

MIGRANT SEX WORK IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Suzanne Werder¹

¹Auckland Sexual Health Service

The Prostitution Reform Act 2003 decriminalised sex work for residents of Aotearoa New Zealand. This model is regarded internationally as one that prioritises sex workers' rights and safety. Evaluation showed that post the Act, sex workers felt they had more rights and were less likely to feel pressured into accepting a client (Abel, Fitzgerald and Brunton, 2007), with street-based sex workers seeing that police now have a responsibility to maintain their safety (Armstrong, 2017).

Unfortunately, none of these rights and protections for resident sex workers are afforded to the migrant sex worker. Under Section 19 of the Act, a work visa is not to be granted to a person who has in the past, or intends, to work or invest in the business of sex work.

The intent of Section 19 of the Act is to deter sex trafficking; the reality is that the migrant sex worker is left without protections, and faces the threat of deportation if found to be sex-working. This can place the migrant sex-worker in a precarious position when it comes to accessing health care, or reporting violence or inappropriate work conditions.