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Empowering Autonomy: A Community-Based Approach to Sex Work Policy

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Disclaimer

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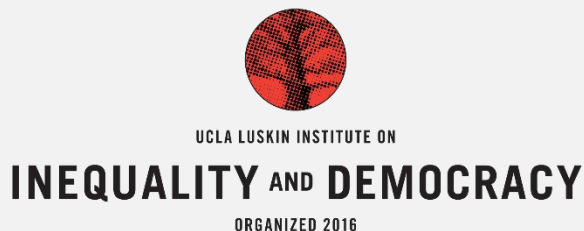


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Glossary of Terms

This glossary aims to clarify key terms used throughout the document to facilitate a more thorough understanding of the topics discussed.

- **SWOPLA (Sex Workers' Outreach Project Los Angeles):** SWOPLA stands for Sex Workers Outreach Project Los Angeles. SWOPLA is a peer support and mutual aid organization based in Los Angeles, run by sex workers and for sex workers (“About,” SWOP-Los Angeles). Their main programming areas are outreach, community building, public education, research, mutual aid and political advocacy (“About,” SWOP-Los Angeles).
- **Sex Work:** Sex work is defined as the exchange of sexual activities/services between consenting adults for money or goods (Rayson and Alba 2019). This is NOT to be confused with sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is not consensual, involves forced or coerced acts, and can involve minors.
- **Workers/Sex Workers:** The term “workers” and “sex workers” are interchangeable within this report. This is defined as individuals engaged in the sex work industry, providing sex work in exchange for compensation. Refer to the definition of sex work from above.
- **Policing/Policing practices:** This term encompasses the criminal justice system and all forms of law enforcement. It includes not only interactions with local police officers but also the broader ways in which laws are enforced. This can involve various law enforcement agencies, court systems, and even regulatory bodies. The role they play in financial access is significant, as these practices can impact the financial well-being of sex workers, their ability to secure housing, open bank accounts, and more. This term aims to capture the full spectrum of law enforcement’s impact on the lives of individuals engaged in sex work.
- **Participants/Focus Group Participants:** The term “participants” and “focus group participants” will be interchangeable for the purposes of this report. This refers to data gathered from our focus groups as part of our primary data collection.

The following three terms refer to three legal frameworks for sex work that we will examine extensively in the report:

- **Decriminalization:** The removal of criminal penalties in the sex work industry for both the client and the worker, allowing it to be governed by labor laws and regulations like other professions.
- **Legalization:** The process of making sex work legal if workers abide by certain regulations and restrictions, often involving a system of licensing and monitoring. Failure to abide by these regulations would result in criminal penalties.
- **Criminalization (Status Quo):** The current legal framework in California where sex work is illegal and subject to criminal penalties. We also consider legal frameworks

where only clients are criminalized but not workers to be under the criminalization framework as well. “Status quo” and “criminalization” are interchangeable in this report.

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of three legal frameworks of sex work on health, workplace safety, community safety, and economic/financial impact. These frameworks are decriminalization, legalization, and criminalization.

We base our policy analysis on an extensive methodology that includes findings from numerous focus groups with sex workers and a comprehensive literature review. These sources offer insight into the impacts of these governance modes.

Our key findings paint a troubling picture of the current political landscape in the United States, specifically California. The status quo of criminalizing sex work has led to negative outcomes for both sex workers and society. These outcomes span across various areas of our data analysis. Testimonies from impacted sex workers and international policy analysis make it clear that decriminalization offers numerous benefits. These benefits are evident across the social safety infrastructure, from improved management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to decreased reliance on carceral institutions. Decriminalization has also proven to be more politically feasible than legalization, particularly in terms of long-term implementation. In addition, legalization offers limited benefits for a small partition of occupation, while worsening quality of life for those whose work remains criminalized, and persistently stigmatizing the totality of sex workers.

Therefore, we recommend that local, state, and federal governments adopt a decriminalization policy for the governance of sex work. This policy would prioritize providing workers with critical workplace protections, improving access to public health, and empowering marginalized workers. Our research team believes that decriminalization upholds the rights and dignity of sex workers. It improves relationships between workers and healthcare providers, reduces state-sanctioned and other forms of violence against sex workers, and has a positive economic impact that primarily benefits the workers themselves.

Looking forward, we recommend further research into the specific mechanisms through which decriminalization can be implemented. We also suggest exploring additional support services that can be provided specifically to sex workers under a decriminalization framework.

We invite you to read the full report. It provides a detailed discussion of our research methods, findings, and recommendations. We believe that a nuanced understanding of this issue is crucial as it informs policy decisions that uphold the rights and dignity of sex workers. Furthermore, it can be extrapolated to understand the critical role of empowering policies, which is particularly important for industries over-represented by gender and racially marginalized individuals.

Chapter 1: Introduction

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SEX WORKERS OUTREACH PROJECT OF LOS ANGELES (SWOPLA), this Applied Policy Project (APP) uses a community-based research approach. It investigates the intersection of labor protections and financial dynamics within the sex industry. The goal is to better understand the impact on the health and safety of marginalized workers. Using a holistic lens, the research focuses on the impacts of different legal frameworks of sex work on workers. Our research group has intentionally centered the testimony of sex workers in the development of our policy recommendations. We have rooted our research in the critical notion that all sex workers are seeking and deserving of financial, professional, and personal autonomy. They are individuals who are especially subject to vulnerability in these realms due to the intimate nature of their work. We aim to understand these complex dynamics through a robust literature review and a series of focus groups. These focus groups involve current sex workers based in Los Angeles County. Our objective is to recommend policies that ensure labor protections, physical and emotional safety, holistic health, and long-term economic stability for sex workers, as well as public health improvements for the public. Grounded in the lived experiences of the community members who are guiding and informing this study, we hope these findings play a crucial role in the construction of an empowering, worker-centered policy. The methodology and policy findings aim to contribute to the discourse on sex work policy. This discourse is founded from sex worker leadership and designed to uplift the voices of sex workers. It aims toward more effective and empowering policy outcomes for the most marginalized workers within the sex worker umbrella.

To share these arguments for decriminalizing sex work, we are presenting this information through the utilization of narrative strategies that uplift the lived experience of impacted workers. These workers are often further marginalized through race, gender-identity, immigration status, or occupation within the sex industry. We hope to investigate the mechanisms of how decriminalization of sex work has the potential to provide workers access to a dignified living and protection from violence and health challenges. These challenges include but are not limited to sexual assault from criminal law enforcement, intimate violence in the workplace from putative clients, recurring STI exposure, lack of quality care from medical providers difficulties obtaining payments, and lack of access to financial institutions or the social safety net. All these challenges are fundamental pitfalls of the criminalized market in California. Through this project, we aim to facilitate and actualize impactful local and statewide policy change through the utilization of qualitative and quantitative data sourced from focus groups, enabling our group to perform our analysis at the community level.

Our primary research question is:

“How do different legal frameworks that govern permissions for employment for individuals within the sex industry, intersect with policing practices, labor and employment protections, and financial dynamics across the sex industry — and how does this interaction, centering the financial and material well-being of sex workers, inform more effective and empowering policies for these workers?”

We seek to explore how this interaction of labor policy, personal financial security, and public health outcomes can be leveraged to shape more effective and empowering policies for sex workers. The focal point of our investigation is on how different legal frameworks, specifically the dichotomy between criminalization and decriminalization, can influence the economic stability, health, labor protections, and safety of workers in the sex industry.

The overarching objective of our project is to offer a comprehensive analysis of these complex dynamics, especially those that are unintended policy consequences of either pathway. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the creation of policies that promote safer, healthier, and more economically stable conditions for sex workers. This is particularly important for those currently lacking protections under current law, including street-based sex workers and those facing additional risks due to marginalization related to their gender, sexual orientation, or racial identification. A pivotal question guiding our inquiry is whether sex workers experience greater economic prosperity and stability under decriminalized frameworks. We center lived experience as our foremost policy informant.

In essence, our research is vital for understanding the complex dynamics of the sex industry and developing strategies that ensure safety, health, and economic stability for sex workers. This research emphasizes the importance of considering intersectionality in these discussions to ensure that a diverse array of workers is represented so that their unique challenges are addressed through proposed policy mechanisms. We collectively believe that this comprehensive and interconnected view can lead to more effective and empowering policies for sex workers.

Chapter 2: Background

Problem Identification

One of the central elements un-explored in existing research on sex work is the utilization of a comprehensive and intersectional approach. This approach not only focuses on the lived experiences of sex workers, but also considers the varied policy impacts related to racism and gender marginalization. It also examines the network of inter-industry dynamics that lead to different levels of government oversight, such as in pornography and street-based sex work. While there is a growing body of research that includes these critical considerations, we have highlighted some foundational studies. These studies address barriers faced by sex workers, including health disparities, unsafe working conditions, and economic challenges.

The stigma against sex workers poses a significant barrier to socio-political advocacy. Studies indicate that the criminalization of sex work has led to a growing social stigma around this profession (Goldenberg et. al. 2015, Sawick et. al. 2019). As a result, this increased stigma has heightened the likelihood of sex workers experiencing external violence and mental health disorders. These disorders include anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Goldenberg et. al. 2021, Sawick et. al. 2019). Moreover, the harsh stigmatization of sex workers in U.S. society often hinders their access to necessary health care. This includes care for sexually transmitted infections (STI), birth control, and general health concerns. These conditions are particularly severe for sex workers of color and queer sex workers (Goldenberg et. al. 2021).

The stigma associated with sex work is particularly relevant to HIV, a critical issue given the overrepresentation of LGBT+ individuals and people of color, notably Black/African American individuals, among sex workers in the United States. Despite proactive efforts by federal and state public health agencies to manage and reduce HIV spread, the scarcity of available and accessible services for sex workers remains a significant, yet insufficiently addressed, challenge in combating an ailment that has long affected marginalized communities. (Lyons, 2020)

Through an analysis of these issues intertwining the dire need for public health and labor oriented justice, our primary research question arises: “How do different legal frameworks that govern permissions for employment for individuals within the sex industry intersect with policing practices, labor and employment protections, and financial dynamics across the sex industry — and how do these interactions, centering the financial and material well-being of sex workers, inform more effective and empowering policies for these workers?” Through the policy/practice component of our research question we aim to address the intersection of legal frameworks (specifically, criminalization and decriminalization) and economic stability within the sex industry. Our primary objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of these complex dynamics, with the goal of providing policy recommendations that contribute to safer, healthier, and more economically stable conditions for sex workers. One core site of inquiry is based in the exploration of whether sex workers are more economically prosperous, stable, and supported under legal frameworks involving less criminalization of the sex trade. We have chosen to explore this dynamic through a combination of an expansive literature review providing comparative insight into international exemplars of sex work legalization and decriminalization models, focus groups that provide key testimony from former and current sex

workers based in the greater Los Angeles area, and economic analysis from both our comparative analysis and survey results from our focus groups.

Challenges

One of the main challenges that SWOPLA faces is the lack of public understanding and education about the difference and the implications of legalization versus decriminalization of sex work. Many people, including some sex workers, may view these terms as synonymous, but they have distinct legal and social consequences. Legalization involves creating new policies of regulation and taxation, specifically to apply to sex work, and continues to criminalize sex workers who do not comply with the new policies. Decriminalization involves removing all criminal penalties based on consensual participation in sex work. SWOPLA, an organization of former and current sex workers, champions decriminalization to enhance the rights, safety, health, and economic outcomes for sex workers, without the pitfalls of over-regulation, entrenched industry power dynamics, or policies that neglect workers' rights.

Another challenge SWOPLA faces is public education surrounding decriminalization. Many people may have moral or ideological objections to sex work. They fear that decriminalization will contribute to increases in crime, violence, trafficking, or 'sexual impurity'. SWOPLA aims to overcome these barriers by providing evidence-based arguments and narratives that show the benefits of decriminalization for sex workers and society. If SWOPLA were to draft a bill for decriminalization, the proposed law would need to address the following aspects:

- **Health benefits:** Decriminalization would enable sex workers to access health care services without fear of stigma or legal repercussions and reduce their exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. It would also improve their mental health by reducing stress, trauma, and discrimination. It might also allow sex workers to more effectively negotiate for measures to protect their health.
- **Economic and financial benefits:** Decriminalization would increase the income and financial stability of sex workers, as they would not have to pay fines, fees, or bribes to law enforcement or third parties. It would also allow them to access banking and comprehensive financial services, which are often denied to them due to their occupation. Decriminalization would also generate tax revenue and reduce criminal justice costs for the state.
- **Community safety:** Decriminalization would prevent sex workers from being arrested, incarcerated, sexually assaulted, and/or blackmailed by law enforcement, as compared to criminalization. Decriminalization would reduce violence and exploitation in the sex industry as sex workers would have more autonomy and control over their work. Decriminalization would also enhance the ability of sex workers to build trust with potential sources of support as sex workers would be able to talk about violence, abuse, or exploitation without fear of arrest or prosecution.

SWOPLA would also like to highlight the different outcomes of existing decriminalization and legalization models. The New Zealand and New South Wales decriminalization models have shown positive results in terms of reducing violence, improving health, and empowering sex

workers. Nevada’s legalization model, however, has been criticized for maintaining the stigma, exploitation, and marginalization of sex workers (Goldenberg 2021).

Opportunities

The removal of criminal penalties for sex workers can create a more equitable financial environment for these individuals, by addressing the challenges and risks that they face due to the lack of access to banking and financial services. As a SWOPLA board member pointed out,

“The problem is you can’t deposit [cash] if you don’t have a bank account; [and] you can’t pay rent with it, get a loan from the income, or get an apartment approved if you can’t deposit it. To frame the problem as ‘it’s risky to carry cash’ when the problem is ‘you’re as good as dead without a bank account, and no one will serve someone who might be a whore,’ makes it seem like the problem is a minor cost of doing business, when it’s a deadly consequence of anti-whore stigma.”

This project will specifically focus on the impact of financial complications workers face — such as not having a bank account — on the health, housing, and well-being of sex workers, especially in the current financial atmosphere which places a strong emphasis on digitized currency and online banking, and the informal cash economy winnowing in its salience.

Another opportunity is the role of sex work decriminalization in challenging resource allocation norms for law enforcement — especially as more advocacy organizations and politicians are becoming aware of the way in which police budgets comprise an exorbitant component of state and local expenditures, all the while police violence and brutality remains a rampant challenge. This project will examine whether decriminalizing sex work could be a vector for reducing the budget of law enforcement by minimizing or eliminating police oversight in this realm while also ensuring that sex workers are not subjected to harassment, extortion, or abuse by the police.

Finally, this project will also examine the link between the ability to gain health care services and the varying health outcomes for sex workers — intertwined with how housing status, rent, and economic stability are influenced by factors such as access to health care, impacting the overall well-being and health of sex workers. This project will identify opportunities for improved health care access and mental health support for sex workers while concurrently identifying the best practices models to ensure these changes can be systematically implemented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

WE USED A COMBINATION OF SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF ECONOMIC, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND LABOR-ORIENTED IMPACTS OF DECRIMINALIZATION AND LEGALIZATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, ALONGSIDE COMMUNITY-BASED FOCUS GROUPS WITH CURRENT SEX WORKERS TO EXPLORE OUR PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION. We aim to provide a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of the complex dynamics of the sex industry, while concurrently developing strategies to ensure safety, health, and economic stability for sex workers.

Our literature review examined the data and literature from countries that have implemented the partial decriminalization of sex work, such as New South Wales and New Zealand. These countries have exemplified positive outcomes in terms of reducing violence, improving health, and empowering sex workers — specifically in comparison to countries that have criminalized or legalized sex work. The literature review also explored the challenges and opportunities that partial decriminalization poses for sex workers, especially in relation to their financial status and interactions with law enforcement.

