Migrant sex workers and trafficking - insider research for and by migrant sex workers

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Abstract

Researching marginalised groups is challenging and fraught with ethical issues. These issues can be exacerbated when the researcher is an outsider. Migrant sex workers are a marginalised group due to their position as a sex worker and their migrant status. For outsiders undertaking research with these groups there is the potential for their personal beliefs and moral views around migration, sex work, race, gender and sexuality to influence research methodology, analysis, interpretation and outcomes. Often this has resulted in migrant sex workers being portrayed as victims in need of help, rather than as active, self-determining agents. Much of the research relating to migrant sex workers and trafficking has taken place in institutionalised settings. In such settings, there is good reason for migrant sex workers to identify as coerced victims in need of help rather than as willing migrants who have experienced bad workplace situations and/or who have engaged in alternate migration pathways. Research of this type is usually conducted in detention centres or refuges or worse still-citing difficulties in accessing this population, some researchers will only interview service providers and make conclusions without ever speaking to the target population the research makes claims about. Insiders can more readily gain full and uncompromised access to sex workers affected by trafficking policy outside of institutional settings. In this paper using an example from Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association, we argue for more insider research. We present our methods and discuss how insider led migrant sex work research can lead to

> *credible research outcomes and have many broader benefits for our
> community.*
>
> **Keywords:** *Insider research, participatory research, sex workers,
> migrant sex workers, peer education, community development*

Introduction

Ethical research is crucial but especially so when it comes to
marginalised and stigmatised communities. Ethical issues include
informed consent, confidentiality, access and also accurate
representation. When the researched are migrant sex workers there
is a tendency in the popular and academic literature, to portray
migrant sex workers as victims without agency. This relates in part
to the values and worldview of the researcher but also of the
inability of outsiders to gain entry to marginalised populations and
gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study. As
such, outsider led research can result in finding and interpretations
which lead to poor policy decisions and ultimately poor outcomes
for the people the policy is designed to protect. In this paper we
argue for and provide an example of the methods used in insider
led research with migrant sex workers in Australia, and explore
how such an approach can help resolve some of the ethical
dilemmas present.

We organise our paper as follows. First we provide an overview of
Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association and the
peak body of sex workers and sex worker organisations in
Australia. Next we discuss migrant sex workers in Australia and
discuss how the linking of migrant sex workers and human
trafficking in academia and the popular media, has often resulted
in poor policy and fails to recognise migrant sex workers as self-
determining agents. We argue this is because most of the research
which has been undertaken has been by outsiders who as non-
migrant sex workers fail to fully understand and accurately
present migrant sex workers' views. Next we present our methods
and discuss how this enhanced the quality of the research.

About Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association

Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association, is the peak body of sex workers and sex worker organisations in Australia. Scarlet Alliance aims, through its objectives, policies and programs, to achieve equality, social, legal, political, cultural and economic justice for past and present workers in the sex industry; in order for sex workers to be self-determining agents, building their own alliances and choosing where and how they work. Formed in 1989, our membership includes State and Territory based sex worker organisations and projects throughout Australia, as well as individual sex workers, which ensures we are able to represent the issues affecting our members and sex workers Australia wide. To inform our work from an evidence base we have regular consultation and steering committee meetings with our membership, as well as with individual sex workers. Scarlet Alliance adopts an affirmative action policy in regards to our membership, leadership, staff and volunteers, that is, everyone involved in Scarlet Alliance is a sex worker. This is driven by the belief that sex workers are best placed and capable of leading and directing policy, research and services for sex workers. While there are skills in report writing or research that can be learnt, the marginalisation and experiences of being a sex worker can only be known by someone who has actually been a sex worker. Additionally, Scarlet Alliance has a policy of consultation and representation with and by members within sub-communities on specific issues, for example, male spokesperson on issues relating to male sex work.

 The centrality of affected communities has supported effective community engagement, policy development and implementation and is acknowledged as critical to the success of Australia's successful HIV response (DOHA, 2010, p. 3). Recognising the importance of sex worker peer education to this response, the Australian Government began resourcing peer educators and sex worker organisations. More recently, sex workers have also been

employed as peer educators by Scarlet Alliance as part of the
'whole of government' response to trafficking in persons.
Australian Government Department of Health and Aging
recognises multi lingual peer outreach as especially important due
to additional considerations presented by groups with intersecting
marginalities and specific needs, such as language, visas and
effects of criminalisation (DOHA, 2010, p. 27). Skilled peer
educators are in high demand within the existing sex worker
organisational infrastructures and there are challenges to
maintaining these human resources, including the under
resourcing of sex worker organisations and the high turnover of
staff (Department of Health and Ageing, 2005, p. 19).

Migrant sex workers

Migrant sex workers in Australia have played an important role in
informing, leading, and producing knowledge within the context
of the contemporary international sex worker rights movement,
the birth of which can be traced to the 1975 protests in Lyon,
France. More recently anti-trafficking interventions have had a
largely negative impact on sex work in general but on migrant sex
workers in particular (Augustin, 2009; Pearson, 2007; Weitzer,
2007). Currently anti-trafficking interventions both in Australia
and abroad have been based on criminal justice approaches with a
firm focus on the sex industry. There is a widely recognised dearth
of evidence based research in the area and claims of the difficulty
in researching trafficking particularly within the sex industry has
led to a gross overestimation on the size and nature of trafficking
in the sex industry (Feingold, 2010; Jordan, 2011; Weitzer 2012).
The stereotype that exploitation and the sex industry are
inherently linked and therefore migration for sex work equals
trafficking is a widespread one that is often recycled in the media.
This has contributed to poor public policy based on limited
evidence.

