

Experiences of Sex Workers in Johannesburg

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In South Africa, sex work has been one of the most hotly debated issues. And, debates have gone around on the decriminalisation of sex work and its legalisation.

While this is the question, there are many experiences for people in this field of work as there are many thoughts and behaviours shared by society on these issues that allow sex workers to experience an immense number of murders, rights violations, stereotypes, and discrimination in their line of work.

Most sex workers fall into this line of work because of their circumstances and the “scarcity” of jobs created by capitalism to be able to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

A 58-year-old woman who chose to be identified as Lebo from Bloemfontein said that she started this work to support her brother’s children as well as her own.

“I used to work in the kitchen but the money was not enough and I did not get an education,” said Lebo. She mentioned that she was very young when her parents passed on as she was still in grade 7, and later lost her brother whose children she now has to provide for. Lebo has been in this field for the last 15 years.

When asked what her experiences are in the field and how she is seen by the society she said that some people are accepting and others are not and that she has no support at all. “They can do and say what they want, I don’t care about anyone,” said Lebo

Lebo also spoke about how sex work is not safe and that there are many cases of sex workers being murdered which scares her a bit. “This job is very dangerous, just recently there was (sic) news that some women that are sex workers were murdered after leaving with a customer.”

She said that she manages to get some good customers and others are just bad in terms of treatment and respect for her. She tries to keep safe by telling her customers that she has her own place and that she won’t be going anywhere with them.

Though the field is a little chaotic and is still considered illegal in this country, Lebo does not believe that any other job can provide for her family as this one does. “I am okay with my job and I will rather stay here than do any other job,” said Lebo.

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