

Supporting community action on AIDS in developing countries



SEX WORK, VIOLENCE and HIV

A guide for programmes with sex workers

About those involved

Who is the International HIV/AIDS Alliance?

Established in 1993, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) is a global partnership of nationally-based organisations working to support community action on AIDS in developing countries. These national partners help local community groups and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to take action on AIDS, and are supported by technical expertise, policy work and fundraising carried out across the Alliance. In addition, the Alliance has extensive regional programmes, representative offices in the USA and Brussels, and works on a range of international activities such as support for south–south cooperation, operations research, training and good practice development, as well as policy analysis and advocacy.

Our mission is to support communities to reduce the spread of HIV and meet the challenges of AIDS. To date we have provided support to organisations from more than 40 developing countries for over 3,000 projects, reaching some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities with HIV prevention, care and support, and improved access to treatment.

Frontiers Prevention Project

The Frontiers Prevention Project is a multi-country, prevention-focused initiative which aims to slow the spread of HIV and support populations that are key to the epidemic in responding to the HIV-related challenges they face. It focuses on low-prevalence countries that are put at risk by growing epidemics, working specifically in Cambodia, Ecuador, India, Madagascar and Morocco.

Funded by the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, the project has made an important contribution to increasing knowledge of HIV and how to prevent it, improving access to and the quality of treatment for sexually-transmitted infections, and the creation of community-based organisations and networks of people living with and affected by the virus.

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Cover: This photograph was taken by Kunthea, a 25-year-old sex worker who works in a karaoke parlour in Cambodia. The photograph was taken as part of a PhotoVoice project (Unheard Voices, Hidden Lives) which was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as part of the Alliance Frontiers Prevention Project. © 2006 Kunthea/International HIV/AIDS Alliance/PhotoVoice.

"I work in a karaoke parlour. It is attractively decorated. However, while some guests sing and dance happily with the music others insist that I drink wine with them and try to forcibly touch my whole body. It makes me feel bad and resent my work."

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Violence is often poorly understood and is rarely taken into account in HIV/AIDS projects with sex workers.

What is this guide about?

In order to be effective, HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes must address the broader factors that make people vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Human rights abuses, stigma, discrimination and marginalisation stand in the way of people obtaining HIV/AIDS-related information, the means to prevent HIV infection, as well as care, treatment and support.

Violence can be one of the most important factors affecting the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS. For various reasons, sex workers often find themselves in situations that put them at increased risk of violence. In addition, it can be very difficult for sex workers to obtain protection from violence and to access support when they have experienced violence. Despite this, violence is often poorly understood and is rarely taken into account in HIV/AIDS projects which work with sex workers.

In Part 1, we describe how and why violence can occur in the context of sex work, and why it is important for HIV/AIDS programmes to understand this. We challenge some of the assumptions related to violence and sex work. In Part 2, we give examples of ways in which HIV/AIDS projects have successfully addressed violence in the context of sex work.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily for organisations implementing HIV/AIDS projects with sex workers and for organisations providing funding and technical support to these projects. It aims to help organisations understand and assess the importance of taking violence into account, and to help design and carry out activities to prevent and deal with violence against sex workers.

It is hoped that the discussions and examples presented will help these organisations to know what questions to ask, what issues to look for, and how to make projects more effective by responding better to the needs of sex workers.

Part 1: Understanding violence in the context of sex work

Part 1 begins with some definitions of violence and an exploration of the links between HIV and violence. It goes on to discuss the challenges involved in ensuring that violence is addressed in HIV programmes. The second section provides a more detailed understanding of violence in relation to sex work. It challenges some common assumptions and provides examples of the circumstances in which sex workers often face violence and the many ways in which it can come about.

Sex workers' own perceptions of violence demonstrate the different ways violence can be defined. One project in Brazil discovered that sex workers considered they had been victims of violence only if the injuries they incurred were serious enough for them to require hospital treatment. On the other hand, the following statement from a member of the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers in Montreal, Canada, shows a much broader definition of violence:

"If I am abducted, or threatened, or my liberty is restricted; if I lose my house, or my children are taken away from me. All of these things constitute violence, whether the person doing it is a policeman or a crook."

A member of the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers in Montreal, Canada.

Although it is common to associate violence with physical abuse, and with its direct consequences such as injury, it is important to look beyond this.

What is violence?

There are many definitions of what constitutes violence. Although it is common to associate violence with physical abuse, and with its direct consequences such as injury, it is important to look beyond this. Violence can also be emotional: verbal abuse and stigma can damage a person's self-esteem and psychological well-being, making them more vulnerable. Moreover, the World Health Organisation considers the threat of physical injury to be in and of itself an aspect of violence: threats are traumatising and have an impact on the lives of those who are threatened.

It is also important to understand that violence can come from many different sources: communities, the authorities (including police and soldiers), other marginalised people, in the form of self-harm, and even from health services and programmes. Violence from these different sources is often interlinked, with one source aggravating the other. The strategies that sex workers employ to protect themselves from one source of violence may put them at greater risk from another.

Because this guide deals with sex work, violence is discussed in the context of stigma against sex workers. Stigma is often directed at a whole group rather than just individuals, and in the same way, stigma-related violence can also be directed at groups or communities. However, as discussed later, stigma and violence are not inherent to sex work.

The links between violence and HIV/AIDS

It is well known that the AIDS epidemic is fuelled by human rights abuses. In particular, different forms of marginalisation and stigma stop people accessing the information, support and services that would help to protect them from HIV/AIDS. They can also put people in situations that make them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Violence has very strong links to vulnerability to HIV. Here are some examples of these links:

Physiological links. Injuries caused by physical violence can increase the likelihood of HIV infection. This is particularly true of vaginal or anal injuries caused during violent sexual assaults. Even very small wounds can increase the risk of HIV infection when the person subsequently comes into contact with infected blood or body fluids.

Social links. The fact that a person has been a victim of violence can itself be stigmatised, or can cause fear in others. This can increase barriers to accessing health services, including for treatment of injuries, as well as HIV prevention services and treatment. The presence of physical signs of injury resulting from violence may mean a person is less likely to seek support, as they may be afraid of stigma if they show injuries in public or to medical personnel. Also, the fact that a person has been a victim of violence can lead to blame or rejection from within that person's social network. This isolates the victim from the people and places they would usually turn to for support and security.

Psychological links. Marginalised or stigmatised people are often blamed when they are the victims of violence, and this can be internalised as guilt or self-blame. Being affected or threatened by violence often harms a person's self-esteem, and this can mean they are less likely to do what they need to do in order to protect themselves from HIV.

Marginalisation and stigma stop people accessing the information, support and services that would help to protect them from HIV/AIDS.

