Acknowledgements

This report was written by Stacey-Leigh Manoek, a consultant and attorney at the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT). The information and data was collected and provided by Nosipho Vidima (Say Her Name Coordinator), Lesego Tlhwale (Media Advocacy Officer) and Ishtar Lakhani (Advocacy Manager). We would also like to acknowledge the sex workers and the families of those whom we lost and whose contributions have been instrumental in the fight for human rights for sex workers.

This report was made possible with funding support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Oxfam. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this Say Her Name publication lies entirely with the authors.
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“She was a dutiful daughter who loved and respected her parents and made sure they did not suffer. She taught her friends a lot about life and in life. She loved to sleep and her rest. She loved joking around.”

– by Lebo (friend)

Mamoeti Mosoati

“Anisa was 33 years old when she was killed. She could be wild, but also cute and adorable. Her parents had both died, but she had a younger brother that loved her and got excited and lightened up whenever she came home.”

Anisa Adam
TO COMMEMORATE & HONOUR
Ntombovuyo Christina Ntamo

“Ntombovuyo was a sweet person who loved people, straight talker, generous and sharing. Loved companionship, solidarity and unity with her fellow sex workers, honest about her journey an activist in action. She loved beautiful wigs/hair, she would even swap wigs off peoples head if she thought yours was much more beautiful. She loved her boyfriend and always talked about him ‘Nini’ this ‘Nini’ that…”
– Dudu Dlamini

“When I first met her we got into the same taxi and again the next day only to realise we worked the same job and since then we became close friends”
– Nobuhle

“She would make me laugh even when I’m angry, I remember the last time she came home she came home drunk ‘Mama, mama I have a vegetable combo for you’ calling me coming from the other end of our street, but this was her nature she would bring me nice things for mother’s day blankets etc. The first time I ate pizza was because she came home with it for mother’s day, she would do these sweet things for me and teach me new things. My nickname for her was Voyvoy her father would call her”
– Ntombovuyo’s mother
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The #SayHerName Campaign exists to commemorate and honour women who have been taken from us by violence. It further aims to protect and uphold sex worker’s human rights including the constitutional rights to access to healthcare, freedom from violence, access to justice and labour law protections.

Sex workers in South Africa are confronted with high levels of violence, stigma, discrimination and many other human rights violations, which we believe is the direct result of the criminalisation of their work. The violence that sex workers experience increases their risk of STI and HIV infection, and also prevents sex workers from accessing health, social and legal services and information. During the period 2014 – 2017, the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) received reports of 118 women who sell sex and who have died as a result of violence. More than 50 percent of the deaths reported were as a result of murder, which is defined as “The unlawful killing of another human being without justification or excuse”.

It is for this reason that SWEAT advocates for the full decriminalisation of sex work as most respectful legislative model to ensure the realisation of sex worker’s human rights.

“She was a proud mother of 3, always laughing and very funny person. She worked all night and went back in the morning to her children having bought for them nice things, she also volunteered for sex workers program because of her passion and love for people.”

– by Khethimpilo Peer Educator

Nelisiwe Thwala
“Amanda, known as ‘shorty’ loved attention and dressing up – she craved the love of a family. She was a bundle of energy -the phrase “dynamite comes in small packages” comes to mind because she was petite but had an explosive personality. Because of her size she was always treated like the baby sister, the baby daughter. There was always a bigger sister who would take care on the role of protector, care giver and mentor. She will surely be missed. At least we can be assured that heaven is one beautiful cherub richer.”

– By Leonie Geduld

In South Africa, sex work and its related activities are criminalised in both national and municipal legislation. As a result, sex workers work in oppressive conditions, and experience discrimination, which manifests itself as violence and a denial of access to health and justice services.

As a direct result of the criminalisation of sex work, workers experience grave human rights violations. To address these, in 2016, the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) launched the #SayHerName Campaign to protect and uphold sex worker’s human rights including the constitutional rights to access to healthcare, freedom from violence, access to justice and labour law protections.

The Campaign’s name is drawn from an American social movement which drew attention to the murder of black women who were dehumanised in the media and whose deaths received very little attention – being framed in headlines only as “woman found dead” or “body found” and never introduced as a human being whose loss is noted and mourned.¹

Through the Campaign, SWEAT aims to humanise sex workers to ensure that violence against them is recognised and that justice is sought for those who were murdered and further sought to address stigma and the way in which police investigate crimes committed against sex workers. The campaign also encourages sex workers to report crimes they experience or witness.

