each other by sharing information about 'bad' clients (S8, S13, S16). One sex worker explained that after a client tried to pull off a condom,³¹ she warned others by posting his name and telephone number in all the fakers chats with sex workers she was in (S16). But this sex worker also indicates that others in these group apps prefer a website, so there is more of an overview (S16). One disadvantage of group apps is that someone has to be a member (S15, S16), and thus needs to know other sex workers, while faker lists on websites are accessible for everyone once a (free) account is made. Moreover, in case the police get access to these group apps, for example during a check, sex workers are afraid that the police find their data (S8).

6.2.3. Other measures

Finally, sex workers take other measures to maintain their safety. Firstly, a sex worker explains she uses deposits. This way, she is ensured that it is not a check by the police, she already has part of the money in case a client does not show up ('fakers') and she has information about the client in case something happens (S16). But, as she explains, she has not always done this, and therefore she is glad that never something bad happened (S16). Secondly, in clubs and private homes, colleagues can keep an eye on each other. When working unlicensed, sex workers sometimes also work with multiple sex workers at one address for the same reason (A7, Po1, Po3, O4). Some sex workers also prefer to work together because they think it is more fun (S13, S14, S15). One ex-sex worker explains that it feels indeed more unsafe to work alone: "You don't have any colleagues that help you fight a person. He can grab you, for example. [...] It is hard to work alone, you are vulnerable, very vulnerable" (S10). But this ex-sex worker also explains that she still wanted to work alone, because she wanted to keep the friendship and work separated, and she is aware that this is not allowed in Rotterdam (S10). Thirdly, some sex workers inform their surroundings when they go to a client (S9, S15). One sex worker indicates she is no longer doing that: "I used to leave notes, with the addresses I went to. I thought: in case something happens, they will find those. But I'm no longer doing that. My clients now are all so sweet, I don't have to worry anymore" (S9). Another sex worker indicates that

³¹ See Chapter 5.2.1.

she often turns on her Google location finder and informs others. But this is not always watertight: "I tell them [her surroundings]: I'm working here, from time to time, and if you don't hear from me, please call me. That's nice. But I have to learn to pick the right people because sometimes I ask someone and then I say that I'm home again, and that person doesn't answer. Yeah, that doesn't make me safe, of course" (S15).

Moreover, one sex worker points out that because she is not able to deposit the black money she earns, the cash is piling up in her home: "It feels more unsafe. I have a stash of cash in my home, and every time someone visits or when I'm on holiday and someone takes care of my cats, I think: who do I let in?" (S15). Another sex worker states that she had clients who tried to steal money: "Some of them first pay you, so they see where you keep the money" (S10). This sex worker, therefore, says that using a safe can avoid these problems. One sex worker explains she has a safe in which she keeps all the money she earns (S11) and another sex worker uses an external safe, which she rents, to store the money because then it is no longer in her home (S13). Finally, one sex worker mentions that she had a dog: "I always make sure the TV is on in the living room, and I used to have a dog. Sweetheart, but if someone came in, he'd bark. Then they [clients] are a bit frightened. And I pretend that I'm bringing the money to my partner" (S6). This sex worker also refers to having another person around or at least creating that illusion. One sex worker asks her partner to be the living room while she is working (S11). Another sex worker explains that when she worked in a sex cinema and shop, she knew the operator was in the store so she could warn him, which made her feel safer (S16).

6.3. Reporting abuse ... or not?

It seems that sex workers have low trust in the police and the government in general (A1, S14, S15, Observation 3 and 14). When asked about the relationship between sex workers and the police, a sex worker laughed: "Ha, it's fucked-up. There is a lack of trust. And because of everything that has happened, it only decreased. There are many people working from home, they can be checked, and kicked out of their houses. They get a huge fine. That happens because of the

police.³² So, what do you think if something happens, that sex workers go to the police? No, because trust has been damaged too many times" (S6). Sex workers also distrust the government in general. Licensed working sex workers, who work the opting-in system, were disappointed when it turned out that they were not entitled to financial help during the lockdowns (A1, A6). "With opting-in, sex workers paid so much tax and got nothing in return. It was scandalous, really scandalous" (S7). Another sex worker agrees: "All that time, I paid taxes. Sex work falls in the high rate of taxes, and we didn't get any financial support. Why would I still pay taxes? If the government doesn't want to take care of me, why would I take care of the government? Sex workers say that the government is our biggest pimp. That's a reason to start working unlicensed" (S15). Sex workers already risked large fines for violation of covid rules (A4, S6), and the lack of financial support while paying taxes seems to be an extra factor in the distrust sex workers already had towards authorities (A1, A6, A7). The police are aware of the distrust and know that it is unlikely that incidents would be reported (Po1). Still, police officers point out that they find it important to be present, so sex workers can reach out to them (Po1, Po2, Po3): "We always hope that they [sex workers] reach out to us, even though they are working illegally. I always tell them that: hey, you say you don't work legal and that you're not a victim of human trafficking, but please don't let that stop you from reporting abuses" (Po3). Still, a social worker finds it more likely that they solve problems with each other rather than reporting abuses to authorities (A1).

Several respondents indicate that especially sex workers from outside the Netherlands, such as Eastern Europe and Latin America, distrust authorities, including the police, even more (A4, Po1, Po2, Po3, Mu3, S6, S8, S10). "When a sex worker gets checked by the police, in Latin America, they are risking being raped and assaulted. Because the police there are corrupt and bad. So, if you experienced that, or you know that that happens, then you fear the police here too" (S6). Sex workers from Eastern Europe often have a distrust towards authorities as well (A9, Po1). As a police officer indicates, it often takes much time and effort to gain their trust (Po2). One Romanian ex-sex worker indicates that it perhaps also has to do with word of mouth: "They all talk bad about the police,

³² This sex worker (S6) refers to the period where sex work was not allowed due to lockdowns, and they could receive large fines because of violation of covid rules. See chapter 1.4.2.

without a reason. No reason at all. Only because they know that in Romania, sex workers are bullied by the police. Then they come here [the Netherlands] with the same idea in their head. They are afraid, and they behave hostile toward the police. But they don't have any experience here, no experience at all. They only speak English, but badly. So, they cannot communicate with the police and think that they are bullying them. But that's not true. [...] They talk to each other, negative, gossiping" (S10).

Sex workers that have had contact with the police, differ in their experiences. Some sex workers indicate that the police hinted that abuses such as violence or robbery are part of their job and felt that they are not taken seriously (A1). A sex worker confirms: "Sex workers are afraid that to be looked at: sorry, but you do this work, what do you expect? Like you're asking for it" (S14). These stories are often told through word of mouth: "If you want to report something, you are often told that you should have chosen a different profession. At least that's what I've heard a lot through the grapevine. Or they say: come back in seven weeks, even with things like rape and the like. Is someone going to walk, with all the evidence, on their body for seven weeks? And traumas?" (S6). Social workers also indicate that use of language is not always respectfully toward sex workers, which can reinforce their negative treatment (A1, A2, A4). One sex worker wanted to report abuse that occurred by her client who was mentally disabled. But, as she explains, she is unsure whether she would report abuse again: "I've made a fool of myself. It's really been a waste of my time. They didn't do shit with it, I just know. I thought: they really think I'm crazy. That was bad. [...] I really shouldn't have done anything with it, I should have kept it to myself because the results ... it didn't help me, it helped nobody" (S9). A sex worker points out that although she understands the distrust, by not going to the police when something has happened, they possibly maintain the situation of fear and prejudices (S14). There are also positive stories about the contact with the police. Two sex workers indicate that they would report abuses to the police because they have been treated nicely in the past (S10, S13). "The police advised me to stop working. Yeah, they were right. Of course, I told them what I did for a living. I was treated very respectfully every time" (S10). This sex worker had to call the police several times, and although they were not able to do anything against the suspects, she thinks the police treated her very nice and respectful (S10).

Besides the trust issue, one sex worker also indicates that she finds it hard to decide whether she should have gone to the police: "I was so stupid when I started. I sometimes made people pay afterwards. Then they've had sex and didn't pay. But what is that? Is that rape, is that theft? [...] While, if I would have had a construction company, and people don't pay me, I'd file a lawsuit" (S14). Moreover, in case a sex worker does report abuse, she must disclose her name: "I'm not going to report when something happens, because what will happen to me? Or what is he [the abuser] going to do, perhaps he'll know my name? You know, if it becomes a trial" (S16). Another sex worker talks about the time there was a girl who did not want to report an incident because she was afraid her parents would find out (S13). One important aspect here is whether the sex worker was working licensed or unlicensed. As indicated in Chapter 3, many sex workers work partly licensed and partly unlicensed. When working unlicensed, an ex-sex worker indicates that she definitely would not have gone to the police: "I wouldn't go. They already checked me once. Then I would be saying: no, I don't work there, but here! You can find me here! No, I really wouldn't have done it. At that moment, no. But when everything was fine [when she was working licensed], there were moments where I did reach out to them" (S10). Another sex worker confirms; when she talks about the time a client took off his condom, she says: "After that, I went for an STD test. The lady said that this was rape. I was shocked because I didn't experience it as such. Wow, if I would have been working licensed, I could have gone to the police. Now I cannot report it because I'm so afraid that I will be kicked out of my house and get a fine, you know" (S16). Moreover, a sex worker indicates that one time she thought that a girl had a pimp; she did not contact authorities, however, because she thought that if she'd done that, the girl would be gone the next day (S13). Moreover, *if* a sex worker wants to report abuse, they sometimes do not know where to go. They consider the police not an option because they do not trust them or are afraid of consequences. In the sex industry, there is no such thing as an authority where abuses can be reported, for example a labor inspectorate (S8). "Oh, yes, I have experienced some violence. But the thing is, you have nowhere to go. It almost feels like, apparently, it's part of the job. Because I'm doing this work, I have the risk to experience this. It feels intense" (S9). Some sex workers indeed indicate that they find abuses part of their job: "I've never filed a report with all those things [clients who did not pay,

stealth[ing],³³ not even allegations. You can safely say: I experienced this as a sex worker, how the man looked like and that they keep an eye on things or something. But you don't even think about it, it's part of the job. And of course, that's not true, it shouldn't be. It's not part of the job, it's abuse, like in any other profession" (S14).

