



suggested language

Terms Not to Use

Sex work, sex workers, commercial sex work, commercial sex workers, adult services provider, adult sex provider, transactional sex

The term "sex work" and its derivatives have but one purpose—to normalize prostitution, cast it as an occupation like any other, one that any woman can choose as freely as she may choose to become a teacher, lawyer, or doctor. The pro-prostitution movement has succeeded in popularizing this terminology in the context of popular culture, public health, social service, and even anti-trafficking sectors. This change has occurred without difficulty since the one truth in their rationale is that the term "prostitute" contributes to and exacerbates the stigma, discrimination and violence experienced.

Sex sector, state sex economy

The word "sector" can be used to mean part of or a division of a national economy. When used as "sex sector," the sexual exploitation inherent in organized sexual exploitation is obscured and absorbed into mainstream economic interests of the state.

Forced prostitution, voluntary prostitution, forced trafficking, voluntary trafficking, migrant sex workers

"Pro-sex-work" advocates press for the distinction between "free or voluntary" and "forced" prostitution." From this perspective, only cases of "forced prostitution" are considered sexual trafficking.

Client, customer, hobbyist, john, punter, trick, date, curb crawler

These words are frequently used to describe the male buyers of commercial sex acts. However, use of these terms normalize their role in commercial sex—as if buying sex is as normal and legitimate an activity as buying a car or dining at a restaurant—and obfuscate their true identity as abusers and perpetrators.

Terms to Use

Prostituted persons, prostituted women (or children), women (or children) in prostitution; prostituting; sex industry survivors

Children used in prostitution should never be referred to as "child prostitutes." Children cannot give legitimate consent to commercial sex acts; therefore, any use of a child for commercial sex—irrespective of supposed consent—is a form of child sexual abuse. The appropriate alternative phrase is "prostituted child" which accurately conveys that prostitution is an abuse which happens to the child, and that the child is not "a prostitute."

Organized sexual exploitation, prostitution industry, commercial sex industry

The phrase "organized sexual exploitation" more accurately conveys what the "sex sector" is – a massive organized system for the exploitation and commercialization and profiteering from sex.

Prostituted Persons, Commercial sexual exploitation

"The argument that women choose to be in prostitution is not an acceptable way to dismiss the harm of prostitution. We do not dismiss rape and battery by saying that women choose to walk down the street alone at night. Or, if a woman chose to get married, we do not dismiss battery that occurs within the marriage by saying she chose to be with him."

Prostitute, purchaser, purchaser of commercial sex acts, commercial sex buyer, perpetrator

These terms do not mask or normalize the nature of the male role in the purchase of commercial sex acts.

If you have questions about trafficking terminology or language,
please contact NDHTTF at info@ndhttf.org