



Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter Data on Prostitution

November 2020

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter's services are available to any woman who has experienced any form of male violence including wife battering, incest, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and prostitution.

We provide support to women who have been assaulted by johns, pimps or men pressuring them into prostitution. We assist women who are currently being prostituted, women who are trying to escape prostitution, and women who are no longer in prostitution but still struggle with its long-lasting emotional and physical impacts.

The following data is based on our work with 100 women who called our crisis line in the last two years and told us that they were at the time, or in the past, in prostitution.

Of the women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief (VRR) 24% were 15 or younger when they entered prostitution. Furthermore, 43% of the women who called VRR were "underage" (younger than 18) when they entered prostitution. Most often, the girls resorted to prostitution because of on-going sexual assault by their father (in some cases the father also pimped the girl) or grooming by an adult "boyfriend," who often gave them drugs to make sure they stayed dependent on him. Most girls in these situations were "runaways" from abusive homes and/or raised in foster care.

Indigenous women are only 3% of women in Metro Vancouver, yet they make up 27% of the women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief. Black women are only 1.2% of women in Metro Vancouver, yet they make up 14% of the women in prostitution who called VRR. This data reflects the intersection between racism and sexism in prostitution. While all women are vulnerable to male violence, the rate of victimization for racialized women is even greater. This pattern is also reflected in the data of our work with battered women, as 72% of the

women who stay in our transition house are women of colour or Indigenous women.

In 10% of the cases, the mother of the woman who was in prostitution was the one who first reached out to us. In another 10% of the cases, a female friend of the woman in prostitution asked for our support in taking her friend to seek medical care after being injured by a john or for attempting to end her life. In other cases, a female friend asked us to help get her friend back home. In a few cases, a woman who was a stranger to the woman in prostitution saw her on the street injured, undressed and/or distressed and connected her to us.

Of the women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief, 65% disclosed their addiction to alcohol or drugs. Some women told us that they were first dependent on drugs (most often as a coping response to past sexual violence) and turned to prostitution as a means to pay for the drugs. Other women told us that they started using drugs or alcohol frequently as a way to cope with the experience of being in prostitution. Some said that they can't engage in the act of prostitution without being high.

A full 48% of women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief disclosed being controlled/coerced by a pimp. Often the pimp was their male partner and sometimes, the father of their children. We've observed that pimps often sustain their power over women with physical violence and/or by facilitating and maintaining women's addiction.

The primary request of 45% of the women in prostitution who called VRR was a safe shelter. This reflects the need for safety from a pimp or a john, lack of means to rent a place and the need for support from other women. Support in exiting prostitution is a common primary request as well (27% of calls). Emotional support and money are often secondary requests of women in prostitution.

Women who are no longer in prostitution often suffer from post-traumatic symptoms, regardless of how long it has been since they exited. They call Vancouver Rape Relief for peer counselling and support groups.

Often women who are no longer in prostitution are still vulnerable to male violence. They call Vancouver Rape Relief seeking safety from a current abusive

male partner or from johns who still threaten and harass them. We offer these women safe shelter, and accompaniment and advocacy with the police.

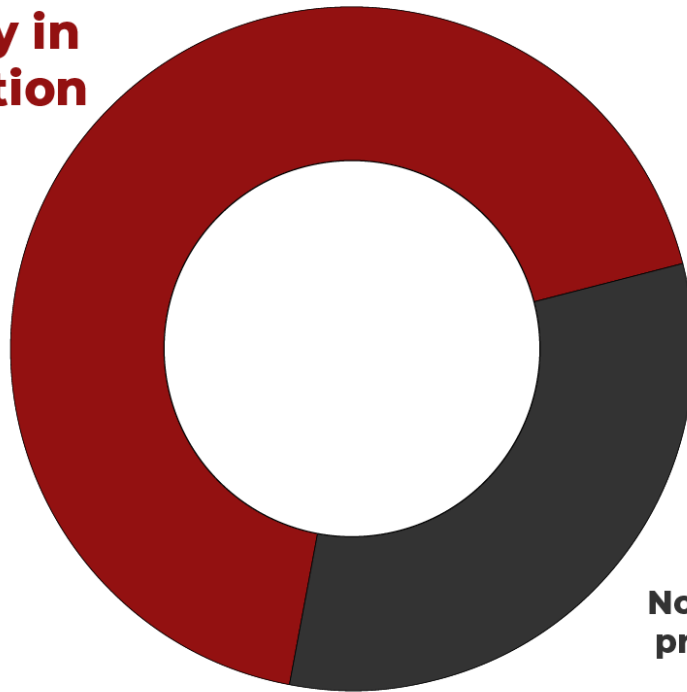
Many women who are no longer in prostitution are struggling with poverty. We help them with money for food, clothes, transportation, and bills. When they need things like furniture or toys for their children, we put a call out and these needs are quickly met by our community.

