

Article

Sex Work and the Politics of Space: Case Studies of Sex Workers in Argentina and Ecuador

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Abstract: While many studies examine how different legal approaches to prostitution affect sex workers' living and working conditions, few studies analyze how sex workers' physical workspaces and the policies regulating these spaces influence sex work conditions. Based on interviews with 109 current or former sex workers, 13 civil society representatives, 12 government officials, and 5 other actors in Ecuador and Argentina, this study describes sex workers' uses of urban space in the two countries and compares how they experience and respond to government regulation of locations of prostitution. Argentina and Ecuador took different approaches to regulating sex work space, which appear to reflect different political ideologies towards prostitution. Sex workers expressed different individual preferences for spaces, and government limitation of these spaces represented one of their major concerns. The results illuminate how sex workers' workspaces influence their working conditions and suggest that governments should consider sex worker preferences in establishing policies that affect their workspaces.

Keywords: sex work; prostitution policy; urban space; regulation; Argentina; Ecuador

1. Introduction

"We don't have a place to work."

—Río, a Buenos Aires sex worker

"All we want is for them to give us a space, nothing more."

—Rosa, a Quito sex worker

On 21 October 2015, a female sex worker performed sex acts with a client in the middle of the sidewalk in the Historic Center of Quito. Surrounding the couple, a group of women screamed, "We are going to have sex in the streets," and, "Is this what the Mayor wants, is this what the Mayor wants?" [1]. Ecuadorian newspaper *El Mercurio* posted a video of the incident on its website with the headline, "The protest of the sex workers in Quito has no limits" [2]. Why were these sex workers so upset? The municipality had closed down the hotels where they serviced clients. They demanded that the municipality give them a "dignified space" to work [1].

On 6 October 2016, another group of women, some dressed in cat masks to hide their identities and others in shirts that read "Feminist Whore", gathered in front of the Buenos Aires legislature. "We don't need rescuing from anyone", read one of their protest signs. They were protesting the recent law passed by the legislature to prohibit *whiskerías*, bars in which the waitresses or dancers are often sex workers [3].

Why did the governments of Quito and Buenos Aires close these businesses, and why did sex workers care so much? What do these sex workers' reactions to the closures reveal about how sex workers relate to their workspaces?

Conflict over sex work in Western academic and political discourse normally centers on the legality of prostitution, producing fierce debates among policymakers and feminists about how different policy approaches to prostitution might impact the individuals in prostitution and gender relations within society.¹ The abolitionist approach argues that prostitution is inherently exploitative and embodies the ultimate form of male dominance over women, and therefore feminists should aim to eliminate the existence of prostitution by criminalizing the purchase of sex [5–8]. The sex workers' rights approach, however, criticizes this "oppression paradigm" [9] and argues that prostitution is a legitimate form of work and should be legalized or decriminalized [10–13].² With this focus on the legality of prostitution, however, less research examines the effects of more specific policies regarding prostitution on sex work conditions in places where it is legal, and Weitzer [15] identifies the conditions of legal prostitution as an under-researched topic. While there is a growing body of research in this area, for instance in New South Wales (NSW), Australia and New Zealand [4,16–18], more research on the conditions within different contexts of legal sex work is warranted, particularly in developing countries.

Because sex work is legal in Argentina and Ecuador, but brothels are illegal in Argentina and legal in Ecuador, these two countries provide the opportunity to examine how sex workers experience different policy approaches to legal sex work. In interviews on the working conditions they face, sex workers in both countries expressed great concern with policies that limited their workspaces. This concern suggests sex workers' relationship to space as an important topic of exploration. Most of the studies that explicitly identify space as an important component of sex work focus on mapping the geographies of sex work and examining how sex workers' responses to law enforcement and their environments construct the locations of sex work within cities [19–24]. Through case studies of sex work in Argentina (primarily in Buenos Aires) and Ecuador, this study will focus on the types of spaces sex workers use in urban environments, adding to the emerging literature on the "micro spaces (sites and arenas) and strategies" used by sex workers ([4,17,18]; [25], p. 151).

