

2016 Health Survey of Women Involved in Prostitution

Summary

1. **According to expert opinion, there were around 700–1,000 people involved in prostitution (PiP) in Estonia in 2016.**
2. **The survey was based on convenience sampling and included 151 women from Tallinn and, for the first time, also from Jõhvi and Tartu.** 109 respondents were from Tallinn, 25 from Jõhvi and 17 from Tartu or rest of Estonia. The survey comprised of women who are in contact with NGO Eluliin. 74% of the respondents were first time participants of a National Institute for Health Development (NIHD) survey (previous surveys were carried out in 2006 and 2011). The results will subsequently be compared with both previous NIHD surveys as well as other surveys among the general population in Estonia. However, since the methods used were not the same, **no direct comparisons can be made with other surveys and assessments only indicate possible differences!**
3. **73% of respondents consider themselves as being involved in prostitution.**
4. **It is probable that people involved in prostitution are an ageing cohort.** Participants of the 2016 survey were older compared to previous surveys (the average age in 2006 was 29.5 and 38.2 in 2016). 88% of PiP have been involved in prostitution since they first entered prostitution. The average period of being involved in prostitution was 9.2 years, 22% of respondents had been involved for less than three years. It is not possible to estimate what would have been the results if participants were not those already in contact with Eluliin.
5. **Prostitution is mostly entered into through acquaintances and on average at the age of 26.** The percentage of women who have become involved through advertisements has decreased (26% in 2006, 22% in 2011, 13% in 2016).
6. **Prostitution is an individual activity in Estonia.** PiP mostly get in contact with sex-buyers through self-advertisement (97%, e.g. telephone number, e-mail), most persons do not share an apartment with other PiP (76%) and practically no one (97%) has had to share the pay they have received for sexual intercourse with anyone else. Sexual intercourse usually takes place at one's own apartment, sex-buyer's apartment, or hotel (67%, 42% and 46% of the respondents respectively had intercourse at said places during the last month). Only 4% said that they work at a massage parlour that provides a "happy ending". Individual prostitution has increased remarkably in the last ten years (location of sexual intercourse in the last month at a sauna/massage parlour 24% in 2006 and 11% in 2016, at company property 35% in 2006 and 4% in 2016, on the street 2% in 2006 and 5% in 2016). This may be related to the legislation, because in 2012, prostitution was made part of the human trafficking paragraph and is now an offence against the person (it used to be considered as an offence against the public order) (16). Almost all PiP in Tallinn and most in Ida-Virumaa know other PiP, which is less common in other areas.
7. **Many people involved in prostitution practise it simultaneously in several towns and many who live outside of Tallinn are additionally involved in Tallinn as well.** 8% of PiP whose main area of operation was Tallinn did not actually live in Tallinn. 55% of women who lived outside of Tallinn had also practised prostitution in Tallinn either full-time or part-time within the last year. PiP who operate in Ida-Virumaa county do not only do it in one town but in

other areas of Ida-Virumaa as well. Participants also stated Paide, Pärnu and Tapa as their main operating area in addition to Tallinn and towns of Ida-Virumaa. Prostitution abroad was scarce and infrequent (9,1–10 days a year), all stated Finland when asked for countries. There are no remarkable differences compared to 2011. Since Jõhvi was included for the first time, high mobility in Ida-Virumaa became apparent.

8. **On average, a person involved in prostitution has 8.1 sex-buyers a week.** Women who evaluated the number of sex-buyers in the previous month as regular had had sexual intercourse with 41.1 sex-buyers per month on average. The median number of sex-buyers per week was seven in 2006, ten in 2011 and six in 2016; 42%, 25% and 49% in respective years had up to five sex-buyers per week.
9. **Median pay for sexual intercourse is 50 EUR.** In 2006, median pay for the last sexual intercourse was 300 EEK (23 EUR) and 50 EUR in 2011. 28% gained all of their income from sex, which is considerably lower than in previous years (67% in 2006 and 82% in 2011). All subjects have been given money for sex, 25% have also received possessions as payment.
10. **Sex-buyers are mostly Estonian or Russian speaking men between the ages of 40–49.** The percentage of foreigners in the last year was estimated to be low.
11. **Condoms are still nearly always used with sex-buyers, but the number of sex-buyers who do not wish to wear a condom is increasing.** The use of condoms with sex-buyers is very high (97% during last intercourse) and 94% used a condom during every vaginal intercourse in the past month. These indicators were 94% and 78% in 2006 and 98% and 97% in 2011. The use of condoms is equally high during different types of sexual intercourse (vaginal, oral, etc.). An uptrend can be noted in the use of condoms during oral intercourse: ten years ago 51% of PiP used a condom during every oral intercourse, five years ago the number was 82% and it was over 90% in 2016. 48% used a condom as their only contraceptive, whereas the rest used some other effective contraceptive method as well. Then again, 75% have stated that there has been at least one person among the last ten sex-buyers who did not want to wear a condom (it was 51% in 2011). In last such a case, 54% of PiP cut all contact with the sex-buyer and 13% had sex without a condom (those indicators were 77% and 3% respectively in 2011). Considering that the sexual partners also included people who inject drugs (25% had at least one among sex-buyers in the previous year, 3% among non-paying partners), condoms are still crucially important in preventing heterosexual transmission of HIV. 43% of participants had only had sexual intercourse with sex-buyers and not with any non-paying partners during the past year.
12. **Sexual behaviour is riskier with non-paying sexual partners than with sex-buyers.** In the past month, 49% of PiP who had sex with a steady partner and 17% of PiP who had sex with a casual partner used a condom rarely or did not use a condom at all. In 2011, those indicators were 72% and 7%, respectively. 76% of subjects used effective contraceptives when having sex with non-paying partners in the past year. Non-paying sexual partners of PiP may be a significant group of people through whom persons involved in prostitution may catch or transmit sexually transmitted infections.
13. **The majority of persons involved in prostitution have been exposed to violence in their lifetime and their experiences with violence exceed those of the general population manifold.** Approximately 60% of the subjects have experienced mental, 60% physical and 50% sexual abuse in their various forms. 20–25% of subjects have experienced various forms of violence while being involved in prostitution, the most experienced forms were rape (29%)

