

# WATCHDOG



## youth coalition

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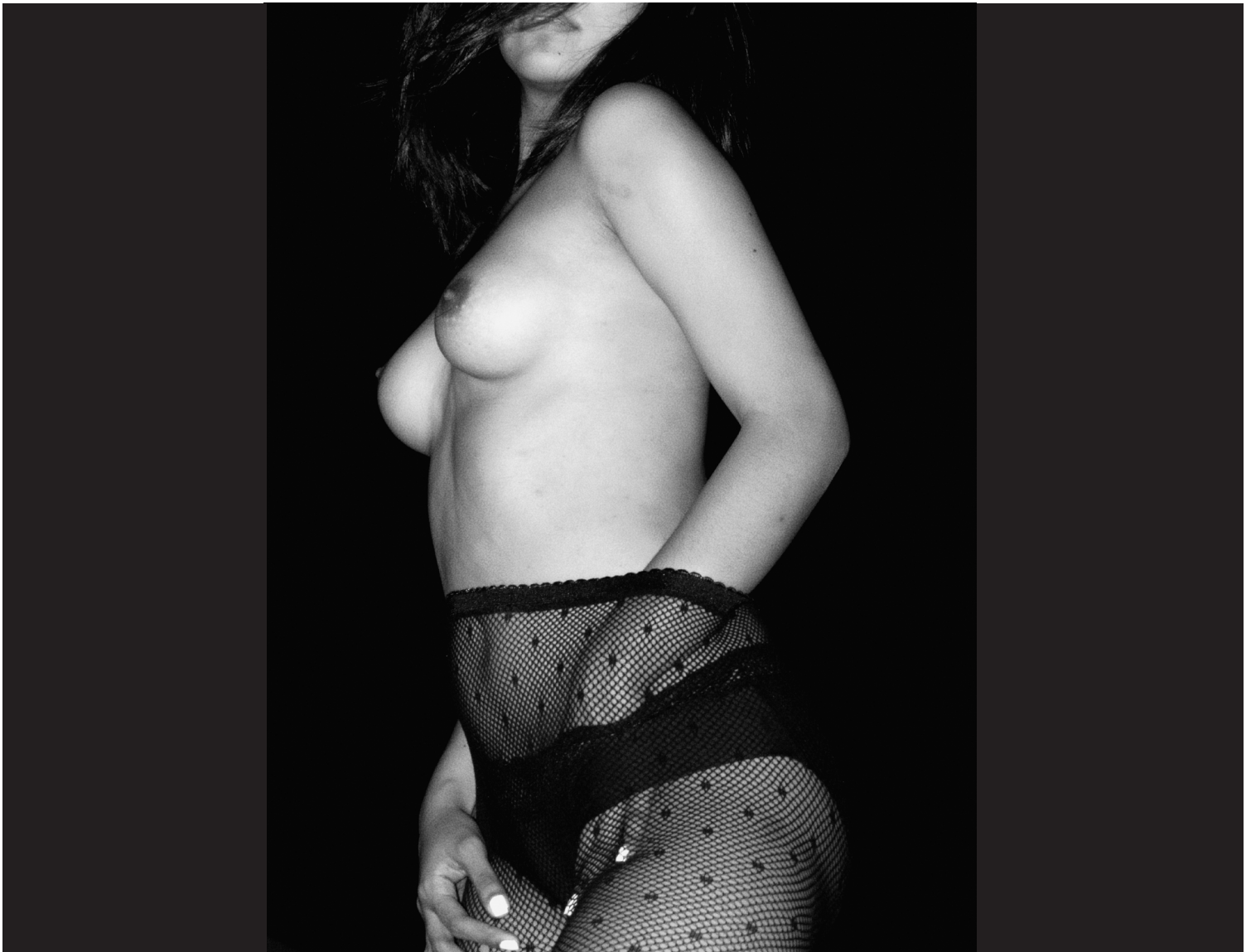
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*Human Too*  
Karren Barcita  
20 | Philippines