In recent years, we've noted an increase of calls from women who have paid jobs but chose prostitution as an "easy way to make money." These women told us that this illusion was shattered very fast (sometimes after their first encounter with a john) and they were quick to leave prostitution. We also received some calls from young women who entered prostitution by engaging with "sugar daddies" and later on with escort agencies, ending with street prostitution. We have only anecdotal testimonies and not comprehensive data on this.

The invisible data—the johns. The women who are in, or were in prostitution, often tell us about particular johns: men who were so violent that they had to go to the hospital after the interaction, men that when the women said "no," raped them, men who refused to pay after the sexual act, men who wanted to re-enact violent pornographic scenes or rape and incest "fantasies," men who left them unconscious in a hotel room or on a bench in the park, and men who kept harassing them after they left prostitution with endless calls and threats and posting videos online taken without permission and against their will. But these stories do not quantify the real data, we know that almost every woman in prostitution encounters dozens, hundreds, and sometimes thousands of men depending on the situation and the number of years that she had to endure prostitution. We do not know the actual numbers of men who buy sex. All we know is that there are many and if it wasn't for the many men who buy sex, there wouldn't be prostitution.

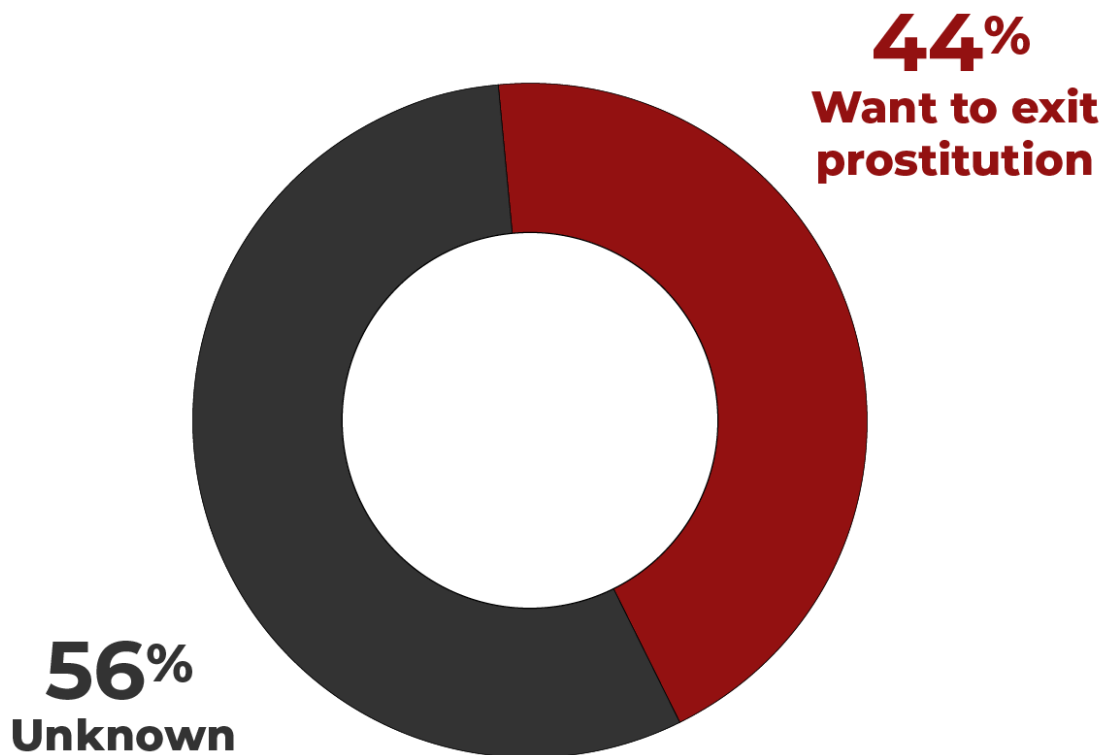
Women who are/were in prostitution who call Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter

68%
Currently in
prostitution



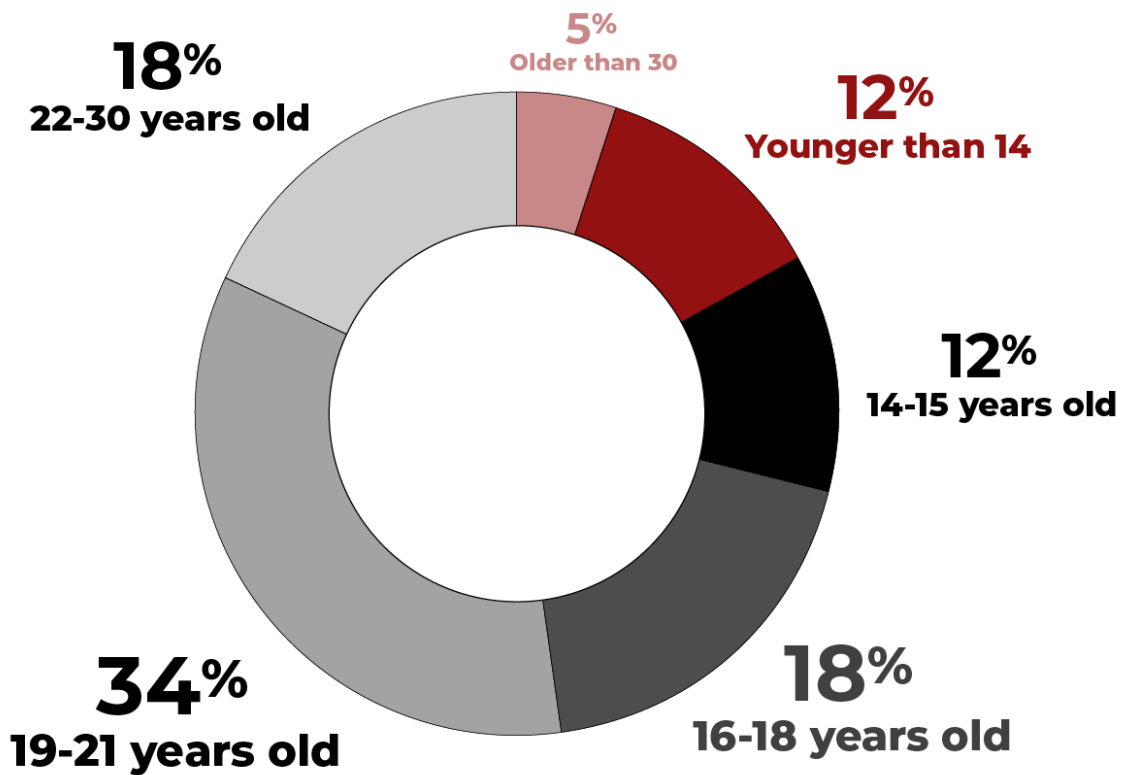
32%
No longer in
prostitution

Women who are currently in prostitution who call Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter wanting to exit prostitution