and beating (26%). A previous study using in-depth interviews found that domestic violence acted as an important risk factor for entering prostitution (18).

14. **A quarter of the subjects had injected drugs in their lifetime.** In 2016, 26% had injected drugs in their lifetime, 66% of them injected regularly (11% had injected drugs in their lifetime in 2011). 38% of drug injecting PiP were HIV-positive and 58% had positive markers of hepatitis C.
15. **PiP who are in contact with NGO Eluliin are well covered with harm reduction services.** 93% had received free condoms from the centre or fieldworker in the last year; 81% of drug injectors had received sterile syringes from harm reduction centres or from Eluliin. The subjects were most in need of health insurance, which emerged as an important reason for not visiting a gynaecologist.
16. **69% evaluated their sexual health as good or very good, no one saw it as bad or very bad. In overall health, these indicators are 56% and 4% respectively.**
17. **The level of seeing a gynaecologist was very high.** 82% had visited a gynaecologist in the last year. PiP had visited the gynaecologist more in the last five years than the general population (96% vs 63%).
18. **Nearly all persons involved in prostitution have been tested for HIV in their lifetime.** 94% had been tested for HIV at least once in their lifetime, whereas 66% had been tested in the past 12 months. The level of getting tested was the same in 2011 (94% and 71% respectively) and better than in 2006 (66% and 57% respectively). Most respondents visit specialist doctors to get tested.
19. **70% of PiP had no sexually transmitted infections.** 20 cases of HIV (13%), 8 cases of chlamydiosis (5%), 6 cases of mycoplasma (4%), 5 cases of trichomoniasis (3%) and 2 cases of gonorrhoea (1%) were detected during the survey. No chlamydia LGV cases were diagnosed. 33 participants (22%) were positive for hepatitis C (HCV) antibodies. 39% HCV-positives and 20% of HIV-positives and 100% with other previously mentioned infections were unaware of their infection. Hepatitis C and HIV were more common than in 2011 (6% and 6%) and in 2006 (7% and 8%). However, it should not be forgotten that no direct comparisons can be made with previous surveys since the methods of inclusion as well as testing were different.
20. **13% of women who participated in the survey had been infected with HIV.** 3/4 of them had injected drugs in their lifetime and 3/4 had hepatitis C markers. This indicates that HIV was primarily transmitted through contaminated injection equipment. All HIV-positive women wore a condom with sex-buyers at all times.
21. **Vaccination against hepatitis B is low** – only 14% said to have been vaccinated.
22. **Many persons involved in prostitution have children.** 81% of subjects had a biological, partner's or adopted child (half of the subjects had underage children) in 2016, 66% of subjects in 2011 (85% of children were underage), 59% of subjects in 2006. Only 15% of women with at least one underage child said that they also have a steady partner or spouse, indicating a large number of single mothers amongst PiP. 78% had had an abortion, 26% had experienced a miscarriage.
23. **59% of PiP had visited a general practitioner in the year preceding the survey.** This indicator is somewhat lower than among women in the general population (72%).

24. **Compared to the general population, persons involved in prostitution experience more mood disorders, head-, neck- and backaches, allergies, asthma, thyroid and lung conditions, however, they do not experience as much high blood pressure and heart diseases.** Most common illnesses were depression (50%), backaches (47%), anxiety disorder (38%), neck pain (37%), migraines (37%), allergies (24%), high blood pressure (19%).
25. **Mental health problems are very common among persons involved in prostitution.** According to the Emotional State Questionnaire EEK-2 (a mental health screening instrument), 59% may have experienced exhaustion, 53% depression, 49% sleep disorders, 41% anxiety disorders, 16% panic disorder, 13% social phobia. These indicators are three to ten times higher than among the general population. 40% of women involved in prostitution have thought about suicide (15% of women in the general population). 20% have attempted suicide. Two thirds of the subjects had felt the need for emotional help in the last year but only a third actually sought help.

Full report:

Lemsalu L, Lõhmus L, Vals K, Rüütel K. Prostitutsiooni kaasatud naiste terviseuuring 2016. Tallinn: Tervise Arengu Instituut, 2017. www.tai.ee