6.4. The sex industry and human trafficking

6.4.1. Association becomes conflation

Several respondents point out that human trafficking occurs in other industries as well, but it seems that the associations are extra strong with the sex industry (A1, S15, S16). One sex worker talks about the time she worked at the market, where she was not allowed to take breaks and had to work ten hours a day for minimum wage: "So, that was allowed? Oh, stop it. Human trafficking takes place in our [sex] industry, but way more in other industries, like greenhouses and stuff" (S16). The *unlicensed* sex industry is even stronger associated with human trafficking (A2). Several respondents point out that sex work and human trafficking are not the same, and they should not be treated as such (A1, A7, Po2, Pu, Mu3, O1, O2). However, respondents think this distinction is not always made, and therefore the association becomes a conflation (A1, A7, S15, O5). Public opinion and media tend to conflate sex work with human trafficking (A1, A2, A6, S15) and several respondents point out that the city council of Rotterdam often conflates sex work with human trafficking as well (Pu, Mu1, Mu3, Observation 11).

6.4.2. Human trafficking from the perspective of authorities

It seems that authorities realize that sex workers are a heterogeneous group, in which both fully independent sex workers are working, but there are also sex workers where the extent of agency and control³⁴ can be questioned (Min1, Min2, Mu1). Although authorities state that sex work and human trafficking are not the same, they do believe that it is often connected in a way (Po2, Mu1, Mu2, Observation 6, 11). Statistics on human trafficking often deal with a large black number, which makes it harder to understand on what scale human trafficking takes place (A7, Min1, Mu3). An employee of the municipality points out that the government has a responsibility to combat human trafficking and to offer care and

³³ See Chapter 5.2.1.

³⁴ See Chapter 3.

protection to victims (Mu1). In the past years, checks by the police on unlicensed sex work have increased; this has led to more reports and thus more imposed measures (Mu1). One sex worker questions the efficacy of the emphasis on human trafficking: "[The conflation] makes it harder to combat human trafficking, I think. Because if you enlarge the scope of potential victims, you can no longer pick out the real victims. If you think that every voluntarily working sex worker is a victim, how do you know who really needs help? Who the real victims are?" (S15). A police officer explains that it can indeed be hard to find a balance: "There is human trafficking, and there is prostitution. Those are two separate things. It is often connected, but those are two different things. I think if you want to do the right thing, you have to find a balance between those two. If you focus too much on illegal prostitution, for example people working illegally from home, you will rush them. Then they won't reach out to you for help. But, if you're too soft, you'll get proliferation. You have to be in balance" (Po2).

6.4.3. How sex workers are disadvantaged by stricter policies

Sex workers find human trafficking a crime that should be combatted, but they point out that current laws and policies also disadvantage sex workers who have nothing to do with it (A1, S6, S8, S9, S13, S14, S15, S16). One sex worker thinks that sex workers who have nothing to do with sex work, have to sacrifice their freedom to the group that is victims of human trafficking (S15). Sex workers think that the stricter laws and policies become, to combat human trafficking, the more likely it becomes that sex workers shift to the unlicensed industry (S15). In the unlicensed industry, sex workers are less likely to report abuses,³⁵ which makes them more vulnerable and thus increases the chance of human trafficking (S6, S15). Moreover, the link with human trafficking impedes the normalization of sex work as a profession (A7, S9). It seems that people sometimes find it hard to understand why someone voluntary chooses to do sex work, and this could contribute to the association with human trafficking (Pu, S9, S14, S15, O5). "People can see that there are voluntarily working sex workers, but they are considered to be an exception", a sex worker explains (S15). Several sex workers find that especially Christian organizations associate sex work more with human trafficking (S6, S8, S15, S16). The link with human trafficking has led to more

³⁵ See Chapter 6.3.

prejudices and exclusion, a sex worker explains: "I used to be out.³⁶ [...] I told people about my work, my parents, and my friends. But I saw it changing. [...] And now I'm in a situation where I feel so disadvantaged and oppressed. It's terrible. I never tell people about my work anymore, I'm completely back in the closet now" (S8). Another sex worker talks about the time when she told her ex-partner about her work: "The first thing he said was: are you working voluntarily? Uhm yeah? If I wouldn't, why would I tell you? Hello? I really felt ... Why is that your first question? It's all because of that image, that association [with human trafficking]" (S16). A social worker points out that in this way, sex workers are quickly labelled as victims (A6). This is problematic because this implies passivity, and thus a lack of agency:³⁷ "Because of that link, people tend to see sex workers as a very vulnerable group, like they are not capable of making decisions by themselves" (A7). Two sex workers also point out that human trafficking overshadows the positive side of sex work (S13, S14).

6.4.4. Clumsy and vulnerable, or a victim?

Whether one could be considered a victim of human trafficking or not, is often hard to determine because it is often a subjective debate. For instance, several respondents point out that the line between making 'clumsy decisions' and being exploited can sometimes be vague. "When I got out, people in my surroundings said ... I had a boyfriend who looked like a pimp. Later, it turned out that he indeed kept my money, but that's another story. But so many people asked: do you keep your money? And you don't work for him, right? Of course, I said that I didn't work for him. That was true, I didn't work for him. But I was such a stupid bitch and so in love that I gave away all my money. He never forced me, but he did manipulate me. He said he would return the money, but he never did. So yeah, at some point, I left" (S6). Other sex workers had similar stories, in which their (ex)partners hold back their money (S13, S14). Moreover, cultural differences and standards complicate the discussion about human trafficking and the sex industry. According to Dutch standards, for instance, women that work relatively much and only earn a little bit of money can be considered exploited (Po1, Po2, Po3). However, migrant women do not always see themselves as victims because they still earn more

³⁶ Sex workers often use the expression 'being out' to explain that they made it public that they do sex work. Sometimes they are fully open, and sometimes only a few relatives or friends know about their work.

³⁷ See Chapter 3.2.

money for the same services than they would have earned in their country of origin (A1, A4, A5, A9, Po1, Po2, Po3). For instance, they sometimes find it normal to pay facilitators, such as drivers, a large amount of their money because after all, they have helped them (A1, A2, Pu). One social worker points out that although working conditions can be considered exploitive according to Western standards, one should keep in mind that foreign sex workers do not always have an alternative (A1). "We try to explain to them, that it isn't normal. [...] But it's really difficult because these women often have families abroad. What are you going to tell them? These women think: if I don't do this, then my family doesn't have any food. For them, each euro is important" (Po3).³⁸ Furthermore, sex workers are not always honest about their living and working conditions (O1, O2), for example because of the distrust towards authorities,³⁹ which makes it even harder to categorize them as victims. In other words, what is considered exploitive according to Dutch or Western standards, might be considered normal or at least reasonable to sex workers from outside Western Europe (A2, A4, Po2).

6.5. Conclusion

It is often assumed that working licensed would be safer than working unlicensed because of the facilities such as cameras and alarm buttons. Sex workers, however, point out that this does not necessarily have to be true; abuses occur in the licensed industry as well. Still, unlicensed working sex workers cannot rely on these facilities. Therefore, these sex workers have to come up with measures themselves; they can do this individually, such as screening and working with deposits, or they can do this together, for example through group chats and fakers lists to warn each other. Most sex workers are aware that these measures are not watertight, but security is not ensured in the licensed industry either. Some sex workers have experienced violence and abuse, while others explicitly state that they have not. Sex workers in general have a large distrust towards authorities, including the police. Unlicensed sex workers are aware that what they are doing is not allowed, and that they can face measures such as closure of the building they are working in. Therefore, they are not willing to report abuses, but this also means that authorities cannot help them. Experiences of sex workers with authorities

³⁸ Here, the police officer refers to the need of money, a factor that can play a role in the autonomy and agency of a sex worker, see Chapter 3.4.1.

³⁹ See Chapter 6.3.

differ; where some sex workers are downright negative about authorities, and mainly the police, other sex workers find that they have been treated nicely and respectfully. Word to mouth stories seem to play a large role here. In the past two decades, municipalities and other authorities have gained more attention to human trafficking. This resulted in stricter laws and policies, which aim to combat human trafficking. Many sex workers do not want to downplay the crime; they take sexual exploitation seriously and want it to be combatted as well. However, they do point out that the stricter laws and policies, disadvantage them as well, since it limits their options to work licensed. Moreover, it puts another negative stemple on sex work while this is already strongly stigmatized.