The premise behind this policy approach is that sex workers do not
have agency and migrant sex workers in particular, are victims

and incapable of making a choice to engage in sex work. In this worldview, sex work is not seen as work but as a crime. From this perspective, trafficking and sex work are seen as inextricably interrelated phenomena. They are interlinked in academic thought and research about trafficking (Campani 1999), a link which many academics have attributed to US policies and abolitionist lobbying groups (Ditmore and Wijers 2003; Doezema 2004; Weitzer 2005, 2007 cited in Saunders 2005; Papanicolaou 2008). This has resulted in much trafficking research blending the two phenomena, making broad theoretical statements without identifying what parts of their research relate to crime (trafficking) and what parts relate to work (sex work). This failure to separate sex work from trafficking is used to support general assertions about the harms of sex work and size and extent of trafficking. For example, the numbers of migrant sex workers in Australia has been used as the number of trafficking victims in Australia. This results in inaccurate and inflated numbers, which in turn are picked up and sensationalised in the media building on the public perception that these are fact. Even when proven to be inaccurate, the truth is forgotten and the inflated numbers remain in the public consciousness. For example, long after the "1000 sex slaves in Australia every year" research was discredited, that number continues to be reproduced (Project Respect, 2004). This faulty perception has driven public pressure on politicians to act. In 2003 the trafficking media landscape of the time was dominated by the work of Wynhausen in *The Australian*, who asserted a death in custody in Villawood was that of a Thai woman who had been sold as a sex slave at age 12 (Wynhausen and O'Brien 2003). This assertion was factually incorrect and was corrected within months by Jim Pollard for *The Daily Telegraph* who travelled to Chiang Mai (Pollard 2003) to investigate. Regardless of the inaccuracies the story captured the imagination of anti-sex work campaigners in Australia and led to irrevocable change to the Australian approach to anti-trafficking. O'Brien summarises:

> The articles commenced in March 2003, and by April politicians were acting on the issue. In their article, 'Sex slave industry "shames" Canberra' the authors indicate that

> the Federal Opposition had been encouraged by their
> articles to push the government for action (The Australian 3
> April 2003, 6). The following day The Australian heralded
> the Federal Government's announcement of a review into
> the prevention of sex trafficking (The Australian 4 April
> 2003, 6). By the next week, a report in The Australian
> credited the Wynhausen and O'Brien articles with sparking
> the review, declaring that, 'their revelations provoked a
> political flurry' (The Australian 12 April 2003). The 2003
> Inquiry demonstrates the influence of a narrative focusing
> solely on sexual exploitation. (O'Brien 2010)

The nature of the arguments that led to these developments are
defined by Ronald Weitzer as a 'crusader' approach and O'Brien
groups the arguments into seven areas:

1. Sex work is bad/exploitative,

2. Violence occurs in sex work and in trafficking,

3. Sex workers' customers and traffickers are bad/exploitative
    (a premise debunked in the Thai-Lao border work by
    Molland 2010),

4. Sex workers do not have agency,

5. Sex work and trafficking are inextricably linked (An
    important claim of the crusader trafficking lobbying in
    Australia, according to O'Brien 2010),

6. The size of sex work and trafficking is high and has recently
    increased and

7. Law reform to legalise/decriminalise sex work would
    increase the prevalence of sex work and trafficking.

The assumptions of these claims lead to arguments and proposals
to abolish sex work. The Attorney General's office tabled the
Criminal Code Amendment (Trafficking in Persons) Bill in
Parliament in late 2004, which was sent to a Legal and
Constitutional Legislation Committee of the Senate in February
2005. The Committee made recommendations to amend the

legislation which was then successfully reintroduced to the senate on the 21st June, 2005. These approaches have increased harassment and risk to migrant sex workers. These approaches to trafficking include unnecessarily frequent compliance activity on Asian sex industry establishments and on Asian sex workers in particular. The harassment and detention of Asian sex workers in the guise of anti-trafficking has driven migrant sex workers underground, marginalising them further and creating barriers to accessing justice, outreach, peer education, industrial rights and occupational health and safety and increased risks to migrant sex workers.

Reliable research outcomes are vital as they inform and shape government policy and are central for ongoing improvement of service delivery and improved health and human rights of the community. From the outset the value and reliability of research outcomes can be influenced by the kinds of definitions used by the research team. Researcher's negative views on sex work and migration can sway the outcome of the research, even prior to its commencement. The influence of trafficking policy on migrant sex workers has further muddied the waters with the conflation of migration by sex workers with trafficking. These policies undermine laws that are beneficial to sex workers, such as the decriminalisation of sex work (Pearson, 2000, p. 57). Research needs to represent people's actual experiences without outsiders' moral judgments or personal agendas affecting the outcomes. While it might be argued that research regardless of who conducts it is a subjective process, a critical understanding of a community's experience and reality can be achieved through the active involvement of members of the community in all phases of the action research process. Many research projects use migrant sex workers to further their claims and anti sex work and anti migration agendas (Weitzer, 2007), often with questionable methodology and minimal or no ethics approval process.

Reliable research can be achieved through active participation at all stages by the community that is the subject of the research,

coupled with clear processes, informed consent, ethically sound methodology, clarity on definitions and sources. Few research projects however have specifically engaged migrant sex workers through each stage of the research process. Nevertheless there are a few examples.

Trafficking knowledge specifically has been produced through activities including projects (such as the SIREN project 1994), research (such as that produced by Sydney Sexual Health Centre in 1993 and 2003), submissions (such as those produced by Scarlet Alliance 2003 and 2004), advocacy (such as the Thai Sex Worker Senate delegation on the process of public participation, 2002), protests (such as that held in Thailand at the opening of the XV International AIDS Congress in Bangkok 2004).