The following description from Svay Pak in Cambodia illustrates some of the links between violence and money:

“In addition to the obvious physical risks of police abuse, raids and arrests added bribery costs to sex workers’ debts, thereby increasing the time spent working in brothels and heightening the urgency to maximize client numbers, particularly the best-paying ones. Furthermore, the disruption caused by police activity reduced clientele, especially when police launched a series of crackdowns ostensibly to close the industry altogether. Usually, after a few days or weeks during which sex workers either operated secretly behind locked doors or were sent away to await better times, business in Svay Pak would return to normal. In the meantime, however, sex workers experienced severe loss of income while incurring additional costs...”

Busza, J. (2005), “How Does a ‘Risk group’ Perceive Risk? Voices of Vietnamese Sex Workers in Cambodia”, in Parsons, J. (ed), (2005), Contemporary Research on Sex Work.

Where people are threatened by violence, avoiding violence is often a much bigger priority for them than avoiding HIV.

Economic links. Violence – including the threat of violence – can cause marginalised people to move around more often, having an impact on their income. It can also lead to people working in more risky situations for less money, further increasing the risk of violence and, particularly for sex workers, leading to more risky sex. In some situations sex workers have to pay “protection money” or bribes to gangs or police officers. Again, with particular reference to sex workers, being physically injured can have an impact on earnings; and violence often occurs in conjunction with robbery.

Legal links. Marginalised people (for instance, sex workers, slum dwellers, prisoners and indigenous people) are often those most vulnerable to violence. They are also often blamed – and arrested – for trying to defend themselves against violence. In many countries, prison settings are themselves associated with violence and with increased risk of HIV infection. Similarly, where legislation criminalises certain activities or behaviour, those targeted are often placed at greater risk of violence.

These examples show the different ways in which violence can make people more vulnerable to HIV; they are all interrelated. Violence can also be associated with stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, making them more vulnerable in all of the ways described.

These links illustrate how tackling violence in HIV/AIDS programmes might help to reduce risk and vulnerability to HIV. But there is also a more basic reason why violence should be taken into account: experience shows that where people are threatened with it, avoiding violence is often a much bigger priority than avoiding HIV. In these situations, helping to tackle violence means helping people to respond to one of the most immediate threats in their lives. This will, in turn, help them respond to other important issues, including reducing their vulnerability to HIV. Tackling violence will also provide a more stable platform for improving people’s access to effective HIV/AIDS services.

Responses to violence by HIV/AIDS programmes

Despite the clear links between violence and HIV/AIDS, and the clear rationale for HIV/AIDS programming to deal with violence where it occurs, few HIV/AIDS programmes deal with the issue in a systematic way. There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- The links between HIV/AIDS and violence are not well understood.
- HIV/AIDS projects tend to have a narrow focus on providing HIV/AIDS-related information and services.
- Even where project workers are aware of the importance of dealing with violence, the project funding may not allow them to do so.
- Violence is seen as something that is external and inevitable, and outside of the mandate of HIV/AIDS projects.
- Organisations implementing HIV/AIDS projects do not always have the skills, knowledge or ability to tackle violence in their projects.

It is important for projects to recognise the extent to which violence is an issue for the sex workers they work with, and to ensure that partners – including those that provide funding or influence funding policy – understand these links too. Project workers also need to know how they can begin to tackle violence within the scope of their activities.

Few HIV/AIDS programmes deal with violence in a systematic way.

A project worker describes the impact of Shari'a law in northern Nigeria on providing health services to sex workers:

"The Shari'a law has caused the sex work industry in the north to go underground thereby making it difficult to target for interventions. This has a direct impact on the health of the sex workers because they no longer have access to information and services. There has also been migration of sex workers from the north to other cities that have lesser sanctions for sex work. This also has implications."

Crago, A., Interview with Irene Patrick-Ogbogu, Women Health Education and Development, Nigeria, March 2006.

Violence is not by any means inevitable for sex workers. But it is far more likely to be a problem wherever sex workers face high levels of stigma and discrimination and where human rights are not protected.

Violence and sex work in context

Violence is not by any means inevitable for sex workers. But it is far more likely to be a problem wherever sex workers face high levels of stigma and discrimination and where human rights are not protected. Sex workers are often stigmatised and discriminated against, both because of how their work is viewed by society, and because they are marginalised in other ways – for instance, if they are women, transgender, or men who have sex with men, or even if they are migrants. In many countries, sex work is restricted in some way by national or local legislation or policy. Harsher laws tend to increase the incidence of violence against sex workers. But in nearly all contexts, the lives of sex workers are significantly affected by police enforcement strategies and public health policies.

Because of these different factors, sex work is forced underground in many places, putting people who sell sex at greater risk of human rights violations, including violence. This happens in a number of ways:

- People have to sell sex in situations that make it harder for them to keep themselves safe, for instance: working alone; working in darker, less public areas; moving around frequently to avoid being seen, and thereby working in unfamiliar areas; spending less time negotiating arrangements and checking clients for danger signs such as drunkenness or aggressive behaviour.
- People who sell sex are more likely to migrate to different regions or countries to avoid stigma, persecution and violence from within their own community. As a result, their vulnerability can be compounded by the social isolation and exclusion often faced by migrants.
- People who sell sex often do not receive adequate protection from the police and judiciary, and their complaints are rarely taken seriously. This can happen even in countries where sex work is legal, because of the way sex work is viewed by society, or because related activities (such as soliciting for clients or buying sex) are illegal. In many countries, sex workers are seen as being to blame if they have experienced violence, and this makes it even less likely that they will make a complaint to the authorities.

- In countries where there is a general lack of human rights protection, sex workers often seek protection from non-state actors such as local gangs or even police officers working in an unofficial capacity. This puts sex workers at risk of extortion, and they may still be vulnerable to violence from their protectors.
- A more hidden sex work environment can also limit the ability of sex workers to develop solidarity within their own community, thereby increasing the risk of violence and decreasing the amount of support available when violence occurs. It also makes it harder for them to share information and ideas about how to avoid violence.
- Sex workers in these situations often have less power to represent themselves when negotiating with healthcare providers and researchers. This can make them vulnerable to unethical practices, leading to further violations of their rights.

These examples demonstrate how even the threat of violence can have an impact on the security of sex workers.

Although these situations are common in sex work settings, there are many situations where sex workers do not face violence, or have successfully fought stigma and discrimination and have defended their rights. In Part 2, examples are given of where and how this has happened. These examples contradict three commonly held views about sex work and violence: firstly, the idea that sex work is itself a form of violence; secondly, the idea that violence is inevitable in sex work; and thirdly, the idea that sex workers bring violence upon themselves. The examples show that violence is related to the circumstances under which sex work takes place, rather than being inherently linked to sex work. Understanding this point is an essential part of tackling human rights violations against sex workers.

"The threat of violence from a client or manager/pimp if a sex worker refuses to have sex with a client without a condom also affects her ability to practise safe sex. The threat of physical or sexual assault will often result in a sex worker 'agreeing' to have sex with a client without a condom, thus potentially exposing her to HIV. This is exacerbated by the fact that clients have economic power over sex workers and will often offer more money for unprotected sex."

