

# **UTS Students' Research on Home Occupations**

UTS Student Project Under Supervision of Eva Cox Nov 2003

## ***Background***

The students who conducted the research were Social Inquiry students completing Research Methods One, a compulsory subject where each student is responsible for conducting a piece of quantitative research. Two groups volunteered to undertake this study which had two aims: one was to see whether local residents were aware of home based businesses in their areas and what they thought of them. The second was to see whether any respondents knew of sex workers in their area who were working from home.

The particular students conducted interviews in eight residential blocks – four in Woollahra and four in Marrickville. In each suburb, two of the blocks chosen held home based sex workers, the other had no known sex workers. I use known in terms of awareness of the sex workers by the Private Workers Alliance or SWOP. In fact the students and the UTS staff did not know which block was with, or without, the operating sex workers, and most sex workers in question did not know when the survey would be undertaken so results could not be contaminated.

The students interviewed a total of 174 respondents, with the breakdown of 80 interviews conducted in Woollahra and 94 interviews conducted in Marrickville.

The key objective of the research – as outlined by the Researchers – was to ascertain whether there was any awareness of sex workers in the area as well as whether their presence had any effect on the neighbourhood. The topic and areas were chosen because of the recent Marrickville council decision rescinding their motion to allow single sex workers without development consent, and the fact that Woollahra has no policy on the issue and both areas had known sex workers in them. Respondents were selected from residents in the blocks and were stratified on types of housing e.g. flats and houses, renters and owners and covered a range of family types to ensure that it was a cross section of residents.

The students did not specifically ask about sex workers as the project was not about attitudes to them per se, but the effects of sex workers and home businesses on areas, whether known or unknown.

Some of the questions asked by the interviewers were “what are the advantages of people running businesses from home?”, “are there types of businesses which should not be run from home?”, “when should businesses need to receive or seek council approval?”, and “what are your perceptions of crime in the neighbourhood?”.

## ***Key Findings***

There were three key findings of the student's research. These were:

1. There was limited awareness of home business generally, with some respondents citing the benefits of home businesses for neighbourhood safety and most respondents stating that they did not think home businesses always needed to seek or receive council approval;
2. There was no awareness of home businesses (sexual services) in either area; and
3. The presence of such workers appeared to have no impact on the resident's perception of crime

### ***Awareness of Home Businesses***

There are a few things to note about the research findings in relation to awareness of home businesses generally and home businesses (sexual services).

Firstly, in all the blocks in Woollahra and Marrickville, the respondents had quite a limited knowledge of home businesses operating in the area. While the majority of respondents who were owners of their property were able to identify home businesses in area, only a minority of renters were able to identify such businesses.

A consistent – and important factor to note – is that no respondent identified home based sex workers currently living and working in the area, not even in those areas where home based sex workers was known to operate. The most that can be said is that one respondent in Paddington was able to identify a previous home based sex worker who had since left the area, and another resident was able to identify a brothel that had closed down.

An interesting point arising out of the Marrickville research was that one in five respondents said that they liked the idea of neighbours working from home as it meant they could keep an eye on the street and/or their home.

The last thing to note about the awareness of home businesses is the responses to the question on when home based businesses should need to receive or seek council approval. The majority of respondents did not think that it was always necessary for home businesses to seek council approval, with most respondents suggesting that approval should be required where the home business caused general disturbance, noise or traffic problems.

### ***Perceptions of Crime***

In relation to perceptions of crime, the researchers in both Marrickville and Woollahra asked the respondents what their perception of crime was in their neighbourhood, giving them the options of “negligible, minor concern, reasonable concern, or serious concern” to choose from.

In Woollahra, the attitude to crime was proportionate in both areas with sex workers and without sex workers. In the former areas (with a known sex workers) the largest proportion of residents (35%) felt that crime was a minor concern. In areas without sex workers, the largest proportion of residents saw crime as a reasonable concern.

Similar results were found in Marrickville where the majority of respondents tended to describe crime as a minor (36.5%) or reasonable (26%) concern.

Only a very small number of people in both areas thought that crime was a serious concern.