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Mexico's prostitutes end up homeless as coronavirus keeps clients at home, shuts hotels

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3 MIN READ



MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Hungry, scared and tired, scores of sex workers in Mexico City have been forced to live on the streets as fear of contracting the coronavirus keeps clients away and the government shuttered the hotels where many of them lived and worked.

Now they sleep under makeshift tents and on sidewalks, relying on social workers and handouts for what little they have been able to eat, and on each other to fend off attackers and criminals.

“They literally put us out on the streets. We’ve been on the street for a week; before we lived in the hotels,” said Marina Rojano, who has been a sex worker for 24 years.

Another woman, Jazmin Carrillo, said she was jolted awake on the sidewalk earlier this week when two men tried to forcibly remove her pants.

“I defended myself as best I could, I screamed for the others to help,” said Carrillo.

The government estimates there are around 7,000 prostitutes in Mexico City.

In an effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus, which has infected 3,181 people and killed 174 in Mexico so far, city authorities deemed hotels non-essential and ordered them shut.

“We spoke to the hotels about not removing the sex workers living there ... but they shouldn’t be working because we’re in the middle of an international health crisis,” a spokesman for the Mexico City government said.

But hotels in the working-class Tabacalera neighborhood had signs saying “no service due to official orders,” and removed sex workers, forcing them to set up tarps and line the sidewalks, according to a Reuters witness and dozens of interviews with prostitutes.

The city government said it was setting up shelters for them and is handing out “COVID-19 emergency support” cards with 1,000 pesos - around \$42 - for food and medicine.

“Nobody can live off 1,000 pesos,” said Rojano.

Still, sex workers said any help was welcome and on Wednesday hundreds lined up for a card.

Some have decided to stop working, but for others, hunger and the need to support a family mean that is not an option even if they lack the means to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

“If they don’t even have enough money to eat, how are they going to pay for a face mask, antibacterial gel, gloves? They don’t even have money for coffee, or food,” said Kenya Cuevas, who runs Casa de las Muñecas, a shelter for transsexual sex workers.

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