

# **Implementing the Prohibition of Prostitution Consumption Law Evaluation Study Report**

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# Abstract

## Introduction

The 2019 Prohibition of Prostitution Consumption (hereafter, the law) was published in January 2019 and came into effect in July 2020 as a five-year temporary order. Prostitution is defined as sex services that include physical contact. The objective of the law is to “bring about the reduction of prostitution by prohibiting the consumption of prostitution, as part of a combined strategy that includes education and a public information campaign, as well as the expansion of treatment and rehabilitation options for individuals in prostitution”. In January 2019, the government adopted Resolution 4462: “Implementation of the Recommendations of the Inter-ministerial Team for Reducing Prostitution Consumption”, which provides budgets to help individuals in prostitution as well as programs for consumers of prostitution.

## The Study that Accompanied the Implementation of the Law

The Prostitution Consumption Prohibition Law specified that a study would be conducted to examine its implementation and impact. The study, which began in November 2020 and ended in May 2024, was conducted under the responsibility of the Research Division at the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs (hereafter, Ministry of Welfare), with the support of the Chief Scientist's Office at the Ministry of National Security. The study was conducted by the [Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute](#). The study examined the implementation and impact of the law in four areas: police enforcement; individuals in prostitution and the services offered to them; prostitution consumers; education and information for the public and public opinion.

## Objectives

The objectives of the study were to examine the impact of the law and Government Resolution on the extent of prostitution in Israel, on its consumption, and on individuals in prostitution.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This impact cannot be isolated from the effects of other processes that took place in Israel at the same time, including COVID-19 and the Israel-Hamas war. Moreover, the three-year duration of this study is insufficient for examining the Law's long-term impact on the extent of prostitution. Therefore, the researchers are cautious with regard to conclusions regarding the Law's direct or indirect effects.

# Methodology

## Surveys

- Public attitudes surveys (2021, 2024).
- Prostitution consumption survey among Israeli men (2021, 2024).
- Survey of professionals in services for individuals in prostitution (2021, 2024).
- Survey of participants in the alternative program workshops, before and after participation.

## Administrative Data Analysis

- Fines issued by the Israel Police in 2021-2023 and data on the individuals fined.
- Data on participants in the Alternative Program.
- Data on service users in programs provided by the Ministry of Welfare (2020-2023) and the Ministry of Health (2019-2022).
- Analysis of Google search terms related to prostitution used in 2013-2024 from the Google Trends website in order to examine trends in the demand for prostitution.
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 34 individuals in prostitution, 64 professionals in related services, 30 police officers, and five prostitution consumers.
- Mapping services for individuals in prostitution.
- Analyzing documents related to the law and its implementation.

# Findings

## Law Enforcement

No budget was dedicated to the law's enforcement, and it is funded using existing resources and based on the police's capability and priorities. Enforcement was approved in December 2020, and began in practice in the second half of 2021, when policymakers promoted the issue with the senior professional staff in the police. From the start of enforcement until the end of 2023, 5,091 fines were issued.

Over the years, enforcement levels fluctuated, with a downwards trend, and in 2023 enforcement was minimal. Most of the enforcement activities were conducted in central Israel, and 97% of the fines were issued by only three police stations (in south Tel Aviv, Rishon LeZion and Kiryat Haim), so that in most areas there was

no enforcement to speak of. According to police definitions of prostitution venues, most fines were issued in brothels. Most (89%) of the fines were issued for the offense specified by the law of 'being in a place used for prostitution in order to consume prostitution', and the rest for actual consumption. About half the fines were not paid on time.

All police officers interviewed expressed the view that the law would not eliminate prostitution, but most agreed with its rationale, emphasized the importance of enforcing it, and argued that the law's enforcement and their very presence at prostitution sites helped reduce prostitution consumption there. The police officers explained that the law was part of the overall effort to reduce prostitution, together with the enforcement of related offenses and the closing of brothels. They mentioned several difficulties in enforcement, including the lack of personnel and dedicated resources, and the difficulty of establishing an evidentiary basis in discreet sites, as well as locating and reaching these sites. Individuals in prostitution who referred to police enforcement of the law said that their relations with the police were still complex, but some noted early signs of improvement.

### ***The Law's Influence on Individuals in Prostitution and the Services for Them***

The law has had a certain impact on the lives of many individuals in prostitution. Some experienced a loss of income, others benefitted from new options for change and for leaving prostitution, partly due to new and expanded services. Moreover, some of the individuals in prostitution reported that the law enhanced their feeling of being protected.

In a survey conducted in 2023 among professionals in services for individuals in prostitution, 72% supported the law, whereas 26% believed it would have a negative effect on their clients. Only 13% believed the law would reduce prostitution.

Individuals in prostitution have a wide range of needs, some of which serve as barriers for leaving prostitution, such as the need for a steady income and housing, emotional difficulties and difficulty in accessing benefits. The services for individuals in prostitution have expanded following Government Resolution 4462, mainly those provided by the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Health, but also by the Ministry of Justice, and unique interventions have been developed and adjusted to the needs of this population. At the same time, the number of service users has grown. Interdepartmental and interorganizational collaborations have also expanded. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of services, and some populations are inadequately served by those available. Among other things, additional services are required for men in prostitution, the services need to be deployed more widely across the country, and financial, housing, and employment supports need to be expanded,

particularly for transgender individuals. Finally, there are barriers to providing the available services, including administrative hurdles and a shortage of professionals specializing in unique populations.