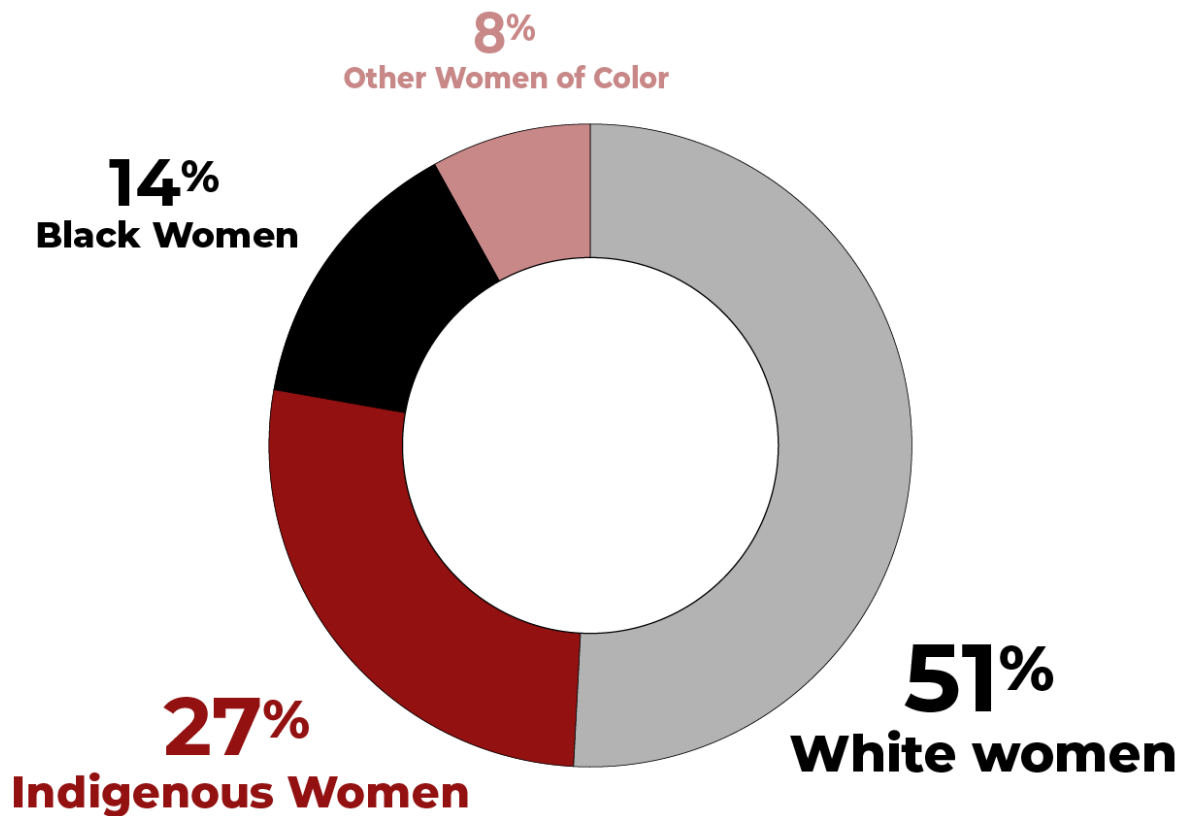
Of the women in prostitution who called VRR, nearly half are trying to exit prostitution.

Age of entry into prostitution of women who call Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter



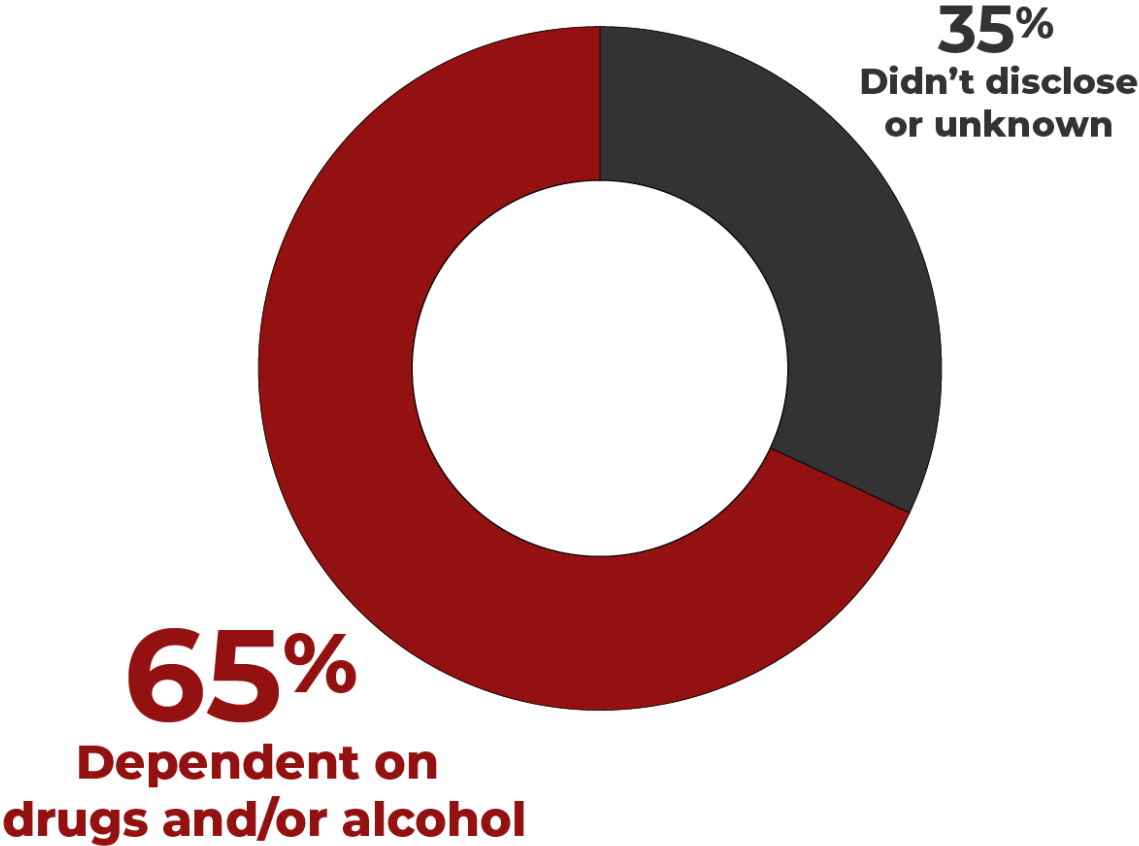
Of the women in prostitution who called VRR: 24% were 15 or younger when they entered prostitution and 43% were “underage” (younger than 18).

