

Advocacy Tools and Resources Used by Sex Worker-Led Organisations to Combat Violence



The Smart Sex Worker's Guide



nswp Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights



Global Network of Sex Work Projects

Promoting Health and Human Rights

NSWP exists to uphold the voice of sex workers globally and connect regional networks advocating for the rights of female, male and transgender sex workers. It advocates for rights-based health and social services, freedom from abuse and discrimination and self-determination for sex workers.

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Introduction

This ‘Smart Sex Worker’s Guide’ provides an overview of the advocacy tools and interventions used by sex worker-led organisations globally to combat violence against sex workers. It builds on the guidance provided in ‘Addressing Violence Against Sex Workers’, chapter 2 of *Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers*, known as the *Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT)*¹. It may assist with programme design ideas, tools and approaches to addressing violence.

Sex work is not inherently violent, but globally, sex workers face extremely high levels of violence. Sex workers are susceptible to violence in a range of contexts, including from police and other state authorities, in their workplaces, homes and relationships, from the general public, and from non-state, organised groups.

Stigma, discrimination, the criminalisation of sex work and police corruption all contribute to violence against sex workers. Sex workers are disproportionately affected by violence, particularly when they are members of other marginalised groups such as gay men and other men who have sex with men, lesbians, migrant workers, transgender people, or when they are economically vulnerable.



Peers Victoria Society member in Canada on Red Umbrella Day

1 WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, NSWP, World Bank & UNDP, 2013, “Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers”, available at http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/en/ (last accessed 1 November 2017).

What is Violence Against Sex Workers?

Sex Workers experience many forms of violence. The SWIT breaks down three main forms of violence experienced by sex workers globally²:

- **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**
E.g.: Being beaten, robbed, threatened, injured or killed.
- **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**
E.g.: Being physically forced or coerced to perform sexual acts; rape; gang rape.
- **EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE**
E.g.: Being extorted, threatened, humiliated, detained, confined or isolated, deprived of human rights or access to services.

Sex workers experience violence from police, authorities, health and social services, as well as state and non-state organisations. Criminalisation of sex work can provide cover for collective abuse of power, which has a detrimental effect on the reporting of violence.

Sex workers also experience interpersonal violence from clients, family, intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers, and from management and colleagues. Finally, criminalisation and social and internalised stigma can promote self-directed violence.

This violence occurs in many contexts: in workplaces, at health and social service agencies, in detention centres, public spaces, and at home.

² Ibid, 23.

Core Values and Principles for Addressing Violence Against Sex Workers

Different programmes, tools and approaches are effective in different contexts. A set of core values and principles are outlined in the SWIT to guide effective interventions.³ They are summarised below.

Core Values

- Promote the full protection of sex workers' human rights.
- Reject interventions based on the notion of rescue and rehabilitation.
- Promote gender equality.
- Respect the rights of sex workers to make informed choices about their lives.

Programme Principles

- Gather information about local patterns of violence against sex workers
- Use participatory methods and involve sex workers in decision-making to identify problems, decide priorities and find solutions to their problems.
- Use an integrated approach in designing interventions – establishing partnerships with a wide range of groups and institutions.
- Build capacity of programme staff to respond sensitively and to understand and address links between violence and HIV.
- Recognise that programmes may have unintended harmful impacts; prepare for and monitor those impacts.
- Evaluate programmes to identify strategies that reduce risk factors and levels of violence faced by sex workers, including measurable objectives that articulate results to reduce violence against sex workers.

These core values and principles are illustrated in the examples throughout this Guide.

³ Ibid, 25-26.

Advocacy Tools and Resources to Combat Violence

This section illustrates common strategies sex worker-led organisations are using to combat violence.

These strategies are divided into three sections:

- **Supporting and Empowering Sex Workers Against Violence:** Examines strategies – including safe spaces, outreach, helplines, counselling, and bad date lists which support sex workers who have experienced violence – as well as trainings, tools and resources to educate sex workers on how to reduce the risk of violence, and assert their human rights.
- **Educating and Holding Perpetrators of Violence Accountable:** Examines activities directed at changing the behaviour of diverse perpetrators of violence – including police, the media, clients and the general public – and holding perpetrators of violence accountable.
- **Documenting Violence for Policy Change:** Looks at ways sex workers are documenting violence and using data in national and international advocacy for policy change.

STRATEGY I:

Supporting and Empowering Sex Workers Against Violence

Safe Spaces

Sex worker safe spaces and sex worker communities create a foundation for addressing violence through sex worker empowerment, capacity building, information and skill sharing. They provide psychological support to overcome stigma arising from violent and discriminatory structures. Safe spaces also serve as a hub where legal, health and other services can be accessed.

Aye Myanmar Association (AMA) addresses violence against sex workers in Myanmar, and it operates safe space locations in four cities, where they offer regular group and individual legal counselling, and meetings with lawyers.



In South Africa, SWEAT/Sisonke organises group sessions called “Creative Spaces,” which run for three hours and are held in an office, tavern, or brothel, as locally appropriate. Creative Spaces provide opportunities for sex workers to share ideas, exchange contact information and set up local WhatsApp groups to communicate. They are also an opportunity for staff and volunteers to collect information on local concerns to feed into the national monitoring programme.

In Greece, Red Umbrella Athens emphasises the need for such places to be calm, safe and discreet, with trained staff to provide psychological first aid for sex workers who have experienced violence.

In New Zealand, sex worker friendly spaces are called community bases, and provide free ‘new worker packs’ that include the sex worker manual, *Stepping Forward* which has tips on working safely, resolving disputes, working with management and dealing with sexual and physical assault.

Safe spaces can simply be a space in somebody’s home. A sex worker from Sisonke Botswana who underwent legal training through the Aidsfonds Hands Off! programme hosts a weekly meeting for local sex workers. She shares rights and health information, and teaches financial skills that help sex workers save money so they are more likely to be in a financial position to refuse potentially dangerous clients.



© SWOP-CHICAGO

Outreach Programmes

Outreach programmes ensure that information and services reach sex workers in their workplaces, whether that is on the street, in bars, brothels, lodges or elsewhere, during the day or at night. Outreach may also be online, through social media and other electronic networks.

