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Everyday Security: Exploring Experiences and Practices in Sex Work in The Netherlands

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Abstract

In The Netherlands, security has a central role both in policy discourses and sex workers' publications. Nevertheless, given the very different interventions demanded by the different actors, legitimized by the same concern for security, it seems that their understanding of security differs. What it takes and means for sex workers to be safe in their job seems to be different for municipal agencies and its officials, and this might lead to a gap in ensuring sex workers' security and safety. This research analyses sex workers' everyday experiences and practices of security compared to the official municipal's security strategies and approaches towards sex work in The Hague. In this sense, it analyses how different approaches to and practices of security can impact the lives of sex workers.

Through a feminist qualitative methodology, this research found and argues that sex workers' security is more complex and diverse than the prevention from physical violence and sexual-related diseases, by showing how different labor-related insecurities and their social status are part of their everyday concerns, experiences, and practices of security. In this sense, this research argues that the governmental and municipal approach to sex work in The Hague fails to guarantee labor-related securities by focusing on public health risks and immigration

control, rather than sex workers' rights, re-producing precarious work conditions for sex workers.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research is relevant to Development Studies and Social Justice Perspectives since it is concerned with the importance of understanding the complexities of security and it invites to go beyond the absence of violence or of an imminent threat both at the moment of theorization and of empirical application. Within the different actions labeled in the name of Development, the way security is understood and approached outlines the actions to take, and this might make visible or invisible the relations of power embedded in those decisions and have different impacts on the lives of different people. Projects labeled under the idea of security, those directed to protect and keep people safe, are rarely questioned, but the way security is defined and pursued is also permeated by hegemonic understandings of humanity and life in the world, and it also functions as a discourse and as a mechanism of control and domination.

In this particular case, this research is also relevant to Development Studies and Social Justice Perspectives because sex work has been the target of control under different justifications, but the idea of protection (whether from sex work or for sex workers) has always been within its discourses. In this sense, although sex work is (partially) legal and regulated in The Netherlands, the specific concerns sex workers have about their security are not taken into account, and they continue to be discriminated and excluded from accessing particular rights, producing precarious conditions for them. This situation makes visible how some sexual practices and gender identities are still objects of control and surveillance more than others, also in a country of the global north, and how the discourse of security is used to keep sex work under control rather than to protect sex workers' rights.

Although the experiences of sex workers cannot be equated to other experiences of security or precarity, not even entirely within the group of sex workers, this research shows that their situation and their struggles are also connected and can be translated into other labor-related struggles in the fight for social justice.

Keywords

Sex Work – Everyday Security – Precarity – Governmentality – Feminist Epistemologies

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Research Problem: Whose Security?

Sex workers¹ experience violence and discrimination all over the world, although in different ways and to differing degrees. While this holds also for the Netherlands, the idea of a safe work environment for sex workers in The Netherlands is sometimes magnified by the media. For example, one article explaining the debate about the legalization of sex work in Spain describes The Netherlands as a very positive and safe environment for sex workers:

“The Dutch Government has verified that after legalization, the sanitary and safety conditions of the workers have improved. In fact, ‘abuses such as human trafficking, prostitution of minors, lack of hygiene and unsafe work environments [...] are rarely detected in the regulated sector in The Netherlands’, says Van der Meer” (Jimenez 2015: np) (My translation).

This image about The Netherlands' approach and sex workers' work conditions is also the result of a discourse that presents a liberal position towards sex work, but that makes the everyday structural violence and discrimination invisible. This idea is contrasted by several reports made by different NGOs and unions in which the unsafe situation of many sex workers in the country is made more visible. For example, the report developed by PROUD and SOAIDS in The Netherlands explains that even if sex workers experience *physical, sexual, financial-economic, and social-emotional* violence, they are unlikely to report this to the police because they fear the consequences against them will be worse. This suggests they do not believe the police will take them seriously, or they think it will not be useful to report their problems (Aidsfonds and PROUD 2018: 44-45).

In this situation, I believe it is important to understand what can be improved to make their work conditions safer, and not to reproduce the same structures and legal frameworks that do not take sex workers' experiences, opinions and practices into account. Otherwise, the result might be to continue to reproduce violence, stigma, and discrimination against sex workers, and for this to remain largely invisible.

Sex workers have different opinions and feelings about their profession, like any other worker. Their opinions may also differ depending on the moment of their lives and work, and on the person who asks. Some sex workers might simply see their job as a way of making a living, others find it empowering and liberating, and others might not like it (Weitzer 2009). Moreover, sex workers' identities, backgrounds, and motivations are also more diverse than the media representation and policymakers think and say about them. In addition to women sex workers, there are also men, transgender women and men, non-binary, intersexual, queer, and so on; their sexual orientation being very diverse, as can be that of their clients (Weitzer 2009). On the other hand, some sex workers

¹ Within this document, the term *Sex Work* refers to any activity between two consenting adults in which a sexual service is given in exchange for an agreed remuneration. A *Sex Worker* refers to the person who gives the sexual service. The decision of using the term is based on my position to support that their occupation deserves the same rights and respect as any other.

are also immigrants and some of them might have problems with their migratory status, as do a lot of workers from other industries.

However, when some critics claim that sex work is inherently harmful and present sex workers only as victims (and only as heterosexual women), they make this diversity invisible and deny sex workers agency and experiences. On the other hand, the constant association of sex work with human trafficking in dominant media and policy discourses creates frameworks that regulate sex work from criminal law, public order and control, or migration (Pitcher and Wijers 2014). In terms of decent work agendas, sex work is rarely included in its discourses and debates. In this approach, the day-to-day security of sex workers is not addressed, their opinions are usually excluded from the discussion, and it can even create or reinforce the vulnerable situations they experience (Heumann et al. 2016: 168).

Sex work has been a topic of interest for researchers, policymakers and social justice activists for a long time now. In the academic field, there is a huge variety in terms of perspectives, methodologies, and approaches to sex work. On the one hand, some research focuses on the negative and violent situations sex workers experience without allowing them to say what they think about it. These kinds of research adopt a position in which sex workers do not know what is best for them and they need to be saved from the situations they are in (see for example Barry 1995). This position follows a closed and simplistic understanding of the situations as in the victim-perpetrator-rescuer triangle in which each role is clearly defined and experienced (Karpman 1968).

On the other hand, some other studies have been paying attention to the importance of taking sex workers' opinions and experiences as the first point of departure to understand their situations and to advise future policies and legislation for the field (see Pitcher and Wijers 2014, Verhoeven 2017, Wahab 2003). In this case, some researchers propose that sex work should be completely decriminalized and legalized, so people in this industry can have the same status as any other worker and can be protected from the possible dangerous situations of their work. Moreover, some empirical research has also shown the huge diversity in terms of sex workers' status, opinions, experiences and positions towards sex work (see Weitzer 2009), giving evidence of the complexity and diversity of this field.

In the case of The Netherlands, there is research concerned with the analysis of the evolution of sex work legislation (see Post et al. 2018), the legal status of sex work in different cities or the analysis of sex work and anti-trafficking policies (specifically in Amsterdam and The Hague) and their implications and rationales (see Verhoeven 2017), or in the analysis of public debates, policies and legislation around sex work and trafficking in the past two decades (see Heumann et al. 2017). There are also comparative studies showing the impact of different regulatory models on sex workers' work conditions. For example, Pitcher and Wijers (2014) do a comparison between The Netherlands and the UK, by analyzing how the different regulations affect sex workers' safety and welfare.

Moreover, one article by Verhoeven (2017) also investigates the meanings sex workers give to their work concerning the public debates, the policies, and legislation in The Netherlands, and in particular to the anti-trafficking initiatives. These studies show the importance of understanding how sex workers experience the different approaches and strategies of security but none of them is concerned with the day-to-day experiences and practices of security.

There are also some empirical studies, especially those done by non-governmental organizations and sex workers unions, like the report by PROUD and SOAIDS, that indicate the different insecurities to which sex workers are vulnerable to and their violent experiences. In this report, there is an emphasis made in terms of the stigma towards sex work and its implications.

Although they do not frame this as a security issue, the violence, the discrimination and the exclusion of sex workers is related to it because it prevents them from being able to open a bank account, to ask for loans, or even to say what do they do for a living, and it is related to the different violent experiences they have. Nevertheless, this report speaks about the national situation and gives no specification about the differences or commonalities between municipalities within the country.

Within this context, security takes a central position in the justification of sex workers' demands as well as of policy interventions – yet, the resulting interventions are vastly different, ranging from raids to ‘rescue’ sex workers from pimps and traffickers to coverage with labor legislation. This is why I think it is important to understand and counter different notions about security between sex workers, their experiences and expectations, and the way municipal agencies understand it and put it in practice.

In that sense, municipal agencies might have a notion about security that produces mechanisms for controlling the sex work industry and preventing human trafficking, but not for protecting sex workers in their day to day dynamics. What it is for sex workers to be safe in their job has differences from what policymakers and municipal agencies understand as security within the sex work industry, and this might lead to a gap for ensuring sex workers’ security.

1.2 Research Question

What are sex workers’ everyday experiences and practices of security in relation to their work and how do these compare with the municipal agencies’ strategies and practices concerning sex work?

1.3 Chapter Outline

The following chapter presents the different conceptual and analytical lenses used in this research, starting with the concept of *Everyday Security*, then *Precairity*, and finally the concept of *Governmentality*. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodological approach, including the politics of knowledge and position, the qualitative approach and research ethics, and an account of sampling and research methods used during the research process. Chapter 4 is a description of the background to the research, including the institutional context of sex work in The Netherlands and The Hague. Chapter 5 is a description and analysis of the findings, divided into subsections related to the main topics. Finally, Chapter 6 is an overview and provides some conclusions to the study.

Chapter 2 – Everyday Security, Precarity and Governmentality

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the different conceptual and analytical lenses used in this research. First, I will present the concept of *everyday security*, used as an approach to understand sex workers' security through their experiences and practices, situated in a specific context and as part of specific power relations. Second, I will present the concept of *Precarity* and its relation to security, used to analyze sex workers' security beyond physical violence and sexual health, and as an experience permeated by the diversity of intersections between context, identities, and particular situations. Finally, I will present the concept of *governmentality* used to analyze the different municipal and governmental policies and strategies, and their effects on sex workers' lives.

2.2 Everyday Security

Among the most recurrent topics discussed in the security field are climate change, internal conflicts, terrorism, migration, food, and energy resources. Moreover, most of the empirical studies conducted about security focus on what security is or what is done to produce it, and the effects and problematics of the hegemonic discourse. Although all of this is relevant for the field, the day-to-day experiences of security are usually left outside the debates and analysis. How security is experienced, felt, and lived by people is not a common question within the field (Crawford & Hutchinson 2015). There have been two ways of studying security, according to Crawford and Hutchinson:

“The first of these focuses upon how security is talked about, understood, conceptualized and articulated by political and other authorities (e.g. Waever 1995; Valverde 2011). The second focuses instead upon detailed analyses of the particular strategies, practices, and techniques that are set out to govern that, which has been characterized as a security problem (e.g. Bigo 2006; Lakoff 2006)” (2015: 1184-1185).