### ***Prostitution Consumers***

The 2024 survey found that Jewish men aged 18-70 reported higher rates of consuming prostitution services compared to 2021. The increase was evident both in five-year rates (12.2% vs 9.2%) and in single-year measurements (9.0% vs 7.1%, comparing the year before the Israel-Hamas war to the year before COVID-19). We analyzed data from Google Trends to examine the trends in the demand for prostitution, continuously and in the longer term. It was found that following the passing of the law in the Knesset in late 2018, there was a decrease in the relative search volume for terms related to prostitution. It was also found that subsequent fluctuations in the extent of searches were related to changes in the number of fines issued by the police, and that from the middle of 2022 onwards, searches increased, consistent with the decrease in enforcement. Nevertheless, in general, the extent of searches from July 2022 until the end of data collection in April 2024 remained lower than the pre-legislation.

Prostitution consumption surveys indicate that the consumers belong to all social groups and are diverse in terms of education and geographical area. About 40% of consumers are “active”, i.e., have consumed prostitution more than once in the year before the survey. The most common site for prostitution consumption is “discreet apartments” (small brothels located in private apartments used by one or several people in prostitution). The most common reason is that it’s “the easiest way to have sex”. About one fourth replied that they were not interested in stopping. About a quarter of consumers reported that they had not heard about the law, and another 40% reported being aware of it but not influenced by it. Nevertheless, about 20% of consumers reported that following the enactment of the law, they stopped consuming prostitution or reduced their consumption.

Prostitution consumers who are fined may avoid paying the fine by attending the alternative program provided by the Adult Probation Service, which includes a psychoeducational workshop. In 2021-2023, only 109 individuals participated in the program, of which 79 (86%) completed it successfully. The program includes three group meetings and two individual sessions with a probation officer. According to a survey conducted among the participants, the workshop had some influence on their attitudes to prostitution, individuals in prostitution, and the consumption of prostitution. In addition, sex addicts, who are a subpopulation of prostitution consumers require a long-term therapeutic intervention currently provided in two centers funded by the Ministry of Health.

### ***Public Education and Opinion***

The law emphasizes the importance of public information campaigns in changing societal attitudes to prostitution.

Several ministries are active in this area: the Ministry of Justice has held digital campaigns to raise awareness of the law; the Ministry of Health holds workshops for youth and professionals on healthy sexuality and risks; the Ministry of Welfare provides the Turning Point project for youth at risk, focused on education for sexuality and preventing entrance into prostitution; the Ministry of Education has developed programs for students and staff on healthy sexuality and identifying risk situations. In addition, third-sector organizations are involved in related information and lobbying campaigns, workshops, educational programs, and training for professionals. In public opinion surveys conducted in 2021 and 2024, we found that 61% of respondents are aware of the law, with the rate of those familiar with the law being lowest among young adults and the Arab population. Most participants in this study suggested that current public information activities are insufficient and ineffective.

About 70% of the respondents in the public opinion surveys conducted in 2021 and 2024 supported the law – a significant increase compared to 2008 (26%) and 2016 (39%). <sup>2</sup>A comparison of the 2021 and 2024 surveys conducted in the period under study indicates no significant changes in attitudes towards the law or prostitution in general. Despite broad support for the law, the public is skeptical regarding its effectiveness. Thus, about 20% believe the law will reduce the number of prostitution consumers, whereas only 5% expect the law to reduce the scale of prostitution in Israel. Nevertheless, more than 80% viewed prostitution as offensive to human dignity and men's attitudes toward women. Gender gaps are evident in public attitudes: women tend to support the law more strongly, to view prostitution as offensive, and to believe that women in prostitution want to leave it and need help to do so. Interviews with both individuals in prostitution and professionals point to the importance of public education in changing attitudes.

## Main Recommendations

Social change is a gradual and long-term process. Legislation is not enough to reduce prostitution consumption, change behavioral norms and enable individuals to leave prostitution if they want to. Enforcement, public education, prevention and treatment are also essential. The following are some of the study's recommendations on these interrelated areas:

- **Enforcement:** We recommend expanding and intensifying enforcement, removing the existing barriers to enforcement, and adding training for police officers.
- **Consumers:** We recommend directing public education efforts at potential consumers, encouraging persons fined to participate in the alternative program, and intensify efforts to identify sex and prostitution addicts.

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<sup>2</sup> See the [National Survey](#) (Santo & Carmeli, 2016), and [Shilo et al. \(2020\)](#).

- **Services:** We recommend continuing to expand and adjust the services designed to help individuals leave prostitution, particularly in the areas of financial, employment and housing support; to include individuals in prostitution in planning interventions; to continue promoting interservice collaborations; to reach out to new service users; and to develop and retain experience-based professional knowledge.
- **Public education:** We recommend directing informational efforts at the entire Israeli public, as well as creating dedicated campaigns for specific audiences. We also recommend conducting additional studies to examine the long-term effects of the law.