

Myths and Facts About Decriminalizing Sex Work

MYTH



Decriminalizing sex work would lead to an increase in human trafficking.

FACT



Making consensual sex work legal actually makes it easier to go after human traffickers, and makes it more likely that victims of trafficking will seek help. By removing criminal penalties, both sex workers and victims of trafficking will be more likely to report coercion to authorities as they are not afraid of prosecution themselves.

MYTH



Decriminalizing sex work opens the door for more people to be forced into sex work and will increase violence in communities.

FACT



Sex work decriminalization means that consensual sex work, among adults, would no longer be against the law. It would still be a crime to force people into sex work, to engage in human trafficking, or for adults to have sex with minors. After sex work was decriminalized in New Zealand, sex workers were more likely to report incidents of violence to police, and they were two-thirds more likely to refuse clients because they felt unsafe.

MYTH



All sex work is a form of coercion/discriminatory towards women.

FACT



People engage in sex work for a variety of reasons, including better income or flexibility; difficulty finding employment due to discrimination, lack of education, or criminal convictions; or simply because it suits them. Sex workers represent all genders, as well as people who do not identify with a particular gender, so the construct that sex work is emblematic of patriarchy does not take into account the diversity of experiences within the industry. Gender inequality can have a major influence on women's entry into sex work; but criminalization does not address this—it just makes their lives less safe.