

**REDTRASEX- LATIN-AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN
FEMALE SEX WORKERS NETWORK**

**10 REASONS FOR THE SEX
WORKERS TO TALK ABOUT
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE
RIGHTS**



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INTRODUCTION

Sexual and reproductive rights are part of the human rights and express the possibility, for every person, to make autonomous decisions regarding our own body and life in the fields of sexuality and reproduction. They implicate the capacity to enjoy sexuality, the right to have consentuous sex, the absence of all kinds of violence, coercion or abuse, the access to quality health care services, the possibility to separate the exercise of the sexuality from reproduction, and to have access to adequate information about our body and all aspects involved with sexuality.

One of the human rights is the right of authority over our own bodies and making autonomous decisions about sexuality without violence, coercion or any kind of discrimination.

Despite SEX WORKERS, being women, found ourselves protected and sheltered by this wide range of rights, many times we are considered “impelled” to decide about ourselves and don’t have access to basic services (such as health care) or we face so much stigma as we face discrimination.

This is why sex workers ask ourselves who are the people that can decide freely, when our decision to be sex workers is plagued with prejudice, pre-concepts and stigma. What about quality health care, when we are pointed out and discriminated against when we try to get medical attention? Why other people control the exercise of our sexuality? Do they know what the consequences are in our daily life because of the lack of regulation in our job? What is the acknowledgement of our autonomy for the people who think we are confused or lack capacity to choose what we want in our life? Why do they insist in condemning our work to secrecy? Public policies that include our specific vindications, they do it from stigmatization or just focalizing in our genitals or the possibility to get or pass around STDs.

In RedTraSex we understand how important it is to talk about sexual rights with an integral look, which includes not just consentuous sexual relations but full knowledge of our bodies, emotions and feelings.

We want to vindicate our capacity to take care of ourselves, feel pleasure in different spaces, including the exercise of sexual work. When we carry out sexual work, we are exercising our right to liberty at the same time we exercise our sexual and reproductive rights. This means we have the right to a violence-free life and not being subdued to unsolicited medical treatments or interventions, as well as enjoying and preserving our intimacy.

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1

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS REPRESENT US AS WOMEN AND AS WORKERS, IN OUR PRIVATE LIFE AND IN OUR WORK LIFE.

In both spaces, female sex workers have the right to fully enjoy sexuality without prejudice or stigma that serves as a base for discrimination.

We can choose how, when and who to have sex with (involving money or not).

We have the right to being informed about all the aspects related and connected to sexuality, that is, we have the right to be informed about every disease we can get through sexual intercourse, about contraceptive methods (all existing methods), its advantages and disadvantages; but also we have the right to receive information about the pleasure of sexuality, our right to have orgasms (in our job and out) and every aspect involved in sexuality (not just focusing in our genitalia).

We also have the right to safe and wanted pregnancies, deciding whether we want children or not, and if we want them, how many they'll be and in which conditions. We have the right to a sex life and, in our case, a work life, safe and violence-free, without being treated differently because of our sexual choices. Likewise, we have the right to sexual autonomous decisions based in our self-esteem and empowerment.

2

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS GUARANTEE US THE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES RESPECTFUL OF OUR LIFE AND WORK CHOICES.

A study carried out by RedTraSex¹ showed that 5 of 10 sex workers (from a total amount of 1006) didn't talk about sexual work in the last consultation regarding reproductive health, most of all because of embarrassment (44%), while more than 1/3 didn't talk because of the fear of rejection and also, fear of other people to finding out.

¹ "Study about stigma and discrimination in health care services against female sex workers in Latin America and the Caribbean". RedTraSex. 2013.

Many times we suffer clear hostility from institutions and professionals, and sometimes we anticipate such hostility and prefer not to seek for medical attention or not telling the medical professional we are sex workers, because many times when we declare our profession, it enables a whole set of verbal and symbolic mistreat – such as moralist speeches regarding sexual work and insistence in the importance of sex workers to change our activity -.

The quality of medical assistance, particularly on sexual and reproductive health, requires communication, trust, information and confidentiality.

In several countries of the region were registered situations where the right to motherhood has been violated by institutional pressures based on stigma about our work. Nobody can threaten us or our children arguing we are not fit to exercise motherhood; sexual work does not keep us from being responsible parents. Sheltering ourselves in the sexual and reproductive rights, we sex workers demand the best health care services, and to be informed on how to take care of our health, without being victims of prejudice and stigma; we also have the right to a sex life free of diseases, or in such case, to demand a proper medical attention to revert them, and the most complete information on how to protect and take care of ourselves while exercising our sexuality the way we choose to.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS PROTECT OUR RIGHT TO RECEIVE AN INTEGRAL ATTENTION

3

In eight countries² of the region exist gynecologic and STDs controls for sex workers, provided by specialized health care centers. Sex workers must attend to this centers with variable frequencies depending on the country (weekly, monthly, biannually) to certify the results of the medical exams in personal health cards or some other kind of credential. Those centers restrict their attention to mandatory health controls or questions about HIV or STD, leaving out other needs regarding sexual and reproductive health.