Different types of spaces used by sex workers offer different working conditions. For instance, street-based sex workers are consistently found to experience more victimization than indoor sex workers [15,18]. Street-based sex work, however, may provide sex workers more autonomy and earnings than indoor managed spaces like brothels [4]. This paper seeks to expand the body of knowledge on sex workers' feelings about the spaces in which they work, how they decide where to work, and how policies regulating these spaces affect the conditions they face. Given the potential influence of sex workers' workspaces on their working conditions, this study examines how government regulation of these spaces impacts sex workers' qualities of life. Furthermore, it analyzes how governments' political ideologies towards prostitution shape their regulation of these spaces and how sex workers respond to government controls.

2. Background: Sex Work and Space

2.1. Geographies of Sex Work

Space, far from a mere background for the activities of society, plays a key role in manifestations of social hegemony and in individuals' experiences and power. As Hart explains, "It is both uncontroversial and obvious (at least to geographers) that people's identities are in part constructed

¹ In this study, I use the terms "prostitution" and "sex work" interchangeably, relying more often on the term "sex work" due to the stigma associated with "prostitution." I define sex work as the direct exchange of sexual services for money or goods, similar to Abel and Fitzgerald's definition [4]. When discussing persons or organizations that explicitly object to defining prostitution as a form of work, I employ the terms they use.

² Legalization allows the government to control sex work and place regulations on when, where, and how it may take place, while decriminalization removes all laws regarding prostitution [7,14].

through the spatial locations they inhabit and frequent” ([19], p. 215). The physical spaces that groups occupy may indicate their relative status within society, and power is exerted through these spaces [26,27]. Just as marginalized racial, ethnic, or class groups may occupy specific places within a city, so, too, may marginalized sexualities. Gay communities, for instance, often occupy specific neighborhoods or businesses; prostitution similarly occupies specific locations [28,29]. The nature of these spaces influences the experiences and behaviors of the individuals who inhabit them.³

The spaces that sex workers occupy within a city frequently result directly from state control over physical space and deliberate exclusion or tolerance of sex workers in specific places. In their application of Henri Lefebvre [27]’s Marxist theories on the production of space to prostitution, Hubbard and Sanders “contend that the geography of sex work is the outcome of an unfolding relationship between different types of space—the ordered spaces of the capitalist state on the one hand, and the ‘lived’ spaces of the prostitutes on the other” ([21], p. 75). States have a view of the way spaces should function to fulfill the goal of creating a productive society, which they enforce through laws, while sex workers occupy space with the goal of soliciting clients. The overlap of these spaces creates “distinctive geographies of sex work”, in which sex workers occupy spaces where the state will tolerate their presence or where they can escape state control ([21], p. 76). Red-light districts most obviously embody the relegation of sex work to specific spaces in a city. States limit sex workers’ access to certain spaces in their attempts to make the city “a functional and ordered whole”, viewing sex work as morally wrong and therefore “a disturbance to that socio-spatial order” ([21], p. 82). These efforts often reflect a desire to preserve an order of “‘respectable domesticity’—that is the social norms of heterosexual monogamous relationships and reproduction” by creating a “moral geography” that hides non-normative forms of sex from view by the dominant population ([24], p. 101; [29,33]). Policing of sex workers’ access to space marginalizes them both physically and socially; even the creation of legal zones of tolerance may ghettoize them from the rest of society [20,24].

Sex workers frequently find ways to escape or subvert state control, however. Sex workers may refuse to leave their spaces, instead coming up with tactics to solicit clients undetected by police [34]. Alternatively, they may move to other areas of the city or alter their forms of working. In Birmingham, England, sex workers turned to window prostitution as a “tactical response” to prohibitions against street sex work, forming the current red-light district ([21], p. 84). Not only does the state, thereby, shape urban space, but so, too, do sex workers themselves [21]. Sex workers are limited in their “experiences of space” by government control, but they exercise “resourcefulness and resistance” through the “construction of their own particular spaces” ([22], p. 150).