# Alliances for Solidarity - Access to SRHR Services for Sex Workers and the LGBTQIA+ Community

For the past five years, YCSRR has released a “Watchdog” for the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) on May 17 – an entirely youth-authored publication on LGBTQIA+ rights. The theme for the 2018 IDAHOT is “Alliances for Solidarity” – so this year, the YCSRR decided to highlight the common struggles that young LGBTQIA+ people and young sex workers face when accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services. While YCSRR continues to support IDAHOT as an important day of visibility for the LGBTQIA+ community, we have decided to release this Watchdog on June 2nd, in honor of International Sex Workers’ Day. On 2 June 1975, approximately 100 sex workers occupied Saint-Nizier Church in Lyon, France, to express their anger about their criminalized and exploitative living conditions. On 10 June at 5pm the church was brutally raided by police forces. This action sparked a national movement, and the day is now celebrated in Europe and around the world. Source: Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)

Though we are more than four decades out from 1975, conservative social norms continue to stigmatize young people’s sexuality, which leads to the development of laws, policies and practices that discriminate against LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers, including criminalization laws which restrict access to health care services and deny young people their sexual and reproductive rights. To ensure that the human rights of sex workers and LGBTQIA+ people are respected, protected, and fulfilled; it is necessary to view sex work as dignified work and decriminalize it.

With these connections in mind, we are proud to publish this year’s 2018 combined IDAHOT/ International Sex Workers Day Watchdog. This publication contains articles, blogs, pictures, posters and stories of 9 young people from the Philippines, Argentina, Nepal, India, Kenya, and Pakistan discussing sex work and LGBTQIA+ issues in their own contexts. On the International Sex Workers Day, we call for an alliance of solidarity to decriminalize sex work and institutionalize human rights for all.

Yours in solidarity,

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

On the Cover

## Human Too

Karren Barcita  
20 | Philippines

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*What makes us human is burning our walls down and reaching out to help one another thrive and live life for the better. The series is a visual representation that gives emphasis on nudity- being seen by others. A metaphor about how sex workers can find strength in their vulnerability and how sex education can help make that happen as long as we work together because after all, we are human too.*

# Press Release: Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights adopts policy on sex workers' rights

As an organization, the Youth Coalition on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR) has always supported the human rights of sex workers and stood in solidarity with sex worker organizations. In January 2018, the membership of YCSRR officially adopted a position paper to support the human rights of sex workers, and provides concrete recommendations to civil society organizations, policy makers and funders on supporting sex workers organization.

The position adopted by YCSRR pushes for governments to adopt the framework of decriminalization, noting, "Sex worker-run organizations throughout the world advocate for the decriminalization of sex work. Decriminalization reduces stigma, increases sex workers' health and safety, allows them to advocate for labour rights and improve their working conditions, and organize for their human rights in relative safety."

The position paper also acknowledges that sex workers are disproportionately affected by HIV<sup>1</sup> and an estimate of 33-46 per cent of new HIV infections among sex workers and their clients could be averted in the next decade if sex work was decriminalized. The use of condoms is an important harm reduction technique for sex workers, as condoms reduce the dangers of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies that accompany sexual activity. But not only do sex workers have to overcome barriers to negotiate safer sex, in some jurisdictions in the United States of America (USA), for example, carrying condoms puts them at risk of arrest.<sup>2</sup>

The YCSRR membership also acknowledges the evidence that the negative effects of criminalization and stigma on sex workers is often amplified for young sex workers who are less likely to seek help as minors, or may be "doubly-criminalized" as young people involved in the sex industry.<sup>3</sup> They may also be more likely to do street-based work, which is more dangerous than work based indoors. Keeping

these considerations in mind, the YCSRR memberships urges countries to decriminalize sex work and refrain from regulating sex work in ways that impact sex workers' human rights and bodily autonomy including by mandating STIs testing, or other medical procedures. The YCSRR also recommends that sex workers and sex worker-led initiatives should be involved in the development of any and all legal, policy, or programmatic efforts related to sex work. As such, policies and programs aimed at young people who practice sex work should aim to recognize the autonomy and human rights of young people

Sex workers' rights are human rights, and we are all accountable for upholding these rights and ensuring that sex workers are able to live, work and organize freely and safe from harm. As YCSRR, we are proud to stand in solidarity with sex workers and be strong and supportive allies for their health and rights.