To complement the literature review, we also collected primary data through a series of focus groups. We gathered qualitative and quantitative data from key stakeholders — all of whom identify as sex workers. This data collection focused on the lived experiences of these individuals with law enforcement, financial challenges, and the impact of existing policies. A total of 18 individuals participated in our focus groups. Of our focus group participants, 44.4% identified as non-binary or transgender and 82.4% identified as Black/African American. The specific steps of our focus group analysis were as follows in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Focus Group Methodology

The findings of our data analysis guide the policy recommendations we have made.

Chapter 4: Results from Data Collection

THIS CHAPTER PROVIDES FINDINGS ON THE THREE DIFFERENT LEGAL FRAMEWORKS APPLIED TO SEX WORK: CRIMINALIZATION, LEGALIZATION, AND DECRIMINALIZATION. Each framework has distinct implications for the health, safety, economic stability, and societal attitudes towards sex workers. In Figure 2 below, we summarize our 12 main findings from our literature review and focus group analysis of each framework, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges associated with each approach:

Criminalization: Sex work is illegal and subject to criminal penalties	Finding #1: The criminalization of sex work has led to significant barriers in accessing healthcare and increased health risks, including STIs and mental health issues.
	Finding #2: Current societal stigma against sex work is perpetuated by criminalization, affecting sex workers' mental health and access to services.
	Finding #3: Criminalization correlates with higher rates of violence against sex workers.
	Finding #4: Criminalization imposes financial insecurity on sex workers due to difficulties in securing payment and accessing financial services.
Legalization: Regulations and government oversight for sex work	Finding #5: Legalization could potentially reduce STI rates but may also introduce mandatory health screenings, which could lead to mistrust among sex workers towards healthcare systems.
	Finding #6: Legalization would increase surveillance and regulation by law enforcement.
	Finding #7: Legalization might lead to shifts in societal attitudes towards sex work but could also perpetuate stigma and discrimination due to regulatory practices.
	Finding #8: Legalization could lead to increased operating costs due to police surveillance and potential financial penalties for non-compliance with regulations.
Decriminalization: No legal penalties for sex work, which recognizes it as labor	Finding #9: Decriminalization could improve health outcomes by reducing stigma and improving access to healthcare services.
	Finding #10: Decriminalization could enhance safety by reducing stigma, criminal punishment, and law enforcement abuse of sex workers.
	Finding #11: Decriminalization could foster a shift towards greater social acceptance and inclusion of sex workers.
	Finding #12: Decriminalization could lead to greater economic stability and access to banking and housing services.

Figure 2. Summary of 12 Main Findings on Three Legal Frameworks

Findings on Criminalization Framework

“Accessing services is already hard. On top of that, your work has a stigma attached to it. If I am going to receive any medication or health advice, I refrain from [disclosing too much] because I don’t want to get stigmatized.”

– Focus Group Participant on Criminalization

We now dive into the multifaceted impacts of the criminalization framework on sex workers. Our findings reveal a stark landscape where criminalization not only fails to cause any positive policy outcomes but actively contributes to sexual violence and the vulnerability and marginalization of

sex workers. Through a combination of literature review and poignant testimonies from focus group participants, this chapter lays bare the harsh realities faced by sex workers under California's current legal paradigm, highlighting the urgent need for policy reform that prioritizes their rights, safety, and well-being.

Impact on Health and Healthcare

Finding #1: The criminalization of sex work has led to significant barriers in accessing healthcare and increased health risks, including STIs and mental health issues.

Prevalence of transmittable disease in relation to the sex industry comprises most research on the sex work industry, particularly as it pertains to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sex workers are disproportionately affected by HIV worldwide due to the criminalization around their profession (Altic et. al. 2015, Footer et. al. 2016, Krüsi et. al 2014). These risks are further exacerbated when sex workers are gender and sexual minorities, such as transgender sex workers (Ross 2012). The literature on this subject further suggests that policing practices and criminalization have led to a further increase in the risk of contracting HIV because of the lack of accountability for clients, and the difficulty of STI risk mitigation techniques under this political reality (Footer et. al 2016., Krüsi et. al 2014, Overs and Loff. 2013).

Concerning health outcomes, focus group participants consistently reported encountering significant barriers to accessing healthcare and essential health resources, due predominantly to the presence of stigma, fear, and internal and external negative judgment. These challenges were compounded by financial constraints, making it difficult for many to afford necessary medical services. Participants noted that under criminalization, sex work has been barred from the advancements in labor safety, such as unemployment insurance or workplace-provided health care. Additionally, there was a pervasive reluctance among participants to disclose their profession to healthcare providers due to both the fear and presence of discrimination within healthcare settings. Numerous participants recounted experiences of encountering judgmental attitudes and discriminatory treatment from healthcare professionals, and several of them indicated that such poor treatment discouraged them from seeking healthcare services in the future. Some re-account instances of being regarded as negative statistics or even culpable actors in regards to STI and HIV transmission. The psychosocial stress resulting from such stigma and discrimination further exacerbated the already precarious health conditions faced by sex workers.

Finding #2: Current societal stigma against sex work is perpetuated by criminalization, affecting sex workers' mental health and access to services.

Sex workers are not only at a higher risk for worse physical health outcomes but also are at higher risk for worse mental health outcomes as well. Criminalization perpetuates stigma against sex workers, which has been historically ingrained into the fabric of the U.S. status quo. Both macro and micro level stigmatization has led to deplorable working conditions and interpersonal harm — in turn negatively influencing the mental health of sex workers (Benoit et.

al 2017). Poor mental health outcomes are associated with increased likelihood of substance use disorders, and therefore, sex workers are often at risk for substance abuse issues because of stigmatization and poor mental health (Pandey et al 2022). As with physical health, mental health issues and substance use disorders are more likely when society further marginalizes sex workers because of gender identity and gender expression (Pandey et al 2022). The lack of comprehensive, accessible, and sex worker accommodating health provisions is a critical byproduct of criminalization, worsening this rampant public health crisis through the lack of suitable management systems and institutions. All these factors are worsened by the overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well as gender-queer and transgender people within this profession — which compounds and characterizes the phenomena of *whorephobia*.

Workplace and Community Safety

Finding #3: Criminalization correlates with higher rates of violence against sex workers.

One of the hallmarks of criminalization of sex work is criminalization's correlation with higher rates of violence against sex workers. Sex workers, under criminalization, are offered minimal societal protections from violence due to a lack of legal protection, villainization of their trade, and proliferation of social stigma associated with this work.

As a result, sex workers are too often subject to assault and abuse by buyers — **ON A GLOBAL SCALE, SEX WORKERS HAVE A 45-75% CHANCE OF GETTING ASSAULTED WHILE ON THE JOB** (Urban Justice Center, 2020). The Sex Workers and Police Promoting Health in Risky Environments (SAPPHIRE) study in Baltimore, Maryland revealed that **78% OF SEX WORKERS HAD EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE ABUSIVE ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE UNDER A CRIMINALIZATION FRAMEWORK** (Footer, 2018).

Focus group participants highlighted pervasive violence perpetrated by law enforcement agents, leading to a profound fear of interaction with law enforcement among sex workers. This fear often deterred individuals from discussing instances of violence, whether inflicted by law enforcement, clients, or others, even with healthcare or mental healthcare service providers, due to a fear of involvement of law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, focus group participants noted that the absence of adequate safety measures during interactions with clients underscored the vulnerability of sex workers to exploitation, violence, and harm within their working environments.

The prevention of violent crime against workers in this industry can be quantified not only by the welfare benefit to the wellbeing and survival of people in this trade but also by the annual savings on the national criminal legal system. **UNDER THE CRIMINALIZATION FRAMEWORK, FEES RELATED TO ISSUES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE TOTAL AN UPWARDS OF \$3,554,375,000 PER YEAR** (Dalesandry 2014). In totality, criminalization has contributed to excessive burden being placed on the worker, from navigating the legality of their work and protecting personal safety, to advocating for recognition and respect during sessions.

Some may argue that criminalization of sex work discourages human trafficking. Existing studies, however, note that there is no link between the criminalization of sex work and a decrease in human trafficking (American Civil Liberties Union 2020). A 2021 joint report from the USC Gould International Human Rights Clinic and the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking concluded US anti-trafficking operations are entirely counterproductive at present (Garry and Reinbrecht 2021).

The safety of sex workers also greatly varies between indoor and outdoor sex work. Indoor sex work, including massage parlors, brothels, and private rooms, is less safe in a criminalized framework due to the lack of ability for sex workers to negotiate transactions, such as the type of services and their prices for each service (McDermid et. al 2022).

Furthermore, sex workers are at a higher risk of robbery and assault when conducting sex work in a criminalized landscape because of high cash flow in indoor venues (McDermid et. al 2022). Regardless of local and cultural contexts, the results are the same: criminalization of indoor sex work leads to poorer working conditions, increased risk of violence, and a reluctance for sex workers to seek help when conditions are more than they can bear (West et al 2021).

Economic and Financial Impact

Finding #4: Criminalization imposes financial insecurity on sex workers due to difficulties in securing payment and accessing financial services.

Focus group participants described a myriad of challenges contributing to financial insecurity within the context of criminalized sex work. These challenges ranged from difficulties ensuring payment for services rendered to instances of financial discrimination when attempting to access banking services, loans, or housing. Such systemic barriers perpetuated economic vulnerability and further marginalized sex workers within broader socio-economic structures.

Not only does criminalization impose financial insecurity on sex workers, it also costs the criminal justice system money. An analysis in the District of Columbia found **CRIMINALIZATION RESULTS IN AN EXPENDITURE OF, AT MINIMUM, \$20,188.48 USD PER WORKER** criminalized from the District's criminal justice system (Footer, 2018).

Overall, criminalization imposes financial burdens on both sex workers and society as whole.

Findings on Legalization Framework

“Our government has a hard enough time creating policies around bodies as far as healthcare goes [regarding] reproductive rights. I can’t imagine that we’re in a place where policymakers are ready to legalize something responsibly.”

– Focus Group Participant on Legalization

Next, we examine the intricate dynamics of the legalization framework for sex work, examining its multifaceted impact on health outcomes, workplace safety, and economic conditions. Exploring the nuanced realities faced by sex workers under legalization, our findings reveal a complex interplay between regulatory measures and the lived experiences of those within the industry. This highlights the potential benefits and challenges of the legalization framework.

Impact on Health and Healthcare

Finding #5: Legalization could potentially reduce STI rates but may also introduce mandatory health screenings, which could lead to mistrust among sex workers towards healthcare systems.

Within the realm of health outcomes, legalization has the potential to reduce the rate of STIs by removing some of the challenges to access screenings and other health services. A six-year study on the effects of indoor legal prostitution in Rhode Island displayed that decriminalizing indoor sex work decreased the rates of gonorrhea, dropping infections by 40% (West et. al 2021). Additionally, a legalization model can reduce the risk of negative health outcomes of sex workers. With Netherlands (Dutch) adoption of a legalization framework, Dutch sex workers are at a lower risk of negative mental and physical health outcomes compared to U.S. sex workers (Krumrei-Mancuso 2017). However, criminalized forms of sex work still exist in the Netherlands, with individuals who choose to work independent of a brothel remaining criminalized. With the need for further COVID-19 protections for sex workers, it has revealed that legalization of sex work has limited health and safety protections for workers who would prefer to work from home and outside of their brothel environments to implement more personalized and stringent public health protections. The COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled the need for further workplace and public health protections for sex workers in legalized environments (McNicoll 2024).

Focus group participants voiced many concerns regarding mandatory testing required by a legalization model. Forcing sex workers to comply with a legalization regime ostensibly aimed at regulating and monitoring the health of sex workers would further exacerbate mistrust and alienation among sex workers towards healthcare systems. It further marginalizes the sex workers who would not be able to comply with this ‘pro-sex worker’ government measure.

Participants were particularly apprehensive of any forced health screenings or sex worker registries that could be part of such a scheme.

Workplace and Community Safety

Finding #6: Legalization would increase surveillance and regulation by law enforcement.

Focus group participants establish that the legalization of sex work will lead to increased monitoring and regulation by law enforcement agencies. This heightened scrutiny not only intensifies the surveillance of sex workers but also perpetuates a climate of fear within the industry. Participants noted that discriminatory licensing practices because of legalization would further compound the challenges faced by sex workers, as regulatory frameworks often favor certain segments of the industry while marginalizing others. Additionally, while legalization may afford increased labor protections for regulated workers, these benefits are often contingent upon compliance with stringent regulatory requirements, leaving many workers vulnerable to exploitation and exclusion.

Finding #7: Legalization might lead to shifts in societal attitudes towards sex work but could also perpetuate stigma and discrimination due to regulatory practices.

While a legalization framework may lead to small shifts in societal attitudes towards greater acceptance and normalization of sex work, the increased regulations and heavy policing of workers can contribute to the perpetuation of stigma and exacerbate existing discrimination. Focus group participants emphasized that legalization does not challenge the discrimination that sex workers face but instead allows forceful regulation that can reinforce harmful stereotypes. Because of the heightened scrutiny, societal attitudes may shift further towards the belief that sex work is deviant, suspect, or anti-social.

Economic and Financial Impact

Finding #8: Legalization could lead to increased operating costs due to police surveillance and potential financial penalties for non-compliance with regulations.

The increased surveillance and policing of sex workers under legalization can have significant financial impacts. Participants highlighted that increased surveillance by police may increase operating costs within the sex industry as sex workers may be forced to change their working environment and adopt more safety measures to evade police intervention. The heightened presence of police may also affect market demand and pricing as consumers become more cautious, although some clients might feel more comfortable hiring sex workers if they were sure they would not face negative legal consequences. Finally, financial penalties for failing to comply with strict requirements may exacerbate economic difficulties for sex workers.

Participants also discussed concerns around legalization introducing a range of regulatory measures aimed at standardizing and controlling the economic aspects of sex work. This includes the regulation of the price of work, which, while potentially offering stability and predictability for some workers, also constrains the autonomy and bargaining power of others. Similarly, the establishment of a standard minimum wage for regulated workers seeks to address economic inequalities within the industry but often fails to adequately account for the diverse needs and circumstances of all sex workers. Moreover, the ability to file taxes legally and access formal financial services is typically restricted to regulated workers under legalization, further exacerbating economic disparities and exclusion within the legalized framework.

Overall, while legalization may have offered certain benefits in terms of formal recognition and labor protections for some sex workers, our analysis reveals significant drawbacks and limitations inherent in this approach. From coercive health screenings to discriminatory licensing practices and economic regulation, the legalization of sex work often exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities within the industry, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to sex work governance.

Findings on Decriminalization Framework

“Everyone will know that there is no offense in the work and healthcare providers will be more likely to create a safe space.”

– Focus Group Participant on Decriminalization

Finally, we explore the transformative effects of the decriminalization framework on the sex work industry. Our findings reveal significant improvements in health outcomes, workplace safety, and financial stability for sex workers. Decriminalization emerges as a powerful catalyst for social and economic empowerment, challenging the stigma and legal barriers that have long marginalized this workforce. This underscores the potential of decriminalization to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Impact on Health and Healthcare

Finding #9: Decriminalization could improve health outcomes by reducing stigma and improving access to healthcare services.

Key studies¹ highlight the notion that decriminalizing sex work, through the standardization of health and safety measures in the workplace and the removal of stigma that acts as a barrier to accessing healthcare, will improve the health and safety of sex workers and society (Wong, 2014).

