

## **Violence against Sex Workers in Latin America: Pervasiveness, Impunity, and Implications**

**By Stephanie A. Bell**

On December 17, 2005, two transgendered sex workers in Guatemala City were shot in the head, one fatally. Witnesses—including the survivor—alleged that police forces shot the victims. Human rights advocates have argued that the attack was part of a broader social cleansing campaign that has targeted all sex workers.

Sex workers in Latin America are subjected to violence regularly. This violence varies greatly, but its pervasiveness and the impunity for perpetrators are two common themes. Violence against sex workers comes from many different sources: police, pimps, johns, serial killers, gang members and others. The violence also takes many forms, including arbitrary confinement, physical and sexual assault, torture, and murder. The police often do not consider violence against sex workers to be a crime, and therefore do not try to investigate or prosecute known perpetrators. Other times, the police are the perpetrators of the violence.

In some Latin American states, including Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, there are widespread murders, most unsolved, of sex workers that have been occurring since at least 2003. In other states, including Argentina, Chile, and Peru, sex workers are assassinated by police when they start organizing to demand that their human rights are met. Police forces have arbitrarily detained sex workers in states where prostitution is legal and then sexually assaulted the sex workers. Sex workers in brothels or who are controlled by pimps often suffer confinement and assault. Clients also physically and sexually assault and murder sex workers.

Violence, police abuse, and the denial that this violence against sex workers is a real crime violates their basic human rights, including the right to security, and the right to being treated equally without discrimination and as a person before the law. The restriction on movement that is imposed on many sex workers (often in the name of combating human trafficking or preserving public health) is a further human rights violation. Finally, sex workers are clearly being subjected to torture, cruel and inhuman punishment and treatment.

Violence against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people is commonplace in many states in Latin America. The widespread and incredibly brutal murders of women in Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador have received international attention and condemnation. Many of these women are sexually assaulted and tortured before actually being killed. Domestic violence, sexual assault, and child sexual abuse are all common occurrences in many states and are often not treated as legitimate crimes. Hate crimes against LGBT persons also occur frequently, with Jamaica, Brazil and Guatemala being infamous for hate crimes and homophobia.

When a girl or woman disappears or is brutally murdered in states such as Mexico and Guatemala, her family must prove that she did not live a “doble vida” [double life] for the police to investigate the crime. Even in cases where there is no doubt of the girl or woman’s

“purity,” there have been few perpetrators brought to justice. Moreover, the need to prove that a woman was not sexually active in order for her to be treated as a full human being demonstrates the position of sex workers in these states. As sex workers are by definition sexually active, they are clearly not seen as full human beings or worthy of police time for either protection or justice.

The widespread violence against women and LGBT people falls in the greater context of machismo culture. Like many cultures, the region of Latin America is a traditional hetero-normative patriarchy, in which men’s wants and needs are given greater value and priority than women’s and children’s. Furthermore, sexual orientation is not determined by the gender of one’s partner, but rather the role taken in sexual acts. Men who have sex with men, but take an “active” role in sexual acts do not consider themselves to be gay or bisexual and are often actively homo- and trans-phobic against those who take a “passive” role.

In reaction to the dangers and oppression that sex workers face, a growing number of sex workers are organizing to demand that their human and labor rights are protected. Many states in Latin America have at least one sex worker organizing project. While some of the organizations were formed with the assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to work on HIV/AIDS prevention, many have since split from NGOs, at times to organize around what they find to be more pressing issues, such as violence. Police violence is a particular concern for these organizations, and they often take direct action and try to work with the police to end the violence. Despite this, leaders of these organizations have been murdered with impunity.

There is a dearth of literature regarding sex workers’ human rights in Latin America. The available academic literature focuses mostly on HIV/AIDS. In addition, there is little documentation or analysis of the prostitution policies of many states, making comparative policy analysis difficult.

Although many different policy prescriptions are advocated by groups with varying agendas regarding sex trade, most policies can be divided into three general stances: prohibition, abolition, and regulation. Prohibitionist policies stem from a concern for common decency and moral societies. These policies punish sex workers and their clients, as is the case of Mexico. Those who advocate abolition, the most common stance in Latin American states, generally can be divided into two well-known ideologies: radical feminism and moral Puritanism. The abolitionists either see prostitution as rape by economic coercion or as corrupting to those involved. Regulation also often takes two forms, with a division between concern for the community and concern for the sex workers. Concerns on both sides include public health concerns, safety concerns, and “decency” concerns.

Each stance has positive and negative implications for preventing violence against sex workers. The prohibitionist view seeks to eliminate sex work and, thus violence against them. However, by stigmatizing and criminalizing both the sex workers and the clients, violence against the sex workers and by the clients increases. Similarly, the radical feminist abolitionist view hopes to prevent violence by eliminating sex work—which they view as inherently violent—altogether. Nonetheless, opponents argue that abolition will never happen and by criminalizing sex work these policies make sex workers far more vulnerable to violence. Although abolitionist policies do not officially punish the sex worker or the

client, but do punish pimping, in practice sex work is driven further underground, making sex workers more vulnerable. Some forms of regulation specifically address violence against sex workers by regulating the environments in which they work. However, other forms of regulation, such as mandatory testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI) and imprisonment for positive tests, increase the stigmatization of sex workers and violate their human rights.