Sex workers can exercise some power against state control through the spaces they create for themselves. As Knopp explains, “As difference is constructed (spatially) to facilitate the accumulation of power, that (spatialised) difference is also empowered. This is true in even the most asymmetrical of power relations” ([26], p. 159). Although states have power over sex workers in excluding them spatially from mainstream society, the spaces sex workers do occupy can symbolize their resilience and provide them a place of their own within society. In Hart’s study of street sex workers in a Spanish red-light district, for example, the area became simultaneously an illicit space and a “safe space” for taboo activities ([19], p. 222). This space and power balance is dynamic; as sex workers adopt strategies to avoid state control, states come up with new ways to control them. For this reason, Hubbard and Sanders describe spaces of prostitution

“as the outcome of an ongoing relationship between the ordering enacted by the state, law and citizenry . . . and the negotiation of this ordering enacted by those who make their living in the red-light district. This identifies the red-light district as always *becoming*, a

³ Several of the forementioned articles about the emergent research in this area address this issue. For more on the geography of sexuality, specifically sex work and LGBT+ spaces, see Bell and Valentine’s *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, Maginn and Steinmetz’s *(Sub)Urban Sexscapes: Geographies and Regulation of the Sex Industry*, and Doan’s *Queering Planning: Challenging Heteronormative Assumptions and Reframing Planning Practice* [30–32].

complex assemblage made and remade through the folding together of these different types of space.” ([21], p. 80, emphasis in original).

Sex workers and the law’s constant response to one another creates the spaces of sex work, which move and change over time as a result of this negotiation [35,36].

Of course, sex workers and the state are not the only parties that shape these spaces. Clients, pimps, brothel owners, and local residents too contribute to the dynamics of sex work spaces. For instance, clients influence where sex work occurs because sex workers are likely to congregate where there is high client demand. Pimps or individual sex workers may control parts of the street and charge other sex workers to occupy those spaces [37], and prostitutes who are victims of sexual exploitation or trafficking may have little power to control where they work [38,39]. Brothels and other sex work businesses likely choose their locations in reaction to state policies and client demand [36,40]. Other residents may complain about the presence of sex work, leading the state to intervene and force sex workers out of a space where they were previously tolerated [20,41], or to preemptively allow sex work only in nonresidential or industrial areas [42]. These players all have a relationship with the state, and their negotiations may, too, shape sex work spaces and limit the power of sex workers to choose their own spaces. The spaces where sex work takes place, therefore, are the result of conflicting pressures in a complex evolutionary system.

2.2. Spaces’ Influence on Sex Workers’ Conditions

To the extent that sex workers do have control over the spaces where they work (and therefore excluding victims of sex trafficking), and among the spaces that are accessible to them, it’s safe to assume they choose those with the best working conditions. But what are their preferences and concerns, and what spaces provide the best conditions? Working conditions may include a variety of factors: earnings, autonomy, safety, cleanliness, privacy, comfort, distance from home, or relationships with other people in the space. As sex workers choose a space, however, they may have to make trade-offs between desired conditions.

Much of the literature on different sectors of sex work suggests that sex workers experience less victimization within managed indoor sex businesses like brothels⁴ than in street-based work, as well as possibly escort and private work [18]. Brothels in particular can protect sex workers from violence and theft in providing a safe, familiar location monitored by brothel management [43–46]. In Nevada, USA, many legal brothels have emergency buttons in the bedrooms so sex workers can call in security if a client becomes violent or refuses to wear a condom [43,46,47]. These buttons do not guarantee safety, as a sex worker might not always be able to reach the button if a client becomes abusive [43], but they can add an additional level of protection. Brents and Hausbeck suggest that safety in the brothel comes from “working in a setting that allows constant public scrutiny of the behavior of the customer before the actual paid party, that makes client anonymity and easy exit difficult, and that provides a houseful of people just a flimsy door away” ([43], p. 281). More important in determining the relative safety of a sector of sex work may be the site of provision rather than the site of solicitation; Prior, Hubbard and Birch [18] found that 52.6% of sex worker incident reports in NSW, Australia occurred in an assailant’s vehicle or the sex worker or assailant’s residence, sites more likely to be used by street-based, escort, and private workers. Brothels can thus provide security as compared with street-based or escort and

⁴ I define a brothel as a business of more than one sex worker in which the sexual services are provided on premise, typically managed by a third party to whom sex workers must pay a portion of their earnings. However, there are also instances where sex workers may manage their own brothel as a collective, such as the brothel Danubio Azul in Quito, discussed further in the case study on Ecuador. Some sex workers work out of privately owned premises or their own homes, either collectively or alone; Prior and Crofts [16] suggest that home occupation sex services premises should be considered a separate category from large commercial sex premises. When using the term brothel, I generally refer to a commercial sex premise owned by a non-sex worker third party, and I specify if referring to a sex worker-owned business.

private work, where sex workers may not have protection from client violence unless they pay a guard or pimp, who may also exert violence [39,48–50].