Focus group participants believe decriminalization would significantly reduce the fear of judgment by healthcare providers, fostering a more trusting and open relationship between sex workers and healthcare systems. This newfound trust, coupled with the removal of legal barriers, increases the likelihood of sex workers to actively seek out health resources and healthcare services. As a result, this leads to improved overall health outcomes and a reduction in psychosocial stress associated with stigma and discrimination.

IN NEW ZEALAND WHERE SEX WORKERS ARE LESS STIGMATIZED DUE TO DECRIMINALIZATION, SEX WORKERS DEMONSTRATE A LOWER RISK OF NEGATIVE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH THAN U.S. SEX WORKERS (Goldenberg et. al. 2021). Over a six-year Rhode Island based study, it was shown that the **DECRIMINALIZATION OF SEX WORK PRODUCED A 30% DECREASE IN REPORTED RAPES AMONGST SEX WORKERS AND A 40% DECREASE IN FEMALE GONORRHEA INCIDENCE** (West et. al 2021).

Furthermore, decriminalization makes it easier to allocate resources towards sex workers as it treats sex work like other professions. Previous research that studies the health and safety of sex workers have seen a decriminalization framework supporting the needs of sex workers and promoting a better quality of life (Goldenberg et. al. 2021). Sex worker support groups and networks, like SWOPLA, could also help mitigate the negative outcomes that are associated with sex workers in a criminalized landscape (Jackson 2019).

Research also affirmed that localities, such as that in Johannesburg, South Africa that provided sex work specific services, and provided staff that were specifically trained to work with sensitive populations had higher quality reviews from sex workers regarding treatment and quality of care, especially when compared to standard public clinics (Goldenberg et. al. 2021). In a further case-study within Mexico City, it was found that sex worker-led projects were highly successful at curbing public health risks associated with sex workers, such as STI's while also providing instrumental public health education around issues like domestic violence (Goldenberg et. al. 2021). In this case study, the sex worker lead project was APROSE, a public health clinic centered on the health needs of sex workers that also provided low-cost services to the public (Goldenberg et. al. 2021).

¹ While there are not many studies in the U.S. as sex work is mostly criminalized, a study in London noted that legalization of sex work can lead to a 33% to 46% decrease in rates of HIV for female sex workers.

Workplace and Community Safety

Finding #10: Decriminalization could enhance safety by reducing stigma, criminal punishment, and law enforcement abuse of sex workers.

When it comes to workplace safety, focus group participants believe that decriminalization would foster an environment of increased accountability from clients. This shift would empower sex workers to assert their rights with their clients, and to be able to discuss instances of violence or exploitation without fear of legal repercussions, thereby enhancing their overall safety and well-being. Moreover, focus group participants believe decriminalization would extend existing labor protections to all workers within the industry, irrespective of their legal status or line of work, ensuring equal rights and protections for all sex workers.

The literature also notes that the decriminalization of sex work supports the alleviation and minimization of global sex trafficking and exploitation (Garry and Reinbrecht 2021). To prevent sex trafficking and care for survivors, survivors must be able to safely discuss sexual exploitation and abuse without the fear of facing legal repercussions. Decriminalization allows for sex workers to benefit from societal support when they have been violated, rather than being further isolated in situations of abuse (Garry and Reinbrecht 2021).

Furthermore, decriminalization will reduce societal stigmatization, which can prevent the social marginalization of those who have been sexually exploited. Existing studies note that there is no link between the criminalization of sex work and a decrease in human trafficking (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020). Rather, decriminalizing sex work can decrease human trafficking by recognizing sex workers' human rights, allowing survivors of sex trafficking to access social supports, and preventing the people from becoming vulnerable to being trafficked or exploited in the first place.

Finding #11: Decriminalization could foster a shift towards greater social acceptance and inclusion of sex workers.

Beyond these tangible benefits, focus group participants believe that decriminalization would likely spark broader societal shifts, including increased public acceptance and cultural normalization of sex work. By recognizing sex work as a legitimate form of labor and removing punitive legal frameworks, decriminalization challenges entrenched stigma and discrimination, paving the way for greater social inclusion and justice.

Economic and Financial Impact

Finding #12: Decriminalization could lead to greater economic stability and access to banking and housing services.

In terms of financial dynamics, focus group participants affirm that decriminalization would afford sex workers greater agency and autonomy in their economic endeavors. With the removal of legal barriers and stigmatization, sex workers can more easily find clients, leading to a more consistent flow of work and a stable income. In our literature review, an analysis in the District of

Columbia found that **DECRIMINALIZING SEX WORK YIELDED AN ANNUAL INCREASED INCOME OF \$5,348.68 USD PER WORKER** (Footer, 2018).

Furthermore, focus group participants widely said that decriminalization would facilitate increased access to banking, loans, and housing without fear of financial discrimination. Additionally, the ability to negotiate their own rates and work together on issues like payment standards would further enhance economic security and stability within the industry. Decriminalization would enable all workers to file taxes and file for benefits legally, legitimizing their work, fostering financial inclusion, and making it much easier for sex workers to rent apartments and obtain mortgages.

In summary, our analysis underscores the profound positive impacts of decriminalization on the health, safety, financial well-being, and societal acceptance of sex workers. By prioritizing human rights, autonomy, and dignity, decriminalization represents a crucial step towards creating a more just and equitable society for all individuals involved in the sex industry.

Chapter 5: Criteria for Evaluating Policy Options

SEX WORK IS A FORM OF LABOR THAT INVOLVES THE PROVISION OF SEXUAL SERVICES FOR REMUNERATION. As such, sex workers should be entitled to the same labor rights and protections as other workers, as well as the recognition and respect of their dignity and autonomy. Sex work, however, is also a highly contested issue. It raises political, social, and public health concerns. Policies that affect sex work should aim to balance these different interests while prioritizing the needs and rights of sex workers. In this chapter, we propose five criteria for evaluating policy options related to sex work: labor protections, health, economic impact, community safety, and political feasibility.

Criteria #1: Labor Protections

Labor protections are a fundamental right. Policies should aim to ensure the safety of sex workers in their workplace and provide them with fair wages, decent work, and a social safety net. They should address issues such as violence, exploitation, harassment, and discrimination that sex workers may encounter from clients, employers, third parties, or law enforcement. They should also empower sex workers to organize collectively, negotiate fair wages and working conditions, and access grievance mechanisms and legal recourse.

Fair Wages

Fair wages are essential for ensuring the economic security and dignity of sex workers. Policies should aim to protect sex workers from wage theft, exploitation, and coercion by employers, third parties, or clients. They should also ensure that sex workers have the right to set their own prices and terms of service, and to receive fair compensation for their work. Policies should also facilitate the payment of taxes and social security contributions by sex workers, as well as the recognition of their income and occupation for legal purposes.

Working Conditions & Grievance Mechanisms

Working conditions are important for ensuring the health and well-being of sex workers. Policies should aim to improve the physical and psychological working environment of sex workers, and to reduce the risks and harms associated with their work. They should also ensure that sex workers have the right to choose where, when, and how they work, and to have control over their working arrangements. Policies should also provide sex workers with access to occupational health and safety standards, training, and equipment, as well as the right to refuse or terminate a service.

Policies should aim to protect sex workers from violence, abuse, and harassment by clients, employers, third parties, or law enforcement, and to ensure that they can report and seek redress for any violations of their rights. They should also ensure that sex workers have access to legal aid, representation, and support, and that they are treated with respect and dignity by legal, political, and social institutions. Policies should also facilitate the meaningful leadership of sex workers in the development and implementation of laws and policies that affect their lives and safety.

Defining Levels of Impact

To evaluate the impact of labor protections for each legal framework, we have defined below what beneficial, mixed, and harmful are for labor protections:

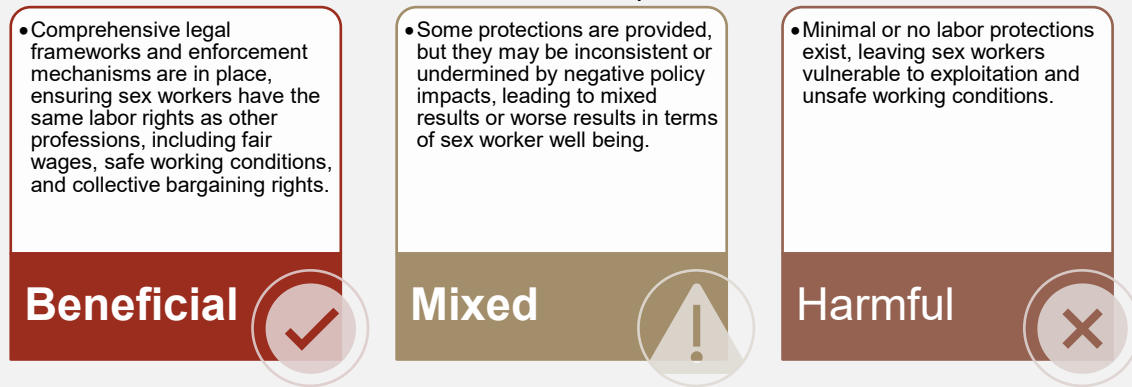


Figure 3. Defining Levels of Impact for Labor Protections

Criteria #2: Health

Health is a fundamental human right and a critical indicator of quality of life. Policies should aim to improve both mental and physical health outcomes for sex workers. They should also ensure access to health care services, removing barriers such as stigma, discrimination, and legal restrictions. Policies should address the specific health needs and risks of sex workers, such as sexual and reproductive health, HIV/STI prevention and treatment, and mental health support. They should also facilitate the implementation of public health interventions that are tailored to the needs of sex workers, such as outreach programs, peer education, and harm reduction.

Healthcare Access & Discrimination

Access to healthcare is crucial for the health and safety of sex workers, yet criminalization, mandatory testing, and reporting requirements can create significant obstacles. These policies can discourage sex workers from seeking medical care due to fear of legal repercussions or the risk of breach of privacy. The threat of being subjected to mandatory testing or having to report their occupation can lead to avoidance of healthcare services, which in turn can have detrimental effects on their health. Furthermore, the stigma and discrimination sex workers often encounter in healthcare settings can result in substandard care or outright denial of service, violating their right to confidentiality and quality healthcare. It is imperative that policies are reformed to eliminate these barriers, ensuring that healthcare services are accessible, non-discriminatory, and respectful of sex workers' privacy and dignity. Additionally, healthcare providers should receive proper training to understand the specific needs and rights of sex workers, and sex workers themselves should be actively involved in the creation and implementation of healthcare services tailored to their community.

Discrimination in healthcare settings is a violation of the human rights and dignity of sex workers. Policies should aim to prevent and eliminate the discrimination that sex workers may

face in accessing and receiving health care services. They should also ensure that sex workers have access to legal and social protection from discrimination, and that they can seek redress and accountability for any violations of their rights. Policies should also promote the respect and recognition of sex work as a legitimate form of work and a human right and challenge the stigma and stereotypes that fuel discrimination against sex workers. Policies should also support the empowerment and mobilization of sex workers to advocate for their health and human rights.

Health Outcomes

Examining health outcomes is important for measuring the impact of policies on the health and well-being of sex workers. Policies should aim to improve the physical and mental health outcomes of sex workers, and to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with their work. They should also monitor and evaluate the health outcomes of sex workers using indicators such as HIV/STI prevalence and incidence, sexual and reproductive health outcomes, mental health outcomes, substance use outcomes, and quality of life outcomes. Policies should also use disaggregated data to capture the diversity and disparities among sex workers, and to identify and address the social determinants of health that affect sex workers, such as poverty, violence, and discrimination.

Defining Levels of Impact

To evaluate the impact of health for each legal framework, we have defined below what beneficial, mixed, and harmful are for health:

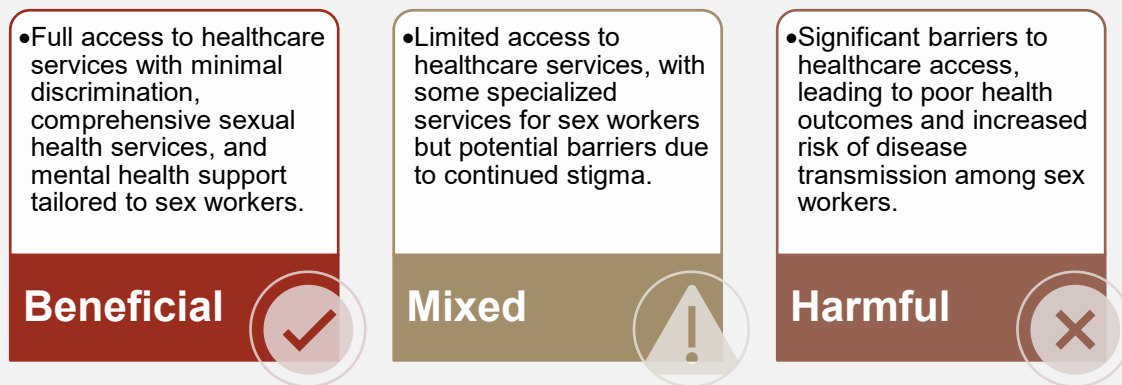


Figure 4. Defining Levels of Impact for Health

Criteria #3: Economic Impact

When assessing the various policy approaches to sex work, it's essential to consider the economic implications. An effective policy should recognize the potential for increased tax revenue and the opportunity for more strategic budget allocations. Instead of directing funds towards law enforcement against sex work, resources could be better utilized by addressing more critical community needs. This shift not only reflects a more efficient use of public funds but also aligns with broader economic strategies that prioritize community health and safety. Furthermore, any policy evaluation must consider the unique economic challenges faced by sex workers, such as securing stable housing and accessing financial services, to ensure a holistic and equitable approach.

Housing Stability

Housing stability is a key factor that influences the economic well-being and quality of life of sex workers. Policies should aim to improve the housing outcomes and options for sex workers, who often face barriers to accessing and maintaining adequate and affordable housing. These barriers include stigma and discrimination from landlords and property managers, legal restrictions and prohibitions, and housing precarity and crisis. Policies should ensure that sex workers have the right to housing and are not evicted or excluded from housing programs because of their work. Policies should also provide housing assistance and support to sex workers who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, such as permanent supportive housing. Policies should also recognize the role of housing as a form of health care and a harm reduction strategy for sex workers, as housing can improve their physical and mental health, safety, and autonomy.

Access to Financial Institutions

Access to financial institutions is essential for economic security and financial independence. Policies should ensure that sex workers have access to banking, insurance, credit, and other financial services that are often denied to them due to their occupation. Many sex workers rely on cash as their main form of income, which exposes them to risks such as theft, violence, and exploitation. Moreover, in a world where cash is declining, sex workers may face difficulties in paying for goods and services, accessing online platforms, and participating in the digital economy. Policies should facilitate the integration of sex workers into formal financial systems, enabling them to build savings, invest in education or training, and plan for the future.