The present study is the newest instalment of knowledge produced by migrant sex workers in Australia. Within this current research, migrant sex workers are positioned as the subject of trafficking knowledge; knowledge that is a source of empowerment, protection and sustainability. These sex worker led research projects present a counter narrative on trafficking and migrant sex work. The counter narrative democratises knowledge- it is controlled and created by migrant sex workers not on and about migrant sex workers. Research for and by the community not only advances knowledge in the field but also increases capacity within the community. This process of research that increases knowledge and community development is critical to the principles of action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). When research is undertaken by a community member, the tensions that exist between the researcher and participants are alleviated by the united aims of both researcher and participants. In the present research, it was an agreed aim that the value of the Alliance research would be in the representation of the actual voices and reality for migrant sex workers as perceived by migrant sex workers- not the perception of our reality by outsiders. By increasing the knowledge in the field the research aimed to increase evidence base about migrant sex workers. In addition to

the lessons from similar research undertaken in 2006/07, these were the considerations and environment that affected and drove the need for our latest research project.

Participatory and iterative development of the research

The process of engaging with, involving and developing the research strategy as a participatory and iterative process was simultaneously action research and capacity building. The development of the research strategy is outlined below.

In 2009/10 Scarlet Alliance conducted a migrant sex work research project, building upon a survey instrument and methodology that had been used successfully by the organisation in 2006/7 in partnership with Zi Teng, a sex worker organisation in Hong Kong (Scarlet Alliance, 2008). The research presented in this paper aimed to find similarities and differences between migrant and non-migrant sex workers experiences in Australia and address an identified evidence gap. As the peak national body of sex worker organisations in Australia, Scarlet Alliance was able to draw on knowledge from our membership as well as incorporating improvements based upon the learning from the previous research. The initial survey instrument was developed in 2005 by Zi Teng and has been used to assess the working conditions and demographic of Chinese language background sex workers in seven countries. The first collection in Australia occurred in 2006/07. For survey results see Scarlet Alliance (2008) and Elena Jeffreys and Roberta Perkins (2011).

The 2010 survey expanded upon the 2006/07 survey, in content, languages and reach. In 2006/7 there were less questions than the later survey, it was run only in Simplified Chinese and English, and less than 100 sex workers participated (n=43 Chinese language background and n=29 English language background). The 2010 methodology was established through discussion and agreement between Scarlet Alliance and the funder, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). Early contractual negotiations included agreement that the 2010 survey instrument would be an updated

and expanded version of the Zi Teng survey, it would be run in four languages and target over 100 sex workers. By incorporating the lessons from the earlier research and the implementation of sex worker led research approaches the project collected over 600 surveys, 594 were deemed complete enough for analysis. 75% of these were classified as migrant. This is the largest research of migrant sex workers in Australia to date.

The survey in 2006/07 gave condoms as a gift to sex workers who chose to participate in the survey; and planned to do so again in 2010. The AIC originally had concerns about the use of work related gifts. This feedback was brought to the Steering Committee who affirmed that condoms were a preferred gift; after a briefing from Scarlet Alliance, the AIC supported the proposal to distribute work related gifts.

After commencing collection it was found that in certain states condoms were widely distributed for free; their value as a workplace gift therefore was diminished. It was determined acceptable to give other gifts of equal value. Other gifts included the book "Call Girls" by Roberta Perkins and Frances Lovejoy (UNSW Press) based upon a decade of research projects similar to this one. International phone cards and boxes of chocolates complemented the array of gifts of equal monetary value available to participants to choose depending on availability.

The first detailed discussions about the 2010 survey instrument were hosted by Scarlet Alliance in Surry Hills, New South Wales, Australia, in December 2009. In attendance were Scarlet Alliance Migration Project Staff (who are themselves migrant sex workers), Scarlet Alliance leadership, Steering Committee Members (Chinese, Korean and Thai speaking background sex workers) including some of the Chinese speaking background 2006/7 survey collectors and participants, representatives from future potential project partners (i.e. sex worker member organisations of Scarlet Alliance who had the capacity to undertake collection for the research project), Scarlet Alliance members with a social research background, and project staff from the AIC.

At this meeting the survey was discussed in detail, question by question. This included the layout of certain questions, the order of questions, response types (multiple responses vs single responses, qualitative vs quantitative), determining which questions would be optional, cultural issues and potential translation problems. Language sub-groups had time to discuss the wording of questions, to ensure the survey could be successfully translated simply from English into three other languages. Experiences of both collection and data analysis from the first round of the questionnaire in Australia were taken into account.

Scarlet Alliance drew on outreach data from sex worker organisations in Australia to determine which languages to use for the survey. Sex worker organisations regularly conduct peer education to sex worker workplaces. During these visits peer educators routinely collect data on their observations, utilising action learning to ensure appropriate services are being tailored to needs of the community. Sex worker organisations around Australia have consistently reported to Scarlet Alliance that they were outreaching sex workers from non-English speaking backgrounds who spoke Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai and Korean. Due to financial limitations and the high cost of translation, the survey was only produced in what was identified as the four most commonly used languages. Researchers were also actively sought from those language backgrounds. Choosing these three particular languages (Simplified Chinese, Korean and Thai) in addition to English (to enable comparison data) allowed for the widest number of non-English speaking background sex workers to participate, in all levels of the project.

Time and resources affected the decisions that were also made about the sex and gender focus of the research. Outreach data from our member organisations affirms that male sex workers make up approximately 5-10% of sex workers in Australia. Male sex workers are under-represented in sex worker community structures such as peer education and sex worker organisations and there are only a small number of sex industry businesses in

Australia that employ male sex workers. There was no targeted
recruitment to encourage male researchers, and as a result the
collection did not target male workers specifically, resulting in sex
workers who identify as male being underrepresented in the
survey.

There were a small number of trans* collectors who were trained
during the project.

Recently shifting terminology meant that while use of the term
"transgender" to identify sex and/or gender diversity had been
current for the sex worker community in the 2006/07 survey, by
2010 this terminology had become outdated. Scarlet Alliance
updated the use of the term "transgender" to the more inclusive
"trans*" in late 2010; too late to impact upon the survey questions.

