

Research for Sex Work call for papers

Addressing violence against sex workers

Deadline: August 1, 2010

Research for Sex Work seeks contributors for its twelfth issue. This annual publication has been published by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) since 2004. The forthcoming issue will focus on violence against sex workers and what can be done to fight it. It will be widely distributed in print and through e-mail around the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers (December 17th). Like previous issues, this one will be published in collaboration with an NSWP member: SWAN (Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network), which is active in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. To increase access in this part of the world, the issue will be bilingual, in English and Russian.

Research for Sex Work aims to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, experiences, observations and research results on the subject of sex work, health and human rights. Although the title suggests otherwise, Research for Sex Work is not an academic journal. Readers and authors come from sex workers (support) organizations, HIV prevention projects, local and international NGOs, universities and research institutes. They are outreach workers, sex workers, activists and researchers.

We welcome three types of articles: 1) results from (community-based) research and literature reviews, 2) lessons learned and experiences from projects or programmes and 3) opinions/personal experiences. In the forthcoming issue, we would like to include articles from sex workers and support organisations on what they are doing to fight violence in their community. What steps were taken to address unsafe working conditions and what were the results? What are the lessons learnt from these experiences, what are the good practices? What can other organizations and groups do to increase the safety and improve the health and wellbeing of sex workers? We also welcome submissions from researchers but cannot accept traditional research papers.



July 2009

**RESEARCH FOR
SEX WORK** 11
ISSUE

Editorial Melissa Ditmore and Will Rockwell

Researchers frequently ask sex workers about wages earned, traumatic experiences endured, and the requests of their clients, but rarely about their own satisfactions and pleasures.

In this issue, Jayasree A.K. analyses some Indian sex workers' manipulation of male desire for vaginal sex. Sex workers at Mali's DANAYA SO show how the condom operates as a marker of commerce and how unprotected sex can be a symbol of love.

Rut Pinedo González, from a support project in Spain, discusses sex workers' physical pleasures while working. Holly Pottle describes the satisfaction people in the sex industry can find in collective action—especially independent or isolated workers who may not have colleagues to talk with.

We are pleased to offer an excerpt from Hilary Kinnell's new book *Violence and Sex Work in Britain* that highlights the rejection

of the client role by men who commit violence against sex workers. These men often refuse to pay, use condoms or comply with other sex worker demands. Sarah Kingston examines current UK legislation proposing to criminalise men who buy sex that positions them as exploitative abusers, while research has found clients to be psychologically and socially 'average' men.

Lastly, the latest report from New York City's Sex Workers Project describes the ineffectiveness of law-enforcement approaches to trafficking in the United States and offers alternative ways to assist those who have been trafficked.

Whether it is a direct and sexual satisfaction or the more holistic sense of pleasure in collective action for safer working conditions, this issue of *Research for Sex Work* contributes lesser-known ideas about the possible satisfactions and positive outcomes of sex work.

Here are some suggestions for articles:

- Examples of successful initiatives to address violence against and increase personal safety of sex workers
- Personal stories of sex workers on how violence affects their lives
- Results of recent community-based researches on violence against sex workers
- Literature reviews on specific forms of violence against sex workers in specific contexts (e.g., street-based sex work, brothels, massage parlours) worldwide or in a particular country or region.

Other ideas for articles that would fit in the broad theme of violence against sex workers are welcome. For a short overview of issues at stake, please see below.

If you would like to contribute, please send a message about your work and the topic of your article to the chief editor, Nel van Beelen, at r4sw@nswp.org. You may also contact her if you need additional information or if you would like to discuss your contribution. She can read English, German, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The deadline for all article submissions is **1 August 2010** and the maximum number of words is 1200. We may reserve the right to shorten your submission in case there is limited space.

You can submit your article in English or Russian (articles in Russian send to Aliya Rakhmetova at SWAN@tasz.hu). Please don't hesitate to share your experiences with a world-wide audience!

Writing them down can help many sex workers worldwide to combat violence.