Complete decriminalization is a policy stance as well, but it is currently not an enacted policy in many states. Decriminalization would force policy makers and enforcers in the state to regard sex work as legitimate work with whatever protections that entails. While many sex workers see decriminalization as the ultimate protection against individual and state-sponsored violence, opponents contend that decriminalization leads to more damaging incarnations of sex work, including child prostitution and sex trafficking.

Decriminalization would benefit sex workers' rights by increasing police accountability and by increasing the ability of sex workers to organize. Sex workers are expected to be sexually available to any person, at any time, and in any way, without regard to what has been agreed upon or what the sex worker wants. If prostitution is decriminalized, police would have to give crimes against sex workers the same consideration and investigation as crimes against other persons. Decriminalization would also—importantly—criminalize police abuse against sex workers. Finally, in many states, it is illegal for sex workers to organize to ensure their human and labor rights. If sex work is decriminalized, organizing would also be decriminalized, allowing sex workers greater power in demanding that their rights are met.

International policies are a complicating factor within state policy development. In particular, the USAID policy that prohibits aid to states that work with sex worker organizing projects has proved harmful to some states, including Brazil who rejected the funding. In addition, many of the international anti-human trafficking doctrines have imposed an abolitionist agenda on states that had previously decriminalized or authorized regulatory policies. Finally, the intersection of sex work and transnational migration makes the legal status of many sex workers even more ambiguous.

As is often the case, the most egregious human rights violations occur against the most vulnerable people. In Latin America, sex workers are vulnerable not only because of their stigmatization, but also because of their lack of legal protection or recourse. Therefore, human rights advocacy needs to occur on the individual level, in order to prevent acts of violence and end impunity for perpetrators, as well as on the community level, to reduce stigma and oppression, and finally on state and region-wide levels, to develop policies that will protect the rights of sex workers. Ultimately, economic development policies that focus on women and girls are needed to give those who would like to escape the sex trade other opportunities to support themselves and their families.

### **Annotations**

Allen, Jafari Sinclair. 2007. "Means of Desire's Production: Male Sex Labor in Cuba." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14:183-202.

Annotation: In this ethnographic study, Allen immerses himself in the culture and circumstances of male sex laborers in Cuba. The author focuses on how disparities caused by racist, sexist, and heterosexist assumptions inform the men's experiences. Although most of the male sex laborers in Cuba are from poorer Black families, they still enjoy greater freedom and benefits than female sex workers. In addition, the common Latin American construction of gay men being only those in the more passive sexual role protects the male sex laborers from homophobia. Allen gives a very clear picture of what life is like for these men, and how the Cuban economy and culture inform their experiences.

Amnesty International. 2005. "Guatemala: Fear for Safety: Sulma, Other Transvestite Sex Workers in Guatemala City and members of Integral Sexuality AIDS Support Organisation (OASIS)." (AMR 34/044/2005)  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR34/044/2005/en/dom-AMR340442005en.pdf>.

Annotation: This news release details the violence that sex workers and LGBT individuals face in Guatemala. It focuses in particular on the shooting by police forces of two transgendered sex workers (one of whom was fatally wounded, the other seriously wounded). Both of these sex workers were involved with OASIS, an organization that works on HIV prevention and supports the LGBT community. Amnesty International documents the widespread murders of transgendered sex workers and the violent attacks on OASIS members and workers that have been used to silence the organization.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "No Protections, No Justice: Killings of Women (an Update)."  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR34/019/2006/en/dom-AMR340192006en.pdf>.

Annotation: This report details the extensive problem of kidnappings, rapes, and brutal murders of women in Guatemala. Almost all perpetrators of this violence face no consequences for their actions. Amnesty International found indifference on the part of police and government officials to these murdered women. They also examine the discriminatory laws that facilitate perpetrators' impunity. Families must prove that the victim was an "honest" woman in order for police to even investigate the case. If the victim is believed to be a sex worker or involved in gangs and drugs, the police excuse her torture and murder as her own fault. This is a very compelling and informative report that details the depth of violence that women and their families face in Guatemala. The report also sets forth a list of recommendations that Guatemala should take to prevent this violence in the future and to help families find the justice that they seek.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Jamaica: 'Just a Little Sex.'"  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR38/002/2006/en/dom-AMR380022006en.pdf>.

Annotation: This report details the pervasive sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica. Cultural attitudes and lax laws regarding sexual assault and incest perpetuate the violence against women. Lesbians are also particularly targeted for sexual violence, in an effort to teach them a lesson. Girls and women are often blamed for their assaults, being accused of dressing provocatively or working in the sex trade. This report is very comprehensive, detailing the problem at every level: individual girls and women, communities, cultural attitudes, and policy. It also addresses what is being done to prevent and address the violence, as well as giving extensive recommendations on what Jamaica can do to remedy the problem.

Brennan, Denise. 2004. "Women Work, Men Sponge, and Everyone Gossips: Macho Men and Stigmatized/ing Women in a Sex Tourist Town." *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (4):705-733.