Race of women in prostitution who call Vancouver Rape Relief



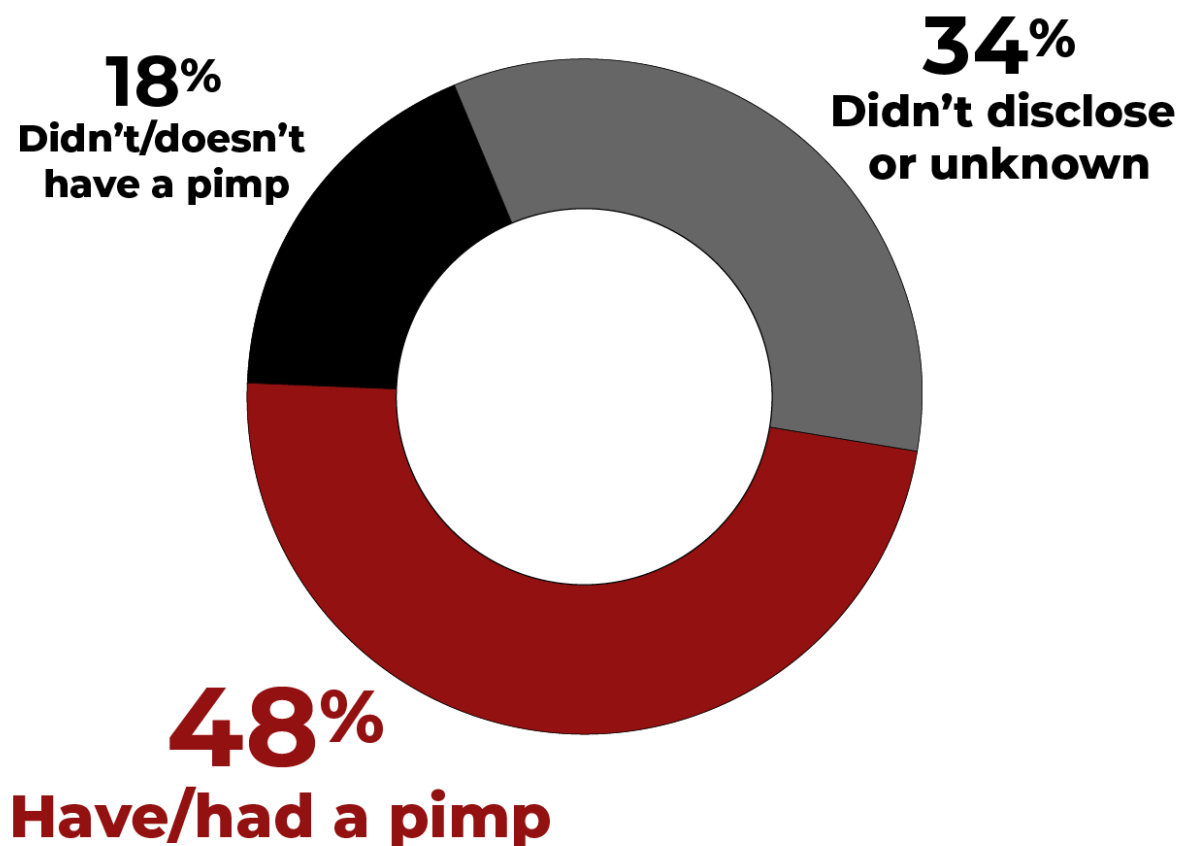
While Indigenous women are only 3% of women in Metro Vancouver, they make up 27% of the women in prostitution who called VRR. While Black women are only 1.2% of women in Metro Vancouver, they make up 14% of the women in prostitution who called VRR.