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# Shifting the debate of sex work

Amit Timilsina  
23 | Nepal

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.”<sup>1</sup> The International Labor Organization (ILO) has defined decent work (an aspirational agenda) as work that is productive and delivers fair income, along with security, labor rights, and social protection for families.<sup>2</sup> Despite these universal human rights standards, the question of whether sex work is work, and should thus be decriminalized, is one still fought about in societies and feminist movements worldwide.

The debate of whether or not sex work should be defined as work exists in Nepal as well. There has been friction between youth who support and do not support sex work as dignified work. Those against viewing sex work as work often argue sex work is oppressive, and draw from women’s rights, cultural and religious contexts to support criminalization. Of course, not only (cisgender) women, but men and transgender people are also involved in sex work and no one wishes to be labeled as criminal.<sup>3</sup> But despite this debate, the ILO’s definition sums up with no hesitation that “sex work” is work since sex work is productive and delivers income for the survival of an individual or family the same way other work does. The debate should shift from traditional thinking and the debate of whether sex work is work, to providing human rights to commercial sex workers.

Using a small online survey, I collected responses from 35 Nepalese youths from diverse sectors and background was conducted to understand the perspectives of Nepalese youth regarding sex work. Almost 87% expressed that they supported the legalization and decriminalization of sex work in Nepal. The respondents believed that commercializing, legalizing and decriminalizing sex work would decrease the rape cases that are escalating in Nepal currently. Furthermore, respondents reflected that legalizing sex work would generate revenue for the nation. Respondents also believed that commercial sex workers should have access to basic rights including access to information on sexual and reproductive health care, and that commercial sex workers should be free from violence, coercion and force. If sex work is legalized, at least commercial sex workers can have a legal way to fight against the exploitation happening to them.

Sex workers from the past to now have been protesting and appealing to have access to basic human rights to live with respect and dignity.<sup>4</sup> There have been lots of cases around the globe where sex workers are harassed, violated and abused by clients, police, predators and discriminated by laws and system of country.<sup>5</sup> The stigma attached to sex work, including the negative perceptions of the general public, has put commercial sex workers into vulnerable positions. The discussion and discourse must dig into the socio-economic context in which commercial sex workers dwell. Socio-economic factors such as debt-bondage, low level of skill, and lack of education and job opportunities push sex workers to vulnerable position. Moreover, sex workers can be discriminated against with low pay and inappropriate working and living conditions that can negatively affect their health.<sup>6</sup>



The ILO has developed the decent work agenda with gender equality as a crosscutting agenda to create jobs, labor rights, and social protection at work. The agenda should also recognize the need to legalize and decriminalize consensual sex work. The debate should focus on eliminating injustice against sex workers, and stigma and discrimination associated with sex work. We need to shift paradigms to build supportive environments to ensure sex workers are protected from harm.<sup>7</sup> The shift in dialogue should be to provide access to information regarding safer sex and access to health services for commercial sex workers. Young people's role in shifting this dialogue is very important for countries benefitting from the demographic dividend such as Nepal, where the majority of the population are youth. Youth should play an important role to sensitize their communities about the lives and choices of commercial sex workers and encourage others to most of all respect their choice of sex work as a mode of sustaining their livelihood. Youth can also work to make sex workers aware of how to file physical harassment charges when they are violated. At the top of the nation's progressive system, policies and laws play an important role in eliminating existing inequality in work, and youth are pivotal to shift the debate of sex work from traditional norms to a human rights perspective.<sup>8</sup>

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# Impact of Criminalization and Discriminatory Laws on Lives of Sex Workers and LGBTQIA+

Poorvi Mehrotra  
24 | India

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India is known as the land of divisiveness but also as inclusive of all the differences each individual possesses. We have had a long struggle of equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for education, housing etc. for both men and women. However, these are still limited to the two socially accepted and identified genders i.e. men and women. Other members of the community who fail to recognize themselves in the above two genders are mostly met with anger, discrimination, pity, cruelty and disrespect. Similarly, we have a set notion of which profession people can venture into and which they can't. We are living in a world where taking one right step towards social development and empowerment faces millions of speculations but one wrong step faces no arguments against it.