Defining Levels of Impact

To evaluate the economic impact for each legal framework, we have defined below what beneficial, mixed, and harmful are for economic impact:

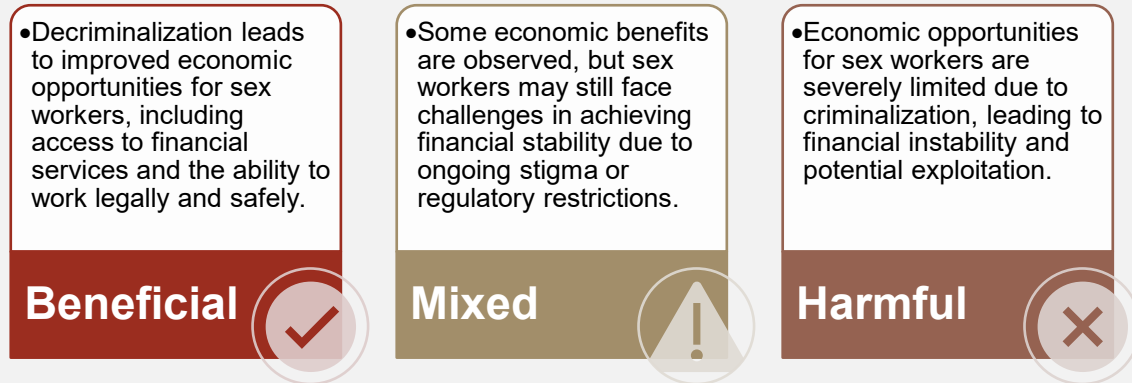


Figure 5. Defining Levels of Impact for Economic Impact

Criteria #4: Community Safety

Community safety is a shared responsibility and a common goal. Policies should aim to create safe communities for everyone, including sex workers. They should address issues such as crime, violence, and trafficking that may affect sex workers and the general public. They should also foster trust and cooperation between sex workers and other members of their communities, as well as promote social inclusion and cohesion through destigmatization of sex work. Policies should recognize the positive contributions of sex workers to society and challenge the stigma and discrimination that they face. Recognizing the positive contributions of sex workers to society involves a comprehensive understanding that their work can have various beneficial impacts. This includes economic benefits, such as contributing to the local economy through services and spending. It also encompasses the role they play in promoting sexual health and education, as many sex workers are knowledgeable about and advocate for safe sex practices. Furthermore, by providing companionship and intimacy services, they fulfill social and emotional needs within the community.

Safety from Law Enforcement

One of the sources of insecurity and violence for sex workers is the criminalization and stigmatization of their work by law enforcement. Policies should aim to decriminalize sex work and protect sex workers from arrests, raids, extortion, sexual abuse, and harassment by police officers. They should also ensure that sex workers are not subject to mandatory testing, registration, or reporting, which may violate their privacy and autonomy. Policies should also facilitate the ensure that sex workers are treated with respect and dignity by the justice system.

Destigmatizing Sex Work in Mainstream Culture

A major source of insecurity and violence for sex workers is the social stigma and discrimination that they face because of their work. Policies should aim to destigmatize sex work and challenge the stereotypes and myths that portray sex workers as immoral, deviant, or victims. They should also promote the recognition and respect of sex work as a legitimate form of labor. Policies should also support the education and awareness of the public and the media about the realities and diversity of sex work and sex workers.

Stigma can result in discrimination when it comes to health care access and housing. Sex workers often face barriers to accessing and maintaining adequate and affordable health care and housing due to stigma and criminalization. They may encounter stigma and discrimination from health care providers, landlords, and property managers, who may refuse to serve them, treat them poorly, or evict them because of their work. They may also face legal restrictions and prohibitions that limit their housing options and rights.

Furthermore, stigma can also justify violence towards sex workers, such as intimate partner violence, hate crimes, and police brutality. Sex workers are often targets of violence from various perpetrators, who may see them as easy prey, disposable, or deserving of harm because of their work. Stigma also creates a culture of impunity, where violence against sex workers is tolerated, ignored, or even encouraged by the society and the authorities. Sex workers face difficulties in seeking justice or protection, especially since police are likely to arrest, abuse, or harass them, if their profession is discovered.

Additionally, stigma also perpetuates victim blaming when sex workers are assaulted or victims of other forms of violence. Sex workers may face negative attitudes and judgments from the public, the media, and the justice system, who may blame them for their victimization and question their credibility and character because of their work. This may discourage sex workers from seeking help or support and may also influence the outcomes of legal cases involving sex workers, such as rape trials or murder investigations.

Destigmatizing sex work is important because it can improve the safety, health, and well-being of sex workers, as well as their access to justice and human rights. Destigmatizing sex work can also benefit the society, as it can reduce the spread of HIV and other STIs, decrease sexual violence, and promote social inclusion and cohesion. Thus, destigmatization of sex work is an important criterion in evaluating the different policy options.

Defining Levels of Impact

To evaluate community safety for each legal framework, we have defined below what beneficial, mixed, and harmful are for community safety:

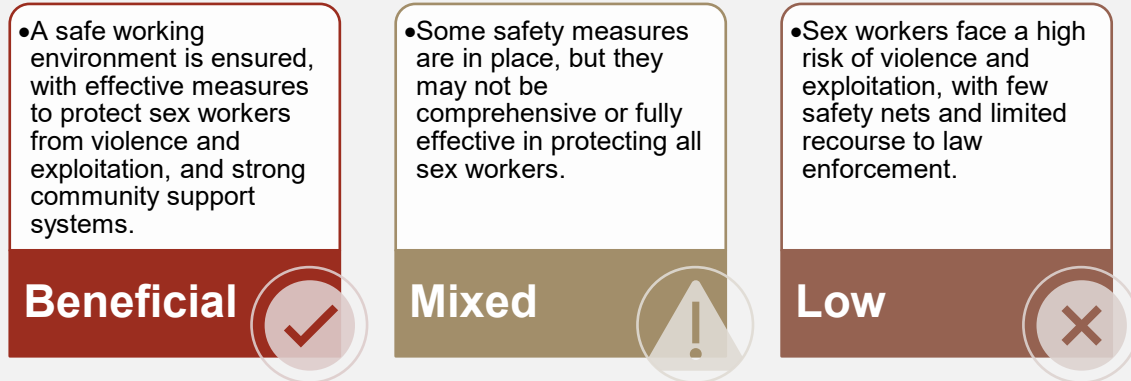


Figure 6. Defining Levels of Impact for Community Safety

Criteria #5: Political Feasibility

Political feasibility is an important criterion for evaluating policy options, as it reflects the likelihood and ease of implementing and sustaining them in a given political context. Policies should consider the political interests, preferences, and power dynamics of various stakeholders, such as sex workers, clients, employers, third parties, law enforcement, policymakers, civil society, labor unions, and the public. Policies should also consider the legal, institutional, and cultural factors that may enable or constrain policy change, such as constitutional rights, human rights obligations, international agreements, public opinion, media coverage, and social movements.

Defining Levels of Impact

To evaluate political feasibility for each legal framework, we have defined below what high, moderate, and low are for political feasibility:



Figure 7. Defining Levels of Impact for Political Feasibility

Summary of Criteria Selection

In this chapter, we have presented five primary criteria for evaluating policy options related to sex work: labor protections, health, economic impact, community safety, and political feasibility. We have also defined the levels of impact for each criterion. These criteria are not only important areas of concern within the sex work industry but also reflect broader societal values such as labor rights, health, economic well-being, and safety. Including these as criteria for policy evaluation ensures that the policies are comprehensive, equitable, and aligned with these values. We, however, also acknowledge that these criteria are not mutually exclusive or independent of each other. Rather, they are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent. They affect and are affected by each other in complex and dynamic ways. For example, improving the health outcomes of sex workers may also improve their safety, income, and social inclusion. Conversely, criminalizing and stigmatizing sex work may worsen their health, safety, income, and social exclusion.

Likewise, sex workers often face structural oppression based on multiple aspects of who they are, such as their race, class, gender, sexuality or migration status, in ways that sometimes compound, so we will keep the multiple dimensions of sex worker identities, and how oppressions based on those identities intersect, in mind as we conduct our analysis.

Our goal is to inform policy decisions that improve the working conditions and outcomes of sex workers while addressing the structural barriers and injustices that they face. In the next chapter, we will use these criteria to evaluate different policy options for sex work reform.

Chapter 6: Policy Options and Evaluation

Defining the Policy Options: Decriminalization, Legalization, and Criminalization (Status Quo)

In chapter 5, we have proposed five criteria for evaluating policy options related to sex work: labor protections, health, economic impact, community safety, and political feasibility. In this chapter, we will use these criteria and lens to evaluate different policy options for sex work reform. We will compare the advantages and disadvantages of each policy option and discuss their implications for sex workers and society.

Three policy options exist for addressing the complex interactions between policing practices and financial dynamics within the sex industry. The policy options that we will examine are:

Decriminalization

This policy option involves the removal of criminal laws and penalties related to sex work and related activities, such as soliciting, advertising, or procuring. It is based on the perspective that sex work is a legitimate form of work, a human right, and a personal choice for consenting adults. It aims to empower, protect, and respect sex work and sex workers.

Legalization

This policy option involves implementing new forms of regulation and control of sex work and related activities, such as licensing, zoning, or testing, and maintaining legal punishments for noncompliant sex workers. It is based on the view that sex work is a necessary evil, a public health issue, or a source of revenue. It aims to manage, monitor, and tax sex work and sex workers.

Criminalization (Status Quo)

This policy option involves the prohibition and penalization of sex work and related activities, such as soliciting, advertising, or procuring. It is based on the view that sex work is immoral, harmful, and a threat to public order and morality. It aims to deter, punish, and eradicate sex work and sex workers. It should be noted that no credible evidence exists that criminalization results in fewer people participating in sex work.

We will also consider the feasibility, acceptability, and sustainability of each option, as well as the potential challenges and opportunities for implementation. Our evaluation is based on the findings from our literature review, primary data collection, and best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis that can inform policy decisions and recommendations for sex work policy reform.

Decriminalization Policy Evaluation

Decriminalization of sex work entails the removal of legal penalties and punitive measures targeting individuals engaged in consensual adult sex work. This approach acknowledges sex work as a form of labor and seeks to address the inherent risks and vulnerabilities faced by sex workers within the current legal framework. By reframing sex work as a legitimate occupation, decriminalization aims to promote the safety, health, and economic stability of sex workers while reducing the harms associated with criminalization. Table 1 summarizes our evaluation of decriminalization.

Table 1. Decriminalization Policy Option Evaluation Overview

Policy Option Evaluation Overview: Decriminalization		
Criterion	Impact	Justification for Impact
Labor Protections	Beneficial	<p>Removes Legal Barriers: Decriminalization eliminates legal obstacles, allowing sex workers to negotiate fair wages, benefits, and working conditions.</p> <p>Equal Labor Rights: It grants sex workers the same labor protections and rights as other workers.</p>
Health	Beneficial	<p>Enhanced Health Outcomes: Decriminalization leads to better mental and physical health for sex workers by removing healthcare access barriers.</p> <p>Reduced Stress and Trauma: It alleviates the stress, trauma, and discrimination that come with criminalization.</p> <p>Healthcare Access: Decriminalization ensures access to essential services like HIV/STI testing, contraception, and treatment for substance use disorders.</p> <p>Public Health Interventions: Enables tailored public health initiatives, including outreach programs and mobile health clinics.</p> <p>Informed Health Choices: Provides sex workers with resources and support for better health decisions, reducing STIs and HIV prevalence.</p>
Economic Impact	Beneficial	<p>Economic Stability: Decriminalization removes legal barriers, enhancing sex workers' opportunities for stable employment and income.</p> <p>Operational Freedom: It allows sex workers to work openly, negotiate fair compensation, and access social benefits like other workers.</p> <p>Financial Services Access: Decriminalization provides access to banking, insurance, and credit, crucial for financial planning and security.</p> <p>Societal Participation: Integrates sex workers into formal economies, allowing full societal participation and contribution to economic growth.</p> <p>Financial Security: Helps sex workers achieve financial security and supports the well-being of their families.</p>

Community Safety	Beneficial	<p>Safety Enhancement: Decriminalization reduces the fear of legal repercussions, enhancing the safety of sex workers.</p> <p>Support and Protection: It enables sex workers to seek help and protection against violence, exploitation, or abuse.</p> <p>Collective Organization: Sex workers can collectively organize for their rights and safety, forming unions or associations.</p> <p>Crime Reporting: They can report crimes without fear of retaliation, improving relations with law enforcement.</p> <p>Community Safety Measures: Decriminalization allows sex workers to implement community-based safety measures and support networks.</p> <p>Destigmatization: It creates conditions that contribute to the destigmatization of sex work.</p>
Political Feasibility	Moderate	<p>Moral Opposition: Decriminalization may be opposed by groups with moral or ideological objections to sex work.</p> <p>Legal Challenges: It could face challenges from laws or treaties that criminalize sex work or related activities.</p> <p>Support from Advocacy Groups: Human rights, public health, and sex worker organizations may support decriminalization for the benefit of sex workers.</p> <p>No New Infrastructure: Decriminalization does not need funding for regulatory infrastructure, unlike legalization.</p> <p>Greater Political Feasibility: It is considered more politically feasible than legalization due to these factors.</p>

Labor Protections

A decriminalization framework also ensures the labor protections of sex workers by removing legal barriers to negotiating fair wages, benefits, and working conditions. It also provides them with the same labor protections and rights as other workers.

Health

Furthermore, decriminalization improves both mental and physical health outcomes for sex workers by removing legal barriers to healthcare access and harm reduction services. It also reduces stress, trauma, and discrimination associated with criminalization. When sex work is decriminalized, individuals can access essential healthcare services, including HIV/STI testing, contraception, and substance use disorder treatment, without as much fear of discrimination or stigma, and with much less fear of law enforcement involvement. Furthermore, decriminalization allows for the implementation of public health interventions tailored to the needs of sex workers, such as outreach programs, peer education initiatives, and mobile health clinics. These initiatives can provide sex workers with the information, resources, and support they need to make informed choices about their health and well-being, ultimately reducing the prevalence of STIs, HIV, and other health risks within the community.

Economic Impact

Decriminalization creates opportunities for sex workers to achieve economic stability and financial independence by removing legal barriers to their employment and income-generating activities. Without the threat of arrest or prosecution, sex workers can operate openly and freely, negotiate fair wages and working conditions, and access labor protections and social benefits available to other workers. Decriminalization also facilitates access to mainstream financial services, such as banking, insurance, and credit, which are essential for building savings, investing in education/training, and planning for the future. By integrating sex workers into formal economic systems, decriminalization enables them to participate more fully in society, contribute to economic growth, and achieve greater financial security for themselves and their families.

Community Safety

Adopting a decriminalization framework enhances the safety of sex workers by removing the fear of arrest, prosecution, and violence from law enforcement. It also empowers sex workers to seek support and protection when faced with violence, exploitation, or abuse, and to organize collectively for their rights and safety. They can talk about workplace conditions and violence without fear of negative legal repercussions, allowing sex workers to better avoid exploitation & violence, and seek support when they occur. Moreover, decriminalization empowers sex workers to organize collectively, advocate for their rights, and implement safety measures within their communities. By removing the legal barriers to forming unions or associations, sex workers can negotiate safer working conditions, access resources for harm reduction, and establish networks of mutual aid and support. Decriminalization also allows structural conditions to favor the destigmatization of sex work.

Political Feasibility

A decriminalization framework, however, may face political resistance from groups who oppose sex work on moral or ideological grounds. It may also face legal challenges from existing laws or international treaties that criminalize sex work or related activities. However, decriminalization may also garner political support from human rights, public health, and sex worker organizations who advocate for the rights and well-being of sex workers. Such organizations are more likely to support decriminalization given the widespread support from sex workers. Therefore, decriminalization is more politically feasible than legalization, as decriminalization is likely to motivate a larger portion of the political actors invested in sex worker well-being.

Legalization Policy Evaluation

Legalization of sex work entails establishing a regulatory framework that allows for the legal operation of sex work establishments and activities, often including licensing, taxation, and oversight by governmental authorities. While proponents argue that legalization can improve safety and reduce harm, it ultimately falls short of meeting many of the policy objectives outlined in our research. Table 2 summarizes our evaluation of legalization.

