

Forum: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNW)

Issue #1: Measures to protect female sex workers from physical harm and social stigmatization.

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Introduction

Sex work, the form of employment within the sex industry providing services like prostitution and pornography in exchange for compensation, this field employs an estimated 42 million individuals globally. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a noticeable surge in sex work activity. Notably, in platforms like OnlyFans, there was a significant growth from 7.5 million users in November 2019

to 85 million by December 2022, with projections pointing towards an increase to 170 million users and 1.5 million creators by 2023. The primary motivation for many sex workers entering this field pertains to limited alternative opportunities, while others laud the flexibility it offers, with a significant portion driven by economic hardships. Unfortunately, sex workers encounter under-reported incidents of violence on a global scale. The profession often faces unwarranted stigmatization, largely rooted in societal perceptions of immorality and impurity surrounding sex work. This negative connotation significantly impacts the individual rights and collective rights of sex workers, leading to discrimination from healthcare providers and law enforcement agencies. The collective rights of sex workers regularly clash with individual rights, sex work frequently creates barriers of discrimination that put at risk these rights. For example, safety, healthcare, freedom of speech, etc. Studies suggest a likelihood of 45% to 75% of sex workers experiencing sexual violence whilst providing services worldwide. Specific reports, such as the investigation of prostitution done in the Chicago Metropolitan Area (Center for Impact Research (CIR)), indicate that 20% of sex workers have reported sexual harassment incidents involving law enforcement personnel. In the majority of Europe, sex work is legal, and their laws ensure the protection of sex work nationally. For example, Germany, decriminalized sex work in 2002 and provided health check-ups and social security to sex workers, similar to Greece and Belgium. In conclusion, sex work remains a significant and complex discussion of the global workforce, employing millions of individuals worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown resilience in the industry, and emphasized the need for better understanding and support toward sex workers. In spite of the increase in the profession, sex workers continue to face societal stigmatization and discrimination. Some countries have undeniably taken the steps necessary towards decriminalization and protecting sex workers' rights, there is still much work to ensure the safety, dignity, and social rights of all individuals involved in the profession of sex work.

Definition of Key Terms

Sex workers: Group of people who exchange consensual sexual-related services for monetary or material compensation. Different types of sex workers include; prostitutes, strippers, porn stars, lap dancers, etc

Social Stigmatization: Discrimination of a person or a group of people based on deviations from societal norms

Double standards: The unequal treatment or expectations applied to someone due to gender.

Healthcare: The services and support provided to maintain good health. This includes doctor appointments, medicine, and different treatments/procedures.

Sexually transmitted disease: Diseases transmitted through sexual contact (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) These diseases include HIV, chlamydia, syphilis, etc.

Homicide: The deliberate act of killing another person (manslaughter, intentional murder, justifiable homicide)

Harassment: Persistent and unwanted behavior that causes physical or emotional distress. (Verbal, physical, and sexual)

Morality: Standards dictating what is considered right and wrong behavior

Coitus: Refers to sexual intercourse involving penetration

General Overview

Female sex workers face threats to their physical safety as well as constant social stigmatization solely because of their line of work. The discrimination against female sex workers stems from the illegality surrounding their line of work as well as misconceptions about morality fueled by double standards. Sex work is considered to be one of the oldest professions having been around since ancient times. Sex work has changed and evolved through the years due to factors such as technology which has allowed for more accessibility to services. On average, the age of entry to this profession is 14 years old, which in turn highlights the vulnerability to exploitation these young girls face. According to a study conducted by the National Library of Medicine, female sex workers who join the industry before the age of 18 are at a higher risk of developing HIV, food insecurity, and even homelessness.