Although the emergence of *human security* can be seen as a closer attempt to take people's everyday experiences as a point of departure, the dominant approaches continue to generalize security needs and goals. One of these dominant approaches, known as the 'narrow' approach to human security, continues to understand and take the individual outside its social and political context, and it focuses on protecting the individual from violent threats to their physical security (Shani 2011: 56-57).

The other dominant perspective is known as having 'broader' definitions and it is based on the 'Capabilities Approach'. This approach, among other things, questions the privilege given to material things and income and it challenges dominant assumptions about well-being by considering people's experiences and agency (Sen 2001: 11). Nonetheless, even when this approach supports a participatory formulation of development, and in this case of security

goals, and argues for a central role of empowerment, it reproduces some of the western culture assumptions about life and security.

According to Shani, “[e]mpowerment here acts as a biopolitical technology which constructs the disciplined individuals needed for neo-liberal governmentality” (2011: 58). In this sense, there is still an intention behind human security approaches to producing particular subjects and the specific and diverse ways of experiencing, understanding and practicing security are not the center of its interventions.

Following then the ideas of experience, diversity and social context, I will use the concept of ‘everyday security’ developed by Crawford & Hutchinson (2015). This concept allows the research to focus both on the ways people *experience* security projects, strategies and regulations, and how people create specific “[...] practices to govern what they understand and interpret as their own security” (Crawford & Hutchinson 2015: 1185). Moreover, even though this approach might be recent in the field of security, it is not new to the social sciences and to some feminist perspectives in which the epistemological and methodological standpoint is people’s experiences and practices.

For example, some researchers have argued for a feminist standpoint, taking as a point of departure: “the conception of security as the human experience in everyday life mediated through a variety of social structures of which gender is one” (Truong et al. 2006: xii). In this sense, security goals cannot be established as general, unchanging or equal for every person, neither only as an isolated experience, but rather it should be understood as part of specific and contextual experiences and practices permeated by social relations and power dynamics:

“[...] the more we study everyday security, the more we expose the material inequalities, injustices, abuses of power and differential social experiences of security projects, all of which might provide the foundations of emancipation” (Crawford & Hutchinson 2015: 1199).

Concerning this, on the one hand, *practices* refer to the habitual or recurrent strategies sex workers have developed, used or avoided, to keep themselves safe within their work, and those created by the municipal agencies. On the other hand, *experiences* refer to the way sex workers feel, engage and or think about those practices and the ones developed by municipal agencies.

2.3 Precarity and Security

Although precarity as insecurity, especially insecure work, has been the dominant understanding (Paret and Gleeson 2016), within this research paper, *Precarity* is understood as an experience (Neilson and Rossiter 2008), rather than a fixed and defined category, that is produced both by different understandings of what counts as ‘normal’ or as ‘worthy’ identities, or “who qualifies as a subject of recognition” (Butler 2009: iii), and thus as the inequalities in terms of access to different rights and services produced by these norms. Understanding precarity as experience allows me to analyze the different intersections that influence sex workers' experiences of security since governmental strategies and policies have different normative bases and hence different effects on sex workers' lives depending on their multiple identities.

Moreover, to acknowledge a diversity of experiences allows me to analyze how the neoliberal goal of shaping productive and competitive subjectivities is

related to specific ways of controlling and managing populations, creating specific experiences of precarity and security.

Given different topics related to the working conditions and status of sex workers were a concern and source of insecurity for several sex workers during the interviews, I used and adapted the forms of labor-related security that Standing (2011) uses in his book ‘The Precariat’ to analyze and discuss the findings:

“Labour market security – Adequate income-earning opportunities; at the macro-level, this is epitomised by a government commitment to ‘full employment’.

Employment security – Protection against arbitrary dismissal, regulations on hiring and firing, imposition of costs on employers for failing to adhere to rules and so on.

Job security – Ability and opportunity to retain a niche in employment, plus barriers to skill dilution, and opportunities for ‘upward’ mobility in terms of status and income.

Work security – Protection against accidents and illness at work, through, for example, safety and health regulations, limits on working time, unsociable hours, night work for women, as well as compensation for mishaps.

Skill reproduction security – Opportunity to gain skills, through apprenticeships, employment training and so on, as well as opportunity to make use of competencies.

Income security – Assurance of an adequate stable income, protected through, for example, minimum wage machinery, wage indexation, comprehensive social security, progressive taxation to reduce inequality and to supplement low incomes.

Representation security – Possessing a collective voice in the labour market, through, for example, independent trade unions, with a right to strike” (Standing 2011: 10).

These categories were sometimes combined in the empirical reality reported by the participant sex workers of this research, and hence in the analysis. The different situations identified in sex workers’ experiences and practices do not necessarily imply that they lack all forms of labor-related security to be in a precarious situation. Moreover, Standing states that precarity also refers to:

“... being in a status that offers no sense of career, no sense of secure occupational identity and few, if any, entitlements to the state and enterprise benefits that several generations of those who saw themselves as belonging to the industrial proletariat or the salariat had come to expect as their due” (Standing 2011: 24).

This idea of the precarity will be used to analyze sex workers' experiences and practices of security related to the municipal approach because it allows the analysis to go beyond the evident work risks sex workers might be exposed to. In this sense, this labor security approach allows me to analyze sex workers' experiences and practices from a broader understanding of security and of their current work situation. As argued by Siegmann and Schiphorts:

“...work-related insecurities offer a conceptual umbrella for the conditions that a large and increasing number of workers in the global North and South experience. They emerge in the context of neoliberal globalization that intersects with marginalization based on social identity as well as with the denial of political rights” (2016: 112).

2.4 Governmentality

Foucault’s concept of *governmentality* refers to the mechanisms and technologies, the rationalities, techniques, and procedures, by which the state controls specific populations. This is done by re-producing what is considered as ‘normal’ and what is not, and this is usually justified through the idea of security and protection. In *Security, Territory, Population* 1977-1978, Foucault (2007) explains how the modern state is in charge of taking care of the population’s lives and well-being by controlling it. This is related to a growing concern with the bodies and how they should be cared for and protected. A discourse that involves the productivity of the bodies and therefore the rationality of science and with it the ‘experts’. Foucault also called this *biopower*.

“By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me quite significant, namely, a set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern Western societies tool on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species” (Foucault 2007: 1).

It refers to the way behaviors and practices are shaped and controlled by institutions, both public and private, that organize and regulate life around specific understandings, and are legitimized by a discourse of protection and security. The *mechanisms of security* are created to keep these behaviors and practices, framed as dangerous, “within socially and economically acceptable limits [...]” (Foucault 2007: 6) in specific contexts, and the way of doing it is always molded by the question of whether punishing or being more permissive will cost more or less to do it. These concepts allow me to analyze how the different municipal and governmental policies and strategies related to sex work have an impact on sex workers' lives and how they are related to different mechanisms of controlling populations and normalizing certain behaviors, usually in the name of security.

Finally, it is important to highlight that these regulations and mechanisms of control are not free of specific hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. According to Corrêa and Jolly (2008), sexuality has been approached as a problem that needs to be resolved and controlled within the dominant discourses and projects of development, it has been treated as a problem related to “[...] population control, disease or violence – rather than as a source of affirmation, pleasure, intimacy and love” (Corrêa and Jolly 2008: 37-38). This approach to sexuality has also reproduced an understanding of gender from a binary and heterosexual perspective, and this has led to particular situations of exclusion and violence against those who do not identify within the hetero-normative regime.

Thus, it is important to understand the way specific notions of *gender* and *sexuality* are part of the differentiated experiences and practices of security around sex work. Sex workers have been, as gay people:

“[...] stigmatized on the basis of their sexual activity... [and] The legal persecution of both populations is justified by an elaborate ideology which classifies them as dangerous and inferior undesirables who are not entitled to be left in peace” (Rubin 1999: 156).

These notions about sexuality also reproduce a higher position of non-commercial sexual relations in the sexual hierarchy and the persistent disciplining and limitations of women's sexuality through the ‘whore stigma’. In this sense, specific understandings of sexuality influence how sex work regulations are constructed, and they reflect underlying relations of power and inequality and its implications in people's lives.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and the Ethics of Caring

3.1 Introduction

This research was based on a qualitative feminist epistemological framework, taking sex workers' opinions and experiences as the principal source for the construction of knowledge and action, and starting from the ethics of caring. In that sense, this research starts from the idea that people have a deep understanding and knowledge about their lives, especially in relation to their experiences of violence and oppression, and they are the ones that should guide the questions and interpretations of their realities and experiences (Cahill et al. 2019, Harding 1992, Narayan 2004, Wahab 2003;).

To position sex workers (or any marginalized group) as the experts of their own lives and experiences, and to make possible the spaces for them to speak about themselves, is not only an ethical and epistemological issue but also an ontological and political act (Code 2015, Harding 1992). Sex workers have been constantly excluded (as women have historically) from the debates and decisions that affect their lives. Starting from their own experiences and opinions is also challenging the notions about 'who is the expert' and 'who we have to be' (or who we think we are) to decide for others. In this chapter, I will describe the epistemological approach and qualitative approaches, the ethics of caring, the sampling and research methods of this research.

3.2 The Politics of Knowledge and Position

I position myself as an active participant within this construction of knowledge since my opinions, analysis, and experiences also inform the results of the research. This is related to my experience working for 5 years in a Colombian civil organization that supported sex workers in their struggle to secure and demand their rights, and I deeply believe that sex workers deserve the same respect and rights, status, and opportunities that any other worker has or deserves.

Even though sex workers have an 'epistemic advantage' (Narayan 2004) regarding their own experiences and current situations in relation to their lives, and in this case to their work, my position as an academic, my personal and political background as an activist, and the context within which this research is developing also influence the results of the research. This does not mean that others are incapable of understanding the situation of someone else. But it implies that it is easier if one shares some kind of similar experience (especially in terms of oppression).

It is important to acknowledge that *sex workers* are not a homogenous group, not even within one city, and it is possible to find different and even contradictory opinions and experiences. On the other hand, to have 'epistemic advantage' regarding one's own life does not mean to understand something in general, nor to be critical or neutral about it: "[...] no point of view is 'neutral' because no one exists unembedded in the world" (Narayan 2004: 218). In that sense, I use

the idea of ‘multiple subjects’ developed by Harding (1992) to be constantly reflecting on the power relations between ‘researcher’ and ‘research subjects’, the complex relation between ‘experience’ and ‘knowledge’, and the possibility of creating knowledge from multiple and variable experiences (including mine).

On the other hand, it is also important to bear in mind that this research is context-specific and that the production of knowledge is deeply related to it. Nevertheless, the particularities and diversities found can also lead to important reflections regarding the connections and similarities in the way sex work is approached in different contexts and its implications, and to build communal projects towards social justice. As expressed by Mohanty:

“In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately [...]” (Mohanty 2003: 505).