Table 2. Legalization Policy Evaluation Overview

Policy Option Evaluation Overview: Legalization		
Criterion	Impact	Justification for Impact
Labor Protections	Mixed/ Harmful	<p>Inadequate Labor Protections: Legalization might not fully safeguard sex workers' rights to fair wages, benefits, and working conditions.</p> <p>Regulatory Bias: Regulations may favor employers or establishment owners, disadvantaging individual sex workers and street workers.</p> <p>Potential for Abuse: Sex workers could still encounter labor violations or abuses within a legalized, regulated system.</p> <p>Limited Recourse: There may be insufficient mechanisms for sex workers to seek recourse or protection under legalization.</p>
Health	Mixed/ Harmful	<p>Partial Healthcare Access: Legalization may offer limited healthcare access through regulated venues.</p> <p>Unmet Healthcare Needs: The diverse healthcare needs of sex workers may not be fully met under legalization.</p> <p>Barriers for Marginalized Groups: LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color might still face healthcare access barriers.</p> <p>Persistent Stigma: Stigma related to sex work could continue, affecting healthcare access without discrimination.</p>
Economic Impact	Mixed/ Harmful	<p>Incomplete Economic Protection: Legalization may fall short in safeguarding the economic rights and stability of sex workers.</p> <p>Formal Employment Opportunities: It could provide formal employment in regulated establishments and access to financial services.</p> <p>Continued Exploitation: There's a risk of perpetuating exploitative labor practices and economic disparities.</p> <p>Challenges in Fair Compensation: Sex workers might struggle to negotiate fair wages and benefits where regulations favor employers.</p> <p>Taxation of Regulation Costs: Additional financial burdens could be imposed on sex workers through taxation of regulation costs that are not present in decriminalized labor.</p> <p>Housing Challenges Persist: Legalization may not resolve housing issues, as sex workers could still encounter stigma and legal barriers.</p> <p>Income Instability: The unpredictability of income within the regulated system may lead to housing insecurity for sex workers.</p>
Community Safety	Mixed/ Harmful	<p>Unaddressed Vulnerability: Legalization may leave the deeper safety concerns of sex workers unresolved.</p> <p>Limited Legal Framework: It provides a structure for establishments but neglects the needs of marginalized or street-based sex workers.</p> <p>Power Imbalances: Legalization could maintain or worsen power dynamics favoring larger establishments over individual sex workers.</p> <p>Reporting Barriers: The regulatory environment might hinder sex workers from reporting abuse due to fear of repercussions.</p>

Political Feasibility	Low	<p>Resistance from Sex Workers: Legalization might be opposed by sex worker organizations against state regulation and control.</p> <p>Human Rights Challenges: It could face legal issues from obligations or agreements that protect against exploitation or trafficking.</p> <p>Mixed Agency Support: While revenue and law enforcement agencies may back legalization for management and taxation purposes, organizations that value sex worker buy-in for policy change will not support legalization.</p> <p>Political Hurdles: Significant challenges exist due to the need for funding and infrastructure to regulate sex work.</p> <p>Low Political Feasibility: Legalization is considered the least politically feasible due to these hurdles.</p>
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Labor Protections

Legalization may not adequately protect the labor protections of sex workers, as they may still face challenges in negotiating fair wages, benefits, and working conditions, particularly in environments where regulation favors employers or establishment owners over individual workers. They may also face labor violations or abuses within the regulated system, without effective recourse or protection.

Health

While legalization may provide some access to healthcare services through regulated establishments, it may not fully address the diverse healthcare needs of sex workers. Marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color, may continue to face barriers to accessing comprehensive healthcare within a regulated system. Additionally, the stigma associated with sex work may persist, leading to continued discrimination and challenges in accessing healthcare services without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Economic Impact

Legalization may not adequately protect the economic rights and stability of sex workers. While it may create opportunities for formal employment within regulated establishments and some formal access to financial institutions, it may also perpetuate exploitative labor practices and economic disparities within the industry. Sex workers may still face challenges in negotiating fair wages, benefits, and working conditions, particularly in environments where regulation favors employers or establishment owners over individual workers. Moreover, taxation and regulation may impose additional financial burdens on sex workers without commensurate benefits or protections. For example, in the Netherlands where sex work is legalized, with stringent zoning permissions and government oversight, there is evidence of financial abuse from employers of sex workers of marginalized genders, most notably those who identify as men or trans women (Kovacsics et. al. 2023). Legalization may not adequately address the housing challenges faced by sex workers, as they may still face stigma, discrimination, and legal restrictions in accessing

housing assistance, financial support, and social services. They may also face housing insecurity due to the instability and unpredictability of their income within the regulated system.

Community Safety

Legalization may not adequately address the underlying vulnerability and safety concerns of sex workers. While it may provide a legal framework for establishments, it does not address the needs of marginalized or street-based sex workers. Thus, most sex workers would not fit within the regulated system. Moreover, legalization may perpetuate existing power imbalances within the industry, favoring larger establishments or operators over individual sex workers. Regulation may also create barriers to addressing abuse or exploitation, as sex workers may fear repercussions from authorities or employers within the regulated system.

Political Feasibility

Legalization may face political resistance from sex worker organizations who oppose the regulation and control of their work by the state. Without sex workers onboard, it becomes difficult to gain the support for legalization from LGBTQ+ organizations, human rights organizations, healthcare organizations, and domestic violence intervention/prevention organizations. It may also face legal challenges from human rights obligations or international agreements that prohibit the exploitation or trafficking of sex workers. However, legalization may also garner political support from revenue and law enforcement agencies who seek to manage, monitor, and tax sex work. Legalization faces significant political hurdles as it also requires additional funding to build out infrastructure to regulate sex work. As a result, it is the least politically feasible policy option.

Criminalization (Status Quo) Policy

Evaluation

Continuing the status quo in the legal framework maintains the criminalization of sex work, perpetuating a myriad of existing challenges and barriers faced by sex workers. Under the current system, engaging in consensual adult sex work is often criminalized, leading to various negative consequences for individuals involved in the industry. Table 3 summarizes our evaluation of criminalization (status quo).

Table 3. Criminalization Policy Option Evaluation Overview

Policy Option Evaluation Overview: Criminalization (Status Quo)		
Criterion	Impact	Justification for Impact
Labor Protections	Harmful	<p>Lack of Labor Protections: Sex workers cannot negotiate fair wages, benefits, or working conditions due to the absence of legal protection.</p> <p>No Legal Recourse: Without legal rights, sex workers have no means to seek justice or address grievances.</p> <p>Unsafe Work Environments: Sex workers face unhealthy and unsafe working conditions without established labor rights or standards.</p>
Health	Harmful	<p>Legal Barriers: Current laws hinder sex workers' access to quality healthcare and harm reduction services.</p> <p>Health Disparities: There's an increased prevalence of HIV/STIs, mental health issues, and substance abuse among sex workers.</p> <p>Stigma and Discrimination: Sex workers face societal stigma and discrimination, which exacerbates health risks.</p>
Economic Impact	Harmful	<p>Economic Opportunities Limited: The current system limits sex workers' economic opportunities, leading to marginalization.</p> <p>Precarious Working Conditions: Sex workers are often forced into unstable and unsafe working environments.</p> <p>Exposure to Exploitation: There's a risk of exploitation by clients, employers, or third parties.</p> <p>Financial Instability: The lack of legal recognition leads to financial insecurity and instability for sex workers.</p> <p>Legal and Financial Burdens: Sex workers face legal costs and fines without corresponding benefits or protections.</p> <p>Barriers to Financial Services: Criminalization prevents access to financial institutions, hindering legitimate economic activity.</p> <p>Housing Instability: Legal barriers contribute to housing instability, with risks of eviction and discrimination.</p> <p>Stigma-Related Discrimination: Occupation-related stigma can lead to housing discrimination and social service exclusion.</p>
Community Safety	Harmful	<p>Increased Vulnerability: Sex workers are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation due to fear of legal consequences.</p> <p>Lack of Recourse: Harassment, abuse, and extortion occur without legal protection, leaving sex workers without recourse.</p> <p>Disproportionate Effect: Marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color, migrants, and the homeless, are disproportionately affected by the criminalization of sex work.</p> <p>Compounded Discrimination: Intersectional discrimination exacerbates the challenges for sex workers, leading to further marginalization.</p> <p>Cycle of Harm: The current legal framework perpetuates harm and marginalization, affecting sex workers' safety, health, and economic well-being.</p> <p>Reinforced Stigma: Social stigma and discrimination are reinforced, contributing to the isolation of sex workers from society.</p>

Political Feasibility

High

Support from Prohibitionists: Some groups may support criminalization to prohibit and eradicate sex work.**Opposition from Sex Workers, Human Rights Organizations, and LGBTQ+ Organizations:** Organizations representing sex workers may resist criminalization due to its stigmatizing effects.**Status Quo Advantage:** As the current legal norm, criminalization faces fewer political obstacles than other frameworks.**Minimal Political Effort:** Maintaining criminalization requires less political effort than implementing decriminalization or legalization

Labor Protections

The status quo denies the labor protections of sex workers, as they are unable to negotiate fair wages, benefits, and working conditions with social support and legal protection. Sex workers are often exposed to unsafe and unhealthy working environments, due to the lack of established standards or societal support for sex worker labor rights.

Health

The status quo undermines the health outcomes of sex workers by creating barriers to accessing quality healthcare services. It exacerbates health disparities and risks, such as HIV/STI prevalence, mental health disorders, and substance use disorders. Due to stigma, discrimination, and criminalization, it is more difficult for sex workers to negotiate health-related conditions of their work with clients, since negotiations are criminalized themselves and lengthier negotiations create additional evidence of criminal activity.

Economic Impact

The status quo restricts the economic opportunities of sex workers, pushing them into marginalized and precarious working conditions. It also exposes them to exploitative practices by law enforcement officers, landlords, clients, employers, and strangers, leading to financial instability and insecurity. It also imposes legal costs and fines on sex workers, without providing them with any benefits or protections. It does not allow access to financial institutions as their work remains criminalized and unrecognized as a legitimate form of labor. The status quo undermines the housing stability of sex workers, as they face legal barriers to accessing housing assistance, financial support, and social services. They also face eviction, homelessness, or housing discrimination due to their occupation, criminal record, or stigma.

Community Safety

The status quo exacerbates the vulnerability of sex workers to violence and exploitation, as they are often unable to seek help due to fear of arrest or prosecution. They are also subjected to harassment, abuse, and extortion by law enforcement officials, clients, or third parties, without legal protection or recourse. The criminalization of sex work disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, people of color, migrants, and

individuals experiencing homelessness. These intersecting forms of discrimination compound the challenges faced by sex workers, further marginalizing and isolating them from mainstream society. The continuation of the status quo in the legal framework perpetuates a cycle of harm and marginalization for sex workers. It undermines their safety, health, and economic well-being, while reinforcing social stigma and discrimination. Without meaningful reforms to address the underlying structural inequalities and injustices, sex workers will continue to face significant barriers to realizing their rights and dignity.

Political Feasibility

Criminalization may face political resistance from sex worker organizations who oppose the criminalization and stigmatization of their work. It may also face legal challenges from constitutional rights or human rights obligations that protect the privacy, autonomy, and dignity of sex workers. However, criminalization may also garner political support from groups who support the prohibition and eradication of sex work. Since criminalization is the status quo, it faces the least significant political hurdles compared to the rest of the legal frameworks. Maintaining the status quo requires minimal political action compared to decriminalization or legalization.

Summary of Policy Options and Impacts

Table 4 shows that decriminalization has the most positive impact across all criteria. Legalization has a mixed impact across all criteria, causing harm while potentially benefiting some sex workers, while criminalization has the most negative impact across all criteria. Regarding political feasibility, decriminalization warranted a moderate rating, as the more feasible of the two potential policy changes analyzed. Considering that maintaining criminalization is the current political reality, it had to rate as most feasible.

Table 4. Summary of Policy Options and Impact

Summary of Policy Options and Impact		Legal Framework		
		Decriminalization	Legalization	Criminalization (Status Quo)
Evaluation Criteria	Labor Protections	Beneficial	Mixed/Harmful	Harmful
	Health	Beneficial	Mixed/Harmful	Harmful
	Economic Impact	Beneficial	Mixed/Harmful	Harmful
	Community Safety	Beneficial	Mixed/Harmful	Harmful
	Political Feasibility	Moderate	Low	High
Overall Evaluation		Best Policy Option	Mixed/Harmful Policy Option	Worst Policy Option

Chapter 7: Policy Recommendations

THE CULMINATION OF OUR RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION OF VARIOUS POLICY FRAMEWORKS LEADS US TO ADVOCATE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SEX WORK POLICY REFORM.

Our primary recommendation is the decriminalization of sex work, supported by the implementation of comprehensive support services and continued advocacy efforts.

These recommendations are grounded in the evidence that decriminalization not only respects the rights and dignity of sex workers but also contributes to better health outcomes, economic stability, and community safety.

Recommendation #1: Decriminalization as Primary Policy Recommendation

Fundamentally, we believe that decriminalization is the most effective policy option for ensuring that sex workers, regardless of employment site, can continue their employment in a safer and economically just manner. Sex workers are posed to reap greater financial benefit, be encouraged to utilize public health services, and feel safer and more empowered in their work environment under the decriminalization model. We also believe that economic analysis performed in Massachusetts and New Zealand point to evidence that the state will save significant public funds from carceral institutions such as jails and police enforcement under decriminalization. Due to the disparities of employment opportunity amongst sex workers of color, and those with marginalized gender identities, decriminalization is an equitable policy option that provides an improved quality of life for LGBTQ+ sex workers and those who identify as immigrants and people of color, especially when compared to competing options.

- **Remove Criminal Penalties:** Decriminalization should involve the removal of all criminal laws that penalize sex work-related activities. This shift acknowledges sex work as legitimate labor and aligns with human rights principles.
- **Labor Rights and Protections:** Decriminalization must be accompanied by the extension of standard labor protections to sex workers, ensuring fair payment, safe working conditions, and the right to organize.
- **Healthcare Access:** Decriminalization removes certain barriers in accessing healthcare services, allowing sex workers to seek medical attention and decrease stigma from healthcare providers.
- **Economic Empowerment:** By decriminalizing sex work, we can facilitate sex workers' access to formal financial systems, enabling them to achieve greater economic security and independence.

We strongly recommend that policy makers and special interest groups collaborate on structural pathways towards institutionalization of decriminalization — following research conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union, National Center for Transgender Equality, and other human rights organizations — Human Rights Watch found that 52% of Americans, and two-thirds of voters between 18-44 support decriminalization as of 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Recommendation #2: Access to Comprehensive Support Services

Access to comprehensive support services is paramount in addressing the multifaceted needs of sex workers and ensuring their safety, health, and economic stability. This recommendation encompasses various types of services tailored to the diverse challenges faced by sex workers, including healthcare, legal assistance, social services, and community support networks.

- **Healthcare Services:** Sex workers often face barriers to accessing quality healthcare due to stigma, discrimination, and legal restrictions. Comprehensive healthcare services should include sexual and reproductive health services, HIV/STI testing and treatment, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and harm reduction programs. These services should be culturally competent, non-judgmental, and accessible to all sex workers, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, or immigration status. These services should not work with law enforcement and treat the privacy and autonomy of their sex working clients with even more respect and deference than typical healthcare services organizations treat their typical patients.
- **Legal Assistance:** Legal barriers and criminalization exacerbate the vulnerability of sex workers to exploitation, violence, and discrimination. Access to legal assistance is essential for navigating complex legal frameworks, addressing instances of harassment or abuse by law enforcement, and advocating for the rights and safety of sex workers. Legal services should encompass legal advice, representation in criminal and civil matters, assistance with navigating administrative processes, and support for pursuing legal changes to prevent future harm.
- **Social Services:** Many sex workers face economic insecurity, housing instability, and social isolation, which can exacerbate their vulnerability to exploitation and harm. Social services should address these underlying social determinants of health and well-being by providing access to housing assistance, financial support, vocational training, job placement services, and social support networks. These services should be holistic, trauma-informed, and responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of sex workers. Sex workers themselves must be consulted and involved in creating or adapting such programs for sex worker needs.
- **Community Support Networks:** Community-based organizations and support networks play a crucial role in providing peer support, advocacy, and empowerment opportunities for sex workers. These networks should be led by and for sex workers, fostering a sense of belonging, solidarity, and collective agency. Peer-led support groups, mentorship programs,

and grassroots advocacy efforts can amplify the voices and agency of sex workers, challenge stigma and discrimination, and promote community resilience and empowerment. Sex workers themselves must be consulted and involved in creating or adapting such programs.

