

Issue 14 ~ 3 Reaching Out 展翅

AUGUST 2008

NEWS ABOUT SEX WORKERS

Meeting with the Police

Since the murder cases in March, AFRO has had meetings with the Police to discuss possible measures to protect sex workers.

1. Crime reporting mechanism: From 9 April, the Crime Prevention Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force would inform sex workers support groups i.e. AFRO, Zi Teng and Midnight Blue of crime against sex workers and deliver related information to the organisations. To date, we have received information about 16 cases. Most of them are about robbery, a client refusing to pay, a client using forged dollar note etc.
2. Regular Meetings: On 30 May 2008, AFRO, Zi Teng and Midnight Blue, male sex workers support group, met four representatives from the Crime Prevention Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force, including Mr. Ng Kam Wing and Mr. Lee Kwan Hing. At the meeting, the police released urgent contact numbers of 24 districts to these organisations. It was intended that calling the designated? numbers would shorten the time and procedure of crime reporting relating to sex workers.

AFRO has printed out these information and would distribute it during outreach visits. Please give us a call should you require more details. The police expressed that they would possibly meet the sex workers support groups again in 3-6 months.

Be careful when signing a statement

Recently, AFRO received complaints from sex workers that the statements taken by the police were different from what they verbally gave. We would like to once again remind everyone to read through the statement taken by the police. Please do not believe that "it's only a procedure", or that "it wouldn't cause anything, you won't be charged", as said by some police officers. You have every right to remain silent, not to answer any question, and not to sign any statement or document. You also have the right to make phone calls, to us and your lawyer.

Co-action by the police and the Buildings Department

Targeting "one sex worker apartments" in Yau Ma Tei, Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui etc, the police has co-acted with the Buildings Department and raided a series of raids. Apart from registering I.D. cards of the customers, the police and the Building Department representatives also entered the apartments and took pictures. It is believed to be an action taken by the police targeting the "grey area" created by a big apartment being divided into a few smaller apartments. In fact, sex workers being concentrated on the same floor can effectively give better protection. Women working in "one sex worker apartments" are usually the targets for the previous murder?? and/or robbery cases. In order to better protect the personal safety of sex workers, the government should start

the process of decriminalizing sex work.

AFRO'S NEWS READING

Police Abuse – using foul language, threatening and sexual harassment 28/06/2008

http://the-sun.on.cc/channels/news/20080628/20080628024142_0000.html

Sex workers, whether as the victims of crime or the arrested, are always bothered by police abuse. For example, a police officer refusing to produce his/her warrant card when checking “the licence” or I.D. card/relevant document of a sex worker; a sex worker being scolded or verbally assaulted; not being allowed to make a phone call; being forced to sign a statement which she does not agree, or even being strip-searched! The “categorisation” of strip search (into 3 categories) which became effective from 1 July 2008, has many grey areas and people’s rights are not adequately protected.

AFRO'S WORK REPORT

JULY 1 Rally

This year’s theme is “**One World, Universal Human Rights**”. Every one should enjoy same human rights despite their work, identify, race, sex, religion, age and language; however, this does not necessarily applicable to sex workers. Thus, we took this opportunity to come out to tell everyone “human rights of sex workers should not be intruded’.

Four sex workers brought their family members joined our staff and volunteers (Angela, Davina and Mr. Kam) together with Executive Committee member, Nancy and her family, a total of fourteen were marching on the street, asking for decriminalizing sex work.

DECRIMINALIZATION

Last month, we distributed a booklet about decriminalization and discussed the impact with the women. In this exercise, we learned that most of the sex workers did not have a good understanding of the concept. In general, they did not want mandatory registration for fear of identify exposure; quite a lot of women were interested to know more about the possibilities of “two-women brothel”, “red light district”, “taxation” etc.

Sex work is not a crime. We hope to see that sex work is being treated as a form of “work”, like any other business act to be governed by commercial laws. Sex workers are service providers who should be protected by labour laws.

PEER EDUCATION

There were four sex workers participated in the new peer education programme which started in May. This six-month training programme included health, legal rights, life skills and outreach skills, supplemented with outreach practice. After completion,

participants would come on board as Peer Educators and would help with outreaching and drop-in centre duties to support and share their knowledge with other sex workers.

VOLUNTEER TEAM

Let us welcome the “New Kids on the Block”! After a series of volunteer training, there were nine new volunteers joining our outreach team. This has released the pressure on our day-time scheduling. We look forward to working happily with you all!

WALKATHON

Do you still remember the walkathon in April? We were pleased to announce that we had reached our target and raised \$52,745. This sum would be used for the general administration of the organization.