The Campaign enables SWEAT and the Sisonke National Sex Worker Movement of South Africa (Sisonke) to publically respond to sex worker human rights violations, refer sex workers for legal representation and provide court support and case monitoring in cases were sex workers human rights are violated. Human rights violations will be investigated and where sufficient evidence exist, complaints processes and other avenues for recourse will be used to vindicate sex worker’s human rights.
In 2014 we started collecting data relating to the deaths of sex workers. We created a report sheet, an example of which is in Annexure A, which we also shared with our partners.

We collected data using various means. Our Media Advocacy Officer and media liaisons pursue cases identified from the media by following-up with journalists as well as individuals identified in the articles, for example, investigating officers. We also receive reports from Peer Educators who conduct Outreach where sex workers work as well as facilitate ‘creative spaces’ with sex workers. In addition, we receive reports from SWEAT’s National 24-hour sex worker Helpline. Finally, our Human Rights Defenders also report where the deaths of sex workers were reported directly to them.
“She was a sex worker and mother. She was so sweet a person you will never ever hear her fight with her colleagues. She loved her child, a boy, and her house. She was always joking with us and because she was older than us, she did not like us to be unprofessional.

She was pregnant and sick and did a back street abortion. It did not go well and because she was HIV positive she never recovered and died. The lack of information made my friend lose her life.”

– by Dudu (SWEAT)
In South Africa, all aspects of sex work are criminalised, with both the sex worker and the client committing criminal offences. The Sexual Offences Act of 23 1957 currently prohibits the act of having sex for reward [section 20(1) (aA)]. This section only targets the sex worker and not the client. The new Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 now also criminalises the act of buying sex (section 11). In addition to this, each province has municipal by-laws which regulates activities or behaviour that takes place in the public sphere, for example, By-law Relating to Streets, Public Places and the Prevention of Noise Nuisances, 2007, in the Western Cape stipulates that one may not “importune any person for the purposes of prostitution”.

In South Africa it is estimated that there are approximately 153 000 sex workers (figures range between 132 000 and 182 000). Out of the 153 000, it is estimated that 138 000 are adult female sex workers. This makes up 0.9 percent of the adult female population in South Africa. However, there are also male and transgender individuals who sell sex. The majority of sex workers are found in large urban areas, 22 percent in Gauteng, 16 percent in Kwa-Zulu Natal and 11 per cent in the Western Cape. Sex workers work in many different environments and the level of control that they have over their work varies. Some sex workers work outdoors, in other words they are working on the street. They are a very visible section of the sex work industry and as a result easier targets for perpetrators. Other sex workers work indoors, from their homes, in bars, clubs, massage parlors, escort agencies or brothels.

“Nondumisa was bubbly, opinionated and loved having fun! She was confident and loved wearing eye catching clothes and heels that would make her the centre of attention wherever she went, especially in the clubs. She was a fashionista.”

– by Phe (friend)
The majority of sex workers in South Africa are female. Given the high rates of gender-based violence in South Africa, one in five South African women older than 18 has experienced physical violence, sex workers vulnerability to violence is compounded. In Figure 1 above, it shows 65 murders during the reporting period, which amounts to 55.08 percent of the total reports received. Physical violence and rape is higher amongst sex workers than the general population.

In addition, sex workers’ criminal status in society increases vulnerability to violence in a number of ways. Sex workers around the world continue to be murdered at rates higher than the general population, in fact in some places standardised mortality rates for sex workers are six times those seen in the general population. Sex workers are also unlikely to report cases of violence against them as they experience secondary victimisation by the police as well as, there are extraordinarily high rates of violence against sex workers that are perpetrated by the police. Of the abuse reported to the Women’s Legal Centre by sex workers, over 60 percent of cases were from police as perpetrators. These were mostly cases of harassment and verbal abuse, but there were also cases of physical and sexual abuse. Another consequence of criminalisation for the people who have died is that the police have not investigated their deaths with the aim to arrest and refer the perpetrator for prosecution. Thus resulting in no justice for sex workers.

All of the sex workers whose deaths were reported, left dependents, such as children. Sex workers are often the breadwinners in their family and research shows that sex workers support approximately four (4) children or adult dependents on their income. The impact of a bread winner’s death is severe for these families. Also, later becoming aware of the kind of work that the person did, may result in the family themselves being ostracized by the community and children shunned.

The current legal framework, is conducive to the violation of sex worker’s human rights such as the right to freedom from violence, equality before the law, access to justice, health, unfair labour practices, privacy, dignity, the right to not be detained without a trial, and not to be tortured or treated in a cruel and degrading manner.

"Anita was a dutiful mother. She was the bread winner who was looking after her 4 siblings after her mother passed away and her own 3 beautiful children. Her elder child had her matric ball this year and she wasn’t here to witness that. She was always full of smiles and life. You would never see her angry even if she was angry she was always polite. And she loved partying!"