Recommendation #3: Continued Advocacy

Grassroots advocacy is the backbone of policy transformation for marginalized communities. It is the persistent voice that calls for lasting, systemic change, fueling the collective action that shapes public opinion and the structural powers that influence legislative reform. As we turn our attention to the third pillar of our policy recommendations, we underscore the importance of sustained advocacy in this movement toward the decriminalization of sex work. This section delineates the strategic actions necessary to foster a society that upholds the rights and dignity of sex workers.

- **Public Education:** Addressing misconceptions and stigma surrounding sex work is crucial for promoting empathetic policy governing this industry. Education and awareness campaigns can challenge stereotypes, dispel myths, and foster a more compassionate and inclusive society, specifically regarding this intimate form of labor. We encourage these campaigns to be tailored to diverse audiences and center perspectives from sex workers.
- **Leadership Development:** This research affirms the necessity of sex workers' insight and leadership regarding the development and implementation of policies that govern their work, implicate their bodily autonomy, and radically shape their relationship to carceral systems.
- **Worker-Centered Know Your Rights Advocacy:** An additional component to educational advocacy is the outreach and education for those currently employed in the sex industry. In the face of laws empowering sex workers and providing additional workplace protections, we recommend state actors to partner with local worker advocacy organizations for the coordination of “Know Your Rights” trainings purposed for sex workers to be aware of the policy changes that are impacting their employment status and provide space for advocacy in the face of predatory action from uninformed or rogue law enforcement.
- **Research and Evaluation:** This research also echoes the demand for ongoing research to monitor the change over time impacts of decriminalization in specific localities and explore shifting labor dynamics that arise in the face of decriminalization. We hope this and future research can be utilized to inform future policy decisions that govern the legality of sex work.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

We advocate for the decriminalization of sex work, highlighting it as the optimal policy for safeguarding the well-being, health, and financial security of sex workers. Crucially, decriminalization must be coupled with the provision of extensive support services and ongoing advocacy efforts. This comprehensive approach is essential to ensure that sex work is acknowledged and respected as legitimate employment.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

THIS EXTENSIVE RESEARCH UNDERSCORES THE IMPERATIVE FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE LEGAL TREATMENT OF SEX WORK. The evidence presented in this report compellingly advocates for the decriminalization of sex work as the most beneficial policy option for sex workers, public health, and society at large.

- **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Decriminalization emerges as a pivotal force in empowering sex workers, granting them autonomy and legitimizing their profession. It dismantles the barriers that impede this class of workers — predominantly occupied by individuals marginalized by way of their gender, sexuality, race, and immigration status — access to labor rights, healthcare, and financial services, thereby enhancing their quality of life and societal integration.
- **Health and Safety:** The health and safety benefits of decriminalization are profound. By removing the stigma and legal obstacles, sex workers gain improved access to healthcare and are better positioned to safeguard themselves against violence and exploitation. This shift not only benefits individual workers but also contributes to broader public health goals.
- **Economic and Social Impact:** Economically, decriminalization promises a more inclusive and equitable financial landscape for sex workers. It also holds the potential to alleviate the fiscal burden of the criminal justice system, redirecting resources to more critical areas of public welfare.
- **Cultural and Political Progress:** Culturally, decriminalization fosters a more compassionate and informed understanding of sex work, challenging entrenched stigmas and misconceptions. Politically, while challenges remain, the growing support from human rights and public health advocates suggests a favorable climate for the adoption of decriminalization policies.

We recommend decriminalizing sex work to protect sex workers' safety, health, and financial well-being. Implementing this policy should include comprehensive support and ongoing advocacy to recognize sex work as valid employment. We recommend that future policies be crafted in close collaboration with sex worker communities to ensure that their voices and experiences are at the forefront of reform. It is through such inclusive and evidence-based policymaking that we can aspire to create a just, equitable, and humane society for all.

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Appendix A: Supplemental Focus Group Data Analysis

Main Axis Encoding and Selective Encoding

The current coding results have generated categories of significant theoretical value; however, merely obtaining disjointed and disconnected categories falls far short of theoretical formation. To identify the interrelationships between categories, we contrast and analyze the initial categories obtained from two cases, seeking their connections and consolidating recurring concepts into primary categories. The organization of these primary categories will facilitate addressing the core questions of our study while also helping to avoid information redundancy and confusion. To delve further into our research questions, we further refine these primary categories, identifying and distilling two core categories to establish a foundation for comparison and analysis. The overall coding results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Encoding Results

Core Category	Main Category	Initial Category
A1 policing practices affect financial dynamics	Direct effect	Arrested, imprisoned, and deprived of income Financial penalties work mentality
	Indirect effect	Increase the cost market demand and prices the quality and quantity of customers the work environment and site selection
A2 financial dynamics affect policing practices	Direct effect	the allocation of police resources the level of police intervention
	Indirect effect	fiscal and tax revenues the attitudes of local residents the local economy the social environment

Framework Construction

By encoding all interview texts, the encoded results are as shown in Table 5 above. When conducting in-depth analysis of these encoded results, we sought logical connections and interactions within the structure of the tables, forming a comprehensive framework.

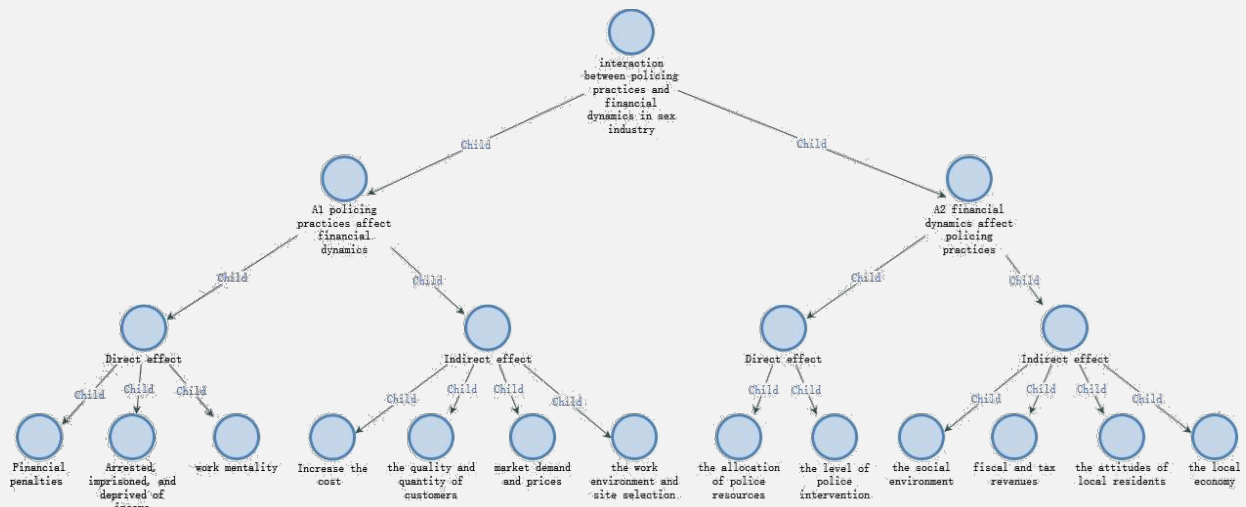


Figure 8. Construction of Framework

Within the sex industry, police practices have both direct and indirect impacts on financial dynamics. In terms of direct impacts, these include Arrested, Imprisoned, and Deprived of Income; Financial Penalties; and Work Mentality. Firstly, police enforcement actions such as arrests and imprisonment may prevent sex workers from continuing their work, leading to income loss. Secondly, financial penalties may exacerbate economic difficulties for sex workers. Lastly, the presence and activities of the police may negatively impact the work mentality of sex workers, inducing fear and anxiety. In terms of indirect impacts, these include Increased Costs, Market Demand and Prices, Quality and Quantity of Customers, and Work Environment and Site Selection. Firstly, police actions may increase operating costs within the sex industry as sex workers adopt more safety measures to evade police intervention. Secondly, the presence of police may affect market demand and prices as consumers become more cautious or due to reduced supply. Thirdly, police actions may influence the quality and quantity of customers sex workers can attract, either due to customer concerns or increased competition. Finally, the presence of police may influence the choice of work environment and sites for sex workers to avoid intervention.

In summary, police practices have multifaceted impacts on the financial dynamics of sex workers, directly affecting their income and work mentality, and indirectly impacting market operations and the selection of work environments for sex workers.

The financial dynamics of sex workers also have direct and indirect impacts on police practices. Direct impacts include the allocation of police resources and the level of police intervention, both of which are influenced by financial dynamics. For example, prosperous sex industries may prompt increased police resource allocation for regulation, while economic downturns may reduce police intervention due to resource constraints.

Moreover, financial dynamics also indirectly impact police practices in terms of fiscal and tax revenues, attitudes of local residents, the local economy, and the social environment. Firstly, economic activities within the sex industry may affect local fiscal and tax revenues, potentially leading to increased governmental support for the industry. Secondly, the economic status of

the sex industry may generate moral and ethical debates in society, increasing social pressure on police, who may then intensify investigations and regulations. Additionally, positive economic contributions of the sex industry may influence local residents' attitudes, potentially affecting police attitudes and behaviors towards the industry. Thirdly, fluctuations in the profitability of the sex industry may impact the stability and profitability of related businesses, potentially leading to increased regulatory pressure on police. Fourthly, the financial dynamics of the sex industry may affect the social environment, influencing police behavior, particularly regarding public safety in illicit or unauthorized venues. Police may enhance monitoring and enforcement efforts in these areas to maintain public order and safety.

In conclusion, the financial dynamics of the sex industry may directly or indirectly influence police behavior and priorities. Police typically adjust their enforcement strategies and resource allocations accordingly to address various social issues and criminal activities associated with the sex industry.

Appendix B: Focus Group Code Book

Open Coding Categories & Quotes

Criminalization/Status Quo Impacts

Work-related Challenges

- Access to Services
 - Difficult to find health resources and services
 - “It is hard for me to find screening tools that are free.”
 - Difficulty affording care
 - “My health insurance is really bad, i don’t get to see primary doctors that much and it’s extremely difficult to access any kind of specialty care. I pay for my mental healthcare out of pocket.”
 - “I don’t have many people in my life that i talk about my work with so I used to go to a therapist but I can’t fit that into the budget anymore.”
- Law Enforcement
 - Fear of law enforcement interaction
 - Reluctance to ask for help from law enforcement even after experiencing violence.
 - “I’m always careful in everything I do because I don’t want to end up in jail.”
 - “If something were to happen, I would not reach out to the police. I’m more concerned about booking a client who ends up being a police officer”
 - “I had a friend who got mugged and when they contacted the cops, their response was terrible. They respond to these situations with a lot of stigma.”
- Payment
 - Difficulties ensuring payment after work.
 - “I tend to go with paying upfront because I’ve had incidents in the past where the meeting went good but when it comes to getting paid, it’s a bit of a scuffle.”
 - “They only pay you if they want to, even if they said they would pay you upfront.”
 - “You meet clients that do not want to pay or won’t pay the agreed upon amount and it might get to a point that they are aggressive.”
 - Price volatility issues → cost of living goes up, must charge increased prices for services, clients are unhappy
- Safety
 - Lack of feeling safe when making outbound requests
 - Lack of feeling safe when meeting new clients
 - Lack of feeling safe after payment

- “I am having trouble finding a spot to hide my money after getting paid. Sometimes they try to rob you.”
- Risking one’s safety to get work / earn money.
 - “I get a client and they’re far and it’s not a place I am familiar with, so I am rather skeptical but since you have to pay the bills, you still have to go there.”
- Lack of resources post-violence → unwilling or unable to call law enforcement

Emotional + Physical Wellbeing

- Risk Aversion / Precautionary Measures
 - Implementing screening measures when taking in new clients
 - Setting boundaries with clients / potential clients
 - “If someone doesn’t read my ad or doesn’t respect my boundaries, i won’t see them because that indicates they will probably cross boundaries during a meeting.”
 - Taking on a persona to improve safety
 - “I also have a persona of like a girl next door which I think makes me appear less intimidating to clients and they’ll treat me with more softness.”
- Self-care strategies
 - Importance of support networks
 - “We have a bunch of groups where we talk about our work week and the challenges we are facing. We support each other emotionally and still have fun; we remind ourselves that it’s real work with inherent risks.”

Psycho-social Stress

- Work-related Stigma
 - Dehumanization of sex workers
 - “I feel that a lot of times clients don’t see sex workers as human beings. People make assumptions about what we’re doing and who we are.”
 - “In most cases, people think all sex workers are just like animals. They feel like that is just someone who is desperate for money to survive.”
 - Stigma in health settings by providers and healthcare workers
 - “Based on my previous encounters, accessing services is already hard. On top of that, you are in a certain line of work with a stigma attached to it. So, if I am going to receive any medication or health advice, I refrain from asking too many questions because I wouldn’t want to get stigmatized once the health worker knows what I am doing.”
 - “I’m looking into therapy but what if I find one that is not open or accepting to what I do?”
- Experiences of Discrimination
 - Discrimination in healthcare
 - “I was discriminated against at pp just because of the number of sexual partners I had so I don’t tell any doctors that I do sex work.”

- “Going to get care, I don’t like going in most cases. There’s always discrimination. Makes me feel like not going to get healthcare because of the challenges.”
 - Discrimination online
 - “There are certain sites that don’t allow black sex workers to make profiles.”
 - “In most cases, black people are not allowed to use some of the online platforms.”
- Self-esteem
 - Experiences with stigma + discrimination heavily impact self-esteem of sex workers.
 - “Discrimination from family and friends affects how I feel about myself but I’m always encouraging myself to keep going.”

Financial Challenges

- Financial Insecurity
 - “There have been sometimes we have inconsistent income and mainly because the money fluctuates.”
- Financial Discrimination
 - Banking restrictions
 - “Several banks and financial institutions have these policies which have been making it difficult for sex workers to access accounts”
 - Housing limitations
 - “There are some cases where apartments are very difficult to get because of the nature of your job. You will be asked what type of job you are doing before getting an apartment.”
 - “If you’re applying for an apartment or something, you need paystubs, and we don’t have that kind of consistent documentation.”
 - “I probably would not be able to access a loan because lenders would see me as not employed.”

Policy Impacts

- policy changes affect sex work
 - “law enforcement in LA has increased its efforts to combat human trafficking which is positive but as sex workers, it can lead to increased police presence, arrests, and violence”
 - “anti trafficking legislation has changed the mode of looking for clients from in person to online. It also reduces my income”

Policy Frameworks + Impacts (Decriminalization / Legalization)

Legalization Impacts

- Regulation concerns
 - “Legalization will invite more law enforcement into sex workers’ lives as well as regulating their bodies.”
 - “I think if the government legalizes sex work, that may be a restriction. People might not be able to carry out their work very well.”
 - “Sex work should be legal without regulations and licensing that is not discriminative.”
 - “If it’s being legalized, I wouldn’t be free.”
 - “Too much monitoring could be detrimental to someone who personally negotiates with their own clients.”
 - “I want nothing to do with legalization because if it becomes legalized, the government is going to regulate us based on their own opinions and biases.”
- Health and safety impacts
 - “Legalization wouldn’t help if they want to make sure we get safe workspaces and healthcare access.”

