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# The Impact of Housing on Sexual Labor

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**Housing 1<sup>st</sup> Conference, April 2018**

# SEX WORK 101

# What is Sex Work

Adapted from SWOP Chicago, Harm Reduction, 2016

## **Sex work is**

a commercial exchange of a sexual service for money or other benefits like housing, transportation, and other survival needs.

used to refer to a broad range of transactions.

used to refer to people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds who are involved in the sex trade.

a term that has been adopted by health, labor and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the World Health Organization.

# What is Sex Work

"A broad definition of sex work would be: ***'the exchange of money or goods for sexual services***, either regularly or occasionally, involving female, male, and transgender adults, young people and children where the sex worker may or may not consciously define such activity as income-generating'.

Sex work may be ***formal or informal***. In some instances, sex work is only a ***temporary*** informal activity. Women and men who have occasional commercial sexual transactions or where sex is exchanged for food, shelter or protection (survival sex) would not consider themselves to be linked with formal sex work.

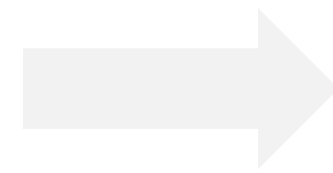
*UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS, in its fact sheet "HIV/AIDS, Gender and Sex Work," published in its 2005 Resource Pack on Gender and HIV/AIDS*



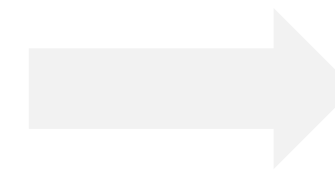
# Types of Sex Work



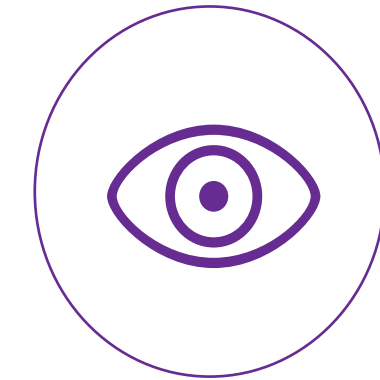
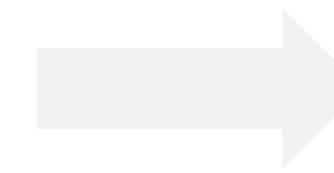
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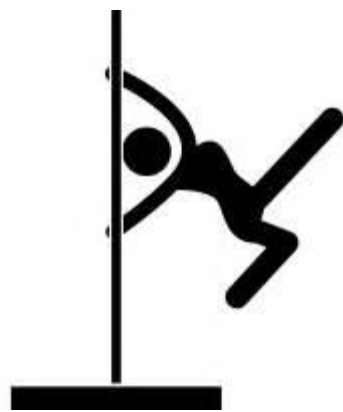
**MASSAGE**



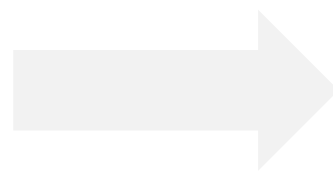
**PHONE SEX OPERATOR**



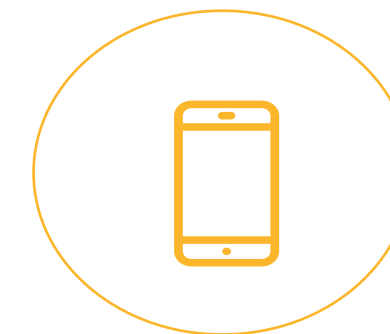
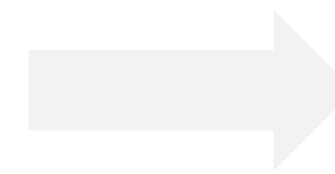
**CAMMING**



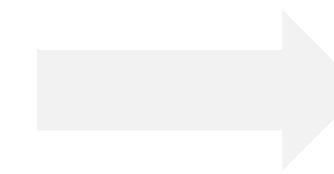
**DANCING/STRIPPING**



**FETISH**



**PORN**



**SUGARING**

# Who are Sex Workers

- What are stereotypes about sex workers that you have heard or held?
- Where do those stereotypes come from?