India in its Constitution talks about being inclusive to all but at the same time criminalizes a person based on their sexual orientation or the kind of occupation they are a part of. In India's legal context, we have an Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 377 which refers to 'unnatural offences' and says whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may be extended to ten years, and shall also be liable to pay a fine.

Currently, the section 377 of IPC criminalizes homosexuality. This law was implemented under British Rule and has been in force since 1861. Social activists and organizations working for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community have been fighting strongly to scrap section 377. It is important for activists, organizations and other relevant entities to reach out to LGBTQIA+ people - advocate for them, with them, and by them.

India stands as a confused nation over its stance on sex work. According to Section 370 IPC, which deals with trafficking of any person, any activity or recruitment, receiving or giving of payments for services are considered as illegal. However, the ITPA Act of the Indian Constitution states, indulging in sex work is not considered illegal or punishable but abuse or exploitation of a person for any commercial purpose is punishable. India may not directly criminalize 'sex work', but it criminalizes activities associated with sex work like advertising and soliciting. However, by this stance, the conditions this policy brings to the profession are worrisome, as any criminalization leads to poor or no access to healthcare services which further results in no health insurance or access to social benefits.

The discrimination by law and criminalizing the very presence of people with different sexual orientations and gender identities or people involved in sex work denies people their basic human rights. We cannot live like ostriches with our heads in the sand pretending everything will be fine if we criminalize a particular community or a profession and ignore the impact. It is important to recognize the impact such laws have on that minority of community. Criminalization takes away their human right of gaining proper health care, the right of being treated equally and with respect and dignity, and the right of education, as many LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers do not receive formal education because of shame, non-acceptance and being discriminated upon.

At a time when we should be progressing towards accepting and being more tolerant towards things which are natural and don't create a hindrance in our daily life. The more we are regressing and becoming okay with things which SHOULD be bothering us- the rise in violence against any gender, the rise in rape cases, the rise in objectifying of women, lack or no access to proper health and sanitation etc. Many development sectors have tried to take up the topic of HIV/AIDS, however, it is still seen as taboo and all the more when it comes to talking about having sex with person of same sexual orientation. The reach and awareness of safe sex is still a distant dream and because there is no proper law which legally protects sex workers or the LGBTQIA+ community, they are losing out on a lot of services and access which rightfully is theirs and is naturally inherited by being citizen of the country. It is time we rise to action and make the world a safe space for all living beings with no discrimination based on sex, gender or occupation.

Maria Agostina  
23 | Argentina

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# Those questioning coffee eyes!

Lirisha Tuladhar  
Youth Activist Leadership Council (YALC)  
18 | Nepal

Content Warning: This piece contains mention of sexual and physical violence.

I stirred my coffee again and again, unable to drink it. The colour of the coffee resembled her lost eyes. Her silence hung onto my thoughts everyday, compelling me to think about how lucky I am, to have hot coffee to sip while her coffee eyes sipped the bleakness of life.

How will I ever be able to forget her? When I met her 9 weeks ago, her with her coffee eyes. So vulnerable... so innocent. Her files revealed a fragility that I couldn't fathom. So many scars already... even though her dress tried to hid her body's scars made by cigarettes, her eyes betrayed the hidden wounds from all these years.

I tried connecting and communicating with her so I could reduce the burden she carries within herself. I tried to empathize with her to my best ability. My efforts were not in vain, for a week later, she shared...

She shared her life story with me and I could find myself relating to her life: losing her family at the mere age of 15 because she was transgender. Forced to drop out of school because they didn't want her. Denied a job because of her gender identity.

She had no other options and so she chose to work as a sex worker for her livelihood. She started gradually, and as she went on with it she started enjoying that life, the money, the survival.

But the last night she was brought to me, she had fresh wounds from her client who, after using her services, denied her payment, saying he was not satisfied. When she protested, he made her the victim of sexual

torture, brutally beating her and throwing her on the roadside. Her eyes questioned me in silence, why the discrimination? Why was she tortured? But I had no answers.

