

Facts about sex work & violence in Southern Africa.



SEX WORKERS IN SOUTHERN 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:

In most countries in Southern Africa it's illegal to solicit clients. Bylaws on public disorder, indecency and loitering are often used to prosecute sex workers.



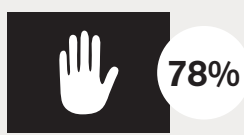
Criminalisation:

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.

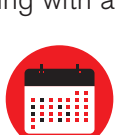


70% of the sex workers in Southern Africa experienced violence in the past year

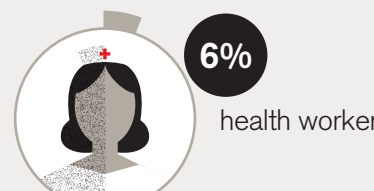
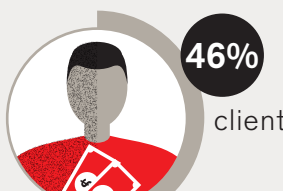
Types of violence



Risk factors



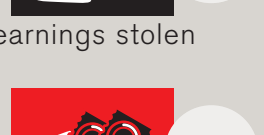
Who are the perpetrators?



"He took me home to his place. As we were going there he was calling or chatting to his friends telling them to come or whatever. After three minutes we got to his place. There was a knock at the door. Three more guys came in. I have never told anyone this...they beat me up and did all sort of things. They beat me up and took turns."
- Male sex worker Zimbabwe

36% of the sex workers experienced violence by the police in the past year upon arrest

What type of violence are we talking about?



Hard facts

To prevent getting arrested, **38%** of the sex workers had **sex with a police officer** and **51%** paid bribes to the police.



Arrest

48% of the sex workers were arrested last year. On average they were arrested 6 times and most of them were detained for 24 hours per arrest.

Filing a case

28% of sex workers filed an incident with the police, but only **21%** of the cases were investigated.

Reasons for arrest?



"We were arrested on a cold, wet winter night. We were put in the van, about 4/5 of us. They closed the van, one policeman sprayed with pepper spray while another hosed us with a hosepipe. We were later taken out of the van...led to the green yard, which is the open space before the call entrance. We were made to stand there for about three hours, with no roof. We were soaked, cold, itching from the pepper spray" - Female sex worker South Africa

34% of the HIV-positive sex workers do not have regular access to treatment

HIV prevalence

34% is HIV negative



38% is HIV positive
20% does not want to disclose status
8% has never been tested

At the clinic



47%

of the sex workers have been shouted at and/or were stigmatised by a health worker in the past 12 months.

Access to regular HIV medication

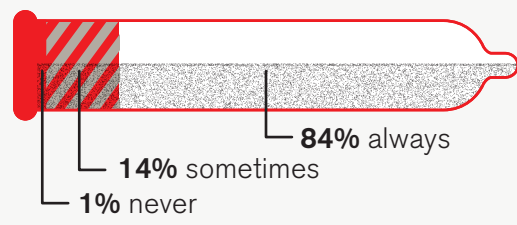
Of those who indicated to be HIV positive:

66% receives regular treatment



34% gets no regular treatment

Condom use while selling sex:



"She (the nurse) started like 'Yeah why do you do those things, you guys are so dirty, you guys are not even thinking about your futures, you are doing the sex worker things'... And she refused to help me." - Female sex worker Namibia

Recommendations:

- Decriminalise sex work in Southern Africa** and adopt supportive laws, policies and legislation for sex workers
- Foster **zero tolerance of violence** against sex workers by effective investigations and prosecutions of perpetrators, by training and sensitisation of law enforcement officials and fostering police accountability.
- Protect, support and empower sex workers** to advocate for their rights and equal protection before the law by providing support and funding to sex worker-led initiatives.

Hands Off! Reduction of violence against sex workers

The Hands Off! programme, coordinated by Aidsfonds, 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.

The following partner organisations in the Hands Off! consortium participated in the design, implementation and dissemination of the research: Sisonke and BONELA (Botswana); Pathfinder and Tiyane Vavassate (Mozambique); Rights not Rescue Trust (Namibia); Sisonke, SWEAT and WLC (South Africa); Pow Wow and SRC (Zimbabwe); and North Star Alliance (Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe).

