

# Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers

## Introduction

**Sex workers** are adults who receive money or goods in exchange for consensual sexual acts. Sex workers are **particularly vulnerable** to sexual violence and face many barriers to reporting.<sup>1</sup> Based on a study through the Sex Workers Outreach Project, sex workers of color and transgender sex workers are thought to be at even greater risk for experiencing violence.<sup>1</sup> Sex workers have limited options to report sexual violence and are reluctant to go to the police because of potential arrest or further assault.<sup>2</sup> According to a report submitted to the United Nations in 2004, police violence against sex workers has a pattern that includes “assault, sexual harassment, public ‘gender searches’ (police strip searches for the purpose of viewing genitalia) and rape.”<sup>2</sup>

Many individuals involved in sex work find the term “prostitute” to be demeaning, stigmatizing, and outdated. In this fact sheet, the word “prostitution” will only be used when quoting from public policy or government documentation. MCASA believes that every sexual assault survivor deserves accessible, compassionate, and respectful care.

## In Maryland

*Maryland defines prostitution as the performance of a sexual act, sexual contact, or vaginal intercourse for hire.*

- In 2018, **761** people were arrested for prostitution or commercialized vice.<sup>3</sup>

## Nationally

- There are an estimated **1-2 million** sex workers in the United States.<sup>4</sup>
- **1 in 5** police reports of sexual assault from emergency rooms in the United States were filed by sex workers.<sup>5</sup>
- Sex workers are often ineligible for rape victims compensation funds or receive reduced amounts.<sup>2</sup>
- A study through CNN Health conducted a systematic review on research articles between 1990 and 2018 on sex work in 33 countries. This study reported that sex workers, on average, are **13 times** more at risk of HIV than the general population.<sup>6</sup>
- Sex workers are more at risk of HIV due to being economically vulnerable, unable to negotiate condom use every time, and experiencing violence and marginalization.<sup>6</sup>
- Native Americans and Indigenous Alaskan women are overrepresented in statistics of those detained for prostitution.<sup>7</sup>

## Globally

- Women, men, and nonbinary people in the sex industry—including those in pornography, stripping, phone sex, camming, escorting, and more—face disproportionate amounts of sexual assault and harassment internationally.<sup>8</sup>
- Worldwide, there are an estimated **40-42 million** prostitutes.<sup>4</sup>
- **80%** of the world’s population of prostitutes are female and range in age between 13-25.<sup>4</sup>
- At some point in their careers, sex workers have a **45-75%** chance of experiencing sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>
- Migrant sex workers, women, especially transgender women of color, individuals who use drugs, and individuals with criminal records are especially vulnerable due to intersecting bias.<sup>5</sup>
- Rates of sexual and physical violence against sex workers are lower in contexts where sex work is not criminalized.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samantha Cooney, 2018. “They Don’t Want to Include Women Like Me.” Sex Workers Say They’re Being Left Out of the #MeToo Movement.” Retrieved from <https://time.com/5104951/sex-workers-me-too-movement/>.

<sup>2</sup> Sex Workers Project, 2020. “Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers,” Retrieved from <https://swp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Fact-Sheet-Sexual-Violence-Against-Sex-Workers-1-1-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Maryland State Police, 2020. “Crime in Maryland- 2018 Uniform Crime Report”, Retrieved from <https://mdsp.maryland.gov/Document%20Downloads/Crime%20in%20Maryland%202018%20Uniform%20Crime%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> ProCon, 2018. “How Many Prostitutes Are in the United States and the Rest of the World?”, Retrieved from <https://prostitution.procon.org/questions/how-many-prostitutes-are-in-the-united-states-and-the-rest-of-the-world/#:~:text=There%20are%20an%20estimated%201,are%20thought%20to%20be%20men%E2%80%A6>.

<sup>5</sup> Katherine Koster, 2017. “17 Facts About Sexual Violence and Sex Work,” HuffPost, HuffPost News. Retrieved from <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/17-facts-about-sexual-ass>

<sup>6</sup> Nina Avramova, 2018. “More violence, sexual infections when sex work is criminalized, study finds.” Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/11/health/criminalizing-sex-work-more-violence-stds-intl/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Fondation Scelles, Charpenel, Y. “4<sup>th</sup> Global Report.”

<sup>8</sup> Kyli Rodriguez-Cayro, 2018. “Sex Workers Can Be Sexually Assaulted Too, And We Need To Talk About It. Retrieved from [Sex Workers Can Be Sexually Assaulted Too, And We Need To Talk About It \(bustle.com\)](http://SexWorkersCanBeSexuallyAssaultedToo.AndWeNeedToTalkAboutIt(bustle.com))