3.3 Qualitative Approach and Research Ethics

This research privileges sex workers’ participation, their voice and expectations, and the active commitment to inform and construct possible transformations to achieve social justice. To do so, I developed a qualitative methodology to understand the different notions about security, being always aware of the possible changes proposed by the people involved. Now, although the anthropological term has been called ‘participant observation’, I guided my research practices by the concept of Ruth Behar *vulnerable observation*:

“Our intellectual mission is deeply paradoxical: get the ‘native point of view’, but please without actually ‘going native’. Our methodology, defined by the oxymoron ‘participant observation’, is split at the root: act as a participant, but do not forget to keep your eyes open” (Behar 1996: 5).

This concept of vulnerable observation reflect what I think is an ethical attitude, both in the practices, dynamics and ways of being during fieldwork, as in the moment of reflection and process of analysis: the fact of feeling vulnerable in the field and the need to pay attention to how our actions in the field could be harmful to others or ourselves. This is also related to my commitment to be constantly reflective about the power relations between the different actors within the research (including myself), and the possible effects the research can have on people's lives. As argued by Wahab (2003):

“[...] the knowledge created with sex workers would be a result of all of our life experiences and social, political, economic, and spiritual standpoints and resources coming together through dialogue. Consequently, the focus of the research [is] not to discover the ‘truth’ of sex workers’ lives but rather to create knowledge with them collaboratively” (Wahab 2003: 629).

This is related to the notion of ‘responsible research’ and ‘caring’, developed by Code (2015), that I want to highlight within the ethics of caring for this research. In the first place, I believe caring is important to be critical and reflexive towards the research process, the participants and their power relations, and the different situations one might encounter. Contrary to the dominant discourse

about emotions being an impediment for generating knowledge, I believe caring is crucial for the construction of knowledge because it makes it possible to go beyond the presuppositions and biases, and to see the multiple possibilities and dimensions of one situation. On the other hand, I believe that caring is important to position something as important. As expressed by Code:

“Stories can bring damaged people and their suffering into contact with the practices of other knowers and activists: through narrative they perform an advocacy function, inviting readers to care, showing them why, in this specific situation, it matters, yet ensuring that ‘this situation’ cannot be dismissed as an isolated instance” (2015: 16).

Finally, caring also enables the researcher to be always reflecting on the possible effects of the research, not only on the participants directly involved but on other people involved in the field. In that sense, I considered different ethical challenges from the beginning, taking into account that new challenges might emerge during fieldwork, and during the analysis and writing process.

3.4 Sampling and Methods

Regarding sampling, I developed different and combined strategies depending on the stage of the research. First, I focused on The Hague especially because sex workers’ experiences there had not been particularly analyzed in the academic field, and this meant there was the possibility of generating new knowledge about it.

The Hague was also a strategic place for developing this research because sex workers are not as visible and recognized as sex workers working in Amsterdam are, which means they participate less in the public debates and they are not always deeply involved in the dominant discourses.

Finally, the approach to sex work in The Hague combines policies that give some freedom to sex workers in the licensed sector but restricts their independence in the rest of the sectors. This is also important for this research to be able to analyze the effect of different approaches on sex workers’ lives.

Second, given the limitations regarding languages (since I do not speak Dutch and some sex workers do not speak English), this research focused on English or Spanish speakers sex workers working in The Hague. Moreover, I developed a combination of i) *snowball or chain sampling* and ii) *Maximum Variation sampling* (Patton 1990).

The snowball sampling started with gatekeepers from the different organizations and unions (Liberty, Shop and especially Spot 46) to contact sex workers and to invite them to participate in the project. The methodological strategy to which both the team from Spot 46 and I agreed on was to go with them to do fieldwork in both streets, and introduce myself and the research to sex workers and ask them if they were interested in participating, while the team from Spot 46 was doing their regular activities. Each participant was asked if they knew another sex worker that wanted to participate and to whom I could reach out. Moreover, the snowball sampling was also applied to decide which actors or public institutions were important to include, starting with Spot 46 and the sex workers participating in the research.

Maximum Variation sampling means that I tried to work with a diverse group to identify both differences and commonalities. In that sense, I wanted to explore and be reflexive about the implications about the experiences of sex workers working on windows, or sex workers working from home or without a permit, for example, or in terms of gender identities, time working in the field, etc.

In practice, I started talking to both cisgender and transgender women working from windows in both licensed sectors in The Hague: Geleenstraat and Doubletstraat. Then, I talked to some sex workers that combine their job in windows with home-based sex work. Only one person interviewed worked in clubs before, but only works in windows now. Finally, I also spoke with one man working home-based.

In terms of methods and within the framework explained above, I developed 4 methodological stages:

1) *Networking and vulnerable observation*: I participated in organizational meetings, activities, events, and workshops related to sex work, particularly in The Hague, but also in one international workshop about sex work developed in Berlin, Germany. I also participated in 2 organizational meetings, one including actors from the Municipality and sex workers. I also participated in some Spot 46 team's regular fieldwork activities in which they sell condoms, lubricants, and other products to sex workers at a very low price, and they give relevant information to sex workers. They also explain the services they give and invite sex workers to go to their office if they need anything. On the other hand, I participated in one activity called 'Clients Action', organized both by the Municipality and Spot 46, in which clients can access free STI testing right there in the street, and they receive information about it and sex workers rights. I also went alone to both streets when I had an interview arranged, and I spoke to other sex workers during these visits.

2) *Semi-structured qualitative interviews*: In the first place, I performed 3 *exploratory semi-structured interviews* with key informants: one with Cobie Kames, a former sex worker that founded Liberty, a sex workers' organization in The Hague, one with Jacomien Veldboom, a member of Spot 46, and another with a Marjan Wijers, a researcher and member of the Advisory Board of Proud (The National Sex Workers' organization based in Amsterdam). The idea of these exploratory interviews was to give shape and inform my current ideas about the topic, learn more about the context, inform my focus, explore possible further participants in the research, and discuss possible methods to include. In total, I performed 1 more interview with an institutional actor, a member of the Security Department – Public Order and Security from Municipality. I developed multiple strategies to contact the police but, in the end, it was not possible to interview one of their members. A Police Officer that is part of HEIT² agreed to see me, but then he had to cancel our appointment.

I also developed a qualitative semi-structured interview guide, both in Spanish and in English to explore sex workers' practices and experiences of security (see appendix 1). I performed 13 interviews² with sex workers (see table below).

² All sex workers' names were changed to a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Nationality (All of them also have one EU Nationality)	Place of Residence	Type of Work in The Hague	Time as SW	Experience in other cities or Countries	Type of Work in Other places	Languages	Gender Identity
Gloria	50	Dominican Republic	Other than The Hague, She only comes for a couple of months.	Windows (Doublet)	10 years	Yes, she did not say where	No	Spanish, English	Cisgender woman
Martha	50	Dominican Republic	Other than The Hague, She only comes for a couple of months.	Windows (Doublet), clubs	10 Years	No	No	Spanish, English (understands Italian and French)	Cisgender woman
Marcela	34	Dominican Republic	Utrecht (Near to it)	Windows (Doublet)	1 year	Amsterdam	Private houses Italy.	Spanish, English, Dutch, Italian, German	Cisgender woman
Raquel	44	Ecuadorian	The Hague	Windows (Geleen)	20 years	Amsterdam and in Belgium	Window and streets	Spanish, Dutch	Transgender woman
Katherine	48	Ecuadorian	The Hague	Windows (Geleen) and Streets (when she started)	21 years	No	Street	Spanish, Dutch, (Little English)	Transgender woman
Vanessa	50	Ecuadorian	The Hague	Window (Geleen) and Streets (when she started)	30 years	Utrecht	Street in Rotterdam when she started	Spanish, Dutch, English	Transgender woman
Meike	50	Dutch	Amsterdam	Home based	No answer	The Hague	No	Dutch, English	Transgender woman
Victoria	52	Brasilian	Rotterdam	Windows (Geleen) and Home Based (Rotterdam)	2 years	No	No	Portuguese, Spanish, English	Transgender woman
Rosa	50	Dominican Republic	The Hague	Window (Doublet)	No answer	Spain	Clubs and Private Houses	Spanish, English	Cisgender woman
Carmen	56	Colombian	The Hague	Window (Doublet)	4 years	No	No	Spanish, English, Dutch,	Cisgender woman
Miriam	48	Dominican Republic	The Hague	Window (Doublet)	14 years	No	No	Spanish, Dutch (a little), German, and she is learning English	Cisgender woman
Laura	36	Dominican Republic	The Hague	Window (Doublet)	2 years	Amsterdam	Window	Spanish, English (a little), Dutch she is learning	Cisgender woman
George	26	Dutch	Amsterdam	Home based (clients homes), mostly in Amsterdam and some times in The Hague. Via webpages	7 years	Belgium	Home based	Dutch, French, Spanish, English	Cisgender man

Table 1: Research Participants – Sex Workers

3) Follow up conversations: I had follow-up conversations with 3 sex workers and with 1 member of Spot 46 to ask specific questions regarding what I was looking in the results and my interpretation about them. This had two objectives: first, as a way of confirming or deepening on specific topics from the

results, and second, to include the participants in the analysis and reflective process, giving them a role in this part of the research and including their opinions and reflections as the experts of the topic.