In South Africa, SWEAT/Sisonke regularly conduct outreach that is tailored to the sex work patterns in each area. Helpline information, rights information cards and booklets are distributed to sex workers with invitations to attend Creative Spaces.

In Singapore, Project X conducts a ‘StreetSmart Initiative’⁴ where they partner with Law Society’s Pro Bono Services Office to offer mobile legal clinics for street sex workers near their workplaces.

4 Project X, “Increasing Access to Justice for Sex Workers: 2015 Report”, 20 June, 2016, <http://theprojectx.org/2016/06/20/increasing-access-justice-sex-workers-2015-report/>.

Helplines

Helplines are a popular way to connect sex workers with other anti-violence services, including police advocates, legal services, counselling and medical and other support services.

Advantages of helplines:

- Low-cost to run and manage.
- Accessible remotely – without a computer or internet – to sex workers who can't read or write.
- Provide a centralised location for data collection.

Tips and suggestions when setting up helpline:

- Create a clear timetable for assistance (24/7 support is ideal, as crises can occur at any time).
- Set appropriate expectations with callers.
- Ensure helpline staff and volunteers receive training and support.
- Develop a referral network with trusted lawyers and service providers.
- Carefully explain the legal process and commitments (financial, time, emotional) associated with reporting violence to allow sex workers to make informed choices.

Common challenges:

- Developing a trusted reputation takes time, as does circulating helpline information.
- Ensuring referrals are to sex worker-sensitive organisations.
- Receiving calls about other matters (such as HIV and STIs) and from clients seeking sex workers.
- Losing contact details for follow up when sex workers change phone numbers or move.
- Sex workers may be unwilling to pursue legal action, or not show up for court proceedings.

For over a decade, SWEAT/Sisonke in South Africa has run a national 24/7 toll-free hotline to support sex workers. They receive over 200 calls a week, mainly from sex workers, but sometimes from brothels that have been raided, or clients or members of the public. The helpline number is widely advertised on condoms, lube, stickers around working hotspots, and by outreach teams. Callers can report police violence, request a stand-by state lawyer or access sex worker-sensitive referrals for services.

Faith Hope Love in Ukraine has been running a hotline in Odessa since 2002. The hotline is open from 10.00am to 6.00pm. After hours calls are received by social workers on mobile phones. In 2015, Legalife-Ukraine also started a 24 hour hotline in the Kirovograd region, providing legal assistance within 30 minutes, utilising lawyers in different parts of the city ready for rapid response.

In India, sex workers with Ashodaya Samithi developed an informal call system for addressing unsafe clients. If a client appears to be taking them to an unsafe place, the sex worker discreetly dials a pre-programmed number on their phone, while speaking with the suspicious client – “Why are you taking me to ‘x’ address instead of where we agreed?” Or, “Why are there three of you here instead of one?” The silent listener on the phone hears where the sex worker is and what help is needed to avert violence.

Social worker, Lyudmila, provides counselling from a mobile outpatient clinic in Ukraine.



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© AJO-CAMEROON

Psychological support team in Cameroon

Counselling

Services for sex workers who have experienced violence must address mental health, in addition to legal and medical support. Some support may be provided informally through peer networks and in safe spaces, but more formal services may be needed. It is important to ensure that services are sensitive to sex worker needs; conducting training and following up regularly is essential, as staffing and attitudes may change over time.

Red Umbrella, Athens provides psychological first aid. Their goal is to reduce stress induced by trauma, and to help sex workers make decisions about their next steps. They note the importance of regular training, supervision, and taking steps to avoid burnout, while also making sure services are consistently available.

In 2017, Avenir Jeune de l'Ouest (AJO), Cameroon partnered with two external organisations to provide professional psychological care to sex workers who have experienced violence, conducting evaluations to determine satisfaction with the programme.

The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC) distributes print resources about supporting sex workers who have suffered sexual assault, reinforcing sex workers' right to be safe at work and to access broader support services.

Resources

- [New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, "Sexual Assault Sex Worker Support Information"](#).

Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadoras Sexuales LIQUIDAMBAR in El Salvador conducts wellbeing training days with sex workers



© ASOCIACIÓN DE MUJERES TRABAJADORAS SEXUALES LIQUIDAMBAR

Warning Lists

Warning lists, also known as 'ugly mug' or 'bad date' lists, 'aggressor sheets' and 'abuser alerts', provide an opportunity for sex workers who have experienced violence to share information with other sex workers, even where they don't want to be identified by police or pursue charges. Warning lists are shared regionally and locally in various ways and help sex workers identify serial offenders. Key information that is captured usually includes:

- **When:** date/time of incident.
- **Where:** location and circumstances of incident.
- **What:** description of incident.
- **Who:** contact information, description and any identifying characteristics of offender and/or car description and registration number if applicable.

Different strategies are adopted to ensure that the information shared is timely, reliable, and does not endanger the reporter or other sex workers. These include:

- Word of mouth dissemination between sex workers.
- Collection and dissemination of information by outreach teams, through a website, downloadable phone application, or member-only Facebook or WhatsApp groups.
- Use of caller ID phone applications such as TrueCaller that allow call recipients to tag problem callers and warn others using the application.
- Printed reports posted in sex worker safe spaces.
- National or local reporting that is collected and shared with members via email or SMS.

Peers Victoria Resources Society in Canada distributes printed reports in their safe spaces and via their outreach vans. With permission, they share reports with police liaison officers, allowing the reporter to remain anonymous.

In the U.S.A., there are numerous local and national bad date lists. St. James Infirmery, based in San Francisco, has developed a phone application⁵ for online reporting and access to information in 18 languages.

5 “SF Bay Bad Date List”, St James Infirmery last accessed 8 November 2017 at <http://sfbaddate.com/>.

6 “Abuser Alert”, Project X last accessed 8 November 2017 at <http://theprojectx.org/abuser-alert-2017/>.

In South Africa, sex workers informally use the popular chat application, WhatsApp, to warn each other of dangerous situations. WhatsApp groups are also used to network, and to assist each other with childcare and other needs. Outreach teams from SWEAT/Sisonke collect information about local alerts to add to their central reporting system.

In Singapore, Project X’s Abuser Alert⁶ programme notifies a contact list about offenders. Abusers can be reported by phone, email, or anonymously online.