Many trans* individuals identify themselves as "male" or "female"
rather than "trans*" and may have self-selected as "male" or
"female". Within the sample there are a small number of sex
workers who identified themselves as "transgender", and a
smaller number again who chose not to identify themselves by the
gender options provided. Overall this has resulted in the majority
of respondents reflecting the gender and language background of
the researchers (see table 1 and 2). This does not in any way reflect
the nature of the sex industry, rather it is a direct reflection of the
researchers and methodology employed by the project.

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	568	95.8
Male	17	2.9
Transgender	8	1.4
Total	593*a*	100.0*b*

a 1 missing response; *b* may not accurately sum to 100 due
to rounding

Table 2: Language that respondent self selected to complete the survey

Language group	Frequency	Percentage
Thai	136	22.9
Simplified Chinese	85	14.3
Korean	41	6.9
English	298	50.2
Other/unknown	34	5.7
Total	594	100*a*

a may not accurately sum to 100 due to rounding

The project became a networking, volunteer and action learning space that introduced sex workers of Thai, Chinese and Korean language background to colleagues and opportunities for increased involvement in the formal organisations of the sex worker movement. Three bilingual peer researchers went on to become formally employed as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) peer educators at sex worker organisations. Peer researchers, survey participants and sex workers encountered during the research process were all exposed to Scarlet Alliance and the opportunity to become part of the Steering Committee which guides the work of the Migration Project. Like all the work at Scarlet Alliance, the project has many formal and informal, external and internal forms of evaluation which guides future action, improvements to approaches and ensures we maintain our relevance for our community.

Critical anti-racist and feminist approaches to methodology

Sex workers were involved in every level of the research project, from its inception and negotiation to its dissemination and management, right through to its analysis and reporting. This imparted various benefits to the project that were readily apparent.

- Holistic perspective – the ability to account for a range of aspects and nuances within the sex worker community in the research via involvement of sex workers in every facet of the project.

- Unparalleled access – both to workers and workplaces, particularly to CALD sex workers and to workplaces outside the licensed brothel sector.

- Understanding of issues – often anticipation and effective solutions to potential issues were posited before they arose protecting against confounding variables arising throughout the research.

- Expediency and efficiency – being pre aware of the issues and intricacies of sex worker communities and sex work workplaces saved considerable time and resources. The ability to draw on existing networks and relationships further contributed to this.

- Trust within the community – Trust that exists by virtue of relationships built over many years and the camaraderie of peers with analogous experiences. It would have otherwise taken a considerable amount of time to have built this level of trust.

- Integrity of responses – trust amongst peers and of the motivations of the research meant sex workers were more likely to respond honestly.

Having sex workers in the leadership of the project maintained the integrity of the project. Whilst conceptualising, negotiating and discussing the project with the funder and potential outreach partners, sex workers were best placed to represent the issues and interests of the sex worker community. Sex workers have pre-understanding of sex work, something that outsiders cannot. This pre-understanding, an important aspect of insider research, enhanced the efficiency of the project and reduced barriers to understanding; the sex workers collectors already had intimate

knowledge of the issues and the naturalistic environment of the research (Gummesson, 2000: 57 cited in Coughlan, 2007, p 296). Using familiarity, personal knowledge and existing expertise is a recognised part of successful action research by insiders (Riemer 1977 cited in Coughlan, 2007, p 294). There are many benefits that a critical understanding of insider research can contribute to sex workers led research.

The pre-understanding that sex workers as insiders have is grounded in the real life needs, practicalities and concerns of sex workers in Australia. Sex workers have the first hand experience to know that a sex industry workplace is a workplace, and are experienced at treating sex worker workplaces as workplaces, not as research sites. This is one of the benefits of insider research; sex worker peer researchers can be trained to implement a methodologically sound research project within sex worker projects because first and foremost we understand that it is sex workers' *workplaces* we are entering into. Non-sex worker collectors are outsiders in that space, sex worker collectors, while having the role of researcher for that interaction, are, by virtue of peer-status, insiders.

When non-sex work researchers enter a sex work workplace, sex workers are not in control of their identity disclosure; seeing sex workers breaches the confidentiality of the sex workers in that premises. By employing sex workers as peer researchers we ensure that even though there is no avoiding disclosure taking place, it is an equal relationship because the trained collector is a sex worker also and discloses themselves as such, thus minimising the power dynamic. Sex workers are part of a culture of identity protection and are less likely to breach the confidentiality of another sex worker.

Van der Meulen explains that due to the prevalence of unethical and exploitative research conducted by anti-sex work feminists:

> … it is not uncommon for sex workers to refuse to engage in research studies unless they are members of the research team. Action research philosophies and practices, therefore,

> are particularly relevant and important in supporting a
> growing wave of sex work research that has been endorsed,
> influenced, and supported by sex working communities."
> (van der Meulen 2001, p. 370.)

This project provides strong evidence to suggest that insider research by sex workers has a high participation rate. The first phase of survey collection aimed to reach 100 participants in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. After the first 4 months of survey collection with fifteen active peer researchers and over 100 surveys collected, an extension to the scope and timeframe of the survey was negotiated with AIC; with an increased focus on Chinese and Korean collection, and expanding to the regional settings of Toowoomba, Townsville, Newcastle and Kalgoorlie, and encompassing the additional cities of Brisbane, Perth and Canberra, and including an online survey. A further 8 months of collection were added with an intended target of 500 surveys, a target which was exceeded. Over 1000 community education, information and networking sessions occurred- far in excess of the 679 surveys that were collected, 594 which were deemed sufficiently complete and therefore eligible for analysis.

