# FACTS AND FICTION ABOUT SEX WORK

**FICTION: Sex workers are 'vectors of disease'**

**FACT:** Actually sex workers have higher standards of sexual health than the general community, and there has never been a reported case of sex worker to client or client to sex worker HIV transmission in Australia. Some of this stereotype originally comes from the syphilis scares of the 18th and 19th Century in Europe, before effective condom technology made commercial sex safe.

In Australia, sex workers are extremely responsible when it comes to their sexual health, after all our bodies are our business, and like pianists who take care of their hands, sex workers have good reason to care for our assets. Most sex workers use condoms for oral sex, which is rare in the general community.

**FICTION: People are forced into sex work**

**FACT:** Only as much as anyone is forced into any form of waged labour. Very few people are independently wealthy, and so most people are forced to earn money in some way, or receive welfare payments. These are the same choices available to sex workers. In Australia, a country with a welfare system, no one is forced to choose whether to do sex work or starve.

Most people who work in the sex industry demonstrate skills such as good communication, negotiation and ability to deal with diverse people. These skills are useful in other service industries, as well as the helping professions. People choose to sex work because of the higher rate of pay than other jobs, flexibility of hours and the opportunity to be self-employed.

**FICTION: Sex work makes sex workers drug dependent**

**FACT:** Firstly, drug use in the sex industry is much less widely spread than you may think. Recent Australian research suggests that approximately 10 - 15% of sex workers are injecting drug users. This means that 85-90% are not. The most commonly used drug in the sex industry would be nicotine. Sex workers use alcohol at a lesser rate than the general community.

Most sex workers that use illicit drugs began using them before they began sex work. Illicit drugs, precisely because they are illegal, are over priced and can be difficult to acquire. Drug users may choose to do sex work in order to earn higher wages than other forms of employment in order to purchase expensive drugs and also to have the time available to access them. Sex workers are rarely driven to use drugs in order to 'cope with sex work'.

**FICTION: Clients of sex workers are dangerous psychopaths who couldn't get sex elsewhere**

**FACT:** A recent large scale survey of sex industry clients showed that clients are no different to any other male in the general community. Clients come from a range of ages, races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Clients are certainly no likely than any other man to be violent. Many clients are married, so they are not necessarily undesirable or possessing poor social skills.

Clients access the services of sex workers in order to have sexual variety, to have hassle free sex outside of a relationship, to have pleasant company, to relax, to have an orgasm. Generally clients do not visit sex workers to pick a fight or to cause harm. It is a well known fact that women are more at risk of violence from someone they know, their partners or family members, than a complete stranger. This is as true of sex workers as other women.

**FICTION: Making tough laws against sex work keeps people out of the sex industry and helps sex workers**

**FACT**: Economic motivations are the most likely factor in a person deciding to work in the sex industry. This is evidenced by the growth in the sex industry all across Australia in recent years, even in States and Territories where sex work remains criminalised. This growth is probably a result of a range of economic reasons, including cuts to welfare payments.

Harsh anti-sex work laws have a negative impact on sex workers in a number of ways. A criminalised sex industry is an underground sex industry that reduces the access of sex workers to health and support services. Sex workers are also less inclined to report crimes against them when working in an illicit industry, as they would be incriminating themselves in the process.

While brothels are illegal, they are not recognised as workplaces, and sex workers have no status as employees. This means that sex industry employers have no legal responsibility to comply with Industrial Relation legislation, or to provide a safe working environment for their employees.

Criminalisation creates a barrier for those sex workers who may wish to exit the sex industry. As more and more jobs require police checks, a criminal record can reduce sex workers chances of finding alternative employment.

**Information in this article was sourced from Principles for Model Sex Industry**
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