

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to raise awareness of the unclear situation in escort agencies in the Northern Territory. While the escort agencies hire staff as sub contractors they are treated more as employees. This situation greatly disadvantages sex workers while I assume has economic benefits for the agency owners.

Examples of workers being treated as employees include;

- Workers are told what to wear and how to present themselves while delivering services. This is controlled to the detail of the agencies insisting on manicures, cosmetic waxing and types of underwear.
- Workers shifts are dictated to them including start times and finishing times. I have heard many stories of workers being late to their shift and being fined \$50 - \$100 for being late. This money is taken out of their earnings.
- Some escort agencies do not provide safe sex products for free but instead add a mark up to their cost price and therefore make additional profit on the sale of condoms and personal lubricant etc to sex workers.
- Sex workers are not usually offered the discretion to choose to not go out on a booking. Similarly when the booking finishes early, for what ever reason, the escort agency forces the sex worker to stay with client by not picking him/her up, until the time paid for has passed.

Examples of workers operating as sub contractors include;

- Workers do not operate under separate trading name to the escort agency. In an instance where a worker has promoted themselves as a independent business the worker was made redundant for trying to 'steal the agencies clientele'.
- Sex workers are expected to cover overhead costs while on bookings. For example, when a customer pays for the services with a credit card this worker must ring the details of the card through to the escort agency reception to get authorisation. The cost of the mobile phone call is the responsibility of the worker.
- An essential part of sex workers safety is to take a mobile phone out on a booking. This is to be used to "check in" and "check out" with the escort agency so that they are aware of where the worker is and if everything is ok. Mobile phones are also used if the sex worker feels threatened during a booking and they contact the agency for help. In these instances a safe code word is used to alert the escort agency but not the client. Again with these uses of the phone, the sex worker is responsible for paying for the mobile phone.
- Escort Agencies do not provide workers with group certificates.
- Escort agencies do no provide access to work-cover, sick leave, superannuation or other employment entitlements.

I hope these points bring to your attention the unclear practices occurring in the Northern Territory. If you would like to discuss any of these matter further please do not hesitate contacting me.

Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council,
Sex Worker Outreach Project
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