Sex workers who choose to work in a brothel for its security, however, must trade off income and agency. Sex workers in brothels often pay around 50% of their fees to brothel management [43,46,51,52]. Further, brothel-based sex workers may have less freedom to come and go as they please or to choose their clients. A study of 772 sex workers in New Zealand found that street-based sex workers preferred the greater autonomy and earnings of working in the street [4]. Yet the sex workers who chose to work in brothels viewed the downsides as worth the benefits [4]. The Nevada sex workers interviewed by Brents and Hausbeck [43] generally viewed the safety provided by the brothel as worth the decrease in income and felt free to leave the brothel when they wanted, despite requirements that they remain on brothel premises any time they are contracted to work. Similarly, migrant sex workers in Belize felt that brothels gave them “a large degree of self-autonomy” ([45], p. 31). Conditions can vary greatly between brothels depending on size, location, and management practices [47]. Sex workers’ choice of space to work depends upon their perceptions of conditions in all the spaces available to them and how they prioritize these conditions.

Sex workers may also develop personal attachments to their places of work. Both indoor commercial sex premises and outdoor sex work spaces can serve as important areas of socialization [4,19,53,54]. Street sex workers may decide to remain on the streets even if safer indoor alternatives become available because they like the environment’s familiarity and culture and may form strong social bonds with other sex workers and with clients [19,20]. Sex workers in brothels may also value socialization with other sex workers and with clients [4,53]. This socialization with other sex workers is less likely to occur in home-based sex work [16]; however, the home provides greater opportunities for other forms of socialization with children or other family members. It follows that sex workers’ spatial preferences may further depend on what spaces they are used to and may vary widely between individuals.

Government regulation of sex work spaces can significantly change the conditions sex workers face. Shutting down commercial sex establishments may drive sex workers to work on the streets or in more private, underground forms of indoor sex work, where they face more danger and law enforcement authorities are less able to monitor for exploitation [51]. Legalizing brothels could improve brothel conditions by creating regulations for the protection of sex workers and clients. Brothel codes can ensure that sex workers are working in safe and sanitary conditions, and contracts between sex workers and brothels enable sex workers to seek legal redress if the brothel does not follow the terms of the contract [46]. When brothels are unregulated, prostitutes do not receive legal status as workers and brothels have no legal obligations to them, leaving the workers in a vulnerable position [51].

However, simply legalizing brothels may not be sufficient to improve conditions. Just as brothels may operate outside the law when brothels are illegal, they may illegally operate outside of code when brothels are legal. Some brothels may choose not to comply with regulations because they can save on costs, or they may profit from exploiting their workers. Operation outside of code is more likely if regulations on brothels are constructed to make the operation of a legal brothel very difficult or expensive. For instance, in NSW, Australia, despite state law allowing brothels to operate as legal businesses, some local governments continue to place stricter regulations on brothels than other businesses [40,55,56]. Local governments and councils may subject them to restrictions intended not for the safety of sex workers but to discourage the existence of brothels, based on beliefs that they breed crime and contribute to moral corruption [40,56]. These restrictions may dis-incentivize some brothels from operating legally because obtaining legal status is much more expensive than continuing to operate illegally [40] or because seeking registration would bring attention to a business that previously operated without community or council knowledge, risking the business being shut down if not approved [55].

Governments control sex work space not only through legislation but also through regulations and implementation choices. Law enforcement chooses where to enforce laws against street prostitution,

for instance [21], and local governments sometimes implement federal laws regarding brothels or other sex work spaces in a way that undermines the law's intended purpose [40]. These choices all influence what spaces sex workers have access to and therefore the conditions they experience.

