

Facts about sex work & violence in South Africa.



SEX WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA FACE UNACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF VIOLENCE, STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. IT PUTS THEM IN SITUATIONS THAT MAKE THEM CONSIDERABLY MORE VULNERABLE TO HIV/AIDS. SUPPORTIVE LAWS AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES, CARE AND SUPPORT ARE NEEDED TO SECURE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF SEX WORKERS.

What the law says:

It is illegal to solicit clients, sell sex in a public space, keep a brothel or knowingly live from the proceeds of sex work. Bylaws on public disorder are used to prosecute sex workers.



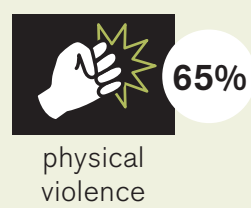
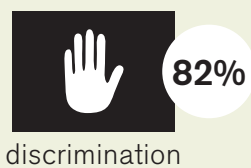
Criminalisation:

Sex workers who operate in settings where prostitution is criminalised face increased risk of violence, police abuse and lack of access to health care and the justice system.



71% of the sex workers in South Africa experienced violence in the past year

Sorts of violence

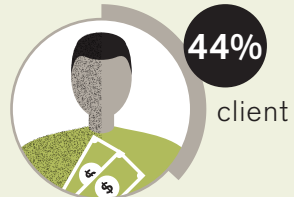
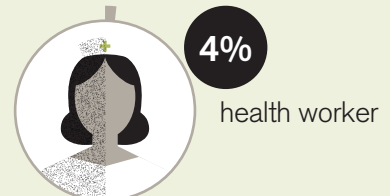


Risk factors



“ I was ordered by one client and he took me to an open field. When I got there, there were seven of them waiting for me. I was raped by all of them. They did horrible things to me. ”

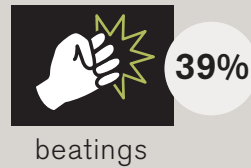
Who are the perpetrators?



“ When they find out I'm a transgender, normally they hit you in your face. Or they stab you with a knife in your legs or on your hands. ”

60% of the sex workers experienced violence by the police upon arrest in the past year

What type of violence are we talking about?



Hard facts

To prevent arrest, **48%** of the sex workers had **sex with a police officer** and **60%** **paid bribes** to the police.



Arrest

25% of the sex workers were **arrested** last year. On average they were arrested five times and most of them were detained for **24 hours** per arrest.

Reasons for arrest



Filing a case

24% of the sex workers filed an incident with the police. Only **21%** of the cases were investigated by the police.

“ Police officers took us to a remote forest and spayed our eyes with pepper spray. I realised they had left us on the edge of a cliff, so we were going to plunge to our death. These are the people who are supposed to protect us. ”

39% of the HIV-positive sex workers does not have regular access to treatment

HIV prevalence

24% is HIV negative



56% is HIV positive

13% does not want to disclose status

7% has never been tested

At the clinic



50%

of the sex workers has been yelled at and/or stigmatised by a health worker in the past twelve months.

Access to regular HIV medication

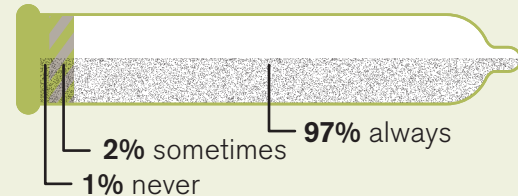
Of those who indicated to be HIV positive:

61% receives regular treatment



39% gets no regular treatment

Condom use while selling sex:



“ I went to the clinic after I had been raped by the brothel manager. He told me that he had given me AIDS. At the clinic I was pricked and then they revealed my results and viral load score in front of everyone in the waiting room. ”

Recommendations:

- 1 Decriminalise sex work
- 2 Foster **zero tolerance of violence** against sex workers by effective investigations and prosecutions of perpetrators - and hold the police accountable for addressing internal corruption, abuse and failures to act
- 3 Support sex worker movements that build solidarity among and **empower sex workers** for their own protection

Hands Off! Reduction of violence against sex workers

The Hands Off! programme, coordinated by Aids Fonds, works on the reduction of violence against sex workers in Southern Africa through prevention, care and support. The programme works with sex worker-led groups, law enforcement, health and support services, legal centres and NGOs working on human rights.

Sisonke, SWEAT and Women's Legal Centre

Sisonke is a movement of sex workers, by sex workers. SWEAT is South Africa's leading sex worker human rights organisation. The Women's Legal Centre (WLC) aims to advance women's human rights through strategic litigation and legal advocacy.

Read the full report or more about Hands Off! at www.aidsfonds.nl/handsoff