4) **Qualitative analysis:** the data generated was analyzed by using Nvivo12. This software was used to codify all the information and to do a triangulation analysis of sex workers' interviews, official documents and institutional interviews, and academic resources. In the end, 1,417 references from all the sources were coded under 82 codes. Moreover, the software was also used to identify important topics within the data in terms of the coding frequency:

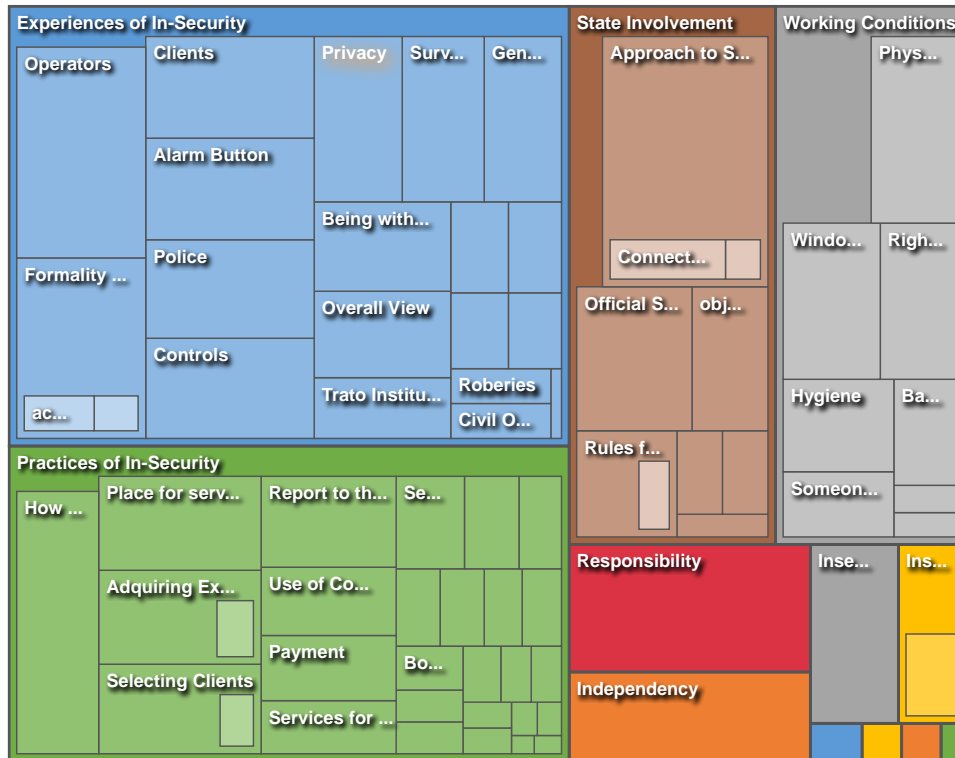


Chart 1: Coding Frequency – All Nodes Included

Chapter 4 - Background to the Proposed Study

4.1 The Netherlands

Now, despite that sex work is legal in The Netherlands, abolitionist approaches have been gaining voice and power again (Heumann et al. 2017: 46) and this also permeates how some municipalities direct and structure their regulations. In day-to-day experiences, sex workers continue to experience violence, stigma, and discrimination in The Netherlands (Aidsfonds et al. 2018). Post et al. (2018), in their article *Regulation of Prostitution in the Netherlands: Liberal Dream or Growing Repression?*, develop a description and analysis of the Dutch sex work policy by interpreting the legislators' attitudes towards sex work in legal narratives. Their article concludes with an interesting paradox in which "[...] the idea of this liberal dream goes hand-in-hand with a growing repression of personal freedom in the Dutch prostitution sector" (Post et al. 2018: 18).

This discussion is present today and sex workers continue to fight against policies and a legal framework that reproduce violence and discrimination against them and to make clear their voices cannot be excluded from the discussion. For example, some municipalities have started different projects that aim to move the currently available spaces and streets where sex work is legal to other parts of the city, this with the argument of increasing sex workers' security. As expressed by Velvet December, advocacy coordinator of Proud, the biggest organization of sex workers in The Netherlands, on the international women's day in the Netherlands: "I think we can all agree, this is not about saving us, this is a project of gentrification, with the safety, the livelihood of sex workers as collateral damage" (December 2019: no page).

In The Netherlands, the way regulation is structured and implemented can vary in each municipality, leading to different experiences about sex workers' security and different roles municipal agencies in ensuring safe work conditions for sex workers. On the other hand, the current security strategies that are there for protecting sex workers against violence from clients do not always work. As some sex workers expressed during a meeting at Spot 46 with members of Liberty and Shop (two sex workers organization from The Hague), and two members of the Municipality, they are sometimes said not to use the 'panic button' unless it is a 'life or death' situation, so they have to deal with violent clients themselves (fieldnotes). Although all the participants of this research expressed that the existence of the alarm button is very important for their security, it is considered the last resource to be used.

The debate around security is also related to the different positions regarding sex work in The Netherlands (and abroad). On the one hand, the essentialist feminist perspective and most of the policy discourse argue that sex work reproduces patriarchal violence against women by objectifying and exploiting their bodies for a sexual purpose (See for example the work of Sheila Jeffreys, one of the main proponents of this view). This perspective sees sex work isolated from other contexts and situations in which women are objectified or in which their work is exploited (Alexander 1987: 184-185, Overall 1992). From this perspective, sex workers are women that need to be saved and guided to a better life.

On the other hand, this understanding of sex work also blurs the line between sex work and human trafficking or sexual violence, making the possible

actions to create a safe and decent work environment for sex workers more difficult. In the Netherlands, since 1911, sexual exploitation and some prohibited forms of business involving sex work were considered a criminal offense in the Criminal Code (Article 250a). Nevertheless, it was until 2005, following the Palermo Protocol, that human trafficking entered the Dutch Criminal Code as a more broad and complex reality than before. However, the conceptualization of forced prostitution and sexual exploitation did not and has not changed much in comparison to the legislation from 1911 (Zeegers and Althoff 2015: 361). This view of *protecting as rescuing* produces specific strategies and policies that have an impact on sex workers' lives.

4.2 The Hague

In The Hague, sex work is officially organized around what is called 'the licensed sector'. This refers to sex businesses within the city that operates under a license, and where sex workers can offer and give their services to clients. This is divided into private houses, clubs and the two windows areas in the city called Doubletstraat and Geleenstraat. Since 2000, a limit to the number of 85 licensed sex businesses was established. Moreover, since 2015 each business has to renew its licenses annually, and since 2017 they have to include a 'business plan' to do it. The 'General local regulation for the municipality of The Hague' (APV for the acronym in Dutch), dedicated to public order and safety regulations, indicates, in 'Chapter 3 - Regulation of prostitution, Sex Branch and Related Items', Article 3.13 that:

"A prostitution business has a business plan, which at least describes what measures the operator takes:

- a) in the field of hygiene;
- b) to protect the health, safety, and self-determination of prostitutes;
- c) to protect the health of customers;
- d) for the prevention of criminal offenses" (City Council 2019: 53)³.

Apart from indicating what those measures should guarantee in terms of hygiene, condoms available and a functioning alarm system, exactly what those measures are or what type of minimum conditions in terms of security do they have to include in this business plan is not specified in the document (see APV 2019).

Regarding street-based and home-based sex work, The Municipality of The Hague has made it illegal to work under such modalities. Now, the rules for being able to work as a sex worker in the licensed sector include a) being 21 years old or older, b) having a nationality from one of the EU countries, c) having a valid residence permit from The Netherlands, d) registering at the Chamber of Commerce as a self-employed worker, and e) paying taxes.

Regarding window-based sex work, sex workers have to pay daily rent to use one of the rooms/windows in Doubletstraat or Geleenstraat. This payment varies depending on each business and depending on whether the sex worker

³ All official documents were translated with translation software.

wants to rent it for half shift or the entire shift (half shift would be from 7:00 to 17:00hrs or from 18:00 to 24:00hrs). According to the APV, the operator⁴ has to be present during the hours that the business is open.

Finally, sex work is approached in The Hague through a security network that includes national and municipal institutions, civil organizations and business owners or entrepreneurs like the window-keepers. Within the Municipality, there are 3 departments in charge of issues related to sex work (Anonymous 2019, interview). First, the security department is in charge of giving policy advice, advising the Mayor about decisions to be made, and of the supervision of business, but they do not perform the last in practice. This specific department is dedicated to Sex Work and Human Trafficking together. There is also a Planning (Urban development) team in charge of the territorial planning of the city, including economic activities. They are in charge of the plan for moving the sex work permitted areas to another place of the city (Veldboom 2019, interview).

Second, the GGD Haglanden is in charge of the protection and promotion of public health and they provide information and health services, in particular, the tests for STIs and vaccinations. They are also in charge of doing inspections to the establishments, and they focus on sexual practices and health conditions for sex workers. Finally, the OCW (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) is in charge of security, health, and social work. They are in charge of issues around health and they also focus on prevention. Their role is also more related to the creation of strategies than the implementation.

Apart from the Municipality departments, the Haag's Economic Intervention Team (HEIT for its acronym in Dutch) is in charge of preventing and reducing 'malicious activity and abuses' in sex work (Integraal Veiligheidsplan Den Haag 2019-2022 [Integral Security Plan The Hague 2019-2022]). Although their main objective is not only related to sex work, one of their main focus and areas is directed to it, and it focuses on preventing human trafficking. The HEIT also has law enforcement functions. Their team was responsible for creating a 4 years plan (Kadernota Prostitutiebeleid 2015-2018 [Prostitution Policy Framework 2015-2018]) that was meant to achieve 1) a better position for sex workers, 2) to eliminate stigma, 3) and prevent human trafficking. Nevertheless, they have focused on the last one (Veldboom 2019, interview).

Finally, the Ministry of Justice and Security are the ones in charge of creating the laws. This is also interesting since sex work is not approached from the labor sector, there is not labor inspection in this area, but it is approached as a security issue impacting the city and its citizens.

Apart from the public institutions, the sex work security network is also officially composed by civil society organizations (Shop, Spot 46, Liberty and Stichting De Haven) since the Municipality sees them as part of their security strategies. They offer information and services related to their work, and they support sex workers in their day-to-day needs.

⁴ The term 'operator' is used to refer either to the business owner or the manager. This is because sometimes it was not clear in the interviews whether the owner was taking care personally of the management or a manager was there for that. Both situations are possible, and it may change in each case, but this does not change the responsibilities they have regarding sex workers' security or the effect of their actions, attitudes, and modes of operating on sex workers' security.

Chapter 5 – ‘I am my Security’: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

“I would like to receive more payments digitally because it is also a matter of being able to do my job more officially... and of financial security” (George 2019, interview).

Although sex workers do see the risk of violence from clients and the risks for their sexual health as important topics of security within their work, they are also concerned about other aspects that make sex workers’ security more complex and diverse, as the two introductory quote reflects. Given that, as discussed in the methodology, sex workers are not a homogeneous group, their experiences and practices of in-security reflect the multiple inequalities and power relations embedded in their work, and show that sex workers’ security is more than just the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and direct violence from clients.

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of sex workers’ everyday experiences and practices of security and how they compare to the municipal strategies and practices towards sex work. I will discuss how insecurity is related to precarity and the different power relations and inequalities producing it. This research argues that governmental and municipal approach to sex work fails to guarantee the different forms of labor-related security for sex workers by focusing only on some aspects of *work security* and by focusing on the prevention and elimination of human trafficking but neglecting sex workers’ rights.

The following sections of this chapter include a triangulation of the analyzed information, including sex workers’ interviews and fieldwork notes, interviews with institutional members and official public documents, and academic resources. These sections include, first, a discussion of *work security* as more than sexual health and the prevention of physical violence. Second, the difficulties of asking for help, reporting bad working conditions, and the effects of official municipal security strategies. Thirdly, the importance of acknowledging different needs for different sex workers and of being free to choose the conditions in which they feel safer. Finally, I will discuss the role of sex workers’ status, recognition and the lack of efforts related to this from the public institutions.

5.2 Work Security

As discussed in the background section, the municipal policies and rules focus on aspects related to the hygiene of the workplace (in the licensed sector), the health of sex workers and clients, and the prevention or detection of human trafficking cases. Related to this, operators are obliged to have a business plan that includes health and safety measures in the form of a protocol (see APV). Nevertheless, in practice, sex workers’ health is reduced to sexual health, and their safety is reduced to the prevention of physical violence from clients and human trafficking.