– by Ncumisa (friend)
Stigma is a key factor in perpetuation of violence against sex workers, because they are marked out as people who “deserve” abuse.¹⁸

Nokuphila Moudy Kumalo (‘the deceased’), a 23-year-old sex worker, was found dead in Ravenscraig Road, Woodstock, Cape Town on 14 April 2013. Zwelethu Mthethwa (‘the accused’) has been charged with the murder of the deceased resulting from a brutal assault on 13 April 2013.

Die Burger on Saturday (15 June 2013) reported that 52-year-old Mthethwa was captured on CCTV on 13 April 2013 getting out of his car in a street in Woodstock, Cape Town, approaching a woman – possibly a sex worker – and hitting her repeatedly.¹⁵ CCTV shows a male assailant repeatedly kicked and punched her on the head for 4 minutes and 37 seconds. Medical evidence before the court showed Kumalo had blunt force injuries to the head and that her liver was basically ‘torn in half’.¹⁶ On the 16 March 2017 Zwelethu Mthethwa was found guilty of murder by Judge Goliath, at the Western Cape High Court and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment.

Nokupila’s murder is an example of the aggravated violence that sex workers have to endure on a daily basis. Stigma makes sex workers invisible, and this is shown by the fact that the news about her murder only surfaced a month after the incident and that the news reports mainly focused on the “famous” artist Mr. Zwelethu Mthethwa. The trial went on for four (4) years, and many feared that Mr. Mthethwa would drag the trial for many more years, thereby delaying justice and Nokupila would be one of many whose murderers continue to walk the streets of South Africa. Indeed Mr. Mthethwa had used many delaying tactics but later he was handed a guilty verdict and sentenced. Unfortunately, for many sex workers, and all of 65 reported to have been murdered, their murderers continue to walk free.

“We knew her as Mimi. She was a very hard working woman who loved her work as peer educator for Sisonke. Her passion was so great that she even did more than what her job required of her. Sex workers lives mattered a lot to her and the rights of sex workers was what came first to her. At work she would always ask if she did not understand something and always ask for clarity. Mimi was a bubbly person, a go getter and always eager to learn and to teach.”

– by Thuli (her manager)
Sex workers, particularly those who work on the street, because of increased public exposure, are at considerably higher risk of violence and even murder than other people. Not only do sex workers experience violence by clients, but they are also subjected to violence from state agents, such as the police, as well as discrimination in housing, access to healthcare and education amongst others. Because of societal taboos around particularly women who have sex with multiple partners, sex workers are highly stigmatised. Stigma is a key factor in perpetuation of violence against sex workers, because they are marked out as people who “deserve” abuse.

Sex workers are also highly at risk for sexual violence and sexual abuse. In the murders reported, many of them experienced sexual assault too. Many sex workers, do not work in the areas where they reside because they are afraid of the communities’ reaction to them and fear being discriminated against. Also, due to the criminalised nature of their work, they are forced to work in isolated, dangerous areas to hide from police officers for fear of arrest and abuse. Hence, in this research, the areas where sex worker’s bodies were found are most likely the areas in which they conducted their business. For example, sex workers opt to work in bushes on the outskirts of busy urban areas.

Transgender sex workers are also particularly stigmatised, because they are also perceived to violate gender norms in addition to sexual norms. Transgender women are not only stigmatised, but also face severe threats of violence from clients, for example, in this research, transgender sex workers were murdered by their clients for reasons unknown. Transgender women sex workers are also targets for grievous bodily harm and violence because of contributing factors such as transphobia.

As mentioned earlier, sex workers also experience violence and abuse by state agents, such as the police, with many South African sex workers reporting that they have been harassed, robbed, assaulted or raped by police, as well as being subjected to unlawful arrest or demands for bribes. However, people who pose as clients of sex workers are the main perpetrators of the murders reported here. People who pose as clients are more likely to abuse sex workers when they know that sex workers are very unlikely to go to or receive support from police because they are criminalised.

Modelling estimates that sex worker clients constituted 3.0-13.2% of the total number of adult males or females (aged 15-49) in Southern Africa. Regrettably, few studies describe the characteristics and behaviour of clients or other sexual partners of sex workers in SA. A number of studies have documented client violence against sex workers in the South African context. From these studies it would seem that some sex worker clients exhibit anti-social and dangerous behaviour. In addition, a Cape Town study found that street-based sex workers are vulnerable to abuse by people who pose as clients because the covert nature of sex work forces them to operate in isolated areas where they are susceptible to violent interactions with people who pose as clients.

