

# Research Report

## **“Coming to Dance, Striving to Survive: A Study on Latin American Migrant Exotic Dancers”**

The movement of Latin American women to Canada to work in the sex trade industry, particularly as exotic dancers, is common. Nevertheless, little is known of their experiences, their oppression as women, as Latinas, as women of colour, as temporary workers and as sex workers. The position of temporary workers plus the criminalisation and stigmatisation of the sex industry leave the exotic dancers exposed to abuse. Women’s human and civil rights are violated and little has been done to redress this situation. This study intends to understand the day-to-day lives of Latina migrant exotic dancers. It sheds light on how women’s immigration status affects the conditions under which they work and live, as well as their relationship with their employers, and, their emotional well being

July, 2002



**LATIN AMERICAN COALITION TO  
END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN**

## RESEACH REPORT

# **“Coming to Dance, Striving to Survive: A Study on Latin American Migrant Exotic Dancers”**

### **Author**

Latin American Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Children “LACEV”

### **Project Coordinator**

Lilian Valverde

### **Researcher**

Patricia Diaz Barrero

### **Advisory Committee:**

**Sayonara Mairena  
Patricia Arango  
Carolina Berinstein**

### **Consultation Group:**

**Ken Luckhard  
Blanca Alvarado  
Cristina Alcivar  
Leslie Milner  
Araceli Navarrete**

### **This Project is dedicated to:**

**The Latin American exotic dancers who migrate to this country looking for a better future and particularly to those women who participated in this project.**

### **Thank to:**

Ken Luckhardt for his sensitivity and understanding of Latin American Women issues and Raul Oliva for binding the report.

Funded by: International Solidarity Fund of Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Social Justice Fund

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>  | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b>                                    | <b>3</b>  |
| Theoretical Framework  |           |
| “Trafficked Women” or “Migrant Sex Workers”?                       |           |
| What is Exotic Dancing?  |           |
| The Legal Landscape in the Exotic Dancing Industry                 |           |
| Immigration Regulations for the Exotic Dancing Industry            |           |
| <b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b>                             | <b>16</b> |
| A Word from the Researcher   |           |
| Research Design  |           |
| Outreach Strategy  |           |
| Data Collection  |           |
| Data Analysis  |           |
| <b>FINDINGS</b>  | <b>19</b> |
| A. Chronological Stages  |           |
| 1. Recruitment Process in the Women’s Country of Origin            |           |
| 2. Arrival to Canada   |           |
| 3. Transition  |           |
| 4. Settlement and Adjustment                                       |           |
| B. Environment   |           |
| 1. Working Conditions around Exotic Dancers as Migrant Sex Workers |           |
| 2. Legal Implication of Exotic Dancers’ “Temporary Workers” Status |           |
| 3. Social Environment and Triple oppression                        |           |
| 4. Emotional Well Being While Working in the Sex Trade Industry    |           |
| C. Advise From Participants  |           |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>                             | <b>57</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>  | <b>60</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX</b>  | <b>65</b> |
| Demographic data   |           |

## INTRODUCTION

The movement of Latin American women to Canada to work in the sex trade industry, and particularly in exotic dancing, is common; nevertheless, little is known of their experience, their oppressions as women, as Latinas, as women of colour, as temporary workers and as sex workers. They, often, come as “Temporary Foreign Workers” with “Temporary Employment Authorisations” under the exotic dancing program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The position of temporary workers plus the criminalisation and stigmatisation of the sex industry leave the women exposed to abuse by club owners, club managers, and agents, as well as clients and partners. Women’s human and civil rights are violated and little has been done to address this situation. They have been neglected by the government, whose predominant response to the issue has been more criminalisation and law enforcement regulations.

There is a lack of research in this area and service providers agencies geared to the Latin American population have not made Latina exotic dancers a priority population. In recognizing the need to understand this reality, this study adopts an exploratory naturalistic approach that intends to understand and document the experiences of the day-to-day lives of Latina immigrant exotic dancers. The research question that guides this study can be summarized as follows: What are the socio-economic, legal, and emotional conditions of Latin American Women who come to Toronto with specialized visas to work as exotic dancers?

This research was possible thanks to the financial support of the International Solidarity Fund of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Social Justice Fund and the constant work of the consultation group formed by representatives of agencies and individuals with skills in the different areas of the project.

LACEV is committed to end violence against women and their children in the Latin American community in Ontario. We recognize that women have been historically discriminated against and marginalized, and that men have enjoyed more power and privilege. At the same time we acknowledge the differences of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation and class amongst Latin American women.

Before launching into the study, we will define the theoretical framework that this study uses, and later we will situate the study in the international context of the anti-trafficking discourse. This is followed by the definition of the essential terms - exotic dancing, the legal landscape in the exotic dancing industry and the immigration regulations for exotic dancers.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Theoretical Framework

The term “sex work” or “sex worker” has been coined by sex labourers themselves to define an economic activity and an income generator rather than a type of person or a class of women<sup>1</sup>. This umbrella term “sex work” includes a variety of activities or employment opportunities, as Julia Garro puts it, including prostitution, telephone sex operations, erotic massage, professional domination and exotic dancing<sup>2</sup>.

In general terms, it is possible to say that there are three prominent perspectives on sex trade work. The first one considers that sex trade is inherently exploitative and should not be legalised. According to this perspective women’s entry into sex trade is not a matter of choice and most of them are either trafficked or recruited while looking for jobs. Above all, women are deemed to be subordinate to the men that are buying them; this relationship remains unequal because it is inherently exploitative<sup>3</sup>. According to this definition, there cannot be voluntary sex work as all sex work is a violation of human rights. Groups such as, the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Women in Action, the Coalition against Prostitution, and other organizations advocate this position.<sup>4</sup>

The second perspective states that sex trade work is legitimate work if the women choose to do it; but if they are forced into it, lured, or deceived they become victims subject to special protection by the nation-states and the international community. This perspective creates a distinction between “forced sex work” and “voluntary sex work”. Although sex workers’ rights have influenced this perspective<sup>5</sup>, making it possible to recognise sex work as legitimate work this distinction produces the dichotomy of “whores” versus

---

<sup>1</sup> Jo Bindman, with the participation of Jo Doezema, “Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda,” Network of Sex Work Projects 1997, p. 5, online: <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/redefining.html>

<sup>2</sup> Julia Carro, “Working hard in the sex trade,” *The Varsity*, (November 15, 1999), online: <http://varsity.utoronto.ca/archives/120/nov09/feature/working.html>

<sup>3</sup> Jean Enriquez, “Sail On, Women. Being in the sex trade is not, and will never be an empowered choice,” *Women in Action* (2:1999), online: <http://www.isiswomen.org/wia/wia299/hum00010.html>

<sup>4</sup> For more information visit Women in Action webpage <http://www.isiswomen.org>, and the Coalition Against Traffic in women <http://www.catwinternational.org>

<sup>5</sup> Jo Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women? The re-emergence of the myth of ‘white slavery’ in the contemporary discourse of ‘trafficking in women’,” International Studies Convention. Washington, DC, Febraury 16-20, 1999. *Gender Issues*, Vol. 18 no. 1, Winter (2000) p.13

“victims”. In Joe Doezema words “Too often the distinction is interpreted in such a way to deny sex workers’ rights.” Some of the exponents of this position are the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women and the Foundation against Trafficking in Women<sup>6</sup>.

Sex workers, sex workers’ organizations, and some radical feminists advocate the third position. In this perspective, sex work is seen as legitimate labour that needs to be decriminalised in order to empower the sex workers and improve their working conditions. According to this perspective the stigmatisation and criminalisation of sex trade marginalizes the sex trade workers making them more vulnerable to exploitation. It is noteworthy that sex trade work is not exploitative by itself, rather it is the conditions under which it is performed that makes it exploitative. Therefore, improving the labour conditions and increase control of the women over their work, as well as to improve their status within society, has been the main objective of movements such as the prostitutes’ rights movement.<sup>7</sup>

Decriminalising the sex trade industry is imperative before any advancement in the industry can happen. Criminalising the industry puts the sex workers in a very vulnerable position in regards to harassment by the police and other law enforcement officers. Organizations such as COYOTE, (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) and the Exotic Dancers Alliance with their Canadian counterparts, BEAVER, (Better and All Very Erratic Repression) and the Exotic Dancers Alliance of Ontario form part of the many organizations and individuals that support this perspective<sup>8</sup>.

For the purpose of this research project, we use the theoretical framework of the third perspective since it is in keeping with LACEV’s philosophy and values. It is our belief that women working in the sex trade industry, and particularly, in the exotic dancing industry deserve the same human and labour rights as any other citizens and workers. Although we recognise that some women may be lured in the sex trade industry we reject the conflictive dichotomy that creates the “victims” versus “whores”. This division of “good girls” and “bad girls” has caused a great deal of damage to the sex workers rights and the victimisation of all the women in the industry leaving them without agency and capacity to

---

<sup>6</sup> For more information visit the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women webpage <http://www.inet.co.th/org/gaatw> and the Foundation against Trafficking in Women webpage <http://www.bayswan.org/FoundTraf.html>

<sup>7</sup> For more information visit <http://eminism.org/readings/supporthookers.html>

<sup>8</sup> For more information visit the COYOTE webpage [www.walnet.org/csis/groups/coyote.html](http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/coyote.html), [www.bayswan.org/COYOTE.html](http://www.bayswan.org/COYOTE.html), the Exotic Dancers Alliance webpage [www.eda-sf.org](http://www.eda-sf.org) and the Naked Truth webpage <http://www.jumpstartcommunications.com/NakedTruth/>

advocate for their own rights.

We believe that it is through the empowerment of women in the sex trade industry, the improvement of their labour conditions, the decriminalisation of the industry and its de-stigmatisation in society that will ensure that the “slavery-like conditions” commonly associated with the industry decrease and, eventually, disappear. As long as our society endures the values of capitalism, patriarchy, sexism, racism and homophobia sex work will remain and true equality for women will never be achieved.

### “Trafficked Women” or “Migrant Sex Workers”?

The movement of, mainly, women from the rural areas to the cities or from the so called “developing” countries to the “industrialised” countries to work in the sex trade industry is conceptualised in two competitive approaches. The two perspectives reflect the different position in relation to the anti-trafficking discourse that dominates the international agenda.

#### *The anti-trafficking Discourse*

The international discourse on trafficking in women has dominated, and practically monopolizes, the discussion around migrant women in the sex industry. From this perspective, the movement of women to work in the sex industry is perceived as a trafficking issue.

Although, there has been a lack of consensus in the definition of trafficking, the most important international organizations working in this area have come up with their own tentative definition<sup>9</sup>. In recent years, the United Nations has been particularly instrumental in defining the term and implementing strategies to attack the trafficking in persons and, particularly, in women and children. The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, provides some agreement about the exclusiveness or inclusiveness of the term. This protocol defines trafficking in persons as:

- (a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of

---

<sup>9</sup> For a variety of definitions of Trafficking in Women see: The Toronto Network Against Trafficking in Women, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario and The Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN INCLUDING THAI MIGRANT SEX WORKERS IN CANADA. Prepared for the Status of Women Canada June 2000. Appendix B

the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;<sup>10</sup>

This is, perhaps, the most widely accepted definition in the anti-trafficking discourse. The protocol was adopted on December 15, 2000 and will be open to signatures until December 15, 2002. Until now 105 countries have signed the protocol and six have ratified it<sup>11</sup>. This protocol also encourages nation-states to implement laws against human trading. As part of this initiative the UN created the Global Program Against Trafficking in Human Beings. Other United Nations pronouncements on trafficking in women have been done by the UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women<sup>12</sup>.

In the academic sphere, a definition that has been widely used in studies that prioritize the anti-trafficking discourse is the one provided by Marjan Wijers and Lin Lap-Chew who define it in the following terms:

Trafficking in Women: all acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of a woman, within and across national borders for work or services by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion.<sup>13</sup>.

Important studies prepared for the Status of Women Canada, such as: "Trafficking in Women in Canada: A Critical Analysis of the Legal Framework Governing Immigrant Live-in Caregivers and Mail-Order Brides", and "Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian Case" use the above definition.

---

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Protocol To Prevent, Suppress And Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women And Children, Supplementing The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (New York: United Nations, 2000) Article Three P.2 online: [http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final\\_documents\\_2/convention\\_%20traff\\_eng.pdf](http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, online: [www.undcp.org](http://www.undcp.org)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Fact Sheet No.14, Contemporary Forms of Slavery," online: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs14.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Marjan Wijers and Lin Lap-Chew, Trafficking in Women: Forced Labour and Slavery-Like Practices in Marriages, Domestic Labour and Prostitution, (Netherlands: Foundation Against Trafficking in Women, 1997), p. 36.

### *The Counter Argument of the anti-trafficking Discourse*

The other approach to conceptualise the migration of women to work in the sex trade industry has emerged as a counter argument to the trafficking discourse. This approach criticises the use of the term “trafficking” and the laws and policing that results in harming the sex trade industry and sex trade workers. This perspective considers that women who knowingly migrate to perform sex trade work should not be considered “trafficked” as long as no force, threat of violence or coercion are present in the recruitment or transportation process.<sup>14</sup>

According to authors like Joe Doezema and Kamala Kampadoo the term “trafficking in women has its antecedent in the term “white slavery.” Doezema in “Loose Women or Lost Women the re-emergence of the myth of ‘white slavery’ in the contemporary discourse of ‘trafficking in women’” shows how the two terms are closely linked and how some of the imaginary used in the “white slavery” discourse has been reconstructed in the contemporary discussion of “trafficking in women.”

“‘White slavery’ came to mean the procurement, by force, deceit, or drugs, of a white women or girl against her will, for prostitution.”<sup>15</sup> This term started to be used when women began migrating in great numbers, first from Europe, later from The United States and Canada. After the migration of white women was halted the term was not used until its re-emergence with a new name “trafficking in women” when women from Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe begin migrating to the United States and other industrialised countries. Although, the “victims” are no longer white women but Latinas and Asian women the sensational descriptions and emotive language, as well as motifs such as the ignorance of the victim, her youth and innocence prevail in the current discourse, as Doezema explains.