Decriminalization Impacts

- Work-related changes
 - “I only get clients online but if it was decriminalized, i would feel more comfortable freestyling (going to hotels and other physical spaces to find clients)”
 - “Clients would be more accountable because we could talk to someone if a client is putting us in an unsafe situation.”
- Income
 - “Decrim is very good for sex workers so that they can be able to do what they want, it might make them get more compensation and more ways of life to live freely.”
 - “There would be stability in terms of income.”
 - “We will be able to access financial empowerment.”
 - “More accountability and more stable income to live freely without us being heavily policed.”
 - “We would be able to file our taxes legally.”
 - “Set rules regarding the minimum wage that we should be paid.”
- Safety
 - “Advocating for decrim is the first step towards improving working conditions and safety.”
 - “We wouldn’t fear arrest for seeking medical attention.”
 - “Safer work environments and benefits”

- “those in this working sector can feel free to report crimes without fear and the police response to situations that affect us will be without stigma”
- “also get to access labor protections to access our benefits and protect us against discrimination”
- “improvement on security”
- “sex workers can report crimes without fear of arrest”
- “more comprehensive safety regulations”
- “clients would no longer use it against us that our work is criminalized in order to manipulate us”
- Health
 - “decrim would really help in getting non-judgemental healthcare for us”
 - “being more free with healthcare providers and telling them everything without fear of being judged”
 - “everyone will know that there is no offense in the work and healthcare providers will be more likely to create a safe space”
- Stigma
 - “the act of buying, selling, and managing sex would no longer be a crime and it would be something that is accepted in the community and in society. You’ll get the justice you have deserved for a long time”
 - “we will get equal rights”
 - “it will make sex workers get more public recognition as workers without people discriminating against them”
 - “decrim would really help push back against the people who really look at us without a lot of stigma and negativity. It would help us in matters of our peace, security, and mental wellness”
 - “i would be able to survive without the stigma that surrounds my work”
- Other
 - “decrim would lead to building greater community for sex workers”
 - I think the decriminalization offers a range of potential benefits for us, like improving our safety, health and our overall well-being like there will be greater collaboration with law enforcement and we will not be afraid of. Legal repercussions? And will be able to report crimes like violence and thefts to the police, fostering cooperation and improve safety.

Recommendations

Resources

- free screenings
 - “we need more screening. It is very hard to find resources to screen”
- affordability of healthcare
 - “healthcare costs should be reduced if one identifies as a sex worker”

Education

- law enforcement trainings
 - “I think police training would be useful so that they don’t respond to our situations with stigma”
- public education
 - “public education on the issues affecting sex workers and letting people know that it is a job like any other”

Safety

- resource for sharing information about clients and location when conducting outbound work to improve feeling of safety when visiting a new location/new client
 - “I would like somewhere where I can share my location and the information of clients for my own safety”
- harm reduction
 - “we need to support harm reduction practices to make sure sex workers are safe”
- red light districts
 - “for those working in red light districts, they need security measures and health inspections”
- anti-violence programs
 - “anti violence programs and research is needed”

Thematic Analysis

Status Quo – Criminalization

Health Outcomes

- difficulty finding healthcare / health resources
- difficulty affording healthcare / health resources
- reluctance to share profession with healthcare providers
- stigma + discrimination within health settings / perpetrated by healthcare providers
- psychosocial stress as a result of stigma + discrimination

Workplace Protections

- violence perpetrated by law enforcement
- fear of interaction with law enforcement
- reluctance to report violence to law enforcement
- lack of law enforcement response to reports of violence
- violence perpetrated by clients
- lack of safety when meeting new clients

- lack of safety when responding to outbound requests

Financial Dynamics

- difficulty ensuring payment after work
- financial insecurity
- financial discrimination when accessing bank accounts / loans
- financial discrimination when accessing housing

Legalization

Health Outcomes

- forced health screenings

Workplace Protections

- increased monitoring by law enforcement
- discriminatory licensing practices
- increased labor protections only for regulated workers

Financial Dynamics

- regulation of price of work
- standard minimum wage only for regulated workers
- ability to file taxes legally only for regulated workers

Decriminalization

Health Outcomes

- reduced fear of judgement / discrimination by healthcare providers
- higher likelihood of actively seeking health resources / healthcare
- reduction of psychosocial stress

Workplace Protections

- increased accountability by clients
- higher likelihood of reporting violence to law enforcement
- increased labor protections for all workers

Financial Dynamics

- ability for workers to find clients with more ease / more consistent work and stable income
- increased access to banking, loans, housing without financial discrimination
- ability to negotiate own rates
- standard minimum wage for all workers
- ability to file taxes legally for all workers

Other

- increased public acceptance + cultural shifts

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions and Script

Introduction

Please take a moment to change your screen name to your chosen pseudonym and include your pronouns in parentheses. Make sure your pseudonym matches the one you initially provided on the sign-up form! Please send a private chat message to [insert name] including your pseudonym and email address that you provided on the sign-up form so we can issue e-gift cards accordingly! [Insert name] will directly message you once your e-gift card has been emailed to you to confirm you received it.

10 Minutes: Opening/Warm Up

Thank you so much for joining today's focus group session, we are intrigued to learn more regarding your experience working in the sex industry, and personal policy opinions crafted over the course of your career. We are UCLA Master of Public Policy Students, supporting SWOPLA in their advocacy goals through hosting a series of focus groups related to working conditions for folks in the sex industry. We will limit the conversation to two hours to be respectful of everyone's time, however we will remain available to be able to answer questions or discuss further to ensure folks can have their thoughts fully explored — we highly encourage people to pass on questions that they are not interested or comfortable answering, and to take snack and self-care breaks as needed.

[Maintaining Confidentiality] Please know that all of the information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be connected to any personal identifying information in any way. The focus group session will be recorded so we can transcribe your comments, but, again, these recordings as with everything else in this study will remain confidential. To preserve everyone's right to privacy, we are asking each of you to choose a pseudonym (this can be a fake name or a nickname) which will be used throughout the duration of this focus group. While facilitating this focus group we will only refer to you by the pseudonym you choose, and we ask that you also only refer to yourself and others present by the pseudonym they choose.

[Gift cards] You will receive an e-gift card for your participation. A member of the team is currently working on distributing digital gift cards to the email you provided, and you can reach out to us at any time if you run into any challenges. While we are distributing those, we kindly ask that you please fill out this brief demographic survey, using your pseudonym. The information collected in this survey will remain confidential and will only be used for our research to better understand how different groups are affected by varying policies. I will put the link to the survey in the Zoom chat box now.

[Drop the link to the demographic survey in the chat and give 5 minutes to complete.]

[Research team introduction with names and pronouns]

Before starting, we would like to establish some community guidelines. These are the guidelines:

- Take space AND make space → be mindful of time and space taken, make space for others as well so we can ensure everyone feels heard and valued.
- Utilize “I” statements when sharing.
- Avoid interrupting others when they are speaking.

Do these sound good to everyone? Are there any other guidelines that folks would like to add or remove? Does anyone have any questions before we begin? If there are no further questions, I am going to begin recording at this time. We will use the recording to make a transcript using your pseudonyms that we can share with SWOPLA and use to help us write up our report.

[Participant Introductions (pseudonym, pronouns, type of sex work)]

[Ice Breaker] What is your dream vacation destination and why?

[Paste into chat for reference: pseudonym, pronouns, what type of sex work do you do? What is your dream vacation destination?]

[BEGIN AUDIO RECORDING]

30 Minutes: Average Day/Policing Practices

[Disclaimer] We will be keeping track of time during each section to ensure that we are respectful of finishing each discussion item within the allotted time. We will be starting with questions about folks’ experiences at work, their work environment, and challenges and successes experienced at work. As a reminder, please feel free to pass on any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and we encourage folks to ask clarifying questions and openly interpret these (and all) questions!

[Prompts should only be asked if the group is particularly quiet or needs additional clarification. To remain within time, please prioritize asking the leading questions predominantly]

- **Question 1:** Can you take us through an average workday for you?
- **Question 2:** What are recurring challenges that show up in your work environment?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: How often are these challenges related to law enforcement?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: How often are these challenges related to your work environment - this could be your manager, co-workers, or payment related challenges?
- **Question 3:** What factors into how well you feel you are compensated for a gig?
- Follow-Ups geared towards → What are some factors that make you feel you need more payment/less payment?
- **[If time allows] Question 4:** Are there challenges related to power dynamics in your work-environment? What do you feel are the reasons and outcomes of these interactions?

20 Minutes: Emotional Well-Being + Support Services

Now we will be pivoting to discuss self-care, practices for resilience, and strategies for community care that you find instrumental.

- **Question 1:** What self-care practices or community care practices do you utilize to cope with the stress and challenges we discussed in the previous section?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Can you elaborate on how those challenges affect your life?
- **Question 2:** What services would be immediately useful to meet your most urgent survival and wellness needs / what changes in the world you live in would be helpful for you?
- **[If time allows] Question 3:** Please feel free to describe any discrimination by the healthcare system and providers:
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Do you have access to any physical health or mental health services, such as counseling, therapy, or medical providers that you would recommend?

30 Minutes: Policy Opinions

Now we will be exploring policy opinions, based on your lived experiences, as a reminder you all are the experts, we hope to delve into folks' visions for a political reality that is empowering and grounded in this collective knowledge. We want to ask your opinions on these two models, and will use the terms "decriminalization" and "legalization" using these definitions:

- **Decriminalization:** The removal of criminal penalties in the sex work industry for both the client and the worker, allowing it to be governed by labor laws and regulations like other professions.
- **Legalization:** The process of making sex work legal for workers who abide by certain regulations and restrictions, involving a system of licensing, monitoring, or new regulatory scheme to apply specifically to sex workers. Failure to abide by the new regulations would result in criminal penalties. *[please paste definitions into the chat]*
- **Question 1:** Are you familiar with decriminalization and legalization as terms for these two different models of regulating sex work?
- **Question 2:** What are your opinions on decriminalizing sex work?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: How do you think decriminalization would affect your safety, health, and economic stability?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: How do you think decriminalization would affect your work and day-to-day life?

- Follow-Up/Prompt: What would the difference be under a legalization model, where sex work is only legal in certain circumstances and new regulations were put into place?
- *[If there's a long silence here, maybe focus people on safety, health, & economic stability one at a time, starting with whatever people have seemed most open to talking about.]*

25 Minutes: Policy Impacts

We will now turn the conversation to discuss personal finance challenges within the current policy landscape — we strongly encourage folks to skip any questions that may be too personal. The purpose of this section is to collect some numerical data that displays the income related, potential benefits and drawbacks of the various policy models— legalization, decriminalization, or the status quo.

- **Question 1:** Are you aware of any sex work related legal changes that have affected your work and/or income?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Does anyone else have examples of policy changes that impact your work?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Were you working when FOSTA/SESTA was passed and Backpage.com was seized? How did it affect your work?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Did you notice any changes in your work in 2023 when SB 357 was repealed, and loitering was no longer a crime?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: What about in 2022 as AB 5 was being implemented and strippers were reclassified as employees?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: What about any policy changes that have impacted your work, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and how the government responded to it?
- **Question 2:** Have you been impacted by financial discrimination and how does this affect you?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Have you had problems getting bank accounts, loans, or apartments?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Have you faced discrimination by online platforms such as social media sites, messaging apps, or other content creator platforms?
 - Follow-Up/Prompt: Have you ever had your social media accounts shadow banned, or just banned?
 - **Follow-Up to all (ask after barriers in group are brought up):** What are some tools and strategies you use to navigate those barriers?
- **Question 3:** What are some challenges negotiating prices and terms?

5 Minutes: Final Question and Conclusion

Question 1: After a long, challenging day — what re-centers you?

[Let participants respond]

[After participants have finished responding] Thank you for your time today. We appreciate you sharing your personal experiences working in the sex industry, we hope this can help to inform SWOPLA in their advocacy for laws and policies that affirm sex worker rights and well-being.

Appendix D: Demographic Survey Questions & Results

The demographic survey was administered to focus group participants as part of the check-in process.

Demographic Survey Content

Instructions

We kindly ask that you please fill out this brief demographic survey. The information collected will remain confidential and will only be used for our research to better understand how different groups are affected by varying policies. Your email address will not be collected with your response. If you prefer not to answer a question, please write in "prefer not to disclose."

Questions

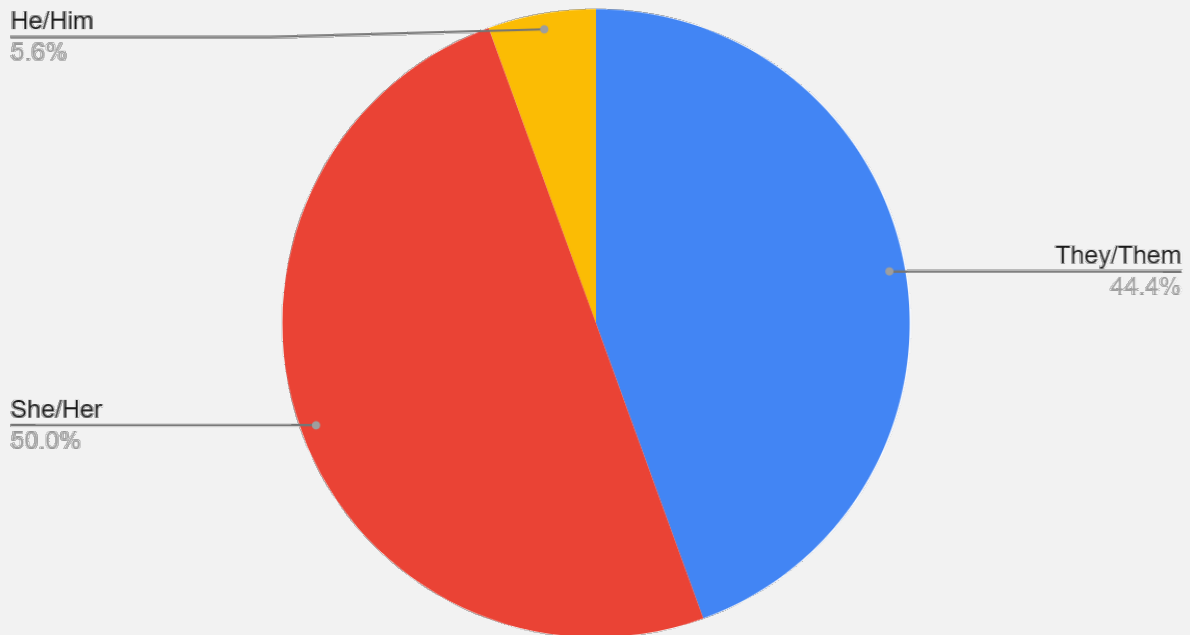
- 1) Preferred Pseudonym: _____
- 2) What is your age, in years? _____
- 3) What are your pronouns? _____
- 4) What gender do you identify as? _____
- 5) Do you identify as transgender or gender non-conforming?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer Not to Disclose
- 6) Do you identify as Latinx/Hispanic?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Prefer Not to Disclose
- 7) If yes, what is your Latinx or Hispanic ancestry or origin? _____
- 8) How would you best describe yourself?
 - a) White
 - b) Black, African American
 - c) American Indian or Alaskan Native (please specify tribe): _____
 - d) Asian Indian
 - e) Japanese
 - f) Native Hawaiian
 - g) Chinese
 - h) Korean
 - i) Guamanian or Chamorro
 - j) Filipino
 - k) Vietnamese
 - l) Samoan
 - m) Other Asian (please specify): _____
 - n) Other Pacific Islander (please specify): _____
 - o) Prefer not to Disclose
 - p) Other: _____