Dependency on alcohol and/or drugs while in prostitution among women who call Vancouver Rape Relief



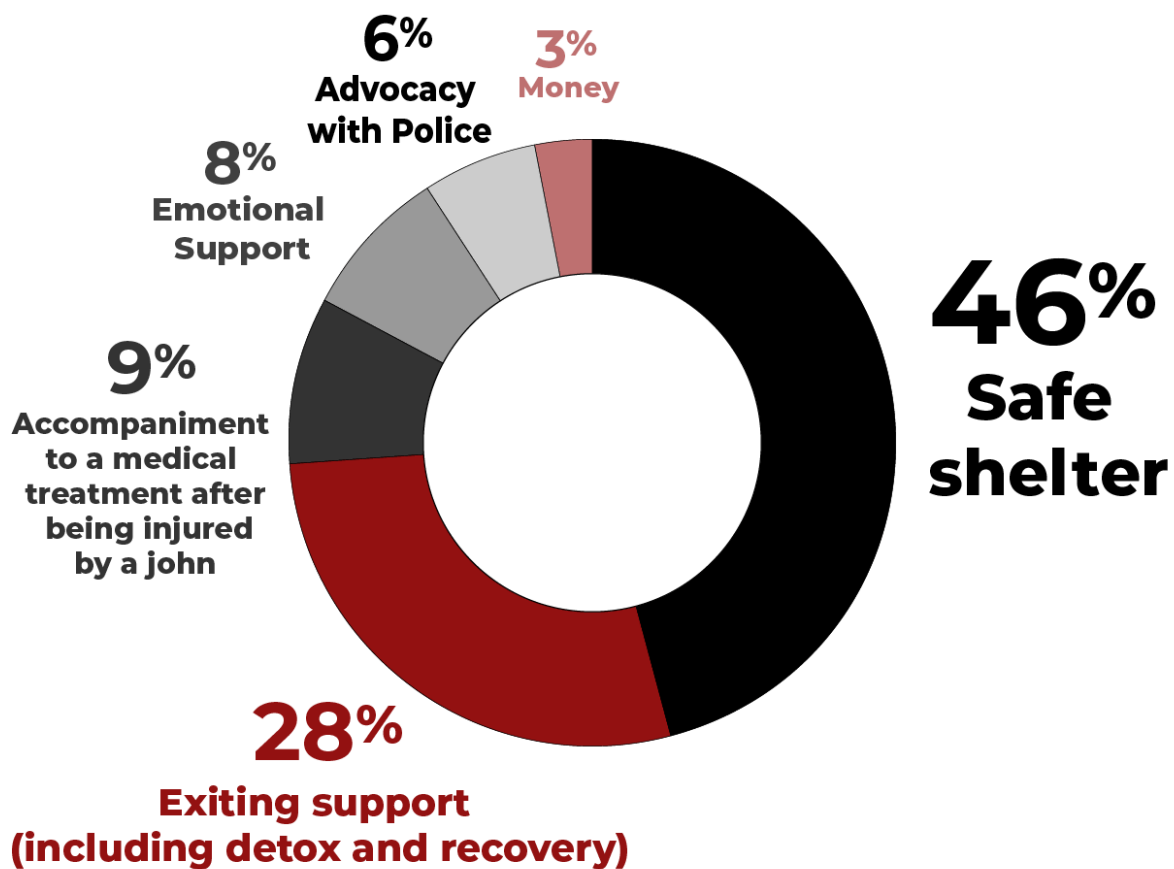
65% of women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief disclosed being dependent on alcohol and/or drugs.