The importance of peer researchers being familiar with workplaces they or their friends have worked at cannot be underestimated as a factor in participation rates for research projects. Other insider researchers have made similar observations. van Heugten notes from her own experience of insider research, that her own knowledge, word of mouth and utilising existing community infrastructure resulted in response rate of 100% (van Heugten, 2004, pg 206)

Use of the pre-understanding with sex worker communities or sex worker workplaces and networks, many built up over years of friendships and/or collegial relationships, meant that peer researchers were well placed to access a high number of potential respondents. The insider status of the sex worker peer researchers in the project meant that they were already networked into that

environment the project were able to build on their existing access to premises and trust from potential sex worker participants.

We believe the insider status of peer researchers and trust that exists in the sex worker community has resulted in accurate and reflective data. In addition to being respectful of sex workers wishes, the explicitly sex worker led and voluntary nature of survey participation, we believe, contributes to the veracity of responses in the survey. Consultation with the Steering Committee on the responses supports this is the case. Other academics agree;

> Not only can the inclusion of sex workers in the project design and implementation increase sex workers' support of the project itself, but according to some, the inclusion of local stakeholders in the research project and an equalizing of power imbalances can actually lead to more valid and reliable results based on local expertise. (van der Meulen, 2001, p. 376)

Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) is cited by van der Meulen as arguing that [insider] "…action research is much more able to produce 'valid' results than ordinary or conventional social science" because of the implicit stake that the insider community has. (p. 376)

As discussed in more detail below, the specific insider approaches adopted in the methodology of this project were critically and culturally nuanced. This included the up-skilling of peer researchers, respect for the lineage of the survey instrument, appropriate informed consent processes, use of explicitly optional questions, affirmative action for sex workers of Thai, Chinese and Korean language backgrounds, and community based translation checking were all outcomes of adopting an insider approach to the research.

Capacity development and training

The collector training was only available to sex workers. Affirmative action and payment was implemented for multilingual

sex workers whose first language was Thai, Chinese and/or Korean. Sex workers who spoke English as a first language participated as volunteers. Five training sessions for survey collectors were conducted across Australia, with thirty-six sex workers trained in total.

Melbourne had six participants or 16% of the entire group, Adelaide had eight participants or 22% of the entire group, Sydney had two sessions, with twenty-one participants overall, or 58% of the entire group, and Canberra had one participant or 2% of the entire group (See Table 1)

Table 3: 2010 Peer Researcher Training- Number of sex workers trained who became active researchers.

City	Trained	Became Researchers
Melbourne	6	5
Adelaide	8	3
Sydney	17	12
Sydney	4	4
Canberra	1	1
Total	**36**	**22**

Where it was not feasible to do training in other states and territories, relevant potential collectors were invited to travel to cities where training was taking place. Participants in the training could then self-select to become collectors. Of the thirty-six trained participants, twenty-four became survey collectors (66.6%). There was no pressure on those who completed the training to become survey collectors. The training was seen as an action learning exercise with an aim of improving sex workers research skills in a range of ways. Even though the training was specific to this particular project, the skills learnt are transferable to other research situations. Overall, the amount of sex worker trained was considered one of the successes of the project and demonstrated the community's interest and commitment to this research.

The training had two components. Firstly Scarlet Alliance conducted training on outreach skills. This included dealing with potential difficult issues for sex workers that may arise as a result of participation in the survey. For example, it was understood that given the types of questions addressed in the survey, it was possible that it could give rise to some discomfort amongst some potential respondents. Steering committee meetings had discussed what these potential triggers might be and what the appropriate responses to these could be. In addition to this, remembering that the outreach was conducted in partnership with existing peer education outreach, those in the training were advised to draw upon the considerable expertise of existing outreach staff in dealing with these issues. The training ensured that potential collectors were aware of all of the support mechanisms in place for sex workers. Role playing these concerns was included in the training, and participants were given a referral list in four languages of organisations that could provide support on a variety of issues. Potential survey collectors without prior experience in outreach were encouraged to actively listen but to ultimately refer sex workers directly to their sex worker organisation, to specialist organisations, or to the police, depending on the presenting issue/s and the wishes of the survey participant. Other aspects of the training included the history of the sex worker movement and peer education. This component of the training was specifically run for sex workers with no prior outreach experience.

To ensure consistency of delivery of the survey, potential peer researchers were taught how to use the "Administration Guidelines" that had been developed specifically for the projects by the AIC. The guidelines went through the steps for collection, interpretations and explanations for the questions. The guidelines also covered the agreed upon method of dealing with unfinished surveys and assisted surveys. Assisted surveys occurred if a sex worker asked a researcher to fill in the survey on their behalf because they were illiterate or had a disability, the researcher could do so. This was only done in cases where the participant requested assistance, unprompted by the researcher. The researcher indicated

it was an assisted survey by marking the front page with an "A". This allowed for observation of any notable differences from the unassisted survey results. This was an uncommon occurrence with only 11 marked as assisted. The training included going through the background of the survey, response types, and each survey question, including questions that may be problematic, and the optional questions. The participants then had an opportunity to ask questions followed by a role play exercise conducted in pairs. Each participant had a chance to play both the role of collector and survey respondent in a mock collection exercise. This enabled the participants to become familiar with the survey and aware of questions that may come up during collection. It also gave the participant role playing the collector a chance to practise using the administration guidelines and answer potential queries. These responses were then ripped up and disposed of.

As outlined earlier, there were strong community development outcomes associated with the training. 22 sex workers trained in collection went on to do peer education and outreach for the survey. Others got involved in the Steering Committee. And every sex worker who participated reported being more skilled about research and about how to get further involved in their local and national sex worker organisations. In this way the research contributed to increasing the capacity of the sex worker community.