Access To Healthcare

According to Article 25 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." As stated by the UN Healthcare is considered a right, sex workers face difficulties when trying to seek healthcare due to stigmas they face such as derogatory and dehumanizing language as well as being denied healthcare. One out of four sex workers is denied healthcare due to discrimination fueled by a moral judgment of their occupation. This inaccessibility puts sex workers at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as mental health issues. Another barrier that makes it difficult for sex workers to access healthcare is discrimination experienced by healthcare providers, which often leads sex workers to avoid healthcare settings. According to an article published by UNFPA, "more than 60% of sex workers fear and distrust health care workers". The

consequence of sex workers not having open access to healthcare is that they often resort to substance abuse since they do not have a healthier alternative to cope with all the stigmatization they constantly have to deal with. Sex workers are more prone to substance abuse 3.2% of sex workers reported using cocaine in the last 6 months which is alarmingly higher than the general population, which comes to show that sex workers are more prominent to substance abuse which is considered to be correlated to mental health issues. Sex workers who turn to drugs are also found to be more vulnerable and according to an article published by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), “drug use reinforces their dependency on sex work, trapping them in a ‘work-score-use’ cycle, adding to their health and social problems.” Sex workers are more likely to turn to drugs, and once they do they are trapped in an endless cycle which makes them even more vulnerable due to their work which doesn't allow them access to healthcare.

Consequences of Technology

With technology becoming part of our daily lives and quickly changing multiple aspects of the world, it makes sense that sex work has also experienced some changes caused by technology, which has brought positive and negative consequences. Some positive impacts are increased safety through the use of apps that help sex workers screen their clients beforehand, and also increase their anonymity by allowing them to interact with clients remotely. Sex workers who participate in online platforms such as OnlyFans have more autonomy since it eliminates the need for pimps, who used to dictate what clients the sex worker could take and the way that they should be compensated. The platform of OnlyFans peaked in popularity during the pandemic. According to The Guardian, “Use of OnlyFans exploded during the pandemic, going from 7.5 million users last November to 85 million now.” This peak allowed sex workers to make income during times of isolation. Technology also helps sex workers

communicate with their clients, which allows for more discreet and efficient arrangements to be made without the police or others finding out. However, digital platforms also make way for new forms of harassment to take place, such as stalking and invasion of online privacy. The Netherlands has an issue with stalking, having 12.6% of sex workers reporting stalking and harassment in 2010.