Annotation: In this ethnographic study, Brennan uses gossip as a tool to understanding female sex workers and their male partners in the tourist town of Sosúa, Dominican Republic. In this town, sex tourism has transformed women into the breadwinners of the family, causing an abrupt shift in gender roles. While the women have created a consistent narrative of familial duty to legitimize their work, the men of the town are celebrating their roles as dependents, spending their partners' money on clothes and jewelry, and taking mistresses out to clubs. Many of these men physically abuse or coerce their partners into giving them all of the money that they make as sex workers. Brennan's study gives a vivid account of life in Sosúa with many women recounting their experiences. Nonetheless, it is unknown if this study could be generalized to other sex tourist towns or other parts of the Dominican Republic.

Cabezas, Amalia Lucia. 1998. "Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba." In Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition. Edited by K. Kempadoo, & Doezema, Jo. New York: Routledge.

Annotation: Cabezas focuses in this chapter on female sex workers in Cuba. The author looks at who profits from these women's work, focusing on global capitalism as fuel for the trade. Cabezas critically analyzes past descriptions of female sex workers, both in mainstream media and academic studies, looking at how racism, classism, and sexism inform their depictions. Cabezas also criticizes the pathological model of studying sex workers in favor of looking at the root causes of sex work and why these women's work in the sex industry is given such greater value than other means of supporting themselves. Cabezas' critical look at sex workers in Cuba is helpful in not only examining structural support of the sex industry, but also prescriptive in that the author's aim is to improve the working conditions of sex workers.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Tourism, Sex Work, and Women's Rights in the Dominican Republic." In *Globalization and Human Rights*. Edited by A. Brysk. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Annotation: In this very comprehensive piece, Cabezas illustrates how sex worker organizing projects have used human rights discourse to defend themselves from abuses by both the state and the larger political economy. As in other Latin American states, women are punished for having "public lives." While male sex workers and economically privileged female sex workers face few barriers, any working class female who is out in public can be arrested (often including physical and sexual assaults) for "bothering tourists." The author also includes an insightful and thorough analysis of the disparities caused by the globalized tourist economies and how this affects individuals (particularly women). Although Cabezas focuses on the Dominican Republic and its position as a tourist destination, the author's excellent analysis is easily translatable to many other states in Latin America.

Carrington, Carmen, and Claude Betts. 2001. "Risk and Violence in Different Scenarios of Commercial Sex Work in Panama City." *Research for Sex Work* (June).  
<http://www.nswp.org/pdf/R4SW-04.PDF>.

Annotation: Using a combined ethnographic and survey based study, Carrington and Betts focus on risk for HIV/AIDS and violence among sex workers in Panama City. One in eight sex workers reported being raped while on the job in Panama City. Although sex workers have an almost 100 percent rate of condom use with clients, they do not have the power to negotiate condom use with their intimate partners. This is often due to domestic violence, economic dependence, and stigma. The condom use amongst sex workers in Panama City is significantly higher than other parts of Panama and other parts of Latin America. The authors effectively analyze the complex position of sex workers' empowerment to protect themselves in some instances, while still lacking the power to do that in others.

Chacham, Allesandra S., Simone G. Diniz, Monica B. Maia, Ana F. Galati, and Liz A. Mirim. 2007. "Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Sex Workers: Two Feminist Projects in Brazil." *Reproductive Health Matters* 15 (29):108-118.

Annotation: In this research study, Chacham et al. surveyed and interviewed female sex workers in two different parts of Brazil who were participating in a feminist health project. These projects sought to address all the health needs of sex workers (not just STI/HIV prevention) in an empowering manner. The stigma and discrimination that sex workers face when attempting to access services at public clinics often keeps them from disclosing their work; however, without this knowledge, many practitioners do not offer them services and exams specific to sex work, such as contraception and protection, ways to protect themselves from physical and sexual violence, mental health services, and self-care techniques. The two projects that the authors analyze are powerful examples of how sex workers can

improve their living and working conditions when they are empowered to organize themselves.

Chant, Sylvia, and Carolyn Pedwell. 2008. "Women, Gender and the Informal Economy: An Assessment of ILO Research and Suggested Ways Forward." Geneva: ILO.  
[http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/lang--en/docName--WCMS\\_091605/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/lang--en/docName--WCMS_091605/index.htm).

Annotation: In this comprehensive review of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) research on women in the informal economy, Chant and Pedwell give an extensive summary of the findings of research performed to date and a comprehensive list of recommendations for future research. The authors particularly emphasize the need for research to be accessible and helpful to those whom they are trying to empower, low-income women in the informal economy. Through their research, the ILO is trying to promote "decent work," as defined by four components: employment opportunities, rights, protection, and voice. Decent work as defined by the ILO very much reflects most sex worker organization's goals. ILO uses their research capabilities to give credence to the efforts of sex workers to formalize their work, thereby improving their working conditions.

Chew, Lin. 2005. "Reflections by an Anti-Trafficking Activist." In Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights. Edited by K. Kempadoo, J. Sanghera and B. Pattanaki. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Annotation: In this book chapter, Chew analyzes the intersections of trafficking, sex work, and migration from the perspective of an anti-trafficking activist. The author argues that policies need to reflect a rights-based framework to protect people from becoming victims of trafficking and to improve the lives of all people involved with migration and sex work. Chew finds the punitive laws surrounding both migration and sex work as contributors to human trafficking. If human rights, especially labor rights and freedom of movement, were being met, people would be less vulnerable to violence and oppression from traffickers, pimps, and law enforcement.