**All types of people**

# Categories of Sex Work

## CHOICE

Fully consenting to the work, can leave for other employment options but chooses to stay for various reasons.

## CIRCUMSTANCE

Consenting to work in the sex trade but would prefer other work, or wants to leave and needs to stay, usually for financial reasons.

## COERCION

Individual is not consenting to work. Being tricked or forced by another individual(s). Also called sex trafficking.

# Coercion Within the Sex Trade

## UNITED STATES FEDERAL DEFINITION OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

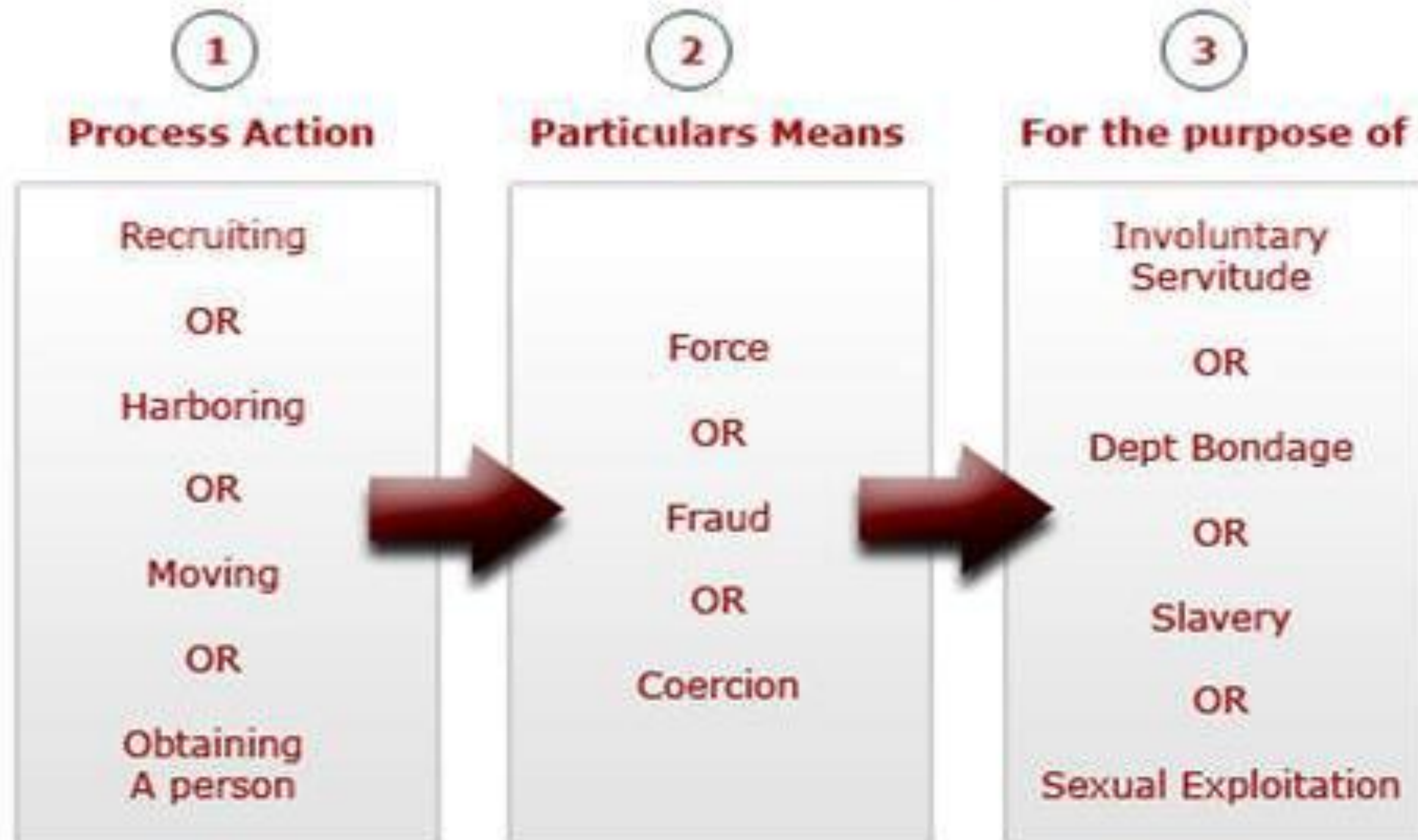
- **Sex trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion; *or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age;* and
- **Labor Trafficking:** the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