Alexander, H. (2001), "The impact of violence on HIV prevention and health promotion – The case of South Africa", Research for Sex Work, 4.

There are many situations where sex workers do not face violence, or have successfully fought stigma and discrimination and have defended their rights.

“Although not all policemen, pimps, clients, partners and community members are violent, sex workers regularly find themselves in violent situations. The criminalisation of the industry and the stigmatisation of sex workers means that few sex workers are able or willing to report incidents of violence to the police or to access health and support services.”

Alexander, H. (2001), “The impact of violence on HIV prevention and health promotion – The case of South Africa”, Research for Sex Work, 4.

“Clients who come make trouble. They hit us, they insult us. Some men tear the end of the condom and put Chinese balm so that it burns. Even if we’re tired, they don’t stop – it’s like rape. With all this, they ask for their money back. If you don’t give it back, there’s a fight.”

Quoted in: Sangaré Mollet, B. and S. (2005), Tainted Hope.

Avoid making assumptions about the sources of violence against sex workers – for instance, that violence always comes from clients or managers of sex workers.

Ways in which sex workers face violence

If programmes are to make a contribution to reducing violence against sex workers, it is important that programme managers understand what is happening in their particular context. The examples provided here illustrate many different ways in which violence can be perpetrated. The exact situation differs in every setting.

Sources of violence against sex workers

Programmes should avoid making assumptions about the sources of violence against sex workers – for instance, that violence always comes from clients or managers of sex workers. Violence from clients may be common in some places, especially when sex workers are not able to properly assess a client’s likely behaviour in advance. However it is a rare occurrence in many places. Violence perpetrated by a client generally occurs once a sex worker has accepted the client and they have found a private place; this shows how important it is for a sex worker to be able to assess the client in advance. It is also true that violence is sometimes perpetrated by brothel owners, managers or associates. This is especially so if the relationship is coercive – for instance, if working conditions make it necessary for sex workers to obtain protection, thereby placing themselves under the control of another person.

Violence against sex workers also comes from many other sources. Sex workers are often subjected to verbal and physical abuse by members of the local community. This can be an ongoing problem, or it can be sparked off when local leaders or prominent figures make sensationalist or stigmatising comments in the media. Conversely, the media tends to be far less concerned about reporting violence or murder when sex workers are the ones affected.

In nearly every country sex workers report that they are subjected to police violence in the form of beatings, rape, extortion, or during street clean-up operations, police-led brothel closures or so-called rescue operations.

This happens whether sex work is illegal or not, because even where it is not illegal some related activities are criminalised. Also, the police can exercise power in illegitimate ways when dealing with sex workers, for example by threatening violence if sex workers do not comply with their demands.

It is important to bear in mind that police violence cannot be justified on the grounds that a person is engaged in an illegal activity: the role of police officers is to prevent crime and protect citizens, not to judge or punish. Forms of police coercion reported by sex workers, such as extortion and rape, are illegal and have nothing to do with legitimate law enforcement. The legal status of sex work in any one setting is more relevant in terms of the likelihood of sex workers registering complaints against police violence and having those complaints taken seriously.

As is the case with community-based violence, the extent of police violence can vary widely over time. Clean-up operations, where sex workers are forcibly removed from the streets, tend to come in waves, sparked off by negative media coverage, statements from local politicians, or in preparation for public events or visits from dignitaries. Also, not all police officers behave in the same way. Some individuals abuse their position more than others, and therefore the situation can vary depending on how work shifts are organised.

Police actions can also make sex workers more vulnerable to violence from other sources. When sex workers are arrested, beatings and/or rape by other prisoners or prison guards are common, particularly for male or transgender sex workers who are locked up with men. Quite apart from the violence that occurs during brothel closures, there are also longer-term consequences of such crackdowns. Evicted sex workers lose their possessions and are forced to work in areas they are unfamiliar with, and with clients they do not know. Brothel closures are often presented as operations that aim to rescue sex workers from coercion, but the rescuers themselves are often responsible for coercion and violence.

Research carried out in Madagascar revealed that the vast majority of interactions between police and sex workers had no legal basis. They were more to do with police officers attempting to gain money or sex by virtue of their uniform and weapons or by threatening to use force. For many sex workers, police officers represented an authority to be obeyed rather than one that has defined legal roles and responsibilities to protect them.

International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2005).

Forms of police coercion reported by sex workers, such as extortion and rape, are illegal and have nothing to do with legitimate law enforcement.

In 1999 there was a series of forced brothel closures in Bangladesh, even though prostitution was not illegal. The brothel system had provided a form of security from violence, and the negative impact of removing the system was immediate. Subsequent research with sex workers showed that after this, average numbers of clients increased, as did rates of risky sex and incidence of violence against sex workers.

Jenkins, C. and Rahman, H. (2002), "Rapidly Changing Conditions in the Brothels of Bangladesh: Impact on HIV/STD", AIDS Education and Prevention, 14.

Research protocols require ethical approval, and they therefore usually incorporate strict standards including the principles of voluntary participation and informed consent. However, these principles are not always upheld in the conduct of the research as project workers at Danaya So, a sex worker organisation in Mali, discovered. Researchers from a well-respected national institute, conducting a programme enlisted police officers to help them recruit participants in a brothel. The Danaya So project workers witnessed intimidation and the use of threats of arrest and violence to force sex workers to participate. When the Danaya So co-ordinator made a complaint, the police also threatened her with arrest for disrupting the research programme. Danaya So also informed WHO of the problems. More recently there have been fewer problems in terms of how researchers conduct themselves with sex workers, although other problems persist – for instance, long delays in providing the test results and medications to which participants are entitled.

Other potential sources of violence against sex workers include family members, partners and other sex workers, especially when circumstances make it hard for sex workers to develop solidarity as a group. When violence in sex work communities is common or normalised, it can be the case that there is more violence between sex workers and by sex workers against their children. Health professionals can also be a source of violence: doctors can be verbally abusive and can take advantage of sex workers; and there are many documented examples of researchers allowing force and coercion to be used to get sex workers to participate in their studies.

In some countries, criminals and gangs are also a source of violence. This can be particularly difficult to tackle, especially where gangs are involved in protecting some sex workers and not others, or where the police are unwilling or incapable of tackling the gangs.

These examples show that violence can come from many sources. But in many places, some or all of them may actually provide a source of support or protection from violence. It is crucial for programme managers to begin with an open mind and to expect the unexpected, while not making any assumptions about how violence affects sex workers in a given setting.

Places and situations where sex workers face violence

Another common assumption is that violence against sex workers always occurs in their place of work. Where sex workers are highly stigmatised or controlled by other people, violence in the workplace is a major problem, and brothel-based sex workers are not necessarily less at risk than those who work on the streets.

