

Sex workers reveal their struggle to survive the coronavirus

By [Marisa Dellatto](#) and [Reuven Fenton](#)

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Selling sex isn't an **"essential service"** during the **coronavirus** lockdown.

Sure, Anna, a Brooklyn-based sex worker, is still seeing her regulars despite the social-distancing measures being implemented to fight the spread of COVID-19. But business is down "80 percent" as the global infection count surpasses 857,000 cases.

"Before the virus came, I was seeing one or two clients a day, making around \$200, \$300 a day," she tells The Post. Now, Anna is living on \$300 a week, and there "could be days where you sit around all day not knowing what to do with yourself."

The 35-year-old Russian immigrant, who declined to give her full name for privacy reasons, says she can't leave her line of work altogether. She has to support herself and her 17-year-old daughter. And unlike **employees laid off** from mainstream — i.e., legal and taxed — businesses, she's ineligible for **unemployment benefits**.

"What's the other way? I'm not going to go steal. I'm not going to go rob. I can't. [But] my daughter needs me. I need to provide. I need to give her some type of support," says Anna, who markets herself as a "curvy brunette" who specializes in

“massage” and “S&M” under pseudonyms on the raunchy websites Adult Search, City X Guide and Harlot Hub.

Sex workers like Anna across the country are faced with risking their lives — and endangering the public’s safety — to earn money with their bodies during quarantine.

Several local and national organizations, like [Sex Workers Outreach Project](#), have launched [online fundraisers](#) to help “providers” survive this uncertain time — but right now, the future seems bleak.

Anna is not taking on new clients, limiting herself to five or six familiar johns after the New York Department of Health [released graphic guidelines](#) for safe sex during the pandemic.

“I’m still taking a huge risk, but I’m being as careful as I can,” she says. “Showers before and after the session, rinsing my mouth with Listerine.”

In the age of COVID-19, a typical transaction starts with discussing how the client is feeling and if they’re experiencing any symptoms. Anna then segues into an exploratory massage, “feeling their skin to check if they’re feverish, if they’re perspiring,” she says. “I’m watching to see if they’re coughing, sneezing. I’m looking to see if their eyes are red.”

When they get down to hardcore business, she doesn’t allow clients to kiss her, something that used to be on the menu.

“I’m constantly sanitizing my hands, and I also sanitize his — you know. I’m rubbing alcohol over everything,” Anna says of trying to adhere to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s](#) safety standards. However, she doesn’t wear a face mask or gloves, because “that’s weird ... it would scare the person away. A man wouldn’t pay \$100 to have me massage him with a pair of gloves.”

Last week, in search of mainstream employment, Anna planned to attend a job fair in Flushing, but it was canceled due to the virus. Right now, “I’m just trying to survive,” she says.

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Reduced rates for remote work

It takes more than a global pandemic to put the world’s oldest profession out of business. Frenchie, a high-end escort headquartered in San Francisco, is calculating more affordable rates to survive economic instability in the [most expensive rental market](#) in the US.

“I’m trying to find different packages of clients who want to support me during this hard time,” she tells The Post. “But everybody is going through a hard time.”

She made the decision to stop servicing clients in the flesh when California enacted strict restrictions against in-person contact. Now, she’s trying to make the jump to “camgirl” sex sessions — but it’s not easy money.

“I don’t even know where to start. I’m trying to find a price range,” the 29-year-old says. “I do really love my in-person work. I like connecting with people. And virtual is something I’m not used to.”

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Frenchie admits she’s nervous about losing her virtual virginity. “It’s so weird. I’m lucky [they’re] paying me \$200 for a phone call tonight. My rate is \$800 an hour in person,” she says. “I’m going to need to make a lot of phone calls to pay my rent.”