In light of the discussion above, this study therefore asks several questions: First, what is the relationship between sex workers and space, and what conditions do they experience in different types of spaces? Second, how do their interactions with the state influence the spaces they use and the conditions they experience? Finally, how do states decide how to regulate sex work space, and what strategies do sex workers employ to negotiate these spaces with the state?

3. Methods

I examine sex workers' relation to space and policies regulating sex work spaces based on case studies of sex work conditions in Argentina and Ecuador. These two countries provide an opportunity for policy comparison, because brothels are criminalized in Argentina but permitted in Ecuador. Surveying a random sample of sex workers in different spaces in each country was not possible due to the wide diversity of locations where sex work can take place, lack of data about the population as a whole, limited time and geographic access, and safety concerns. I therefore used a snowball sample approach to interview sex workers and other relevant actors, including sex worker organizations, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on prostitution, and government officials to ask about the conditions faced by sex workers.

These interviews were semi-structured to obtain a comprehensive view of the conditions of sex work in the countries and to allow interview participants to explain the factors they considered most important. Questions for sex workers were designed to be open-ended and elicit storytelling to reveal their experiences and perceptions. I also sought to find out how participants thought sex work conditions could be improved and what legal model of sex work they wanted. To address the influences of brothel legality on sex work conditions, I specifically asked about the conditions sex workers faced in brothels versus other spaces. I asked additional questions in response to participants' answers and varied questions as seemed contextually appropriate. All subjects gave their informed verbal or written consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. Methods were approved by the Duke University Institutional Review Board (D0542) on 5 May 2016. See Appendix A for a list of all interviews conducted, Supplement A for a list of typical questions, and Supplement B for consent forms used.

3.1. Argentina

Interviews in Argentina took place in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires in late May and early June 2016. I obtained interviews with 41 active sex workers on their personal experiences in prostitution by directly approaching individuals at their places of work with a small flyer with information about the study (see Supplement C) or through snowball sampling. Interviews took place in the locations where sex workers operated or in a nearby kiosk or café chosen by the sex worker, during their working hours.⁵ I interviewed 25 sex workers who worked in the *microcentro*, the center of the city. As a hub for business and tourism, the *microcentro* was safer and more easily accessible than many of the other areas of prostitution in Buenos Aires. Five participants worked in Recoleta, another upper-class area; ten in Once (officially called Balvanera), a lower-class neighborhood home to many immigrants; and one in other locations (see Figure 1). Due to time and financial constraints, I was unable to conduct interviews outside of the city of Buenos Aires, so information on sex work in other parts of the country relies on information provided by interview participants and secondary sources.

⁵ Sex workers were free to choose the time of their interview, and all chose to be interviewed during times they would normally be soliciting clients.