7. Social dimension

As argued in previous chapters, due to stricter requirements, unlicensed working sex workers are much on their own in terms of income, hygiene, health and safety. Although stigma is also present in the licensed industry, it is even a larger problem for unlicensed working sex workers; most women already have to keep their job a secret for their surroundings, but now for authorities as well. However, as the results will show, unlicensed working sex workers often understand each other better than outsiders do, which creates a community in which experiences and advice are shared. This chapter explains how the social dimension, whether one can talk publicly about their work, but also the contact with other sex workers, plays a role in how an unlicensed working sex worker organizes her work, and thus shapes the labour conditions described in earlier chapters. Although it might seem paradoxical, unlicensed working sex workers can be activists. This chapter addresses why sex workers aim for better rights and identifies the struggles sex workers face to unionize.

7.1. Stigma and anonymity

7.1.1. Stigma and its consequences

Paying or getting paid for sexual services is strongly stigmatized (A5, Mu3, Po2). There is often a moral debate about sex work, and whether it can, or should, be considered a profession (A6, Po2). This manifests itself in the public opinion (A1, A2, A7, Po2) and politics (A6, Mu3, Pu, O5), but also in the fact that banks associate it with crimes, such as money laundering, and therefore do not grant sex workers a business bank account or a mortgage (A5, A7). Sex workers who have clients in health care explain that they often do their job under the label 'health care' rather than 'sex work' to avoid the stigma sex work entails (S8, S9). Another sex worker talks about the double standard people have when she tells them about her work: "When I say: I work with people with an ostomy, autism, paralysis, ALS, no hands, no legs, doesn't matter. [...] They want love and attention, that's my job. Oh, oh, that's nice, they say. But when I say: I have four, five days a week mostly Moroccan clients, then I'm a dirty whore. So, it's about how people want to categorize you" (S13). The stigma on sex work has several consequences, which can be a reason for a sex worker to work unlicensed (A1). Firstly, stigma can play

a role when one wants to find a job outside the sex industry (A1, A7). Sex workers find it hard to reach out to the Dutch Employee Insurance (Dutch: UWV) to seek another job because they are afraid that the taboo on their previous work is still there (A1). The Business Register of the Chamber of Commerce, where sex works are registered, displays detailed information.⁴⁰ Sex workers are also registered at the municipality when they apply for a license. By working unlicensed, a sex worker does not register herself and thus her anonymity is more ensured, and stigma is avoided.

Moreover, stigma can have an impact on the relations a sex worker has with her friends, relatives, and partner (A1, A5). A sex worker talks about the moment her daughter-in-law found out that she was doing sex work, and although she changed her opinion later, it was a difficult time for her (S9). Some sex workers, therefore, lie to their surroundings about their real income, or partly lie by saying that they are therapists or have a business (S14, S15). A sex worker explains that she knew stories about women who were not able to work during lockdowns, and their families started asking questions: "You don't want to return to your family. Because why did you lose your job? You do catering, so you can deliver the food at home? You know, they have to explain everything" (S6). But, as an ex-sex worker explains, it is sometimes difficult to lie to your family: "They expected that I would call in the morning, or I would join them with an activity. But I was often very tired in the morning because I worked all night. So, I just told them: I have to work tonight. It's not easy to have sex all night, to please others, because that's usually how it goes, and then visiting your family the next morning and having to carry stuff, I don't know. You go to the market, you do this and that. So, I had to be honest and tell them" (S10). This sex worker indicates that in the beginning, her family made jokes, but later accepted her work. Several sex workers did not tell their (whole) families about their work, because they are afraid of disapproval, disappointment, or aggravating reactions (S12, S14, S15, S16). Some sex workers are more open to selected persons, such as friends, because they feel that these persons have a more accepting attitude towards their work (S13, S14, S15, S16). There are also sex workers who work completely anonymous, without anyone in their surroundings knowing, a sex worker explains (S6).

⁴⁰ See Chapter 4.2

The stigma on sex work can make a sex worker feel dirty and ashamed (A9). Some women do not call themselves sex workers, even though they offer sexual services in return for money (A9). One sex worker points out that sometimes, sex workers also experience stigma and taboo "in their own head", even though no incident has happened (Observation 14). One sex worker who has stopped and started several times in the past years points out that the stigma can also have a mysterious, exciting side: "[Sex work] is exciting, because it is often disapproved, that's the beauty of taboo. I thought it was exciting to lead a double life. I had a different name, I felt like a super-spy. The double life also has its charm, which is also fun. That's also something I noticed when I stopped with sex work, it makes me feel average and I find that so boring" (S14). In other words, working in secret can be exhausting (S10), but it can also enable one to have a sort of alter ego, a double life (S14). There are also sex workers who publicly talk about their profession, or, as sex workers themselves say: 'they are out' (A6). There are also sex workers who state that stigma does not bother them (S6, S13). One sex worker says she simply does not care what her surroundings think of her (S13). Another sex worker explains that she made it publicly because she did not want a double life (S9). This sex worker also explains that when she made it public, other sex workers surprisingly no longer wanted to be seen with her: "I was open about it, they were not. They didn't want to be next to me. [...] Perhaps they think: but then they think the same of me. While people who don't do that work at all have no trouble being next to me, but people that do sex work, do sometimes. The taboo is huge" (S9). However, 'going out' does not always happen voluntarily: two sex workers explained that someone in their surroundings told other people about their work (S15, S16). Many sex workers are afraid that someone else will make their work public, a sex worker explains (S6).

7.1.2. The role of anonymity

Because there is so much stigma, most sex workers find it important to work as anonymous as possible. They try to maintain their anonymity in different ways. Almost all sex workers use a pseudonym because it ensures more anonymity and they often have a second, separate phone for work (Observation 10). Secondly, one sex worker explains that she wears a wig in the photos she uses for her advertisements, to avoid recognition by others (S16). Moreover, to ensure anonymity of both client and sex worker, most sex workers prefer cash because it

is not traceable.⁴¹ Furthermore, unlicensed sex workers often do not work in only one municipality but often travel to other places in the Netherlands as well (A5, A8, A9, Po1, Po2, Po3, Mu1, O1, O2, O5, Observation 10, Observation 14). Sex workers, thus, have high mobility. This increases their income,⁴² but sex workers also work further from home to reduce the chance of being recognized: "I used to go far away too. Everyone does that, at least if you have the opportunity. If you have your own car, no children. Suppose you have to pick up the children from school, that doesn't work. But, if people have a choice, they will not go to work in their city, where they can run into their neighbours. The great thing is, I did meet the neighbour, 150 kilometres away. He thought the same, apparently: I'll go very far away and then I won't meet anyone [laughs]. Anyway, that's how it is. [...] Because of recognizing, anonymity" (S14). Another sex worker indicates that because she is depending on public transport, she indeed prefers to work closer to home, and not in smaller places that are harder to reach (S15), while another sex worker has her own car and can drive everywhere (S13). One sex worker from Limburg explains that she worked in Hellevoetsluis (near Rotterdam) because she thinks that it was more anonymous and since it is a large city, there would be more potential clients (S11). Other sex workers work in their city, but also in other places in the Netherlands because the client lives there (S9, S11, S13, S15, S16). Several respondents point out that sex workers in Rotterdam also work often in Antwerp (Belgium) because it is close and enables sex workers to tap into a new market (A8, A9, Mu1, S14, S16). An employee of the Municipality of Antwerp states that although she sometimes sees sex workers from the Netherlands, they do not keep track of where sex workers are coming from (Antw). Besides Belgium, sex workers can work in other countries, mostly Germany (Pu, Mu1, S13, S16). There are also sex workers from abroad who come to the Netherlands and work for example in Rotterdam for a few weeks, and then return home (Mu1, S8, S13).

7.2. Discrimination and exclusion

7.2.1. Specific policies and laws for the sex industry

Sex workers often feel treated differently, because specific laws and policies are designed for the sex industry: "I think we are the most stigmatized group worldwide. And then you want to register us in a database, which can be hacked,

⁴¹ See Chapter 4.2.

⁴² See Chapter 4.3.

that adds nothing to our existence, and offers no safety. And you're only doing that with *one* profession. Nurses need a special registration, and taxi drivers need a license, I think. Those are things that make sense to me. Because that has to do with your diplomas, and it is not strongly stigmatized" (S8). This sex worker refers to the Sex Work Regulation Bill (Dutch: Wet regulering sekswerk, Wrs), which aims to uniform sex work policies in the Netherlands, and thus reduce disparities; for instance, the minimum age would be increased from 18 to 21 years of age,⁴³ and a license requirement would be introduced for all sex businesses and sex workers via a database, which in its turn would provide municipalities an overview of their sex industry (Bleeker & Van den Blaak, 2021; Hiemstra et al., 2020). The goal of this bill is to prevent coercion and exploitation, and to create safe and healthy working conditions for all sex workers (Hiemstra et al., 2020). Due to the impact of the bill and the resignation of the Dutch government in January 2021, the bill is declared controversial and is thus delayed (CCV, n.d.; Observation 11 and 14). Still, many sex workers are afraid that this bill will be accepted and already know they would refuse to register themselves (A1, S8, S14, S15). "I only know sex workers who mainly work unlicensed, purely because they don't want to be registered, because they don't dare. They are afraid that it leaks out" (S14). A social worker explains that several data leaks and the childcare benefit scandal by the Tax and Customs Administration⁴⁴ reinforced those feelings of distrust (A1). A sex worker confirms: "One data leak after another is on the news, you know. Youth care has another data leak. Yes, they [sex workers] are just afraid of that. It's not safe" (S14). Moreover, one sex worker explains that she doubts registering because she thinks she is afraid that she will not get a Certificate of Good Conduct (Dutch: VOG), which she needs if she wants to have an education career (S16). There is one sex worker who thinks that she would register herself once the bill has entered into force, because she already is open about her work (S9). Moreover, a sex worker explains that she thinks that sex workers from abroad, who often deal with a language barrier, do not understand the intentions and possible consequences of the bill and therefore do not find it problematic (S8). Still, several respondents point out that they have doubts about the Wrs because they question

⁴³ In 2015, the minimum age for sex workers in Rotterdam was already increased to 21 years, see Chapter 3.1.1.