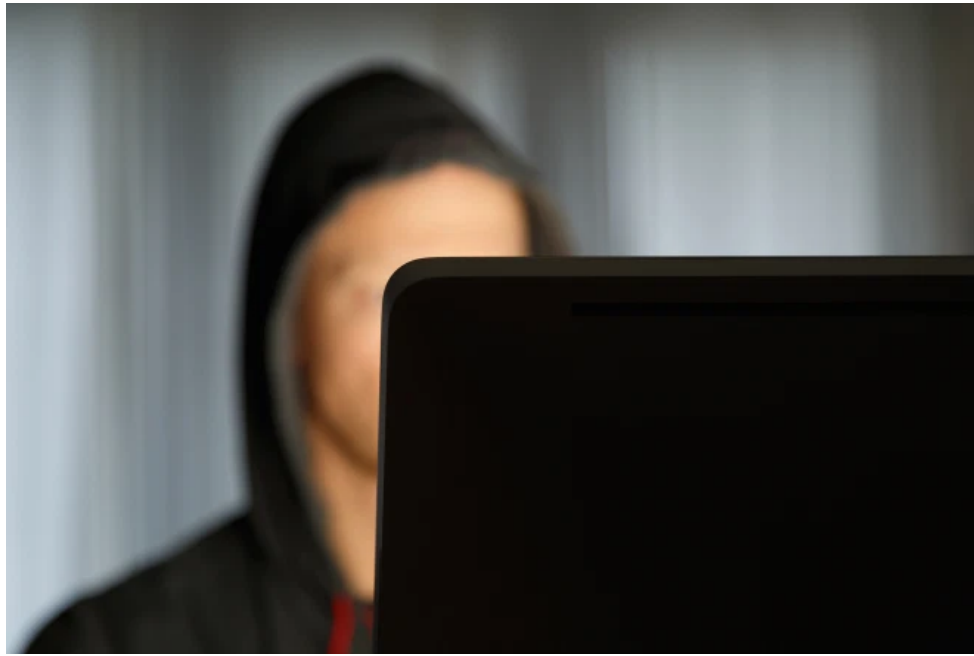
In addition to video calls, Frenchie has decided to launch an account on OnlyFans, a popular website where subscribers can pay to see her NSFW videos. But by doing so, she’s risking her privacy and her safety.

“What I love about this job is I create my clientele. I can decide who I see. I work for myself. I screen them. I like seeing the same people,” she says. “But with cams, your face is out there.” A friend of Frenchie’s had one of her OnlyFans videos ripped and posted on Pornhub where anyone can view it, without her consent. Because of that, Frenchie has decided not to show her face in any of her content.

“It’s really affecting me and my business,” she says. “Because I don’t show my face, I can’t charge as much.”

Online work “is not gonna generate that much income. Now I’m going to have to go through my savings that I worked so hard for. I have to pay my rent,” she says. It’s difficult to budget for a crisis with no end in sight. “Not knowing when exactly this is going to be over is creating more stress,” Frenchie says.

Some clients have reached out to Frenchie and asked to meet up, quarantine be damned. But she’s not risking it. “I’ve been tempted, but I don’t want to get anybody sick,” she says.



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Making do is scary but empowering

Nyx, an escort based in western New York, is also making the switch to online pay-for-play because of the coronavirus threat.

“I’m only as safe as the practices of my [sexual] partner,” the 28-year-old, who is transgender, tells The Post of his decision. “Even if you only see [the client] a few times a year, you don’t know how frequently they travel. A lot of my clients do travel from New York City, Miami, LA, San Francisco, all the major areas of the outbreak. It was just too much risk. I had to close that chapter — at least for the time being.”

Before the worldwide death count exceeded 42,000, Nyx, who declined to share his last name, had about 10 hands-on clients he serviced on occasion. It wasn’t steady income, but it supplemented the struggling artist’s wages from the restaurant industry, and later ride-sharing, which he also had to stop doing because of the COVID-19 exposure risk.

“That was very hard. Sex work and artwork are really the only two incomes I’m going to have ... until things change,” he says.

Although he was hesitant to perform online, Nyx is glad COVID-19 forced him to make the change. “I’m enjoying it more. I feel a lot safer, more comfortable and more empowered,” he says. “I’ve become more relaxed and really am enjoying the persona I’m portraying.” Once the world returns to normal, he plans to keep his work on the web and claims he’s done meeting clients in person.

Nyx is using Twitter to promote his accounts on sexy sites like OnlyFans, ManyVids and JustFor.Fans. He’s blocked anyone he knows from his vanilla life from seeing his posts — but “eventually, someday, someone will come across my profile and know who I am,” he says.

In addition to privacy concerns, he’s dealing with burnout. “Interacting online with possibly thousands of people who you will never meet and not taking that to bed every night” is a struggle, he says.

Despite taking a financial hit, Nyx is fighting to see the silver lining.

Unlike in-person work, which was very lonesome, he’s made friends online with others in the sex work community and is planning content collaborations with them once travel is allowed again.

“This is the first time I’ve had to use my life experience to help others in the community, not just sex workers but trans folks who don’t have resources to talk to someone about transitioning,” he says.

“As scary as it is to go into the unknown and not know what kind of income we’re going to be making, or where things are going to go the next four to six months, I feel very positive about what I do now,” Nyx adds.

“You do what you can with what you have.”

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