- 9) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- a) Some School
 - b) High School Diploma
 - c) Some College
 - d) 2-year degree (Associate's)
 - e) 4-year degree (Bachelor's)
 - f) Professional Degree
 - g) Prefer Not to Disclose
 - h) Other: _____
- 10) What is your status in the US?
- a) US Born Citizen
 - b) Permanent Resident Card or Green Card
 - c) Asylum or Refugee Status
 - d) Temporary Protected Immigrant Status
 - e) Tourist Visa/Work Visa/Student Visa
 - f) Prefer Not to Disclose
 - g) Other: _____
- 11) Which income group do you fall under?
- a) Less than \$30,000/year
 - b) \$30,000/year - \$60,000/year
 - c) Above \$60,000/year
- 12) What is your role within the sex industry? _____

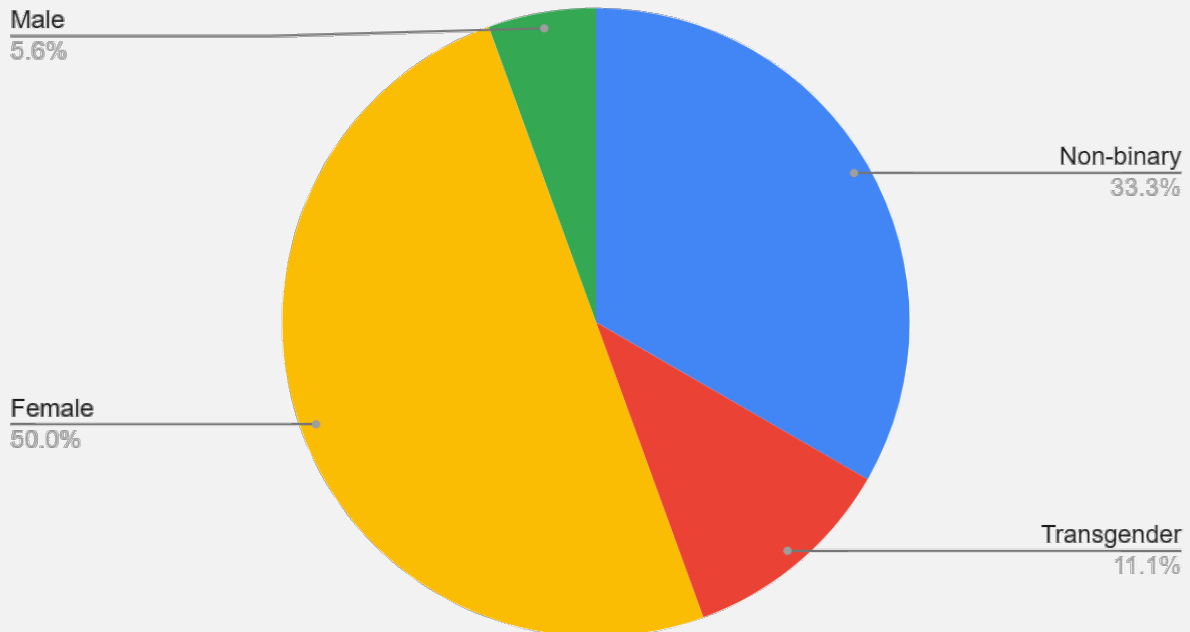
Demographic Survey Results

We have aggregated our results to protect the identity of participants. We had a total of 18 participants. Participants' age ranged from 26-45 years of age with the average being 29 years of age and median being 28 years of age.

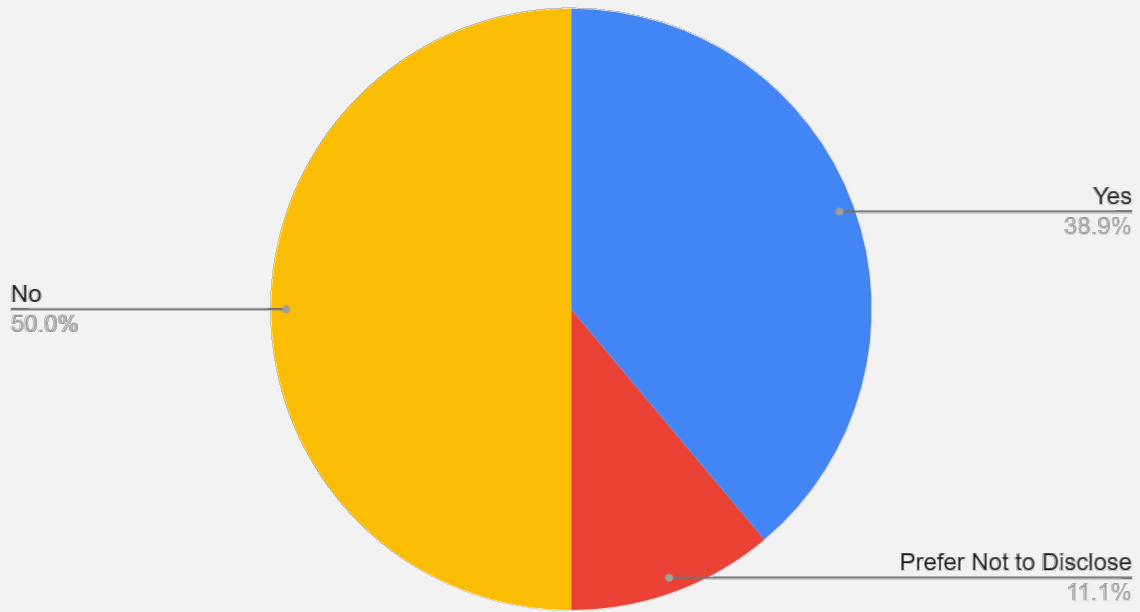
3. What are your pronouns?



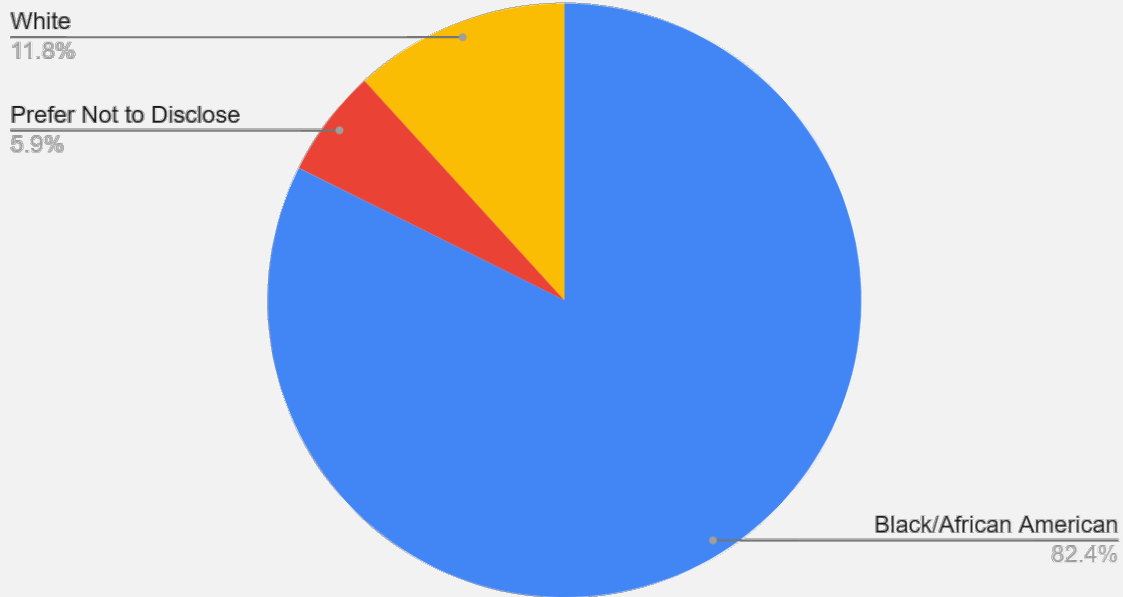
4. What gender do you identify as?



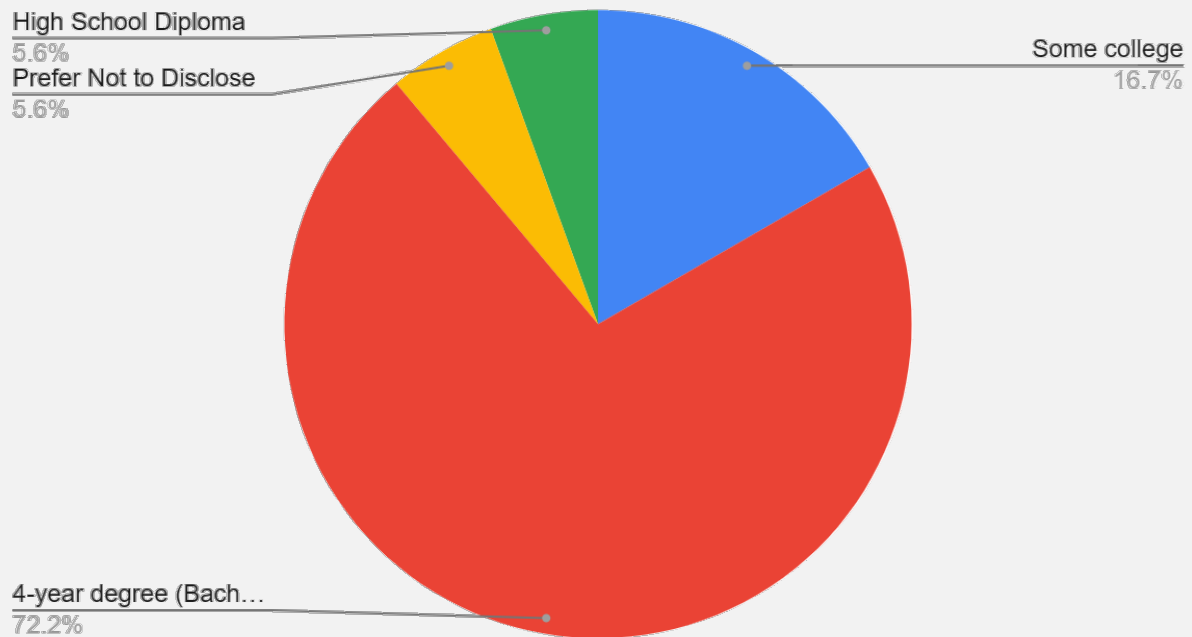
5. Do you identify as transgender or gender non-conforming?



8. How would you best describe yourself?

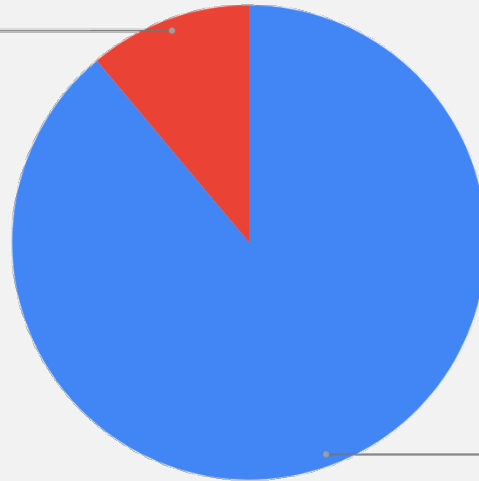


9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?



10. What is your status in the US?

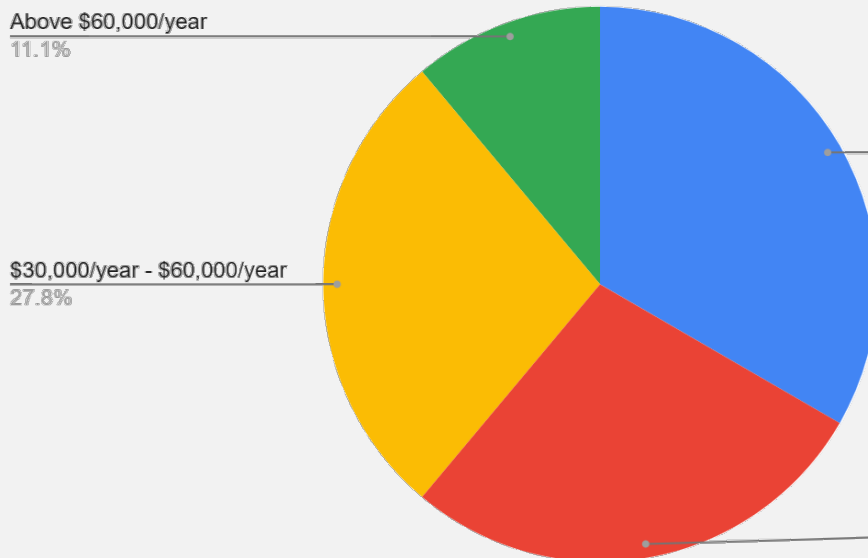
Permanent resident card or green card
11.1%



US born citizen
88.9%

11. Which income group do you fall under?

Above \$60,000/year
11.1%

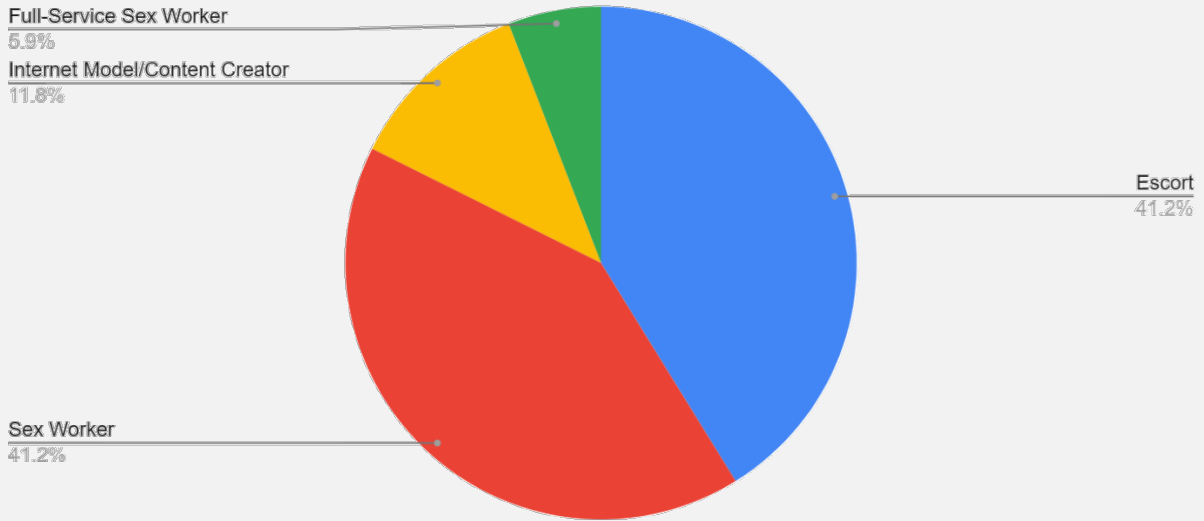


Less than \$30,000/year
33.3%

\$30,000/year - \$60,000/year
27.8%

Prefer Not to Disclose
27.8%

12. What is your role within the sex industry?



Appendix E: Screener Survey

A link and QR code to the screener survey was included on all recruitment materials.

Screeners Survey Content

Instructions

Thank you for your interest in joining one of our focus groups! Please answer the questions below to see if you qualify.

Questions

- 1) Have you worked in the sex work industry within the past 12 months?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

- 2) Are you based in Los Angeles County?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No