Once again, in thinking about where violence occurs it is important to avoid equating sex work with violence; rather, it is important to understand violence as one of the consequences of stigma against sex workers. So, sex workers also face violence when they are not working, either because they sell sex, or because they have few sources of support. Generally speaking, women, transgender people, men who have sex with men and migrants are more likely to face violence, irrespective of whether they are involved in sex work or not. Particular problems for migrant sex workers include: irregular residency status; being indebted to those facilitating their migration; racism; not being able to speak the language of their new place of residence; and being poorly informed of the existence of services and support. It has already been shown that these problems increase their risk of experiencing violence.

Violence also occurs in many other settings: at home, in hospitals, in police stations and prisons. Other situations where there is a higher risk of violence include: national borders (where migrants are often the victims of extortion), shelters for vagrants or homeless people, and sex worker rehabilitation centres, where it is common for sex workers to be detained against their will.

There are many examples of violence from gangs and militias. In one study in Cambodia, a third of surveyed sex workers said they had been gang-raped by gangsters. In Peru, some local governments have financed militias to clamp down on prostitution, resulting in intimidation, violent attacks, and restriction of liberties of sex workers. In Pakistan, militias have been implicated in the murder of sex workers.

Jenkins, C. (2006), Violence and exposure to HIV among sex workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Policy Project, Washington DC.

Miluska Vida y Dignidad (Peruvian sex worker association), Press release issued in Lima, Peru, 5 July 2007. BBC News: "Pakistan 'prostitutes' beheaded", 7 September 2007 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6983692.stm).

Transsexual sex workers in Montréal, Canada, said that being put in police or prison cells with men was the situation where they were most likely to face violence. In their view, dealing with this situation was a bigger priority than tackling the risk of street-based violence. Male sex workers also report high levels of rape in prisons.

Stella, Montréal: Bulletin Stéllaire and Revue Constellation.

“The entire community was terrorized,” said Meena Seshu when asked about the impact of 200 police descending on the brothels of Sangli, India, on May 20, 2005. According to Seshu, the point of the raid was not to provide help and safety to those inside. If it had been, sex workers would not have been abused with harsh language, their calves would not have been struck with lathes (clubs) as they tried to run, and outreach workers from her organization, SANGRAM, would not have been beaten as accessories.”

Thomas, R. (2006), “Spotlight on Meena Seshu, SANGRAM: Sex Worker Rights in Rural India”, Spring 2006 Sexual Health and Rights Program (SHARP) Newsletter, Open Society Institute.

An interview with a project worker in Nigeria illustrates some of the problems with sex worker rehabilitation efforts:

“Who runs the rehabilitation homes? There are rehabilitation homes run by an NGO that belongs to The Vice President’s wife while some are run by Government. Do they do anything unethical? Some of them are forced to have sex with the policemen; if they refuse they are raped violently. They are made to stay undressed and mocked.”

Crago, A., Interview with Irene Patrick-Ogbogu, Women Health Education and Development, Nigeria, March 2006.

The more integrated sex workers are in society, the less vulnerable they are.

Situations where there are high levels of consumption of drugs or alcohol are often associated with violence. Alcohol in particular can make people more likely to behave aggressively and violently, and over-consumption of alcohol can inhibit sex workers’ ability to protect themselves. This is a particularly complex issue because alcohol and drugs can in themselves form part of a person’s coping strategies – for instance, consuming alcohol to get over fear.

Finally, there are many accounts of outreach workers and peer educators facing violence in the course of their work, and particular attention is needed to ensure they can carry out their activities safely.

These examples show how varied the sources of violence against sex workers can be, but they do not reflect the reality in every setting. Generally speaking, the more control sex workers have over their lives and working conditions, and the more integrated they are in society, the less vulnerable they are. This is the main starting point for many of the strategies outlined in Part 2.

Part 2: Tackling violence against sex workers

Part 2 provides examples of ways in which HIV/AIDS projects can help reduce the incidence of violence against sex workers and provide support to those who experience violence. The first section describes basic principles, which should be applied in any context. The second and third sections describe examples of activities (or “strategies”) carried out directly with sex workers, and in the broader environment that affects them. These examples are not intended as a checklist of activities to carry out; rather, they represent a range of ideas that should be considered and that may be combined, depending on each context.

A study in Brazil concluded that one of the main reasons for sex workers not seeking help after experiencing violence was that they did not know where help was available – whether it be medical support, legal support, or redress for human rights violations.

Longo, P., Telles, P. (2001) "Violence against female sex workers in Brazil – preliminary findings from a Horizons study", Research for Sex Work, 4.

Projects should avoid making assumptions about whether the sex workers they work with are facing violence, or about where and how violence takes place.

This section outlines some of the basic principles and approaches that sex work projects should adopt in order to identify whether violence is a problem and how to begin addressing it.

Ask sex workers to identify the problem

As the first part of this guide shows, sex workers experience violence in many different ways. Project managers should avoid making assumptions about whether the sex workers they work with are facing violence, or about where and how violence takes place. They should also avoid equating sex work with violence or simply seeing violence as an inevitable part of sex work. The first basic principle in addressing violence against sex workers is to ensure that sex workers themselves identify and analyse their situation to establish what problems and issues need to be addressed.

Barriers to sex workers discussing violence

There are many potential barriers to sex workers identifying violence as a problem and to discussing it openly. Because of the relationship between violence and fear, and because sex workers themselves are often blamed for the violence they experience, they may be reluctant to talk about it, even where it is a major problem. Some may feel ashamed of having been a victim of violence, or they may fear that openly discussing violence will put them in greater danger. Indeed, in some situations, sex workers face violence so regularly that they come to view it as something that is inevitable. If they feel that there is nothing that can be done about violence, they may be unlikely to raise it as a problem when talking to project workers.

For this reason, projects need to build relationships of trust with sex workers before they can begin to discuss violence, as is the case with any sensitive issue. They should not pressure sex workers into discussing these issues, but rather should try to provide safe environments where sex workers feel able to discuss them.

Within a specific location or within a given group of sex workers, individuals will have different experiences of violence. For instance, migrants, transgenders or young sex workers may face violence more often as they have fewer sources of support and fewer strategies to avoid or deal with violence. Many projects only work with the most visible sex workers; those they fail to reach are often the most marginalised and the most at risk. Projects must therefore ensure that the experiences of the majority or of those who are the most confident do not hide differences or specific issues within a group.

The issues surrounding violence tend to be more complex than they seem and projects must not force sex workers into doing or saying anything that might put themselves in danger.

There are a range of techniques that can be used by projects to ensure that they gain a proper understanding of how violence affects sex workers in a given location, and what can be done to change this.

Many projects only work with the most visible sex workers; those they fail to reach are often the most marginalised and the most at risk. Projects must ensure that the experiences of the majority do not hide differences within a group.