Dennis, Jeffery P. 2008. "Women are Victims, Men Make Choices: The Invisibility of Men and Boys in the Global Sex Trade." *Gender Issues* 25:11-15.

Annotation: Dennis critically surveys the literature on global sex workers to examine the disparities between depictions of male and female sex workers. The author finds that the risks of sex work are often minimized for males, and that sexual orientation is only examined with male sex workers. Dennis concludes that heterosexist assumptions cause the disparities in the research. This article is a good survey of existing literature on sex workers and raises consciousness about what sexist and heterosexist assumptions inform the research on the global sex trade.

Disogra, Carlos E., Rodrigo Mariño, and Victor Minichiello. 2005. "Self-Reported Use of Health Services, Contact with Police and Views about Sex Work Organizations among Male Sex Workers in Cordoba, Argentina." *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 17 (1/2):181-195.

Annotation: Disogra et al. surveyed male sex workers (MSWs) in Cordoba, Argentina, to assess their use of health services, the frequency and quality of interactions with police, and their desire for a sex worker organization in Cordoba. Most respondents had trouble accessing public services due to long waits and limited hours of operations. Although MSWs generally reported few interactions with police, many of those that had interactions reported police telling them to leave, with fewer reporting physical violence from the police and none reporting sexual assault. The respondents strongly wanted a sex worker organization in Cordoba. Most respondents wanted such an organization to address complete decriminalization, health services, job alternatives, and discrimination against sex workers. The authors provide an important description of the experiences and needs of male sex workers in Cordoba although it is unclear whether these findings could be generalized to other parts of Latin America.

Doezema, Jo. 2002. "Who Gets to Choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol." *Gender and Development* 10 (1):20-27.

Annotation: Doezema uses a historical perspective to analyze the effects that the 2000 UN Trafficking Protocol will have on sex workers, particularly migrant sex workers from poorer countries. The author looks at how historically anti-trafficking legislation has been used to repress sex workers and female immigrants. Although the protocol leaves governments free to recognize sex work as a legitimate profession, it also allows governments to discourage sex workers from organizing, restrict their freedom of movement and migration, and persecute sex workers in the name of fighting trafficking. Doezema surmises that a new framework is needed, one that is developed by sex workers themselves and one that both recognizes women's ability to consent to sex work and recognizes the false dichotomy between innocent trafficking victims and guilty prostitutes.

Ertürk, Yakin. 2005. "Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women, Mission to Guatemala." United Nations, Commission on Human Rights.  
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G05/108/17/PDF/G0510817.pdf?OpenElement>.

Annotation: This report documents Ertürk's findings from a visit to Guatemala after receiving reports of widespread brutal murders of women and girls in the state. The author was impressed with the newly elected president's commitment to ending violence against women, but found that the long history of brutal crimes during the civil war and the culture of impunity contribute to the continued violence. Over 1400 women were brutally murdered in a four-year period in Guatemala. The author

provides a comprehensive account, not only of the crimes against women, but also cultural, historical and economic factors that contribute to the violence. Ertürk also provides an extensive list of recommendations to protect women and bring the perpetrators to justice.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and a Gender Perspective: Violence against Women, Mission to Mexico*. New York: United Nations, Commission on Human Rights.

Annotation: Ertürk documents her findings in Mexico on violence against women, focusing in particular on the brutal murders that have been taking place in the border regions and the *machista* culture that enables violence against women. The author provides a comprehensive background on the federalized government structure of Mexico and the widespread gender inequality and discrimination, both contributing factors to the impunity of those who commit violence against women. Ertürk also documents the steps that Mexico has taken to rectify the situation, and recommends further actions to be taken on a local, state, and federal level.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, Yakin Ertürk: Intersections between Culture and Violence against Women." United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/103/04/PDF/G0710304.pdf?OpenElement>.

Annotation: In this comprehensive report, Ertürk, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, examines how culture contributes to and often excuses violence against women. The author argues that oppressive cultural practices need to be changed and that culture is not an excuse for violence. The author further argues that identity politics are contributing to women's oppression, particularly when indigenous rights to practice customs are violent towards women. The author uses numerous examples from many different states, including examples from Latin America, and ends with a comprehensive list of recommendations for international bodies, regions, and states.

- Facio, Alda. 2003. "Trafficking in Women and Children for the Sex Trade: Reflections from a Latin American Human Rights Feminist." *Canadian Woman Studies* 22 (3/4):136-142.

Annotation: Facio, the Director of the Women, Gender and Justice Program at United Nations Latin American Institute for Crime Prevention (ILANUD), uses a feminist human rights framework to examine the problem of trafficking of women and children in Latin America and the Caribbean. Facio gathers much of her information on the situation from conventions of the UN, non-governmental organizations, and various governments, giving this article a unique perspective. Although Facio mostly focuses on the overall situation of widespread trafficking and

the vast sex industry in Latin America, the author also explores characteristics of the individuals involved, including the childhood sexual abuse of many sex workers and the pathos of men who want to have sex with women and children who do not want to have sex with them. Furthermore, the author advances a controversial argument that the legalized and widely accepted prostitution industry in many Latin American countries contributes to the widespread sex trafficking in the region.

