

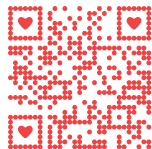
What are sex workers actually asking for?

- **The full decriminalisation of sex work and explicit anti-discrimination and anti-villification protections.**
- **Peer delivered culturally safe support** to sex workers who are victim-survivors of violence.
- **Dedicated sex worker legal services** to provide tailored legal assistance and support access to justice.
- **Meaningful sex worker engagement** to inform FDSV policy reform, and address systemic stigma and access barriers.
- **Tackle the structural drivers of violence** through intersectional and rights-based strategies to address the experiences of sex workers.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SEX WORKERS AND FDSV

Read our full briefing paper

This paper outlines key issues for sex workers and FDSV, with policy recommendations to strengthen Australia's responses to gendered violence.



SAFETY WITHOUT STIGMA.

Sex workers are partners in ending gender based violence.



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Sex work is not a driver of violence against women and girls.

The belief that sex work is violent or a driver of violence leaves sex workers out of mainstream feminist campaigns and adds to the stigma that creates barriers to reporting violence or seeking support.

To understand why this view remains strong in Australia, even as more states and territories move to decriminalisation, we need to look at the history of family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) services in unceded Australia.

In the 1970s, women's anti-violence work and refuges were shaped by second-wave feminism, which often saw sex work and pornography as forms and drivers of violence against women. This legacy still affects anti-violence organisations today, with some leaders and researchers continuing to argue that sex work and pornography are incompatible with gender equality. This view also appears in policy and media debates about pornography and violence.

Criminalisation dehumanises sex workers

Criminalising sex work increases the risk of violence against sex workers by treating us as less deserving of safety and protection.



CRIMINALISATION INCREASES VIOLENCE

Studies show a link between anti-sex work attitudes, which are allowed to grow under criminalisation, and higher levels of violence against sex workers.



CRIMINALISATION CREATES BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE

Criminalisation increases stigma and discrimination, making it less likely that sex workers will disclose violence or seek support.



CRIMINALISATION LIMITS ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND SUPPORT

Criminalisation discourages sex workers from reporting violence to police due to fear of arrest, disbelief or inaction. It also makes sex workers reluctant to pursue court cases, as they anticipate stigma, blame and unfair treatment in the criminal legal system.

Stigma enables violence and limits support.

Sex workers experience violence in different settings. This violence is enabled within the context of stigma, which is reinforced by criminalisation, licensing, and policing, and impacts our ability to access health, support and justice from mainstream services.

When sex workers attempt to access specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services, we are often not recognised as victims and face more questioning and scrutiny. Studies also show a link between anti-sex work rhetoric and increased violence against workers.

Sex worker peer organisations provide essential support

Sex worker peer organisations are run by and for sex workers, founded on the principles of peer support, peer education and community development. Some organisations employ peer counsellors and run violence support programs, although funding for this is often limited. Even without enough resources, peer organisations are still the first place many sex workers turn to for support after violence. This includes:



Where are we now?

There is no consistent strategy to address how stigma affects sex workers' access to family, domestic and sexual violence services, police and courts. To improve this, approaches to gendered violence must include the impact of stigma, criminalisation and marginalisation on sex workers.