As in the “white slavery” campaign, the “trafficking in women” crusade greatly exaggerates the numbers of actual women that are “trafficked.” These numbers can easily be manipulated because first, they are no reliable statistical sources due to the lack of systematic research. Second, when statistics are available they refer to the numbers of migrant or domestic sex workers rather than cases of trafficking. Thirdly, there are indications that are sex workers and not “coerced innocent” what forms this traffic<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Trafficking In Women Including Thai Migrant Sex Workers In Canada, p.5

<sup>15</sup> Doezema p.4

<sup>16</sup> Doezema p.6-12

The anti-trafficking campaign promotes international and national laws that ultimately serve to impede the free movement of sex workers. They restrict the sex workers mobility and rights.<sup>17</sup> Gretchen Soderlund and Emma Grant explain the implication of these laws for the sex trade industry and for migrant sex workers. In their words "these laws, which often specifically target the sex industry, rob sex workers of their ability to seek financial opportunities away from their own country, which may be encountering depression due to globalization."<sup>18</sup> The anti-trafficking solution emphasis deportations and further criminalisation rather than legitimisation of domestic and migrant sex workers.<sup>19</sup>

In the anti-trafficking discourse, the diversity of the stories of the women tends to disappear in a homogenous narrative of "trafficked women." "By wrapping every incident in sensationalist language of "sexual slavery" and duplicity, these stories fail to address the diverse range of life circumstances which lead women and men to enter the sex industry<sup>20</sup> and to migrate.

Other problems associated with the dominant anti-trafficking discourse are related to the organizing of sex workers, de facto immigration laws, and criminalization of voluntary movement to the sex trade industry. For example, international anti-trafficking laws make very difficult the international organization of sex workers who are denied visas to travel countries and organise themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Although the anti-trafficking laws affect migrant sex workers from all over the world, it seems that women from the so-called "third world" countries have been disproportionately affected. Thus, these laws become de facto immigration laws that seek to deny entrance of women with the least capital to the richer countries.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Carol Leigh and Marjan Wijers, "Statement on Trafficking, Stigmatisation and Strategies for Alliances prepared to the Transnational Trafficking Seminar on Trafficking in Women," June 20-24 Budapest, Hungary 1998, online <http://www.bayswan.org/alliances.html>

<sup>18</sup> Gretchen Soderlund and Emma Grant, "Girls (Forced to) Dance Naked! The Politics and Presumptions of Anti-Trafficking Laws," Bad Subjects. Political Education for Everyday life, Issue # 40 , October 1998: p.2, online <http://eserver.org/bs/40/soderlund-grant.html>

<sup>19</sup> Soderlund and Grant p.4

<sup>20</sup> Soderlund and Grant p.3

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Soderlund and Grant p.4

The current definition of trafficking includes any illicit or illegal transport, however since prostitution and other sex work is illegal or highly criminalised, voluntary travel arraignments will always fall into the category of trafficking.<sup>23</sup>

Although this approach does not try to deny that “some women are trafficked in the sense that they are moved between countries through a brokered deal.”<sup>24</sup> Its main focus is to empower women in the sex trade industry. It places special attention on the working conditions of national and immigrant sex trade workers who are subject to similar abuse experienced by workers in low status jobs in the informal sector augmented by the stigmatisation and criminalisation commonly attached to the sex trade industry.<sup>25</sup>

These two conflicting approaches on the movement of women to perform sex trade work have polarised the discussion and, although, some efforts to compromise have been made the first approach keeps dominating the international agenda.

**This study found out that out of the eleven women that were interviewed two did not know that they were going to come to Canada to work as exotic dancers; the other nine knew what their jobs were going to be. When arriving in Canada their working conditions were appalling, for all of them, and their human rights were violated. In spite of that, these courageous women were able to break with their initial conditions and found ways to gain more autonomy and improve their living and working status. This is not to say that the current working conditions in the exotic**

---

<sup>23</sup> Carol Leigh, “Trafficking and the Distinction Between Forced and Voluntary Prostitution”, online: <http://www.bayswan.org/Distinc.html>

<sup>24</sup> Soderlund and Grant p.4

<sup>25</sup> Jo Bindman, “Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda”

**dancing industry are good, or even acceptable, but this is to say that the women are not ignorant of their own circumstances and that they are able to take action and to make decisions on their own. We believe that sex trade should be decriminalised and women should be allowed to immigrate to Canada as landed immigrants and not on specialised “entertainer” visas as temporary workers.**

### What is Exotic Dancing?

Some authors consider that exotic dancing is, in Western society, a contemporary form of the Burlesque theatre, which was performed at the end of the eighteenth-century and at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. Lucinda Jarret in Stripping in Time a History of Erotic Dancing makes an exhausted historical study on the progression and history of exotic dancing in North America and Europe. According to her study, “burlesque” theatre was an indigenous English tradition imported to North America. “This theatre found its form in pantomime and its expression in cross-dressing, which enabled women to appear in tights and to show their legs on stage for the first time.”<sup>26</sup> For Jarret, later, burlesque lost its association with complete musical show and became a series of sketches with full display of women’s bodies. In the twentieth-century this artistic form became more sophisticated and marked to specific audience in a more complex society<sup>27</sup> suiting to the values of the capitalist system and patriarchal society where anything can be bought, including the dreams and illusions produced in the interaction of a dance with a naked woman.

### *A definition*

A standard or clear definition of exotic dancers is not provided, or at least not easy to find. The definition of an exotic dancer in the licensed provision says: a

---

<sup>26</sup> Lucinda Jarret, Stripping in time A history of Erotic Dancing, (London: Pandora, 1997) p.9

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* P.20-21

“person offers services appealing to erotic or sexual appetites”.<sup>28</sup> A more sociological description of the activity says that “[s]triptease performances have been designed to titillate customers at a distance, to please through illusion and fantasy.”<sup>29</sup> In her definition Diane Meaghan presents the performance as an illusion of sexual invitation, a distinct form of conversation, a melodrama that is preoccupied with sexual, gender and race relations, and embodied in a stylised presentation of the female body.<sup>30</sup>

Although far away are the days of big theatrical productions with soft lights and elaborated costumes, and today’s exotic dancing is geared to the sexual stimulation of the customers, some authors, activists and dancers consider that this form of dancing should gain a place as art. For instance, Judith Lynne Hanna, a researcher from University of Maryland has campaigned to establish exotic dancing as an art form since it meets all the criteria of what art is: learned skill, creative imagination and communication. She does not agree with those that diminish the component of artistic performance because they do not approve its content.<sup>31</sup> This is noteworthy since Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in the Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW), classifies exotic dancers as part of the performance arts category.<sup>32</sup>

#### *How exotic dancing is performed*

In most of the clubs in Toronto, women are expected to engage in two kinds of dancing performance: stage dancing and table dancing. The dancer’s show on stage consists of three or four songs: at the end of the first song she has removed her top, at the end of the second the garments below her waist and the third and fourth song are reserved for her floor work, whose main purpose is to provide a direct view of the dancer’s genitalia. The dancer, usually, supplies the music, which allows her to prepare and put together a show. There is always a dancer on the stage.

---

<sup>28</sup> Vern Smith “ Strip club laws a ball of confusion Stayed charges leave exotic dance clubs in legal limbo” Eye Magazine July 07 2000, online:

[http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue\\_07.06.00/news/nekkid.html](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_07.06.00/news/nekkid.html)

<sup>29</sup> Jacqueline Lewis and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndal, “Final Report: Erotic/Exotic Dancing: Hiv Related Risk Factors 1998,” Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Windsor 1998 p.4, online:

<http://zeus.uwindsor.ca/courses/sociology/maticka/star/dancersummary.html>

<sup>30</sup> Diane Meaghan, “The Political Economy of Stripping: The Social Construction of Sex Trade Work,” diss., OISE University of Toronto, 2000, p.84

<sup>31</sup> Jeff Horwich, “Exotic Dancing –is it are?,” Minnesota Public Radio News March 4, 2,002 online: [http://news.mpr.org/features/200203/04\\_mainstreet\\_sex-m/dance.shtml](http://news.mpr.org/features/200203/04_mainstreet_sex-m/dance.shtml)

<sup>32</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW), online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/FW-e/>, p.82

The other type of performance that the dancers engage in is the so called “table dancing”, which is the private show that the dancer performs for the patron. The level of privacy depends on the amount of money the customer is willing to pay; it can take place in an area visible to others or in more secluded booth therefore, more expensive, commonly known as VP lounges or Champaign rooms. A dance in one of these exclusive areas is double the price than in the main floor<sup>33</sup>. It is in this area where “lap dancing” could take place. This is when the dancer sits on the client’s lap and gyrates on him entering into contact with the client’s groin area. The legality or illegality of lap dancing has been extensively discussed within the legal landscape of the exotic dancing industry as it is explained next.

### The Legal Landscape in the Exotic Dancing Industry

The legal landscape in the exotic dancing industry, in Audrey Macklin’s words, occupies a grey zone. In Canada there are three main instances that shape the law in the industry and therefore, affects the working conditions of the dancers. These instances are the Courts, the Criminal Code of Canada, and the municipalities’ by-laws.

The criminal Code of Canada dedicates its PART V -- Sections 150-182 to what it calls “Sexual Offences, Public Morals and Disorderly Conduct.” This chapter is divided into Sexual Offences, Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals and, Disorderly Conduct. It is the “Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals” that has influenced the exotic dancing industry the most. Section 167 “Immoral Theatrical Performance” has been used in important court cases against exotic dancing clubs. The section says:

167. (1) Every one commits an offence who, being the lessee, manager, agent or person in charge of a theatre, presents or gives or allows to be presented or given therein an immoral, indecent or obscene performance, entertainment or representation.<sup>34</sup>

To define when an act is indecent the courts use the “community standards of tolerance” test, which can be interpreted as what Canadian society would tolerate others being exposed to based on the harm that that exposure would produce<sup>35</sup>.

Some other sections that can have implication for exotic dancers are: Corrupting Morals, Section 163; Indecent Acts, section 173; Nudity, Section 174; Causing Disturbance, Indecent Exhibition, Loitering, Etc. section 175; Communicating for

---

<sup>33</sup> See Diane Meaghan, and Jacqueline Lewis and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndal

<sup>34</sup> Canadian Government, The Criminal Code of Canada, (Ottawa: Canadian Government, 1892) online: <http://insight.mcmaster.ca/org/efc/pages/law/cc/cc.html> Part V

<sup>35</sup> R.V Butler, [1992] 1S.C.R 452]

the Purpose of Prostitution, Section 213; and Common bawdy-house, Section 210.<sup>36</sup>

In 1973 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that dancing naked was not immoral,<sup>37</sup> but the Liquor Control Board of Ontario believed that alcohol was able to alter the person's personality, therefore only non-alcoholic clubs were allowed to have dancers that perform complete nudity. Later the LCBO was unable to restrict the entertainment policies in bars and total nudity was allowed in serving alcoholic bars<sup>38</sup>.

In 1991, allegations to the Metropolitan Toronto Police complaining illegal acts at Cheaters, a North York exotic dancing club, led to one of the major decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada dealing with this industry. An investigation by undercover police led to charges against Patrick Mara and Allan East, the owner and manager of Cheaters, for allowing indecent performance contrary to section 167(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada<sup>39</sup>. They were found guilty but they took the case to the Ontario Court of Appeal.

In another decision made by Judge Hachborn of the Ontario Court, ruled that lap dancing was not indecent. The Ontario Court of Appeal overturned the decision and convicted the accused. On appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, it was held that the acts were indecent but the owner could not be convicted because he lacked the necessary knowledge of the acts being performed in the club to sustain a conviction<sup>40</sup>. On March 12 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it is indecent for strip clubs to let customers pay naked dancers to gyrate on them<sup>41</sup>. The Court also said that it was dangerous, humiliating and not far from prostitution. "It degrades and humiliates women and publicly portrays them in a servile and humiliating manner as sexual object, with lost of dignity" (R.V. Mara 1997).

According to the interpretation of Jacqueline Lewis and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndal the decision in the case of Mara only dealt with lap dancing in a public space

---

<sup>36</sup> The Criminal Code of Canada part V and VI

<sup>37</sup> The Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project, "The Bare Facts. How dancers get 'jerked' around by the law," online: [www.walnet.org](http://www.walnet.org)

<sup>38</sup> Don Cullen, "Her Story ain't History", The Naked Truth, Summer 2,000 online: <http://jumpstartcommunications.com/NakedTruth/Dance-History.html>

<sup>39</sup> Jacqueline Lewis and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndal, "Final Report: Erotic/Exotic Dancing: Hiv - Related Risk Factors 1998," p.9

<sup>40</sup> "A review of the Law of Indecency and Nudity," Criminal Law Study Paper, online: <http://www.ilcc.ca/en/criminal/?sec=3d>

<sup>41</sup> Kirk Makin, "Lap dancing an indecent ant, top court rules," The Globe and Mail [Toronto] March 13, 1997: A1

leaving un-addressed whether lap dancing in private booths, as the ones in VIP or Champaign rooms, is also indecent.

The exotic dancing industry is also regulated by the municipalities through by-laws. The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto was the first municipality to institute a lap dancing bylaw with the “no touching rule”.

