

Decriminalize Sex Work to End Human Trafficking And Promote Health & Safety

No one is more committed to ending violence and exploitation within the sex trade than sex workers.

Service providers, health-care professionals, researchers and sex-worker-rights advocates know that the best way to reduce trafficking, sexually transmitted infections, and violence against women is to decriminalize prostitution. Those who are the most vulnerable, such as queer and transwomen of color, are subject to the most violence and exploitation as a result of criminalization and stigma.

Amnesty International, the World Health Organization, American Civil Liberties Union, Human Rights Campaign, and the Libertarian and Democratic Socialists of America parties all support decriminalizing sex work.

Sex Work vs Human Trafficking.

Sex work is the exchange of sexual or erotic services for a fee or something of value between consenting adults. Human trafficking involves force, fraud, or coercion into various forms of labor (such as farm labor, restaurant work, or erotic labor). If a minor is induced into prostitution, that constitutes human trafficking as well. Trafficking is illegal and exploiters should be identified and prosecuted.

Conflating sex work with human trafficking hurts all people in the sex trade whether they are there by choice, circumstance, or coercion. First, law enforcement resources are wasted on targeting consensual adults in the sex trade, minimizing resources available to address exploitation. Second, sex workers and trafficking victims are unlikely to report abuse to police for fear of being arrested, harassed, or shamed.

Criminalization Does Not Work.

Criminalizing the world's oldest profession creates a black market where violence and exploitation thrive. This is true whether the criminalized party is the buyer, seller, or third party (such as a roommate or partner of a sex worker).

When sex workers are criminalized they cannot report violent crimes committed against them, they are often afraid to advocate for their safety or seek medical care. Criminal records make it difficult for marginalized individuals to leave the sex trade if they choose due to employment discrimination.

Criminalizing clients does not reduce violence or demand. End demand policies result in an inability to screen for safety. Workers cannot differentiate between predators posing as clients who are scary, and would be clients who are just scared.

Criminalizing third parties, such as bookers, managers, hired security, or the roommates/partners of sex workers often make it impossible to work collectively (which is safer).

Legalizing and strictly regulating the sex trade creates a two tiered system that favors employers rather than sex workers.

The best way to improve health and safety within the sex trade is to listen to sex workers and stop the arrests.