⁴⁴ This scandal (Dutch: toeslagenaffaire) involved "a decisional aid on an AI algorithm that used nationality as a discriminant predictive feature, with ensuing bureaucratic decisions reflecting discrimination of minority groups" (Alon-Barkat & Busuioc, 2022, p.6).

whether sex workers will register themselves (A1, A7, Po1), they are afraid that they lose sight of sex workers (A1, A7) and they have questions about the granting and enforcement of licenses (A5, Po2, Mu3, Observation 17). Moreover, at this point, there are no 'advantages' for sex workers to register themselves, and according to several respondents, there thus should be some form of a reward to make registering more appealing (A1, Po3, Observation 16). Although there is thus much criticism, the Wrs is not off the table because authorities wish to have a uniform policy to remove the confusion that appears because all municipalities have their policies (Mu1). Moreover, the bill also enables authorities to register personal data (Dutch: bijzondere persoonsgegevens) about sex workers, since there has not been a legal basis for it yet (Mu1, Observation 16).

Besides the special policies, sex workers often feel treated differently because authorities, such as regular policemen or employees of the municipality, are often too curious (A1, A2, A4). Sometimes, irrelevant questions are asked, which makes sex workers feel awkward and are not willing to talk much about their profession (A4). One social worker suggests that this might be because authorities are not always familiar with the target group (A2, A7). This can be a reason for sex workers to avoid contact with authorities, and thus work unlicensed. Aid agencies such as Humanitas try to educate authorities and professionals on how to treat sex workers respectfully, and although it seems that it works, there is still room for improvement (A2, A3, A4). AVIM states that they find it very important to approach sex workers respectfully during checks, but they also admit that they are aware that 'regular' policemen do not always know how to treat sex workers in a proper manner (Po1, Po2, Po3).

7.2.2. Exclusion within the sex industry

It should be noted that exclusion occurs within the sex industry as well. For instance, in Rotterdam, there are no licensed businesses where particularly male and trans sex workers can work (A1). This social worker points out that nationally, there are several businesses where a few male and/or trans sex workers can work, but it is nothing compared to the total number of male and trans sex workers (A1). In other words, male and trans sex workers are often automatically dependent on the unlicensed industry. Although there are more licensed businesses where female sex workers work (A1), it should be noted that not all female sex workers

can actually work there: "Most people think that exclusion [in the sex industry] is about male and trans sex workers but it goes way further than that. [...] It's also about too old, too ugly, too hairy, too fat, too ... It's so much more than the standard thought that only male and trans sex workers are excluded" (S16). She refers to a documentary⁴⁵ in which a woman wanted to start as an escort but was not accepted by the escort agency because she did not shave (S16). Licensed businesses such as clubs and private homes often hold on to typical images of women and thus do not accept female sex workers who differ too much from that image (S16). This sex worker finds this decision remarkable, since she works in a specific niche where the income is higher: "My price is one of the highest, I'm one of the most expensive, but I'm not welcome at other places? Where they could actually make a fucking lot of money off me, but I don't fit into the typical picture? Where's the fucking logic? There is no logic, it's just the image we have of women that have to be blonde, slim, big tits" (S16). In other words, the licensed industry has set certain appearance requirements to be accepted; one can be slightly different, but when one differs too much, she will be refused (S16). Refused sex workers are thus dependent on the unlicensed industry, together with male and trans sex workers. In the unlicensed industry, it is easier for these sex workers to work. The internet functions as a filter,⁴⁶ where sex workers can indicate that they provide specific services. Clients, at the same time, can seek specific wishes and demands that licensed businesses do not provide, such as specific fetishes. Demand and supply can, thus, find each other faster and easier. Although she does not want to work in a licensed business, the excluded sex worker does want to have the opportunity at least (S16). Several sex workers indicate that there should be a licensed place where all sex workers are welcomed - female, male and trans - so everyone can work licensed (S14, S15, S16).

7.3. The community: "We know how it feels"

7.3.1. Understand and help each other

Sex workers mostly have contact via the internet. There are group apps by and for sex workers on Whatsapp and Telegram, some of them have up to 150 members (S8, S13, S16).⁴⁷ These group apps enable sex workers to have contact

⁴⁵ Luhrs, Y. (2021). *Ik word prostituee* [I want to become a prostitute] [TV documentary]. Net5.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3.3.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 7.3.1.

easier and faster. Because they often use a special work phone,⁴⁸ it is also more anonymous than speaking to each other offline. Here, experiences are shared, and advice and questions are asked (S8, S13, S15, S16). Uncomfortable conversations with clients and incidents are reported here as well because the blacklist of Kinky was deleted in 2020.⁴⁹ During the lockdowns, several sex workers have been robbed by 'clients'. The footage of these robberies was shared in the group apps, and although sex workers indicate that they found it horrible to see, they point out that it is a way to keep each other updated (S8, S13, S14, S16). There are also group chats where sex workers search for a new workplace, for example because their last one was closed by the municipality after a check (A4, Po1, Po3, S11).

Sex workers indicate that they often understand each other better than their surroundings (S15, S16, Observation 12 and 14). Two sex workers explain that they can be more open about her work, and they experience less shame and stigma between sex workers (S14, S15). A sex worker also says she enjoys her work much more since she is in contact with other sex workers (S16). One sex worker says that she often has to defend her work: "You have to be able to dress it up very much, from okay why am I doing this, why do I think this is good for me, why do I like this work. So, the moment I do have a bit of a nasty client, you immediately have the reaction: yes, you see, it's indeed a bad profession, or: it's indeed bad for you. I worked at a university for a while, and that was a terrible job for me, but nobody there said: oh well, go do something else, it's better for you. No, everyone says: come on, it's part of the job, it's normal, you can do it! It's viewed differently" (S15). Another sex worker explains that when something indeed happens, for example the time a girl was raped by a client, the reactions of sex workers are often different than those of non-sex workers: "We understand each other, we find it sad. But someone else, someone from Christen Unie⁵⁰ would say: see, the industry is very unsafe! You don't want it, but they will do it anyway, right? Yeah. But you were naked? You decided to give someone access? But it's rape, and no one gives permission to be raped" (S16). In other words, sex workers often find it easier to talk to each other about their work, because outsiders often do not understand their work or have prejudices.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 7.1.2.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 6.2.2.

⁵⁰ Christen Unie is a Dutch Christian-democratic political party.

In the licensed industry, sex workers can meet each other in the workplace, for example in clubs or private homes. When working unlicensed, however, getting in touch is much harder. Some sex workers simply went to google and found support organizations (S8), some sex workers met each other via aid agencies (S16) and others meet each other via other sex workers (S15) or were simply added to a group chat (S8). There are sex workers who have many contacts within the community and speak with other sex workers frequently (S8, S13, S15), and there are sex workers who know others but do not have a contact that often (S9). At the same time, sex workers point out that there are also sex workers who are isolated and do not have contact with others (S6, S8, S16). In other words, not everyone is a member of the community. One sex worker explained that she does not know other sex workers and that she did not realize that she could try to find them, for example online (S11). Sometimes, sex workers only meet other sex workers after a while; Three sex workers indicated that they did not know anybody when they started working, but at some point, they met people who introduced them to others (S14, S15, S16).

Sex workers often do not want to go to authorities⁵¹ and find it hard to talk with their surroundings about their work.⁵² A social worker thinks that sex workers rather help each other than go to the authorities (A1). One sex worker explains that because they are so dependent on their selves, they help each other: "I have to be honest, I worked in education, and everyone thinks that education is a lot of fun and joy, but it's everyone for themselves. And everyone wants to be the best, and help each other superficially, but not for real things. And in this industry [sex industry], help or friendships come so quickly. Really meaningful" (S16). Sex workers help each other in different ways. One sex worker explained that her friend needed cash in her bank account, and thus her friend deposit the cash on her bank account, so she could transfer it to the account of her friend (S7). Another sex worker explains that when she was thinking about working licensed but expected that it would be difficult to get a license, another sex worker offered her to be registered at her escort agency if it would not work out (S16). Sex workers also call each other when they are in trouble and do not know what to do. A sex worker talks about the time she got a phone call from a girl who had been checked by the

⁵¹ See Chapter 6.3.