Both in the APV and the Kadernota, the business plan appears to be very important to guarantee sex workers security and, according to one of its members, this is one of the official strategies of the municipality to protect sex workers (Anonymous 2019, interview). Nevertheless, what do those protocols exactly contain is not very clear and it was not possible to have an example. Moreover, most sex workers are not aware of the existence of this protocol, and those who are, do not know what exactly the protocol is. According to the interviews and the fieldwork observations, these working conditions vary considerably between businesses.

According to Standings' category of *Work Security*, the focus of the municipal strategies and approaches to sex work leave sex workers partially unprotected in this regard too. This precarious protection against work risks produces particular types of insecurities.

The focus on sexual health

For almost all interviewed sex workers, the possibility of getting infected with some of the sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is one of the most significant risks they experience doing their job. Concerning this risk, sex workers are grateful for the services given by the GGD and Spot 46 and they expressed all members of both institutions have always been very respectful and nice to them. Nonetheless, apart from the risk of getting STIs, some sex workers also talked about other issues related to their health that are not taken into account in the municipality's approach.

The municipality has focused their efforts on sex workers' sexuality through different strategies as free vaccination and STI's testing for sex workers and clients and giving information about safe sex. This approach is related to the fact that sex work is framed as a 'public health' issue and sex workers' sexuality is the target of health-related interventions, as in the Kadernota:

“It is very important for public health that sex workers can do their work safely. We therefore strongly focus on providing good information and offering help and care where necessary” (Municipality of The Hague 2015-2018: 26).

This is based on the Public Healthcare Act (Wgd for its acronym in Dutch), which focuses on promoting general health and preventing illnesses among 'risk groups', and the related tasks are performed by the GGD. Although this is important, framing sex workers as a 'risk group' legitimates specific interventions that target their bodies and practices specifically, and other aspects of their health are made invisible.

This is a form of *biopower* since it is a way in which the municipality legitimates the control and surveillance of sex workers. Legitimated under the discourse of protection and security, this can be understood as a practice of *governmentality* and normalization. The fact that sex workers' bodies and sexuality are seen as the target of public health is naturalized, and other bodies are not seen as the target of these interventions, even if all have influences on public health.

Although these services are important for sex workers, the focus on them reinforces the stigma around sex work that sees them as STI's bearers and subjects of unsafe sex practices. This shows that there is still a hierarchy around sexuality because although there are specific health services related to sexuality for non-sex workers and they have to pay for them, their identities do not need to be classified for them to access those services.

According to the interviews, emotional, psychological and physical health are also an important part of sex workers' safety. For example, three sex workers said they cannot talk about their job with friends or family because of the stigma, and they would like to have someone to talk to or a place for doing that because it is important for their emotional stability and psychological health. On the other hand, sex workers do not have any kind of security if they get sick or if they cannot work a day for any personal circumstances.

According to the interviews, even though sex workers do not have a contract with the operators, if they cannot work one day, they won't earn any money, but they will have to pay the rent of the window anyways if they do not notify their absence since the day before. This creates a particular relation with operators since sex workers depend on the 'flexibility' or 'kindness' of the operator because it is not a formal employer-employee relation, but they do have power over their work in this sense. Even though home-based sex workers do not have this obligation, they too stop earning their income if they get sick or if they have any other personal inconvenience. This is also related to Standing's category of *income security* since sex workers do not have the possibility of getting into a system of protected adequate stable income.

In terms of hygiene, some sex workers working in windows expressed being very happy about their work conditions in this regard. For them, the operators are always taking care of cleaning the corridors, rooms, and bathrooms, they provide them with towels and sheets, and sex workers are allowed to ask for more as many times as they need and use the shower as many times as they want.

For other sex workers, the physical working conditions are very poor. Some complained about how the operators take care of the place because there is a lot of dust and no proper ventilation. This is also related to another security concern since some sex workers said they are forced to open the door to have some ventilation, and this puts them at risk since having the door open might lead to someone unwanted to enter the room:

"I do not like to work with the door open because I have the right blood to attract anyone, except someone nice ... Then I keep the door closed because I feel better... So that situation affects me a lot... besides the dirt accumulates too much and... I inhale all of it..." (Martha 2019, interview).

Another aspect of bad conditions is that there are not enough showers and the ones they have are not properly clean:

"When I go to that window, I take a shower before, I do all my [physiological] needs before, but I do not go to those... because they do not clean them well... I finish my job and go to my house and bathe there instead of taking a shower in those showers" (Katherine 2019, interview).

There are significant inequalities in this regard since the physical conditions depend on each operator of the windows' business. As this quotes show, these conditions are very poor for some people: the spaces are not clean, the rooms are too small, the beds are also very small, they prefer to bring their towels and sheets since they do not trust the ones the operators give to them or they can tell they are very old since they have holes and stains, there are not enough showers or they are not very clean, and there is not enough circulation of air.

This was also confirmed by my observations during fieldwork. Although I have to acknowledge that opinions about cleanliness might be different because

each person has different standards, I also observed and felt big differences in this regard, even between rooms in which sex workers pay the same rent amount. These observed differences were especially in terms of dust in the rooms, furniture conditions, ventilation, but also about the space. Some rooms were very small, having limited space to move or to do other activities, and they do not have natural light, while others have big spaces and even a kitchen and separate rooms for eating, drinking something or just hanging out.

Although some sex workers, especially those who go only when they have fixed clients or they spend less time there, are not concerned with the size of the room, the sex workers who take both shifts (starting in the morning and finishing at midnight) were concerned because this affects their emotional wellbeing and it also contributes to a reduced group of clients, making them more vulnerable to choose those they would not otherwise.

Being robbed or not payed

The second greatest risk sex workers identified is the possibility that clients steal from them, end up not paying for the services, or ask for the money back. Some sex workers have a special drawer with a locker where they can put their valuable things, but others do not. Also, some clients pay them with fake bills or in the case of one home-based sex worker, the client was supposed to make the virtual transaction but never actually did. This gets even more complicated when some clients ask their money back because the time was over, but they did not finish, and operators tell sex workers to give the money back to avoid problems.

Now, it is important to say that both getting robbed and the clients getting aggressive are bigger risks for transgender women than for cisgender women and men. This is because some clients get aggressive when they find out (or pretend they just found out only because they know this would be a pretext to ask for the money back) that the sex worker is a transgender woman. This might happen even after the services were given, so the client demands the money back and/or gets aggressive.

This is also related to the power relation produced by the persistent hierarchies among gender identities since clients know transgender women will not have much support, and they probably will not report to the police or complain with the operators since they have more chance of losing their workplace than of getting support. This will be discussed deeper in the following subchapters.

Now, contrary to what many people think, these risks are lower for some home-based sex workers, as it is in the case of transgender women being asked for the money back for ‘tricking’ men about their gender identity:

“I think maybe like she said there are sometimes if you work in the window it is difficult because they think you are a woman. And if you do it from home it is online, then there is no misunderstanding for example about this... so that makes it a little bit safer” (Meike 2019, interview).

In this sense, for some transgender women, it is safer to work from home because these misunderstandings do not happen. This is related to the imaginary around the public-private divide and around which one is more secure for sex workers. The municipality approach is based on the assumption that the licensed sector is safer because it is public. According to Wijers:

“The idea is that it is less safe if you work home-based and you know, if we allow that, then all those women can become victims of trafficking if we don’t see them. So, there is also this kind of myth that if we know where they are, then everything will be ok” (2019, interview).

This idea about the licensed sector being safer in terms of the visibility caused by the public space legitimates the different policies and laws making it illegal for sex workers to work from home and the different mechanisms of controlling and surveilling sex workers. Nevertheless, this is more likely to happen in windows and in these cases, transgender sex workers end up by giving the money back to avoid getting hurt or having problems since the operators make them pay for any damage caused by the client. This is a form of sexual and economic violence, as expressed by Raquel:

“For not returning the 50 euros, I had to pay 350 euros that the glass cost. Those houses have insurance, but the woman made me pay 350... that lady is a shrew, it's not the first time, not just to me. She says: ‘So, the next time you have problems, you have to return the money because they are going to break the glass, that way you will avoid having more problems’. How will I return the money if my body has already been occupied?” (2019, interview).

As it is expressed in Raquel’s quote, sex workers do not have any kind of security regarding this kind of work risks since there is no possibility of getting compensated for the stolen money, and they are obliged to give the money back to clients even when the services were already given, and they have to pay for any damages caused by clients. This unequal relation with operators and the fact that they prioritize their property and business income rather than sex workers’ protections is related to a market-driven society and produces precarious conditions for sex workers because they are treated “[...] as commodities, rather than as humans in need of social protection” (Paret and Gleeson 2016: 279).

Moreover, Aidsfonds et al. conceptualize this as sexual violence since the sexual service was given with consent in exchange for the money, so if there is no money in exchange, there was no consent (2018: 17). This is also implicit in Raquel's quote when she refers to the situation of giving the money back as an injustice because her 'body has already been occupied', referring to the fact that she gave the services with the condition of being paid in exchange. George, a male sex worker who has had 3 clients who tricked him and did not pay for the services, explained to me that:

“The problem here is that these types of cases, with the police, are not seen as cases of abuse but as economic crimes, so technically I believe that if a client does not pay you, you do not go to the police to ask for help but you will have to ask to an agency that works with debts. But those procedures for a sex worker, to contact those types of agency, is very expensive and you do not know if in the end you will be paid” (George 2019, interview).

Although both the APV and Kadernota emphasize that sex workers' health and safety are the responsibility of the businesses' operators, there are no specific regulations regarding specific risks like this or related to the working conditions, and the supervisions directed to the businesses do not focus on this. First, when I asked to one member of the Municipality about who is in charge of supervising these aspects in the windows, she said that there is no one specific in charge because the Security Department checks that the policies from the owners are

being followed but they do not have very specific rules in relation to the physical space, for example. The GGD is checking the health conditions but more in terms of sex workers' practices, not about the work conditions (Anonymous 2019, interview). As expressed by Pitcher and Wijers:

“In practice, however, there is little control over whether the operator adheres to the conditions and sex workers mostly do not feel in a position to claim their rights vis-à-vis the operator” (2014: 555).

This was corroborated by Carmen, who said the Municipality is the one that can demand the operators to adhere to some minimum standards of hygiene or physical infrastructure, since sex workers cannot do it directly (2019, interview).

Secondly, business managers are informed when supervision is going to be done, and they have the time to prepare for it in terms of the physical conditions of the place. At the same time, operators tell sex workers also about those checks so they are also prepared and help to clean: “They let us know when they are going to inspect so we can prepare. We clean and fix” (Miriam 2019, interview). Finally, sex workers believe official supervisions, both those directed to check their working status and the ones directed to business, are not there to protect them but only to control them and to identify human trafficking cases:

“The controls do not serve to protect us. Only to control that we are with papers in order. The only thing is if you're chuleada⁵, it's the only thing that matters to them. Just today there was one for the owners, but the police entered and left quickly. I think they just look at the documentation and leave” (Victoria 2019, interview).