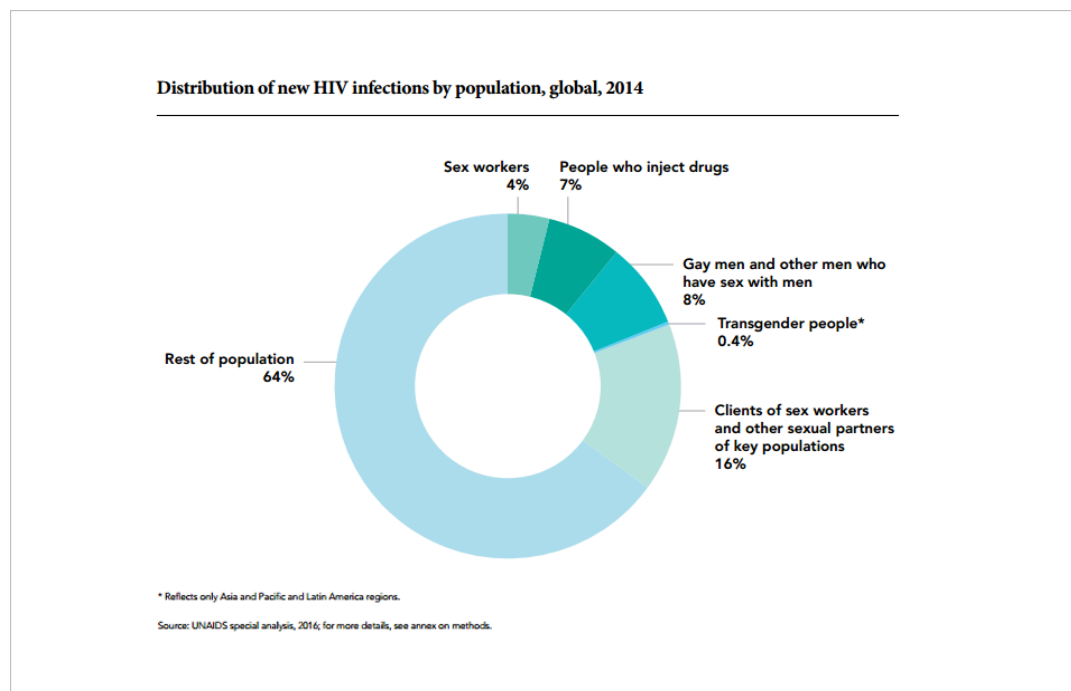
Harassment Faced by Sex Workers

Sex workers face vast forms of harassment such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, stalking, and sexual violence. According to the American Journal of In epidemiology, female sex workers are 12 times more likely to get murdered compared to women in the general population. These forms of harassment happen online and offline. Reportedly, 82% of sex workers have been physically assaulted, however many of the persecutors have not faced arrest due to the stigmas against sex workers. Online harassment is a growing concern for sex workers since clients can easily access online platforms to harass and threaten sex workers. People feel entitled to be able to harass sex workers due to the low image society holds of them, leading to vast amounts of hate speech against these workers online and in public spaces.

Lack of trust in Law Enforcement

There is a lack of trust between sex workers and law enforcement, which leads to crimes against sex workers being underreported. The criminalization of sex workers impedes them from being able to resort to law enforcement out of fear of penalization and lack of police protection offered to them. Sex workers also face violence at the hands of law enforcement, which contributes to the feeling of powerlessness and mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, faced by sex workers. According to a study conducted, 17% of sex workers reported rape and sexual assault at the hands of police officers. A major factor that contributes to police sexual violence against sex workers is the

misconceptions about sex work, which include thinking that these workers are always sexually available and not having a clear line drawn between what is considered their work and what is considered non-consensual/sexual harassment/rape. Another factor is the criminalization of their work, which makes them more vulnerable to law enforcement to exploit their position of power due to their recognition of their devalued social status.



Major Parties Involved and Their Views

New Zealand

New Zealand became one of the first countries to fully decriminalize sex work under the New Zealand Prostitution Reform Act 2003. Allowing any person above the age of 18 to sell/buy sexual services. A review by the Christchurch School of Medicine found that 90% of sex workers believed that the Prostitution Law Review provided them with legal and safety rights. 57% stated that police attitude towards sex workers improved as well as 64% found it easier to refuse clients. New Zealand sex workers have found it easier to advocate for their rights

since the decreased stigma, this has helped sex workers get the right to justice from discrimination and harassment. For example, under the Human Rights Review Tribunal, a sex worker was able to prosecute a brothel owner for sexual harassment and receive compensation in 2014. New Zealand's sex work is a direct opposition to the 'Swedish Model' in prostitution Policy, which criminalizes any purchase of sexual services, whilst believing that sex workers can be safe only by ending demand. Many sex workers believe that the 'Swedish Model' puts at risk their human rights and lives.

Germany

Germany legalized sex work in 2002 and The Prostitution Act was created in Germany in 2002 to improve the legality and safety of sex workers. Health consultations for sex workers are mandatory as they help maintain the physical and mental health of the workers. Sex Workers get access to health consultations, and regular check-ins when registered. Regarding legal certification, they have both a registration certificate and a health consultation certificate. Brothels and clubs offer social security to sex workers when workers have both certificates (social security consists of healthcare, nursing/elderly care, unemployment, and pension benefits) to make it as close to a normal profession as possible. All are under the Prostitution Protection Act of 2002 but have been severely improved by 2017. Prostitution Zoning laws are laws to determine which places are available to do work in, communities and cities away from sex work as it is illegal and/or intolerant towards sex work.

Colombia

Although Sex Work is not illegal in Colombia and the Constitution recognizes it as decent work, the Constitution of 1991 does not specify police behavior, so they act according to their prejudice. Groups like PARCES advocate for safety and anti-discrimination towards sex workers and other groups. Pimping, Brothels, and Street is prohibited and can range from prison time and penalties. There are

Mandatory health checks and registration to ensure sex worker's well-being. As “legal” as it may seem, there is still corruption and mistreatment within the police involvement.

