

PROSTITUTION

Canadians Remain Divided on How to Deal with Prostitution

Men and older Canadians support decriminalization and consensual prostitution, but women and younger Canadians do not concur.

[VANCOUVER – Jun. 30, 2011] – The views of Canadians on prostitution vary greatly according to age and gender, with a large proportion of men and older respondents voicing support for some kind of decriminalization, while most women and younger respondents are not as comfortable with the idea, a new Angus Reid Public Opinion poll has found.

The online surveys of representative national samples of 1,009 and 1,002 Canadian adults sought to gauge the opinion of respondents on a wide range of aspects related to prostitution, from awareness of the status quo and existing guidelines, to whether specific activities should be permissible.

First Survey - Awareness and Guidelines

As evidenced in surveys conducted by Angus Reid Public Opinion in [2009](#) and [2010](#), only about a quarter of Canadians (22%) are aware that exchanging sex for money is legal in Canada, while seven-in-ten (70%) mistakenly believe that the practice is illegal.

Respondents were then informed about the status quo, and presented with several actions that are deemed illegal by the Criminal Code. At least four-in-five respondents believe paying for sex

KEY FINDINGS

- **53% would decriminalize some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution**
- **24% would prohibit prostitution entirely, and make it illegal to exchange sex for money**

Full topline results are at the end of this release.

This release contains the results of two surveys:

First Survey (six questions) - From June 21 to June 22, 2011, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,009 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panellists.

Second Survey (seven questions) - From June 28 to June 29, 2011, Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted an online survey among 1,002 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panellists.

The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 3.1% for both samples, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to the most current education, age, gender and region Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

from anyone under the age of 18 (96%), bringing someone to Canada to work as a prostitute (91%), and making money off of the prostitution of others (83%) should continue to be illegal. A majority also believes people should not be allowed to own, run, occupy or transport anyone to a bawdy house (or brothel) (55%) or publicly communicating for the purposes of prostitution (53%).

Still, there is no clear consensus on how some of these guidelines are currently applied. While 36 per cent of respondents believe the Criminal Code provisions related to communication and brothels are fair to the purpose of protecting the public good, almost half (47%) think the rules are unfair and force prostitutes into unsafe situations.

Canadians were asked about the regulations that are now in place in some countries, which make it a criminal offence to buy services from prostitutes, and contemplate both fines and sentences to “clients” of prostitutes. While 32 per cent of respondents believe both the prostitutes and the clients should be punished for their actions, 52 per cent of Canadians state that nobody should be punished and that adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution.

The notion of prostitutes working indoors or in brothels is supported by 62 per cent of respondents, with 28 per cent expressing concerns that allowing this practice would lead to a legitimization of prostitution, which could turn Canada into a safe haven for sex tourism.

Finally, when asked about specific policy options to deal with prostitution in Canada, only 14 per cent of respondents voice support for keeping the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution. One-in-four respondents (24%) would prohibit prostitution entirely, and make it illegal to exchange sex for money, while a majority (53%) would decriminalize some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allow adults to engage in consensual prostitution.

Second Survey - Court Case and Definitions

Only 22 per cent of Canadians say they are following the appeal of an Ontario Superior Court decision that struck down three Criminal Code provisions related to prostitution “very closely” or “moderately closely.” Two thirds of Canadians (67%) believe prostitution—defined as “the act or practice of providing sexual services to another person in return for payment”—should be legal between consenting adults. Three-in-ten respondents (29%) disagree with this notion.

Respondents were told that exchanging sex for money is currently legal in Canada, but that the Criminal Code makes many activities surrounding prostitution illegal. They were then asked to voice their opinion on whether five situations where prostitution could take place should be allowed.

Three-in-five respondents (58%) believe escort agencies that offer sexual services should be legal, and half of Canadians (50%) felt the same way about massage parlours that offer sexual services. Canadians were evenly divided in their assessment of newspaper, magazine ads and online forums that offer sexual services (47% legal, 46% illegal) and websites that offer sexual services (46% legal, 47% illegal).

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

However, two-thirds of respondents (67%) believe prostitutes should not be allowed to offer sexual services to clients on the street.

Advocates and opponents of decriminalized prostitution have often cited the examples of New Zealand and Sweden as models to modify Canada's prostitution laws. Two-in-five Canadians (42%) think Canada would be better off if its laws on prostitution were closer to those in New Zealand, where current guidelines allow prostitution, people working and maintaining brothels, living off the proceeds of someone else's prostitution, and street solicitation to all be regulated and legal activities.

Conversely, 16 per cent of Canadians would prefer to implement a model similar to the one that is currently in place in Sweden, where guidelines make it legal for people to offer sexual services, but illegal for people to purchase them, and prostitutes are regarded as exploited victims, who have social service funds at their disposal. Three-in-ten respondents (31%) believe neither option is adequate for Canada.