Tools Together Now, a toolkit developed by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, describes a number of types of tools that can be used to stimulate participatory discussions:

- Mapping tools, which can be used to help provide an overview of dangerous places or of support services.
- Time analysis tools, which can help show how danger or risk changes at different times during the day or even over a year or more.
- Linkages and relationship tools. These can be used to better understand how different individuals, groups, organisations, or services link together; or to analyse the consequences of different events or actions and how they affect the risk of violence.
- Measuring and prioritising tools, which can be used to assess how big a problem is, or the relative effectiveness of different strategies to tackle it.

Adapted from: Tools Together Now, International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2006).

Participatory assessment and learning techniques

A relatively formal approach would involve using participatory assessment and learning techniques. These are useful in situations where it is possible for a project to organise group sessions with sex workers. If used correctly, these techniques have a number of advantages:

- They make it easier to collect a range of views and experiences, so that it is not just the views of dominant or confident people that are discussed. This is because they allow people to express their ideas in different ways according to what makes them feel most at ease.
- Unlike classical research methods which require individual respondents to talk about themselves, participatory approaches give participants the option of talking about “the community” or “people like us”. In this way they can enable people to discuss issues without necessarily having to directly relate their own experiences, which can be very traumatising.
- They allow people to think about issues such as violence from different perspectives – for instance, the perspectives of individuals who are victims or perpetrators; of specific groups of people; and of the overall community. This makes it easier to understand overall patterns of violence and the different levels at which it might be tackled.
- They allow people to think about how violence – or any other problem – affects their lives and security in general. This means that even in places where sex workers are resigned to violence, they can begin to understand how much impact it has on other parts of their lives, such as their level of poverty or the security of their children.
- They make it possible to formalise the participation of sex workers, ensuring that they themselves rather than project workers identify problems and solutions. They help to build leadership and motivation to do something about the issues being discussed.

Participatory techniques are often presented in a package, as part of a process called a “participatory rural appraisal” or “participatory community assessment”. These processes can be a very good starting point to get baseline information for a project as they help identify the problems to be addressed. But the techniques can and should be used throughout the lifecycle of a project, to encourage those they work with to constantly analyse and review what is happening. This is especially true when trying to address issues such as violence, which may be complex and not easily identifiable at the outset. The way violence occurs may also change over time, and this is another reason why projects should keep up to date with the problems sex workers are facing.

The bibliography at the end of this guide contains references to a number of documents that explain how to use participatory techniques. These include a range of tools that can be used to stimulate discussions on different types of questions. Most of these tools need to be adapted if they are to be used to discuss violence with sex workers. The best way to adapt them is to try them out and observe the positive and negative aspects of each. Tools should be avoided or adapted if the discussions they lead to include any of the following happening:

- Not everyone present participates fully – some people are marginalised from the discussion.
- People are upset or traumatised by the discussion.
- The discussion leads to some participants being blamed or shamed.
- The tool or technique fails to stimulate a useful discussion.

In some cases these problems may occur because of the way the facilitator is using the techniques, or because the facilitator is not comfortable with the issues being discussed. The manuals referred to provide guidance on how facilitators should approach their work.

The way violence occurs may also change over time, and this is another reason why projects should keep up-to-date with the problems sex workers are facing.

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) faced a particular challenge in its work with migrant sex workers in Svay Pak, Cambodia.

From MSF's perspective, providing only clinical services was not enough to ensure the effectiveness of their efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. It was important to find ways of addressing some of the broader issues affecting sex workers' vulnerability and risk, in a way that did not threaten the brothel owners or other powerful groups such as the police. However, they were working in an area where sex workers faced serious restrictions, with their movements being controlled by brothel owners and the police. The owners of the brothels were generally suspicious of the activities of any organisations that tried to work with the sex workers, although they were keen to allow sex workers to attend clinical services.

MSF therefore worked with sex workers to set up a drop-in centre just above the clinic. The centre provided an informal safe space which sex workers could attend at the same time as they made visits to the clinic. In time, the centre began to organise regular group activities including structured discussions about well-being, about common needs of the community and ways of acting upon them. Gradually, it became possible to organize discussions on sensitive issues such as violence and how to avoid it, although facilitators were very careful to allow these discussions to emerge in their own time, rather than forcing the issue.

Busza, J., Hom-Em, X., Ly, S., Un, S. (2001), "Petals and thorns: the dilemmas of PLA and debt bondage", PLA Notes, 40.

It is important to keep in mind that participatory tools are often designed with a view to analysing a specific issue. For instance, specific manuals exist for conducting participatory assessments on HIV or health. Moreover, they often use problems as a starting point: for example, a manual would be designed to examine reasons for risky sexual behaviour or poor health. When it comes to analysing violence, however, it is not advisable to have violence as the starting point of the discussion. Instead, facilitators should use participatory discussions in such a way that participants can raise the issue if they wish, but without being asked or forced to do so.

One way of doing this is to ask participants to talk on a much broader level about the things that affect their well-being or happiness. Taking this more positive approach can be more empowering for participants. It also situates the discussion in terms of their whole lives rather than one specific aspect of their lives. A discussion about what helps or hinders well-being can then lead to more specific questions, for instance, about how poor health or fear of violence help or hinder well-being. Another good reason to adopt this positive approach is that the things that contribute to a person's overall well-being are often good starting points for discussing ways of dealing with violence.

Other ways to build awareness of the impact of violence

Many projects – perhaps most – will not be able to organise formal discussions along the lines described above. In some cases it will not be possible to get a representative group of sex workers together; in others, it may be too time-consuming or even too dangerous to organise such an activity. Some sex workers may be suspicious of such activities or may find it difficult to attend sessions if their partners or associates are suspicious. In other cases, as discussed above, violence simply may not come up as an issue, especially if sex workers consider it to be a fact of life.

In these situations HIV/AIDS projects need to find alternative ways to open up the discussion on how violence occurs. They should also make efforts to build awareness that violence is unacceptable.

One way this can be achieved is through the creation of safe spaces where sex workers can meet outside of work. These spaces do not need to conform to any particular design, and they may or may not involve structured activities, such as health or literacy education; the most important thing is that they do whatever sex workers say they would find useful. As well as being worthwhile in their own right, such activities can help to build solidarity between sex workers, and individual self-esteem. This should make it easier for sex workers to start discussing the problems they face as a group and to start thinking about how to address them. Like any effective HIV/AIDS intervention, it takes time for these activities to develop and to have an impact, and projects should be planned with this in mind.

In some situations it may be appropriate for projects to be proactive in putting violence on the agenda for sex workers, especially when violence is clearly very prevalent but not acknowledged as such. In these cases, it is likely that the project will already have some knowledge of what is happening and how, so there is less risk of making incorrect assumptions. Moreover, projects can raise the issue of violence in a relatively abstract way, without making explicit or direct references to how the situation relates to sex workers. This could be done by producing leaflets or setting up radio discussions on violence as a general issue, referring to any research published on the prevalence of violence in the population as a whole. It is also useful to make references to national and international laws and human rights agreements that deal with violence and personal security, in order to back up condemnations of violence. Any materials produced should also include information on sources of support for those who are victims of violence, where such services exist.