In New Zealand, sex workers can use Protex, a free messaging service, to share and receive texts about dangerous clients. Sharing safety information is encouraged in sex worker-friendly community bases, via ‘GOSSIP’ posters.

‘GOSSIP’ Posters displayed in sex worker spaces in New Zealand



Arming Sex Workers with Information

Many sex worker organisations provide context-sensitive information, such as negotiating with difficult clients, avoiding dangerous situations and strategies to minimise harm after sexual violence (such as post-exposure prophylaxis and morning-after pills) and emergency information. Information is shared in safe spaces, during outreach, and through online chat forums and resources.

Resources

- SCOT-PEP, “[Sex Workers Toolkit](#)”.
- SWOP-USA, “[Safety & Self-Care Resources](#)”.
- St James Infirmary, 2010, “[Occupational Health and Safety Handbook](#)”.

RIGHTS TRAINING

Providing training for sex workers on human rights is an important part of addressing violence against sex workers. Educating sex workers about their rights can also be helpful when they face violence from authorities.

In 2014, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) obtained funding from the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund to host a human rights training with 22 sex workers from eight European countries. This practical training included: identifying human rights violations, collecting evidence, strategies to overcome barriers, partnering with other sex workers, stakeholders and networks. In addition to individual participants taking new skills back to their countries, the workshop resulted in a community report on structural violence in Europe⁷.

In 2010, the Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP), Kenya, trained 18 peer educators as paralegals to share rights information with sex workers, and to be a first point of contact for sex workers who need legal help⁸.

Asociación Goover, Ecuador, conducts rights and empowerment workshops with male sex workers, and assesses the impacts of those workshops through surveys and post-workshop involvement with the organisation. Also in Ecuador, Coalición de Trabajadorxs Sexuales de Quito (CTSQ) involves male, transgender and female sex workers in labour activism; they started their training workshop on 17 December.

7 International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe, 2015, “Community Report: Structural Violence: Social and institutional oppression experienced by sex workers in Europe” available at <http://www.sexworkeurope.org/resources/community-guide-structural-violence-2015> (last accessed 8 November 2017).

8 Open Society Foundations, 2016, “No Turning Back: Examining Sex Worker-Led Programs that Protect Health and Rights” available at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/no-turning-back> (last accessed 8 November 2017).

POLICE CARDS AND BOOKLETS

Rights information cards help prevent police violence by reminding authorities of their responsibilities and demonstrating that the individual is supported by a sex worker organisation.

Foundation for Trans Women Living with HIV, Uganda, distributes such cards to sex workers during outreach. Sex workers use these cards when they are approached or arrested by police. The cards inform police that the holder is aware of their legal rights and references relevant legislation. Challenges with this strategy include translation of the rights information card from English to Luganda (as some police officers cannot read English), ongoing printing costs, including costs of durable materials so cards are not ruined in the rainy season.

SWEAT, Sisonke and Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa, partner to produce rights information cards and a pocket-sized human rights booklet that are distributed on outreach. They include sections on arrest and detention, constitutional human rights, and the laws often used against sex workers. SWEAT found it was important to educate sex workers on a respectful way to use the card or invoke their rights, as a confrontational approach sometimes resulted in a backlash from police.

Resources

- Midnight Blue, “[Legal Procedures and Your Rights](#)”.
- Stella, “[Guides and Info Sheets](#)”.

Other Grassroots Safety Strategies

SWOP Behind Bars, U.S.A., works with sex workers who are imprisoned. They report that their number one method to combat violence is, and always will be, “community”. They create community with sex workers in person, through social media and in the mail. They match sex workers in prison with pen pals and create Amazon Wish Lists so volunteers can send books to inmates. They report that people who receive more mail in prison are less likely to experience physical violence from other inmates or staff.

In Mysore, India, sex workers build relationships with staff at safe lodges. Staff watch out for sex workers and knock on the door after a designated period to ensure sex workers are safe, and to hurry the customer out.

In Busia, Kenya, sex workers mobilised security guards, bar owners and bicycle taxi drivers to provide security and other support to sex workers.

Sex workers in Mysore, India protest against violence



STRATEGY II:

Educating and Holding Perpetrators of Violence Accountable

Combatting Intersectional Violence and Building Partnerships

In addition to violence directed at sex workers, many sex workers face discrimination and further violence as a consequence of sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism or other forms of bigotry. Intersectional issues can compound violence against sex workers.

Effective responses can be formed in partnership with other violence-affected groups, other sex worker organisations, health and crisis response services, legal and rights-based organisations, trade unions and workers movements, academic, political, and funding organisations.

Ashodaya Samithi, India built public credibility and social status by participating in local issues such as water rights campaigns – developing networks and connections that help keep them safe, and upon which they can call for support to address violence against sex workers.

Legalife-Ukraine brainstormed with the LGBT community and people who use drugs on the main challenges for each community. They determined nine common objectives and priorities for joint advocacy and created the National Communities Platform as an alternative, independent structure to exchange information, identify actual needs of key populations, and influence the decision-making of local authorities and international donors.

Gays and Lesbians Living In a Transgender Society, U.S.A. has partnered to support transgender sex workers in Africa and Latin America with asylum applications and relocation. In Australia, sex worker rights organisations have been involved with LGBTIQ movements for four decades, participating in the first Mardi Gras in 1978, and building solidarity to address common issues of violence.



Educating the Public

EVENTS

Public events such as rallies, remembrances and protests raise awareness of sex workers' rights, and bring public awareness to issues of violence. December 17 is International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers⁹, and sex worker-led organisations mark the date in different ways. Information about global events are aggregated and shared on the [December 17 Website](http://www.december17.org/about/). Some sex worker-led organisations also draw attention to violence against sex workers on dates such as Transgender Day of Remembrance, International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, Slutwalk and Reclaim the Night, and at other human rights events.

9 "About December 17th" International day to End Violence Against Sex Workers last accessed 18 December 2017 at <http://www.december17.org/about/>.

Candlelight protest of violence against sex workers in Mysore, India

Benefits of rallies such as those held on December 17th:

- Raise public awareness about sex work, sex worker rights and issues of violence.
- Break down myths about sex workers and reclaim language.
- Build sex worker solidarity and connect isolated sex workers to sex worker-led organisations.
- Form alliances with individuals and other organisations.
- Create media awareness.