Japan

Japan's history with sex work and trafficking traces back to the late 1800s when trafficked women often worked in brothels. According to the International Labor Office in Japan, issues like trafficking are typically highly reported. Brothels were essential to the economic expansion of Japan before World War I. After World War II, sex became essential for growth and development, which consequently increased rates of sex trafficking in Japan. There are an estimated 100,000 women who are sex trafficked to Japan (2003) mainly from Latin America. Prostitution in itself is banned in Japan under the Anti-Prostitution Law, enacted in 1956, but adult entertainment services use loopholes in the law to get away with sex work, as the law isn't specific enough with restrictions and penalties. Sex work is considered legal as long as it doesn't relate to the definition of prostitution, which translates to intercourse. 32.9 thousand sex work operations have been running in Japan in 2022, Adult entertainment industries take advantage of loopholes to work around the ban on sex work. Mainly providing services that aren't legally defined as coitus.

Timeline of Events UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date Description of Event

Date	Description of Event
1864	British Contagious Diseases Act, was initiated by the United Kingdom to prevent the spread of diseases. Allowed the arrest of female prostitutes to be checked for STIs.

1983	SWOP was established as the Australia Prostitute Collective but in 1990 changed to the Sex Workers Outreach Project, the first sex worker organization funded by the government. This organization supports sex workers regarding STIs. Providing education, health services, etc.
1992	Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) was started in 1990 by Sex Work activists who networked sex worker rights projects around the world and formally launched in 1992.
1999	Criminalization of the purchase of prostitution. Buyers are the ones who are punished rather than the service provider. Adapted in Sweden and known as the Nordic Model
2003	Prostitution Reform Act 2003, decriminalization of prostitution in New Zealand
2006	Can Do is a project that was founded in 2006 to promote the rights of Thai female Sex Workers. Expanding and protecting Sex Workers' rights in Thailand
2014	Butterfly – Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network was created in 2014. To advocate and inform people of the violence and challenges sex workers face in Canada.
2015	Amnesty International adopted a policy calling for the protection from harm and coercion of sex workers. To end They're discrimination and provide their full access to education, employment, etc.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) 2006

An organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of sex workers, they are a sex-worker-led network in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. They work with different allies to create societies in which sex workers are free from discrimination and violence and where sex work can be decriminalized and protected. They have created other separate guidelines and networks that have been implemented by other nations. For example, Sex Workers Network Consortium – Global Fund capacity building program: Making the Global Fund work for sex workers, mainly a community support group to engage other support workers with the progress SWAN is making. Implemented by Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Ukraine. Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT) roll-out and capacity building implemented by Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, North Macedonia, Russia, Armenia, and Serbia.

The African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA) 2021

ASWA launched a Sex Worker Murder monitoring tool. This tool helps locate and monitor the deaths and violence committed toward sex workers in Africa. ASWA states that the violence towards sex workers is not documented enough, and the data isn't sufficient or verified. This would be updated 2–3 times a year, this research would help raise awareness of the violence towards sex workers.

UN involvement

The UN has numerous organizations that have been advocating for the rights and safety of female sex workers, such as the UNDP, CEDAW, and UNFPA. The CEDAW committee has stated that the criminalization of sex work was a form of gender-based violence and has called upon states to decriminalize sex work, and its views are aligned with those of the human rights-based approach to sex

work. A document created by WHO alongside UNFPA, UNAIDS, and NSWP in 2012 recognizes how marginalized and criminalized the work environment for sex workers. They provide recommendations and effective interventions to prevent HIV and STIs, as well as treatment for sex workers. The recommendations consist of the decriminalization of sex work and the discarding of unjust criminal laws and regulations against sex workers. As well as prioritizing their access to health services, to make sure their right to health care isn't denied due to stigmatization and discrimination.