Often, for protection, sex workers would opt to work in the indoor sector (brothels, clubs and parlour) and pay hotel managers a fee to use their premises for their work. Hotel management can be a source of abuse for indoor sex workers and often have control over them because they know that sex work is illegal. Sex workers report incidents of rape by hotel management and beatings by hotel security. In addition, hotel management may force sex workers to return fees to disgruntled people clients. Some sex workers may also be at an increased risk of intimate partner violence, as reported here, three sex workers were killed by the partners. Two sex workers committed suicide due to continued violence and abuse that they experience at the hands of their partner. Their partners may become jealous or threaten to report them to the police for selling sex if they complain of domestic abuse. Sex workers experiencing intimate partner violence are also unlikely to seek protection of the law since under criminalisation it is the law that persecutes them.
BRUTALITY IN THE MURDERS REPORTED

“Valencia she was a good person and a humble girl. She was like peace to the sex workers and she loved to recruit people to come to SWEAT. She was supportive to everyone at sex worker’s areas. She liked to share what she have.”

– by Joyce (SWEAT Peer)

The reports of the sex workers who were murdered also included information of the assaults on their bodies which included mutilations, being stripped of their clothing, being burnt by acid, repeated stab wounds and one woman was even decapitated. We emphasize the level of brutality to illustrate the severe impact that stigma and hatred that people may have towards sex workers and how this is carried out against them in the form of violence and mutilations.

UNKNOWN CAUSES OF DEATH AND NATURAL DEATHS

“Fikile was a dedicated mother of three and always made sure that her kids had everything they needed and were properly taken care of. Her children – of which two are disabled – have been separated as their mother is no longer alive to provide for them.”

– by Wandai (Peer Educator) and her Aunt

Sex workers are faced with complex and layered levels of stigmatisation, social exclusion, deprivation and abuse, coupled with lower levels of access to health care, employment, justice, and economic advancement. These layers of stigma forces sex workers to the margins of society, where they become almost invisible to society and unfortunately to their family too. There are fifteen deaths reported where we were unable to ascertain the cause of death. Sex workers rarely work in the community in which they live for fear that their family or friends may ostracise or disown them when they become aware of their work. Some of the reasons why we
were unable to ascertain the cause of death are, because the family of the sex worker was informed and refused to speak to us, the family could not be located to claim the body and in other cases police delayed/refused to investigate or cases were not open.

Twenty-three deaths were reported as natural deaths, meaning that the persons died from natural causes, for example, one person was reported from dying after reporting severe headaches and another died from Pneumonia. As mentioned earlier, because of the criminalisation of sex work and its associated stigma, many sex workers have reported limited access or denial of access to health services and treatment for preventable and treatable health issues. Although the state classifies these cases such as deaths from ‘natural’ causes, these people died because of stigma and criminalisation which prevented them of accessing and obtaining the necessary health care that would have saved their lives.

**DRUG-RELATED**

In our research, in 2016, there are three reported cases of deaths resulting from drug overdose. One death was reported from a person who has defaulted on her HIV medication. So in total, there are 4 reported cases of persons dying due to drugs/medication.

There are indeed many reasons why people including sex workers use drugs. It has been reported that sometimes clients may request sex workers to engage in drug use with them. The issue here is that in South Africa both sex work and drug use is highly stigmatized and people who are engaged in these activities are often treated as less than worthy, are denied access to treatment, have limited access and are vulnerable to abuse and violence. Part of the stigma and discrimination attached to both sex workers and people who use drugs is that their ability to make decisions for themselves is ignored.

In this study, one death was reported for defaulting on HIV medication. We would like to highlight this death, because sex workers are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS not only because they may use drugs but also because they engage in penetrative sex with multiple partners over a prolonged period of time, putting them at risk for HIV infection if they do not use condoms. While access to condom are available freely, often the mere possession of it places sex workers at risk of being abused or arrested. Further, in order to hide away from the police, they work in isolated areas with limited time to screen clients and negotiate condom use. We also want to point out that discrimination and stigma on the part of health care workers, in that they may pass judgmental comments or have a negative attitude towards the sex worker, makes it difficult for sex workers to access the necessary treatment. These could all be contributing factors as to why this person defaulted on her/his HIV medication.
MEDIA REPORTING

“She was very sweet mama, and liked to share what she have. She was strong mother and fought for sex worker’s rights and she had that hope that sex workers will win decrim.”