Sex workers in Kenya march on International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

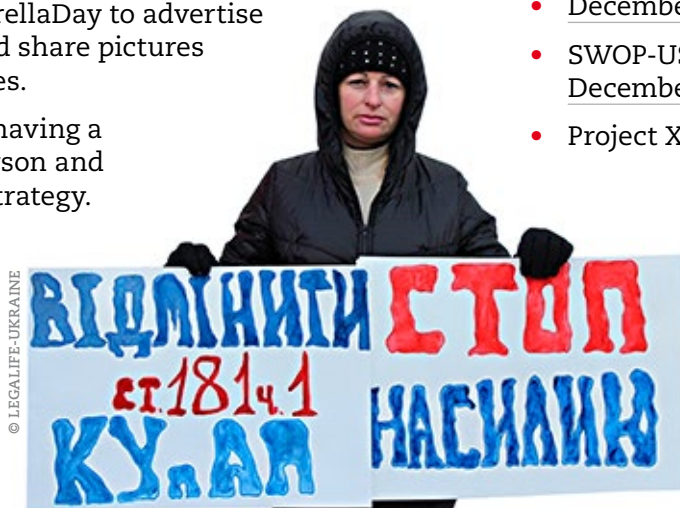


Possible challenges:

- Sex workers may not feel safe or comfortable being identified as sex workers in public spaces.
- Alliances need to be monitored and nurtured to ensure consistent values.
- For some sex workers, certain events and dates may be re-traumatizing.

Tips:

- Encourage costumes and masks to provide cover for those who don't want to be identified, and to increase media and public interest.
- Increase attendance and avoid outing by encouraging attendance by non-sex worker allies.
- Use social media and popular hashtags, such as #IDEVASW and #RedUmbrellaDay to advertise events and share pictures of activities.
- Consider having a spokesperson and a media strategy.



© CAMILLE McOAT



Sex worker rally by STRASS, France

Resources

- [December 17th Website](#).
- SWOP-USA, 2015, “[Toolkit for Organising December 17 Events](#)”.
- Project X, 2015, “[Champions of the Year](#)”.

Legalife-Ukraine protester on 17 December, 2016



TRAINING AND SENSITISATION

In addition to public rallies and demonstrations, some sex worker organisations work to sensitise the public by training key people, such as faith leaders, church communities and policy makers on violence against sex workers.

In South Africa, public trainings and training with faith leaders and church communities are taking place to address men's use of violence against women and girls. Sex worker organisations and allies have worked to ensure issues of violence faced by sex workers are addressed in these trainings.

In El Salvador, Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadoras Sexuales LIQUIDAMBAR, participates in advocacy at the local government level in the Citizens' Assembly of Governance and on a committee for violence prevention, but with caution, because they face challenges of gang violence and organised crime.

Asociación Goover identifies sex workers who are not afraid of being seen, and who are willing to share their personal experiences to sensitise about issues of violence. Coalición de Trabajadorxs Sexuales de Quito (CTSQ) builds on that work through visibility-raising actions such as "Fighting for the street", labour rights campaigns and social inclusion.

Asociación Goover raising visibility of male sex workers in Ecuador

Educating the Media

One of the challenges of addressing violence against sex workers is media sensationalism that conflates sex work and violence and dehumanises sex workers. Different approaches taken by sex worker organisations include educating the media, and creating their own media, such as videos, documentaries, storytelling pieces and music to communicate about violence. Many sex worker-led organisations use Facebook, Twitter and other social media to draw attention to violence.

In Southern Africa, numerous short videos were created in partnership with sex workers addressing the need for decriminalisation to address stigma and violence experienced by sex workers. Asociación Goover created a documentary about male sex workers in Ecuador – Cacherótico.

Legalife-Ukraine protesters on International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, 2016



Sex workers march in Pride Parade in Athens, Greece

South African sex workers partnered with Sonke Gender Justice to publish a guide for journalists and writers that includes correct definitions, key statistics and explains issues of violence. Legalife-Ukraine trains journalists and is also planning to produce a regional manual for journalists on “How to write about sex work”.

Resources

- Sonke Gender Justice, 2014, “Sex workers and sex work in South Africa: Guide for journalists and writers”.

Educating and Holding the Police Accountable

Police are among the main perpetrators of violence against sex workers globally. Violence at the hands of police and authorities also deters sex workers from reporting violence. To address police violence, sex worker-led organisations conduct police sensitisation and training, reporting and advocacy, utilise police liaison officers, and monitor for police accountability.

In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, sex workers faced high levels of violence from a hostile police force. Police conducted repeated raids, harassed and charged sex workers with petty crimes, extorted, detained, humiliated and raped sex workers. Tais Plus and Shah-Ayim collaborated with individual police officers, created allies and opened dialogues. They worked with the Ministry of Interior and developed a training course for police to create institutional accountability. Although raids continue, the collaboration is developing, with pathways for sex workers to report police misconduct, and sex worker friendly officer acknowledgement¹⁰.

In Ukraine, sex workers experienced widespread fines, harassment, extortion and abuse from police. Under Ukrainian law, police are accountable to the public, and Legalife-Ukraine formally obtained permission to observe and monitor police relations with sex workers. They trained sex workers to document their interactions with police, using mobile phones to record their experiences. Legalife-Ukraine serves as a member of a national watchdog organisation monitoring human rights in relation to law enforcement. Monitoring and sex workers' empowerment have reduced the number of police violations¹¹.

In Uganda, Alliance of Women Advocating for Change (AWAC) reports that local sex worker-led organisations working directly with police are most effective at sensitising police and reducing violence. In Togo, Association des Femmes Amazones (AFAZ) also holds regular meetings with police¹². AMA Myanmar reports that meetings with police and government have reduced police violence, and provide an inexpensive way to improve relations between sex workers and police.

In Papua New Guinea, Friends Frangipani also conducted police training and sensitisation about sex workers and the rights of transgender people, but since 2016 have faced funding challenges.