Fregoso, Rosa Linda. 2006. "We Want Them Alive': The Politics and Culture of Human Rights." *Social Identities* 12 (2):109-138.

Annotation: In this article, Fregoso uses a highly theoretical approach to examine the murders and disappearances of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The author also examines how family members and advocates for the victims have been using feminist and human rights discourses to advocate for women's rights. The author examines how calling the victims "señoritas" separates them from less worthy victims such as sex workers. Fregoso argues that a feminist human rights framework needs to penetrate both the cultural and the political spheres to truly make a difference in the lives of women.

Hinchberger, Bill. 2005. "Support for Sex Workers Leaves Brazil without US Cash." *The Lancet* 366:883-884.

Annotation: Hinchberger relays the successful sex workers' organizing campaign against police brutality and HIV/AIDS in Brazil. New regulations from USAID forcing recipients of monetary aid to condemn prostitution have caused the Brazilian government to reject the \$40 million aid package unless USAID backs down on that position. Brazil argues that the sex worker organizations founded the movement to fight HIV/AIDS and are what keeps it effective. This brief article is a powerful example of the dilemmas that US regulations against prostitution cause states like Brazil. Hinchberger also shows how immensely effective organized sex workers can be in addressing both their own problems and those of their communities.

Holloway, Pippa. 2003. "Regulation and the Nation: Comparative Perspectives on Prostitution and Public Policy." *Journal of Women's History* 15 (1):202-211.

Annotation: In this review of five books on prostitution policy in different states and regions of the world, Holloway not only reviews the books themselves but also the different policies documented in each book. Most of the reviewed books take a historical perspective, and two of the books focus on Latin American states, Argentina and Mexico. Holloway focuses in particular on the historical precedence of separating public women's sexuality and private women's sexuality in the name of public health and how this has led to abuse of sex workers. Holloway also draws distinction between socialist and capitalist states on how they address policies regarding prostitution. The author uses the books to develop a broad overview of prostitution policy in different states.

Human Rights Watch. 2004. "Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence, and Jamaica's HIV/AIDS Epidemic." Human Rights Watch 16(6)  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11894/section/1>.

Annotation: In this comprehensive report, Human Rights Watch details the instances and culture of homophobia in Jamaica. The brutal murder of prominent Jamaican gay rights activist, Brian Williamson, brought international attention to the rampant homophobia that pervades Jamaican culture. The author also documents the violence that men who have sex with men, and male and female sex workers, face at the hands of police, who often extort money and sex from the workers. Human Rights Watch also looks at how pervasive homophobia has hampered the efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Jamaica, a growing epidemic. Finally, the report details a list of recommendations to combat homophobia and prevent HIV/AIDS.

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\_\_\_\_\_. 2008. "Right Abuses Fueling Global HIV Epidemic: Government, Police Actions Blocking Access to HIV Prevention." *Human Rights News*  
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/07/14/mexico19353.htm>.

Annotation: In this brief article, Human Rights Watch documents the violence and discrimination that sex workers and men who have sex with men face in many countries, but particularly focusing on Mexico. Although Mexico effectively addresses HIV/AIDS in certain policies, the punitive laws and abuse of sex workers, men who have sex with men, and the workers that try to help them greatly undermine these policies. This leaves everyone less safe. The authors applaud the International AIDS Society for focusing on human rights. This article gives a good general overview the far-reaching effects of abuse and discrimination against sex workers in Mexico.

Kempadoo, Kamala. 2004. Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor. New York: Routledge.

Annotation: In this book, Kempadoo argues for an openness of female Caribbean sexuality in an attempt to dismantle the capitalist, racist heteropatriarchy of Caribbean culture. The author sees sex work as liberating for women because it defies the concept of the monogamous female and promiscuous male, and more importantly because it makes explicit the economic relations of sexual labor. Kempadoo examines sexual labor by most women (not just professional sex workers) as a fundamental part of both the culture and the economy of the Caribbean, a place where men's racialized needs and wants and capitalism drive the agenda, thereby causing exploitation, oppression, violation, and discrimination of women. Finally, Kempadoo asserts how women can help themselves, not by giving up sex work, but rather by demanding a fundamental change in the structure of their worlds and resisting their systems of oppression.

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\_\_\_\_\_. 2005. "Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights." In The Global Resistance Reader. Edited by L. Amoore. New York: Routledge.

Annotation: In this chapter, Kempadoo examines sex workers' rights in the era of globalization. The author focuses on how globalizing forces have impacted the sex industry and its workers. Kempadoo dissects the interactions of the developed and the developing world as seen in sex tourism, international mandates, the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, and sex worker organizing. The author's thorough account of sex worker organizing is particularly well-documented. Kempadoo argues that the organizing of poorer states' sex workers has gone virtually unnoticed, which further marginalizes them.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "The War on Human Trafficking in the Caribbean." *Race & Class* 49:79-85.