In Brazil, a sex work group, Fio de Alma, was concerned about the level of violence that sex workers in Rio de Janeiro lived with, and even accepted to some degree. With government support, the group conducted a campaign that began with encouraging sex workers to regard violence as a violation of their rights and advocating for improved responses by police. Another important activity was to disseminate tips for avoiding violence and direct support to sex workers who experienced violence.

In some situations it may be appropriate for projects to be proactive in putting violence on the agenda for sex workers, especially when violence is clearly very prevalent but not acknowledged as such.

Experience shows that in nearly every situation where sex workers face violence, they already have some strategies to protect their safety and health.

Start with what sex workers are already doing to deal with violence

Below we give some examples of different strategies that have been used to successfully deal with violence against sex workers. In every case, sex workers themselves came up with these strategies. Experience shows that in nearly every situation where sex workers face violence, they already have some strategies to protect their safety and health. Sometimes these strategies are effective, but sometimes they can create other dangers. Projects should encourage sex workers to talk about how they deal with violence and the advantages and disadvantages of certain actions. Rather than introducing new ideas, projects should begin by sharing and building on the positive things that already exist, and by reducing the negative aspects.

In order to help sex workers build on what they are already doing, HIV/AIDS projects can encourage them to discuss how each strategy works. The following questions may be useful in doing this:

- Is it a strategy used by sex workers themselves? In other words, is it a skill or a piece of information that can help an individual to reduce his or her risk of violence? Or is it something that sex workers can do as a group to reduce the violence they face or to support those affected by violence?
- Is it a strategy aimed at affecting the broader environment? In other words, does it help to change the behaviour of those who perpetrate violence, to improve access to services and information for sex workers and other marginalised groups, or to tackle any of the other broader human rights abuses that put sex workers at greater risk of violence?

After considering strategies in this way, projects can support sex workers to develop ideas about ways to strengthen and extend those strategies to ensure that they help more people. For example, if not all sex workers are aware of the individual strategies that can help them, what would be the best way to inform or train them? If some sex workers are currently excluded from strategies such as group solidarity and support, what is the best way to include them? The aim here is to help ensure that all sex workers – including the most marginalised – receive the right type of support.

Address violence against sex workers as part of HIV/AIDS projects

The examples provided in Part 1 show that, in many situations, sex workers face violence, and that this can make them more vulnerable to HIV. They also show that addressing violence against sex workers should not be a separate project, but rather, it should be an integral component of HIV/AIDS programmes. Another basic principle, then, is that HIV/AIDS projects working with sex workers should begin with the assumption that violence contributes to HIV vulnerability and plan appropriate responses within project activities. This principle is relevant both to project design and the way the project is presented to those responsible for taking funding decisions, as it is important that they also provide support to activities that tackle violence.

Addressing violence within the scope of HIV/AIDS projects does not necessarily mean that the project itself must directly provide all of the relevant services and activities. In many cases these are specialist services, and no single project can provide all of them. In most cases, HIV/AIDS projects will need to link up with other partners, such as local authorities, service providers, human rights organisations and welfare and social support organisations. This may involve planning together with other organisations to help them respond to the needs of sex workers, and letting sex workers know that certain services exist. It may also mean carrying out advocacy activities to ensure that sex workers have full access to these services, as they are often excluded from them.

HIV/AIDS projects working with sex workers should begin with the assumption that violence contributes to HIV vulnerability and plan appropriate responses within project activities.

Projects have transmitted information on violence to sex workers using many different approaches. Pamphlets and leaflets are popular in most places, but sex work projects all over the world have also produced cookbooks, clothing, calendars, films, plays, and songs that discuss human rights and that raise awareness of violence and of how to avoid it.

In situations where there is more solidarity and support between sex workers, it is easier for them to share tips and ideas and to give each other advice.

This section outlines various strategies that sex workers can use to help protect themselves from violence and how to find support if they are affected by violence.

Individual-based strategies

These are strategies that individual sex workers can use to deal with the threat of violence. Most sex workers have ways of putting themselves at less risk, or of getting themselves out of trouble. Although these do not always work, they do provide some degree of protection. For the most part, sex workers learn these strategies for themselves, based on what is most realistic in their situation. Some ideas are fairly simple, such as wearing clothes or shoes that they can easily run away in if needed, or working in places where it is easy to raise the alarm if something happens. Other ideas require more skill or planning, such as carrying alarms, or working out ways of having sex that make it easier to control a client.

Unfortunately, sex workers often learn what works through a difficult process of trial and error. People who are new to sex work can therefore benefit a great deal from getting to know those with more experience. In situations where there is more solidarity and support between sex workers, it is easier for them to share tips and ideas and to give each other advice. HIV/AIDS projects can help this process by bringing sex workers together in the ways described earlier.

There are also more formal approaches to supporting individual sex workers. Most HIV/AIDS projects have experience in disseminating information on HIV/AIDS – for instance, using pamphlets or other approaches. These approaches can also be used to transmit advice on rights, on how to avoid violence and on where to get support.

Many projects provide training in areas such as the law and human rights, first aid provision and self-defence techniques. But again, these approaches should not be uncritically adopted in HIV/AIDS projects. Encouraging sex workers to physically defend themselves can put them at even greater risk of harm, for instance if perpetrators subsequently enlist help to get their revenge. It may also encourage a greater culture of violence in sex work settings. Although self-defence has been an important individual strategy for some sex workers in some settings, it should only be promoted with extreme caution. Sex workers themselves should help to design training courses, in order to ensure that the content is relevant, feasible and appropriate.

Outreach workers (including peer educators) should also have strategies for ensuring that they do not get into violent situations. Indeed, HIV/AIDS projects should have health and safety policies to ensure the security of their outreach workers or peer educators. Once again, policies should be appropriate to the setting. In many places, outreach workers are provided with alarms, torches and mobile phones, and they are given additional security by the presence of a support vehicle nearby. Where good, supportive relationships exist with police officers, it is also useful to inform them of the schedules of outreach workers.

Group-based strategies

There are a number of ways that groups of sex workers can tackle violence. It has already been shown that solidarity and group cohesion can help reduce levels of violence. They can also help to ensure that victims of violence get immediate support. HIV/AIDS projects can start to have an impact on violence by helping build solidarity among sex workers and by providing opportunities for them to meet and share experiences.

One anecdote described a self-defence training workshop for sex workers that included advising them not to be outside at night in places like the red light area. This was an absurd piece of advice for street-based sex workers because it completely failed to understand the context of their lives. It is a good example of how important it is for sex workers themselves to decide on the most appropriate ways of dealing with violence.