⁵² See Chapter 7.1.1.

police: "She booked a hotel for four nights, but after one night she was kicked out, but she didn't get her money back. But that was in Eindhoven,⁵³ I'm not going to drive all the way to Eindhoven, you know. But someone else from the south was reading along so I said: can you help her? And she did" (S13). Sex workers also share tips and give each other advice, they teach each other about work itself, for example about hygiene (S14). They also share tips about how to get around rules. One sex worker for instance explained that she tipped others to work via Airbnbs because then checks would not have negative consequences when one works from their own home (S10).⁵⁴ Experiences with authorities are often told word to mouth (A1). They also recommend each other to go to aid agencies (A9) or seek help together (S16). Sometimes sex workers also discuss what services they want to offer and what clients they should accept (S13). This sex worker explains that learning from each other often goes both ways: "I said to her [another sex worker]: you should take some time off, clear your head! But she taught me stuff too, you know. My advertisement was online 24/7, and I learned from her: turn it off, take some rest. [...] So, she really taught me to take time off too, and I'm feeling happy now" (S13). At the same time, one sex worker indicates, the advice given is not always helpful; she explains that during the lockdowns, some sex workers encouraged each other to continue working (S16).

7.3.2. Hostile contact

It seems that the community of sex workers can be very friendly and supportive because they often face the same struggles, such as stigmatization. At the same time, there can also be hostile contact. For instance, there can be trust issues. A sex worker explains that only a few days before the interview, she was working in a cottage in a holiday park when she suddenly had guards standing at her door; she suspects another sex worker of betrayal (S6). Sex workers thus can also betray each other, another sex worker confirms (S8). Moreover, there is often competition among sex workers because their clients are their income (A9).⁵⁵ A police officer explains that sex workers might indeed betray each other: "I sometimes get messages that say: you should check that out, or: you should have a look at that. [...] They then point to another ad, from another girl. Either it's fire

⁵³ Eindhoven is a city in the south of the Netherlands.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 3.3.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.3.

envy or it's something real. And then sometimes we manage to call an advertisement, and then we get the same story. So it must have been envy if they are on the same street, come from the same village or have had an argument. It's competition, yes" (Po1). A sex worker indicates that some sex workers, therefore, want to stay anonymous, for example because they are afraid that their 'colleagues' would make public that they are doing sex work (S8). A sex worker thinks that these tensions also have to do with one's personality and the position one is in: "I think if you are more privileged [in terms of agency and income],⁵⁶ you could easier say: well, this person has something to offer, and that person has something to offer" (S8). One sex worker said she once wanted to give another sex worker advice about what she should do after she was checked by the police, but this other sex worker did not appreciate it and reacted hostile (S16). This sex worker also explains that sometimes, sex workers tend to show off their income and clients, which she finds very annoying and mean to the sex workers who are struggling with their income (S16). Sex workers talk and gossip about each other as well (S3, S4, S10, S13, S14, Observation 14). However, one sex worker points out, tensions exist in licensed businesses as well (S6), and another sex worker says it is normal to find some people nicer than others (S15).

7.4. Activism and unionization

Sex workers often feel frustrated that they are not taken seriously by authorities and that their rights are denied (A1, A4, S6, S8, S15, S16). Specific problems are not being able to open a bank account, not being able to get a mortgage or rent a house (Rijnink & Van Wijk, 2020). Sex workers often find that even *if* they are heard, nothing is done with their answers (A1). Social workers point out that they find it important for the sex workers to raise their voices, but it takes small steps which takes much time (A2, A7). Although it might seem paradoxical, unlicensed working sex workers can be activists or members of a union by sex workers (S6). There are several initiatives in the Netherlands that aim for better rights for sex workers and where sex workers can take part of: Sekswerkexpertise [Sex Work Expertise], SWAD, SAVE, Seksworks and Red Insight. In Amsterdam, there is a special center, the Prostitution Information Centre (PIC), where information and education are provided about sex work in general and the Red-Light District of

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3.4.

Amsterdam. These initiatives do not distinguish licensed from unlicensed working sex workers; everyone is welcome (S6). Since these initiatives often take place nationally and the licensing system differs from municipality to municipality,⁵⁷ such distinguishment would also be impossible. Several sex workers take part in these initiatives (S6, S7, S8, S15), while others indicate that they find it not their cup of tea or are not enough familiar with it (S9, S10, S11, S12, S13). Although it seems that, slowly, there is more and more attention to these initiatives (Observations 1, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17), there are several issues that make it particularly hard for sex workers to unionize.

Firstly, as two sex workers point out, it is hard to get grants and there is often a lack of money (S6, S8). According to two sex workers, grants are often awarded to Christian organizations rather than to initiatives by sex workers (S7, S8). Furthermore, there is a problem with anonymity. There is a small group of sex workers who are fully open about their work and often appear in the media (A1). They are 'out' to their surroundings, their work is no longer a secret. For other sex workers, however, anonymity does form an issue: their surroundings do not (fully) know about their work, and thus they are afraid that their name will be leaked out or that they are photographed. One sex worker explains that although she wishes to participate, she is very scared that her work becomes publicly and therefore does not take part yet (S16). Anonymity forms also a problem when a sex worker does not agree with an administrative measure or she has a problem with authorities. Two sex workers point out that when they do so, their names will be listed in the case and a trial can be publicly accessible (S8, S16). In other words, a sex worker must give up her anonymity to start a legal case, and therefore sex workers often do not start one (S8). Thirdly, sex workers often work in different cities, sometimes even different countries or they work in the Netherlands only for a short period and then return to their country of origin.⁵⁸ This makes it particularly hard to unionize because as soon as they leave, it is often hard to stay in touch. Physical distance can thus be a problem (S9) or they find it not important enough, because they will be gone soon (Observation 14). Another issue is that sometimes, sex workers are not aware of unions, or they seem not to be interested enough (Po1, O5). One sex worker points out that it takes often much time: "Yeah, it's not

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1.1.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 7.1.2.

for me. They were all using terms, really ... that made me feel stupid. [...] but I notice ... yes, you know, then you spend 2,5 hours, 3 hours on such a [meeting]. To put it bluntly, that cost me turnover. [...] I really want to do my best, but every time, it's just not it for me" (S13). This sex worker indicates that she prefers to help others in other ways than a union (S13). Finally, the pandemic made it even harder to gather (S8); Larger groups of people were not allowed, protests were only allowed after the measures for Covid-19 were no longer as strict (Observation 12) and many sex workers went back to their country of origin (S8).⁵⁹ Together, although little steps have been taken, these issues makes it hard for sex workers to unionize.

7.5. Conclusion

Although stigma is also present in the licensed industry, it is even a larger problem for unlicensed working sex workers; most women already have to keep their job a secret for their surroundings, but now for authorities as well. Several respondents find that the increased emphasis on human trafficking, as explained in Chapter 6, has led to further stigmatization because it makes it harder to understand why people voluntarily choose this profession. Stigma has several negative consequences. Formalities, such as a bank account and a mortgage become harder because the sex industry is associated with crimes such as human trafficking and money laundering. This leads to exclusion of people in the sex industry. However, the exclusion also takes place within the sex industry: not all sex workers are welcomed in licensed businesses, including men and trans sex workers, but also female sex workers who do not fit the typical image of women the sex industry seems to have. Due to stigma, sex workers find it very hard to talk about their work with their family, friends and others; some sex workers, therefore, keep it (partly) a secret. For most sex workers, anonymity is very important. Many use a pseudonym, a special work phone, and they work in a variety of places, often further from home. Sex workers indicate that they often feel misunderstood by outsiders, and they understand each other very well. Several sex workers describe the community as a place where friendship is easily made and where one can ask for help and advice. This has also to do with the fact that sometimes, unlicensed working sex workers often cannot or do not want to reach out to authorities and

⁵⁹ See Chapter 7.1.

aid agencies and therefore are dependent on their own. Still, not all contact goes well. Sometimes there are arguments and tensions, and some sex workers tend to betray each other. Most sex workers, however, indicate that contacts are rather friendly. Finally, sex workers find that policies and laws treat them differently. Especially the Wrs is feared by many because it would obligate sex workers to register in a national database. Some respondents say that authorities, such as police officers, already treat sex workers differently. Forming a union to aim for better rights is difficult, however, due to a lack of money, the role of anonymity and the fact that the mobility of sex workers is so high, which leads to fragmentation. Although it seems there is little improvement, the steps are little, and it often take time.

8. Conclusion and discussion

8.1. Conclusions of this study

This study aims to understand how the governmental approach in Rotterdam to female sex workers has changed since 2000, and the consequences for the labour conditions of unlicensed working sex workers in Rotterdam. This study is conducted from the perspective of unlicensed sex work as work; in this way, the moral debate is avoided and an insight into how sex workers have organized their work could be gained. In terms of labour conditions, several aspects have been studied: income, hygiene and health, contact with aid agencies, safety, social contacts, contact with authorities and activism/unionization.