Annotation: In this article, Kempadoo documents the problems that the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) presents for states in the Caribbean. In particular, Kempadoo focuses on the aspect in which US trafficking mandates differ from the UN mandates. The TVPA links all forms of prostitution to trafficking and punishes states with legalized prostitution or otherwise supported prostitution with possible economic sanctions. Kempadoo opposes this linkage because of both policy and theoretical implications. The author believes that by equating all sex work with trafficking, the US is denying women their sexual agency and ignoring the root causes (poverty, oppression, etc.) of why women work in the sex industry. Kempadoo's view of trafficking is interesting in that the author frames it as a moral panic rather than a human rights issue.

Khan, Irene. 2005. "El Salvador: End Impunity for Violence against Women." London, (13 October). <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR29/002/2005/en/dom-AMR290022005en.pdf>.

Annotation: In this letter, Khan, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, pressures El Salvador's president, Elías Antonio Saca, to address the brutal violence against women that occurred in El Salvador. From 2002 to 2004, at least twenty women were brutally tortured, sexually assaulted, murdered, and dismembered in El Salvador. Very few of the cases have been investigated. Family members and women's advocates have been ignored or harassed by the police. The gruesomeness of the crimes, with women's body parts floating in nearby rivers, has caused general terror for women in the country. Khan uses El Salvador's ratification of various human and women's rights agreements to pressure President Saca into action.

Langberg, Laura. 2005. "A Review of Recent OAS Research on Human Trafficking in the Latin American and Caribbean Region." *International Migration* 43 (1/2):129-139.

Annotation: In this research study, Langberg documents the situation of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean after the UN Protocol of 2000 was put into place. The author found that poverty, sexism, and violence fuel the sexual trafficking of women. In addition, many states equate sexual

trafficking with both smuggling of migrants and prostitution, and persecute trafficking victims as law-breakers. Furthermore, many law enforcement units do not have the resources to address the multi-faceted issue of trafficking. Finally, the author concludes that many states in Latin America and the Caribbean are making slow but steady progress in fighting human trafficking.

Longo, Paulo, and Paulo Telles. 2001. "Violence against Female Sex Workers in Brazil: Preliminary Findings from a Horizons Study." *Research for Sex Work* (June)  
<http://www.nswp.org/pdf/R4SW-04.PDF>.

Annotation: In this brief article, Longos and Tellos give a good overview of violence against sex workers in Brazil and the recourse for rights violations. Violence from clients is normalized as being part of the work in Brazil, but police violence is seen as an actual abuse. Sex workers do not seek help when they become the victims of violence because most of the documented violence comes from the police and sex workers often do not know whom to go to for help. Most do not know of any recourse they can take if their human rights are being violated. This article gives a good overview of both violence against sex workers and common conceptions of human rights enforcement in Brazil.

Middleburg, Maurice I. 2006. "The Anti-Prostitution Policy in the US HIV/AIDS Program." *Health and Human Rights* 9 (1):3-15.

Annotation: In this article, Middleburg explains the practical implications of the US regulation to restrict HIV/AIDS funding to organizations that denounce prostitution in developing countries. The author also reflects on the situation from an ethical and rights-based framework. Middleburg concludes that the policy is not only ineffective in reducing prostitution, it also endangers sex workers' rights and public health. Middleburg's analysis of the US policy shows not only its far-reaching implications, but also what these implications look like for the most vulnerable members of society.

Munro, Vanessa E. 2008. "Of Rights and Rhetoric: Discourses of Degradation and Exploitation in the Context of Sex Trafficking." *Journal of Law and Society* 35 (2):240-264.

Annotation: Munro questions the categorization of sex trafficking as necessarily a human rights abuse. The author examines the charges that come with trafficking (exploitation, coercion, etc.) to determine their congruence with human rights abuses. If exploitation and coercion are seen as human rights abuses, they could be incited in many situations that would not be commonly considered as trafficking. Munro concludes that the complexity of the situation should preclude any sweeping decisions or generalizations. Munro thoroughly explains the legal precedents and implications of classifying trafficking as a human rights abuse.

Oliveira, Maria Waldenez de, Joyce Moreno, and Luciana Furlanetto Pereira. 2001. "Taking a Look at Sex Work, Risks, and Violence in Brazil." *Research for Sex Work* (June) <http://www.nswp.org/pdf/R4SW-04.PDF>.

Annotation: In this brief article, the authors document the self-reporting of violence against sex workers in Brazil and their reactions to it. Sex workers do not have legal worker's rights in Brazil as in many parts of the world. They see violence as an everyday risk of working in the sex trade. Female sex workers have no power or recourse to defend themselves against violence, so they use the skills that they do have—negotiation, speaking softly and being obedient—in attempts to defend themselves. Nonetheless, in doing so, they often end up giving the client sexual services without payment. This article is useful in that the information comes directly from sex workers themselves and could feasibly be generalized to other Latin American states.

Padilla, Mark B. 2008. "The Embodiment of Tourism among Bisexually-Behaving Dominican Male Sex Workers." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37:783-793.