By Clause No. 1 to Report 13 of the Human Services Committee adopted by the former Metropolitan Council at its meeting of August 17, 1995, Metropolitan Council enacted and passed By-law No. 129-95, being a by-law further regulating licensed adult entertainment parlours by requiring that there be no touching between patrons and attendants performing services in these premises.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly after the Supreme Court Decision in 1997, the Toronto Police Service Special Investigative Services Morality Bureau engaged in a project known as “Project Almonzo.” A discussion paper prepared by the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, summaries project Almonzo in the following way:

A joint initiative aimed at closing down illegal strip bars operating as booze cans. Project Almonzo involved four municipal police services, the Proceeds of Crime unit, the AGCO, OPP secondees, the RCMP, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the City of Toronto licensing department. The project also involved the Victims’ Assistance program, Ministry of the Solicitor General and social assistance funding. Project Almonzo resulted in 602 charges including 267 prostitution-related charges as well as drugs, firearms, and *Immigration Act* violations. To date, two liquor licences were revoked and another one suspended with several more establishments subject to revocation/suspension proceedings.<sup>43</sup>

“Project Almonzo” is not currently operating but unprecedented numbers of dancers were affected by this project. This, in spite of the statement made by Det. O’Mara who stressed that “the goal of the project is not to do a “hooker sweep” but to attack organizations involved in trafficking of women for sexual purposes.”<sup>44</sup> Although, “police admit that they have failed to rein in this vast

---

<sup>42</sup> City of Toronto Council and Committees, online:

<http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/legdocs/agendas/committees/ep/ep980522/it006.htm>

<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, “Building Safer Communities Safer Communities Through Co-operative Enforcement A Discussion Paper,” Government of Ontario: October 19, 2000, online: <http://www.cbs.gov.on.ca/pdf/mccr/BldgSaferComm.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Marina Jimenez and Stewart Bell, “650 charges in Canadian Sex Slave Trade,” National Post [Toronto] May 18, 2000

underground industry.”<sup>45</sup> Migrant exotic dancers were particularly targeted by this project because of their status as migrant workers<sup>46</sup>

Despite the efforts of law enforcement agencies or the criminalisation of lap dancing by the Supreme Court of Canada, the Criminal Code of Canada and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, lap dancing is a practice that still continues. As Jacqueline Lewis and Eleanor Maticka-Tyndal mention, if the concern with lap dancing is to prevent harm, especially to women, the currently regulatory devices are not appropriate. Perhaps the solution is to regulate the industry improving working condition for the dancers.

### Immigration Regulations for the Exotic Dancing Industry

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the legislation that replaces the 25 year-old Immigration Act, in its objectives section provides guidance on how Canadian immigration policy should be administered. In particular, it recognises the need “to facilitate the entry of visitors, students and temporary workers...”<sup>47</sup>

According to Immigration and Citizenship Canada “the foreign worker category includes persons who came to Canada to work on a temporary basis. ... every Foreign Worker must have been issued an employment authorization.”<sup>48</sup> The Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW) provides regulations on temporary workers. “In these Regulations, “employment authorization” means a document issued by an immigration officer whereby the person to whom it is issued is authorized to engage or continue in employment in Canada.”<sup>49</sup> However, not any worker can apply for a temporary authorization. Chapter Seven of the Foreign Worker Guidelines contains a comprehensive list of the main occupations and categories as well as the requirements for each of them, exotic dancers is one of those occupations.

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Vern Smith, “Sex Slaves or harassed sex-trade workers? Being ‘rescued’ by police means imprisonment,” *Eye* October 8, 2,000  
online:[http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue\\_08.10.00/news/sex.html](http://www.eyenet.net/eye/issue_08.10.00/news/sex.html).

<sup>47</sup> Government of Canada, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration, 2002) p.16

<sup>48</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “FACTS and FIGURES 199. Statistical Overview of the Temporary Resident and Refugee Claimant Population,” Publications, online:  
<http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/pub/facts99-temp/facts-temp-7.html>

<sup>49</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW), online:  
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/FW-e/>, 2.1 Definition of employment authorization

In regular circumstances, before a person can apply for an Employment Authorization she or he needs to have a job offer from a potential Canadian employer who requires an "Employment Validation" issued from a Human Resource Centre in Canada (HRDC). If the HRDC office determines that there are no Canadian citizens or permanent residents available to fill the position, the job offer to the foreign worker is validated. Chapter 2 Section (1.4) of the Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines defines Validation as:

"... a HRDC is a labour market process which determines that the employment of a foreign worker will not have an adverse effect on employment opportunities for Canadian citizens and permanent residents...."<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, the employer has to make reasonable efforts to hire or train Canadian citizens or permanent residents to do the job, or prove that qualified Canadian citizens and permanent residents were considered initially and are not available or cannot be reasonably trained for the position for which the foreign worker is requested.

According to Audrey Macklin, exotic dancers were exempted from seeking job validation from HRDC by virtue of Exemption Code E99 "Reciprocal Employment Opportunities of Canadians Abroad" (Immigration Regulations: s. 20(5)(e)(iii)). This exemption has its origins in the early 70's with a cross-border movement mainly of Canadian and American exotic dancers engaging in an informal exotic dancers exchange programme. "Strippers with a job offer from a Canadian employer could arrive at a Canadian port of entry and apply for and receive a TEA without any state scrutiny of the circumstances behind the demand for their services."<sup>51</sup>

It was not until 1997, when a controversy broke out on the role of the Canadian government in the sex trade industry that the government was forced to revoke E99 for exotic dancers. In 1998, Human Resources Canada issued a generic letter issuing a Validation Exemption for exotic dancers. HRDC states that, "As a result of a National Labour Market Opinion [NLMO] issued in 1998 by HRDC, and as long as this NLMO is in effect, employers who wish to hire foreign exotic dancers do not require an employment validation from HRDC."<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW), Chapter 2 Section (1.4).

<sup>51</sup> Audrey Mcklin, "Dancing Across Borders", Trafficking and Canadian Immigration Policy," unpublished, Toronto, 2001 Available by contacting Audrey Macklin at [audrey.macklin@utoronto.ca](mailto:audrey.macklin@utoronto.ca)

<sup>52</sup> Human Resources Development Canada, webpage, online: [www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca). Code E99 - Reciprocal Employment Opportunities of Canadians Abroad

In Macklin's analysis, the exotic dancer programme has been used to fulfil a labour market shortage that Canadian exotic dancers are not willing or not able to fill under the current working conditions.

Migrant exotic dancers to Canada are deeply impacted by the immigration regulation for exotic dancers as "Temporary Foreign Workers," as well as the domestic legal issues of the exotic dancing industry.

The conceptualisation of sex trade as legitimate work where women need to be empowered, and where labour conditions need to be improved, and recognising that exotic dancers have their own agency to advocate for themselves frame this study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### A Word from the Researcher

**This research study was carried out by a main researcher with the constant support, advice, and guidance of a working committee and, with the supervision of a consultation group. The research design was prepared by LACEV and interviews were carried out by two members of the working committee and the researcher. All the members of the working committee and the researcher are Latin American, Spanish speaking, and immigrant women. The researcher believes that, ideally this study should have been done by a Latin American immigrant exotic dancer, hopefully in the near future Latinas exotic dancers will be in the position to do research in their own**

**working trade, and in the Latin America community at large.**

**The contact with the women in the exotic dancing industry was greatly facilitated by the fact that the researcher, as well as the working committee are Latinas women, speak Spanish, have experienced immigration barriers and have a trajectory of political activist in the Latin American community in Toronto.**

Research Design

**Little is known of the experience of Latina immigrant women working in the exotic dancing industry in Canada. There is a lack of research in this area and service provider agencies geared to the Latin American population have not made Latina exotic dancers, or any other workers in the sex trade area, a priority population. Therefore, this study adopts an exploratory naturalistic approach that intends to understand the day-to-day life of Latina immigrant exotic dancers. Through feminist/participatory/action research this study is interested in comprehending what is like to be a woman coming from Latin**

## **America to work in the exotic dancing industry in Toronto.**

The research question that guides this study can be summarized as follows, what are the socio-economic, legal, and emotional conditions of Latin American women who come to Toronto with specialized visas to work as exotic dancers? This research desires to achieve two main goals. The first one is to investigate and document the experiences of Latin American women who come to Toronto with "Temporary Employment Authorizations" to work as exotic dancers. The second goal is to explore four areas: the social environment in which the women face a triple oppression as women, immigrants and sex workers, the working conditions around them as migrant sex workers, the legal implication of their "temporary workers" status, and their emotional well-being while working in the sex trade industry.

### Outreach Strategy

**Reaching the women in the exotic dancing industry was a main concern. The first phase of the outreach strategy took place by sending notification to community agencies and service providers that have had contact with this population. An important number of interviews were the product of this first outreach stage. In its middle stage this strategy was exhausted. In the last interim report, presented in September 200 the process of interviews has slowed down. Therefore, a more proactive strategy was designed and implemented. This new strategy had excellent results and different outputs for LACEV and the project.**

**The most significant results for the research were that an important number of women started contacting us, as well as an ex-agent, and that the Latin American community become aware of the project.**

**The outreach strategy consisted of publicist adds asking for women who wanted to participate in the project in mainstream mass media, Internet and e-mail list and posters. At the same time a cellular telephone number was designated only for the use of this project, in this way the women could call after regular office hours. The advertisements can be broken down in the following manner:**

Mass Media

- 4 ads were placed in Latin American newspapers, El Popular, El Expreso, Latino Post and Correo Canadiense.
- 2 ads were posted in a free publication, Compraventa, for 4 weeks starting on February 13 and later on March 8.
- 1 ad was posted in "Apuntes", an informational space in TLN, the Spanish-speaking channel.
- A note on the project was broadcasted on Sembradoras, a radio show in Spanish

Internet and e-mail list

- The ad was posted at the Latin American Coalition Against Racism (LACAR) web site and at Alternativa Latinoamericana.
- The ad was posted in the following e-mail lists: LACAR, MNSJ, OISE and women's studies at University of Toronto.

Postering

- More than 100 posters were placed in the areas surrounding some of the clubs in Toronto: on Bloor from Lansdowne to Bathurst, on Yonge from Bloor to King, the Queensway, and the area of Jane and Finch

## Data Collection

**The study's data collection efforts consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews with Latina women that are or had been in the industry, interviews with "key informants," and visit to some of the exotic dancing clubs in Toronto.**

**Eleven women who used to or are currently working as exotic dancers from six different Latin American countries were interviewed. The semi-structured format allowed for spontaneity and gave the women an opportunity to explore important issues for them. Each interview was carried out in Spanish and was audio taped, with the permission of the person that was being interviewed, and were transcribed verbatim. Each session lasted from one to three hours. In order to ensure absolute confidentiality no names appear in this report. Each woman participant received an honorarium of forty or fifty dollars as a recognition of her time.**

Five interviews with the “key informants” or people that have had a role in shaping the topic, or have an expertise in an area concerning the exotic dancing industry. The purpose of their testimonies was to get a broad range of perspectives. The people interviewed were: **Consuelo Rubio**, community legal worker from the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, **Mary Taylor**, ex dancer and activist, **Audrey Macklin**, professor and researcher from University of Toronto, **Beverly McAleese and a group of front line workers**, from Street Light, and an **ex-agent**, who used to recruit women from Latin America.

Three different field visits to two different clubs in downtown Toronto took place on February 7<sup>th</sup>, on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and on April 9<sup>th</sup>. The first visit was to accompany a male client, the second visit invited by an ex dancer who used to work in that club and the third visit invited by a current dancer. During those visits the researcher was able to see the changing rooms, the washrooms and kitchen, as well to observe the internal dynamics and have informal conversations with the women.

## Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were analysed throughout the research process. Transcripts were studied as well as personal notes and field notes. The data were inputted and analysed with the help of software for qualitative data analysis, QSR N5. In the first stage themes were detected by the use of recurrent words that appeared in all the interviews such as English, visa, contracts ... etc. Later significant statements were identified and an initial coding was developed. From the coding clear topics started to appear which were rearranged and organised in a hierarchical order. The results are presented by describing the themes that emerged. Each theme begins with a description, followed by the sub-themes, which also start with a description followed by a one or several citation in English translation.

**Comment:** First Draft

**Comment:**

## FINDINGS

### Listening to the women and the key informants

Based on the interviews, it can be said that in general terms the women who come from Latin America to work as exotic dancers pass through four different, more or less, chronological stages. The first one takes place in their home country, “Recruitment” -- a country in Central or South America, where they are

contacted by “agents” working for Canadian club owners whose mission is to recruit as many women as possible. The rest of the stages take place in Canada. The second stage is the “Arrival” of the women to a new country, Canada, followed by a “Transition” stage and a final stage of “Settlement or Adjustment.” Aside from these four “chronological” stages, four themes emerged from the data collected and analysed.

The main categories identified were: the social environment in which the women face a triple oppression as women, immigrants and sex workers, the working conditions around them as migrant sex workers, the legal implication of their “temporary worker” status, their emotional well-being while working in the sex trade industry. These themes are present during the different chronological stages that take place in Canada --Arrival, Transition, and Settlement. However, they are different depending on the stage that the women are going through. For example, the working conditions are different for a woman that has just arrived in the country and for another woman that has been in Canada for an extended period.

For the purpose of this report, the chronological stages are discussed as follows, and the four categories are analysed later in the report, followed by recommendations.

## **A. Chronological Stages**

Four chronological stages or periods were detected in the study. These periods occurring one after the other are “Recruitment”, that usually takes place out of Canada, “Arrival to Canada”, “Transitions”, and “Settlement and Adjustment”.

### **1. Recruitment Process in the Women’s Country of Origin**

Out of the eleven women that we interviewed, ten were recruited in their home countries and only one entered the industry after being in Canada for several years. The ten women were offered jobs with clubs in Toronto and signed contracts, thus they entered Canada with working visas, or they had their visas issued at the point of entry, usually the airport. Out of the eleven the only woman who entered the industry with permanent immigration status was the woman who was not recruited in her country of origin.

#### **1.1 Country of Origin Conditions**

All of the women that were recruited in their home countries cited their severe economic situation as the main reason for having left their countries. The woman who entered the industry after being in Canada mentioned that she came to the country marrying a Canadian man.

In their own words:

*I had a very bad economic situation in Venezuela. I was too poor. I am a single mother at that time I only had my daughter. My family is very poor we are very, very poor; I needed to change the cycle of poverty. My grandmother is poor. My mother is poor. We did not have any money for education. Some times, we cried because of the lack of food, then I decided to come to Canada.*

**Six out of the eleven women worked in the sex trade industry in their countries of origin. The rest worked in low-income jobs such as receptionist, factory worker, singer, or waiters. Only one was previously unemployed that being the woman who was recruited in Canada.**

*In 1996, it was almost impossible to find work. In the town that I am from there was a woman that I became friends with. She was the owner of a resort and she had a nightclub. She treated the girls very well. She used to provide the women with housing and paid them for the drinks and the dance. She explained to me what I had to do and she offered me a job.*

*I started dancing in Costa Rica when I was twenty years old. I could not study. I worked in a factory and later in the club.*

*I used to work (as a receptionist) but I just made minimum wage, which is just enough to eat.*

*I came to Toronto with a Cuban friend. We started living in a basement. I arrived here and I could not find work. I did not speak English. Two weeks passed, three weeks and I ran out of money.*

Seven out of the eleven women were single mothers. They had between one and two children before coming to Canada, and all of them migrated without their children. They left the children with their parents and more commonly with their mothers. The majority of the women with children reported having them at a very young age --during their teen years. None of the six had partners when they left their country. One woman had recently divorced and was fleeing from her ex-husband who issued death threats against her.