Controlled / coerced by a pimp while in prostitution among women who call Vancouver Rape Relief



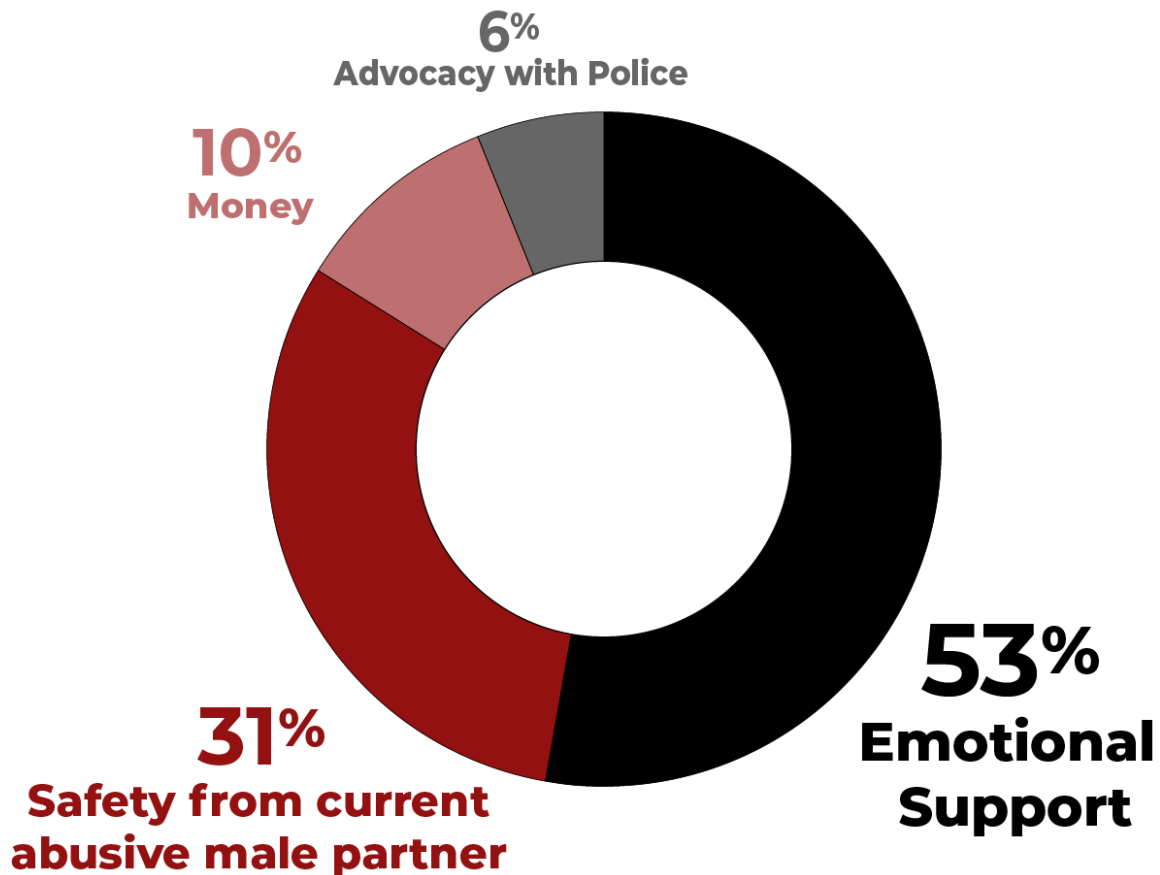
48% of women in prostitution who called Vancouver Rape Relief disclosed being controlled/coerced by a pimp.

Primary request from women in prostitution who call Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter



The primary request of most women in prostitution who called VRR was for a safe shelter. This reflects the need for safety from a pimp or a john, lack of means to rent a place and the need of a support from other women. Exiting support and accompaniment to medical treatment after being injured by a pimp or a john are a common primary request as well. Emotional support and money were additional requests of the women in prostitution who called VRR.

Primary request from women who exited prostitution who call Vancouver Rape Relief



Many women who are no longer in prostitution have post-traumatic symptoms regardless of how long it has been since they exited. They called Vancouver Rape Relief (VRR) for peer counselling and support groups. Often, women who are no longer in prostitution are still vulnerable to male violence. They called VRR seeking safety from a current abusive male partner or from johns and pimps who still threaten and harass them.