Resources

- SWEAT/Sisonke, 2014, "Police Sensitisation Training Manual".
- ICRSE, 2015, "Training Manual on Sex Work, HIV and Human Rights".

10 Open Society Foundation, "No Turning Back: Examining Sex Worker-Led Programs that Protect Health and Rights", 38.

11 Ibid, 14.

12 "Tele Mensah talks about overcoming brutality to build vibrant movement in Togo," ASWA Alliance last accessed 8 November 2017 at <http://aswaalliance.org/tele-mensah-talks-about-overcoming-brutality-to-build-a-vibrant-sex-workers-movement-in-togo/>.

Educating Clients

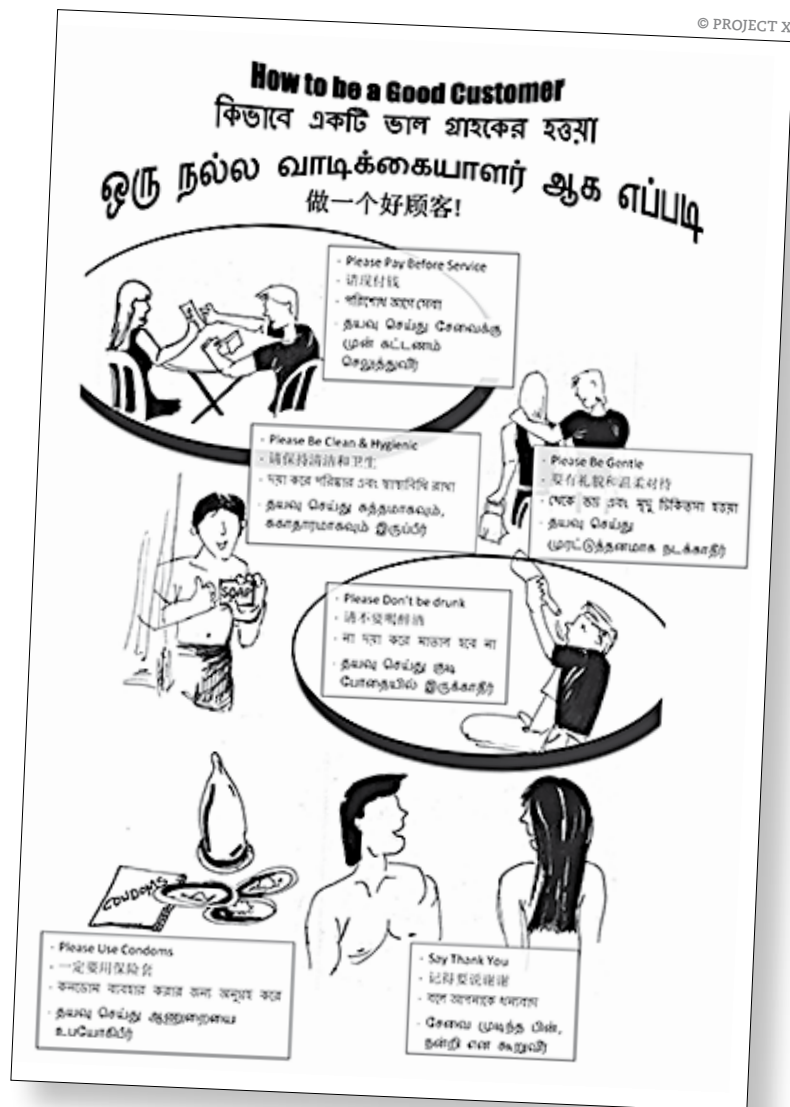
Client violence may arise because clients have not learned appropriate and respectful interactions with sex workers, a problem perpetuated by ignorance, stigma and criminalisation.

SWEAT, Sisonke and Sonke Gender Justice in South Africa produced a booklet aimed at clients of sex workers, called “The Secret Guide to the Business of Sex”. It explains South African sex work and answers frequently asked questions, recommends practical approaches to make sex work safe and promotes decriminalisation.

Project X, Singapore produces a multilingual poster on how to be a good client that includes basic information on treating sex workers with respect. They encourage wide distribution and reproduction.

Resources

- SWEAT/Sisonke, 2017, “Health and safety guide for clients of sex workers”.
- Project X, “How to Be a Good Customer”.



Multilingual 'How to Be a Good Customer' flyer used in Singapore

STRATEGY III:

Documenting Violence for Policy Change

Data Collection, Analysis and Dissemination

Ethical collection of accurate data on violence against sex workers, and the effective sharing of that data is important in advocating for policy change, and for securing funding for anti-violence programmes.

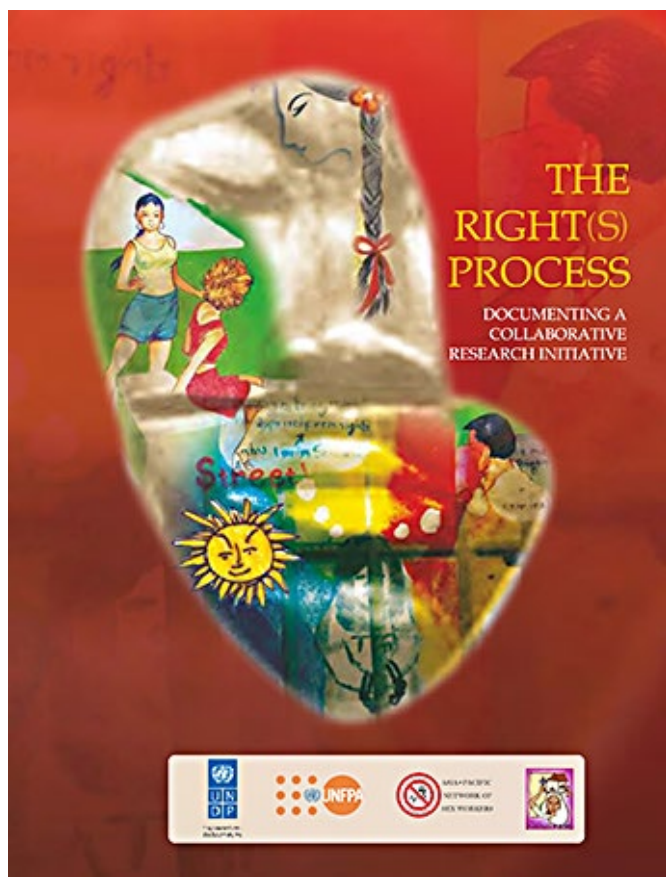
Project X in Singapore, through its Abuser Alert Programme has been collecting data on violence against sex workers since 2014, while also providing support to sex workers. Project X designed their data collection framework to match the format for local police reports and meet United Nations requirements for reporting. Project X used data to build relationships with police departments and to hold their government accountable for human rights violations.