I recall that particular day her heavy yet soft voice echoing her pain and agony. Her eyes turned a shade darker like black coffee with the cream of sadness, helplessness and confusion, asking me silently: why she couldn't live a dignified life as a sex worker? Why is she treated inhumanely? Why does she have nobody to turn to for help? Why is she labelled a criminal even though she is the victim?

When she had looked upon me with those black coffee eyes, I could feel the bitter taste myself. And I had to look down, for I had no answers yet again.

That was the last I saw of her.

She was gone, but she left me with a lesson, an understanding that we have failed our youth and future generations. We as individuals and the system have ignored sex workers and transgender people. We have ignored their vulnerabilities, but also the rights they hold. We have chosen to keep ourselves in the dark, and in doing so, we have dragged them along with us into the darkness.

It is time we all brew up a new cup of coffee with the cream of development. It's time we create equality and take the time to understand and support all members of the LBGTQIA+ and sex work communities.

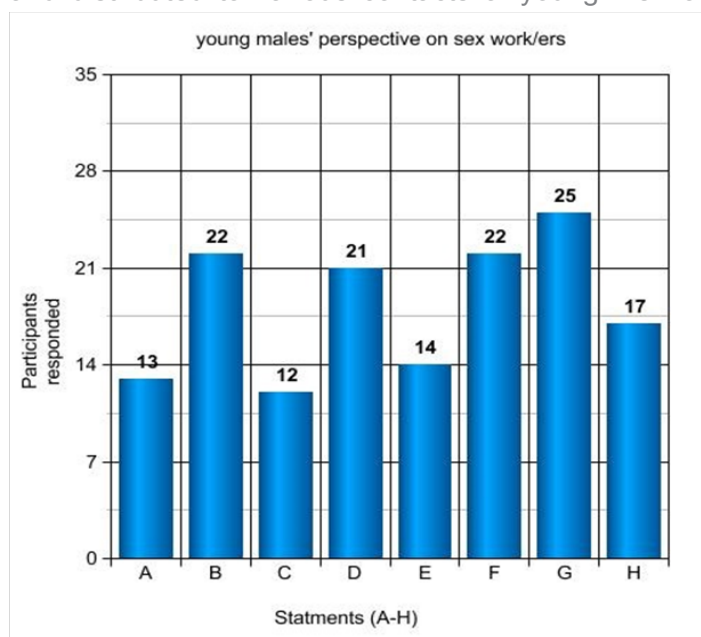
# Young Pakistani males' perspectives on sex work/ers

Sarmad Muhammad Soomar  
23 | Pakistan

The current society in which we live, people have historically been grouped as male or female (though as time passes, new gender identifications are emerging). Unfortunately, these two groups have not been equal in society. For centuries, men have had moral privilege and social power, while women have been oppressed and systematically disadvantaged. No doubt with time women have grown in industries like education and finance and have empowered themselves to be confident and courageous. On the other hand it is still practiced and evident in a variety of families and clans of Pakistan that the primary decision-making power regarding sexual and reproductive health matters is still in the hand of men (partners, spouses, siblings or parents).

This Watchdog's focus on diverse sexualities and sex workers' rights made this a prime time to investigate how Pakistani patriarchal young men view these topics. If our future decision makers will continue to be men (because of male dominance), and these young men are not aware of the basic human rights and specific sexual health rights for all communities without discrimination, then it will be difficult to convince them to implement human-rights based policies when they are in power in the future.

Following the agenda, a simple google form was created and distributed to various contacts of young men on



social media or present in my email contact list. Within a time frame of two to three days, a total of thirty five (35) young men shared their perspectives related to sex work/ers by filling out the form. The data provided insights that should be points of reflection for all advocates striving for the provision of fundamental sexual health rights in Pakistan. Also, the simple questions and their responses suggested that advocates should help these young men re-evaluate or investigate these perspectives more through one on one discussions or perhaps small groups. These discussions would provide the young men with correct information to work on their attitudes and understandings for advocacy purposes and involve them in planning awareness strategies and policy dialogues. Men's hereditary control over social and moral roles can be reduced, and on the other hand involving men can be positively utilized to make provision of rights a great success in conventional parts of the world.

