

UN Women



Exploring How Approach Female Sex Work

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History of the committee

Since its establishment in 1945, the United Nations has faced the challenge of addressing issues regarding gender inequality, which were becoming ever more evident as the 20th century progressed and got closer to the 21st. Yet, despite



establishing four organisms- the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)- and independently of their efforts, gaps in gender equality and women's empowerment remained significant. In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established, and in 1975, from June 19th to July second, the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City, marking the start of a series of international conferences on the topic, and the start of what we now officially know as UN Women.

In June of 1992, The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), otherwise known as “The Earth Summit”, was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where


women's contribution to sustainability and ecological leadership was one of the talking points. In the World Conference of Human Rights of 1993, in Vienna, Austria, directly discussed and supported the creation of UN Women. Many others, such as the International Conference of Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt in 1994; The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1995; and Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, also known as Habitat II, in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996, all played a part through their own unique focuses in creating and organization entirely made for the protection women and girl around the globe.

On July 2, 2010, while the United Nations was going through a reform, the UN General Assembly approved the creation of UN Women through Resolution A/RES/64/289. Said resolution took into account all past actions taken in international conferences, different



resolutions issued before, and consolidated UNIFEM, DAW, INSTRAW, and OSAGI into the new entity. In the present day, UN Women's primary mandate is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in all areas of life. To achieve this, the organization focuses on

five main goals that work to prevent and respond to gender-based violence; empower and support women towards financial independence; encourage female leadership and active participation; and include women in peace processes and their own safety. UN Women achieves



the aforementioned goals through supporting countries in their implementation of new laws and politics to benefit women and girls, establishing financial and innovation alliances in order to apply said laws, and leading and organizing all gender equality-related actions in the UN.

Introduction

The debate on how countries should approach female sex work is highly complex and multifaceted, yet it is of extreme importance. How a nation addresses female sex work is deeply interconnected with its relationship with human rights, public health, morality and ethics, religion, personal liberty, social justice, culture, and feminism. Policies surrounding sex work can either protect or further marginalize women, depending on their design and implementation, and can have significant impacts on efforts to combat human trafficking, child exploitation, and even drug trafficking. Moreover, the issue of sex work extends beyond the workers themselves to



include other key agents such as sex work facilitators, brothel owners, law enforcement and clients, each of whom plays a role in shaping the dynamics of the industry.

Addressing female sex work requires integral measures that take into account the diverse

array of experiences, the wants, and the needs of the women involved.


A stylized illustration of a dragon's head and body, rendered in dark green and black, with a lighter green background. The dragon is positioned at the top of the page, with its head on the left and its body curving towards the right.

Historical context

The evolution of policies and attitudes toward female sex work has been shaped by significant social, legal, and cultural shifts over time. In the 19th century, Western countries began to formalize their approaches to sex work, often under the guise of public health and moral regulation. For example, the Contagious Diseases Acts in the UK (1864-1886) aimed to control venereal disease but also led to the criminalization of sex work. On the other hand, some countries allowed prostitution and thought of it as necessary for men and their needs.

The rise of feminism, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, contributed to changing perspectives on female sex work. Feminists began to question traditional views, advocating for the recognition of women's agency and the importance of addressing the socio-economic conditions that influenced women's choices. These evolving attitudes set the stage for later discussions about the regulation of sex work and the protection of those involved in the industry.

The 20th century saw growing advocacy for the rights of sex workers, influenced by feminist and human rights movements. The 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point with the emergence of prominent sex worker advocacy groups such as the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) in the UK and the Comité d'Eveil (Committee for Awareness) in France, who challenged the legal status of sex work and called for reforms to enhance safety and rights. These groups organized significant events like the 1985 International Conference on Prostitution in



Paris, where activists from around the world gathered to discuss the decriminalization of sex work and its impact on workers' safety and rights.

Through worldwide conferences and summits, such as the 1999 Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) meeting in Manila, the international community has thoroughly debated how sex work should be regulated. Discussions have centered around various models, including the full decriminalization proposed by New Zealand, which was implemented with the Prostitution Reform Act of 2003, and the Nordic model adopted by Sweden in 1999, which criminalizes the purchase but not the sale of sexual services.

Today, the approach to sex work remains diverse. Countries like Canada have adopted a hybrid model with the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) of 2014, which aims to protect sex workers while criminalizing their clients. In contrast, nations such as Germany and New Zealand have implemented more liberal strategies, focusing on the regulation and recognition of sex work as legitimate labor. Meanwhile, conservative approaches persist in places like the United States, where many states enforce laws that criminalize aspects of sex work, reflecting the complex and varied responses to sex work based on individual national criteria and agendas.

Current Issue


Given how complicated female sex work is to tackle, different countries have adopted a variety of legal frameworks to address it, from complete criminalization to complete legalisation. Criminalization involves imposing legal penalties on all parties involved in sex work. This approach aims to completely



eradicate the sex work industry by treating all aspects of it as illegal. For example, in many U.S. states, sex work is criminalized, with those participating in it facing potential legal consequences.

Legalization permits sex work but under strict conditions to ensure health and safety standards. This model includes regulations such as prohibiting minors from participating, access to healthcare and special security. The Netherlands exemplifies this approach, having implemented regulations to oversee and control the sex work industry while prioritizing the health and safety of those involved.