*Trafficking in Victims Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386)*



Action + Means + Purpose:

### 3 Elements Necessary to Meet Trafficking Definition:



# Sociopolitical Context

- **Legal**

- A way to access certain benefits

- A crime to prosecute

- **Colloquial**

- A social dialogue

- A series of enslaving acts, NOT the institution of slavery*

# Key Take Aways About Sex Work

- Formal or Informal
- Independent, collective, or for a third party
- Exchange for resources including currency, housing, food, drugs, services or other necessities
- Criminalized and not criminalized
- Choice, circumstance, and coercion
- All gender identities, ages, foreign and domestic, race and ethnicities

A CONSTELLATION OF EXPERIENCE



Harm Reduction

# Occupational Health and Safety Concerns

What harm needs to be reduced

## HIV, HCV, STIs

**HIV:** 12 x higher globally

**STIs:** 5-60 x higher  
In the U.S. (Strathdee, 2008)

**HCV:** prevent, test, treat

## SELF HARM

**Mental illness:**  
2 x higher

**PTSD:** 20%

**Suicidality:**  
60% decrease on  
Entheogenic  
therapies

## VIOLENCE

**35:** The average life expectancy of a Trans woman of color

**33:** Sex workers killed on the job last year

**Sources:** Street, client, intimate partner, pimp, police

## ISOLATION

Dual identities

Stigma

Criminalization

Trauma



# Sex Work and Substance Use

## WHY PEOPLE IN THE SEX TRADE MIGHT USE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

- To increase sexual pleasure
- To increase sexual stamina
- To increase sexual risk taking (kinkiness)
- To cope with trauma
- To lose or manage weight
- To decrease appetite
- To stay awake
- To help make money
- For connection to clients, friends, family
- As harm reduction to manage mental health, counter other substances/issues
- To party



# Principles Harm Reduction Applied to Sex Work

1. Views trading sex for money and resources as neither inherently harmful or degrading, **or** inherently stabilizing or empowering.
2. Focuses on who people are rather than what they do, and sees people as whole people.
3. Recognizes the myriad of reasons why people engage in the sex trade and seeks to help people meet goals as defined for themselves in non-judgmental and compassionate manners and atmospheres.
4. Recognizes the potential infectious disease and physical safety consequences associated with sex work, and seeks to help people mitigate these factors.
5. Seeks to provide holistic support rather than isolated interventions
6. Highlights the impact that the criminal justice response to sex work has on people in the sex trade, and seeks to eliminate sociopolitical barriers to care, safety, and general wellbeing. Understand stigma and its byproducts to be at the root of harm experienced by individuals involved in the sex trade, and that intersecting oppressions compound the harm.
7. Believes that incorporating a diverse range of sex workers into public health policies and discussions can be a gateway into community health. Understands that one individual's experience does not equal that of all individuals in the sex trade.



