Meaningful Work
TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES IN THE SEX TRADE
DECEMBER 2015

With new analysis from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey

[Image of two individuals holding signs: "JOBS NOT JAILS" and "NYHTIC SEXIS EQUALS" and "#TRANSLIV"]
Meaningful Work
TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES IN THE SEX TRADE

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#BLACKTRANSLIVESMATTER

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Pass nondiscrimination and other trans-positive laws and policies
Improve and monitor policing practices
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Executive Summary

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) examined the experiences of over 6,400 transgender adults across the United States in 2008-2009. To date, it remains the largest reported survey of transgender people in the US. The NTDS found that transgender people overall experience high levels of discrimination in every area of life, as well as high levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, negative interactions with police, incarceration, and violent victimization. As a result, many transgender people participate in the sex trade in order to earn income or as an alternative to relying on homeless shelters and food banks. The criminalizing and stigmatizing of sex work in the United States can worsen the discrimination and marginalization that transgender people already face in society. Trans sex workers experience harassment and violence, often at the hands of police, and these experiences are heightened for transgender people of color, especially women.

KEY FINDINGS

694 NTDS respondents—10.8% of the overall survey—reported having participated in sex work and 135 NTDS respondents (an additional 2.3%) indicated that they had traded sex for rent or a place to stay.

Black and Black Multiracial NTDS respondents had the highest rate of sex trade participation overall (39.9%), followed by those who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (33.2%). Those who identified as “White only” had the lowest rate of participation at 6.3%.

Transfeminine NTDS respondents were twice as likely to participate in the sex trade compared to transmasculine respondents (13.1% vs. 7.1%)

Education

Those who expressed their transgender identity while attending grades K-12 reported substantial negative experiences in educational settings.

83.2% Of sex trade participants experienced problems in K-12 and 76.8% reported harassment.

51.2% Reported physical assault and 23.2% reported sexual assault in school due to bias.

26.1% Left school due to harassment (vs. 10.8% of non-sex workers).
Employment

An overwhelming majority (69.3%) of sex workers reported experiencing an adverse job outcome in the traditional workforce, such as being denied a job or promotion or being fired because of their gender identity or expression (vs. 44.7% of non-sex workers). Those who lost a job due to anti-transgender bias were almost three times as likely to engage in the sex trade (19.9% vs. 7.7%).

Current unemployment rates were dramatically higher for those who reported involvement in the sex trade (25.1%) compared to those who were not (12.4%).

Transgender sex workers were more than twice as likely to live in extreme poverty (under $10,000/year) than those who hadn’t participated (30.8% vs. 13.3%) and were less likely to be higher income earners, only 22.1% reported household income over $50,000/year (compared to 43.4% of non-participants).

Housing Insecurity

Those who had ever been involved in the sex trade experienced substantially higher rates of homelessness; 48.1% reported experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives (compared to 14.2% of non-sex workers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>Denied access to a shelter (vs. 17.5% of non-sex workers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>Were thrown out of a shelter (vs. 12.9% of non-sex workers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>Harassed by staff (vs. 39.1% of non-sex workers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>Physically assaulted and sexually assaulted by staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Police & Court Interaction

Transgender sex workers reported high levels of interaction with the police (79.1%). They also indicated that they were somewhat uncomfortable (26.3%) or very uncomfortable (31.8%) seeking help from the police.

Of those who have appeared in court, transgender people engaged in the sex trade were also more likely to report biased treatment by judges and court staff (39.6% vs. 15.5% of non-sex workers).

They also report mistreatment (64.1%), as well as physical (12.9%) and sexual (9.2%) assault at the hands of the police.

Rates of arrest and incarceration varied significantly by race and gender for transgender sex workers: People of color were more than twice as likely (46.8%) than their white counterparts (18.3%) to report being “arrested for being trans.” Similarly, 58.8% of people of color and 35.2% of respondents reported being sent to jail/prison “for any reason.”