



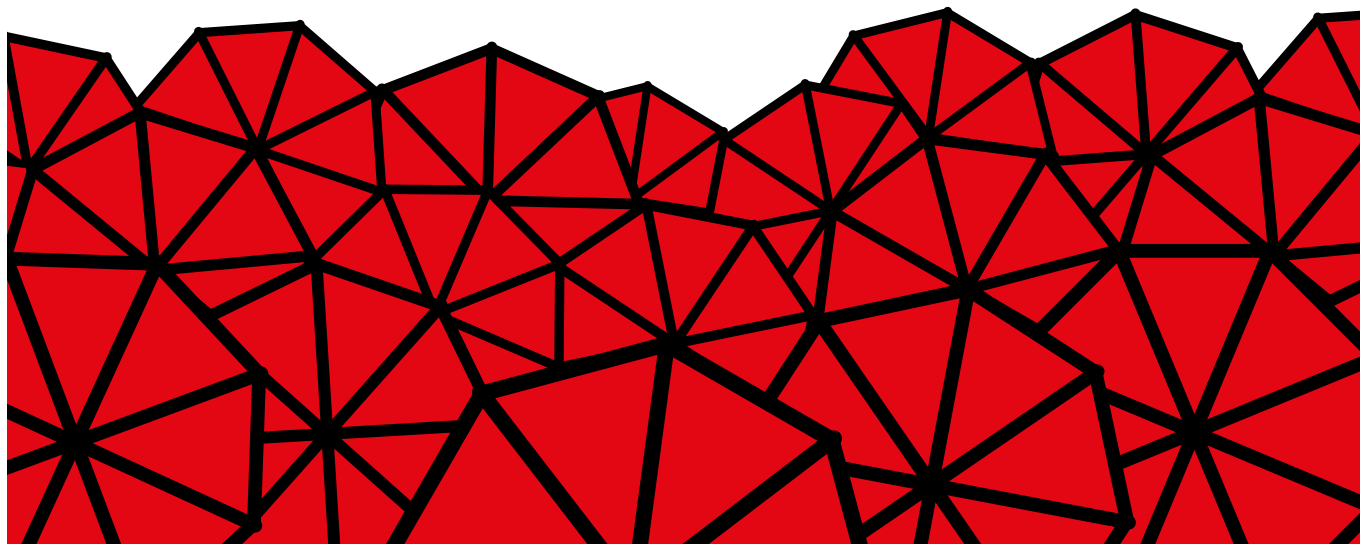
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Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

**BRIEFING
PAPER**

**#08 The Needs and
Rights of Male
Sex Workers**

a summary



The Needs and Rights of Male Sex Workers:

a summary

Introduction

Male sex workers (MSW) constitute a large component of NSWP's membership and this briefing paper aims to go some way in highlighting the needs and rights of this community.

Lack of understanding about the male sex worker community often leads to gaps in service provision and/or inappropriate services being provided.

Lack of understanding about the MSW community often leads to gaps in service provision and/or inappropriate services being provided. This briefing paper explains the unique needs and rights of MSW and is intended for those who make policy, design and implement programmes, and work directly with MSW, in the hope of increasing awareness and understanding of the multiple realities and needs of this community. This paper is also intended as an advocacy tool for NSWP member groups to utilise in their attempts across the world to raise awareness of the needs of MSW and advocate for their rights, from the grassroots community level to global forums for change. Some recommendations are offered to policy makers and programme designers, donors, and those who work directly with MSW, in the hope of joint working and community efforts to promote the rights of MSW globally.

Male Sex Workers – A Diverse Group

A vast number of men are working in the different sectors of sex work globally, and are not a homogenous group. Their differences include sexuality, relationships outside of sex work, targeted clients, work conditions/context and additional factors such as migration status, HIV status, socio-economic background and/or drug use. These differences mean, among other things, that MSW experience differing levels of access to services and differences in opportunities for community mobilisation for successful advocacy. The overwhelming diversity amongst MSW is too often ignored in targeted services and programmes, including HIV prevention, treatment and support programmes, and this must be acknowledged to better enable all MSW to access their full health, human and labour rights.

The Issues and Needs of Male Sex Workers

Invisibility

Male sex workers, for many reasons, are too often rendered invisible in discussions around sex work, in comparison to female and trans sex workers. One explanation for this is that it is thought that globally, male sex workers constitute a smaller percentage of the general sex working communities. More critically, however, it is clear that MSW are often purposefully made invisible in some discussions because they do not fit the 'ideal' narrative of sex work put forward by those with an analysis of sex work as a form of violence and exploitation of women. Radical feminist groups, alongside others involved in portraying sex work through this lens, purposefully exclude MSW from their discussions because they do not fit the stereotypical image of a female victim who needs to be saved and rescued/rehabilitated from a life of 'prostitution'. The invisibility of MSW is also fuelled by the additional stigma faced by men who have sex with men, meaning it is extremely difficult in most contexts for gay or bisexual men

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and/or MSW to come out, to organise, and to advocate for their rights. This process of 'coming out' can in some contexts lead to MSW being stigmatised, discriminated against, attacked or prosecuted by authorities and public officials.