It is expected that the court challenges on prostitution will eventually reach the Supreme Court of Canada, which may end up ruling about the regulations surrounding prostitution at the federal level. A majority of Canadians (58%) expects the court to render a ruling that decriminalizes certain activities and allows adults to engage in consensual prostitution, while 22 per cent foresee a decision that prohibits prostitution entirely, and makes it illegal to exchange sex for money. When asked what their preferred outcome for this legal dispute would be, respondents favoured decriminalization over prohibition by a 2-to-1 margin (60% to 26%).

Three-in-five Canadians (62%) say they would be comfortable living in a society where prostitution is legal, while one third (32%) state that they would feel uncomfortable.

Analysis

The views of Canadians on prostitution provide an opportunity to examine clear gender and generational divides. Throughout the two surveys, around three-in-five men consistently voice support for decriminalization, brothels and consensual prostitution, and seven-in-ten see little problem with prostitution being legal. Women, on the other hand, are only supportive of decriminalization in the interest of safety and essentially in situations where no person is being exploited.

Canadians aged 18 to 34 are definitely not convinced that legal prostitution would be the right course of action for Canada. Younger respondents are more likely to express feeling uncomfortable about this notion than their older counterparts, and are also less likely to both support decriminalization and wish for a court ruling that allows adults to engage in consensual prostitution.

On the question of exploitation, Canadians have drawn unambiguous lines. The level of rejection for paedophilia, human trafficking and pimping is decidedly high. However, at least half of respondents are open to allowing prostitution as a business, in the form of escort agencies or massage parlours. At the same time, the exchange of sex for money on the street is decried by most Canadians.

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

On a regional basis, the push for decriminalization finds the highest level of support in British Columbia (57%) and Quebec (55%), where fewer than one-in-five respondents (18% and 19% respectively) are willing to prohibit prostitution entirely. These are also the two provinces where at least two thirds of respondents claim to be comfortable with the idea of legal prostitution.

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About Angus Reid Public Opinion

[Angus Reid Public Opinion](#) is a public affairs practice headed by Dr. Angus Reid: an industry visionary who has spent more than four decades asking questions to figure out what people feel, how they think and who they will vote for. A team of talented and experienced practitioners with a unique and profound understanding of global issues conduct high quality research throughout the world on a daily basis for corporations, governments, academic researchers, and non-profit organizations.

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**For more information, please contact
our spokesperson listed in the footnote.**

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about prostitution in Canada. From what you have seen, read or heard, is it legal or illegal to exchange sex for money in Canada?

Region							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Legal	22%	23%	23%	18%	27%	16%	13%
Illegal	70%	68%	70%	78%	64%	77%	75%
Not sure	9%	9%	8%	3%	10%	7%	12%

Prostitution

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Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Legal	22%	29%	14%	18%	21%	25%
Illegal	70%	65%	75%	70%	72%	68%
Not sure	9%	6%	11%	12%	7%	7%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Exchanging sex for money is currently legal in Canada. However, the Criminal Code makes many activities surrounding prostitution illegal. Do you think each of these activities should be legal or illegal in Canada?

	Legal	Illegal	Not sure
Publicly communicating for the purposes of prostitution	36%	53%	11%
Owning, running, occupying or transporting anyone to a bawdy house (or brothel)	34%	55%	11%
Making money off of the prostitution of others	11%	83%	5%
Bringing someone to Canada to work as a prostitute	5%	91%	4%
Paying for sex from anyone under the age of 18	2%	96%	2%

Prostitution

Several provisions in the Criminal Code prohibit public communication for the purposes of prostitution, and make it illegal to own, run, occupy or transport anyone to a bawdy house (or brothel). From what you have seen, read or heard, which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?

	Gender & Age					
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
These provisions are fair to the purpose of protecting the public good	36%	33%	39%	37%	33%	40%
These provisions are unfair and force prostitutes into unsafe situations	47%	55%	41%	39%	53%	48%
Not sure	16%	12%	20%	23%	15%	13%

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Prostitution

In some countries, existing regulations make it a criminal offence to buy services from prostitutes, and contemplate both fines and sentences to “clients” of prostitutes. Thinking about this, which of these options do you think would be best for Canada when it comes to prostitution?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Only punishing the prostitutes	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Only punishing the “clients”	7%	4%	9%	9%	6%	5%
Punishing both prostitutes and “clients”	32%	25%	39%	33%	30%	33%
Nobody should be punished—adults should be allowed to engage in consensual prostitution	52%	66%	39%	43%	55%	55%
Not sure	9%	5%	13%	13%	8%	7%

Prostitution

Some people support allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe this will make them safer, and stop them from working on the streets. Other people oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels because they believe it would lead to a legitimization of prostitution, which could turn Canada into a safe haven for sex tourism. Thinking about the views of both sides, do you support or oppose allowing prostitutes to work indoors or in brothels?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Support	62%	74%	51%	56%	65%	64%
Oppose	28%	19%	36%	26%	26%	31%
Not sure	10%	7%	13%	17%	9%	5%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Generally speaking, which of these policy options would you personally prefer to deal with the issue of prostitution in Canada?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Prohibiting prostitution entirely, and making it illegal to exchange sex for money	24%	18%	27%	39%	24%	19%	24%
Keeping the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution	14%	11%	12%	8%	14%	17%	14%
Decriminalizing some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allowing adults to engage in consensual prostitution	53%	57%	52%	46%	52%	55%	53%
Not sure	10%	14%	9%	6%	9%	9%	9%

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Prostitution

Generally speaking, which of these policy options would you personally prefer to deal with the issue of prostitution in Canada?