*When I was in Ecuador I was in a very difficult situation, very, very difficult. Before I came here, I was a single mother. I had my first child when I was 16 years old.*

*I had two children that were with my parents in the capital city. I used to work and send money for their education ...*

*I had just divorced my husband because he mistreated me. He used to threaten me to death. I was very afraid since he did not leave me alone. I wanted to find a contract outside the country.*

## 1.2 Recruitment Process

The most usual way in which women are recruited in Latin America to come to Canada as exotic dancer occurs through "agents." These "agents" are from women's own country or other countries in Latin America, they speak Spanish and know the culture. They befriend the women, and women trust them.

The findings of our study suggest that there are, at least, two different kinds of "agents". The first kind operates very closely with the clubs. They are paid and financed by the clubs to bring the women. This type of agent develops a very close relationship with the women that they recruit, a relationship that continues in Canada where women pay them regular fees. They travel from Canada to Latin America on a regular basis and, usually, have permanent resident status in Canada. For the purpose of this study, they will be called "long-lasting-agents".

The second kind of agents is the “short-term-agents”. They contact the women in their country of origin and they are, also, paid by the clubs, but their work finishes when they deliver the women to the clubs or leave them in the airport. They do not develop a relationship with the dancers -- some of the women never see these “agents” again.

In general, the agents are in charge of finding prospective women to come to Canada. Often, they recruit women who are already in the sex industry. “Agents” contact women in night-clubs, bars and, other places of the sex trade industry.

*I was working in the bar and the agents showed up there. They made us dance then they sat down with us and they started telling us about Canada.*

*Some folks got to the club I was working in. That night people from Japan and from Canada arrived at the club. I had two different contracts one to go to Japan as singer and another one to come to Canada as a dancer....*

But sex workers are not the only targets of “agents.” They also contact women through friends, relatives, or acquaintances, someone who knows someone who is offering opportunities to go to Canada. In at least one case a woman was recruited by a relative. In this particular case, it seems, the agent - the relative - did not develop an exploitative relationship with the woman. In at least one case, a dancer became a “short-term” agent when she went back to her country and recruited old friends and women that she new to dance for the club where she was working.

*I had a friend who knew about my situation with my ex-husband. I was looking for a contact to leave the country. My friend met a woman who was offering contracts to come to Canada.*

*I had a friend in Costa Rica who lived in Canada. She told me that she had a great job for me where I could make \$2,000 dollars a week. I was amazed. All that money! And I believed her...*

*... [T]hen, two cousins who were in Windsor told me ... “why don’t you come to work here”...*

One of the agents’ duties there is to provide the women with the contract from the club and “translate” it for them. The contracts are, usually, in English, which is a foreign language in Latin America, except in Belize. Out of the 10 women recruited outside Canada only one was fluent in English, thus she was the only

one who could fully understand the contract. Another woman had a friend translate the contract for her. The rest relied on the translation made by the agent, which was incorrect and exaggerated. In one case, a woman had her contract changed. She signed one contract in her country and a completely different one here in Canada.

*The agent is Ecuadorian but she lives in Canada. She gave me the contract in English and she translated into Spanish, so I could understand. But when I came to Canada and went to a person who spoke English I realised that she had adjusted the translation to her convenience.*

*I did not even read the contract because it was in English and I did not know any English. She (the agent) read it to me.*

*They gave us a paper in Spanish but when we were in the airport, before taking the aeroplane they gave us the contracts to sign.... That contract was in English but at that moment we trusted them.*

### 1.3 Visas

In the countries where the nationals need visas to enter Canada, the agents provide “help” to deal with immigration. They tell them what to say, and what not to say, in the interviews with immigration officers. The women have to have medical tests and prove that they have enough ties with their country and that they will go back.

*We got the visa in the Canadian consulate. They (the agents) gave us a piece of paper with all the questions that we would have to answer at the Consulate. We had to study that paper.*

### 1.4 Promises

In the majority of the cases, women were told that they were coming to dance. The deception for most is more about the working conditions, living conditions, salary arrangements, and even personal freedom. Two women however, were completely deceived; one was told that she was going to be a singer and another one that she was going to be a cleaner in a hotel.

*I had a friend in Costa Rica who lived in Canada. She told me that she had a great job for me where I could make \$2,000 dollars a week.... I asked what kind of work and she said working in a hotel. I asked her, doing what? And she said, doing the same that thing that women do in hotels in Costa Rica. I said, cleaning rooms? And she said Yes.*

*... I got a visa to come to Canada to sing. That is what the functionary at the embassy told me. I was there with my daughter when she said it. We both heard the same.*

For the women working in the sex trade industry in their home countries, their expectations were to improve their working conditions since they were told that dancing in Canada did not include sexual favours or sexual contact.

*... [T]hey told me that here I just had to dance and that is all. You do not have to be in contact with the client, if you do not want. I liked the idea.*

*... They told us that we only had to dance, that no one was going to touch us and that we did not have to do anything else but to dance.*

Women were offered regular salaries ranging from \$2,000 dollars a week to \$2,000 dollars a month. They were offered boarding in Canada. Likewise, agents "lent" money to the women to pay for air tickets, visas' costs, and other expense.

*... [T]hey told us all these beautiful things but when I arrived I realised that they had deceived us. They lied to us, like we were little children...*

*They told me that they were going to pay me \$600 a week for 6 days a week from 7pm to 12 am.... Housing and food were offered verbally.*

*They told me that they were going to pay me \$2,000 dollars a month.... Here they told us that they were going to "save" that money for us and they only gave us \$500 a month...*

### 1.5 Listening to the Key Informants

For the purpose of the study, an "ex-agent" was interviewed. He is a Latino man whose job was to go to countries in Latin America and recruit women that would come to Canada to work as exotic dancers. In the interview, he confirmed many of the statements the women made regarding the agents' behaviour. One of his most revealing assertions was the fact that the agents would not be able to do their job without the club owners. The club owners are the ones that finance all the expenses of the agents' trip to Latin America --expenses such as air tickets for agents and women, payment for visas, local contacts, and others. Whoever, the involvement of club owners is impossible to prove because contracts between agents and club owners are never signed. Likewise, women blame the agents because they are the ones with whom they have direct contact. In reality, the

club owners are as responsible as the “agent”. The club owners are very aware of the agent’s methods, lies and movements.

In his own word:

*They (the club owners) make money at every end. The agents say that they finance the women but there is always another person behind who does not want to be involved. If there is any problem with the government all the people that work for the club owner would fall but not him, because his name does not show up anywhere. It is a liar the one that says that he finances the women because the one that has money does not want his hands on the fire. He will always look for someone that represents him --he is the investor. The majority of those investors are white male Canadians that need someone that speaks the language and knows that world.*

This “ex -agent” was very well versed in his job and knew how to “recruit” the women

*I was like the lion in a jungle looking at all the victims.*

*To recruit them you have to use psychology. You have to talk to them about beautiful things, but you should never talk to them about love. You create a kind of business friendship.*

Life in Canada

This part of the findings concentrates on the stages or periods that the women go through in Canada “Arrival,” “Transitions” and “Settlement”. We examine what happens to the women when they arrive in Canada, what barriers that they have to face in a country that is unknown to them, where they neither speak the language nor know the culture. They, because of their profession, are stigmatised and criminalised. How they are isolated to ensure that they do not learn either the language or their rights. Later, how they overcome the initial stage and gain more autonomy of their work. Who help the women in this transition. And, finally, how they settle down and get adjusted to their living and working conditions.

## **2. Arrival to Canada**

The women depart from their countries leaving behind children, families and loved ones. Their emotional sorrow is comforted by the hope to improve theirs and their families’ living conditions. They arrive in Canada with high

expectations. They hope to work, make enough money, live well and have the promises made by agents fulfilled.

## 2.1 Living

Every woman was offered housing and meals by the agents in their countries. In Toronto, they were picked up at the airport and taken where they were going to live. Some of them lived in the house of the “long-lasting-agent.” Some others were taken to houses owned by the clubs or rooms in hotels rented by the clubs. Some clubs have rooms on top, or houses close to them. In all cases women had to pay rent, usually, overpriced, and some of them did not have any freedom of movement.

*The manager knew everything about us because we lived in the upper part of the hotel and at night, we used to go down and dance.*

*Yes. They told us that they were going to give us everything, housing, meals. But the house was a room with two bunk beds. We slept four women in each room and we had one washroom for all the women. In the kitchen, there was rice, sometimes milk, sugar, coffee, and Instacream.*

*They picked us in the airport and took us to a Quality Inn, a hotel where we had to pay six hundred dollars a week plus food. We had to pay for the hotel.*

## 2.2 English

The lack of ability to speak English is one of the most difficult barriers that the women have to face. Not only because they cannot communicate with their clients, which affects their business, but also because they are not able to learn the country’s law and look for help when they need to. The women’s only contacts in this stage are the “agents” and managers in charge of them.

Out of the eleven women, only one was completely fluent in English when she arrived in Canada. The majority of the women arrived without any training in English. Soon they realised that if they did not start speaking the language they would be out of business. In this stage, clients become an avenue for learning English.

*I did not know any English. Do you want a dance? That was all I knew.*

*When you do not speak English, you think that they are telling you something but they are not telling you that. It is like an illusion. You think they are telling you something that you would like them to tell you.*

*No, I did not know anything. I did not know the law here. I could not go anywhere. I did not even have my passport.*

### **3. Transition**

Slowly women realise that their working and living conditions can dramatically change if they leave the place where they are. They learn the working standards for the exotic dancing industry and realise that they are working below them. Who helps them in this transition period? How do they leave the initial conditions? These are some questions that will be explored in this part of the study. During this stage, women have to make difficult decisions like leaving the clubs where they have been working, moving in with their boyfriend, or going back to their countries. It is a period marked by severe crisis and a lot of instability.

During this time, women risk losing their legal status, since breaking the contract with the club would make them illegal. The women reported five places or people that helped them during this transition period: clients, consulates, agents (ironically), shelters and friends. These are not exclusionary and, on the contrary, women get help from a combination of them. When women are able to leave the agent or stop paying quotas to the club is they can finally start making any money.

#### **3.1 Clients**

Clients play a big role informing the women about different options and opportunities that they can have. They are, usually, the first contact to Canadian society outside the circle of club owners, managers, and agents. Generally, the women develop relationships with clients.

At least four women married men that they met during the first year of being in Canada; the women reported having met these men anywhere between 1 to 8 months of their arrival. Out of these four women, one stopped working as an exotic dancer and the other three left the first club and found contracts with other clubs as "free-lancers".

*I learned from other women and from clients that other clubs would pay much better. I asked around and people told me that in other places women made twenty dollars for a song. I told myself, they are robbing me here.*

*Q: How long does it take you to leave the club?*

*A: I met the man who became my husband. He had been a client of the club for more than ten years.*

*I met a guy who became my boyfriend. He told me that there were many other clubs where I could make more money... I married him later. I met him after a month of being here.*

*During my first contract I met the one that became my husband.*

*I used to talk to a Salvadorian friend and he told me that they (the club) were deceiving us. I met him in the club.*

### 3.2 Consulates

The most prevalent place cited by the women for providing assistance was the consulate of their country. Three women reported having gone to a consulate. During this period the women required professional help and they did not know who could aid them. No one mentioned agencies, community centres or the government. The only other place that was cited was a shelter.

*Where should I go? I thought...hum the consulate. They have to give me my money in the consulate. I am not going back to Colombian without my money. I went to the consulate and the counsel gave me the number for the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples..*

*[Due to the fact that the woman left the club she lost her working visa and became illegal] I did not have visa and they (the agent) could tell immigration. I talked to my boyfriend (who became my husband) and he told me to go to the Ecuadorian consulate. I went and talked to the counsel. He told me that they had had that problem before.*

*We keep in touch with the Mexican consulate. They advised us to go back to Mexico and charge them, otherwise we had to stay here and fulfil the contract.*

### 3.3 "Long-lasting-agents"

As ironic as it may seem, agents play an important role during this period because they are the ones who can provide the women with contracts for other clubs. In this way, the women avoid losing their working status. At this point, women also realise that although the agents are taking advantage of them they also can "use" them to remain in Canada.

*My agent told me that she could take me to another club but that I had to pay her twenty-five per cent of everything that I made. If I made one thousand dollars, I had to give her two-hundred-twenty-five dollars. That is what I started paying by week. She told me that she would give me a new visa.*

*One day we all got together and we talked to the agent. We told her that we were fed up and that we wanted to work in another club. They gave us a new contract that said that they could help us to find work in another club. But if we wanted to do this we had to pay two hundred twenty five dollars a week.*

*The agent recovered the passport but without the working permit. They also told her that they were not going to pay me the money that they owed me because I broke the contract.*

In one case a woman after three months of working in the club went back to her country and recruited women to dance for the club. She reported that after that she got better treatment at the club.

*Then I went back and brought twelve women. I did it because I wanted to and not because of the money. They only paid me the ticket. After that I did not have to work with schedule and the manager started treating me better.*

#### 3.4 Shelters

In one case a woman reported going to a shelter for help. She expresses difficulties accessing services in the shelters because dancers are not considered to be women who faced abuse. After going to three shelters, she was referred to an agency and from there to a community center that provided her the help that she needed.

*Q: How did you find help?*

*A: Throughout a Shelter. It is very difficult to remember all this. ... I did not know where to go.... After three shelters, they did not tell me what to do but at least they send me to a place where I could get help. First I went to Barbara Schlifer but they could not help me either. Then, I went to Parkdale Center and they gave me adequate advice. There I found the people that could help me with my case.*

#### 3.5 Friends

Apart from clients other exotic dancers are a contact that provide the women with information. They make friendships and in most cases they help each other. The women learn that there are many dancers who did not have "agents".