5.3 Official Security Strategies

Apart from financing local organizations, the practical elements of the official strategies regarding sex workers' security are the existence of the alarm button, the surveillance cameras, and the police. According to the interviews with sex workers, these mechanisms only work as a way to discipline clients, but their use is completely limited since they rely on publicity and this produces other insecurities for sex workers, particularly in terms of not having any support for compensating time and money losses produced by the use of those mechanisms. This is related to an aspect of precarity explained by Standing:

“A feature of the precariat is not the level of money wages or income earned at any particular moment but the lack of community support in times of need, lack of assured enterprise or state benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings” (2011: 12).

Alarm Button and Surveillance Cameras

In terms of their physical security, the alarm button is the principal official strategy to protect sex workers. The main function of the alarm, as expressed by one member of the municipality, is “the immediate security of the sex worker” (Anonymous 2019, interview), by giving sex workers a way of asking for help if they need it. Nevertheless, almost none of the sex workers has used the alarm

⁵ Being ‘chuleada’ means having a pimp and being a victim of sexual exploitation.

button, even one of them said she does not know how it works. Nevertheless, all participant sex workers think it is very important the alarm button exists. Several said that if an extreme situation arises, they would use it. On the other hand, the fact that it is there makes them already feel safer, and for some, it also functions as a form of scaring the client.

Now, they do not use it for several reasons. First, some of them believe the response will be very slow and the client can react worse because of it, others expressed that the operators get mad if they use it for 'no life-threatening situations' and encourage them not to use it (Fieldnotes). This is related to the fact that operators are afraid of losing their licenses if sex workers use the alarm button too frequently (Wijers 2019, interview).

Another reason for not using it is because it involves frightening a lot of people around them because it is very loud, and it ruins the business, even for others. They prefer to handle the situation themselves, calling a friend, or calling the operator directly to their phones. This last option is only possible for some sex workers because some operators give this possibility, but others do not.

In the case of the sex workers who have used the alarm button or have seen when others use it, the responses and effectiveness of it vary depending on the operator. One sex worker said the alarm started very loud and the operator opened the door and entered the room a couple of minutes after. Another sex worker said the response was very slow when she used it, but there was a response anyways.

This is also related to the private-public divide since the official security strategies rely on their publicity, but sex workers find these ineffective because they are too public and this produces other insecurities as losing clients and hence income. This is why sex workers have created their own practices to govern their security and the official strategies are only left to very extreme cases.

As explained before, some sex workers prefer to call the operator directly when they can, and others try to fill this gap in their security by relying on the sex workers around since they call each other if they feel they need help. Other sex workers use their phones to threaten the client by recording the situation and transmitting it directly on Facebook or exposing them by opening the door or curtain.

In terms of the experiences with the cameras in windows businesses, most sex workers said they believe the cameras in the halls and streets are very important for their security. First, they think it works as a way of scaring the clients and preventing them from doing something bad. Two sex workers said that the cameras from their building do not work, so this is their only function: to make the client think they are being watched. For other sex workers, cameras are important also because there is always someone at the office of the business watching the monitors and making sure everything is ok, so if something happens, they would notice it. Others said the operators are not watching.

Finally, if something eventually happens, there would be visual evidence of the person that was with them in the room. Nevertheless, some sex workers said the cameras only work as monitors, but they do not record or store what they are filming, and others were not sure about it. This also shows that they do not know the security protocols of the place where they rent the rooms, and the supervisions from the municipality might not check their function.

The Police and the Possibility of Reporting

Regarding the police, all sex workers in windows agreed their presence is important. For some of them, it is important because it gives a message to clients. If they see them, they know they have to behave in a certain way, and they know they cannot harm sex workers or break the rules. For others, they must be there, or at least close, so they can respond faster if something happens. Those who have had interactions with the police in these situations said the police were always polite and respectful.

Nevertheless, as it is in the case of the alarm button, all sex workers said they would only call the police if the situation was critical if there was no other way. This is because calling the police or reporting a case takes a lot of time and this is a time they cannot continue working. It also implies that some other sex workers (if not the majority in the street) will be affected by the situation because the police stay there for a long time and fewer clients go. Sex workers do not have any support system or compensation for the lost time, and they still have to pay the rent of the room. As with the alarm button, the police responding to a situation also relies on publicity, and in the same way, that is the reason for not using it.

Some of the operators are those who encourage them not to report to the police because the process lasts a long time and it is working time they lose:

“When something happens, the boss from the house, they don't help... Do you know what happened? Somebody broke the window, and you know what she told us? ‘No, no, don't call the police...’ Because the police go there and start asking questions and everything... and the girls who are next to that do not work... everyone disappears. And if the police were here, they stay 2 or 3 hours” (Vanessa 2019, interview).

Finally, sex workers also think reporting to the police or other institutions will not be useful because for some it has not been when they did it, and it also implies a great investment of time. On sex worker told me about one situation she experienced with a client that got very aggressive with her:

“With one person I had a very difficult case, he hit me and everything. And I asked the police that I never wanted to see him here again on the street, because after I was there after the situation happened to me, they told me that this man had broken a Brazilian's leg, and he had hit someone else ... but after it happened to me. And the next day, he comes... Nothing happened, I always see him here. Still” (Rosa 2019, interview).

As in this case, other sex workers expressed that reporting these situations does not help at all, and they also lose too much time doing it. On the other hand, reporting bad work conditions is also not an option because there is no clear mechanism or because of the fear of the business being closed or the possible retaliation from operators. Asking for help depends significantly on each business, on each operator, because some of them are more committed or involved than others. This will be further discussed in the following sections.

For sex workers, the real function of these security mechanisms, the alarm button, the police, and the cameras, is to scare and discipline clients by making them feel they are being watched, that they can be exposed if they do something wrong, or making them think sex workers are protected. Nevertheless, the fact

that these mechanisms rely on publicity makes them ineffective when sex workers are actually in a dangerous situation, and they might even produce other types of insecurities since they make the situation too public and sex workers have to stop working and, hence making money.

On the other hand, although surveillance might have a disciplinary effect on clients and for instance help to increase sex workers' security in some respects, the rest of their security needs are not taken into account. The main task of police involved in the sex industry is not the protection of sex workers. According to one member of the municipality, The Hague is very different than other municipalities because there is an integrated team with members from the Municipality and the Police working together. This is the HEIT. The role of the police, in this case, is focused on supervising that the businesses are implementing and following the rules, and particularly on identifying human trafficking situations (Anonymous 2019, interview).

5.4 Independency: The Importance of Being Able to Choose

Access to Workplaces

According to sex workers' experiences, operators can decide without any specific reason if they rent them one of the windows or not. These decisions are based both on gender discrimination and on the reproduction of fear towards reporting bad working conditions or bad treatment from the operators. Victoria, a transgender woman who has 2 years of experience working both in windows and as a home-based sex worker, expressed that she has tried to talk to other sex workers to do something about it, but they have said to her that they fear to lose their unique workplace opportunity. This was supported by the other 3 transgender sex workers working in Geleenstraat. As Vanessa, who has 30 years of experience in the field, explained:

“They refuse to lease the room and we have to work in the conditions that are there. And the lady takes advantage that since we don't have another place since they don't give us a window, that's what she takes advantage of and thinks: ‘Oh no, these are NOT going to leave’...” (2019, interview).

This also reflects the different inequalities related to gender discrimination since transgender women have poorer working conditions because they have fewer possibilities of workplaces to choose. Male sex workers have even fewer workplaces opportunities, as expressed by George, who has 7 years of experience in the field:

“There is only one club in Amsterdam, which is the only one in the entire country, which offers workspaces for men. So that lack of regularized workspaces, that is a very big problem... Well, that is something that made me feel insecure” (2019, interview).

This gets even more complicated since home-based sex work is not permitted in The Hague, so transgender women and cisgender men are pushed to work

in the illegal sector, either because they cannot find a workplace in the licensed sector or because they do not feel safe on it.

In this sense, these experiences of discrimination and exclusion, related to what counts as 'normal' or as 'recognizable', shows how these norms produce precarious conditions for sex workers since they create inequalities in terms of access to different rights and services. As argued by Butler: "The performativity of gender is thus bound up with the differential ways in which subjects become eligible for recognition" (2009: iv).

According to the municipality, the fact that male sex workers are more invisible and working underground is because they want to. The 'Framework on Sex Work Policy', developed by the Municipality for the years 2015-2018, argues it is particularly difficult to reach male sex workers because: "[...] they often have an interest in 'staying under the radar'... [and because this group] avoids the care and service provision" (Municipality of The Hague 2015-2018: 34). The persistent gender discrimination is not acknowledged by the Municipality, and neither the few opportunities for men and transgender women to work on the licensed sector caused by it.

In the case of sex workers working from their own home in The Hague, the negative consequences are doubled since they can lose their workplace and their home together. According to one member of the municipality, they cannot give the person a fine because they cannot have their names. Consequently, they only inform the sex worker that this is not allowed. But most frequently, they focus on the owner of the place (landlord) and inform that this is happening in their property. The consequence of this situation is that the landlord will stop renting the place to the sex worker since they could get a very big fine if they allow that activity to happen in their property (Veldboom 2019, interview).

On the other hand, the Municipality assumes that if the person is doing that, there is something wrong happening. So, they focus more on identifying cases of human trafficking than on other things. They have a team in charge of scanning the webpages to identify people working from home. These regulations produce what Paret and Gleeson call a 'precarious legal status' which "goes hand-in-hand with precarious employment and livelihood" (Paret and Gleeson 2016: 281), because home-based sex workers do not count with any protection from work risks, and they live with the constant possibility of losing their homes.

Although sex workers do not have a formal employer-employee relationship with the operators, they still depend on them to have a workplace and there are no regulations related to the refusal of workplaces to sex workers. Given the administrative status of sex workers as self-employed workers, they do not have any kind of protection if they lose their job for any reason, so this increases the fear of reporting any situation. Moreover, sex workers cannot report bad working conditions or treatment since there is no clear system on how to make a complaint or to whom you could go if someone refuses to rent the window to you: "There should be a better complaints system. Anonymous perhaps, to avoid retaliation" (Victoria 2019, interview).

This is related to the Standing's category of *Labor Market Security*, which refers to: "Adequate income-earning opportunities; at the macro-level, this is epitomised by a government commitment to 'full employment'" (Standing 2011: 10). This kind of security is not guaranteed for sex workers because they do not have sufficient opportunities to work in the licensed sector, and if they want to work independently from home, they become illegal workers. As discussed before,

this is even more complicated for men and transgender women since their opportunities are reduced because of gender discrimination.

Choosing the Services' Cost

According to sex workers' experiences and practices, in the window-based sector, sex workers are subjected to have a minimum rate, and this makes it more difficult to negotiate a higher amount with clients. This also creates problems with other sex workers if they ask for less when they want to attract more clients.

