

Sex Workers Outreach Project

Sex Workers' rights and Human Trafficking

<https://swopusa.org/learn-about-sex-work/>

Policy Issue Resources

Books

[Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers Rights](#) By Molly Smith, Juno Mac

[Thriving in Sex Work: Heartfelt Advice for Staying Sane in the Sex Industry](#) By Lola Davina

[Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work](#) By Melissa Gira Grant

[Challenging Perspectives on Street-Based Sex Work](#) By Katie Hail-Jares, Corey S. Shdaimah, Chrysanthi S. Leon

[Coming Out Like a Porn Star: Essays on Pornography, Protection, and Privacy](#) edited by Jiz Lee

Videos

[#DecrimNow: What media should be telling you about the fight to decriminalize sex work](#)

[Coverage of the SESTA-FOSTA legislation must include sex workers voices](#)

[Sex workers rights & decriminalization debate](#)

[Dominatrix Empress Wu Explains How She Heals Others Through Her Work](#)

[The Laws that Sex Workers Really Want](#)

[The Activists Fighting to Decriminalize Sex Work](#)

[What This Male Sex Worker Wants You to Remember](#)

Articles

[Here's why sex work is legitimate work](#)

[How Sex Workers Made San Francisco Safer for Everyone](#)

[Sex Work 101](#)

What is Sex Work?

Sex work is any type of labor where the explicit goal is to produce a sexual or erotic response in the client. Sex work includes prostitution, but it also includes a bunch of other things like erotic dancing, pro-dom/pro-sub work, webcam work, sensual massage, adult film, phone sex, being a sugar baby, etc.

Most media coverage on the sex trade focuses on street prostitution, youth prostitution, and trafficking. Incidentally, a substantial portion of the facts and figures referenced are misconstrued or based on studies of particularly vulnerable populations of sex workers globally. For example:

Myth: 300,000 children are trafficked in the U.S. each year.

Fact: This statistic, collected by the [Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 2001](#), is the high-estimate of all male and female children not living at home, who are viewed as vulnerable to exploitation of any kind.

Myth: The average adolescent prostitute is a female who is virtually a slave to a pimp.

Fact: According to a study of New York adolescents in the sex trade, nearly half of adolescents are male or transgender. Only 8% were coerced into entering the sex industry.

Myth: 68 percent of sex workers report post-traumatic stress disorder on the same level as those who served in military combat.

Fact: This statistic refers to individuals in nine countries who were contacted via social service organizations, and the methodology behind this study has never been released to the public. The psychological affects of prostitution are remarkably variable depending on the sector, country, and individual worker.

Myth: The average age of entry is 13 or 14.

Fact: This figure references informal knowledge of social workers working with adolescents and survivor organizations. Indoor sex workers, who comprise over 80% of the industry, are significantly less likely to enter as adolescents.

Myth: The sex trade is inherently harmful.

Fact: Violence, mental and physical health risks, and marginalization are not inherent to the sex trade, any more than they are inherent to sexual identity or orientation. Stigma and criminalization are the root causes of harms directly related to sex work. These harms are compounded by intersecting oppression for large numbers of sex workers.

Myth: Prostitution is violence against women (or gang rape, or slavery)

Fact: Although violence, particularly against street workers, is common, most violence is perpetrated by non-clients, individuals who pose as clients, law enforcement officials, and a very small proportion of clients. The same goes for clients of indoor workers. While news reports frequently vilify clients of sex workers, even abolitionist organizations recognize diversity in what motivates clients to solicit prostitutes.

In other words, **the overwhelming majority of sex worker clients do not perpetrate violence against sex workers.** And the **central cause of violence is institutional alienation of sex workers from law enforcement protection and a justice system that leads most sex workers to distrust and fear law enforcement officials.** Violent individuals do not fear repercussions and prey on sex workers in particular. Most interactions between sex workers and law enforcement involve arrest, and law enforcement and judicial system officials frequently ignore or doubt reports by sex workers. So sex workers either do not report sexual and physical assault to law enforcement or law enforcement officials do not sufficiently respond to complaints, and individuals remain free and continue to perpetrate crimes against sex workers.