*Then I called a friend and she told me that I could work in the club where she was working. She told me that there I did not have to pay commission. I moved with her and since that moment my life changed....*

*I called my friend and she gave me her address. I took my suitcases and I ran away. ... When I arrived to my friend's house it was like if I had arrived to another country.*

*With the little English that we spoke we started asking other dancers if they had agents. They told us that no that it was not necessary to have an agent. We were very surprised. So we fled from the agents. We left the house and from then on we started making money.*

#### **4. Settlement**

After the women break their contracts with the club that brings them to Canada they have only two options if they want to remain in Canada legally. They can either get married and initiate a sponsorship process or they can find another contract to keep working as exotic dancers. There are not any other options for the women since they are not allowed to study and finding jobs in other industries is not feasible. The only other option attempted by one woman was to make a refugee claim.

It is in this stage that women reported the use of agencies and community centres. It is also during this period that the women break their dependence from the agents, stop paying quotas to the club and gain some control over their work. They become, what in the industry are known as freelancers. They pay a fee to the club, as domestic exotic dancers, and they can keep the money they make with clients. Although this is the most stable stage it is still common that some women have not resolved their immigration status completely.

##### **4.1 Marriage**

Eight out of the eleven women married in Canada. Six women married in the arrival or transition stage and two married during the settlement stage while they were working as "freelancers." For some women marriage became a way to gain permanent status in Canada. Seven women initiated a sponsorship process to gain permanent residency.

*I got married and got my papers. At the end of November I told my boyfriend that I had to go back because my visa was going to expire at the end of the year, so he asked me to marry him.*

Marrying does not necessarily mean leaving the job as dancer. Five women stopped dancing after they got married and three kept dancing.

*It is very difficult to change jobs because the money you make. You need a lot of motivation to do it. I was lucky because I had my husband who supported me.*

Often, women end up in abusive relationships where they are battered, sexually assaulted, and psychologically abused. Women are maintained in isolation fulfilling their "housewife" role, being there to serve the husband and children. At least four women reported being abused by their husbands.

*Every time I got home from my work, we end up fighting. He used to pushed me, he offended me, he slapped me, ... he also insulted me, he used to tell me that I was a prostitute, that I was a piece of garbage. He used to tell me horrible things.*

*He used to hit me. He mistreated me ... I was looking for a shelter to go with my children...*

*He used to treat me very badly and he did not let me do anything. I lived under very bad conditions with him. He had me locked up and he wanted me to do nothing but serve him.*

*... I suffered the most aberrant things from my husband.*

*My husband also abused me. He used to threaten me because I did not have papers.*

When there is a sponsorship process men use it to exercise more control over the women. If the immigration process is withdrawn by the man the woman has to go back to her country. Women feel blackmailed and powerless when it comes to immigration issues.

*He threatened me all the time because I did not have papers. He used to tell me that nobody would help me.*

*My husband jailed me at home. He lied to me telling me that if left him I had to go back to Costa Rica.*

Three women had children with their Canadian husbands, later two got divorced. When they got divorced, the women were in a disadvantaged position in regards to children's custody, mainly because of the stigma around their profession. It was also a recurring theme that men did not want to pay child support and often they had to go to court.

*... I got a lawyer, but this lawyer has not helped me at all he only robbed me. I only got four hundred from my husband. I am still going to court because my husband wants to get the child away from me... for now I have the child but I cannot get him out of the country that is why I can not go to Venezuela.*

*My husband does not give any money for the girl and he has money... a friend of mine told me about a lawyer and right now I am taking him to court.*

#### 4.2 Dancing

As marriage is a way to maintain legal status, so is dancing. However, dancing also provides an income. Out of the eleven women interviewed seven had gained some kind of permanent status, either citizenship or landed immigrant status. Out of those seven three kept dancing.

*Later I got married... I accepted to marry him. That was the only way I got my papers. I could work in anything I wanted but I decided to keep working as a dancer because the amount of money that I was making...*

At the moment of the study only one woman was dancing under a "Temporary Employment Authorization" or working visa. In spite of having been in the country for more than five years with a working visa, she still pays the club to update her working visa every time they renew her contract.

*They give me a contract and that same contract they send to immigration, and then immigration gives me a visa for a year. They charged me what immigration would charge me one hundred fifty dollars and for my son's seventy-five dollars. In total they charged me around four hundred dollars in total, but that is just.*

Every woman who reaches the settlement stage and keeps dancing, either with working visa or with permanent status finds that her working conditions improve in comparison with how they were when they first arrived in the country. Not only they do not have to pay regular quotas, but also they are able to choose the shift or number of hours that they want to work. The women with permanent status can choose the club where they want to dance. They can keep the money they make with clients and they are treated better by club's managers or owners.

*I did not have to work with a contract anymore. I used to go to the club on my own and I used to make my own money. They used to pay me for the stages and I could keep all the money that I made dancing.*

*The guy (the club manager) was a good person for example each dance at the table was twenty dollars and they did not take any of that, all the money was for me. They did not deal with chips and all the money that I made was for me... Their system was different because they did not book the women. You had to go table by table asking if they wanted a dance.*

One of the main reasons why women reported that they kept dancing was the money that they could make.

*Look, my job is very difficult because it is not easy to get naked in front of all those people. Especially in the private dances, but you make good money.*

Although dancing was the most common job the women had after gaining permanent status, two women were able to find jobs in other areas such as hairdressing, and cleaning. Inability to speak English, lack of training and poor education were some of the reasons cited by women when they talked about the difficulty finding jobs.

*It is a little bit difficult because when you do not have education, or a good job to do and make a little bit of money to live, well it is very difficult but, on the other hand I feel good, tranquil. I have always worked to have what I have ...(she works in cleaning)*

*My husband convinced me to leave the job. I left and took a hairdressing course. I just finished the one-year course and I am working in a beauty salon now. I cannot compare the money that I used to make but I am happy, especially now that I am going to have another child.*

#### 4.3 Others

Only one out of the eleven women interviewed tried another way to remain in Canada that was not dancing or marrying. She filed a refugee claim.

*Well, I had only two options, one I could go back to Costa Rica, but leaving with a defeated attitude, I was not going to do that. Therefore, I decided to stay and fight for what was just.*

## **B. Environment**

Five categories or themes emerged from the analysis of the data and several recommendations. These categories were: working conditions around exotic dancers as migrant sex workers, social environment in which exotic dancers face

a triple oppression as women, immigrants and sex workers, emotional well-being while working in the sex trade industry.

## **1. Working conditions around exotic dancers as migrant sex workers**

### 1.1 Working Conditions at Arrival in Canada

The working conditions for the women who have just arrived in Canada are appalling. Women are not paid their salaries, they are told that they are going to be paid in their country of origin, and finally they are never paid. The club managers and owners exploit and abuse the women as much as they can until the women gain some knowledge and move from the “arrival” stage to the “transition” and “settlement” stages.

In spite of the fact that all the women came to Canada with signed contracts, the contracts were not honoured. Women were not paid salaries, as they were told, and had to work longer hours than what they had expected. In two cases women signed contracts for two thousand dollars a month and got paid five hundred a month, the rest, they were told, was going to be paid in their country but it was never paid.

*They told us that they were going to help us save money. It did not bother me because I thought that after six month I was going to go back with my money. I could live with five hundred a month...*

Three women reported that they were not allowed to handle money; they could only deal with “chips,” which are a piece of plastic that have currency value, similar to the ones used in casinos.

*We used to dance for chips. We could not have any money ... at the end of the shift you go to the office and they give you a piece of paper saying the amount of chips you made that day, but you do not see any money until the end of the month.*

In some clubs, the situation was so extreme that the women had to give 50% to the club, 25% to the agent and they could keep only 25%. In other clubs, women could keep the money they made but they had to pay a daily quota to the club and they were charged for visa renewals.

*Look, for every dance you made two dollars. The client pays six dollars three are for the club, one is for the agent and two for you.*

*The clients used to pay us. They (the club) did not take our money but we had to pay to the club.... They only charged us to renew our visas. (Woman from a different club)*

#### 1.1.1. Relationship with club owners and managers, and agents

When the women arrived they were constrained either by the agent that contacted them in their country or by a new agent or manager assigned by the club. This person was in charge of the women. "The long-lasting-agents" became a permanent "ball and chain" for the dancers living off of them.

*The first day when we arrived we slept and the next day we were assigned a manager. I was given a "good" manager. They told us that the first thing was to know Canadian money.*

The club owners and managers exercised an incredible amount of control over the women. Five women had their passport and legal documents taken away and at least four women completely lost their freedom of movement.

*They had everything, passports, documents, everything, everything, and everything.*

When we arrived in Canada they took our passports so we did not have any documents. We were condemned to be there. They frightened us. They told us not to go out because if we did immigration would deport us.

*... [T]hey used to take us everywhere, to the hairdresser, shops, restaurants. They were like our guardians.*

*...[T]hey did not allow us to go out. A friend of mine went out to spend the night with some friends and the manager searched all over, found her and took her back. He told her that she could not spend the night outside. Can you imagine?*

*[T]hey did not let us go anywhere. We were three months without going out.*

Every woman reported having had some kind of problem with club managers and club owners from physical violence, sexual abuse, retention of documents to failure of payments.

*I had a problem with the owner (the manager). I had a fight with the person I shared the room with so I had to sleep in the manager's room. We lived in a house with many other women and the manager lived there but there were no more rooms left so I had to sleep with him. I felt that I had to make love with him because I was living there.*

*I had just arrived from Costa Rica and they took me to the "office" because the owner wanted to see me. The "office" is upstairs, where the vip's are... The "office" is just an office with a sofa, with two chairs and two tables. I entered the room and three men were there. I realised that what they wanted was to fuck me. I said no, nobody told me I had to do that...*

Although the club owner and managers knew that the women could only dance in the club for which their visas was issued, often they forced the women to go dancing in other clubs and even other cities.

*The next day the driver told us to be ready because we were going to go to another city. We were surprised because we knew that we were going to work in Toronto. We told the driver but he told us that he only received orders. We accepted because we thought that we were going to get paid anyway.*

The glamorisation of the lifestyle waiting for them in Canada was a very important tool used by "agents" and recruiters. When the women arrived, they were shocked by the conditions of the places where they were going to work.

*When we arrived we were paralysed. We were hoping for something completely different. To start with, they told us that we were going to go to one of the most exclusive places in Toronto. Imagine, you think that you are going to go to a beautiful place, with all kinds of luxuries and when you arrive it is a place with a bad reputation.*

*We thought the club was horrible.... I saw it like the lowest of the low. There were bad looking clients and a lot of women. We are not going to make any money, I thought.*

### 1.1.2 Relationship with other dancers

Some dancers become a support network for other dancers, particularly for the new ones who have just arrived in the country. Usually dancers who have been in the industry longer let the new dancers know that they do not need to pay agents, that they are overpaying everything and that there are different alternatives for them. They give each other vital information that could help them with regards to lawyers, social services, and rights.

*I learned from other dancers and clients that there were clubs that paid much better*

*Now, that I know the kind of help that there is for us I tell the other women, I give them advice.*

## 5.2 Working Conditions in the "Settlement" Stage

In general terms there are two ways of working in the exotic dancing clubs: salary and "freelance." In the first one, women work with a schedule and are paid a weekly salary for the number of performances on stages that they do. The second one is known as "freelance" although, this term is contested and many dancers consider that is not accurate. "Freelance" dancers can choose the number of hours that they want to work, day or night shift, and they do not receive a salary. They have to pay a daily fee to be in the club, twenty to forty dollars usually, and they have to pay the disc jockey as well.

*I feel very well working "freelance". I do not have a salary. I do not work for them I just go to the table dance and I do not have a schedule. The women who work on salary have a schedule. They have to work from twelve to seven in the evening and they have to perform on the stage as many times as they are told. I do not have to go on the stage.*

The relationship of the women with the club owner and managers varies according to the women's immigration status. If the women have some kind of permanent status in the country they reported less to abuse by the club. When the women depend on the club to remain in Canada the situation is of, almost absolute, dependence which gives place to more abuse. As we explained before this is the case for women who have just arrived in the country recruited by clubs.

*The managers are evil... (They) abuse the women who come with working visas. They abuse the Hispanics who have just arrived. I remember that the owner used to abuse even sexually the women coming from Latin America. They could never bother me because I spoke English and I had citizenship. When I arrived at the*

*club they asked for my passport and I showed it to them; they never troubled me again.*

Consuelo Rubio, a community legal worker for the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples has a long history working in labour issues with the dancers. She considers that there is a very close relationship between immigration status and labour standards in the industry. In her words:

*The labour problems are a result of immigration --of course the industry is also responsible. Canadian dancers do not have those exploitative conditions that these women have. Canadian dancers have more options, they can say no. However, the women that come here to dance they always have to say yes to everything that the client wants. Otherwise, the club throws them out.*

According to the women who have been dancing longest, there has been a decline in their working conditions. Especially in regards to sexual behaviour. It is not unusual that dancers have to perform sexual favours if they want to remain in business.

*When I started dancing it was much better. Now, day after day it gets worse and worse. Some women do sex in the club, many do it.*

*I met women that used to work as exotic dancers and at that time they did not have to take off the bottom part. They used to dance in a place where nobody could touch them...*

In this regard Mary Taylor, key informant for the study, who danced for 20 years mentions that:

*In 1977, when I started dancing, it was entertainment, the dancers used to get paid to do stage shows, everybody got paid according to their experience, the cheapest dancer would be paid \$ 18 a show. Five shows a day and 6 days a week, then you had the features, every body got paid what they deserved. No touching and you also got tips, you never had to sit with the audience and drink. You just did your shows and that is it. Now, they do not pay the dancers anymore, they have to pay the club just to be there, you have to pay a minimum of \$ 20, they have to pay the DJ and if they want to use the VIP's they have to pay \$ 20 more. It costs you \$ 50 just to walk in. On a bad night, you made all your money for the club. That is why a lot of dancers are going the extra mile doing extra things and some times they have no choice but to go out with customers to make extra money.*

Mary Taylor believes that the industry began its decline in 1979 with the introduction of the "G String." Meanwhile "table-dancing" and "Lap-dancing"

were already on their way in Montreal and women started being shipped from Montreal to Toronto forcing the local dancers to do "lap-dancing", or go out of business. Table dancing started as a wooden box that the dancers had to carry close to the client and dance on it. After that the club did not pay the dancers by the show but by the shift, "from eighteen dollars a show to fifteen dollars a shift". "Lap-dancing" was introduced as a way to get rid of the wooden box. The women started dancing on the floor "just between the customers' legs." The proximity of the dancer to the client increase the opportunity for touching.