In Doubletstraat, this amount is 30 euros and if a sex worker asks for more, some clients would refuse to it because they know the rate is at 30: "I charge 50. It is my strategy to say no, because if the others charge 30 and you 50..." (Carmen 2019, interview). Although, as the previous quote reflects, some sex workers use this as a strategy to refuse clients, they could also do it even if the minimum was not there, and they would be free to choose the price they want to charge for their services.

Another insecurity aspect of this established minimum is that sex workers might have problems with other sex workers or with the operators if they charge less than that:

"Many do not want to say it because they get problems... but many of us do it for 20 because we are not doing anything... 20 is better than nothing" (Rosa 2019, interview).

Some sex workers think that those who charge less are making clients refuse higher prices. Nevertheless, one everyday practice that all sex workers I interviewed perform is to negotiate the price, time and services since the beginning with every client, before they enter the room or, in the home-based sex worker cases, before they even meet in person. Home-based sex workers do not have minimum prices and they said this was not a problem for them because they have more freedom to decide how much they want to charge.

Controlling time, space and choosing clients

For some interviewed sex workers working in windows, The Hague is safer than other cities in terms of privacy and less exposure to people who might just go to see, passerby's, or even people they might know and who they do not want to find out what they do. Some of them even prefer to work in the rooms that are inside the buildings and not directly exposed to the street, to be more isolated from the public, more protected in terms of identity and privacy. Some sex workers prefer to work from home because they have more privacy and control over their time. If they are not with a client, they can do other things, rather than just be waiting in the window.

Regarding the control over which clients they accept or not, some sex workers feel unsafe because the rent they have to pay for the window makes them take clients they would not accept in other situations because they have to make at least the amount to pay. This is also related to the fact that a strategy for some sex workers to be safe is to have fix clients and select the ones that will not cause problems (asking money back or complaining). This is more difficult to do if you depend on the windows because you cannot be so selective. This is reflected in Victoria's case, who feel safer working in windows because there are more

people around, but she feels also safer at home because she does not depend on the obligation of paying the rent:

“What aspects make me feel insecure... for example, there [in windows], you have to pay for everything, every day 100 euros in advance right? What makes me feel insecure is, for example, when you don't start working soon. You have to have money to get back the next day because you can't take the money out of your pocket...” (Victoria 2019, interview).

Also, for some sex workers it is better not to depend only on this source of income in case there are not enough clients, so they do not have to accept the ones they consider dangerous, but also in case you want to study or have a non-remunerative job aside:

“...the more dependent you are on that job, the less selective you can be with your clients. If that is your only source of income, if you did not have many clients that week, you will have to accept even if you feel insecure with the client, to be able to pay your bills” (George 2019, interview).

This is aggravated for home-based sex workers since the number of clients they can accept is reduced because they cannot accept them in their homes:

“...I would probably prefer to do that [to receive clients at home rather than going to the clients' houses] so as not to travel too much and also to be able to have more clients because several clients cannot receive me at home...” (George 2019, interview).

Pushing them to work on the licensed sector produces dependency on this source of income and erases the possibility of studying or doing something else at the same time. This is a form of *disciplinary power* because the licensed sector ends-up producing certain types of bodies, it is a way that increases the productivity of its forces.

Another aspect of insecurity related to this is the fact that sex workers do not have labor benefits and, as it is the case of Miriam, some of them work all day every day of the week since they have to save money in order to have vacations, if they do not do that, it is hard to have time and money to take breaks (Miriam 2019, interview). In these cases, it is more difficult to be selective when choosing clients or complementing your income with other sources.

On the other hand, some sex workers also prefer the windows because there are more people around in case something happens, this means they feel safer working close to other sex workers and even having the operators close by just in case. In the case of home-based workers, they were concerned with the fact that they cannot work with a colleague or more, and this makes them more vulnerable. The fact that the windows are safer for some of them in this sense is not because it is very public, but because they are around other sex workers and they take care of each other.

Martha said that even if they are not friends, they are always looking out for each other and listening if someone is asking for help (Martha 2019, interview). As a way of filling this gap, some home-based sex workers inform a friend about where and when the encounter with the client is happening and they agree on a message or call on specific times to make sure the person is safe. Others have a friend nearby, even in the next apartment, in case they need to ask for help. Whether a sex worker is safer in windows or at home depends on particular

characteristics and it varies from case to case, sex workers should be allowed to freely choose their workplace according to what is safer for each one.

5.5 Status and Recognition

The Formality of the Job

For most sex workers, the fact that sex work is considered a formal job is already an aspect of security. This formality, only part of the licensed sector in The Hague, assures sex workers that they have some rights and securities as other independent workers:

“Well, because everyone here knows that one is legal, right? And knowing that one is legal because one can in case of any abuse or whatever, one can report right?” (Laura 2019, interview).

This formality is related to the status of sex workers and their connections with civil organizations or institutions relate to sex work. This status of formal and legal work makes less possible that clients try to do something to sex workers because clients know sex workers are protected. This is one of George's security strategies. He usually tells clients about his involvement in organizations and his work for sex workers' rights so the clients know he knows his rights and that he will do something if they harm him. But, according to him, this is not the case for most male sex workers. The fact that home-based sex work is illegal makes sex workers more vulnerable to these situations: “Clients know that they know that these guys are not going to find their way to the police so easily, that maybe they will be afraid to go...” (George 2019, interview).

Moreover, although sex worker status is self-employed, the relation with the operators is ambiguous, and this became more complicated with the introduction of the opting-in system, and this is the operator's decision. As explained by Pitcher and Wijers:

“Under this arrangement the operator withholds income tax and VAT on the earnings of sex workers, as in an employment relationship, on top of the regular percentage system (usually 50/50). The sex worker, however, cannot derive workers' rights from this. Neither can s/he claim the (tax) benefits due to self-employed workers” (2014: 555).

The lack of recognition as any other worker is also a cause of insecurity. Although there is a recognition from the municipality about the importance of improving the 'position' of sex workers within the society, this has not been the focus of their interventions and strategies. According to the Kadernota “Position improvement is needed to ensure that sex workers are legal and be able to exercise their profession transparently without being exposed to forms of exploitation and coercion” (Municipality of The Hague 2015-2018: 35). Nevertheless, this is not reflected in their strategies since they have focused on pushing sex workers to the licensed sector, making their work illegal and dangerous when some of them are safer at home, and focusing on the identification and elimination of human trafficking cases.

Although sex workers organizations have been pushing the government and the different municipalities in The Netherlands to guarantee that sex workers

can access financial products for their business, this has not been acknowledged by the public institutions. Currently, in The Hague, sex workers cannot create their own business, they cannot work outside the licensed sector and much less together with colleagues. Finally, they cannot access business tools, which would be an important strategy of security for some of them, for example, to avoid situations where the client asks for the money back or does not pay:

“Some entrepreneurs, [...] they have a machine with which they can make the transaction directly, so you know that the money is transferred, but many of those types of machines are not accessible to sex workers... Well, many banking services are not always accessible to sex workers” (George 2019, interview).

The lack of recognition and status as a professional or a formal worker also produces insecurities in terms of not having many options for using your experience, skills and learned abilities. According to Standing, one aspect of precarity is related to the lack of opportunities to improve your status within one occupation: “Besides labour insecurity and insecure social income, those in the precariat lack a work-based identity” (Standing 2011:12).

The fact that they can lose their workplace so easily also makes this more complicated. This will be discussed in the next section. Finally, the persistent stigma related to sex work also makes this job precarious. This is because some sex workers have to hide it from their families and friends, and they have limited possibilities of talking to other people about it.

The Role of Knowledge and Skills

For most sex workers, the most important practice of security is to learn how to deal with clients, especially with those that start asking for more things or those who get aggressive, and they have multiple ways depending on the situation. In terms of choosing clients, experience and knowledge are also important because sex workers start to learn what to avoid or with which client they feel more comfortable.

For example, some sex workers said they avoid some nationalities, some prefer not to accept clients that use drugs or are under the effects of alcohol, and some also prefer to have fixed clients. In the case of home-based workers, they learn to meet the client first in a public place, after hearing their voices over the phone, see how they interact or what questions they ask. They also check their profiles in social media first, see if they have a picture in their WhatsApp or ask them to send them one.

Concerning the use of different items related to their sexual health, they learn to manipulate the condom always themselves because some clients might be sloppy and break them without noticing, and others might even try to break it or take it out on purpose. In that sense, one rule for all sex workers I talked to is that only the sex worker manipulates the condom, and they only use their condoms, not the ones that the clients sometimes have. This is also the case with some other sexual elements or toys. To use different condoms for different things is also something important to learn.

One security practice that all sex workers referred to, and that will prevent most disagreements from happening, is to negotiate and agree on all the services and the price since the beginning, as discussed before. Additionally, it is part of this strategy to always ask for the payment before giving any service. Also, if the

time is over and the client wants to stay for more, they would have to pay first again.

Another related strategy is to keep track of the time and inform the client when it is almost over, in that way the client can decide if they need more time or they want to finish in the time they have. That prevents them from getting angry or frustrated if the time is over and they thought they had more time to finish. Nevertheless, sex workers said they had to learn all this on their own. There is no training, and no advice or places to discuss these topics, and some sex workers are pushed to work alone (home) so they do not even have other sex workers to share experiences and strategies.

Although experience, knowledge, and skills are very important aspects of security for sex workers, this knowledge and skills do not give sex workers *upward mobility in terms of status and income* (Standing 2011: 10). This is also related to *Skill Reproduction Security*. Hence, although experience and acquired knowledge are important for sex workers' security, time expressed as age makes the work more difficult, you might have to charge less, and you have less diversity of clients to choose. Rosa, a 50 years old cisgender woman who has been working in this field for more than 15 years, expressed:

“That happened to me a lot [violent experiences] but things like this don't happen to me... I think, because I already have more security in me. Do you understand? Then the experience is important. Very much” (Rosa 2019, interview).

Nevertheless, her age makes things more complicated: “Many clients no longer want me because I have had menopause. And as I have dried out, I have a lot of hot around and I use a lot of lubricant...” (Rosa 2019, interview). In this sense, she cannot use all the knowledge and experience she has on other things, and time makes her work more insecure. This goes in hand with the fact that stability is complicated because sex workers can lose the room very easily, and there is no escalation since there is no professionalization or recognition of experience. There is a limit on their status and usually on their income. It is also complicated since sex workers fear the business can be closed or they will not rent it to them anymore.

In terms of representation and support from organizations, some sex workers do not know about the organizations in The Hague, but the ones who know them and have used their services said they appreciate them and believe the help they give is very important. Nevertheless, related to *Representation Security* (Standing 2011: 10), there is also a sense of competition between some sex workers within the licensed sector because of the explained situations with the minimum rate, and they do not feel they have a future inside this occupation.

5.6 Conclusion

The title of this Chapter, ‘I am my Security’, reflects a reality in which sex workers do not have enough support or protection to their security. It also represents the fact that most of their security-related needs are not being acknowledged by the municipality or the businesses, and that they have to create their own strategies to protect themselves. The different situations discussed in this chapter show that sex workers' security is more complex and diverse than just sexual health or protection from physical violence.

