**Question**

How do sex workers experience their workspaces and the policies regulating these spaces?

**Background**

### Ideologies towards prostitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abolitionism</th>
<th>Sex workers’ rights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostitution is</td>
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<tr>
<td>inherently oppressive</td>
<td>a job like any other</td>
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<td>How to help</td>
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<td>those in</td>
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<tr>
<td>prostitution</td>
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<td>abolish prostitution</td>
<td>recognize prostitution</td>
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<td>as legitimate work</td>
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<td>Legal solution</td>
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<td>criminalize clients and third parties, but not sellers of sex</td>
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<td>derecriminalize or legalize prostitution</td>
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**Why does space matter?**

- Physical spaces that groups occupy may indicate their relative status within society. Marginalized groups often inhabit specific separate locations.
- The physical spaces where sex work occurs may significantly influence sex workers’ working conditions.
- Government regulation of sex work spaces can determine where and how sex workers operate and the conditions they face.

### Examples of potential policy effects

- **State shuts down brothels** → Sex workers move to streets or private, more underground forms of indoor sex work
- **Law enforcement arrests sex workers on a specific street** → Sex workers move to another street or adopt strategies to avoid detection
- **State creates code of regulations for brothels** → Brothels improve health conditions

### Sex work in Latin America

Sex work is legal everywhere in Latin America except Haiti, but policies with regards to spaces of sex work (such as the legality of brothels or public solicitation) differ between countries.

### Argentina

**Prostitution:** Legal  
**Brothels:** Illegal

**Methods**

Personal interviews with 41 active sex workers in Buenos Aires.
- 34 cis women, 3 trans women, 4 cis men

**Interviews with:**
- Sex workers’ union Association of Women Prostitutes of Argentina (AMMAR)
- Abolitionist prostitutes’ organization Association of Argentine Women for Human Rights (AMADH)
- The Network of Women Sex workers of Latin America and the Caribbean (RedTraSex)
- 2 anti-trafficking organizations

### Ecuador

**Prostitution:** Legal  
**Brothels:** Legal

**Methods**

Personal interviews with 47 active and former sex workers in Quito, Guayaquil, Milagro, & Machala.
- 31 cis women, 10 trans women, 6 cis men

**Interviews with:**
- 10 sex worker organizations
- 6 civil society organizations
- 5 Quito municipal officials
- 4 business owner/managers
- 1 doctor

### Spaces of sex work

#### Brothels

- Take portion of earnings, set hours
- Some provide security through guards, panic buttons – less violence than street
- More anonymity than street
- May have poor conditions

#### Street

- More danger – less time to assess client, greater risk of theft
- Discomfort – standing for long periods, cold
- Earn less than indoor independent work

#### Cafe’s

- Women sit inside at night waiting for clients
- Security, comfort, independence

#### Bars/clubs

- Some treat women like any other client, others provide 50% commission on drinks sold, impose hour requirements
- Security felt provided agency & security

### Argentina (cont’d)

Regulations of space

- Since 2012 anti-trafficking law, government has shut down many businesses where sex work occurs
- Police often raid apartments where sex work occurs, even if owned by independent sex workers, sometimes with violence & theft.

### Ecuador (cont’d)

Regulations of space

- National government passed regulation limiting brothel hours.
- Lost clients, many sex workers unable to work at times that best suit their needs.

### Historic Center of Quito

Municipality wants to move street sex workers off the streets and into a house of tolerance to improve conditions and preserve “cultural patrimony.”

**Why street sex workers oppose the move:**
- The street provides more autonomy
- Older women would have to compete with younger women
- Trans women unlikely to get clients indoors

### Conclusions

- Sex work spaces significantly influence working conditions, and individual sex workers may prefer different spaces.
- Policies regulating spaces, when not made in consultation with sex workers, may worsen conditions.
- Sex workers want a space to work with safety and agency.

Funding: Sanford School of Public Policy and Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute

Learn more: [Youtube] "Trabajadoras Sexuales de Quito: Derecho a la Calle"