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# The War on Sex Trafficking

- Increased sanctions
- Criminalizes public health
- Federal funding bans
- Disproportionate effects on marginalized communities

# Disproportionate Effects on Marginalized Communities

- The racialized system of mass incarceration
- Gender disparities in solicitation charges
- Media sensationalism



# The Criminalization of Sex Work

## Social Institutions

- Denial of services because of arrest/convictions
- Not being allowed to report crimes
- Not allowing people to define their experience, especially in access social services
- Discrimination in housing, including temp housing/hotels based on past experience or profiling
- Refusing funding to programs which are not anti-prostitution
- Closing of bank accounts, crowd-funding accounts, Paypal/other financial mechanisms
- Discrimination in family court, other civil proceedings
- Stigma from community, family, social circles



# Barriers to Accessing Services

- Most shelters and transitional housing programs don't allow sex work
- Requirements to stop trading sex to participate
- Stigma within healthcare settings including shaming, mis-gendering/orienting, outing
- Previous bad experiences
- Age and medical coverage restrictions
- Fear of disclosure to law enforcement & mandatory reporting
- Involvement with law enforcement
- Fear of outing/Lack of confidentiality
- Empowering and safe spaces aren't tailored for/don't outreach to sex workers
- Presence of police and security



Less likely to disclose

# **Barriers to Sex Worker-Sensitive Service Delivery**

Adapted from SWOP Chicago, Harm Reduction, 2016

- Lack of knowledge about sex work and/or the needs of people in the sex trade
- Biased ideas about sex work and sex workers as informed by mainstream media and the criminal legal approach to sex work and sex trafficking
- Moral panic
- Othering; lack of exposure to population
- Institutional barriers



# Creating a Safe Space

Adapted from D'Adamo; Substance Use, Sex Work; Trafficking, 2017

- Make confidentiality and possible disclosure clear
- Collaborate with existing organizations and outreach workers who connect with the community
- Normalize and neutralize language
  - Most people don't consider themselves sex workers
- Hire members of the community
- Offer services and resources that are specific to the sex trade
  - Bad date lists, peer support meetings, peer-led outreach, knowledge building resources including safety tips



# Talking About Sex Work With Participants

Listen When Sex Workers Talk

# THE BASICS



## Don't Guess

Don't profile folks who you think might be trading sex. Rather offer potential resources to everyone.



## Normalize

Use non-judgemental language, put sex work positive pins on your outreach bags and posters in your drop-in.



## Build Trust

People engaging in survival sex often don't see themselves as sex workers. Listen for times when they talk about "boyfriends", "date", or "friends."



## Connect to Community

Engage participant who you know are trading or have traded sex in leadership development and support them in mentoring others and building community.



# Participant Engagement

- Talk with folks about how they make money and survive. The entry point doesn't have to be focused on sex
- Your comfort helps determine their comfort
- Stay informed: know the barriers in your area
- Make violence prevention as much of a priority as overdose prevention
- People need resources more than they need services
  - Safe places to work
  - Safer forms of sex work
  - Community-based resources

# Harm Reduction is Evidence-Based

Research that leverages the efficacy of the harm reduction approach with sex workers:

[The Lancet](#): “Straightforward and achievable steps are available to improve the day-to-day lives of sex workers while they continue to work.”

[Harm Reduction International](#):  
Key harm reduction strategies to be utilized with sex workers are community engagement, community development, health promotion, and peer education

2017 OSF Sex Worker Summit: **Housing is the #1 stated need of people in the sex trade**

# Resources

- [St. James Infirmary Occupational Health and Safety Guide](#)
- [Sex Worker Outreach Project USA](#)
- [Desiree Alliance conference](#)
- [HIPS](#)
- [Global Network of Sex Worker Projects](#)



# Closing

## DISCUSSION

1. How are housing 1<sup>st</sup> providers well suited to increase the safety and well being of participants who trade sex?
2. How have you been approaching sexual labor with participants; how can you incorporate best practice?

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## QUESTIONS

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[www.reframehealthandjustice.com](http://www.reframehealthandjustice.com)

## MORE

RHJ offers comprehensive training and technical assistance (TA) on the harm reduction approach to sex work, sex trafficking, and substance use. We also work with social service programs, criminal justice programs, and public health programs on advancing racial and gender equity.

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