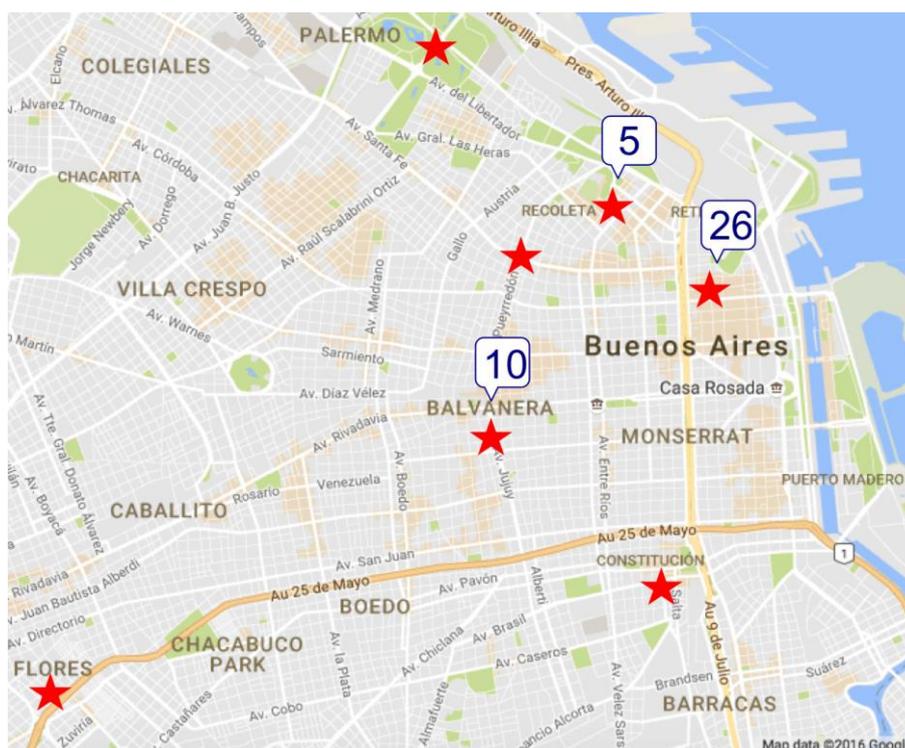


Figure 1. Interview locations in Buenos Aires. Red stars indicate approximate areas interview participants identified as places where sex workers concentrate. Numbers indicate number of sex workers interviewed in the area. Map from *Google Maps*.

Most interviews lasted between 15 and 40 min. Each participant interviewed about their personal experiences received 300 Argentine pesos (ARS) (about 21.50 USD at time of interviews) for their time, as recommended by an NGO, except for two who received 500 ARS (about 36 USD) because their interviews lasted significantly longer than originally requested.

Of these participants, 34 were female, three were transgender, and four were male.⁶ The sample includes 27 sex workers who originated from Argentina, five from Paraguay (one of whom grew up in Buenos Aires), two from Uruguay, two from Brazil, two from Dominican Republic, one from Peru (but grew up in Buenos Aires), and two were not recorded. Among those who grew up in Argentina, 19 originated from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, three from Buenos Aires province, two from Salta, one from Catamarca, one from Misiones, one from Tucumán, and five were not recorded. They ranged in age between 20 and 60 years old, with a mean of 34.5, median of 34, and standard deviation of 9.0 years (excluding two participants whose age was not recorded). The spaces where these participants reported soliciting clients are broken down by gender in Table 1. Because these data were obtained through convenience and snowball sampling, they should not be interpreted as representative of the population of Buenos Aires as a whole. For instance, I was unable to obtain interviews with sex workers in private apartment brothels or those who solicit by internet or public advertisement. However, some sex workers had previously operated in other types of spaces and could provide insight into the working conditions of those spaces. It is also important to note that

⁶ I did not find or hear of any transgender men sex workers in my research, so the term “transgender sex workers” in this study refers to transgender women. I categorize sex workers into female, transgender, and male, rather than cisgender women, transgender women, and cisgender men, both for brevity’s sake and to reflect how the sex workers tended to refer to themselves and each other, as the term “cisgender” is as of now little used in Latin America.

these locations are not fixed; many sex workers changed spaces depending on changes in government policy, business owner attitudes, or client behavior, as discussed further in the case studies.

Table 1. Sex worker participant spaces of solicitation in Buenos Aires, Argentina by gender.

Space of Solicitation (Neighborhood)	Female	Transgender	Male	Total
Street (<i>microcentro</i> and Recoleta)	10	1	0	11
Street/Public transport station (Once)	6	1	3	10
Street outside café (<i>microcentro</i>) ⁱ	9	1	0	10
Café (<i>microcentro</i>)	7	0	0	7
Bar (Recoleta)	2	0	0	2
Bars/nightclubs and street (mostly Recoleta and Palermo)	0	0	1	1
Total	34	3	4	41

ⁱ This category is included as distinct from “Street (*microcentro* and Recoleta)” because these participants had solicited inside the café up until a few months prior to the period of interviews, and therefore provided perspectives on both types of spaces (see Section 4.2.3).

Amongst NGOs, I interviewed the Secretary General of the national sex workers union Association of Women Prostitutes of Argentina (AMMAR); representatives of AMMAR’s provincial chapters in Entre Ríos, Mendoza, San Juan, Neuquén, and Santiago del Estero; multiple representatives of the prostituted women’s organization Association of Argentine Women for Human Rights (AMADH); the Secretary General of the Network of Women Sex Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean (RedTraSex); and representatives of two anti-trafficking organizations. I also rely upon 11 interviews I conducted with anti-trafficking NGOs and government officials in Buenos Aires in 2015 for Judith Kelley’s *Scorecard Diplomacy: Grading States to Influence their Reputation and Behavior* [57].