Annotation: In this ethnographic study, Padilla examines the notions of sexuality and gender identity among male sex workers in the Dominican Republic. As in many Latin American states, sexual orientation in the Dominican Republic is determined by the role a man takes in sexual acts, not the gender of his partner. The sex workers who Padilla interviewed fiercely maintained their masculinity and heterosexuality by taking only active roles in sexual acts. Although they sought gay men as clients, they simultaneously stigmatized gay men and fought hard to avoid public association with them. Padilla provides insight into the practices and reasoning of male sex workers in the Dominican Republic. The distinction between active and passive (men's and women's) roles that many Latin Americans use to determine sexual orientation reveals the stigmatization and oppression that both gay men and all women face in Latin America.

Phillips, Joan. 2008. "Female Sex Tourism in Barbados: A Postcolonial Perspective." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 14 (2):201-212.

Annotation: Phillips uses a postcolonial perspective to study male sex workers in Barbados who financially benefit from having sex with female tourists. The mostly Black sex workers come from an enslaved past while the White tourists are the descendants of their oppressors. Phillips further analyzes how the men, despite escaping from the violence that besieges most sex workers, are nonetheless stereotyped through their racial identity as dependents who are exploited for their sexual labor. Phillips also touches on the negative consequences that the male sex work has on local women and the local community. Phillips' description of the phenomena of postcolonial female sex tourism critically analyzes how postcolonial racialized identities inform the interactions.

Pizarro, Gabriela Rodriguez 2008. "Human Trafficking in Latin America in the context of international migration." In Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions. Edited by S. Cameron and E. Newman. New York: United Nations University Press.

Annotation: Pizarro, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, discusses in this chapter how international migration intersects with human trafficking in Latin America. Pizarro details both the UN mandates on human trafficking and international migration, and also the trends in migration and human trafficking in different states in Latin America. The author briefly discusses the particularly vulnerable position of women and children in being trafficked into coercive sex work and differentiates coercive and voluntary sex work for adults. This chapter serves as an excellent overview of the UN's position on human trafficking and its intersection with international migration as well as trends within individual Latin American states.

REDTRASEX. 2007. "The Network in Countries." In 10 Years of Action (1997-2007): The Experience of Organizing the Network Sex Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by REDTRASEX. Buenos Aires, Argentina: REDTRASEX. [http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion_ENG.pdf).

Annotation: In this chapter of REDTRASEX's extremely comprehensive report, the regional sex workers' network details the activities of all of its member organizations in fourteen different states. This is an excellent primer on what sex worker organizations exist in Latin America, as well as these organizations achievements and goals. Although the organizations differ, some common issues persist, including police abuses, violence, lack of education and other work opportunities, HIV/AIDS prevention, detrimental policies, stigmatization and discrimination. A few of the organizations also document the unsolved murders of their leaders.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "The Sex Work in Americas, America and the Caribbean." In 10 Years of Action (1997-2007): The Experience of Organizing the Network Sex Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by REDTRASEX. Buenos Aires, Argentina: REDTRASEX. [http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion_ENG.pdf).

Annotation: In this section, REDTRASEX provides a brief but comprehensive overview of sex work in Latin America. The network details the stances that governments in some states have taken regarding sex work and the impact this has on sex workers themselves. REDTRASEX finds all three common stances (prohibitionist, regulatory, and abolitionist) as they are currently practiced to be harmful to sex workers. The network also looks at the structural causes of sex work, including poverty, machismo culture, migration, and lack of education and other work opportunities.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "United in One Voice." In *10 Years of Action (1997-2007): The Experience of Organizing the Network Sex Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean*. Edited by REDTRASEX. Buenos Aires, Argentina: REDTRASEX. [http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/10-en-accion_ENG.pdf).

Annotation: This chapter lays out the foundation of the REDTRASEX organization, including the mission, vision, principles, and year-by-year history. The organization exists to give sex workers lives free of violence, stigma and discrimination, with comprehensive healthcare available to them. The network was founded with the common vision of female sex workers organizing themselves. The history of the network shows not only their growth as an organization, but also the developing issues in sex work. The original focus was mostly on ending violence and police repression against sex workers, but has come to include other issues as they have arisen, including HIV/AIDS.

Reynaga, Elena. 2008. "Sex Work and Human Rights." Paper read at International AIDS Conference (August 6) <http://www.redtrasex.org.ar/principal.htm>.

Annotation: In this address, Reynaga, the founder of the Argentinean sex worker organization, AMMAR, executive secretary of AMMAR and the Latin American sex worker network REDTRASEX, discusses the human rights abuses against sex workers, focusing in particular on HIV/AIDS prevention. Reynaga also details the violence that many sex workers face, including sexual assaults from the police. Reynaga argues that organizations and governments need to work with sex workers on the policies that affect them. Although a full list of recommendations is included, Reynaga sees the most important need for sex workers is the recognition of their work as an actual work and the abolishment of all legislations that criminalize sex work.

Ribeiro, Manuela, and Octávio Sacramento. 2005. "Violence against Prostitutes: Findings of Research in the Spanish—Portuguese Frontier Region." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12 (1):61-81.