In Kyrgyzstan, although sex work is not illegal, it is highly stigmatised. Sex workers experience high levels of police extortion, illegal detention, threats, blackmail, humiliation and degrading treatment from police. In 2010, Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan started a programme to collect data on sex workers' human rights violations, while providing counselling and legal support. Data is kept in an Excel database and is closely analysed on a quarterly basis. The data is reported to the Ombudsman, who, after five years, acknowledged violence against sex workers for the first time in his 2016 annual report. CTSQ, Ecuador also tracks cases of violence against sex workers, reporting to the ombudsman and the courts.

Evidence of violence against sex workers in Greece was presented by Red Umbrella Athens for the first time at a national conference of research in psychology in 2017. Coyote RI in the U.S.A. partnered with Brown University to conduct research with Rhode Island sex workers about violence. After presenting the findings of high levels of police violence, they created further partnerships to conduct nationwide research on issues of police violence and discrimination and stigma, with a view to lobbying for decriminalisation.



**Red Umbrella, Athens participates at National
Conference of Research in Psychology**



Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), sex worker organisations, academics and UN organisations jointly researched causes and consequences of violence against sex workers in Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka between 2011 and 2014¹³. Ethical guidelines for academic partnerships that focus on sex work and violence research were developed as part of this project¹⁴.

Resources

- APNSW, 2012, “Ethical guidelines for sex work and violence research”.
- CASAM, APNSW, UNDP & UNFP, 2015, “The Right(s) Process: Documenting a Collaborative Research Initiative”.

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- 13 UNDP, UNFPA, APNSW & SANGRAM, 2015, “The Right(s) Evidence: Sex Work, Violence and HIV in Asia: A Multi-Country Qualitative Study” available at http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/democratic_governance/hiv_aids/the-right-s-evidence--sex-work--violence-and-hiv-in-asia--a-mul.html (last accessed 8 November 2017).
- 14 CASAM, APNSW, UNDP & UNFP, 2015, “The Right(s) Process: Documenting a Collaborative Research Initiative” available at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/the-rights-process-documenting-collaborative-research-initiative> (last accessed 8 November 2017).

Benefits of data collection:

- Allows analysis of the scope of issues and of changing situations in order to monitor and improve programme effectiveness.
- Information can be used to lobby for legislative change and programme funding.
- Evidence can be used to refute myths and correct false assumptions.

Challenges:

- Data collection may seem lower priority than crisis response or direct services.
- Sex workers' identities and safety must be protected.
- Information needs to be reviewed, analysed, presented and distributed.
- Inconsistent definitions and data collection can undermine data quality.

Tips and suggestions:

- Integrate data collection into service provision (e.g. ugly mugs reporting, sex worker hotlines).
- Ensure data collection is consistent with international and national definitions, and between partner organisations.
- Practice ethical data collection methods, ensuring security and confidentiality; monitor for unintended consequences.
- Provide ongoing training on data collection.

National Policy Advocacy

Despite high levels of violence against sex workers, very few cases are litigated. However, some sex worker organisations are using court cases to bring about change. Decriminalisation is a key policy goal for fighting violence. Sex worker organisations also advocate for anti-discrimination legislation and protection of legal rights. Further challenges include ensuring sex workers can and do access the legal system, and that laws are applied fairly, including appropriate sentencing of perpetrators of violence, and awarding damages to sex workers.

In South Africa, campaigns facilitated by Aidsfonds' Hands Off! and Asijiki Coalition for the Decriminalisation of Sex Work have amplified sex worker voices in policy advocacy. Videos help explain the links between violence and criminalisation and the need for legislative change.

Friends Frangipani in Papua New Guinea worked with International Development Law Organization to successfully win damages for four sex workers in a defamation case in 2012, after they were harassed and humiliated by a member of the public on the street.

In Zimbabwe, POW WOW and the Sexual Rights Centre helped nine women arrested for loitering challenge their charges in court. They were successful in a constitutional claim that their arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution for prostitution violated their right to liberty and protection of the law.

In New Zealand, the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective helped a sex worker file a sexual harassment suit against a brothel manager; in 2014 the human rights review tribunal awarded \$25,000 in damages and costs to the sex worker¹⁵.

Resources

- Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, 2015, “Sex Work on the Hill: A Guide to Getting Involved in Legislative Processes that Impact on Our Lives”.

International Policy Advocacy

Ensuring countries meet their international human rights commitments is another approach used to lobby for sex worker rights and address systemic violence against sex workers.

The United Nations conducts periodic reviews on human rights for all UN member states. The UN also has several conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which include periodic reporting for countries that have ratified the conventions. Countries that have ratified the conventions are obliged to submit national reports every four years. States are expected to consult with non-government organisations (NGOs) in preparing their national reports, and NGOs can also submit alternate ‘shadow reports’.

15 Human Rights Review Tribunal of New Zealand, 2014 “DML v Montgomery [2014] NZHRRT 6 (12 February 2014)” available at <http://www.nzlii.org/cgi-bin/sinodisp/nz/cases/NZHRRT/2014/6.html> (last accessed 18 December 2017).

Numerous NSWP members have submitted shadow reports to the CEDAW committee to highlight institutional violence against sex workers. In 2017, NSWP supported Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme and Kenya Sex Work Alliance, Kenya, PION, Norway, and Project X, Singapore to submit shadow reports and attend the CEDAW Committee session. Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan, which submitted a shadow report to CEDAW in 2008 and 2015, noted that vigilance and follow-up is required during and after the process of shadow reporting, to ensure sex work issues are included in Committee recommendations, and that Committee recommendations are implemented.

United Nations Special Rapporteurs also conduct fact-finding missions to investigate allegations of human rights violations and assess and verify complaints of human rights violations, and there are processes for NGOs to engage with Special Rapporteurs.

