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Sex work in Aotearoa New Zealand remains a critical site for social justice and public policy, despite the country's globally unique decriminalisation model. Migrant and gender-expansive sex workers continue to face layered forms of stigma, discrimination, and structural exclusion (Armstrong et al., 2020; Gilmore, 2020; Weinhold, 2023). This presentation will highlight key findings from the discussion chapter of an MA thesis that explored how "risk" and "safety" are shaped by intersecting identities, and how migrant and gender-expansive sex workers actively resist marginalisation. The presentation draws on a peer/ally-designed, qualitative and arts-based methodology involving semi-structured interviews and a collaborative "craft session," analysed using reflective thematic analysis.

The presentation will cover the following key discussion topics: Entitlement to sex and the critique of desire, examining how desire is racialised, gendered, and shaped by power. Resistance through dominance, exploring how agency can manifest in unexpected and complicated ways. The dichotomies of empowerment/trauma and clean/dirty, interrogating how these binaries are constructed and resisted.

Drawing on these findings, the presentation will make the case that while decriminalisation provides a foundational legal framework, it is insufficient without broader cultural and institutional change. Notably, the current legislation excludes non-resident migrants from its protections under Section 19, reinforcing legal precarity for many.

The presentation concludes that advancing equity, dignity, and justice in sex work policy requires two critical shifts: Extending legal protections to all sex workers by removing Section 19. Recognising and supporting the diverse strategies of resistance used by sex workers at the margins.

### **Keywords**

Sex Work; Intersectionality; Resistance; Risk; Safety; Discrimination; Aotearoa New Zealand

### **References**

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