Possible Solutions

Decriminalization of sex work

The criminalization of sex work is one of the factors that makes sex workers vulnerable to physical harm and social stigmatization. By decriminalizing sex work, their vulnerability will decrease since it would help in the way society views sex work and would remove the fear of arrests that stops them from reporting crimes to police and seeking healthcare. The decriminalization of sex work implies legalizing all aspects of sex work by ending the prohibition of consensual sexual acts in exchange for monetary compensation between two adults.

Ensuring accessible healthcare

An important aspect of being able to ensure accessible access to healthcare for sex workers would be to guarantee a non-discriminatory environment, meaning that sex workers will not be judged by their profession and given the same treatment as any other person would receive. Ensuring accessible access to healthcare will help sex workers gain access to sexual and reproductive health services as well as psychological support.

Recognizing sex work as work

Recognizing sex work as real work is a significant aspect of helping reduce stigmatization against sex workers. A factor that highly contributes to sex work not being viewed as real work is the criminalization of it, by decriminalizing sex

work opens up more possibilities for sex work to be recognized as real work and removes the stigmas surrounding this line of work.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The topic of Measures to protect female sex workers from physical harm and social stigmatization connects **SDG 8**. *Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all*. The issue of protecting female sex workers from physical harm and social stigmatization falls under SDG 8. The harmful reputation of sex work holds sex workers back to full productive employment and performance. The ability to be successful in the workforce is a right everyone deserves, regardless of how controversial the job is or not. If workers, in this case, sex workers, are truly benefiting from their work ethically and safely, then every worker would be improving in every other aspect of their life. Protecting all workers through their work safety and environments paves the way to improving their overall human rights.

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Appendix

- I. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/2024-march-sex-work-guide-un-report-short.pdf>

A. Report from OHCHR that addresses the prevention and treatment

for HIV and other STIs female sex workers face. It also emphasizes the importance of decriminalizing sex work to help ensure access to healthcare.

- II. https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/june/20170602_sexwork
 - A. This article by UNAIDS highlights the challenges regarding human rights that sex workers face on a global level. This article also addresses the lack of accessible healthcare due to discrimination and criminalization of sex work.
- III. <https://umichujph.wixsite.com/website/post/barriers-to-healthcare-sex-work-and-stigma>
 - A. This website provides information about healthcare barriers that are faced by sex workers. The stigma that surrounds their line of work makes it harder for them to access quality healthcare due to fear of being discriminated against and fear of criminalization.
- IV. <https://www.iusw.org/sex-worker-statistics/>
 - A. This article has multiple statistics on sex workers globally. These statistics include the predominance of younger girls in sex work as well as the significant scale of the global sex industry.
- V. <https://bmcpublikealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13440-1>
 - A. This article by BMC emphasizes the vulnerability of young female sex workers to violence. It is based on a study conducted in Southwest Nigeria regarding violence among young female sex workers.
- VI. https://escholarship.org/content/qt2vd0d2h2/qt2vd0d2h2_noSplash_a0b42e709d6e141a6b3941c3ba8514f0.pdf?t=n194li
 - A. This PDF provides information about the stigmas surrounding sex workers. It discusses their self-perception and psychological strategies that female sex workers use to cope with their

discrimination.

- VII. <https://www.nswp.org/sex-work-laws-map>
 - A. The link provides a map that color codes sex work laws in different countries. Last updated December 2021.
- VIII. <https://www.opendemocracy.net>
 - A. This article goes in-depth about the decriminalization of sex work in New Zealand and the reasoning behind its impact on their society.
- IX. <https://www.aidshilfe.de/medien/en/md/>
 - A. These websites provide context on sex worker legislation in Germany
- X. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/escort-wins-landmark-case/WQIMHX4UIGDMF2Z74PVZRUN6GQ/>
 - A. This article provides narratives about sex workers being able to be comfortable in addressing their discrimination and struggles
- XI. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/decriminalising-sex-work-in-new-zealand-its-history-and-impact/>
 - A. Goes in-depth about the history and impact that the decriminalization of prostitution had on sex workers.