*Now it is \$ 20 a song and the girls sit on the customer's lap. ... The girls feel that they have not choice, either they are going to do it or some body else is going to do it.*

In a regular Friday or Saturday night, there could be from forty to fifty women working in a club. Some of the women expressed concern since more women means more competition.

*At that new place, there were many women. There were times that I did not make any money for two or three days. At the beginning of the week it was very bad. Some women left to other cities some other went back to Mexico*

*When I arrived and saw all those women I thought to myself I am not going to make any money here.*

*Now it is very dirty to dance. I started in 1994 and then it was very different. There was not the pressure of so many women.*

In a field visit to a club, the researcher could verify the poor conditions of the changing rooms and washrooms. These are the only spaces in the club where the dancers can "relax" and release the pressure of their job. When women get to their job the first place they go is to the changing room to get dressed and ready. They undress and dress, put on make up, do their hair. All this in a place that has inadequate furniture, very poor light, no ventilation at all and is very poorly cleaned. The physical demand of dancing is enormous and some times women change their outfit twice or more. But it is not usually that the clubs have showers, towels, or anything that could provide some comfort to the women's work.

### 1.2.1 Relationship with club managers and owners

The gravest abuse reported by the women from managers and club owners occurred during their first months of being in Canada, what in the study has been called the stage of "Arrival." Once the women become more independent

and reached the "Settlement and Adjustment" stage, the abuse by club managers and owners decreased considerably.

There is a lot of physical and psychological abuse. ... From everybody: the club owners do not pay the women for their work. On the contrary the women have to pay the club just to be there... that is why they like to bring women from outside so they can exploit them.

### 1.2.2 Relationship with the clients

There is a constant tension between the client and the dancer where the clients want to get the "most" sexual favours for the least amount of money and the dancer tries to get the most money for the "least" sexual favours. Women mention that they have to "distract" the man by talking or dancing in an entertaining manner, thus, they are less inclined to touch them or demand sexual favours.

*You have to deal with all kinds of men. You can get a "prince", but you can also get a "devil". You have to know what you are going to face. If you are going to go dance upstairs you may get a good client but you may get a devil that wants to touch you even your intestines. Those are the clients that you have to deal with and you get stressed. ... You are like a torero. The truth is that because I am so happy I can play it. Some times, you can trick them so they do not touch you but you cannot do that with all of them.*

*My work is very difficult because some times you have to deal with drunken men. Men who often are rude and rough. ... As you can find nice men, you can also find the rudest men that think that because you work in this they have the right to do whatever they want. I ask myself, but why? I am like any other woman, a human being that feels. My heart is not made of solid rock.*

In spite of the fact that the women were open about performing some sexual favours they did not see themselves as sex workers. In conversation with four workers from Streetlight, an organization that runs programs for exotic dancers and other sex workers that have been charged explained this situation:

*Because prostitution is such an "evil" thing they have to keep saying to themselves, "I am a dancer, I am a dancer I am a dancer" and those other little things just happen. When you tell them that they are sex trade workers they are shocked.*

Some women reported to be dependant on their ability to have a regular clientele whereas, other women prefer to rotate and be in different clubs because the clients like "new faces."

*I keep working in that club because my clients go there.*

*I work everywhere. Sometimes I go to Toronto, some other times in Brampton. I know all the places and I rotate. I go where the business is good. ... Niagara is where you can make the most money.*

It is not unusual that the clients treat women with disrespect. Sometimes, they are abusive and offensive. Women reported being witnesses to physical abuse by clients and to clients refusing to pay the women after they had danced for them.

*If a client wants to abuse you nothing happens, they can do it since the client is always right.*

*One girl in the club danced many songs for a client and then he did not pay her.*

Women talked about the solitude and loneliness of the men that go to the bars. They mention that men want someone to listen to them.

*There are clients that in a way fall in love with you. They are very lonely and they like it when you talk to them.*

### 1.3 Physical Appearance

Exotic dancing requires a very particular appearance. Women spend, literally, thousands of dollars in clothing, shoes, make up, and other accessories like wigs and hair ornaments. The dancers' shoes play a very important role because they have to be high heels (anywhere between ten to twenty centimetres), and very stable. Bad shoes could risk the dancers' lives.

*The dancer's clothes are very expensive and do not last too long. The more clothing you have the better. For example, I start the shift with one outfit and around six I get changed. Clients pay a lot of attention to your clothing. Shoes are extremely expensive. Creams and make up are very expensive. You have to look good all the time*

At least one dancer had plastic surgery to increase the size of her breast. This has proved to improve the woman's income.

*I had breast surgery because I wanted to.... Now I make more money than before because men want to see and before I did not have anything to show.*

## **2. Legal Implication of Exotic Dancers' "Temporary Worker" Status**

In terms of legal issues four main aspects were discussed: policing, the illegality but practice of lap-dancing, legal immigration status, and legal challenges. When women have sued the company that brought them to Canada for failure in honouring the contracts.

### **2.1 Policing**

The relationship with the police described by the women interviewed was limited to raids and fines. Women talked about the presence of police in the clubs in two different ways: when there were raids in the club, usually a big operation with a fair amount of police, and the other one was the presence involved undercover police fining women when they broke the law. Every woman interviewed talked about the raids, but the majority of them were not personally implicated. Some of the women interviewed had been fined.

*I have never had problems with the police. One time they fined me because I was sitting on the client, but I did not know.*

*I have been lucky because every time that the police have been in the club I have not been there. They show up very often. Everybody knows them but it is different when they do the raids. In five years, that I have been in that club, there have been three raids.*

Two women mentioned that the club manager would be tipped off when the raids could occur and the club could warn the women. Women reported the presence of undercover police before raids in the clubs.

*The police show up all the time, but they (the clubs) knew when the police are going to come because they have a contact. They would tell us to be very careful and not to touch anybody because they police are coming that day.*

*I understand that they (the clubs) have friends in the police department who would tell them when they are going to show up. Then that day you do not touch anybody because the police are undercover.*

*... One night I was working in Brampton and that day all the clients were undercover.... Later that night police with guns and masks showed up. There were policemen all over the place.*

*They (the clubs) know who they (the police) are, so that day everything is normal, ... everything looks normal.*

*When they see police in the club, they let us know so we will not be sitting on any client.*

Women expressed difficulty communicating with the police, in raids or when assistance was required, because of their lack of English.

*... The police made them gave us back our passports but because we did not speak English they (the club) lied to the police and they (the police) left...*

## 2.2 Lap-dancing and policing

The knowledge of lap-dancing regulations and its practice was one of the most contradictory aspects of the study. The women get to know Canadian law and exotic dancing regulations through agents and club managers, who tell them what is and what is not legal to do in their work. In general terms the clubs are permissive and do not prevent in anyway the lap dancing, on the contrary it is promoted it with the use of the VIP rooms. Women recognised that lap dancing was illegal but they saw no other option but to do it or be out of business.

*They never tell you that you have to sit on the client, but that is what you see in the club. They do not say anything and everybody does lap dancing. But, they know it is illegal.*

*When we come to the club they gather all the women and tell us not to do it. But, when we are alone they tell us to do it but carefully. We have to do it because otherwise we are not going to make any money*

*I know that you are not supposed to do lap- dancing, but, if you do not do it, you are not going to make any money. You have to sit on the client and let him touch you. We all do it.*

Women talked about clean or dirty clubs. This “classification” depends on the level of sexual favours that are regularly performed. At least one woman mentioned that in the club where she used to work there was explicit prostitution.

*I am going to tell you something there are clubs that are clean. There, you do not see lap dancing, but in the majority of the clubs you see it.*

*... [I]f the client wants something with the women they go to the "office". The "office" is like a motel and there is prostitution but the club covers it. There are no beds and if the police show up, they do not see anything.*

*... I used to work for a club where nobody touches you, you only dance, there is not lap dancing there...*

*In the club, where I work there is no prostitution, well the client touches, and the woman lets the client touches her but nothing else because the police can show up at any moment.*

### 2.3 Legal Immigration Status

Ten out of the eleven women that were interviewed entered the country with a working visa. Out of the ten, two applied for the visa in their countries of origin, with the "help" of the agents, and the remaining eight had their visa issued at the airport in Canada. These eight women came from countries whose nationals do not or did not require visas to come to Canada, such as Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela in 1995. When the women arrived in Canada, they depended on the club to give them contracts to renew their visas. Either the "long-lasting-agent" or the club apply on their behalf to renew the visa, but the women have to pay for this service. The women depend on the club and, sometimes on the agent to remain legally in the country until they can acquire a more permanent status in Canada, usually, by marrying.

*The club gives me a contract and they send it to immigration. Immigration gives me a visa for a year ... and they (the club) charge me four hundred dollars for the visas.*

### 2.4 Legal Challenges

Three of the women interviewed pursued legal challenges against their employers for owed wages and settled out of court; they are being paid in instalments.

*I hired a lawyer and we won the case. They are paying me in instalments. At the end of every month they pay me a part. Lucky me, because out of all the women that come to the bar with me only a friend and I sued the club. We went to the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples; they helped us find a lawyer, and we were able to recover our money. None of the other women have been paid.*

*The judge told them that they had to pay us. She told them: "You bring all those women from far way, you make them promises, they know how much money you owe them, why do you not want to pay them?" At the beginning, the club did not want to settle but later they did. The asked me to go back to the club and finish the contract but I did not agree because they had kicked me out and I did not want to go back because I knew that I could make more money in other clubs.*

*I wish I would have fought the case until the end but I had to reach an agreement with them, otherwise, it would have taking very long. I needed to restart my life. I would have liked to set a precedent for the exotic dancing industry.*

### **3. Social Environment and Triple oppression**

Women have to face a daily stigmatization because of their work. The families, in women's countries of origin, do not know the kind of work they do or if they know it is kept as a secret and not talked about. Women do not want their children to know about their work and are afraid that others in the community, like school teachers or neighbours, will learn that they are dancers. Often, women have close ties with their families in their countries and the majority of them have eventually brought their children to Canada.

The theme of social conditions refers to the manner in which the interviewed women interact with their families in their countries of origin and in Canada, social stigma, sexism, learning English and access to social services.

#### **3.1 Children**

Ten out of the eleven women have at least one child; only one does not have any children. Six women have children born in Canada. Seven women have children born in Latin America, six being single mothers. Five of these women have been able to bring their children to Canada. Regarding the two women that have not brought their children yet, one has grown children and the other one is in the process of bringing them.

*First I came alone and later, when I was more organised, I went back for my child.*

*I went to Ecuador and brought my child. With the money that I had, we made an extra room in the house for him.*

Most women do not want their children to know what they do for a living. Only one woman mentioned that she would consider telling her child when he is old enough to understand.

*No, they (her husband's children) think that I am a waitress. My son thinks the same. Nobody talks about that at home.*

*I want to quit soon because my daughter is getting old and I do not want her to become a dancer because I am a dancer.*

*I want to dance two more years because in two years my daughter will start school and I do not want her to know.*

*No, I have not told him yet but I will not deny it either. I am waiting until he grows up and reaches an age where he can understand. I want to tell him. I do not see anything wrong with it.*

Providing their children with a dignified living standard is one of the motivations for the women to either start or keep on working in the industry.

*I want my son to have everything that I could not have when I was little. I feel so happy when I can get him something he wants.*

*... My oldest daughter is eleven, almost a teenager, and she wants good clothing. Me as a mother I want to give them all I can. I want the best for my daughters because I could not study. I could not be anybody.*

At least one woman had her daughter taken away by Children's Aid when she was born because she was a dancer.

*She (a dancer) told the nurse that I was a dancer ... and that the child was in risk. ... They called the psychiatrist and he found me well... Later they sent someone to ask questions and that person told me that they knew I was a dancer and that they were going to keep the child because she was at risk. .... They told me that they had to do some research and they kept my daughter. They gave me a telephone number and told me to call later.*

### 3.2 Family

Most women have a strong bond with their families in the countries of origin. They keep in close contact with their relatives by calling them, travelling often to their countries and sending them money on a regular basis.

*I did not have anybody here so I called my mother every week. I wanted to talk to someone and that was my mom who was in Costa Rica.*

*My friend had a big family in Costa Rica and she had to send money. I had to send money too but I had left enough money at home so I did not have to send any for a while.*

Some women feel responsible for the well being of their families in their countries since they consider themselves to be better off economically. Some women have families in poverty or difficult financial situations.

*All these years that I have worked the money that I have made has not been for me it has been for my family. I have paid doctors, my brother's surgery, and many other things. I bought a house for them.*

*I try to help all my family. I help my aunts, because they are in a bad situation. My cousin is at university and her career is very expensive and I help her. I feel very happy to be able to help my family. The more I help my family the more I receive.*

Some of the women who have gained permanent residency have been able to bring their parents here. At least one woman was able to bring her mother to Canada

*I live with my two children and I brought my mother to Canada.*

### 3.3 Stigma

Exotic Dancers are often stigmatised by their families. Women prefer their families not to know that they are dancers, but when they know nobody talks about it.

*My family knows that I am a dancer. I told my mom ... she almost had a heart attack. My family does not like it.*

Dancers are stigmatised by the community as well. At least one woman talked about the damage that could be caused to her daughters at school if they found out that she was a dancer.

*I tell everybody that I am a cleaner. If I tell people that I am a dancer people will think that I am a bad women and if I am bad my children must be bad too, so, people will reject my daughters and then they will not have friends. I do not care what people think of me but I do not want my children to be rejected.*

The women mentioned societal perceptions that dancers are lazy, stupid and prostitutes.

*Socially it has a lot of stigma, people think that dancers make a lot of money, that they do not like to work, that they do not have anything in their brains, and that they are prostitutes. People do not know that there are dancers that have different possibilities. Many have professions, but they keep dancing.*

*There is a lot of rejection of dancers because they are seen as prostitutes.*

*There are people that get afraid of you because you are a dancer ... There is a lot of cruel people who do not know what is to be a dancer but they judge the dancer.*

### 3.4 Sexism

Women mentioned the sexism and objectification that they are subjected to while working as exotic dancers.