Ezaka, a group of transsexual sex workers in Madagascar, established itself with the primary aim of reducing the incidence of violence. The group worked together to set up ground rules for how to stay safe. Over time the group began to work with other sex worker associations in order to help tackle violence against sex workers on a much bigger scale.

Ezaka, Madagascar.

Sex workers themselves should help to design training courses, in order to ensure that the content is relevant, feasible and appropriate.

Although the positive effect of community cohesion is very difficult to measure, a project in Brazil demonstrated how community development initiatives can help reduce both violence and risk of HIV infection. Although effective, many of the community development activities did not resemble classical HIV/AIDS or anti-violence activities. They included creation of safe spaces, forming a choir, literacy classes, workshops on a range of questions such as the history of sex work, money management, opening bank accounts, handicraft training, and legal aid. Participants were better able to manage violent situations, and were less likely to be at risk of HIV when selling sex.

Kerrigan, D., Telles, P., Torres, H., Overs, C., Castle, C. (2008), "Community development and HIV/STI-related vulnerability among female sex workers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil", Health Education Research, 23(1).

The Canadian sex worker organisation, Stella, has the following description of its *Bad Tricks and Assaulters List* on its website: www.cheststella.org/

"The *Bad Tricks and Assaulters List* is a description of the various incidents that are reported to us anonymously every month, in order to make it easier for sex-workers to help each other avoid dangerous situations. If you've had a bad date, let us know. You can always find someone to talk to at Stella, and we can help if you want to file a complaint, or if you need health services or psychological support. You can give us your description of a bad date, and also a bad cop, by fax, e-mail or telephone, or you can come to Stella to fill out a description sheet, or you can print it and send it to us."

Stella, Canada.

Although community cohesion can have a positive impact in and of itself, sex worker groups can also organise specific initiatives to help reduce violence and support those affected. There are many examples of such strategies:

- Keeping pictures of violent clients and violent police officers, that can be used to warn other sex workers – especially those new to the area. This has been done in many parts of the world, and has been nicknamed a "bad trick" (bad client) or "ugly mug" (ugly face) list.
- Creating collective awareness of the laws that relate to sex work and of human rights guaranteed to all citizens. In many countries, there is an assumption that sex work is illegal, even when it is not. This is because activities related to sex work – such as soliciting – can be illegal, or because sex workers are accused of other offences such as vagrancy. Often, sex workers themselves are not aware of the law and how it relates to them, and law enforcement officers exploit this insecurity. Explaining the law and law enforcement is therefore an important part of helping sex workers to protect themselves from violence.
- Creating group guidelines on how to stay safe and what to do to support others when violence occurs.
- Operating an informal safe house system that victims of violence can use. This is especially useful if sex workers are excluded from existing support services.
- Closely monitoring the situation in a given location in order to identify cases of exploitation or violence, and providing support to those who need it.
- Accompanying colleagues to go to the police to make formal complaints against those who perpetrate violence.
- Going on strike in order to demonstrate to clients that violence is unacceptable.

Providing violence-related services to sex workers

There are also a number of services that should be provided to those affected by violence, including medical treatment, post-trauma rehabilitation and counselling, safe housing and legal support. For the most part, these services should be provided by qualified professionals. Some sex worker organisations or other organisations delivering HIV/AIDS projects may have the skills to provide these services – as with the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) in India (see example in box right). But in many cases, the skills required to deliver these services will only be found in specialist organisations. Projects working with sex workers should develop partnerships with these specialist organisations to ensure that services are accessible to sex workers.

When deciding whether to deliver such services (either directly or through partnerships), projects must ensure that sufficient resources are available to provide complete, continuous access for sex workers. It can be dangerous, for instance, to begin providing support to a sex worker wishing to press legal charges against an aggressor but to subsequently withdraw the support, as there may be a backlash against the person making the complaint. Similarly, cutting short the provision of post-trauma support can be very damaging to the person receiving the support.

As with all of the examples given in this guide, these strategies will not work in all settings. Each project needs to work with sex workers to decide which is the most appropriate combination of strategies for their situation.

Sex workers in the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee in Kolkata, India, have created a system of self-regulatory boards (SRBs). The primary goal of the SRBs is to combat exploitation and coercion in the sex trade. Because the SRB members are sex workers, they are well placed to identify which sex workers in the community are being exploited or are facing violence. They have developed systems that enable them to safely get people out of exploitative situations where they exist, and provide follow-up support in the form of housing, training and other social welfare programmes. Thanks to the effectiveness of the SRB system, violence is less likely to occur in the first place because exploitative practices have become less viable for the perpetrators.

Gayen, S. (2006) Innovative approaches to combat trafficking of women in the sex trade, /Inter-Asia Cultural Studies/, 7(2)/.

Part 1 outlined how environmental factors influence the extent to which sex workers face violence. This section or Part 2 expands on the importance of working on these factors, such as culture, society's attitudes, politics and laws, marginalisation, stigma and discrimination, and human rights protection.

Working with sex trade associates

In many settings there are people other than sex workers involved in the sex trade: for instance, brothel owners, pimps or brokers. These associates play different roles: sometimes they can help to protect sex workers from violence and ensure they have safe working conditions; sometimes the relationship is purely financial, with sex workers "employed" by the associate; and in other cases the relationship can be exploitative and even violent. The relationship is not always negative as far as sex workers are concerned.

Whatever the exact nature of the relationship, these associates can clearly have a big influence on how sex workers experience violence. Clearly, in more supportive environments, it is possible for sex workers and HIV/AIDS projects to work with associates to develop norms that ensure a safer working environment for sex workers. In places where the associates are themselves the source of exploitation or violence, it is obviously much more complicated. The example on page 27 from Kolkata shows how sex worker groups can successfully take direct action against people or organisations that are coercing sex workers. The example from Cambodia provided in the box on page 20 shows how it is possible to get around the problem by providing confidential, safe spaces that get sex workers away from their controlling environments. Projects need to be extremely careful when working in these situations however, as there is a danger of creating a backlash against sex workers.

Working with service providers and the authorities

Sex workers often face obstacles to accessing services that are available to the general population – for instance, health, education, welfare, legal and security services. Sometimes these barriers are related to stigma and discrimination against sex workers as a group. But they can also be related to the fact that service providers do not have the skills required to support sex workers in an appropriate way. Given that most HIV/AIDS projects cannot provide all the services that sex workers require, it is important that they work to improve the attitudes and skills of other service providers.

Collaboration with these different services will not always be straightforward. In many cases it will be necessary for sex workers and HIV/AIDS projects to assess how different services behave towards sex workers. In some cases, it might be a matter of identifying and only working with those services or providers that have the positive attitudes towards sex workers; as always, sex workers themselves are best placed to assess this. However, in other situations HIV/AIDS projects have a great deal of work to do in order to change the basic attitudes of these services.