Following is the analysis of responses gathered regarding eight (8: A-H) basic questions/statements answered by thirty five young men (35):

A. A good number of young males (37.1%) understood the term LGBTQIA+.

B. In the majority of the young men's view, the most common involvement in sex work is of females/girls (62.8%). Some knew that men are involved in sex work (20%), but very few knew that other genders are as well (5.7%).

C. On inquiring about common motives regarding involvement in sex work the responses were: Financial (34.2%), Personal Sexual desires (11.4%), Trafficking/Coercion (8.5%) and Recreational (5.7%). The majority of the respondents (40%) considered all four as common motives for sex work.

D. The majority (60%) of the respondents think that human rights are universal and sex workers should also be given their rights without any discrimination.

E. 40% of respondents believe that the typical reason people don't talk about sex work is because they think it's a sinful act.

F. More than half (62.8%) were not aware about the laws of Pakistan regarding sex work/ers.



G. Most respondents (71.4%) said they have no idea what the legislations of Pakistan related to LGBTQIA are.

H. On be asked whether sex work should be allowed without any sort of bias, 48.5% thought it should be allowed.

Working with young men, we should in detail explore about their awareness related to rights, why they haven't heard about other genders and their diversity, what are the factors that have kept them unaware about the laws of their country related to sexual and reproductive health, are the involved in taking updates from social media or other communication sources? Did they get any opportunity to attend any dialogues or workshops relating gender sensitization, sex work or sexual health rights?

Only through these discussions can we ensure that men are heavily involved in sexual health rights as dominant figures in society. These discussions will also help us male advocates to form a man-to-man chain of exchanging information to clarify values and make sound policy decisions which are taken mutually with all other genders and without patriarchal thinking.

If our future decision makers will continue to be men (because of male dominance), and these young men are not aware of the basic human rights and specific sexual health rights for all communities without discrimination, then it will be difficult to convince them to implement human-rights based policies when they are in power in the future.

## 2ND JUNE INTERNATIONAL WHORES' DAY



### WHY JUNE 2ND?

Globally International Whores' Day is an annual event held on June 2, to recognize the anniversary of the day in 1975 when hundreds of sex workers occupied a church in the French city of Lyon. They were protesting against their criminalized and exploitative living conditions.

Police cleared the church after 8 days, but the event triggered the start of an international movement of sex workers fighting for fairer RIGHTS.

HELP US SPREAD THE WORD! with the hashtag: **#SEXWORKISWORK**  
Take part in this fight.



ALLIANCES FOR SOLIDARITY



Maria Agostina  
23 | Argentina



Stigma and discrimination  
Saroj Lamichhane  
28 | Nepal

This piece portrays sex workers, LGBTQIA+ people, and people affected by HIV and AIDS, and reflects the harassment and emotional abuse they often face due to stigma and discrimination.

## The Who I Am

Panamus Cmanto  
21 | Kenya

Sometimes I feel I should have been born an abortion. I was born with a life laid down for me. But I'm confused. I'm not the boy my mother brought up to be. I'm not the pussy loving guy my peers think I am. I wonder at how this world is. There are those who never see the greatness in a man, those who will never see me as anything more than a cocksucker-

Yet I am a poet too. But even as I speak. Someone is buying for my blood. Everyday I struggle to break chains. And all I want is to live peacefully, without my body paraded as an outcast., To not be stared at, when I walk with my lover! And I swear I'm saturated with the absorption of all this hate. Why can't this world let everyone be? I have come home, run into the deepest of waters. All I offer is my true love.

*Author's explanation: "The Who I Am is a lamentation of myself on how when being gay in Kenya we strive so hard but at most we even end up being male sex workers, for we have no law supporting our being and so we tend to hide in the dark where we cast our stones."*

# SESTA/FOSTA censors internet for sex workers

Ankit Gupta  
25 | India

On March 23rd 2018, Craigslist, a popular listing website, shut down its 'Personals' section followed by the signing of two bills by United States House and Senate, Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) in efforts to curb online sex trafficking. Online websites, including Craigslist and Backpage, provide a safe place for people involved in the consensual sex trade to contact clients through online platforms, access bad date lists, and screen clients online.