*When you work there, you feel that you are like a sexual object. You think that all that matters is your body. You do not think that you have worth as a person or that your feelings are important. You think that the only reason a person will be interested in you is because of your body but not because of the way you are or the qualities that you have.*

### 3.5 Learning English

Women recognise the importance of speaking English in Canadian society and they express their desire to take language training, but many barriers halt the women from doing so. Women on working visas cannot attend educational institutions and women with permanent status have jobs and children, which are a priority over learning English. In some other cases, husbands prevent the women from taking English classes.

*When I was pregnant I went to the College and Dufferin centre to learn English ... but I had to quit because my husband did not let me go. ... He was not going to support me if I wanted to study.*

*I went to the school and wrote the test. With the grade that they gave me I should have entered to the third level but I could not take the class because I had to be at home at noon to give my son his lunch.*

Children play an important role in helping the women learn and improve their English.

*Q: Have you studied anything during the time that you have been here?*

*A: Yes, English and my son helps me too.*

### 3.6 Health and Social Services

When women arrived in Canada at least five women were not informed that they had the right to apply for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). When they were sick, they were taken to a private doctor and had to pay for it. Some other women had to pay a monthly fee for medical services, according to the club.

*They did not tell me that I could have OHIP. The owner had a contract with a doctor. We had to pay a monthly fee so we did not have to pay every time we went to the doctor.*

One woman interviewed stated that she had difficulty accessing services in a shelter because dancers are not considered to be women who face abuse. She went to three shelters before she was given adequate advice.

*I went to three different shelters before I was accepted. Sadly, the shelters do not give you support because they think that dancers do not face abuse. They give priority to domestic violence... Besides, in the shelter they gave me a very hard time because they did not let me stay for more than three months and that was not enough time to get out of the situation in which I was.*

### 3.7 Racism

One of the women interviewed, who is black, talked about facing racism and discrimination in the club.

*He (the club owner) did not expect that I was black. When he saw me he did not let me stay in the club's house.*

## **4. Emotional Well Being while working in the Sex Trade Industry**

Women mentioned contradictory feelings about their work: some feel shame, embarrassment, living a double life and, doing something dirty, doing something bad; some others feel satisfied, happy and able to enjoy it. They recognise that it is a difficult job but they like the potential of earnings, the flexible hours, and the attention they can get from the clients.

This theme relates to the emotional well being of the women while working in the sex trade industry. These are emotions, feelings, worries, and dependencies that the women mentioned throughout the interviews.

#### 4.1 Substance Use

Some women reported relying on alcohol and/or drugs to be able to do their job. In some cases alcohol and drugs became part of their work. Nevertheless, some other women stated that they did not need the use of substances to work. However, every woman reported the use of substance, at least once, during her work.

*I am very embarrassed to ask the clients for a dance, so, what I do is drink. At the second drink I can ask anybody. Alcohol gives me courage, strength. I cannot work without alcohol. I have to drink even if it is only a little bit.*

*I have been working for five years and I do not need to get drunk or use alcohol or drugs to work.*

Every woman, even those who cited that they do not need alcohol to work, mentioned that the use of alcohol was necessary for their first dancing experience.

*I told the other women that I was not going to be able to do it ... they told me not to worry that it was like that at the beginning, that they just had to take a couple of drinks, so I did.*

*The first time that I had to dance I had to get drunk. I do not even know how I did it. I learned to drink to get courage to dance until I became familiar with the job.*

*At the beginning it is very difficult because you are very embarrassed ... I did not have the courage to do it ... [They] told me that I needed some tequilitas. That was the only way I did it.*

The women mentioned a relationship between their working environment and the use of alcohol and drugs.

*I do not work too much now because I have alcohol problems. I try not to go to the club very often because, unfortunately, that environment makes me drink. When I am sober, I am very passive and I can not work.*

*... [I]n the club they offer you drugs. If they know that you do drugs they offer them to you.*

*This is such a difficult job, not only that you have to get naked but also you have to be careful not to get involved drugs or alcohol.*

Some of the adjectives that the women use to qualify how they feel with the use of alcohol and drugs are that it gives them courage, strength, security, and spiritual happiness. Alcohol and drugs help them to lose inhibitions and stop feelings of fear, panic, and low self-esteem

*I started drinking to get courage to do the work.*

*I started going to the parties and taking "ecstasy".... I felt happy all the time. ... It was like a spiritual happiness. I thought that drugs were good... I did not know what I was taking...*

Drugs are easy to acquire in the club, for example through clients.

*Many times, we had to go to work very sick so many women started using drugs. ... Some times the clients give them pills or other drugs.*

At least one woman cited that after being sober it was difficult to continue to do in the work.

*I think that without alcohol and drugs it was very difficult to face what was happening there. Facing your fear, panic, depression, lack of self-esteem. It was very difficult to deal with all those feelings that I used to block with drugs and alcohol.*

#### 4.2 Work Incentives

Most of the women like the potential for earnings and the flexible hours when they are "freelancers".

*Let me tell you something, my work is hard, it is difficult because it is not easy to get naked in front of all that people ... but you make enough money.*

*... I feel happy. Do you know why? Because it is a way to make money and I am talking about a fair amount of money.*

***I feel good. I work freelance ... I do not have a schedule***

Many women go into it thinking that it is a way to save money in a short time. Women are aware that exotic dancing is not a life-long profession.

*My intention was to work only for six months and then go back. I thought six months making two thousand dollars a month, I could save, and then I was going to go back.*

*This is not work for all your life. You have to take advantage of it now and you have to be smart if you do not have other opportunities at the time.*

#### 4.4 Feelings

Some of the feelings that the women mentioned in regards to their work are: shame, embarrassment, solitude, living a double life, and doing something dirty, doing something bad.

*For example, I am ashamed to say that I am a stripper.*

*The dancer's life is very bad, very bad, socially it is seen as something bad and in your heart you feel that you are doing something dirty.*

*My work is good and at the same time hard because there are times when I am depressed, I feel bad for the kind of work I do ...*

*Sometimes I feel very lonely. There are many men that want me, but that is not love that is passion, desire, and those men are married, but they want me. I do not like that.*

*I feel that I am living a double life. Out of the club I am a homemaker, I take care of my child, I clean the house, I go shopping, on weekends we go to the mall, I am like any other woman. But, when I am in the club I change. I am like another person.*

*As a dancer I learn ... to lie, to be cynical, hypocritical, and to have something bad in the heart.*

Most of women interviewed dislike performing on the stage because of being watched, criticised and scrutinised by other women. However, at least three women expressed that they like it

*I do not like the stage. When you are in the stage the women are criticising you ... you are everybody's attraction. On the other hand, if you are alone with a client he is paying you for your dancing. In the stage, everybody talks about you. On the stage, I feel humiliated*

#### 4.5 How women see their work

Every woman interviewed agreed that this is a difficult job. It is hard and socially not accepted. However, some of the motivations (apart from money and flexibility) that women mention are: feeling attractive, dancing, dressing up, meeting other people, listening to others' stories.

*All women like to be admired... when you go up to the stage and present an artistic show it is a moment of trance. You feel that you become powerful.*

*I like to feel attractive and desirable.*

*What I like the most is talking and listening to stories. I love to dress up. I used to buy a lot of clothing and perfumes...*

#### 4.6 Violence

The women reported being subjected to psychical and/or psychological violence from their employers, club managers and club owners, clients, and partners.

It seems that the violence in the clubs occurs more often in the arrival stage. Later, women get rid of abusive relations with club managers and owners.

*I used to live in his house because and we had to pay rent, one hundred dollars a week. Food and personal things you had to take care of that. We could leave that house but it was better living there because it was very close to the club. He used to think that we were his. We had a problem and he hit me. I went to the police station because this was not the first time he had hit me. I had told him that if he hit me again I was going to go to the police station but he thought I was kidding because we depended on him so much.*

At least four women reported being physically assaulted by their husbands and one woman reported being psychologically abused by her boyfriend. Out of the eight women who married in Canada; four got divorced.

*I lived with him four years but the last two were a living hell. He did not let me go anywhere, he used to buy everything, He used to pay for everything, and I was at home all the time with the little girl. He had me as his maid.*

## **C. Advice from Participants**

### **1. From The Dancers**

The recommendations provided by the interviewed women can be gathered in two main categories, one related to the need for accessing information, and the other, related to need for support groups for different aspect of their lives.

#### 1.1 Information

The majority of the women consider that the most pressing issue is the lack of information. The interviewed women feel that when they arrived in the country they do not know the law, the places to look for help, their rights, the Spanish speaking organizations or anyone that could give them the information they needed.

Women expressed their lack of knowledge when they come to the country in the following manner:

*I think that the most important thing is to get informed about the services that Canada has. When you just arrive you do not know anything. You do not even know how to ask for help.*

*You do not know anybody and you do not know where to go for help. You do not know that there is help for you. ... It would be good if we could learn about the organizations that can help us.*

*When women arrive they feel completely abandoned... they do not know anything and later when they get in so many problems they do not know how to get out of them.*

#### 1.2 Social Support

The interviewed women express a desire to have a support group or a variety of support groups in a wide range of areas such as self-development, life skill, psychotherapeutic, and parenthood. This support help needs to be in Spanish and they need to be in places where women feel safe, where there is someone that listens to them, and where they can share their experiences and concerns.

*We need support in all the areas, especially psychologically, because we have to recognise that this work drives you a bit crazy and there are women with very weak character.*

*I would like to participate in a group where I could learn how to feel good with myself...*

*A group that would help women to get rid off their addictions, drugs and alcohol.*

*A group for women that have been sexually abused*

*A group on how to raise your children*

## **2 From The Key Informants**

The key informants also have a series of recommendations and ideas that would improve the conditions for the migrant sex workers. Key areas that need to be reviewed, improved and/or implemented are: immigration practices, information accessibility, education and social support.

### **2.1 Immigration Practices**

The immigration process needs to be reviewed and changed because as it is now it puts the women in a very vulnerable condition.

*The systematic problem for these women is that they come with a status that makes them vulnerable to the employer. It should be at least an open work permit where the women are not tied to only one employer (Consuelo Rubio)*

### **2.2 Information Accessibility**

The women should be provided with clear information about the laws in Canada, their rights, and immigration issues. This can be done either by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, or by Metro Licensing and Standards. There should be an infrastructure where the women can get information anytime they need it, and preferably in their own language.

*We should educate them even before they get here so they know what they can expect here. They may or may not come but if they do at least they know what to expect. (Mary Taylor)*

*Have them report once in a while. Have a hotline a number that they can call if they get in trouble. (Mary Taylor)*

*It is immigration or licence responsibility to let the women know their rights and what is legal and what is illegal. (Streetlight workers)*

### 2.3 Labour conditions

**The labour conditions in the exotic dancing industry are appalling. They need to dramatically improve. Women should be protected as any other worker and they should be paid as employees instead of them paying the club to let them dance.**

*I want to see the dancers get paid for their job, it is ridiculous that they have to pay to work (Mary Taylor)*

### 2.5 Education

The women should be able to access education in areas that can help them to adapt to Canadian society. Women should be able to attend classes of English as a second language.

*They should have some good English classes when they come (Streetlight workers)*

### 2.5 Social Support

The women need a place, an organization, or an agency that can provide them with a space where they can go when they need help or just when they want to get out of the environment and relax.

*Something that could work is a place where the women could be left alone. Where they could be together, watch some t.v. and relax (Consuelo Rubio)*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The migrant sex workers that come from Latin America to work in the Exotic Dancing industry in Canada, specifically in Toronto, who are able to remain in the country, pass through four, almost chronological stages: Recruitment, Arrival, Transition and Settlement. Taking into account that every woman's story is particular to her experience, this study finds that the recruitment process, generally, takes place in Latin America where agents financed by Canadian club owners engage the women. Often, the women are in their early to mid twenties, have children or dependents that they are responsible for, do not have permanent partners and work in the sex trade industry or other low paid jobs.

The current "validation exemption" for exotic dancers implemented by Human Resources Development Canada allows club owners to have an almost instant, completely subjugated labour, a labour force that does not have the same rights as other workers. Their condition as "Temporary Foreign Workers" puts them in a very vulnerable position as workers, where their ability to remain in Canada depends completely on the goodwill of their employer. This exposes them to physical and psychological abuse by club owners, managers, and agents. This is further aggravated by the criminalisation and social stigmatization that exotic dancers are subjected to by the Latino community and society at large, as well as the continuous harassment by law enforcement officers.

The temporary shortage of exotic dancers in Canada seems to be more permanent than temporary inasmuch as exotic dancers have been allowed in the country since the 70's. Therefore, exotic dancers should be allowed to immigrate to the country as permanent workers. If women could immigrate to Canada as permanent residents to work as exotic dancers they would not be tied to one employer and would have the protection that the rest of the workers have. This would eliminate the initial stages - Arrival and Transition - of the women when they arrive in Canada as "Temporary Foreign Workers". This study finds that this early period is when the abuses and human rights violations by club owners, managers and agents reaches its highest levels.

The women's working conditions and emotional well being depend upon and dramatically change according to their immigration status. When the women have a temporary working visa and are working for the club that recruited them they are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as human and civil rights violations. When the women have some kind of permanent status, either landed immigrant visa or citizenship, the abuse by club owners, managers or agents decreases. The women can choose their hours, do not pay quotas to clubs or agents, and are able to keep the money they make.

Lap-dancing regulations and its practice is most confusing for the women. They get to know exotic dancing regulations by agents and club managers, who tell them what is and what is not legal to do in their work. In general terms the clubs are permissive and do not prevent in anyway the lap-dancing; on the contrary, they promote it with the use of the VIP rooms. The women recognise that lap-dancing is illegal but they see no other option but to do it or be out of business. It seems in spite of the efforts of law enforcement, lap-dancing is a practice that still continues. If the concern with lap dancing is to prevent harm, especially to women, the current regulatory devices are not effective. A better solution is to regulate the industry improving working conditions for the dancers.

The working standards in the exotic dancing industry are dreadful. Change rooms and women's washrooms are filthy, and day after day the women have to provide more sexual favors if they want to make money. They have to pay the club to let them work as well as pay the disc jockey. They do not have any kind of benefits or protection from the employer. Women should be able to perform their work in a hazardous-free environment and one that is free of violence.

