

Invitation to Recognize Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers

In the spirit of remembrance and healing, the Sex Workers Outreach Project invites sex workers, allies and advocates from around the world to join us in recognizing December 17, the International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers.

Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers was first recognized in 2003 as a memorial and vigil for the victims of the Green River Killer in Seattle Washington. Since 2003, Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers has empowered people from cities around the world to come together and organize against discrimination and remember victims of violence.

As we approach this day, we seek to come together to remember those who we have lost this year, and renew our commitment in the on-going struggle for empowerment, visibility, and rights for all sex workers.

We also renew our commitment to solidarity. For the majority of victims, violence against sex workers is not just violence against sex workers—it's also violence against transwomen, against women of color, against drug users, against immigrants. We cannot end the marginalization and victimization of all sex workers without also fighting transphobia, racism, stigma and criminalization of drug use, and xenophobia.

During the week of December 17th, sex worker communities and social justice organizations stage actions and vigils and work to raise awareness about violence that is commonly committed against sex workers. The assault, battery, rape and murder of sex workers must end. Racism and economic inequality and systems of colonialist, capitalist violence and oppression must end. The stigma and discrimination and criminalization that makes violence against us acceptable must end. Please join with sex workers around the world and stand against criminalization and violence committed against our communities.

Fact Sheet

- 23% of GLBT murder victims on the 2012 Anti-Violence Project report were killed while engaging in sex work.
- The homicide rate for female sex workers is estimated to be 204 per 100,000, according to a longitudinal [study](#) published in 2004. This constitutes a higher occupational mortality rate than any other group of women ever studied.
- A study of New York Street-Based Sex Workers reported that 80% of participants had reported experiencing violence, including 27% at the hands of police.
- In a report on violence against sex workers in India, 70% had reported abuse by police, and 80% had been arrested without evidence.



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Forms of Violence Against Sex Workers

Source: “Chapter 2. Addressing Violence Against Sex Workers” in Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers (WHO, et.al. 2012)

There are several contexts, dynamics and factors that put sex workers at risk for violence.

Workplace violence: This may include violence from managers, support staff, clients or co-workers in establishments where sex work takes place (e.g. brothels, bars, hotels).

Violence from intimate partners and family members: Stigmatization of sex work may lead partners or family members to think it acceptable to use violence to “punish” a woman who has sex with other men. It may be difficult for sex workers to leave an abusive relationship, particularly when perpetrators threaten them, or have control due to ownership of a home, or the power to harm or refuse access to their children.

Violence by perpetrators at large or in public spaces: In most contexts, the antagonistic relationship with police creates a climate of impunity for crimes against sex workers that may lead them to be the targets of violence or of other crimes that may turn violent, such as theft. Some perpetrators specifically target sex workers to “punish” them in the name of upholding social morals, or to scapegoat them for societal problems, including HIV. Sex workers may also face violence from individuals in a position of power, e.g. nongovernmental organization (NGO) employers, health-care providers, bankers or landlords.

Organized non-state violence: Sex workers may face violence from extortion groups, militias, religious extremists or “rescue” groups.

State violence: Sex workers may face violence from military personnel, border guards and prison guards, and most commonly from the police. Criminalization or punitive laws against sex work may provide cover for violence. Violence by representatives of the state compromises sex workers’ access to justice and police protection, and sends a message that such violence is not only acceptable but socially desirable.

Laws and policies, including ones that criminalize sex work, may increase sex workers’ vulnerability to violence. For example, forced rescue and rehabilitation raids by the police in the context of antitrafficking laws may result in sex workers being evicted from their residences onto the streets, where they may be more exposed to violence. Fear of arrest or harassment by the police may force street-based sex workers to move to locations that are less visible or secure, or pressure them into hurried negotiations with clients that may compromise their ability to assess risks to their own safety.

Violence against sex workers is not always defined or perceived as a criminal act. For example, laws may not recognize rape against transgender individuals as a crime, or police may refuse to register a



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report of sexual violence made by a sex worker. Sex workers are often reluctant to report violent incidents to the police for fear of police retribution or of being prosecuted for engaging in sex work.

Laws and policies that discriminate against transgender individuals and men who have sex with men increase the vulnerability of male and transgender sex workers to abuse. Laws criminalizing HIV exposure may prevent HIV-positive sex workers from seeking support in cases of sexual violence, for fear of being prosecuted. Even where sex work is not criminalized, the application of administrative law, religious law or executive orders may be used by police officers to stop, search and detain sex workers.

This creates conditions in which sex workers face an increased likelihood of violence. Sex Workers may also be made more vulnerable to violence through their working conditions or by compromised access to services. Some may have little control over the conditions of sexual transactions (e.g. fees, clients, types of sexual services) if these are determined by a manager.

Organizing Your Own Event

There are many different types of events, and each one can be as unique as you are! In general we want to do 3 things by having events around Dec. 17th.

Educate

You can organize a march, protest, sit-in or some other non-violent method of raising awareness. Simply doing some sort of public art piece around violence against sex workers on raising the public consciousness around sex work and the violence that they receive.

Honor

Honor the lives of sex workers on this day, either by yourself or as an event.