This study does not have an experimental setting and therefore no causal relations can be described (Webbink, 2005). Still, six specific changes in the Rotterdam governmental approach can be identified. Firstly, with the lift of the brothel ban in 2000, the Municipality of Rotterdam introduced a licensing system, as described in the Rotterdam Prostitution Policy (2000). This policy describes that the licensing system had three goals: protection of public order and the living environment, improvement of the position of sex workers and the perpetuation of the existing situation, which means that new businesses were not allowed. Moreover, it would create a clear distinguishment between licensed, unlicensed and illegal sex work. In 2005, the Municipality of Rotterdam closed the streetwalking area named the Keileweg, and from that point on, street-based sex work (such as soliciting) became prohibited. Windows have never been allowed in Rotterdam. The Keileweg was closed because many sex workers dealt with addictions and the nuisance of cars and clients was often reported, and the working conditions of these women were often considered inhumane. Thirdly, in 2015, a new policy regarding the sex industry was introduced, which is still the current policy: the Policy Prostitution and sex industry (2015). It wields the same distinguishment regarding licensed, unlicensed and illegal sex work as the Rotterdam Prostitution Policy (2000) did but added several changes. First of all, it added several requirements for licensed sex businesses in terms of hygiene, the requirement of a business plan, a Bibob check and the requirement for operators to attend meetings to signal abuses. Although the policy regarding enforcement was already updated in 2005 and 2012, the new

policy also introduced opportunities to close buildings in which sex work has been encountered. A third change in the new policy was the raise of the minimum age from 18 to 21 years of age, which entered into force on January 1st 2016. The Municipality listed four reasons: to protect vulnerable, young women and men because they find it harder to stand up for themselves in dealing with clients and operators (1), relatively many young women and men are victims of abuse (2), persons aged 21 would have a greater chance of obtaining a qualification, which would give them an alternative to working as a sex worker (3) and a minimum age of 21 is used often, for example also for operators and managers (4). The fifth and last change of the 2015 policy was the opening of the aid agency Door2Door and the appointment of a confidential counsellor to help sex workers in both the licensed and unlicensed industries and provide information and advice. The 2015 policy added these five changes with two goals: to tackle and prevent abuses and improve the position of sex workers (1), and because the Sex Work Regulation Bill is delayed, the municipal council wanted to implement the desired changes through municipal regulations (2).

Besides the changes in the local governmental approach, there have been three general developments in the Netherlands, which impact the unlicensed sex industry of Rotterdam as well. Firstly, a national Sex Work Regulation Bill (Dutch: Wet regulering sekswerk, Wrs), aims to uniform sex work policies in the Netherlands, and thus reduce disparities; for instance, the minimum age would be increased from 18 to 21 years of age, and a license requirement would be introduced for all sex businesses and sex workers via a database, which in its turn would provide municipalities with an overview of their sex industry. The goal of this bill is to prevent coercion and exploitation and to create safe and healthy working conditions for all sex workers, but due to the impact of the bill and the resignation of the Dutch government in January 2021, the bill is declared controversial and is thus delayed. At the moment of writing (May 2022), it is unsure whether, and when, the bill would come into force. Secondly, there have been three lockdowns, during which all physical forms of sex work were prohibited. Sex workers faced large fines when they were found working during checks. One could argue that this temporary criminalization is a natural experiment, in which problems that already existed became clear. Although these lockdowns have not been part of the local governmental approach, they did impact both the licensed

and unlicensed industries in various ways. Finally, Soa Aids Nederland introduced Ugly Mugs in April 2022, an alternative for the blacklist sex workers were using but was removed due to privacy issues. The lifting of the list led to confusion and panic among sex workers. Now, a new, but legal list is introduced where sex workers can report violent clients again, and where they can check before meeting with a client in person.

The opening of Door2Door, the appointment of the confidential counsellor and the introduction of Ugly Mugs have been important changes for unlicensed working sex workers. In line with the other large cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam has had an aid agency specifically intended for sex workers for six years now. The social workers are familiar with the target audience and therefore stigma and prejudices are reduced, which lowers the threshold to ask for help. Several sex workers indicate that they do not trust Christian agencies due to moral differences. In general, sex workers seem to appreciate this development. Sex workers also explicitly state that they are glad about the introduction of Ugly Mugs. Although this only focuses on violent clients, and thus not on time wasters or fakers, sex workers think it is at least some form of help and indicate that they will use it. These changes have been designed specifically for sex workers, and to help them performing their profession. It forms a signal to sex workers that their worries, for example about their safety regarding the removal of the former blacklist, are taken seriously, which is highly appreciated.

The other changes are all aimed to tackle abuse, combat human trafficking and improve the position of sex workers. However, one should note that the number of licensed sex businesses, and thus the number of licensed workplaces, is decreasing in both Rotterdam and the Netherlands in general. This decrease was also found by Goderie et al. (2002) and RIEC (2011), but this study added an overview of Rotterdam. Although several reasons can be suggested for this decrease, such as stricter laws and policies, and fewer forms of sex work allowed, the options for sex workers are decreasing as well. For some groups of sex workers, such as male and trans sex workers, there already were few options to work licensed. For female sex workers, it is neither self-evident that they all can work licensed. For instance, sex businesses are strictly checked by AVIM that they do not have sex workers with a migrant background and without a working license

working, or sex workers below the age of 21 working in their business. This is in line with the conclusion of Pitcher and Wijers (2014), in which they explain that migrant sex workers are not allowed to work in the licensed industry and thus have no alternative to working in the illegal sector. However, the results of this study indicated that the sex industry itself also makes it also harder for specific groups of sex workers: female sex workers that do meet the legal requirements to work, are not always accepted by licensed sex businesses because of their appearance requirements. Female sex workers that are perceived as deviant in terms of age, weight and/or appearance (e.g. shaving or female body characteristics) are not accepted by these licensed businesses. Although these excluded sex workers have a final theoretical option to work licensed by starting an escort company, this is not always possible because sex workers are not aware or find the process of starting a business too complicated, or they simply do not want to work as an escort. In other words, due to exclusionary practices, working licensed is not an option for all female sex workers. Finally, besides whether a sex worker *could* work in a licensed business, it is questionable whether one *wants* to work there. Sex workers indicate that there is much hierarchy, in which abuses are often not taken seriously, and the operator of the business keeps half of their income. This means that sex workers that need money often cannot or do not want to work in licensed businesses because their income would be too low. Moreover, the experiences of sex workers indicate that working in licensed businesses is not always safer than working unlicensed. Bleeker et al. (2022) found similar results and conclude that an increasing impact of operators might lead to the situation in which sex workers want to work from home to determine their working conditions. Indeed, as the results indicate, by working independently, sex workers can better determine their prices and services and have flexible and efficient working hours.

Now, one could argue that the municipality offers a third legal form, besides licensed and illegal sex work, namely unlicensed sex work. This refers to working from home, which does not require a license if it does not have a 'businesslike appearance'. Although this might sound like a realistic option, it has no meaning in practice because the requirements to not have a businesslike appearance are too strict. For instance, sex workers must be registered on the address, have to work alone (thus without colleagues), the organizational structure cannot be too professional, and they cannot advertise more than once every thirteen months.

The first requirement, regarding the registration, is difficult because sex workers indicate that they often do not feel comfortable working from home; they are afraid that they encounter clients that become stalkers, and that they lose their anonymity. This requirement can also be problematic because not all sex workers can work from home, for example, because their surroundings or neighbours do not know about their work. The requirement to work alone also evokes resistance because sex workers explain that it is safer to keep an eye on each other and that it feels often lonely and that they enjoy their work more when they are with colleagues. Thirdly, the workplace of sex workers cannot be too professional because this could contribute to a businesslike appearance. This means that sex workers cannot organize their work too professionally, for example by having a separate workroom with lingerie, towels, and other needed supplies. They, thus, have to work on a low, amateurish scale. However, sex workers indicate that it would make their work much easier and more professional, also as a signal to the client, to have a workplace they feel comfortable with. The fourth and last requirement forms the largest problem: sex workers must frequently advertise to find their clients and to keep up with the competition. In other words, as soon as a sex worker wants to work more than once every thirteen months, it is no longer possible to legally work unlicensed because it is then considered a brothel. The problem is that it is very unlikely that a license for a brothel will be granted. As soon as the work of a sex worker becomes a little serious, thus, she can no longer work unlicensed from home without being considered an illegal brothel. In conclusion, although working unlicensed seems a real option on paper, in practice it is an empty shell because no serious sex worker can meet the requirements.

Sex workers that cannot or do not want to work in a licensed business and are considered 'too professional' to work unlicensed, are thus automatically dependent on the illegal sex industry. This dependency limits their agency because they are bound by strict legislative frameworks, which limit their options to choose from. The problem here is that authorities such as AVIM keep referring sex workers to the licensed industry. Although this is understandable considering their role and interests, this is thus not an option for many sex workers. As explained above, the goals of the changes in the past 22 years were to improve the safety of sex workers by tackling abuses and combat human trafficking and improve the position of sex workers. However, by making it so hard to work licensed or unlicensed, many sex

workers are dependent on the illegal industry, which can be unsafe for them and thus actually *weakens* their position. For example, although aid agencies indicate that they do not find it important to know whether a sex worker is working legal or illegal, sex workers in the illegal industry find it harder to approach them. When it comes to authorities, for example, reporting abuses to the police, this problem is even larger. For sex workers who can be considered less autonomous and who might have less agency (due to debts or financial needs, a young age, not being fully integrated and a lack of experience), these changes have led to an even weaker position, which makes them potentially become even more vulnerable for abuses. Moreover, one could argue that the development of stricter policies designed for specifically the sex industry is contradicting the aim to improve the position of sex workers in terms of normalization. In other words, a special policy only for sex workers alienates them and distinguishes sex work from other professions, and thus reinforcing the stigma. Stigma, in turn, weakens the position of sex workers, for example because they are afraid to reach out for help. Bleeker et al. (2022) also point out that unlicensed working sex workers will less encounter health care, assistance and judicial authorities. At the same time, it should be noted that the opening of Door2Door and the appointment of a confidential counsellor is appreciated by most sex workers. A place where sex workers can ask for help and advice, without being afraid of the stigma, might contribute to the position of sex workers. Still, this forms a small step in comparison to all changes that have led to a stricter governmental approach.