– by Joyce (SWEAT Peer)

Pinkie Siphamla

‘ROUGH SEX KILLED PROSTITUTE’ – MPUMA MURDER-ACCUSED

MAN PROMISED R2M TO BEHEAD PROSTITUTE

Journalists use these sensationalised headlines to draw attention to their articles. However, these articles report on the deaths of sex workers inaccurately as well as disrespectfully and the headlines serve to perpetuate the stereotypes of sex workers that increase the stigma against them.

When the media reports on the death of a sex worker, the article is often written in an insensitive way with no intention of obtaining any further information of the sex worker as a victim of a crime. When “other” women, or members of the community deaths are reported, they are described with sensitivity with details about their lives holistically portrayed. For example, information about the deceased as members of a community, information about their job, their life, contributions to society and even hobbies and interests are written about. It is in this regard that a vital part of the Say Her Name Campaign is the collection and publication of narratives about sex workers who have died. We aim to produce sensitive, respectful reporting that illustrates the complexity of sex workers lives and that humanizes sex workers in terms of portraying them holistically.

While journalists enjoy “freedom of the press”, they also have a responsibility to uphold the constitutional rights of citizens, avoid unnecessary harm and show special concern for children and other vulnerable groups. Journalists are bound by rules of the Press Code, which include, but are not limited to, reporting truthfully, accurately and fairly, without any intentional or negligent departure from the facts whether by distortion, exaggeration or misrepresentation. When interviewing, filming or photographing sex workers all the above Constitutional, professional and ethical principles of journalism strictly apply. It is vital that journalists and researchers adhere to the principle of ‘First Do No Harm’ and respect sex worker confidentiality, privacy and agency.
DECRIMINALISATION OF SEX WORK

Evidence shows that people in sex work face heightened risks for human rights violations including HIV exposure and serious violence, particularly from state agents, as well as discrimination in housing, access to healthcare, education, etc. This research is present in UNDP, WHO, the UN Special Rapporteur on The Right to Health and Human Rights Watch.

Public health research supports the conclusion that criminalisation of sex work prevents sex workers from having equal access to health services, including HIV-related services. A 2015 Lancet study estimated that decriminalisation of sex work could avert 33-46% of new HIV infections in the next decade.

Other research findings point to the relationships between criminalisation of sex work and negative health issues such as violence, poor condom negotiation, mental health stresses, and general disempowerment. Similarly, with regards to violence, available evidence shows that criminalisation impedes sex workers’ access to health services, impairs their ability to negotiate better living and working conditions, and makes them vulnerable to a range of human rights abuses, especially violence. Studies have shown that criminalisation reduces the ability of people in sex work to organise, be visible, participate in public life as full citizens and be treated with dignity.

SUMMARY OF KEY ARGUMENTS:

• **Decriminalisation** is the best legal framework to address challenges in South Africa (high rates of gender based violence, Stigma, HIV prevalence of HIV, poverty)

• **Criminalisation** is impractical, unworkable, creates an enabling environment for corruption, and abuse of power and inconsistent with central tenants of South African constitution

• **Decriminalisation** has wide support among human rights and public health institutions

• **Decriminalisation** will help the government save money and reduce corruption

• **Decriminalisation** will reduce police abuse against sex workers and increase their access to justice

• **Decriminalisation** will help the fight against HIV and AIDS by reducing health services stigma and removing barriers to accessing health care for sex workers

• **Decriminalisation** will promote sex workers’ economic rights by allowing them to benefit from existing South African labour and workplace laws

• **Decriminalisation** will help fight trafficking into forced prostitution and the commercial sexual exploitation of children because sex workers will no longer fear identifying situations of exploitation and abuse
PERSON REPORTING THE DEATH

Name and Surname: ________________________________________________________________
Organisation of work: _________________________________________________________________________________
Role in the Organisation: ________________________________________________________________________________
Telephone No (Optional): _______________________________________________________________________________

SWEAT is attempting to monitor the death and murders of sex workers. We will be collecting the information to monitor, record and humanise the death of sex workers across South Africa.

“Say Her Name”

Details of the Deceased
Name and Surname of deceased: ________________________________________________________________
Known Date and Time of Death: _________________________________________________________________
Type of Death: _________________________________________________________________________________
Known Home Town/Province: ______________________________________________________________________
Known Year or date of birth: ______________________________________________________________________
Known Age at time of death: ______________________________________________________________________

Describe what you heard about the death:
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

What legal remedies are you seeking?
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

Details of the Relative/Friend
Name and Surname of Relative/Friend: ____________________________________________________________
Contact Details: _________________________________________________________________________________
Address/hotspot if known: _________________________________________________________________________

Are there any newspaper articles about the death: Yes / No please circle
If Yes, please attach the article copy when sending through this Form