

Violence, Sex Work and HIV

Violence and HIV are associated with each other. Evidence shows that marginalised populations such as sex workers and transgender women are at increased risk of HIV as a result of the violence, stigma and discrimination they face.

Sexual violence and HIV



Friction caused by dry sex

Violent and forced vaginal and anal penetration can cause abrasions and cuts that increase the risk of HIV infection.



Forced unsafe sex

Persons who experience rape or sexual assault often have no room to negotiate condom use.



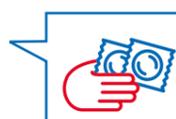
Imbalance in power dynamics

The imbalance in power dynamics and threats of violence often impact one's ability to either negotiate safe sex options, or even refuse sex.

How does this apply to sex workers?



Sex workers mostly operate in criminalised contexts. This results in fear of police and less time and opportunity to negotiate safe sex with clients.



Police officers confiscate condoms from people they believe are sex workers and use that as evidence.



Sex workers avoid healthcare facilities out of fear of humiliation and abuse, so they struggle to access HIV prevention, treatment and sexual and reproductive health services.

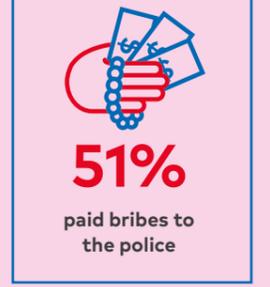
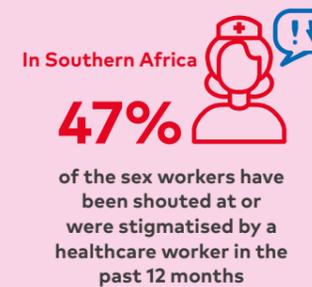
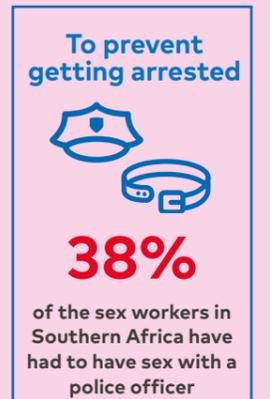


HIV+ sex workers face difficulties in accessing their HIV treatment during and after an arrest.



Transgender sex workers are even more vulnerable to violence and HIV compared to non-transgender sex workers. They face more barriers to accessing HIV prevention, testing and treatment services due to transphobia and social and legal exclusion.

What do the numbers say?



Covid-19 impact



With the current global lockdown measure caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a projected rise in the number of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases globally. If the lockdown lasts for 6 months the UNFPA predicts an additional 31 million SGBV cases. It is expected for every three months of lockdown there will be an additional 15 million cases. SGBV is one of the key factors that increases the risk to new HIV infection, and sex workers (in their diversity) are among the groups that are more vulnerable to this.

How will decriminalisation aid in reducing violence against sex workers?

If violence against sex workers is addressed, new HIV infections can be reduced by 25%. Decriminalising sex work is the first step towards ending violence against sex workers.



If sex work is decriminalised, sex workers will more freely and generally practice safer sex and will be more able to access health services without judgement.



Recognising sex work as work will increase access to safe work locations, economic security and social protection.



Decriminalisation will increase access to justice and sex workers will be able to refer to police in cases of violence.

Community-driven approaches led by sex workers, such as outreach, have proven to be most effective to address intersections between HIV and violence.

Programmes such as Aidsfonds' Hands Off 2 programme work with sex worker-led initiatives and various stakeholders in law enforcement, religious groups, healthcare worker and policy makers to address violence against sex workers.