

Criminalisation of Sex Workers in Singapore leads to Serious Human Rights Violations



Abstract #821

Track C

Issue Code C01

Issue: Ending criminalisation or punishment of those in need of support – Sex Workers



Project X – An introduction

- A human rights advocacy group for sex workers. We believe that sex work is work, and seek to end all forms of discrimination and violence against sex workers.
- Outreach, human rights documentation, public education



Sex Work is NOT Legal in
Singapore



Laws on Sex Work in Singapore

- Soliciting in public place (*Misc Offences Act, Article 19*)
 - First offence: fine of up to \$1,000; second or subsequent offences: fine of up to \$2,000 and/ or imprisonment up to 6 months.
- Persons living on or trading in prostitution (*Women's Charter, Article 146*)
- Suppression of Brothels (*Women's Charter, Article 148*)
- Prohibited immigrants (*Immigration Act, Article 8(3)(e) and (f)*).



Licensed Brothels

- Limited number of brothels are licensed by the Anti-Vice Police.
- 800 – 1000 licensed sex workers at any point
 - Large majority are migrant sex workers
- Immune from raids and criminalisation
- Subjected to mandatory monthly health checks
 - HIV travel restriction
- Banned from Singapore after concluding their contracts
- Lack of labour rights standards



Issues – Streetwalkers & Unlicensed Sex Workers

- Subject to constant policing, harassment, and criminalization by law enforcers.
 - Arbitrary identification checks
 - Photographing
 - Bag searches for condoms and lubricant
 - Public humiliation
 - Verbal and emotional assault
 - Entrapment
- . These practices have created an environment of fear and marginalization for sex workers.
 - Increases their vulnerability to HIV and other health issues.



Transgender Sex Workers

- Transgender sex workers face intersecting forms of discrimination
 - Random checks
 - Body search by male officers
- Need for anti-discrimination legislation alongside decriminalisation of sex work.



The environment of fear means that sex workers are unwilling to make formal complaints against abusive law enforcers or members of the public.



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