One of the biggest threats of these laws is that it pushes sex workers to be involved in more street based sex trade, where they face extensive violence from police, clients, and the general public. Around the world, violence against sex workers is often unaddressed and undocumented. As the briefing paper published by the Global Network of Sex Workers Projects (NSWP) demonstrated, black trans sex workers are most vulnerable to violence, due to the intersection of anti-blackness, transphobia, HIV status, and migrant status. The Trans Murder Monitoring Project (TMM) reveals that 75 percent of all trans victims of murder worldwide between January 2008 and December 2011 were sex workers.

Sex workers are often kept out of the discussion about laws and policies that impact their lives the most, be it by policy makers or scholars. During her trip to India during the spring of 2014, feminist icon Gloria Steinem described prostitution (sic) as "commercial rape," and derided the efforts by sex worker activists and feminist scholars to recognize sex work as a form of labour.<sup>1,2</sup>

The demand for decriminalization not only reduces violence and stigma towards sex workers, it also recognizes sex work as labour, just like any other form of labour. Furthermore, states should not be the deciding factor in who, how and where people can take part in sex work - a common outcome in countries that have legalized, and then heavily regulated, sex work.

As we remember our community members that have been victimized, silenced, and murdered, here are some of the things that we can do to change that:

**Talk about decriminalization:** Sufficient research has shown that decriminalization of sex work<sup>3</sup> and activities associated with it has helped sex workers carry out their work in safety, report incidences of violence without facing discrimination, and access health care. Include the decriminalization of sex work in your advocacy and push for decriminalization with your elected officials.

**Support sex worker led initiatives:** In 2012, Red Umbrella Fund (RUF) was founded as part of a conversation between donors and sex worker communities to fund initiatives for sex workers' rights led by sex workers. In 2014, RUF in association with Open Society Foundation and Mama Cash commissioned a report on funding for sex workers' rights.<sup>4</sup> Sex workers are best placed to know what is best for them; so when supporting organizations that are working for the rights of sex workers, ask them if they are led by sex workers.

**Sex workers can talk, listen to them:** As we remember sex worker community members who have been murdered or have faced violence, we need to protect and listen to sex workers who continue to work and advocate. When organizing panels, conferences, and discussion on sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic justice, and sex work, ensure that sex workers are not only invited to talk about their rights and issues but are also compensated for this labour.

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*Human Too*  
Karren Barcita  
20 | Philippines

## CONTRIBUTORS

Amit Timilsina  
 Ankit Gupta  
 Karren Barcita  
 Lirisha Tuladhar  
 Maria Agostina Biritos  
 Panamus Cmanto  
 Poorvi Mehrotra  
 Sarmad Muhammad Soomar  
 Saroj Lamichhane

## DESIGN

Aney Rijal  
 rijal.aney@gmail.com

A publication of

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights  
 123Slater St., 6th Floor  
 Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H2  
 Canada

E-mail: [admin@youthcoalition.org](mailto:admin@youthcoalition.org)

Website: [www.youthcoalition.org](http://www.youthcoalition.org)

ISBN 978-1-7753893-0-9

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June 2, International Sex Workers' Day, calls activists to speak up for sexual and reproductive health and rights and access to right and services for sex workers, people in sex trade, and LGBTQI+.

Learn more from [Global Network of Sex Work Projects \(NSWP\)](#)

## CONTACT US

[outreach@youthcoalition.org](mailto:outreach@youthcoalition.org)  
[www.youthcoalition.org](http://www.youthcoalition.org)

## EDITORS

Alan Jarandilla Nuñez  
 Amit Timilsina  
 Ankit Gupta  
 Anna Szczegielniak  
 David Imbago Jácome  
 Hayley Gleeson  
 Lloyd Nunag  
 Michiel Andeweg  
 Nomtika Mjwana  
 Ryan Febrianto  
 Sarah Hedges-chou  
 Savannah Mudd

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