Remember

Organize a public memorial event in your town. Invite people to bring writings, stories, readings, thoughts, related news items, poems, performances, etc. Make a circle at the event. Take turns sharing. This will make for a wonderful memorial and be great for consciousness raising and outreach as well.

Specific ideas on how to do this:

- Bike rides
- Yoga classes
- Work shops
- March



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Ten 12/17 Event Ideas

- 1. Organize an event for sex workers only. Organize a special lunch, dinner or activity for women in street-based economies who use your agency.** Get warm food and hot chocolate, and have an activity inspired by 12/17. Some ideas might be...
 - An art project [collage, collaborative posters, improve performance art activities] around strength & resilience.
 - A self-care and self-advocacy workshop.
 - A group discussion on issues impacting the community and ways to fight back; on internal power and strengths; on oppression and resistance.
 - A writing workshop
- 2. Honor victims in creative ways.** Make paper cranes for each person on the list. Write names on red streamers. Attach names to red helium balloons, and release each name when the name is read. Attach names to forget-me-not packages, or candy canes. *This can be a fun volunteer activity, and also serve to educate volunteers about violence against sex workers.*
- 3. Create participatory opportunities for attendees.** Have an open mic. Have a collage table where attendees can make a memorial for a friend or acquaintance, or to symbolize personal victimization and resilience. Have a “photo-booth” or a “video-booth” where attendees can privately share their thoughts & ideas. Create a post-it wall.
- 4. Take advantage of holiday crowds.** Attach a brief description of Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers to candy canes or bags of chocolate gelt. Hand them out at a Weihnachtsmarkt/Christmas Market, or from the corner of a busy street.
- 5. Have attendees be part of the décor** – ask attendees to wear red. Invite attendees to paint a message on a tee-shirt.
- 6. Create ‘shrines’ for victims from your community specifically, or with consent from the victim’s family or friends.** Do this by buying a trifold, decorating it with photos and texts, and leaving post-it notes for attendees to write messages, and/or candles for attendees to light.
- 7. Use public space** – organize a memorial in a park, a speak-out outside of police headquarters or a court-building, or start a march from where a victim was murdered.



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8. **Hold a press conference or speak-out** on the week of 12/17 to announce a program that addresses violence against sex workers, launch a campaign or new service, or publicly announce a list of demands to end violence against sex workers in your area.
9. **Organize an informal art show.** Host it at a coffee shop, a Some ideas include
 - Photographs of places where sex workers experienced violence in your area.
 - Art from an empowerment-based support group.
 - Art by local sex workers.
10. **Use 12/17 as an opportunity to raise funds while raising awareness** – Make salt-dough umbrella ornaments, and organize a red-umbrella decorating competition with a 5-10 entry fee. Sell red umbrella ornaments, December 17 stickers, or other merchandise at an event. Organize a fundraising drive near a local grocery store, and give candy canes with information about 12/17 or 12/17 related topics.

For More Ideas and Inspiration, visit www.december17.org and look at past event descriptions.



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Nitty-Gritty: Logistical Tips

Publicity - Web:

- Share your event page with SWOP-USA ASAP once your event details are confirmed. Do this by emailing details to dec17@swopusa.org, or using the form on the 12/17 website. We'll add it to the December 17th Website!
- Post on Adult Entertainment Boards: BestGFE, The Erotic Review, My PinkBook, VerifyHim, Stripperweb, etc.
- Share details with activist organizations in your area.
- Search for the contacts of event or news reporter in your area. Also check out local listings websites. Submit event details, or send in a press release: See examples here:
 - <http://cyntconnors.tripod.com/PONYWeb/Pages/NYC17Dec03.html>
 - <http://redlightchicago.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/press-release-international-day-to-end-violence-against-sex-workers-2012.pdf>

Flyers:

- It's *way* cheaper to order flyers online than print them out at Kinkos. Here are a few vendors:
 - www.nextdayflyers.com
 - www.bestvaluecopy.com
 - www.vistaprint.com
 - www.ppsprint.com
- If you don't have a graphic designer, photoshop or in-design you can make a pretty decent flyer for free on www.picmonkey.com

Distributing Print Materials:

- Good places to put up flyers are:
 - Near the location your event will be at.
 - Social service organizations and community centers.
 - High-traffic areas.
 - Giving them to friends.

Space:

- Try art galleries, community centers, public libraries, churches, cooperative art spaces or projects, organizations you already partner with, or organizations that are in-line with Harm Reduction.
- For grassroots, collaborative spaces, it can often be useful to offer a small donation (\$75-150) for using the space.
- Look out for spaces that charge rent **AND** require you to purchase food & beverages through a caterer. This can get REALLY expensive!!

Food/Beverages:

- Potlucks are fun & cheap! It's useful to have a few staples (like 1 casserole, a salad, & one bottle of OJ so that stuff is there if ppl are running fashionably late).
- Have a baking party!
- Some restaurants and bakeries will offer food & beverage donations. They are tax-deductable **if the value is under \$75, or the value is over \$75 and they receive written acknowledgement of receipt.**

Decorations:



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- Like flyers, often cheaper if purchased online!
- Check in with Florist shops - some may be willing to give day-end flowers to you for the event.
They are tax-deductable **if the value is under \$75, or the value is over \$75 and they receive written acknowledgement of receipt.**



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