Representation

The project implemented conscious and structural approaches to ensure direct representation and ownership over the project by the community being researched. Scarlet Alliance believes that when English is a second language it is best practise to have researchers who speak the same first language. Sherene Razack describes this critical understanding of power dynamics as place-based feminism (2000, p 39). After the first round of training and collections in 2009 it was evidenced that there was a relatively high number of Thai background sex workers (seven) engaged in the survey collection

project. This is a reflection of the history and strength of the Thai sex worker community in Australia. Thai sex workers are well represented in the survey.

It was identified that there were less Chinese (three) and Korean (one) collectors than Thai collectors. Chinese and Korean language background workplaces were targeted for recruitment to increase the number of Chinese and Korean speaking peer researchers. Three special outreach sessions were conducted within greater Sydney over a fortnight to recruit Mandarin and/or Cantonese speaking participants. This resulted in four Chinese speaking collectors being trained and becoming peer researchers. A week of focused outreach sessions to recruit Korean speaking collectors was also held and while it did not result in active peer researchers, it increased the profile of the project among the Korean background sex worker community in Sydney.

The representation from Korean sex workers, while lower, is still the strongest representation in any survey of sex workers to date in Australia. The small number of peer researchers is also a reflection of the relatively small size of the Korean sex worker population and its shorter history in Australia. Using peer researchers to target workplaces where they already had cultural connections to, that they had worked in, or premises they were familiar with was an important strategy. Sherene Razack, writing about trans-national academic feminist collaboration, makes the point that researchers must have a critical understanding about where they are located, both culturally and geographically (2000). Researchers having peer status, similar language background and comparable migration experience to the sex worker participants was very important to the survey. For example, we know from numerous anecdotal reports on outreach and via our steering committee that most sex workers who were asked to be participants in the survey would experience stigma and racism in Australia because of both their sex work and their racial background. Additionally, migrant sex workers from countries where sex work is illegal and actively criminalised have low trust of authority, due to the frequent and

forcible policing of the sex industry. Many research participants also reported "research fatigue" from having being repeatedly researched upon. A major complaint on this regard was that researchers would come to sex worker workplaces and sex workers rarely saw the outcomes of the research let alone experienced any benefit from participation. Peer researchers from Thai, Korean and Chinese backgrounds understood these very real ethical complications, potential disruptions for sex workers, respect for confidentiality and sensitivity about culturally-specific migration information. Peer researchers were able to adopt a critical anti-racist feminist approach, working through issues and engaging with the target group in ways that is difficult for non peers, in relation to both migration experience and sex worker background.

Culturally appropriate and sex worker sensitive informed consent and confidentiality

Informed consent is a very important issue when it comes to ethical research with migrant sex workers among whom English is a second language.

For confidentiality reasons, this project chose a verbal informed consent process. This process meant the project did not record sex worker participant's names in any way. Verbal informed consent was used by Scarlet Alliance in the 2006/07 and the 2009/10 survey, and is used in other major contemporary sex workers surveys in Australia, including the Laws and Sexual Health (LASH) survey funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

Verbal communication is very important to the verbal informed consent process. If the researcher does not speak the first language spoken by the participant, it may be unclear if the informed consent form has been understood and agreed to. For this reason, rather than use translation, where collectors and participants spoke different first languages, the information pamphlet in their first language was used to explain and obtain verbal consent. The

pamphlet was produced in English, Korean, Simplified Chinese and Thai, and was given to all potential participants. It included an introduction, research terminology (explaining ethical issues such as consent & recompense), Scarlet Alliance (inviting sex workers to become members and/or attend the National Forum), the Steering Committee (inviting sex workers to get involved and information about entitlements if they did), the survey, confidentiality, sensitive and optional questions and complaints (with a name and phone number for complaints if anyone has them) and a list of contacts for sex worker organisations in Australia, Thailand and Hong Kong.

Verbally and in the project information pamphlet the confidentiality measures were highlighted to sex workers considering participation. Respondents were assured that participation was optional, sensitive questions about migration and home town were optional, sex workers were not required to sign a consent form, regional locations of survey collection were not identified as separate to city locations, the workplace name and address was not linked to the individual survey. Once the survey was complete the sex workers placed it into an envelope, sealed it and placed it inside a box along with all other surveys collected during that outreach session. The unopened envelopes were delivered to the AIC. All envelopes were the same to ensure that the peer researcher could not link a survey to a particular individual. Assuring confidentiality verbally, in written format, and physically (through showing workers the envelopes and the sealed box) were ways the project overcame sex workers concerns about disclosure. Peer researchers did not read any of the individual answers that sex workers wrote down.

The project was careful to ensure that participants to be in control a degree of confidentiality and privacy in relation to migration pathways. This emerged as an issue in the first survey collection 2006/7 collection. The Chinese language sub-group was extremely insistent that participants should have a range of ways to control the level of information shared about their particular migration.

This resulted in allowing for optional answers to questions relating to migration pathways (Jeffreys, 2001, para. 9). For example the steering committee felt that asking sex workers to list either small towns or provinces they lived in or travelled through would unavoidably make the respondent identifiable within the relatively small migrant sex worker community in Australia should this information be published, thus compromising their privacy. Even though the entire survey itself is optional it was felt imperative by the multilingual Steering Committees both in 2006/07 and 2009/10 that these questions were marked as explicitly optional; to reinforce that we were not pressuring anyone to give us information that was potentially harmful or risky for them to share.

This was a successful approach in 2006/7 survey; with more than half of the participants happy to fill out the optional sections (Scarlet Alliance, 2008). The 2010 survey included seven optional questions; five from the section on Migration, particularly related to pathways and debt bondage information, and two from the Work Situation section, on debt bondage information and an open ended qualitative "what advice would you give someone else travelling to Australia". More than 70% of sex workers eligible to complete questions regarding migration in the recent survey responded to the optional questions in the 2009/2010 survey. Building on the experience of the first survey, action learning and community development were built upon from 2006/07 to 2009/10.