Neo-Abolitionism, or the “Nordic Model,” targets those who purchase sex rather than the sex workers themselves. This model seeks to diminish the demand for sex work. Sweden is a notable example of this approach, where laws penalize the buying of sex but not the selling.


A stylized illustration of a dragon's head and tail in dark green and black, positioned at the top of the page.

Decriminalization involves removing all laws and regulations concerning sex work, granting the industry the freedom to operate like any other regular industry. This model does not impose specific rules or controls, allowing sex workers to engage in their work without legal repercussions. New Zealand represents this stance, having decriminalized sex work to protect the rights and safety of sex workers while providing them with legal recognition.

All models, and their variations, are subjects of ongoing debate regarding their effectiveness and impact on sex workers and the industry. Some claim that sex workers frequently face significant challenges, including violence, exploitation, and discrimination, and so they should be protected as a vulnerable group. Yet others believe many sex workers choose their profession as a viable economic option, and respecting their right to make this choice is imperative.

Another significant concern in the debate is the intersection of sex work and human trafficking. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), approximately 80% of human trafficking cases globally are for sexual exploitation. While trafficking for sexual exploitation is a grave human rights violation, there is ongoing debate about how best to address it without conflating with consensual sex work. Identifying each case is further complicated by each country's individual view of sex work and the stigma it might hold. For example, research from UN Women illustrates how anti-trafficking measures can sometimes inadvertently impact consensual sex



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work. Efforts to combat trafficking can lead to increased vulnerability for sex workers, who may face harsher penalties and reduced access to support services. Similarly, reports from the Global Network of Sex Work Projects emphasize that anti-trafficking policies can overlap with regulations affecting consensual sex work

Past International actions

In the 56th session of the United Nations General Assembly, July 2024, the Human Rights Council published a report deeming sex work a form of violence against women and exhorting the international community to take immediate action to put a complete stop to the sex work industry. This document has significant implications as it represents a strong stance against sex work, framing it within the context of violence and human rights abuses. It call for immediate action to eradicate the sex work industry and efforts to criminalize or heavily regulate sex work globally. This report lead to several countries to reconsider their stance on sex work




and become stricter in their measures and enforcement on them. The document also gave support for countries like France and Sweden, which had previously implemented



laws criminalizing the purchase of sex.

On the other hand, the UN posted another paper supporting the complete decriminalization initiative of Sex Workers and Feminist Allies (SWIFA). It advocates for a significant policy shift towards the decriminalization of sex work, which could lead to improved legal protections and working conditions for sex workers by reducing stigma, enhancing safety, and providing better access to healthcare and legal protections. The endorsement by the UN helped strengthen advocacy for decriminalization in other countries, leading to increased pressure on governments to consider similar reforms. This support also provided a platform for sex worker advocacy groups to push for changes in legislation and improved protection

In addition, during the 39th session of the UN General Assembly in January of 2024, the Human rights council published a document that detailed eliminating the stigma against sex workers. In addition, during the 39th session of the UN General Assembly in January 2024, the Human Rights Council published a document that detailed eliminating the stigma against social workers. This document had tangible effects by influencing initiatives aimed at reducing discrimination and improving the public perception of sex workers. Countries that adopted stigma-reduction strategies -such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia- saw improvements in social acceptance and better access to health and social services for sex workers. It pushed for the international community to initiate public awareness campaigns and training programs to reduce discrimination against sex workers, leading to more supportive environments and




increased opportunities for a shift in how sex workers were perceived and treated, promoting a more inclusive approach to addressing their needs.

Subtopics

1. Sex Work and Human Trafficking
2. Human Rights Violations Faced by Sex Workers
3. Poverty and Lack of Opportunities Leading to Sex Work
4. Personal Preferences Leading to Sex Work
5. Positive and Negative Societal Views of Sex Work

Positions

- Criminalization: In this position, all key players related to sex work- sex worker, sex work facilitators, and client- are punished by law for their activities. It seek for the ban and reduction of the sex work industry. There two currents to criminalization:
 - Abolitionism: Abolitionists do not ban prostitution directly, but they do ban third-party management, brothel-keeping, soliciting and the acquisition of what was solicited.
 - Prohibitionism: It directly bans prostitution and all that surrounds it.
- Legalisation: Legalisation allows sex work under specific conditions such as forbidding minors to be a part of the industry, supplying clean and sanitary conditions, providing



security systems for places such as brothels, and giving free and unlimited access to sex workers for STD tests.

- Neo-Abolitionism or “Nordic Model”: This model directs the legal punishments towards the solicitors of sex work with the intention to reduce prostitution, specially street prostitution. Brothel-keeping is also illegal for neo-abolitionist perspectives.
- Decriminalization: In decriminalization there are no laws against or regulations of sex work. The industry is given the legal freedom to work as they please.

Guiding questions

- What stance does my delegation hold regarding female sex work? What does it think of the others?
- What actions has my delegation taken to address female sex work?
- How effective have the measures implemented been in achieving its goal?
- What is influencing my delegation’s stance? Is it religion, social justice, or other?
- What is the reality of sex workers in my country?



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