To health services, sex workers attention is just about our genitalia; this not only violates our right to health care, but turns into a lost chance for a better implementation of health care politics and an integral approach.

2 Uruguay, Guatemala, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina (just in some provinces), Panamá, Colombia (just for private establishments) and Honduras

4

For them, we are still being considered a “source of infection”. Personal health cards are against confidentiality, prevention and HIV/AIDS attention legislation. Universal access should be a right, not a way to control or surveillance.

We sex workers demand quality, warm health care services, including a holistic approach that understands health as an integral process that needs to consider both physical and psychological health. We request the State to provide those services free of charge to all of us. These services must be free of stigma and discrimination: our job can't be a reason to be treated differently by the health care services, and our sexual decisions and the decision of having children or not, mustn't be call into question because of our profession³.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS SHELTER OUR SELF-ESTEEM AND AUTONOMY

As women, and especially as sex workers, we are victims of a whole set of prejudices, pre-concepts, stigmas, and above all, inequalities (economic, cultural, and social) – emerged from ideological bases that the patriarchal system has structured – through which our life is organized.

These inequalities generate less insertion in the labor market, or get paid less than a man doing the same job, or having to take care of household chores, or being victims of violent men or even women who had adopted and reproduce these parameters that victimizes them too.

All of this affects our self-esteem and our empowerment process, because stay relegated to the male figure and our actions are being less considered.

Being sex workers, these stigmas worsen and we face on a daily basis situations of violence and mistreat, from other people as well as state, religious and civil institutions. The reluctance to accept us making choices about our sexuality, including the personal decision of being a sexual worker, clearly violates our sexual and reproductive rights.

Those rights shelter our freedom to empower ourselves and make decisions about our lives and our bodies, connecting better with our sexuality and pleasure, and in this way, strengthen our autonomy and self-esteem. We have the right for our self-esteem not to be diminished

³ Our study shows more than 1/3 of sex workers interviewed, were advised by health care services to change their line of work, 20% were referred to a psychologist and/or infectologist (although appointment was made for other reasons than those) because of them being sex workers, or confidentiality was broken.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS SUPPORT OUR CLAIMS FOR A FULL, SAFE SEXUAL LIFE

5

We want to be protagonists of our sexuality, being able to choose and enjoy those choices.

We can choose to live with a partner or by ourselves, and also, if we want to exercise our full sexuality with a single partner or more people (whether we are involved in affective relationships with them or not).

We have the right to enjoy the exercise of our full sexuality safely, without stigmatization or violence, in work or personal situations. We must always be able to decide whether we involve ourselves in a sexual encounter and which are the rules of that encounter.

Part of being able to make that choice is having available information that allows us to know what the safest way to exercise our sexuality is and what are the risks we are putting ourselves into.

Also, we have the right to a safe space to carry out that sexual encounter. Safety meaning contraception, no stigma, no violence, and guaranteeing our right to life: as women as well as sex workers we have the right to exercise our sexuality in safe spaces, free of violence and mistreat (and don't having to "look for security" from other person outside our sexual partner

REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL RIGHTS CONTEMPLATES OUR RIGHT TO LIVE OUR SEXUALITY WITHOUT VIOLENCE, COERCION, ABUSE, EXPLOITATION OR HARASSMENT

6

Absence of legislation and public policies that regulate our work leads to the implementation of arbitrary, violent practices from the law enforcement agencies and the application of local coexistence codes serve as a justification for conducting searches, detentions, requests for identifications and persecutions.

Testimonies collected in an investigation developed by RedTraSex⁴ give account of

4 - "Study about the incidence and politic participation of female sex workers in Latin America and the Caribbean". RedTraSex. 2013.

the demands for payments and sexual favors on behalf of the law enforcement agencies, incidents related to physical and verbal violence.

Related to the customer, sometimes negotiation about safer sexual practices and/or insisting in the use of a condom may end up in violence. To this day, public institutions aren't prepared to receive this kind of complaints.

Throughout the Region⁵, there are many cases of crimes involving sex workers that have remain unpunished, because of political, judicial or police decisions. In our private life or in our work, we shouldn't be victims of violence coming from police or any institution or person. No one can prevent us from exercising our job nor can they interfere in our decisions regarding our sexuality.

7

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS GUARANTEE OUR RIGHT TO NOT BEING DISCRIMINATED FOR OUR CHOICE TO BE SEX WORKERS

On a daily basis, sex workers go through situations of discrimination related directly to our sexual and work choices. Although we acknowledge discrimination towards women (being worst in the case of poor or indigenous women, for example) is usual inside socio-cultural structures as we are inserted in, discrimination towards Female Sex workers is more intense and it potentiates itself.

Situations like taking our children to school, going to a public establishment, seeking medical assistance⁶, declaring our activity on a form, or simply doing some usual task of the daily sphere, awakes a series of actions in people, many times aggressive towards us, many times stigmatizing and many others, just with the intention of ignoring us.

