

IAS Educational Fund Meeting Beirut –Lebanon 30 – 28June 2019

Summary



Introduction

Violation of human rights of sex work

Sexual and reproductive health of female sex workers

Barriers to accessing sexual health services

Stigma and discrimination

Recommendations

Conclusion

Introduction

Female Sex Workers (FSW) are considered to be one of the most vulnerable, stigmatized, marginalized, and discriminated groups in the MENA region whose basic Human rights are violated on a daily basis .

They are subject to various abuses such as physical and verbal violence, extortion, harassment and deprivation from health to housing services.

Violation of human rights in the field of sex work

(PART 1)

Although Tunisia is one of the rare countries to have included the profession of sex work in its Labor Code, legislation is flawed and the government does not guarantee the respect for FSW' Human rights.

1- The definition used to describe sex work, or "prostitution", obscures the reality of these sexual relations, whether hetero or homosexual.

2- Sex workers in licensed brothels who wish to leave their jobs must obtain police authorization and prove their ability to earn a living by "straight" means.

Violation of human rights in the field of sex work

(PART 2)

3- The Tunisian law distinguishes licensed FSW (legal FSW) from the ones without authorization (illegal FSW) or that joined the field of sex work because of a certain turn of events. Thus, the government services participate formalize violence, exploitation of women and minors, sexual extortion and sexual exploitation or extradition to justice .

Amnesty International's 2015 report noted " **victims of sexual violence and gender-based violence in Tunisia** ," FSW are subject to sexual exploitation and blackmail, mainly by the police.

4- Women working outside the law are considered delinquents. Not only are they not protected by the Law, but they are also subject to penal consequences and harassment.

5- Behavioral studies conducted by some organizations also indicate that they were exposed to violence by their clients, and that some of them were subject to child trafficking: **2.5% between the ages of 10 and 14 and 28.3% between 15 and 19 years.**

Barriers to accessing sexual health services

Access to health services by FSW is limited, especially for women living outside the capital, because the lack of social coverage, the inability of health services to satisfy their specific needs and to respect their vulnerability, dignity and confidentiality.

That is despite the fact that Tunisian Law:

- Underline the respect of the right for all citizens,
- Guarantee the same service quality regardless of gender, nationality, religion, belief, political opinion, regional affiliation, civil status, marital status,
- and reject all forms of Stigma Discrimination.

Stigma and discrimination



Despite the legislative changes brought by the “Jasmine Revolution ”and the work of Human rights organizations to eliminate all forms of "stigma and discrimination" to ensure sexual, reproductive and health rights and to cease the criminalization of sexual relations outside marriage in Tunisia, stigma and discrimination remain.

Recommendations

1- **Strengthen staff training**, especially in the areas of human rights and gender equality, ensuring privacy and confidentiality of services and respecting women's choices regardless of whether they are married, unmarried, adolescent, sex worker or PLWH.

2- **Decriminalize abortion and develop the legal bases for safe abortions** in certain situations, especially since abortion is one of the most important difficulties faced by sex workers.

3- **Identify and punish direct or indirect propaganda against abortion in health facilities** and provide palliative treatments to access the procedure without loss of time.

Conclusion



The rights of sex workers and people living with HIV continue to be violated in the region.

There must be more action to limit these violations to ensure individual rights and freedoms that are in line with the spirit of the times and the provisions of international treaties and conventions guaranteeing human rights and dignity, especially that all rights are comprehensive and interrelated.