



Stigma Snapshot

Sex workers 2022

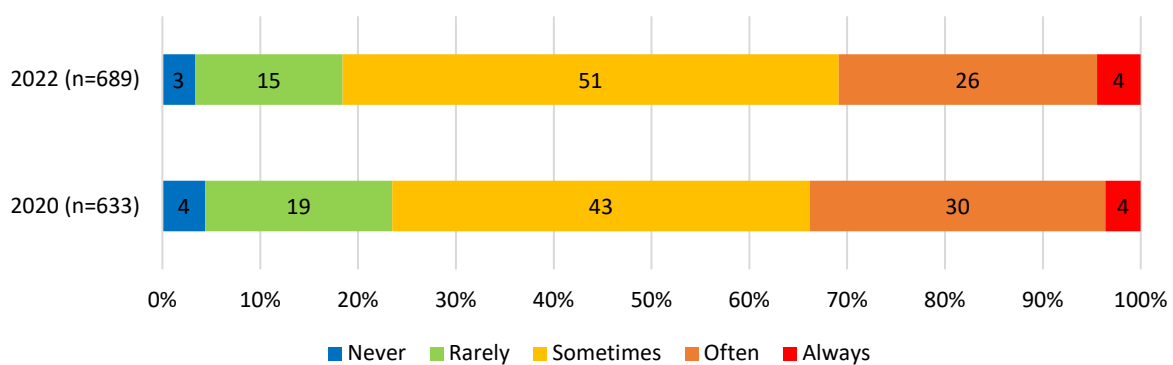
Stigma has a major impact on health outcomes for people living with blood borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The Australian Government Department of Health strategies for BBVs and STIs explicitly aim to “eliminate the negative impact of stigma, discrimination, and legal and human rights issues on people’s health”.

In 2022, a stigma indicator was included in an online survey of sex workers in Australia. This followed on from a previous survey of sex workers conducted by the Centre for Social Research in Health in 2020.

689 people completed the survey

89% female – 87% aged 35 years or younger – 58% heterosexual
18% university educated – 7% born overseas
21% more than 5 years’ experience in Australian sex industry

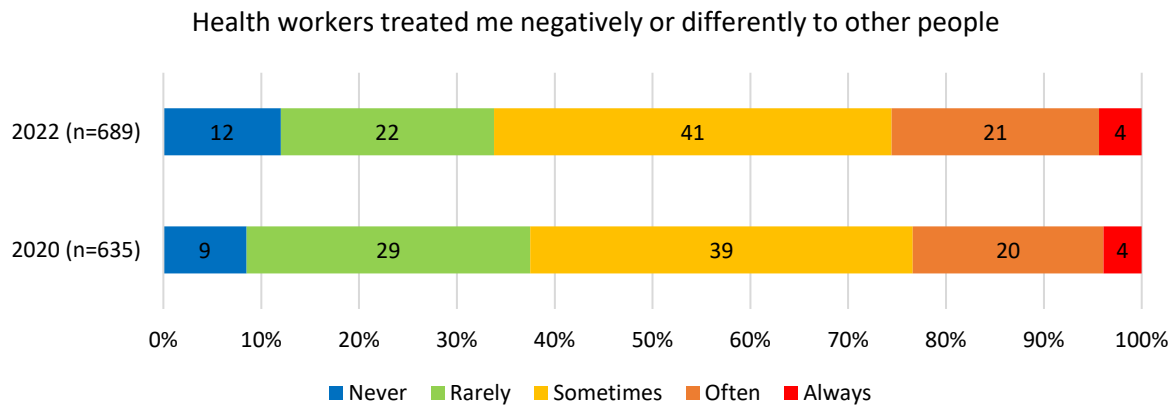
In the last 12 months, have you experienced any stigma or discrimination in relation to your sex work?



In 2022, 97% of sex workers reported experiencing any stigma within the last 12 months in relation to their sex work. This was a similar proportion to the 96% reporting any stigma in 2020. The proportion who reported ‘often’ or ‘always’ experiencing stigma was slightly lower in 2022 than in 2020 (30% vs. 34%).

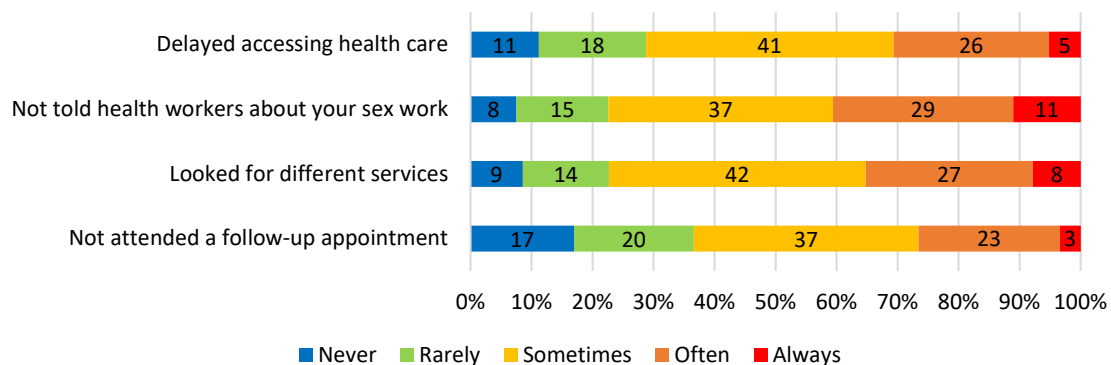


In 2022, 88% of participants reported any negative treatment by health workers in the past 12 months, compared to 91% in 2020. One-quarter of participants in 2022 indicated that health workers had 'often' or 'always' treated them negatively in the past 12 months (compared to 24% in 2020).



Participants were asked additional questions about steps they had taken to avoid being treated negatively by health services.

In the last 12 months, how often have you done the following to avoid being treated negatively or differently by health services?



The most common way participants reported avoiding negative treatment by health workers was to not disclose their sex work (92%). This was followed by looking for different services (91%), delaying accessing health care (89%), and not attending a follow-up appointment (83%). Notably, between 26%-40% reported that they had 'often' or 'always' used these strategies within the past 12 months.

Sex workers in Australia almost universally report experiencing stigma and discrimination in relation to their sex work, with the vast majority also reporting that they were treated negatively within health care settings. Reported experiences of stigma and discrimination in 2022 were not significantly different to those reported in 2020. The implications of this ongoing stigma and discrimination are highlighted by the large proportions of sex workers who had not disclosed their sex work to health services, looked for different services, delayed accessing health care, and not attended follow-up appointments. Significant progress is needed to eliminate stigma within health services and throughout society to ensure sex workers are supported to receive appropriate health care. Wide-ranging interventions are necessary to address stigma towards sex workers across all contexts.

The Stigma Indicators Monitoring Project will continue to monitor experiences of stigma and discrimination reported by sex workers, as well as negative attitudes and behaviour expressed by health care professionals and the general public towards sex workers. This continued monitoring will help inform initiatives to reduce stigma towards sex workers and assess any change following the development and implementation of any future strategic interventions.

If the results presented here have upset you in any way, we encourage you to seek support from Lifeline (13 11 44).

This project was supported by a grant from the Australian Government Department of Health.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable support of Scarlet Alliance and thank everyone who completed the survey.

For more information on this project, please see https://bit.ly/csrh_stigma

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