	Gender & Age					
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Prohibiting prostitution entirely, and making it illegal to exchange sex for money	24%	16%	31%	26%	24%	21%
Keeping the status quo, which criminalizes some of the activities surrounding prostitution	14%	14%	14%	18%	10%	14%
Decriminalizing some of the actions surrounding prostitution that are currently illegal and allowing adults to engage in consensual prostitution	53%	66%	41%	43%	58%	55%
Not sure	10%	4%	14%	13%	7%	10%

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Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about prostitution in Canada. As you may know, a five-judge panel is currently hearing an appeal of an Ontario Superior Court decision that struck down three Criminal Code provisions related to prostitution. Over the course of the past month, how closely have you followed this story?

	Region						
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Very closely / Moderately closely	22%	23%	13%	25%	28%	17%	22%
Not too closely / Not closely at all	78%	77%	87%	75%	72%	83%	78%

Prostitution

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	Gender & Age					
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Very closely / Moderately closely	22%	29%	16%	21%	21%	26%
Not too closely / Not closely at all	78%	71%	84%	79%	79%	74%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Some people have argued that prostitution, the act or practice of providing sexual services to another person in return for payment, should be legal between consenting adults. Do you agree or disagree with this view?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Agree	67%	78%	56%	63%	66%	70%
Disagree	29%	20%	37%	32%	27%	27%
Not sure	5%	3%	7%	5%	6%	3%

Prostitution

Exchanging sex for money is currently legal in Canada. However, the Criminal Code makes many activities surrounding prostitution illegal. Do you think each of these activities should be legal or illegal in Canada?

	Definitely / Probably should be legal	Definitely / Probably should be illegal	Not sure
Escort agencies that offer sexual services	58%	37%	5%
Massage parlours that offer sexual services	50%	45%	5%
Newspaper, magazine ads and online forums that offer sexual services	47%	46%	7%
Websites that offer sexual services	46%	47%	7%
Prostitutes offering sexual services to clients on the street	27%	67%	6%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

Next, we'd like to ask you a question about how two countries have dealt with prostitution.

In New Zealand, current guidelines allow prostitution, people working and maintaining brothels, living off the proceeds of someone else's prostitution, and street solicitation to all be regulated and legal activities.

In Sweden, current guidelines make it legal for people to offer sexual services, but illegal for people to purchase them. Prostitutes are regarded as exploited victims, who have social service funds at their disposal.

Thinking about Canada, do you think the country would be better off if its laws on prostitution were closer to those in New Zealand, or closer to those in Sweden?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Closer to the laws in New Zealand	42%	52%	32%	40%	42%	43%
Closer to the laws in Sweden	16%	14%	17%	20%	15%	12%
Neither option is adequate for Canada	31%	26%	35%	27%	29%	37%
Not sure	12%	8%	16%	13%	15%	8%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

As you may know, it is expected that current court challenges on prostitution will eventually reach the Supreme Court of Canada, which may end up ruling about the regulations surrounding prostitution at the federal level. If this happens, what do you expect the outcome to be?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
A ruling that prohibits prostitution entirely, and makes it illegal to exchange sex for money	22%	22%	22%	28%	20%	20%
A ruling that decriminalizes certain activities and allows adults to engage in consensual prostitution	58%	65%	51%	49%	58%	66%
Not sure	20%	14%	26%	23%	23%	14%

Prostitution

And, if this case reaches the Supreme Court of Canada, what would you prefer the outcome to be?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
A ruling that prohibits prostitution entirely, and makes it illegal to exchange sex for money	26%	20%	32%	31%	22%	26%
A ruling that decriminalizes certain activities and allows adults to engage in consensual prostitution	60%	72%	49%	51%	62%	67%
Not sure	14%	9%	19%	18%	16%	7%

CONTACT:

Mario Canseco, Vice President, Angus Reid Public Opinion, 877-730-3570, mario.canseco@angus-reid.com

Prostitution

All things considered, would you be comfortable or uncomfortable living in a society where prostitution is legal?

Region							
	Total	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	PQ	ATL
Very comfortable / Moderately comfortable	62%	71%	49%	48%	63%	69%	56%
Moderately uncomfortable / Very uncomfortable	32%	27%	44%	37%	31%	25%	41%
Not sure	6%	3%	7%	14%	6%	6%	3%

Prostitution

All things considered, would you be comfortable or uncomfortable living in a society where prostitution is legal?

Gender & Age						
	Total	Male	Female	Age 18-34	Age 35-54	Age 55+
Very comfortable / Moderately comfortable	62%	76%	50%	60%	62%	65%
Moderately uncomfortable / Very uncomfortable	32%	20%	43%	35%	30%	31%
Not sure	6%	4%	8%	5%	8%	4%

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