

Abstract:

This dissertation is an account of the struggle of sex workers' community in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted multiple sectors, one such being sex work. Often considered a taboo subject, sex work received little attention from researchers, especially in Germany. Gaps in research can be found due to limited interaction academics have with sex workers or the agencies that sex workers interact with. For this reason, the objective of the research is to explore the research question of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected multiple forms of (in)securities of sex workers in Germany. As such, the dissertation aims to fill two gaps: First, it seeks give a voice to those who understand the intricacies of the hardships that sex workers face. Second, the German perspective can offer a narrow understanding of the impact of the Covid-19 policies on sex workers. This dissertation prioritises the individual and explores the power relations between the state and a marginalised group such as sex workers. To answer the research question, the dissertation takes a qualitative research approach that uses semi-structured expert interviews to collect primary data. Offering a way to reveal the experiences of a marginalized community, online interviews were conducted with employees of specialist sex-work counselling centres and professional associations (N=6) in June and July 2022. The interviews covered a pre-generated topic list. The transcripts were coded using NVivo software and adhered to the Mayring (2015) format to allow for a qualitative content analysis.

The analysis and discussion revealed four main themes of how the pandemic impacted sex workers: *economic hardship*, *food security*, *personal security* and *digital sex work and security*. Due to the ban on sex work during the pandemic, sex workers faced *economic hardships* as a result of income loss. Even though recovery funds existed, there were considerable obstacles in receiving those funds. The second theme, *food security*, found that sex workers were increasingly reliant on food programmes from agencies, which confirms the problem of financial hardship. The risk of infection halted food programmes, increasing food insecurity. Moreover, there were major impacts on the sex workers' *personal security*. Sex workers who kept working to maintain an income were at an increased risk of contracting Covid-19. Furthermore, as they were pushed into illegality, less regulation and oversight existed, which increased vulnerability to exploitation. Additionally, clients became more violent and sex workers had less leverage in negotiating safe sex. The final theme explored the role of the internet in sex work during the pandemic. *Digital sex work and security* was a reoccurring theme as experts noted a migration of sex workers from the street towards the internet. Nevertheless, they suggest that internet security had a minor role when compared to the other major insecurities that sex workers faced during the pandemic. While this work offers a more thorough understanding of the experiences of this marginalised community, more attention needs to be devoted to find solutions to the insecurities of sex workers, especially in the aftermath of a global pandemic.

Key Words: Sex Work, COVID-19, Everyday Security, Germany