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# Dutch sex workers risk trafficking and abuse as coronavirus bites

by Karolin Schaps | Thomson Reuters Foundation

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# Sex clubs shutting because of COVID-19 will push the industry underground, putting sex workers at higher risk of abuse

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By Karolin Schaps

AMSTERDAM, March 19 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Dutch sex workers risk being trafficked and mistreated by dangerous clients as the shutdown of Amsterdam's sex clubs, to prevent the spread of coronavirus, is likely to drive the trade underground, according to sex industry campaigners.

Lyle Muns, a sex worker in Amsterdam, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that he had stopped seeing clients but was able to survive, for now, on his savings and a loan.

Others were less secure, said Muns, who is also a board member at My Red Light, a brothel in Amsterdam run by sex workers who hire out windows where they pose to attract clients. It shut on Sunday in line with government orders.

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"Vulnerable sex workers will only become more vulnerable to human trafficking because of the coronavirus situation once their economic situation gets more desperate," said Muns.

Prostitutes around the world are likely to be hit by similar moves as the coronavirus epidemic brings tight restrictions on movement and economic hardship.

The Dutch government on Tuesday announced measures to support self-employed workers whose income has been impacted by coronavirus. The Netherlands had recorded almost 2,500 cases of the virus and 76 deaths on Thursday.

Although prostitution is legal in Amsterdam, many sex workers will not benefit from the scheme as they are illegal migrants, already living in precarious conditions, said Muns.

Mistress Sophie, another sex worker in the Netherlands, said she was now meeting clients online and creating customised videos for them.

"I have to eat into my savings," she said in emailed comments.

## UNEASY

As official Dutch brothels and erotic dance shows shut their doors, some sex workers were meeting clients off the radar, which poses health and safety risks, campaigners said.

Amsterdam has about 25,000 mainly female sex workers, although the number could be higher with many operating in secret, according to the United Nations.

PROUD, the Dutch union for sex workers, and five other activist groups, called on the government to set up an emergency fund for undocumented sex workers and self-employed people who are facing tough choices because they have no income.

"They might accept customers they feel uneasy about and whom they wouldn't normally agree to see, they may reduce their prices and agree to have sex without a condom," the campaigners said in a letter to the government on Wednesday.

"This jeopardises the safety and health of sex workers."

One sex worker has set up a crowdfunding page to raise money for colleagues who cannot afford food, medicine or mobile top ups.

"In a crisis like this, vulnerable people in all sectors, not just the sex industry, become even more vulnerable," said Charlot Spoorenberg, spokeswoman for CoMensha, the Dutch Coordination Centre against Human Trafficking.

"We expect that the sex trade could go underground but it's too early to say precisely what is happening." (Reporting by Karolin Schaps; Editing by Katy Migiro. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, which covers the lives of people around the world who struggle to live freely or fairly. Visit <http://news.trust.org>)

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