MCASA
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

FACT SHEET

Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers

Introduction

Sex workers experience increased vulnerability to sexual violence.[1] Due to the criminalization of sex work, sex workers often face discrimination, stigma, and harmful stereotypes, as well as difficulty accessing safe and supportive sexual violence services.[2] For many sex workers, reporting sexual assault to law enforcement can be concerning due to the risk of arrest or further victimization.[3] Additionally, sex workers who experience sexual violence can be excluded or overlooked in community support group settings due to the stereotypes about sex work, which can further isolate survivors who are sex workers.[4]

National Statistics (United States)

- Sex workers have a **45-75%** chance of experiencing sexual violence at some point in their careers.[5]
- In 2023, **15%** of sex workers in the U.S. experienced physical assault within the past year, and **5%** experienced severe violence.[6]
- **45%** of sex workers experienced sexual abuse before the age of **18** in a 2023 Detroit-based study.[7]
- **30%** of sex workers on streets and **14%** of sex workers indoors reported having experienced some form of violence or threats of violence from law enforcement.[8]

Global Statistics

- Approximately **40** to **42 million people** in the world are engaged in sex work, with the majority being women.[9]
- About **80%** of the world's population of sex workers are women, **15%** are men, and **5%** are transgender.[10]
- **60%** of sex trafficking victims are under 18, which are mostly girls forced into sex work.[11]
- **82%** of sex workers reported being physically assaulted since beginning their profession.[12]
- **68%** of sex workers reported having experienced physical violence from clients.[13]
- **1 in 4** sex workers report being raped by clients weekly.[14]
- **70%** of sex workers have reported harassment by police.[15]
- Sex workers can often be **ineligible** for rape victims' compensation funds or receive reduced amounts.[16]
- **Criminalization**, **stigma**, and **discrimination** are all factors that can contribute to sexual violence against sex workers.[17]

[1] Katherine Koster, 2017. "17 Facts About Sexual Violence and Sex Work," HuffPost, HuffPost News. Retrieved October 22, 2026 from https://swp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Fact-Sheet-Sexual-Violence-Against-Sex Workers-1-1-1.pdf
[2] International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC). "Sex Workers." Reviewed July 2024. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://www.iapac.org/fact-sheet/sex-workers
[3] Woodhull Freedom Foundation. "Violence Against Sex Workers: A Human Rights Violation." 2025. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://www.woodhullfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRC-24-info-sheet.pdf
[4] Katherine Koster, 2017. "17 Facts About Sexual Violence and Sex Work," HuffPost, HuffPost News. Retrieved October 22, 2026 from https://swp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Fact-Sheet-Sexual-Violence-Against-Sex Workers-1-1-1.pdf
[5] Woodhull Freedom Foundation. "Violence Against Sex Workers: A Human Rights Violation." 2025. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://www.woodhullfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRC-24-info-sheet.pdf
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[10] Wendt, Stefan, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 13, 2026; updated July 11, 2026). Gitnux. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://gitnux.org/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[11] Wendt, Stefan, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 13, 2026; updated July 11, 2026). Gitnux. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://gitnux.org/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[12] Daniel Magnusson, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 12, 2026; updated July 9, 2026). WifiTalents. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://wifitalents.com/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[13] Wendt, Stefan, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 13, 2026; updated July 11, 2026). Gitnux. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://gitnux.org/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[14] Wendt, Stefan, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 13, 2026; updated July 11, 2026). Gitnux. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://gitnux.org/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[15] Daniel Magnusson, "Prostitution Worldwide Statistics" (February 12, 2026; updated July 9, 2026). WifiTalents. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://wifitalents.com/prostitution-worldwide-statistics
[16] Katherine Koster, 2017. "17 Facts About Sexual Violence and Sex Work," HuffPost, HuffPost News. Retrieved October 22, 2026 from https://swp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Fact-Sheet-Sexual-Violence-Against-Sex Workers-1-1-1.pdf
[17] Velasco, Judith, and Francisco J. Sanmartín. "Victim-Blaming in Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers: A Systematic Review." 2025. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2025.2482916

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Statistics on Sex Workers with Marginalized Identities

- Sex workers of color, immigrants, migrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) sex workers in the United States experience **heightened** levels of sexual violence and assault compared to others.[18]
- Globally, **25%** of sex workers that identify as LGBTQ+ face increased rates of violence.[19]
- Globally, transgender sex workers often earn more for their work, but face **twice** the rate of violence.[20]
- Women, men, and nonbinary people who sell sex experience **disproportionate rates** of sexual assault and harassment worldwide.[21]
- Globally, migrants, women, transgender women of color, substance users, and sex workers with a criminal record are **increasingly** vulnerable due to intersecting bias.[22]
- In specific regions of the world, it is estimated sex workers who experience violence are around **1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV**.[23]
- Sex workers across the world are **more at risk** of HIV due to their increased experiences of violence, **economic vulnerability**, inability to negotiate condom use, and marginalization.[24]

[18] Woodhull Freedom Foundation. "Violence Against Sex Workers: A Human Rights Violation." 2025. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://www.woodhullfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRC-24-info-sheet.pdf
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[24] International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC). "Sex Workers." Reviewed July 2024. Retrieved October 21, 2026, from https://www.iapac.org/fact-sheet/sex-workers