

Statement from a Prostituted Woman

Submitted to Women Speak Tasmania

Primary Statement

One of the things I've found is that sex work is a rather politically contentious topic. Sex workers are not a single monolith, but we do tend to follow particular patterns. There are, however, some outliers that like to get very loud on social media about how great sex work is. This is unusual... but I'm worried that people judge us all by those few, atypical shouting voices.

You also have various groups that seem to see us as a political platform. They claim to be "pro sex work", but in practice, that usually means "pro customer". They're not interested in what an average sex worker has to say, as it doesn't fit the narrative. And when it comes down to us wanting to decide who we do not have sex with... well, they can get very aggressive. I will come back to that later.

I'm going to start with the good things... and these are the reasons why, despite all the bad things, I, and many others, still do sex work.

The money is good. It's very good. If you're a single mum, you can make enough in school hours to support yourself and your children. If you have a disability and can only work minimal hours, you can make enough in those minimal hours to live on. That... that's pretty much the "good", and the only reason why nearly all of us do it.

The bad... oh, the bad...

Well, there's the normalisation of violence. Mostly from men. The number of times I've been smacked, slapped, choked, punched, spat on... I've lost count. Men will often get violent without warning, and then say things like "I got excited" or "I got horny" or "I forgot I couldn't do that". I personally think pornography is responsible... Although I don't watch it myself, I understand most porn these days is violent.

Then there's the verbal abuse... the contempt they show for us... the horrible things they call us... it may sound like words are nothing next to physical violence, but they do wear you down. The same goes for "time wasters"... they seem to have nothing better to do than to muck around and screw with you.



Then you've got the LGBTs... they don't seem to understand that most sex workers are heterosexual, and aren't interested in serving them. They then interpret this refusal of service as prejudice, and get extremely angry, and sometimes violent. They call it "being discriminated against". With lesbians, it's not so bad, as it's pretty easy to filter out in advance, as the customer's gender is usually pretty obvious. But when it comes to transgenders... that can get really nasty, because if you can't tell before the customer is actually in the room with you, you're vulnerable to violence... and they generally react VERY badly to being refused service.

Finally, there's the institutional impact... some banks won't even let you have a personal account if they know you're a sex worker. Some will let you have a personal account, but not a business account. Very few... only one of the "big four" will let you have personal and business accounts, and EFTPOS facilities. But none of them will let you have a mortgage. They say the reason is "unstable income". But unlike people who are employed, I can't lose my job, because I'm a sole trader. That's not the reason. It's either being a single mum, or a sex worker. Or both.

So... you're basically locked out of the housing market and can only ever rent. You have to do a job you hate to keep up with the spiralling prices of pretty much everything. Child support is pretty much non-existent in my case, and family tax benefit is minimal. Some of my friends with disabilities report that getting onto a disability pension is practically impossible. Centrelink actually uses the fact that we ARE working as proof that we CAN work, and thus are not sufficiently disabled to require a pension (though I can't testify to that, as I'm reporting what others have told me).

And on top of all that... society judges us as "tainted" and "unclean". At least it feels that way at times. My own plan is to keep going until my daughter is old enough that I don't need to support her anymore, and then throw in the towel. Take a much lower-paying job, with longer hours, but better working conditions. And maybe then the banks will let me have a mortgage lol.

Anyway... here it is. Not sure how well put together it is, but I think I've covered all the bases. I hope it helps.

Follow-up Clarification

As part of this submission, the contributor was asked to clarify two points relating to health impacts and experiences of coercion.

Questions:

1. Have you experienced any ongoing mental or physical health effects following the abuse described?
2. Were you ever threatened or coerced into sexual contact with a trans-identified male or other member of the LGBTQ+ group?

Response:

1. Mental and physical health impacts

I was diagnosed with PTSD before becoming a sex worker. Honestly, basically all women in the sex industry have PTSD... I have heard it said by other workers that you don't have the skills to block out the experiences involved in doing sex work if you haven't already experienced trauma.

Anyway, I was seeing a psychologist about those issues, and of course, sex work-related issues. Yes... I know doing sex work has traumatised me. My psychologist at one point said something that stuck with me. She said that it's hard to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder when it's not yet "post". She said her police officer patients tend to have the same problem.

Regarding physical injuries... nothing persistent. Bruising and a bloody nose. That's it.

2. Experiences of coercion

I've never given in... I've had threats from customers, of course... but only on two occasions have I had brothels try to coerce me.

In one case, I was told I was being given a "first and final warning" when I refused to serve a transgender customer. I quit on the spot. That is one of the rare positives about the sex industry... you can always find work, so you can do things like quitting on the spot and know you won't have trouble finding work.

At another brothel, the owner told me multiple times that I couldn't refuse to serve lesbians. I told him directly that I would continue to refuse, and if that was a problem, I knew where the door was. He backed down... but raised the issue again months later, with the same outcome.

On one occasion, after I refused to serve a transgender customer, the manager on duty told me I would not be paid (workers are paid at the end of the night) unless I complied.



I contacted the owner, who confirmed I would be paid and instructed the manager to stop.

I have since stopped working at this brothel, as I became uncomfortable with what I would describe as a workplace culture that seemed “rapey”, even though management would ultimately back down.

I guess I’ve been lucky... some of the people I’ve worked with have experienced much worse. I haven’t been raped at work. Others have.

END OF STATEMENT