NSWP members in India and the U.S.A. have successfully engaged with the the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the UN Special Rapporteur in Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, respectively^{16 17}. UN Special Rapporteur recommendations that resulted from this engagement include addressing state and non-state violence, lack of legal redress, the conflation of sex work and trafficking, and the criminalisation of sex work.

Resources

- NSWP, 2017, “CEDAW Shadow Reports”.
- SWAN, 2015, “A Guide for Sex Workers Human Rights Defenders”.
- SWAN, 2015, “REPORTING FROM THE SHADOWS: Using CEDAW to Advocate for Sex Workers’ Rights in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia”.

16 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016, “End of Visit Statement, United States of America (6–16 December 2016) by Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, UN Special Rapporteur in Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children” available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21049&LangID=E> (last accessed 9 November 2017).

17 Human Rights Council, 2014, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on her mission to India (22 April–1 May 2013)” available at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/26/38/Add.1 (last accessed 8 November 2017).

Funding to Combat Violence

Much of the funding to address violence against sex workers comes from HIV programmes as it has been shown that violence can increase vulnerability to HIV. The Global Fund provides funding for programmes that address violence against sex workers. Aidsfonds, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Open Society Foundation have provided funding for rights-based programmes addressing violence against sex workers.

Some sex worker organisations fund programmes to combat violence by partnering with allied organisations for violence-affected communities or non-government organisations, or by crowd fundraising. In some contexts, funding may be possible through national programmes or State health or policing organisations, but often this is not possible, or is accompanied by harmful restrictions in programming. It is important that funding provides for programmes to be sex worker-led.

Funding remains scarce, and securing adequate and sustained funding is among the main challenges to fighting violence against sex workers NSW members experience globally.

Resources

- NSWSP, 2015, [“The Smart Sex Worker’s Guide to Sustainable Funding”](#).

Case Studies

Many NSWP members are using several strategies to combat violence against sex workers. These three case studies from India, South Africa and Bangladesh illustrate how integrated programmes can combat the diverse forms of violence sex workers face from different actors.

Ashodaya Samithi, India

In 2004 in Mysore India, sex workers were arrested, robbed, and raped by police – and boyfriends and clients would beat them. One sex worker recounted – “We were afraid of uniforms – all uniforms, police, security, anyone”. From 2004–2012, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded Ashodaya Samithi, focusing on combatting violence, with priorities and activities determined by sex workers. Ashodaya Samithi received national funding in 2013–2014 for paralegal training for sex workers, but faces ongoing funding challenges.

Ashodaya Samithi sex workers build social status and presence in Mysore, India



© ASHODAYA SAMITHI (DEDICATED TO ASHODAYA FAMILY)

CRISIS RESPONSE	SAFE SPACE	CAPACITY-BUILDING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Rapid response’ support teams conduct outreach, take 24/7 crisis calls, advocate at local police stations, and negotiate sex worker release from detention. • Programmes address violence from police, boyfriends, and in the workplace. • Crisis response not limited to sex work issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in centre created in 2004. • Health services initiated at safe space, with 75% of sex workers accessing services in the first year. • Sex worker isolation decreases. • Sex workers begin to organise formal meetings and develop strategies to address problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity-building with sex workers allows development of community-sensitive programmes and strategies, and increasing sex worker ownership. • Sex workers take over rapid response and other activities.
BUILDING SOCIAL STATUS	ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING AND POLICE RAIDS	ADDRESSING POLICE VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social presence developed by attending community protests, supporting local organisations and creating connections. • Activities generate media coverage and ‘social champions’ (non-voting allies) that create political influence and access to authorities. • Increased community acceptance contributes to sex worker safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a self-regulatory board in 2009, inspired by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. • Board consists of a sex worker majority and key law enforcement, health, and social service stakeholders. • Board investigates underage or unwilling workers, and assists with alternatives, thereby avoiding police raids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rapid response team advocates for sex workers in detention. • Meetings are organised with the police commissioner and other key stakeholders. • Sex workers educate each other on legal literacy, sex work laws and are trained as paralegals. • Police violence declines.
ADDRESSING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE	ADDRESSING PARTNER VIOLENCE	BUILDING NETWORKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex workers create safety strategies, including relationships with lodge staff, negotiation skills, and risk warning techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sex worker empowerment leads to some partner backlash and increased recognition of intimate partner violence. • ‘Boyfriends club’ created to address intimate partner violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building of networks at local, state and national levels.

SWEAT/Sisonke, South Africa

Since 2015, Sisonke has partnered with Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Task Force (SWEAT), the Women's Legal Centre (WLC) and Sonke Gender Justice (Sonke) on initiatives to decriminalise sex work and combat violence against sex workers in South Africa¹⁸.



© SEX WORKER EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY TASKFORCE

Members of SWEAT and Mothers for the Future participate in drama group (Umzekelo) during the 2014 'Infecting the City' Festival.

18 Open Society Foundation, "No Turning Back: Examining Sex Worker-Led Programs that Protect Health and Rights", 46.

CREATIVE SPACES	RIGHTS CARDS	POLICE TRAINING AND COLLABORATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined outreach/safe space held in various locations. • Sex workers meet and exchange ideas and information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of pocket sized reference cards for sex workers to use when dealing with police. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex worker delegates present reports to the Deputy Minister of Police. • Sex workers conduct police training at three police stations. • Transgender Standard Operational Procedures are drafted for, and adopted by the police force.
24-HOUR HELPLINE	DATA COLLECTION	POLICY ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex worker paralegals run a helpline. • The helpline provides referrals for medical treatment, counselling and legal advice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents of violence are documented through the helpline and WLC. • Reports assist with policy advocacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying for decriminalisation with South Africa Commission for Gender Equity and Trade Unions. • Sex workers hold positions on UN advisory groups.
MEDIA ENGAGEMENT	PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT	ENFORCEMENT OF LEGAL RIGHTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a guide for journalists on responsible reporting about sex work. • Video series addressing violence and decriminalisation. • Success measured by frequency and tenor of media discussion of sex work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex workers march to demand action on gender based violence. • Performance via drama groups and photo exhibitions. • Facebook and Twitter presence. • Sex workers conduct condom-clean up on local streets in response to resident concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit complaints of discrimination and unlawful policing. • Provide information to police oversight bodies to ensure action is taken against abusive officers. • Human rights issues pursued up to the High Court, resulting in “arrest without legitimate purpose” being declared unlawful. • Considering further litigation in response to police backlash.