Annotation: Ribeiro and Sacramento distributed questionnaires and interviewed an extensive number of Latin American immigrant women who were working in brothels along the Spanish-Portuguese border. The authors document the extremely claustrophobic nature of these women's lives, as they often live in the same room where they see clients. Furthermore, the two-fold stigmatization and discrimination they face as both undocumented immigrants and as sex workers (despite the decriminalization of prostitution in both countries) isolates them in the greater community. The authors show how violence (physical, sexual, and emotional) impacts these women's lives, even though they are in a theoretically less dangerous situation as "indoor" sex workers. Finally, the authors document where these women have come from and why. Most come from the poorest groups in the poorest countries of Latin America. Although this study did not take place in Latin America,

Ribeiro and Sacramento give a thorough account of what happens after women leave to do sex work abroad.

Sanders, Teela, and Rosie Campbell. 2007. "Designing out Vulnerability, Building in Respect: Violence, Safety, and Sex Work Policy." *The British Journal of Sociology* 58 (1):1-19.

Annotation: Sanders and Campbell advocate for an overhaul of British (and global) policy towards sex work. The authors argue that the criminalization and stigmatization of both sex workers and their clients allow rampant violence against sex workers to continue. The authors use qualitative data from two studies of mostly indoor sex workers to elucidate how violence against sex workers (and street sex workers in particular) can be prevented. The authors argue against the victim-centered crime prevention approach wherein victims are given the burden of preventing crimes. Rather, the authors argue that prevention campaigns must target the potential perpetrators of violence. The authors also argue that governments must decriminalize sex work and institute crime prevention measures to protect sex workers while they work. However, the authors also contend that no policy measures will be fully effective until cultural attitudes shift from viewing sex workers as disposable non-citizens to full citizens whose human and labor rights need to be respected.

Saunders, Penelope. 2005. "Traffic Violations: Determining the Meaning of Violence in Sexual Trafficking Versus Sex Work." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (3):343-360.

Annotation: Saunders uses the history of White slavery and feminist abolitionism to examine the current discourse on violence in sexual trafficking and sex work. The author shows how patriarchal notions of female sexuality have caused feminists who wish to abolish prostitution to side with conservative forces that often criminalize the sex worker. The author argues that sex worker organizations that see the harm that some anti-trafficking regulations cause need to reclaim the agenda by focusing on their own human rights to a life free of violence. Saunders shows how both sides couch their arguments in a feminist human rights framework, yet Saunders finds that the policy implications of the trafficking legislation increase the violence and oppression that sex workers face.

United Nations. 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The United Nations. <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

Annotation: This formative international doctrine on human rights provides precedent for examining the abuses against the human rights of sex workers. Many of the articles apply to the documented abuses that sex workers face, often at the hands of governments and government agents. Advocates for sex workers as well as sex workers themselves have used the language and mandates of the Declaration to demand adherence when it comes to their rights.

Wolffers, Ivan, and Nel van Beelen. 2003. "Public Health and the Human Rights of Sex Workers." *The Lancet* 361:1981.

Annotation: In this short article, Wolffers and van Beelen advocate for a shift in the public health focus on sex work, from looking at sex workers as a source of contagion for HIV and other STIs to looking at the holistic health needs of sex workers themselves. The authors examine the stigmatizing effects of most public health approaches to sex workers. The authors also note how many sex workers are far more concerned with the immediate violence of which they are often victims than the risks of HIV and other STIs. Nonetheless, many public health workers focus strictly on preventing the spread of disease and not on protecting sex workers from violence. Finally, the authors advocate for the decriminalization of sex work as a means to promote the holistic health and safety of sex workers and the greater community.

Wright, Melissa W. 2004. "From Protests to Politics: Sex Work, Women's Worth, and Ciudad Juárez Modernity." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (2):369-386.

Annotation: Wright again uses a Marxist-feminist framework to analyze the disappearance of women from public space in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The author focuses on three facets of these disappearances: the publicity machine that triumphs new high-tech masculine industries that are replacing the older feminine *maquiladora* industries, the widespread kidnapping and brutal murders of women and girls in the city, and the effort to clean up the downtown area by removing sex workers from public spaces (often including robberies and sexual assaults by police officers). Wright details how women are blamed for their victimization. Murder victims are accused of living double lives as prostitutes, and many think that there is no such thing as victimization of a sex worker. The author extensively interviewed the sex workers and activists as well as utilized local news and official statements to great effect. Although Wright's article is very specific to Ciudad Juárez, it also gives an extremely in depth account of women's value in this infamous Mexican city.

Wright, Melissa W. 2006. "Public Women, Profit, and Femicide in Northern Mexico." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105 (4):681-698.

Annotation: Wright uses a Marxist-feminist framework to analyze feminist groups that are organizing around the disappearances and brutal murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and the state of Chihuahua in Mexico. Wright focuses in particular on the group, Ni una Mas, meaning not one more. Officials refuse to investigate many of the disappearances and murders because they believe that the victims were "public women." This term often denotes a sex worker, but it can also describe any woman who lives publicly, meaning any woman who ventures out of the domestic sphere. The women who make up Ni una Mas are trying to eliminate the stigma of the public woman by living their lives publicly in advocating for other women. Wright

also includes a critical analysis of the intersection of globalized capitalism as a funding source for this group.