AFRO SHOP

It has been two months since the opening of the AFRO Shop. Five ex-sex workers were trained to run the shop. We sell condoms and lubricants. Our customers were mainly sex workers and found the service particularly warm and friendly. This helped the sales tremendously!

At present, the women that we were able to reach out joined the industry due to financial constraint. Some got poor education level; some lacked professional skills; some were newly arrived immigrants and encountered difficulties in getting a job; the qualifications of some of the women were not recognised in Hong Kong. The setting up of the AFRO Shop provided basic training for those who wished to change job and through training to help them build up their self-confidence.

(CLINIC NEWS

The AFRO clinic has been in operation for ten months. Our goal is to raise the awareness of the sex workers on health issues: make them aware that this is a high risk industry; learn how to prevent from infectious diseases. Services include testing and checking of Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS, syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HPV and pap smear.

Amongst our users, some were first time visitors; some were returnees for regular check-up, re-visit, treatment, inoculation or consultation. Some women used the hotline to acquire health information.

Many women who came here for the first visit did not know what to be examined. Most of them came because of word of mouth and also the examinations were free of charge. Some might have heard of the name of various sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, but not knowing the symptoms, ways of transmission, effects, treatment and prevention. Some women had myths about the diseases. Some women delayed treatment because “it would not happen to me, I guess, I usually use condoms”; “I got my own medication, as long as I did not feel sick any more, I have recovered. There is no need to see a doctor.” Therefore, we need to work more on promotion and public

education.

Accumulated figures: number of service recipients	Nationality	Service nature of each visit (n=424)
Attended clinic 194	Mainland China 51%	Medical consultation 56%
Outreached 117	The Philippines 23%	Outreach clinic 32%
	Thailand 15%	Revisit 10%
	Hong Kong 10%	Vaccine injection 2%
	Others 1%	

Above data as at 23/6/2008

LATEST UPDATE

Brief Update on decriminalization of sex work in New Zealand

Recently, there are more and more discussions about decriminalization of sex work in Hong Kong. In New Zealand, a review was conducted on the Prostitution Reform Act 2003 (PRA) after the its commencement, in June 2003. While not endorsing or morally sanctioning prostitution or its use, the PRA created a framework to safeguard the human rights of sex workers; protect them from exploitation; promote the welfare and occupational health and safety of sex workers; contribute to public health; and prohibit the use in prostitution of persons below 18 years of age.

So, what's the impact of decriminalization of sex work? The report published on 25 June 2008 became a focus of the country. A conference was held in New Zealand to celebrate the 5th year anniversary of decriminalization of sex work. Those who attended included councilors, brothel owners, Catholic sisters and experts on sexual health etc. Helen Clark, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, indicated that the success brought by decriminalization of sex work helped sex workers fight for their human rights.

The report also revealed the following:

- There was no significant increase or decrease in the number of workers in the sex industry, including street walkers; one-woman apartment and brothels etc.
- Sex workers, especially those working on the streets, were more willing to report crime cases to the police. However, the research showed that the number of prosecuted cases had not increased. More than 90% of sex workers expressed that they entitled the same rights as other citizens.
- The police's attitudes towards sex workers had changed. In some districts, police officers became more friendly. However, illegal brothels were still targeted and police conducted raids.
- The courts were inclined to declare judicially that sex workers entitled to same right as any other citizens.

- Sex workers became less worried about being arrested, and thus more willing to report to the police after being attacked.
- The condom using rate was high. But the sex industry claimed that it had nothing to do with decriminalization of sex work, and that since the 80s, sex workers had shown more concern to their health.
- 93% of the sex workers indicated that the reason for entering the industry was for money.

<http://www.justice.govt.nz/prostitution-law-review-committee/publications/plrc-report/index.html>

29 June 2008

RTHK Hong Kong Connection documentary titled as “Sex work is also work” (in Cantonese) interviewed sex workers with different background and AFRO. To review, please click <http://www.rthk.org.hk/rthk/tv/hkcc/20080629.html>

8 July 2008

LEGCO Panel on Security Meeting:

- Review of Legislation relating of “one sex worker apartment” – documents submitted by Hong Kong Police Force (<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/se/papers/se0708cb2-2481-4-e.pdf>) responded to the suggestion paper prepared by AFRO and other concerned groups. Despite counselors’ support to review the related laws, government reiterated that there was no intention to follow up further.
- And, review the procedure to strip search detainees – documents supplied by Security Bureau and the Police (<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/se/papers/secb2-2439-1-e.pdf>) revealed that police officers were following new guidelines. Unfortunately, these guidelines further exploit human rights of citizens. These include unclear procedure, detainees do not have the right to refuse, no system to prevent police officer abusive use and revengeful way to strip search. In the past, AFRO received complaints from sex workers about unreasonable strip search. AFRO could continue to follow up.