HIV/AIDS Research and Welfare Centre (HARC), Bangladesh

HARC runs a community-led programme to address violence against sex workers in Bangladesh. The programme was designed and begun in 2017 after a workshop with female sex workers to identify key forms and contexts of violence.



© HIV/AIDS RESEARCH AND WELFARE CENTRE (HARC)

SAFE SPACE	CRISIS SERVICE LINKAGE	RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HARC office has a room designated as safe space – with drinking water, tea/coffee, a toilet/ shower and television. • A legal counsellor is present 9.00am–5.00pm daily to document incidents of violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex worker friendly medical services are provided as needed, including the morning-after pill to avoid unwanted pregnancy. • Assessment of other referral needs is conducted in the safe space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly legal training of sex workers. • Outreach workers educate sex workers on violence prevention strategies.
LEGAL SERVICES	OUTREACH	DOCUMENTING VIOLENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand-by lawyer appears in court to assist sex workers. • HARC pays stand-by lawyer based on cases handled. • Where necessary, a repayment plan may be agreed with a sex worker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three outreach workers form a Rapid Action Team that attend police stations or court as requested by the hotline or sex workers. • The team documents violence in the prescribed format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases are reported in a narrative form, providing context for incidents of violence. • A database is kept of the number of hotline calls, types of problems and possible solutions.
HOTLINE	POLICE ADVOCACY	POLICY ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One counsellor • Line is open 24 hours • Late night calls are returned before court hours • The hotline counsellor communicates with the outreach team as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy meetings are held at 12 police stations in Dhaka city, organised by the Rapid Action Team • High-level police officer meetings are held to discuss sex worker concerns with policing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence response to be included in all HIV programmes. • Call for decriminalisation. • Public observance of December 17.

Challenges to Combatting Violence Against Sex Workers

Although specific challenges vary in different regions, most sex worker-led organisations experience the following challenges.

Conflating sex work with violence

Fundamental feminist organisations that seek to abolish all sex work prevent effective action on violence against sex workers by defining sex work itself as a form of violence. When all sex work is included within the definition of violence, actual violence against sex workers becomes invisible. If all sex work is deemed to be violence, sex workers can't effectively report violence or establish violence-free workspaces.

If governments accept incorrect definitions of violence, define sex work and pornography as violence against women, and tie government funding to that definition, then sex worker-led organisations lose access to funding to address violence. If sex work is defined as 'paid rape' by academics, then research findings are inevitably flawed and further misinformation and data is circulated.

Criminalisation and stigma further compound the conflation of sex work and violence by creating perceptions of violence against sex workers as normal or inevitable. In court hearings these perceptions colour outcomes and reduce sentencing, as well as affecting compensation awards to sex workers.

Conflation of sex work and violence also impacts sex workers' perception of themselves and their rights – "Even though we faced huge violence, it was just our fate in life."¹⁹

Conflating sex work with trafficking²⁰

When sex work is conflated with trafficking, 'raid and rescue' programmes increase the risk of violence and target migrant workers and other vulnerable groups. Funding is misdirected towards programmes that exacerbate violence against sex workers instead of rights-based programmes.

19 Ashodaya Samithi sex worker, interview with author, 13 September 2017.

20 NSWP, 2016, "The Smart Sex Worker's Guide: Addressing the Failure of Anti-Sex Work Organisations" available at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/the-smart-sex-workers-guide-addressing-the-failure-anti-sex-work-organisations> (last accessed 8 November 2017).

Criminalisation and discrimination

Criminalisation and inadequate anti-discrimination protections hamper sex workers' use of the legal system to report and address violence. Even where legal channels are available, fear of repercussions, stigma, lengthy and expensive processes, and hostile courts inhibit the reporting of offenders by sex workers. Even successful outcomes can be undermined by minimal sentences, reduced damages awards or police backlash against sex workers. Discrimination and stigma is compounded for sex workers who are members of other marginalised groups such as gay and transgender sex workers, migrants and refugees, and sex workers who use drugs.

Lack of accurate data and funding

Inadequate funding means there is inadequate data on the full scope of violence against sex workers, and on the effective strategies needed to combat this violence. Inadequate data then results in inadequate programme funding. Even where successful pilot programmes are implemented, funding is often time-limited and insufficient to expand successful programmes.

Conclusion

Despite the extensive violence experienced by sex workers, sex work is not inherently dangerous. Rights-based, sex worker-led programmes that sensitise and engage key groups and institutions reduce the prevalence and impacts of violence.

Effective interventions outlined in this guide build the skills and capacity of sex workers to identify and document violence; to implement strategies to respond to it; and to advocate for policy change to prevent it. The range of innovative activities in this guide show the importance of including sex workers in designing and delivering programmes tailored to different needs, cultures and patterns of violence.

“Stop our attackers, not our clients”
– STRASS, France



Insufficient and inconsistent funding remains a key issue. Comprehensive data collection as well as overcoming the conflation of sex work, violence and trafficking are important to ensure that funding is channelled to effective programmes instead of harmful 'raid and rescue' programmes.

Decriminalisation of sex work is key to decreasing violence, particularly police violence, and to breaking down the barriers to reporting and to accessing health and legal remedies. In addition, addressing stigma and enhancing anti-discrimination protections are important to ensure that sex workers' fundamental human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled.



nswp

Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

Even before the HIV epidemic, sex workers were organising themselves. NSWP, as a global network of sex worker-led organisations, has strong regional and national networks across five regions: Africa; Asia-Pacific; Europe (including Eastern Europe and Central Asia); Latin America; and North America and the Caribbean.

NSWP has a global Secretariat in Scotland, UK, with staff to carry out a programme of advocacy, capacity building and communications. Its members are local, national or regional sex worker-led organisations and networks committed to amplifying the voices of sex workers.



nswp Global Network of Sex Work Projects
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