Socio-Legal Contexts Around Sex Work and Homosexuality

Like sex workers everywhere, MSW are often forced to work outside of the law – either because sex work is directly criminalised, or more commonly because many of the associated ways of working are criminalised. For MSW, additional criminalisation can exist in the form of laws that criminalise homosexuality and associated sex – for example, around 70 countries enact anti-sodomy laws and many countries directly criminalise homosexuality. This creates a dual context of criminalisation for many MSW, often forcing them to work in more hidden, discreet ways that can make them particularly vulnerable to violence, and lacking access to health and other important services. Alongside criminalisation, MSW are also the targets of social stigma both due to their sex work and their perceived homosexuality. The degree of acceptance or stigmatisation of homosexuality locally, as well as the legal framework in place that may criminalise or protect men who have sex with men (MSM) and/or sex workers, will impact upon the level of discrimination faced by MSW, often creating obstacles to safe working conditions, access to health and social services, and access to justice in cases of violence. This context can also fuel violence towards MSW, creating a climate of fear of authorities who may also be involved in enacting or condoning violence against MSM and MSW.

Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

Like all sex workers, MSW are viewed as a key population in terms of the global response to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). These responses are often based on epidemiological data that suggest sex workers (SW) and MSM are more likely to be living with HIV. However, too often MSW are categorised amongst general studies of SW and/or general studies of MSM, meaning there is a lack of specific

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epidemiological data on MSW, which can lead to inadequate or inappropriate service provision in terms of health. MSW also report widespread stigma by health professionals at the point of accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Misunderstandings of the realities for MSW, including their sexuality, their family circumstances and their working environments can fuel judgement towards MSW and make them reluctant to seek services. This stigma can also

restrict MSW's access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and some MSW living with HIV complain of being denied appropriate and/or comprehensive treatment, including access to medicines and diagnostics.

Violence, Legal Protection and Access to Justice

MSW report widespread violence being perpetrated against them by various people associated with them, and too often this violence is ignored and/or perpetuated by justice systems that criminalise sex workers rather than protecting them. MSW report being harassed by the police and at times suffer violence at the hands of police and other state authorities who often target them specifically because they are male. Often in an attempt to arrest MSW, laws that are not specific to sex work are used, such as criminal nuisance, loitering, assault, theft and the use and sale of drugs. The use of these laws to arrest and charge MSW is commonplace around the world, meaning that even in contexts where sex work and/or homosexuality are not criminalised, MSW are still targeted for arrest due to stigma around their livelihood.

MSW also report widespread violence at the hands of police. Social stigma and judgement does not end with state authorities, and where this stigma exists around the lifestyle of MSW, police are in a powerful position to condone and sometimes carry out violence. Ingrained notions of femininity and masculinity can fuel violence towards MSW, who are seen as deviating from the norms of masculinity by engaging in sex work – since this is often viewed in the public imagination as a livelihood for women. This idea is also promoted by radical feminist groups that portray sex workers as female victims of male exploitation and violence. MSW are therefore further subject to prejudice and stigma based on their deviance from 'norms' associated with masculinity, which can lead to violence of many kinds, including police violence, gang violence and targeted acts of violence associated with homophobia.

Community Mobilising and Advocacy for the Rights of Male Sex Workers

All over the world MSW have mobilised at grassroots level as a community, and their voices are now heard at international level where they continue to speak out about their needs and rights. Whilst for many MSW criminalisation of sex work and criminalisation and/or stigmatisation of homosexuality remain barriers to speaking publicly, some MSW have been key public figureheads of the sex worker rights movement. MSW communities have also often been at the forefront of bringing the sex worker rights movement together with movements for the rights of other marginalised groups, including the LGBTQ movement. The overlap between MSW with other groups, including LGBTQ, the gay rights movement and the movements of key communities affected by HIV has meant that MSW have made their plight visible in many key forums, debates and discussions, which has further strengthened the visibility of the wider sex worker rights movement. MSW being visible in the sex worker rights movement has helped to challenge the idea that 'prostitution' is inextricably linked to female oppression and exploitation of women and has shifted the debate away from the stereotypes in the public imagination of what and who a sex worker is.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Male sex workers across the world continue to challenge norms, myths and stereotypes through activism and advocacy in the hope of the realisation of sex workers' access to full health, labour and human rights.

Together with all sex workers, MSW across the world continue to challenge norms, myths and stereotypes through activism and advocacy in the hope of the realisation of sex workers' access to full health, labour and human rights. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to this advocacy by highlighting the needs and rights of MSW and act as a valuable resource for NSWP member groups, policy makers, people designing and implementing programmes for MSW and organisations that wish to contribute to the efforts of MSW communities. Below are some recommendations for these groups, people and organisations that wish to contribute to the efforts of MSW:

Recommendations to policy makers and programme designers

- Support sex workers' call to decriminalise sex work and homosexuality
- Acknowledge that sex work is work for people of all genders and move away from any policy design that is influenced by the argument that sex work is violence against women
- Ensure that MSW have full access to protection by the law, and justice in cases where violence is perpetrated against the community
- Engage with MSW on their specific needs to ensure health services meet the needs of the community and are designed and delivered with a rights-based approach, including appropriate HIV prevention, treatment, care and support

Recommendations to donors

- ▶ Ensure that funding is allocated to communities of MSW who are actively engaged in activism and advocacy for the realisation of MSW's rights
- ▶ Ensure that funding for HIV prevention takes into account the specific needs of MSW and does not assume that these needs are fully met in general sex worker programmes or programmes targeting men who have sex with men

Recommendations to those who work directly with MSW

- ▶ Respect the diversity of the MSW community and cater services to the multiple realities and needs of MSW
- ▶ In all services provided ensure that opportunities are created for the self-organisation and mobilisation of MSW



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