5 - The most paradigmatic cases are Honduras, Panamá and El Salvador, as we have previously denounced from RedTraSex.

6 - According to our study, 6 out of 10 sex workers polled in the region chooses to seek medical assistance far from where they live to avoid the discovery of their profession by their family or neighborhood, while 4 chooses to seek medical assistance far from the area where they work so the health services wouldn't find out what they do for a living. Thus, 33% wouldn't go to a hospital or health care service to avoid giving explanations about their work. "Study about stigma and discrimination in health care services against female sex workers in Latin America and the Caribbean". RedTraSex. 2013.

Reactions doesn't come just from formal, public institutions, but from society in general, many times influenced by the media and political speeches, mixing up our work with human trafficking and sexual exploitation, or characterizing it as "immoral" or "improper".

These attitudes, generally sustained by prejudices and pre-concepts about our work and ourselves, violates our right not to being discriminated for our sexual choice or the way we live our sexuality.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ALSO INCLUDE OUR RIGHT TO ORGANIZATION

It's been proven that the strategy of organizing ourselves is the most complete way to fight for our rights and modify state and police structures on behalf of our claims.

Our capacity and freedom to organize as women (or everybody) to defend our rights it sheltered by the right of free association, and also by the sexual and reproductive rights. If, after organizing, we can obtain more autonomy, a real empowerment, a better appreciation of our body and our sexuality, and above all, capacity and strategy to resist violence, stigma and discrimination we are victims of (as women and specifically as sex workers), then our right to constitute women workers organizations is also a part of this wide set of Sexual Rights.

OUR RIGHT TO EQUALITY IS ALSO, FOR US, A SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHT.

We female sex workers are being discriminated and marginalized in different spaces just because we have diverse sexual and work choices from the "socially accepted ones" and opt for a job society denies and stigmatizes, at the same time governments condemns us to secrecy and marginality.

In summary, independent and violence-free choices about our sexual life, sheltered in our Sexual and Reproductive Rights generates the denial of our right to equality and access to basic services such as integral health care services, information about our sexual and reproductive health or quality medical assistance; many times we're

8

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pointed out in hospital waiting rooms or mistreated by the administration or medical assistants.

For our population, sexual and reproductive rights have implications on all of our rights: to equality, liberty, health, even our labor rights.

10

SEXUAL RIGHTS BECOME LABOR RIGHTS FOR US

Free exercise of our job is the free exercise of our sexuality. Some of us choose sexual work as the best option and some choose from a much smaller range of choices where sexual work represents our only real alternative to a dignified living and economic independence. We consider ourselves workers, we don't want stigmatizing names like "prostitutes", ours is a decent job and we fight so it will be recognized as that and we can exercise it in the best conditions.

The right to decide about contraception, sterilization, without asking for anybody's "consent" (partner, pimp, State); knowing emergency contraception to avoid unwanted pregnancies; knowing our sexual rights and the mechanisms and institutions to defend them; are a constitutive part of our work.

Secrecy and the lack of laws to protect any job, expose the workers to vulnerability and insecurity. In our case, as female sex workers, the absence of a regulatory structure that acknowledges our job, violates our labor rights as much as our sexual and reproductive rights. Is because of this that the approval of a SEXUAL LABOR LAW is one of the most important ways to guarantee our rights.

SOME OF THE TREATIES THAT PROTECT OUR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Sexual and Reproductive Rights are disseminated through different Treaties and Conferences. They are deeply related to other rights, so for their full observance, all of the Human Rights must be attended to. The precedents of the Sexual and Reproductive Rights can be found in:

- 1** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proposes the protection of the human being in all its integrity, acknowledging intrinsic dignity and equal, inalienable rights of all members of the human family.

- 2** The American Convention on Human Rights (1969) proposes full respect of essential rights of Men and the commitment of American States to fulfil inherent human rights.

- 3** The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976);

- 4** The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976);

- 5** The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) that fights for the extinction of violence and discrimination against women and includes an article on “Prostitution” in which it stands against the exploitation of women’s prostitution⁷.

- 6** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990);

- 7** The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1994) in which the condition of equality and the fulfilment of the rights of women living in the signatory States are guaranteed.

There are also some United Nations Conferences that collaborated with the consolidation and extension of these Rights. Among those we can emphasize:

- 1** The World Conference on Human Rights (Austria, 1993).

- 2** The International Conference on Population and Development (El Cairo, Egypt, 1994)⁸.

- 3** The Fourth World Conference on Women, which led to the Beijing Platform for Action (China, 1995).

7 - Part I, article 6: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”.

8 - This was the first Conference to expressly define reproductive rights.



RedTraSex Red de Mujeres Trabajadoras
Sexuales de Latinoamérica
y el Caribe

Por una ley que reconozca el Trabajo Sexual Autónomo de las mujeres de Latinoamérica y el Caribe

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