

Key Facts About Human Rights Violations & Sex Work

~ For the 2015 Universal Periodic Review of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA~

Throughout the U.S., pervasive criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers, and those profiled as such, prevents them from fully exercising their human rights, including their civil, political, social and economic rights. People of color, transgender or gender non-conforming people (particularly transgender women of color), migrants, people experiencing homelessness, youth, and HIV-positive people bear a high burden of these human rights violations. Sex workers, and people the police profile as such, face rape, extortion, humiliation, assault, sexual harassment, discrimination and other violence at the hands of law enforcement. While incarcerated, they face additional violence and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Criminalization and stigma can also lead to the denial of their rights to housing, healthcare, parenting and other reproductive rights, education, incomes, and employment. This denial can occur both through direct discrimination, and through the heavy toll that a criminal record—including felony convictions for sex work in some states—can have on people seeking access to these basic rights. Law enforcement officials, including police, prosecutors and judges, also frequently fail to recognize that sex workers can be victims of crime, and thus deny justice or support to sex workers who seek their help.

For more, **see:** *Human Rights Violations of Sex Workers, People in the Sex Trades, and People Profiled as Such*-
<http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2014UPRReportBPPPDASWOPNYC1.pdf>

“Police referred to the rapist—who had personal connections with law enforcement—as a “big teddy bear,” and said they felt bad for him.”

- From a 2014 interview with a sex worker in New Jersey who attempted to report a rape to police

Previous UN Body Recommendations

In its prior UPR process, the U.S. accepted Recommendation 86, requiring it to “[u]ndertake awareness-raising campaigns for combating stereotypes and violence against [LGBT people], and ensure access to public services, paying attention to the special vulnerability of **sex workers** to violence and human rights abuses.” Unfortunately, the U.S. has taken no steps to implement Recommendation 86, while passing laws and pursuing policies that directly contradict this commitment, putting sex workers at heightened risk of violence and human rights abuses. In 2014, UN Human Rights Committee challenged the U.S. Justice Department’s claim that arresting and jailing people charged with sex work offenses is a humane or effective way to fight trafficking. The Committee called on the U.S. to align its anti-trafficking initiatives with human rights norms, which reject criminalizing sex workers.

Suggested Recommendations to the US Government for the 2015 Universal Periodic Review

Implement Recommendation 86 by ensuring respect for the human rights of sex workers and people profiled as such; including their rights to healthcare, education and housing; and their right to be free from violence by government and non-government actors.

Take measures to decrease violence towards sex workers and people profiled as such, by implementing campaigns to end the harms of stigmatization and criminalization.

Question for the US Government

What measures is the government taking to protect sex workers and people profiled as sex workers from violence, including violence from police and other state actors?

Contact: Best Practices Policy Project: Dr. Penelope Saunders, +1-917-817-0324, bestpracticespolicyproject@gmail.com; Desiree Alliance: Cristine Sardina, director@desireealliance.org; Sex Workers Outreach Project-NY: www.swop-nyc.org