Sex workers cannot rely on the facilities in the licensed industry, such as bouncers, cameras and alarm buttons, and therefore they have to come up with measures to be able to perform their work and maintain safety themselves. Especially the rise of the internet has contributed to more autonomy since sex workers no longer need other persons to arrange their workplace and find clients. Vanwesenbeeck (2011), Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) and RIEC (2012) noted a similar development. As the results show, sex workers often use websites such as Airbnb and Booking.com to find a workplace. Together with the fact that street-based sex work was already prohibited, this has led to a rather invisible illegal sex industry. This is in line with the previous studies by Vanweesenbeeck (2011), Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) and Van den Braak and Dupont-Nivet (2020). Interestingly, Goderie et al. (2002) argue that sex workers started to work on the streets in

response to the stricter approach. The results indicate however that street-based sex work does not take place on a large scale in Rotterdam. The study of Goderie et al. (2002) was conducted twenty years ago, which could mean that this has changed in the past decades. Moreover, the studies by Vanwesenbeeck (2011), Rijnink and Van Wijk (2020) and RIEC (2020) state that sex work takes place more and more online. The sex workers in this study, however, indicate that online services such as webcamming and pornography are only part of their job; physical appointments still form their largest part of income. A complete shift to online sex work, thus, cannot be found. Sex workers also explain that they often move within Rotterdam, but also from city to city; this makes their work more fun, but it also increases the income because it creates a form of scarcity. Some sex workers even go to Germany and Belgium. This form of mobility was also noted by Goderie and Boutellier (2006). In terms of safety, sex workers take several measures, including fakers lists, group chats in which they warn each other, working together, and using deposits. Because they feel that they are on their own and do not reach out to authorities, their distrust of authorities can be sustained. Several studies (Van den Braak & Dupont-Nivet, 2020; Bleeker et al., 2022) indicate that unlicensed working sex workers are more at risk of blackmail, theft, assault, rape and human trafficking. The results indicate that working unlicensed does not automatically mean working unsafe; although this can never be watertight, a sex worker can increase her safety by taking measures. Importantly, sex workers in this study also point out that the licensed industry is not automatically safer; several sex workers state that they have experienced more violence when working licensed than they have while working unlicensed. In other words, the labour conditions in the unlicensed industry do not necessarily have to be worse than in the licensed industry.

8.2. Strengths and limitations of this study

This study has both strengths and limitations. Firstly, it was aimed to include as many sex workers and aid agencies as possible. These two groups tell another side of the local approach and its complications for the labour conditions of female sex workers than, for instance, authorities do. Here, it is not about who is wrong and who is right, but by involving different groups with different perspectives and interests, the subject could be approached from different angles. Secondly, the methodology consists of two different methods to gain data from different sources.

In total, 38 interviews with 40 respondents have been conducted. Several respondents have been interviewed twice, and other interviews have been conducted with multiple respondents at the same time. By combining interviews with 17 observations, method triangulation is ensured. Source triangulation exists as well, since respondents of different organizations with different tasks and interests, and observations at different places are conducted. The pandemic did make data gathering more difficult because potential respondents were afraid to meet in person and/or indicated they were occupied. Still, with the fact that a part of the fieldwork has been done during a lockdown, a large amount of data could be gathered in a short period, namely nine months.

The internship at the Municipality of Rotterdam has been of great value in terms of conducting observations. As indicated in Appendix B, observations marked with a * are conducted via the internship; this means that 10 out of 17 observations could only be conducted because of this internship because these meetings are not publicly accessible. The internship, however, did also cause questions when approaching sex workers and aid agencies to participate in this study. At those moments, I explained to them that this internship is rather an opportunity than a bottleneck because now the importance of the subject could be emphasized. I also stressed that I would, by no means, use their data or information on the devices of the municipality, so completely anonymity would be ensured. These two arguments were found important by sex workers, and it seemed that the internship was not a problem per se. Thus, the internship had both an advantage and a disadvantage during data gathering.

In terms of age, experience and personality, the sex workers included in this study differ widely; some sex workers are very experienced and confident, while others are relatively new to the field. The representativeness of the group of sex workers could, however, have been further improved by including more sex workers with a migration background. Authorities indicate that they often encounter sex workers from Latin America and East European countries. I think that due to the lockdown, it had become even harder to approach this group of sex workers because both social workers and sex workers state that many migrant sex workers returned to their country of origin. Although Sanders et al. (2018) point out that the sex workers that can be included in such a study may often be opportunistic rather

than representative, I think that there are ways to approach more sex workers with a migrant background for representativeness. For instance, I noticed that many sex workers and aid agencies asked whether an incentive was available for participation. Finding sex workers with a migration background was not that hard, because I was able to approach them, often via other sex workers, but they were not willing to participate. The sex workers that asked their surroundings to participate, indeed explain that foreign sex workers often think about their income and participating in a study costs time and thus income. Therefore, several sex workers and social workers indicate that offering an incentive would be a way to include these sex workers. Although incentives can have both advantages and disadvantages (Grauenhorst, 2016), follow-up and future research should explore the possibility and usability. A second way to improve the representativeness of sex workers is rather simple: time. Because this study needed to be conducted in nine months, from beginning to end, it was difficult to build up a relationship with trust with respondents. Although trust was gained via telephone conversations and contact via Whatsapp, I think more trust could be gained when there would be more time available. For example, some sex workers needed time to think about whether they would like to participate and approaching sex workers via other sex workers takes time as well. Future research should, thus, explore the potential role of incentives and, where possible, build in more time to develop a relationship of trust with respondents, especially sex workers.

8.3. Recommendations for research and practice

Firstly, future research could explore the potential role of incentives and, where possible, build in more time to develop a relationship of trust with respondents. This trust is so important because several sex workers explicitly mentioned that they have experienced, or they know other sex workers who experienced, that students, journalists and/or researchers have 'misused' their information, for example by only writing about the negative sides, or by using information that is traceable and thus their anonymity was in danger. It is very important that researchers not only take this into account when writing a research proposal but that they also explicitly explain this to the sex workers they approach. Secondly, there could be another method to recruit respondents that have not been used in this study due to a lack of time, but future research can explore. In this study, most sex workers have been approached by social workers or other sex workers.

This implies that only sex workers who know others could be found. Isolated sex workers, thus, are much harder to approach. As the results indicate, many sex workers advertise via websites. One way that could be explored for future research, is approaching sex workers via these websites. This way, isolated sex workers can be approached as well, which might enrich the group of sex workers included in a study, and thus enlarges the representativeness.

Regarding policy implications, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, there should be more awareness that human trafficking and the (unlicensed) sex industry is not the same. Sex workers, who state that they have nothing to do with human trafficking, feel that they are being disadvantaged by policies that aim to combat human trafficking. Policies and laws, thus, should target specific groups of sex workers. Policies and laws should take these factors into account, rather than designing laws and policies for the entire sex industry. Moreover, based on the results, an approach with harsh penalties does not seem to work: harsh penalties and strict enforcement only 'prove' to sex workers that their distrust of authorities is right. Instead, the approach to sex workers should be based on trust and agency. The arrival of Door2Door and the confidential counsellor in 2015 have been an important step. Still, sex workers often feel that they are denied agency because policies and laws are written *about* them, and not *with* them. By involving sex workers in the development of the approach, for example by an advisory board, sex workers can be treated as an equal party. This is currently already happening in the Municipality of Tilburg (De Wildt, 2021). Developing an advisory board takes time and effort, but it could send out an important signal to sex workers that their opinion is important and taken seriously. Designing an approach to specifically (potentially) vulnerable sex workers rather than the entire industry, could also be developed with such an advisory board. But, as several social workers point out, this should happen from the point of view of sex workers and not authorities: what do sex workers find important to talk about, and what do *they* need? As the results indicate, sex workers have often more agency than authorities might think. Involving sex workers in the process of developing an approach could be the first step in improving the relationship between authorities and sex workers.

Finally, there is a recommendation that seems obvious: increase the number of licensed workplaces and make working licensed 'more appealing'. Increasing

licensed workplaces is easier said than done because somebody needs to run such a licensed sex business. However, the municipality could look at its licensing system. Now, licensed sex businesses must meet many requirements but get only little in return. Both, or at least one of these two aspects, should be changed. By lowering the threshold for licensed sex businesses or making it more appealing for them to stay licensed, workplaces can be easier ensured. What operators of businesses would exactly want or need, can be explored through meetings with them. Not only operators of sex businesses, but also sex workers themselves do not always see the advantages of working licensed. For them, thus, working licensed should also be more appealing. One way could be to make applying for a license less complicated and less costly. Another way would be to make the requirements for working from home less strict. For both operators of licensed sex businesses as sex workers, again: developing policies and laws should be *with* the target group, not only *about* them.

