

Working Together to Put an End to Violence Against Sex Workers

International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers is observed annually on 17th December. On this particularly meaningful day, as groups and individuals recognising sex work as legitimate work and supporting sex workers, we believe that it is important to restate that sex workers are still suffering various forms of violence. Also, we hope to arouse public concern towards the issue, and that we can work together to make necessary changes and put an end to violence against sex workers.

Sex workers suffer various forms of violence, which include at least the following:

1 Violence from the legal system

In Hong Kong, it is not an offence for an individual to work as a sex worker. However, the numerous and complicated legal articles usually push sex workers to the edge of committing crimes. Some sex workers may have violated the law without knowing it, while some may mistake themselves for law offenders. Sex workers are facing enormous confusion and pressure. Some police even abuse their power and harass sex workers. Also, some criminals would make use of unlawful means (e.g. fraud, intimidation, violence and so on) to take advantage of them. On the other hand, current legislation compels sex workers to work alone in an isolated setting. Hence, they have to face risks alone.

2 Violence from law enforcers

The grey area created by the current laws provides an excuse for the police to conduct harassment and abuse their power, including unreasonable license checking, permit checking, arrest and prosecution, depriving sex workers of their rights as arrested persons, choosing not to handle cases of sex workers as victims of crime seriously, requesting for free sexual services during undercover operations and so on.

3 Violence from unlawful parties

The grey area between legal and illegal and the abuse of police power made sex workers not as confident in reporting cases and tend not to seek help in face of serious difficulties. What is more, some female sex workers who dared to stand out and voice out were in the end simply ignored by the police. The message that it sent out is no different from tolerating the other unlawful parties to target sex workers to commit crime such as fraud, intimidations, robbery, physical violence, sexual violence, non-consensual sex (without condoms and/or payments) etc.

4 Violence from societal discrimination

The interpretation of law and the way of law enforcement of the police somehow spread a negative yet incorrect message to the public that all sex workers are

illegal. This further deepens public misunderstanding and makes them less willing to reach out with helping hands.

5 Violence from the mass media

Previously, some mass media (especially particular newspapers and magazines) used inappropriate means to take photos or videos of sex workers without getting their permission, and even disclosed them without proper handling. These violate the privacy of sex workers. What is more, some media would use insulting wordings to report related news which could also be counted as a type of violence against sex workers.

To strike for a fair and just society and protect the human rights of everyone, both the government and the public should take on the responsibility to work for reforms and changes and end violence against sex workers:

- 1 The government should look into the importance of decriminalisation of sex work, and to immediately initiate review on related law articles.
- 2 Police should be prohibited from requesting for masturbation during undercover operations and should spare no effort to eliminate crimes against sex workers; law enforcers including the police and Immigration Department should strictly monitor and prohibit any front line officers and allow no harassment or abuse of power.
- 3 Discrimination towards sex workers should be eliminated. When witnessing violence or the abuse of police power against sex workers, members of the public should try their best to help.
- 4 The mass media should immediately stop any inappropriate reporting. News violating sex workers' privacy and containing humiliating elements should be prohibited as well.

Initiated by:

Action for REACH OUT



Co-signed by:

AIDS Concern

Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women

Hong Kong Women Christian Council

Hong Kong Women Workers' Association

JJJ Association

Teen's Key

The Association for the Advancement of Feminism

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