Another lesson from the 2006/07 survey which informed the 2009/10 survey was the importance of translation checking of all written material. Overall the project relied heavily on the multilingual peer sex workers of non-English speaking background on the sub-groups of the Steering Committee to review numerous translations done by accredited translators. Accredited translators use terminology that is socially acceptable to the mainstream community of any given language group. This includes the unintentional use of anti-sex work and anti-sex

worker terminology which would be offensive to migrant sex workers in Australia; the target group of the research. 'Translation checking' was conducted at the language-specific sub-group level to enable lively debate about the most appropriate words to use for the specific language-based sex worker communities.

In 2009/10 similar Steering Committee sub-groups were utilised to ensure that specific questions, methodology and outcomes were analysed by language specific sub-groups in Chinese, English, Thai and Korean. The full Steering Committee membership included bilingual sex workers from Chinese, Korean and Thai backgrounds who are part of the target population of the survey. The committee continued to meet roughly every two months for the life of the survey. The Steering Committee was a formal structure to discuss, identify and address cross-cultural issues that provided practical guidance for the research, much of which were incorporated into the project design and implementation, as well as identify when break-out sessions of language specific sub-groups needed to take place.

An example worth noting is where an accredited translator had used words that meant "sex slave" in the places in the survey which referred to "sex worker." Such a massive difference in intent, within a survey which is designed to tease out trafficking and slavery issues in a respectful and contextualised manner, are so important. A translation error such as this, which was not even noticeable to an accredited translator, would have undermined the validity of the survey. Without migrant sex worker peer based sub-groups to do 'translation checking', the project would have been distributing inappropriate material. Even taking into account the role of the accredited translators, it is not an overstatement to say that migrant sex workers led the translation processes.

Data collection

Peer researchers understood that their role was to engage with sex workers as peer educators; participation in the survey was a by-product; the survey itself was completely optional and there was

no pressure on sex workers to participate. Peer researchers took the approach that sex workers are in the sex worker workspace to work, not to do surveys. With this in mind the length of the survey was a very important issue for the Steering Committee and all discussions with peer researchers. A survey that is too long is unfair on both sex worker participants and sex worker workplaces and would discourage participation. Asking a sex worker to take time away from paid work for longer than twenty minutes was determined by the Steering Committee to be unreasonable.

Regardless of who is researching, even as insiders, any survey in the workplace will create some degree of disruption. The project aimed to create the least amount of disruption in sex worker workplaces visited.

For example, consideration was taken for sex workers who did short-time introductions to clients (usually 5 minutes) and/or actual bookings (30 minutes to one hour) while part way through a survey. In these situations, sex workers sealed their unfinished survey into an envelope and if the introduction or booking went for longer than the peer researcher could wait they knew that the peer researcher would take it, unfinished, and leave their gift for participating with a colleague or receptionist. Peer researchers felt that this solved possible confidentiality issues for sex workers; no partially complete or complete surveys were left on premises.

Sex workers also understood that it was fine if they did not want to participate in the survey. The peer education, referrals and other engagement by collectors was made available to all sex workers on premises regardless of their participation in the survey. Services were not withheld from those who did not wish to participate. The process of research and provision of services and support were mutually reinforcing and mutually supportive. Researchers actively learnt from the process regardless of whether the sex worker participated in the survey. Sex workers were encouraged to talk to peer researchers in a safe way outside the process of the survey if they needed support.

The process of de-identification, explained by the peer researcher, and also in the translated information handout, meant that sex workers knew they were able to trust the process and share their information confidently, both in the survey and in person. No information on surveys could lead to Immigration raids or police investigation or prosecutions. Support from peer educators lawyers or police was provided both on the handout and in person. Peer researchers gave participants options including referrals to NGO's, lawyers and/or their local sex worker organisation.

The peer researchers utilised existing informal friendship and collegial networks to reach participants, often including what is considered "illegal" workplaces and thus hard to reach by people outside of our industry and hard to reach by people not of that cultural background. Outreach lists of local sex workers organisations and newspapers were also used to arrange collection in sex worker workplaces.

Many sites of collection were contacted prior to outreach. Where possible peer researchers of the language group of the workplace contacted sex worker workplaces in advance and explained the purpose of the survey, in their first language. Then project information pamphlet was faxed or posted to the worker or owner/ manager/receptionist of the proposed outreach venue, in their first language. Follow up calls were made after the information was received and an appointment time or verbal consent to visit was obtained. Using language specific communication reduced any potential for mistakes or misunderstandings about the voluntary nature of allowing collectors to visit the workplace. It was made explicitly clear to all workplaces that both visits from peer researchers and participating in the research was optional.

Collectors did persist however if they felt a particular workplace was important to attend and perhaps not genuine about their objections. Other ways of gaining voluntary entry included visiting the site at a variety of times and on different days to engage with

different members of management. When collectors assessed that a refusal may have not been genuine, and followed up with a personal visit, they were almost always allowed entry even if refusal had occurred previously over the phone. It was also found that upon arrival, if sex workers at the workplace were immediately comfortable with the collectors, management felt more at ease about allowing the project access.

Sex worker collectors were the best placed individuals to assess the reasonableness with which they were being refused entry. If sex workers in that workplace would be genuinely inconvenienced by the project, the collectors preferred not to disrupt their workplace. For example some workplace simply did not have appropriate space to accommodate collection. Other reasons for refusal included being too busy, having been visited by the local sex worker organisation or other researchers recently, or undergoing renovations.