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Appendix A: Overview interviews

Aid agencies (social workers)

| Interview | Name | Description | Date of interview | Place of interview |
|-----------|------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | A1 | Door2Door | 16-11-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 2 | | | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 3 | A2 | Humanitas/PMW | 03-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| | A3 | Humanitas/PMW | | |
| | A4 | Humanitas/PMW | | |
| 4 | A5 | GGD Rotterdam (<i>Municipal Health Service</i>) | 14-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 5 | A6 | GGD Rotterdam (<i>Municipal Health Service</i>) | 17-01-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 6 | A7 | Soa Aids Nederland | 15-12-2021 | Online (Teams) |
| 7 | A8 | Leger des Heils (<i>The Salvation Army</i>) | 24-01-2022 | Online (Teams) |
| 8 | A9 | De Haven | 22-02-2022 | Online (Teams) |

Authorities

| Interview | Name | Description | Date of interview | Place of interview |
|-----------|------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 9 | Po1 | AVIM Rotterdam (<i>alien police</i>) | 08-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 10 | Po2 | AVIM Rotterdam (<i>alien police</i>) | 20-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 11 | Po3 | AVIM Rotterdam (<i>alien police</i>) | 10-01-2022 | Rotterdam |
| 12 | Pu | Public Prosecutor Rotterdam | 21-12-2021 | Online (Teams) |
| 13 | Min1 | Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment | 03-01-2022 | Online (Teams) |
| 14 | Min2 | Ministry of Justice and Security | 14-01-2022 | Online (Teams) |
| 15 | Mu1 | Municipality of Rotterdam | 15-02-2022 & 17-02-2022 | Rotterdam Rotterdam |
| 16 | Mu2 | Municipality of Rotterdam | 24-02-2022 | Rotterdam |
| 17 | Mu3 | Municipality of Rotterdam | 01-03-2022 | Rotterdam |
| 18 | Antw | Municipality of Antwerp | 28-03-2022 | Online (Teams) |

Sex workers

| Interview | Name | Description | Country of origin | Date of interview | Place of interview |
|-----------|------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 19 | S1 | Sex worker | Greece | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 20 | S2 | Sex worker | Thailand | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 21 | S3 | Sex worker | Thailand | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 22 | S4 | Sex worker | Thailand | | |
| 23 | S5 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam |
| 24 | S6 | Sex worker and activist | Netherlands | 10-12-2021 | Amsterdam |
| 25 | S7 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 22-12-2021 | Amsterdam |
| | S8 | Sex worker and activist | Netherlands | | |
| 26 | | | | 26-01-2022 | Amsterdam |
| 27 | S9 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 05-12-2021 | The Hague |
| 28 | S10 | Ex-sex worker | Romania | 25-01-2022 | Rotterdam |
| 29 | S11 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 02-02-2022 | Hellevoetsluis |
| 30 | S12 | Sex worker | Romania | 02-02-2022 | Rotterdam |
| 31 | S13 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 07-02-2022 | The Hague |
| 32 | S14 | Sex worker and therapist | Netherlands | 11-02-2022 | Online (Zoom) |
| 33 | S15 | Sex worker | Netherlands - English | 25-02-2022 | Amsterdam |
| 34 | S16 | Sex worker | Netherlands | 03-03-2022 | The Hague |

Others

| Interview | Name | Description | Date of interview | Place of interview |
|-----------|------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 35 | O1 | RIEC Rotterdam | 09-12-2021 | Online (Teams) |
| 36 | O2 | RIEC Rotterdam | 16-12-2021 | Online (Teams) |
| 37 | O3 | Motus Rotterdam | 12-01-2022 | Online (Teams) |
| | O4 | Motus Rotterdam | | |
| 38 | O5 | Vereniging voor Vrouw en Recht (VVR) | 20-01-2022 | Online (Zoom) |

Appendix B: Overview observations

| Nr. | When | Where | What | Description |
|-----|------------|------------------|--|--|
| 1* | 30-09-2021 | Online (Teams) | National Program Prostitution [Landelijk Programma Prostitutie] | Consultation with municipalities in the Netherlands to discuss trends and developments in the sex industry. |
| 2 | 26-10-2021 | Online (Website) | VNG Webinars Human Trafficking part 1: Awareness and Signaling [VNG Webinars Mensenhandel deel 1: Bewustwording en Signalering] | Webinar about human trafficking |
| 3* | 28-10-2021 | Online (Teams) | How to proceed with illegal prostitution in Charlois [Hoe nu verder met (illegale) prostitutie in Charlois] | A meeting with the police of Charlois (a neighbourhood in South of Rotterdam) and several employees of the municipality. |
| 4* | 11-11-2021 | Online (Teams) | Platform human trafficking [Platform mensenhandel] | Consultation with a variety of municipalities in the Netherlands. |
| 5 | 01-12-2021 | Rotterdam | Follow along with Door2Door | During field work in licensed businesses in Rotterdam South, to understand how these sex workers are doing and to offer help in case they need it. |
| 6* | 02-12-2021 | Online (Teams) | National Program Prostitution [Landelijk Programma Prostitutie] | Consultation with municipalities in the Netherlands to discuss trends and developments in the sex industry. |
| 7 | 13-01-2022 | Online (Website) | VNG Webinars Human Trafficking part 2: policy, tools, laws. | Webinar about human trafficking |

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|-----|------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| | | | [VNG Webinars Mensenhandel deel 2: beleid, tools, regelgeving en het speelveld] | |
| 8 | 17-01-2022 | Online (Website) | VNG Webinars Human Trafficking part 3: law enforcement, cooperation in the region, shelter and assistance. [VNG Webinars Mensenhandel deel 3: Handhaving, samenwerking in de regio, opvang en hulpverlening] | Webinar about human trafficking. |
| 9* | 20-01-2022 | Online (Teams) | Evaluation enforcement bottleneck illegal prostitution [Evaluatie Handhavingsknelpunt illegale prostitutie] | Meeting with different organisations in Rotterdam (including municipality, police and RIEC) to discuss how to tackle complicated cases of unlicensed sex work. |
| 10 | 02-02-2022 | Hellevoetsluis & Rotterdam | Follow along with AVIM during checks. | Joining the AVIM in the process of checks. |
| 11* | 10-02-2022 | Online (Teams) | National Program Prostitution [Landelijk Programma Prostitutie] | Consultation with municipalities in the Netherlands to discuss trends and developments in the sex industry. |
| 12 | 15-02-2022 | The Hague | Sex work solidarity protest [Sekswerk solidariteitsprotest] | Protest to draw attention to the fact that sex workers are also people, sex work is work and specific attention for trans sex workers. |
| 13 | 01-03-2022 | Rotterdam | HOOR, organised by ROS | HOOR was a meeting in which different organisations talked about undocumented migrants in Rotterdam. |

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|-----|------------|----------------|--|---|
| 14* | 10-03-2022 | Utrecht | Theme meeting prostitution [Themabijeenkomst prostitutie] | Organised by CCV. Municipalities, practitioners etc. attended from all over the Netherlands and Belgium. |
| 15* | 31-03-2022 | Online (Teams) | G4 consultation prostitution and human trafficking [G4 overleg prostitutie en mensenhandel] | A meeting with the four largest municipalities in the Netherlands (G4) to discuss trends and developments regarding sex industry and human trafficking. |
| 16* | 04-04-2022 | Online (Webex) | Conversation about the Wrs with G4 [Gesprek over de Wrs met G4] | A meeting with the four largest municipalities in the Netherlands (G4), and the Ministry of Justice and Security to discuss thoughts, ideas and doubts about the Wrs. |
| 17* | 21-04-2022 | Utrecht | National Program Prostitution [Landelijk Programma Prostitutie] | Consultation with municipalities in the Netherlands to discuss trends and developments in the sex industry. |

Observations marked with a * are conducted via the internship, see Chapter 2.2.4.

Appendix C: Topic list interviews

Introduction

- Informed consent (including recordings)
- Questions up front?
- Explaining aims of research and labour conditions
 - Income
 - Job security (*staying in the industry*)
 - Social protection (*e.g. health care, financial help, paid sickleave*)
 - Content of work:
 - Autonomy
 - Agency
 - Veiligheid
 - Safety (physically and mentally)
 - Workplace (*e.g. privacy, hygiene, facilities*)
 - Social relations (with other sex workers, but also aid agencies, authorities)
 - Activism and unions
- Function and/or activities of respondent⁶⁰

Lift of the brothel ban (2000)

- Licensing system
- Distinguishment licensed-unlicensed-illegal

Human trafficking

- Attention (municipality, police, public prosecutor)
- Combatting human trafficking

'Exit programs' and autonomy

- RUPS I, II en III

Strenger beleid en regelgeving

Changes in policy and laws

- Business plan (Policy Prostitution and sex industry 2015)
- Bibob check (Policy Prostitution and sex industry 2015)
- Minimum age: from 18 to 21 years of age (Policy Prostitution and sex industry 2015)
- Wrs: registration in national database

Supporting sex workers

- Terminology: prostitution or sex work
- Normalisation and de-stigmatisation (Policy Prostitution and sex industry 2015)
- Information and education (e.g. Door2Door, Humanitas)
- Confidential counsellor
- Advisory

⁶⁰ The topic list was adjusted for every respondent. For example, a social worker was asked what their work entails, while a sex worker was asked what kind of sex work she did.

Specific questions for respondent

- Experiences
- Perceptions

Afsluiten Finishing interview

- Other changes in policies and laws?
- Questions about researcher or research?
- Thank