Jobs in the sex trade industry are highly stigmatised and have a "moral" charge; exotic dancing is noexception. Women mention contradictory feelings about their work some feel shame, embarrassment, living a double life, doing something dirty, and doing something bad. However, this is not the only way women feel about their job they also feel satisfied, happy and are able to enjoy it. They recognise that it is a difficult job but they like the potential of the earnings, the flexible hours, and the attention they can get from the clients.

Some women reported relying on alcohol and/or drugs to be able to do their job, nevertheless, this is not the case for all the women; some women do not need to use substances to perform their work. The use of alcohol and/or drugs can be prompted by the job's environment but the development of an addiction is, usually, tied to other factors in the women's lives.

This research has shown how women's immigration status affects the conditions under which they work and live, as well as their relationship with their

employers, and their emotional well being. While meeting the women, talking to them, seeing them in the clubs and outside they were not shy in expressing their desire to organise themselves to improve their working conditions, to gain control over immigration issues and to demand their rights as part of this country. It is our hope that the Latin American community and the community at large will support the women.

### **Recommendations**

- **Provide Information:**

The women should be provided with clear and understandable information about the regulations in the exotic dancing industry, their rights, and immigration issues. For instance, kits with complete information in the women's languages should be handed out when the women are issued their working visas. These kits should include information on immigration issues, exotic dancing regulations, criminal law, and a list of places and telephone numbers where the women could find help.

An outreach campaign to the clubs needs to be carried out. Particularly, to women who have just arrived in the country and have not had any other contact with Canadian society.

**There should be an infrastructure where women can get information anytime they need it, and preferably in Spanish, for example a telephone line.**

**Dancers with working permits should be allowed to attend English as a second language classes or other types of training that could prepare the women in case they want to leave the job.**

- **Improve Labour Conditions**

If the concern with lap-dancing is to prevent harm, especially to women, then the current regulatory devices are not effective. A more effective solution is to regulate the industry improving working conditions for the dancers.

Women should be able to perform their work in a hazardous-free environment and one that is free of violence.

- Reform Immigration Practices

**The immigration process needs to be reviewed and changed because as it is now it puts the women in a very vulnerable condition. Exotic dancers should be allowed to immigrate to the country as permanent workers, ideally as independent workers.**

- **Enhance Social Support**

There is also a need to provide support to the women that are working or want to leave the industry. A support group or a variety of support groups in a wide range of areas such as self-development, life skill, psychotherapeutic, and parenthood need to be organised. This support needs to be in Spanish and in places where women feel safe, where they are listened, and where they can share their experiences and concerns.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### Legislation and Regulation

Canadian Government, The Criminal Code of Canada. Ottawa: Canadian Government, 1892. Online:  
online: <http://insight.mcmaster.ca/org/efc/pages/law/cc/cc.html>

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Immigration and Refugee Protection Act  
Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines (FW). Online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/FW-e/>.

United Nations, Protocol To Prevent, Suppress And Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women And Children, Supplementing The United Nations

Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime New York: United Nations, 2000. Online:  
[http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final\\_documents\\_2/convention\\_%20traff\\_eng.pdf](http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf).

### Secondary Material

Basman, Aviva. "Transgressing Borders: Migrant Sex Worker's Rights in Canada". Paper prepared for the Intensive Program in Poverty Law at Parkdale Community Legal Service. Winter 2001.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "FACTS and FIGURES 199. Statistical Overview of the Temporary Resident and Refugee Claimant Population." Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Online:  
<http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/pub/facts99-temp/facts-temp-7.html>

Bindman, Jo with the participation of Doezema, Jo. "Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda." Network of Sex Work Projects. Online:  
<http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/redefining.html>

Doezema, Jo. "Loose Women or Lost Women? The re-emergence of the myth of 'white slavery' in the contemporary discourse of 'trafficking in women', International Studies Convention. Washington, DC, February 16-20, 1999. Gender Issues, Vol. 18 no. 1. Winter 2000.

Jarret, Lucinda. Stripping in Time A history of Erotic Dancing. London: Pandora, 1997

Jefferson, David A. Scott. Behind the G-string : an exploration of the stripper's image, her person, and her meaning. N.C : McFarland & Co, 1996.

Lewis, Jacqueline and Maticka-Tyndal, Eleanor, "Final Report: Erotic/Exotic Dancing: HIV -Related Risk Factors 1998," Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Windsor. 1998. Online:  
<http://zeus.uwindsor.ca/courses/sociology/maticka/star/dancerssummary.html>

Meaghan, Diane. "The Political Economy of Stripping: The Social Construction of Sex Trade Work." diss.. OISE University of Toronto, 2000.

McDonald, Lynn, Moore, Brooke and Timoshkina, Natalya. "Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian

Case." Centre for Applied Social Research, University of Toronto. November 2000. Online:<http://www.swc-cfc.ca/publish/research/001115-0662653351-e.html>

Mcklin, Audrey. "Dancing Across Borders', Trafficking and Canadian Immigration Policy," unpublished, Toronto, 2001 Available by contacting Audrey Macklin at [audrey.macklin@utoronto.ca](mailto:audrey.macklin@utoronto.ca)

The Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. "Building Safer communities Safer Communities Through Co-operative Enforcement A Discussion Paper." Government of Ontario. October 19, 2000. Online: <http://www.cbs.gov.on.ca/pdf/mccr/BldgSaferComm.pdf>

The Toronto Network Against Trafficking in Women, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario and The Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic. "Trafficking In Women Including Thai Migrant Sex Workers In Canada." Status of Women Canada. Toronto: June 2000.

The Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project. "The Bare Facts. How dancers get 'jerked' around by the law." The Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project. Online: [www.walnet.org](http://www.walnet.org)

United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Fact Sheet No.14, Contemporary Forms of Slavery," United Nations. Online: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs14.htm>

Wijers, Marjan and Lap-Chew, Lin. "Trafficking in Women: Forced Labour and Slavery-Like Practices in Marriages, Domestic Labour and Prostitution." Foundation Against Trafficking in Women. 1997.

## Articles

"A review of the Law of Indecency and Nudity." Criminal Law Study Paper. Online: <http://www.ilcc.ca/en/criminal/?sec=3d>

Cullen, Don. "Her Story ain't History." The Naked Truth, Summer 2,000. Online: <http://jumpstartcommunications.com/NakedTruth/Dance-History.html>

Enriquez, Jean. "Sail On, Women. Being in the sex trade is not, and will never be an empowered choice." Women in Action 1999. Online: <http://www.isiswomen.org/wia/wia299/hum00010.html>

Garro, Julia. "Working hard in the sex trade." The Varsity, November 15, 1999. online: <http://varsity.utoronto.ca/archives/120/nov09/feature/working.html>

Graham, Amanda. "Strip Clubs bare all to Councillor." Eye Magazin November 29, 2001.

Horwich, Jeff. "Exotic Dancing -is it are?." Minnesota Public Radio News March 4, 2,002. Online: [http://news.mpr.org/features/200203/04\\_mainstreet\\_sex-m/dance.stml](http://news.mpr.org/features/200203/04_mainstreet_sex-m/dance.stml)

Jimenez, Marina and Bell, Stewart. "650 charges in Canadian Sex Slave Trade," National Post [Toronto] May 18, 2000.

Leigh, Carol and Wijers, Marjan. "Statement on Trafficking, Stigmatization and Strategies for Alliances prepared to the Transnational Trafficking Seminar on Trafficking in Women." June 20-24 Budapest, Hungary 1998. Online: <http://www.bayswan.org/alliances.html>

---. "Trafficking and the Distinction Between Forced and Voluntary Prostitution." Online: <http://www.bayswan.org/Distinc.html>

Makin, Kirk. "Lap dancing an indecent ant, top court rules," The Globe and Mail [Toronto] March 13, 1997.

Orhant, Melanie. "650 charges in Canadian sex slave trade" National Post May 18, 2000.

Rayman, Graham. "Toronto Targets Trafficking. Task Force is model for law enforcement organizations." Newsday.com. Online: [www.newsday.com/news/local/newyork/ny-smuggled-toronto-story](http://www.newsday.com/news/local/newyork/ny-smuggled-toronto-story)

Soderlund, Gretchen and Grant, Emma. "Girls (Forced to) Dance Naked! The Politics and Presumptions of Anti-Trafficking Laws," Bad Subjects. Political Education for Everyday life, Issue # 40 , October 1998. Online: <http://eserver.org/bs/40/soderlund-grant.html>

Smith, Vern. "Sex Slaves or harassed sex-trade workers? Being 'rescued' by police means imprisonment" Eye October 8, 2,000. online:[http://www.eye.net/eye/issue\\_08.10.00/news/sex.html](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue_08.10.00/news/sex.html).

---. " Strip club laws a ball of confusion Stayed charges leave exotic dance clubs in legal limbo." Eye Magazine July 07 2000. Online: [http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue\\_07.06.00/news/nekkid.html](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_07.06.00/news/nekkid.html)

## Webpages

City of Toronto Council and Committees, online:

<http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/legdocs/agendas/committees/ep/ep980522/it006.htm>

Coalition Against Traffic in women <http://www.catwinternational.org>

Commercial Sex Information Centre

[www.walnet.org](http://www.walnet.org)

COYOTE

[www.walnet.org/csis/groups/coyote.html](http://www.walnet.org/csis/groups/coyote.html), [www.bayswan.org/COYOTE.html](http://www.bayswan.org/COYOTE.html)

Eminism.or Putting back the emi in feminism

<http://eminism.org/readings/supporthookers.html>

Exotic Dancers Alliance of San Francisco

[www.eda-sf.org](http://www.eda-sf.org)

Foreign Workers

<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/menu/profile-hrdc.shtml>

Foundation against Trafficking in Women

<http://www.bayswan.org/FoundTraf.html>

Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women

<http://www.inet.co.th/org/gaatw/>

Human Resources Development Canada

<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca>

Prostitute's Education Network

<http://www.bayswan.org/penet.html>

The Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women

<http://www.inet.co.th/org/gaatw/>

The Naked Truth

<http://www.jumpstartcommunications.com/NakedTruth/>

SIECCAN. Sex Information and Education Council of Canada  
<http://www.sieccan.org/abstracts/vol7no1.html>

## STAR. Sex Trade Advocacy and Research

<http://venus.uwindsor.ca/courses/sociology/maticka/star/index.html>

United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime prevention  
<http://www.undcp.org/>

United Nations Office of the High commissioner for Human Rights  
<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs14.htm>

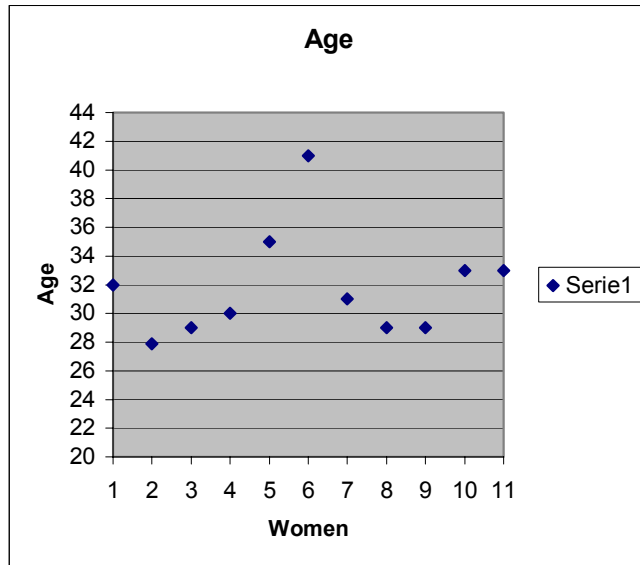
Women in Action  
<http://www.isiswomen.org>

### APPENDIX

#### Demographic Data

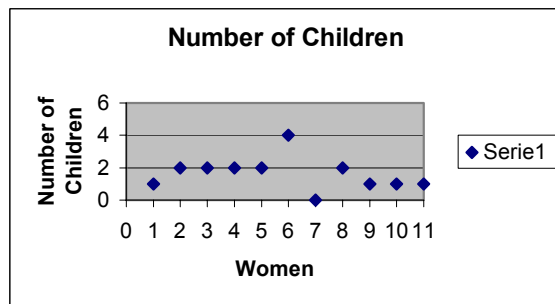
##### Age

- Average age: 31 years
- Out of the 11 women 9 were in the range between 28 and 33



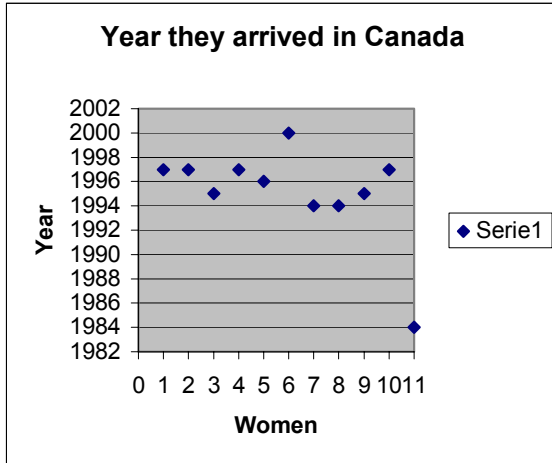
#### Number of Children

- Average number of Children: 1.6
- Out of the 11 women 9 had at least one child and one as many as four



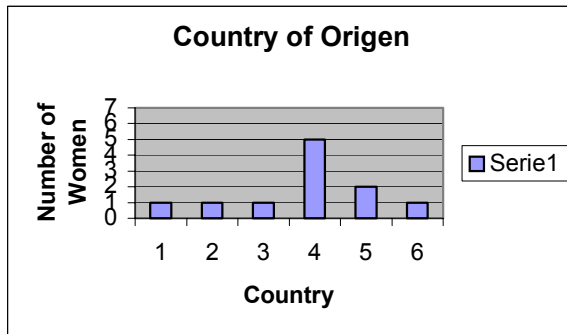
#### Year of Arrival

- 10 out of 11 came to Canada to work as exotic dancers, only one entered the industry after being in the country.
- All of the 10 women that came to work as dancers arrived in Canada between 1994 and 1998



Country of Origin

- 6 out of the 11, one came from Colombia, one from Ecuador, one from Venezuela, five from Costa Rica, two from Mexico and one from Cuba



1:Colombia, 2:Ecuador, 3:Venezuela, 4:Costa Rica, 5: Mexico, 6: Cuba