Peer researchers visited sex worker workplaces (brothels, private sex workers' homes, escort agencies) and service centres for sex workers (sexual health clinics, drop in centres) for the purposes of survey collection. Peer researchers also joined the regular outreach to sex worker workplaces in conducted by the local sex worker organisation where possible. The project consciously chose workplaces across a range of sex industry workplace types and premises to ensure sex workers from a range of experiences were represented. Particular consideration was made for premises that had increased potential to be accused or investigated for trafficking, debt bondage, slavery and/or sexual servitude offences. These included workplaces that Steering Committee members and collectors had heard anecdotal accounts of allegations of poor working conditions, and/or premises that had experienced police trafficking raids. Of these workplaces, peer researchers were able to gain entry 100% all of the time, and surveys were successfully collected from the workers at those premises.

English speaking background workplaces were also targeted by peer researchers for inclusion to ensure comparative groups in the data between sex workers who speak English as a first language and those who speak Chinese, Korean and/or Thai and are working in predominantly English speaking workplaces.

The Chinese, Korean and Thai language clinics of Melbourne, Perth and Sydney Sexual Health Clinics were sites of collection as well. The collectors had spaces for collection at an appropriately discreet locations within in the clinics. Triage nurses were briefed on the project and gave potential participants a short verbal explanation about the research and gave sex workers the option to find out more about the research. If sex workers chose to participate they were directed to the area of the clinic where the survey administration protocols were followed in the same way as any other location. At no time did peer researchers solicit participants from the waiting rooms of sexual health clinics.

The Hustling 2 Health peer-only drop in night for street based sex workers in St Kilda, Victoria, was also utilised as a collection site. This was a way of interacting with street based sex workers without interrupting their work in street based settings.

 The survey was undertaken in partnership with state and territory sex worker organisations. Formal agreements (MOUs) were established with these Scarlet Alliance member organisations with the understanding that only peer staff who had completed the training could conduct the research. Some of these sex worker organisations had already firmly established relationships with workplaces, which were utilised by the project. Other sex worker organisations made new networks through partnering with the project. Organisations who do not have multi-lingual staff were able to meet non-English speaking sex workers. This highlighted a well-known problem for sex worker projects, those with multi-lingual projects are able to develop strong peer education networks, others without multilingual staff are less able to do effective outreach. This process also created an additional benefit for sex workers by creating new networks within the sex worker

community that were previously unexplored due to a lack of resources.

Partnerships also allowed for sharing networks, capacity building of sex worker organisations, and raising the profile of the local sex worker organisation.

Conclusion

Meaningful engagement of communities, but especially those that face stigma, marginalisation and criminalisation such as migrant sex workers requires investment in time and resourcing. It can be tempting for researchers to cut corners and time and gain speedier ethics approvals by not involving or researching the target communities at all. Instead some researchers make claims about migrant sex workers or extrapolate on the nature of trafficking in the sex industry by only speaking to a handful of government or non-government agencies and/or service providers "working with" migrant sex workers without ever interviewing migrant sex workers at all. In recognition of the difficulties in gaining access and trust of the more marginalised populations, adequate investment must be made in devising strategies to overcome these perceived and real barriers. In approaching this research, Scarlet Alliance had networks on which we were able to draw upon, but it also meant promotion and outreach to the communities to recruit peer researchers. It required resourcing of participation and investment in interpreting and translation to ensure full and meaningful participation. Ethics approvals processes and MOU's with partner sex worker organisations in collection was often a lengthy but necessary process. To ensure the meaningful participation of affected communities requires effort, resources, determination and patience but ultimately the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. This process led to increased capacity within the community as well as we believe, more credible research outcomes which can be used to inform policy.

Reinharz suggests human research (such as social research) *should* use human tools, *should* use the researcher as a research instrument

(Reinharz, 1979). Included in these tools are personal experiences and imaginative identification and emotion, which have become recognized as valid sources of scholarly knowledge (Riessman, 1994c). Indeed, Polanyi rejects the concept of knowledge that cannot be attributed to the experience of the individual. He proposes a methodology of passion and commitment as an alternative to impossible and undesirable detachment (Reinharz, 1979) (van Heugten, p. 207).

Sex workers were involved in every facet of the project. Importantly this was a research that came from the community, by the community resulting in benefits for the community. The process used enabled us to address questions and issues significant for our community throughout the research process. Ultimately this leads to more meaningful engagement with the community as the questions asked and the analysis of the data is more likely to be relevant to our experiences and less likely to be misinterpreted. An insider approach resulted in unparalleled access to workers and workplaces, particularly CALD sex workers and to workplaces that are stereotypically considered hard to reach. By having sex workers lead and run the project, those leading the research had an understanding of potential issues and could anticipate effective solutions to potential issues before they arose protecting against confounding variables arising throughout the research, such as confidentiality, racism, fear of immigration, suspicion of authority, and sensitivity about migration information.

We believe this trust amongst peers and of the motivations of the research meant sex workers were more likely to respond honestly thus producing more rigorous data.

In addition to the research benefits, perhaps more importantly the research resulted in capacity development and investment in peer education, representation and autonomy of migrant sex workers of Chinese, Korean and Thai language backgrounds- an invaluable resource for the future of migrant sex worker research. These human resources now exist within our migrant sex worker community. The capacity building process of this research project

was a key consideration in the development of our research strategy. We had employed lessons learnt from the previous research in both the administration and development of the research as well as engaging the human resources developed during the previous research process. All these have been expanded upon and developed further in this research project and will inevitably inform and improve our future research efforts. We hope to build upon the findings that have opened up areas for further inquiry and continue to build the capacity of our peer researchers. Even though the community building aspects were a key consideration for us at all times, there were also a number of unintended benefits that occurred. We believe that keeping community needs foremost and aiming to maintain best practice research approaches led to best possible outcomes on a number of levels. Although it does initially take more time and effort to engage thoroughly and meaningfully with the communities researchers seek to research on, this approach leads to more benefits and a more ethically and critically sound, authentic and rigorous research project.

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