HIV/AIDS projects that take a narrowly focussed approach to working with sex workers can put sex workers at greater risk of HIV/AIDS and of violence. The “100% Condom Use Programme”, which was developed in Thailand and promoted as an example of international best practice, has been shown to be associated with greater violence against sex workers and greater vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. This is because the approach tends to empower managers of sex workers as well as medical authorities and the police, all of whom give sex workers less control over the circumstances in which they work. It is essential that HIV/AIDS projects be aware of the broader impact they can have. They should be developed with sex workers in order to minimise risks.

Loff, B., Overs, C., Longo, P. (2003), “Can health programmes lead to mistreatment of sex workers?” The Lancet, 361:9373.

The following account describes the results of provision of legal support to sex workers wishing to challenge police action in court:

“In two recent court cases, SWEAT supported sex workers in actions against abusive police officers and an abusive brothel owner. In both cases the sex workers were successful in obtaining court orders to prevent the other parties from assaulting, threatening or harassing the sex workers.

These cases mark a small but important development in the protection of sex workers from abuse and the empowerment of sex workers. For the first time sex workers were able and willing to stand up for themselves against the police and brothel management and the positive outcomes of these cases are likely to encourage other sex workers to stand up for themselves in the future.

SWEAT’s efforts to provide safer working environments for sex workers will hopefully ensure that sex workers are somewhat less vulnerable to violence and more capable of insisting on condom use. However, while the sex industry remains illegal, sex workers will continue to be marginalised and will remain unprotected from violence and coercion, and health promotion and HIV prevention programmes will continue to be obstructed. Until sex workers have full and unhindered access to protection, health and legal services, they will not be in a position to insist on safer sex practices and will remain at risk of contracting HIV.”

Alexander, H. (2001), “The impact of violence on HIV prevention and health promotion – The case of South Africa”, Research for Sex Work, 4.

There are many examples of how HIV/AIDS projects have successfully collaborated with other service providers:

- HIV/AIDS projects arranging for sex workers to conduct training for health service providers, in order to show them how they should address and treat sex workers in a non-abusive and non-stigmatising way.
- Sex workers have helped health services develop guidelines for history-taking and medical examination protocols that ensure confidentiality and that ask an appropriate range of questions. When doctors see sex workers they are often only interested in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and they may even ignore physical injuries.
- Sex workers have developed leaflets and posters aimed at police officers, outlining human rights principles and reminding them that the human rights of sex workers should also be protected.
- Sex worker groups can liaise with the police to warn them of violent behaviour from police officers, clients or criminals or of situations where sex workers are being coerced or exploited. They can also encourage the authorities to take complaints from sex workers seriously.
- Sex worker groups can negotiate with researchers to ensure that ethical principles are adhered to. This is an area where the support of HIV/AIDS projects is particularly important in order to ensure that sex worker groups understand the implications of any proposed research.
- Sex worker groups can document cases where HIV/AIDS projects or other initiatives cause or aggravate violence against them – for instance, attempts to rescue sex workers or to punish sex workers for not using condoms or attending health services.
- Sex worker groups, again with support from HIV/AIDS projects, can build relationships with a range of specialist services such as human rights organisations and welfare support groups.

Targeting general attitudes towards sex workers and violence

Given that violence against sex workers often has its roots in broad-based stigma and discrimination against them, another strategy that sex workers and HIV/AIDS projects can adopt is to raise awareness at a more general level. In many countries, there have been campaigns targeting the community at large, sex work clients, or influential opinion leaders. For example:

- Public campaigns have raised awareness of violence against sex workers and challenged the blame directed towards them as a group. Campaigns can be carried out locally (for instance, by providing information or arranging discussions with clients and community leaders), nationally, or even at international level, as with the International Day of No Violence against Sex Workers.
- Religious leaders often play an important role in shaping perceptions among the wider community. Sex workers in Mali worked with Imams (Muslim religious leaders) to reduce prejudice and hostility towards sex workers.
- Sex workers in Kyrgyzstan have arranged training for journalists in order to eradicate negative press descriptions of sex work. Sex workers in Madagascar have also developed close relationships with certain journalists in order to ensure more positive coverage, in particular because increasing HIV prevalence had led to accusatory stories about sex workers.
- Sex worker organisations have used leaflets, newspapers and films to challenge perceptions that they should put up with violence because of what they do.

Women's rights organisations are a potential partner for HIV/AIDS projects supporting the rights of female sex workers. The experience of Danaya So, a sex worker association in Mali, was that the women's rights movement was initially hostile. However, over time Danaya So showed the movement that campaigning for the rights of female sex workers is also a women's rights issue, and Danaya So are now regularly invited to participate in women's rights activities.

DANAYA SO, Mali.

Given that violence against sex workers often has its roots in broad-based stigma and discrimination against them, another strategy that sex workers and HIV/AIDS projects can adopt is to raise awareness at a more general level.

Sex worker groups from around Madagascar carried out research which showed that police interactions with sex workers rarely had a legal basis. It also showed that public health legislation giving the police the authority to monitor the sexual health of sex workers was counterproductive and damaging.

The groups went on to work with authorities at national and local levels to ensure police action was appropriate and that sex workers were not taken advantage of. They did this in a number of ways: by documenting examples of abusive police behaviour; by informing sex workers of the law and of their rights; by conducting information and training sessions for police officers; and by working to influence policy at national level. One result is that the national plan for HIV/AIDS programming with highly vulnerable groups developed in 2007 includes a commitment to reform legislation which discriminates against sex workers.

FIMIZORE Madagascar.

Very often, the law is misinterpreted to the detriment of sex workers, even though sex work is illegal in only a few countries.

The law and sex work

The relationship between sex work and the law has been touched upon a number of times in this guide. Very often, the law is misinterpreted to the detriment of sex workers, even though sex work is illegal in only a few countries. In countries where activities related to sex work are criminalised or where sex work is actually illegal, sex worker organisations and human rights campaigners often support the repeal or modification of the laws that make sex workers vulnerable. However, it is important to note that many of the organisations funding HIV/AIDS projects have to comply with restrictions on the funding of political activism or campaigning.

What is often more acceptable is for HIV/AIDS projects and sex worker groups to negotiate with the relevant authorities about how policies and laws should be implemented in a way that makes sex workers less vulnerable to violence and HIV infection. Clearly, for such efforts to be effective there needs to be a good relationship with the authorities in question, and it is a major advantage to have allies within the official structures who might find it easier to convince their colleagues. It also helps if support can be garnered from authorities both at national and local levels.

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Selected websites containing resources on sex work and violence

Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW): www.apnsw.org/apnsw.htm

Empower (Thai sex worker rights organisation): www.empowerfoundation.org/

Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP): www.nswp.org/, including *Research for Sex Work Issue 4: Violence, Repression and Other Health Threats*.

Pivot Legal (Canadian legal association carrying out research on sex work): www.pivotlegal.org/Issues/sextrade.htm

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