Nel van Beelen

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History Research for Sex Work

The first seven issues of Research for Sex Work were published by the Health Care and Culture section of VU University Medical Centre in the Netherlands with financial support from Hivos. Since 2004, Research for Sex Work has been published by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). The publication is governed by a newly elected Editorial Board consisting of researchers, sex workers and staff of support organizations.

Research for Sex Work explores a different theme in each edition. Previous issues focused on peer education (1998), appropriate health services (1999), empowerment (2000), violence (2001), migration/mobility (2002), human rights (2003), ethics in health care and research (2004), law enforcement (2005), money (2006), sex workers' rights (2008), and sex work and pleasure (2009).

Back issues are available for download from www.researchforsexwork.org.

Violence against sex workers: what can be done about it?

How does it manifest itself?

Over and over again, interviews with sex workers worldwide reveal that the violence they are subjected to is one of their main worries. The forms of violence sex workers face range from verbal abuse from neighbours or passers-by, forceful arrest and harassment by police officers, beatings and robbery, to gang rape, 'date rape' and even (attempted) murder. Other forms of violence are extortion by the police or criminals, blackmailing to get free or unprotected sex, and forced drug and alcohol use in brothels or other prostitution venues. Finally, sex workers can also suffer violence from the hands of fellow workers who compete for a good spot on the streets or the favours of a client, or from the hands of their intimate partners.

Not only do the threat and actual experiencing of violence make sex workers' working life more difficult, it also threatens their health and wellbeing. For instance, rape almost always takes place without the protection of a condom, raising fears about becoming pregnant or infected with STIs. Also their psychological health may be affected by extreme incidents of violence, especially when there is no support system available to them to share experiences or seek legal action.

The wider context

Violence against sex workers does not take place in a vacuum. The sheer lack of protection of street sex workers, but also of those working in isolated places such as hotel rooms and apartments, is commonly the result of anti-prostitution laws and regulations. The criminalization of sex work and drug use contributes to an environment in which violence against sex workers is tolerated. It also leads to reluctance to report incidents of crime to the police and to police officers ignoring the rights of those who do come forward. There are many stories of policemen harassing and mistreating sex workers while at work because they think that the illegality of sex work in itself is an excuse to violate their human rights. Criminalization also drives sex workers onto the streets, where they are more vulnerable to violence from clients, pimps, policemen and others.

Law enforcement's harassment of sex workers and crackdowns on prostitution:

- includes confiscation of condoms, arbitrary arrests and various forms of violence
- makes sex workers reluctant to carry condoms on them, as this can be seen as proof of prostitution
- compels them to accept unprotected sex from police officers in order to pay off fines or be able to bribe them
- makes sex workers avoid outreach services out of fear of arrest
- forces sex workers to rush negotiations with clients in unsafe back alleys
- makes them reluctant to go to the police when they have witnessed incidents of violence or murder
- and last but not least, fuels widespread stigmatization of sex workers, and contributes to a climate that encourages further abuse and violence.

Also the criminalization of clients, which is promoted in some countries, leads to a situation in which sex workers are forced to accept unsafe working conditions. Prostitution is going underground and negotiations between sex workers and their clients take place outside of the public eye. Furthermore, if buying sex is illegal, clients who have witnessed incidents of violence or murder may be reluctant to go to the police.

What can be done?

Many sex workers collectives and support organisations have worked tirelessly to address violence at the workplace. At the individual level, they equip sex workers with safety tips on how to prevent, reduce and respond to violence. They conduct awareness-raising sessions on legal and civil rights and help victims of violence to seek redress. Some projects give lessons in self-defense and distribute alarms and deterrent sprays. There are examples of buddy systems and bad-date warning systems where sex workers inform colleagues of potentially violent clients or incidents. At the community level, groups and organizations stimulate organizing and mobilizing of sex workers to respond to violence and discrimination. Some organisations conduct workshops for law enforcement authorities and police officers to sensitize them on the human rights of sex workers and reduce harassment and interference in prevention and outreach programmes. Finally, at the policy level, organisations are advocating for a change in repressive laws and policies, the drafting of rights-based guidelines on how to deal with violence – including systems for legal redress – and the development of government-enforced Occupational Health and Safety Regulations.