

[Wow. An article about holding sex buyers accountable, yet the vast majority of the arrests are still of the women. And note, the reason the police give for not arresting more sex buyers is ----- it's too dangerous --- for the police. If it isn't safe for the police to be out there interacting with sex buyers, imagine what it must be like for the women. Thirty years ago, police said they didn't like to respond to domestic violence calls because they were too dangerous. - Donna]

## **More 'Johns' being arrested in Worcester as police crack down on sex demand**

Written by Walter Bird Jr. · 12/24/2014 · 5:00 am

<http://worcestermag.com/2014/12/24/johns-arrested-worcester-police-crack-sex-demand/30011>

The recent arrest of about eight men trying to score time with sex workers brought to 14 the number of so-called "Johns" in Worcester as of Dec. 17, according to the Police Department. It represented more than the total number of men arrested in the first eight months of the year, and marks a change in the way police are approaching a problem that has plagued the city for years. It is being praised by those who work most closely with sex workers as a sign that the focus is shifting from simply arresting the women selling sex for a fee.

"The Worcester Police Department is committed to directing resources to address the visible presence of illegal sex for a fee activity that negatively impacts the quality of life in our neighborhoods," Police Chief Gary Gemme said in a statement. "[The most recent] sting operation is an example of our ongoing efforts to reduce both the supply and demand side of the illegal sex for a fee transactions taking place on city streets."

Gemme said the department recognizes that arresting Johns "has the greater potential to shrink or destroy the market for this illegal activity. Community efforts in identifying and providing social services for women victimized by prostitution are a critical part of any long-term strategy." Including the sting, police had arrested 146 women as of Dec. 17 on charges of sexual conduct for a fee.

The sting appeared to have at least a short-term effect among the population of men looking to buy sex from women. One website that features forums from around the country devoted to sex-related activity included a forum titled "Streetwalker Reports" in Worcester. One post on the forum under the screen name "Smoke Screen" indicated the sting had caused the person to reconsider picking up a sex worker in the Main South area.

"... This afternoon as I was driving down South Main, a real pretty girl gave me the look and when I ignored her she stepped off the sidewalk, still looking at me, put her arms out with her palms up, as if to say WTF you don't want this," the post read. "I haven't picked up a SW in over 20 years, been tempted, but this girl was hot. Looked

in her 20's, long dirty blonde hair, very neat. I kept going but a few minutes later I thought about going back, big head took over. She just looked really TGTBT. If I hadn't read about the Worcester sting, I probably would have tried to get her. I couldn't help but to think, they are out there now looking for the ones that they missed in the sting."

Those kinds of websites are disturbing, said Athena Haddon, director of Spectrum Health System's Everyday Miracles Peer Recover Community Center, 25 Pleasant St. The Center works with men and women recovering from addiction, and deals with a number of women either actively engaged in sex work or trying to escape.

"There's like this underground group of men [looking for sex workers in Worcester]," she said. While such websites are alarming, Haddon said she is heartened by the crackdown on Johns. She has long been critical of what she believes was a one-side approach by police in arresting sex workers in much larger numbers than the men trying to buy sex.

"I'm excited," she said. "I think all the right people are getting involved in this ... I think people are finally paying attention and they get it."

Haddon cited the city's Division of Public Health, the city manager's office, the Human Rights Commission and the City Manager's Committee on the Status of Women as playing a role in shifting the focus from the sex worker to the men seeking their services.

"This is a bigger problem and I'm just excited that they see it and I hope they continue to do it," Haddon said of arresting more Johns.

For Haddon and other advocates for the women they refer to as survivors, a crackdown on men buying sex is one more step toward addressing the root cause of prostitution. Earlier this year, advocates scored a minor victory of sorts when Gemme agreed to no longer publish the addresses of sex workers arrested by police in press releases posted on the Department's Facebook page.

The 160 total prostitution-related arrests in Worcester as of Dec. 17 was 22 below the 182 arrests made last year, according to statistics provided earlier this year to Worcester Magazine by Clark University assistant professor Marianne Sarkis. The 14 Johns taken into custody was more than four times greater than the three arrested last year, according to those statistics.

Gemme's stated commitment to addressing both the supply and demand side of prostitution comes more than two months after he spoke of the danger of using female police officers to catch Johns in the act of soliciting sex for a fee.

"Obviously," Gemme told Worcester Magazine in October, "we would like to arrest more males for soliciting sex for a fee, but not at the expense of officer safety. Under the current criminal statutes governing this type of illegal behavior, we would have to expose our undercover officers to unacceptable risks. We also have no intention of allowing uninhibited prostitution to take place in our neighborhoods and around schools and bus stops for the sake of improving our male/female arrest ratios."

For people like Haddon, a focus on Johns marks a welcome change from past practices. "I'm really glad," she said. "It seems like everything is falling into place. I cannot stress enough how important it's been that survivors voices are being heard."

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