The municipality does not take this complexity and diversity into account and they only focus on the normative understanding of sex work. Their interventions are more directed to control the population than to protect it since they reduce sex work to specific spaces (licensed sector), specific hours, and specific genders. This is a form of *disciplinary power* because the systematic organization of space and time allows having control over them, as well as the expected behavior. As expressed by other studies: “This approach situates sex work in the realm of public order, irregular migration and international crime” (Heumann et al. 2016: 168), and it does not address sex workers’ work conditions and rights.

Sex workers’ everyday security showed that their needs are also related to health risks produced by precarious working conditions, or the lack of protection from accidents like clients breaking glasses. The fact that they have to cover the costs in these cases, or the obligation to pay the rent even when they are sick or when they have experienced a difficult situation with a client, reflect precarious conditions that produce more insecurities for them. It was also possible to understand the importance of having a support system or some kind of compensation for the time and money lost in these situations, and also when they want to report a situation.

In the same line, there is a need of being able to report bad working conditions without fearing the business is going to be closed or the operator is not going to rent them the room anymore. They also need spaces to share experiences and strategies of security, and hence the possibility to learn before experiencing something bad, and the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in other things. To leave the official security strategies, like the alarm button or calling the police, as the last resource if they need help also speaks about the limited effectiveness of these strategies and the importance of official alternatives. For example, complementary strategies like the ones some sex workers already have with their operators or having a complementary silence alarm to let the operator know they need help without causing too much noise, could be better options.

In terms of independency, these findings show that sex workers’ needs in terms of security are not homogeneous, but they differ according to multiple characteristics of their identities or life situations like their gender identity, their age, whether they have the support of their families and friends or not, their desires in terms of studies or other activities, their legal status as residents, and, probably, other aspects that were not discussed in this research. In this sense, the conditions and experiences of precarity vary and they are part of different experiences within sex work, creating particular in-securities. The regulations that reduce their possibilities to the licensed sector only produces more precarity and hence insecurity for sex workers.

This is also related to the complexity of the private-public divide. According to the results, it is not possible to say that entire privacy or entire publicity is best for sex workers’ security. The amount of privacy or publicity that each sex worker needs to be safe varies, and this is also why it is important to have different modalities for them to be able to choose what is best in their situation to be safe. For some, publicity is important in the sense that they can be around more people and they can expose clients in case of an emergency, but for others, this publicity is a risk because it is easier to lose clients, it limits sex workers possibilities for negotiation around rates and then limits their clients selection, and it produces particular risks for transgender women.

Finally, sex workers' status and recognition are also important factors for their security. This goes from the treatment they receive from clients and operators, their precarious status as workers and the dependency on the operators' kindness, to the access to business tools and having the option of using their skills and acquired knowledge for other things.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

Sex workers' everyday security reflects the multiple inequalities and power relations that produce precarious conditions and hence multiple and diverse insecurities within their work. This understanding was possible both because of the exploration of their 'everyday security' and the epistemological framework that took their opinions and experiences as the principal source for the construction of knowledge and action. First, as expressed by Crawford & Hutchinson:

“[...] a detailed study of 'everyday security' has important practical and analytical value. It provides a crucial vantage point from which to expose differences in vulnerabilities and insecurities, explore the choices and perceptions that inform the things people do to govern their own safety, and re-engage a rather different politics of security” (2015: 1185).

This close exploration into sex workers' everyday security revealed that security cannot be understood only as the elimination of an imminent threat in a specific moment, as it is to take a sex worker out of a dangerous situations with a client, but to produce conditions that will keep them safe in a long term (Crawford & Hutchinson 2015: 1191).

It is important to reflect on the limitations of this study, taking into account that some aspects of the participants' lives were not addressed because of the limited time to create trust and common objectives between us. During the interviews, sex workers' backgrounds in terms of their migratory history, motivations, personal or family history, for example, were not explored. These are topics that are also important to investigate, like other modalities of sex work as working in clubs or private houses or working without papers, to understand deeper the different experiences and practices of security, and then to see how 'multiple subjects' reveal also commonalities and connections to fight and struggle together

In this sense, although this research is context-specific and refers to a particular work, it points to important commonalities to think about the effects of particular ways of understanding, approaching and regulating sex work, as well as security. It also gives common points with other people experiencing precarity and hence common points of struggle for social justice.

On the other hand, this research has shown that the municipal approach to sex work fails to guarantee the different forms of labor-related security for sex workers by focusing only on some aspects of *work security* and by focusing on the prevention and elimination of human trafficking but neglecting sex workers' rights, as other studies have shown before.

Although the different related policies created by the municipality have specific goals to improve sex workers' position and status, they have not focused on them, but the effects they have are what James Ferguson calls *instrumental effects* (Fergusson 2006). In other words, these policies do not end up generating the necessary transformations for a 'position improvement' or better working conditions of the 'beneficiary' population, as well as regarding the causes of inequality, exclusion, discrimination or marginalization discussed in the findings, but they do generate useful effects for the administration.

These instrumental effects of which Ferguson speaks are in this specific case the increase in control by state agents, the characterization, identification, and classification of the population and even the creation of an imaginary that something is being done to protect sex workers. The point of entry of the policies and interventions is sex workers' protection, but they do not end up achieving it but rather hiding its structural causes.

All of the above is based on the imposition of technical points of view of different types of experts typical of development: the doctor, the economist, the statesman, the police officer, etc. This, coupled with the symbolic violence of the discourse expressed in legal and administrative documents that frame sex workers as victims, as 'risk population' or as bearers of sexual diseases, provides the necessary rationalization to support precarious work conditions, and the lack of protection against discrimination and stigma, generated in the name of security.

This is also related to how the different understandings of what counts as 'normal' or who counts as a subject of recognition produce different experiences of precarity and hence different insecurities that need to be acknowledged. The lack of recognition of sex work as any other work, and hence the lack of regulation from a labor framework, produces precarious working conditions and precarious experiences in life that generate multiple forms of insecurity. Given the diverse elements producing insecurities, sex workers should be allowed to choose between different ways of doing their work according to what they find safer in each case, rather than being pushed to a single form and space.

Word Count: 17.462

Appendices

1. Semi-structured Interview Guide – Sex Workers

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Exploring Experiences and Practices of Security/Safety within Sex Work

MA Research Paper in Development Studies

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

Section I - Profile and Work Context

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Guiding questions: Where were you born, how old are you, what languages do you speak, and how long have you worked in this sector? Ask about gender identity and other relevant identity characteristics)
2. In which modalities of sex work do you work?
 - a. Guiding options:
 - i. Window
 - ii. Streetwalking
 - iii. Club
 - iv. Home-work
 - v. Massage salon
 - vi. Escort Agency
 - vii. Internet – webcam
 - viii. Privéhuis
3. Do you have any work mode preference? Why?
4. Do you always work in The Hague or do you also work in other cities?
5. Why did you choose The Hague? (If the person has lived and/or worked in other cities, also ask about these choices).

Section II - Initial Security Questions

1. In the day to day of your work, what aspects make you feel unsafe or that you are at risk?
 - a. Guiding options: work in places where more sex workers work, work alone, work during the day or the night, work with known or unknown clients ...
2. In the day to day of your work, what aspects make you feel safe or protected?
3. What do you think are the risks of your work?
4. Is there something you do every day to avoid those risks?
5. Is there anything that makes you feel afraid of your job?
6. How do you prepare each day for your work?
7. What people make you feel safe in your work?
 - a. Guiding options: coworkers, operator, administrator or boss, police, a relative or friend who is pending, people on the street, etc ...
8. What people make you feel unsafe in your work?
 - a. Guiding options: coworkers, operator, administrator or boss, police, a relative or friend who is pending, people on the street, etc ...

Section III - Experiences with official security strategies

1. Have you ever gone to _____ if you feel at risk or something happened at work?:
 - Police
 - operator, boss, administrator, etc.
 - the alarm button?
 - a. **If yes:** can you tell me a little more about that experience? (Guiding questions: how did they treat you? What was the procedure? How did you feel? What happened next?)
 - b. **If not:** why?
2. Have you ever gone to the Inspection office of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment for issues related to working conditions?
3. Have you ever been to the Municipality for issues related to your work? (Guiding questions: have you used the GGD health services?)
4. Have you ever been to social organizations or unions of sex workers?
 - a. **If yes:** for what reason? How did you feel? How was the deal?
 - b. **If not:** Why?
5. Have you ever gone to the tax office because you think you are paying more than you should or because your boss, operator or administrator is collecting more than they should?
 - a. **If yes:** can you tell me a little more about that experience? (Guiding questions: how did they treat you? What was the procedure? How did you feel? What happened next?)
 - b. **If not:** why?

Section IV- Questions about Experiences and Own Security Practices

1. What do/would you do in the following situations to protect yourself?:
 - a. With clients:
 - i. If s/he refuses to pay
 - ii. If s/he asks for a service, but you don't want to give it
 - iii. If s/he gets violent
 - iv. If s/he treats you disparagingly
 - v. If s/he requires the service without condom use
 - vi. If s/he wants you to use alcohol or drugs but you don't want to
 - vii. If s/he asks you intrusive questions
 - viii. If s/he stalks you
 - ix. If s/he threatens you with revealing your identity
 - x. If s/he wants to use the shower
 - xi. If s/he takes photos or videos
 - b. With operators, administrators, bosses:
 - i. If s/he refuses to rent a workplace
 - ii. If s/he requires you to work more hours than you want
 - iii. If s/he threatens you with not letting you work more in the place in exchange for something
 - iv. If s/he charges you more money than s/he should
 - v. If s/he requires you to accept customers you don't want to accept
 - vi. If s/he asks you intrusive questions
 - vii. If s/he is violent or abuses you
 - viii. If s/he stalks you
 - c. Working conditions:

- i. If the place is not clean or does not have proper toilet spaces
 - ii. If the alarm buttons do not work
 - iii. If you have nowhere to sleep or rest
 - iv. If there are not enough showers
 - v. If you feel it is dangerous to go out at night to return home
 - d. With people passing through the street
 - i. If they are violent or insulting
 - ii. If they take photos or videos
- 2. What do you do to protect your identity?
- 3. What do you do to protect your health?
- 4. What do you do after experiencing a situation of violence? (Guiding questions: Do you discuss it with your co-workers so they can be careful? Do you have any mechanism to share information about dangerous clients? You do nothing? You take some days off?)
- 5. Do you think that operators or business owners are an important actor for your safety? Why?
- 6. Do you think business operators comply with the plans and responsibilities they have for your security?
- 7. Do you think that the police are an important actor for your safety? Why?
- 8. Is there anything you think could be improved about your working conditions to make you safer at work?

Thank you very much for your participation, those are all the questions. Would you like to add something else?

** Explain the following stages of the investigation and ask if the person would like to participate in a group discussion on this topic.

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