3.2. Ecuador

Interviews in Ecuador took place from June to August 2016. I interviewed 46 active sex workers and 2 former sex workers⁷ on their personal experiences in prostitution, primarily through introduction by leaders of sex worker organizations, as well as through snowball sampling. Of these, 28 worked in Quito, 12 in Machala, seven in Guayaquil, and one in Milagro (see Figure 2). Interviews took place in the locations where sex workers operated during their working hours, except for several interviews in Guayaquil that took place in a park and one in Quito that took place in a restaurant. Most interviews lasted between 10 and 30 min. Each of these participants received 20 USD compensation, based upon a recommendation by two sex workers’ organizations.

Of the sex workers who were interviewed about their personal experiences, 31 were female, 11 were transgender, and six were male. Among these participants, 40 originated from Ecuador, seven from Colombia, and one from Spain. Of the Ecuadorians, 10 originated from Guayas province, 10 from El Oro, seven from Manabí, six from Los Rios, four from Pichincha, one from Esmeraldas, one from Chimborazo, and one was not identified. They ranged in age from 18 to 59, with an average of 36.0, median of 34.5, and standard deviation of 11.3 years. The spaces where all these participants reported soliciting clients are broken down by gender in Table 2, followed by Tables 3–5 which show soliciting spaces by gender in Quito, Guayaquil, and Machala, respectively. The single participant in Milagro was female and solicited in the street. For the same reasons described in the previous section on methods in Argentina, these data should not be considered representative of the sex worker populations as a whole.

⁷ The two former sex workers were both under the age of 18 when they engaged in prostitution, and therefore would be considered victims of child sexual exploitation. Many of the active sex workers also began selling sex before the age of 18. Whether minors who sell sex should be labeled sex workers is a source of debate; some definitions use the term “sex work” to refer only to “consensual exchanges between adults” [58], while others use a broader definition that includes minors [59].



Figure 2. Interview locations in Ecuador. Numbers indicate number of sex workers interviewed in each city. Map from *Google Maps*, edited to include Milagro.

Table 2. Sex worker participant spaces of solicitation in Ecuador by gender.

Space of Solicitation	Female	Transgender	Male	Total
Street (includes all outdoor spaces)	19	10	5	34
Brothel	12	0	0	12
Internet or social media	0	1	1	2
Total	31	11	6	48

Table 3. Sex worker participant spaces of solicitation in Quito, Ecuador by gender.

Space of Solicitation	Female	Transgender	Male	Total
Street (Plaza del Teatro)	12	6	0	18
Street (Avenue Amazonas)	4	0	0	4
Brothel	5	0	0	5
Internet and social media	0	1	0	1
Total	21	7	0	28

Table 4. Sex worker participant spaces of solicitation in Guayaquil, Ecuador by gender.

Space of Solicitation	Female	Transgender	Male	Total
Street	2	1	0	3
Brothel	3	0	0	3
Social media	0	0	1	1
Total	5	1	1	7

Table 5. Sex worker participant spaces of solicitation in Machala, Ecuador by gender.

Space of Solicitation	Female	Transgender	Male	Total
Street	0	3	0	3
Street/Park	0	0	5	5
Brothel	4	0	0	4
Total	4	3	5	12

I also interviewed leaders of four sex worker organizations in Quito, three in Machala, two in Guayaquil, and one in Milagro. Two of these leaders are included in the personal interviews. Other interviews include seven representatives of other NGOs, five municipal officials in Quito, four owners or managers of businesses where sex work takes place, and one physician.

4. Case Study: Argentina

4.1. Background

4.1.1. Regulation of Sex Work

Independent sex work is legal at the federal level in Argentina, but brothels and other third parties that profit off sex work are illegal, as is advertising sex work. Articles 15 and 17 of Law 12.331 on Profilaxis of Venereal Disease of 1937 prohibit the “establishment of houses or premises where prostitution is practiced, or where it is incited” [60].^{8,9} In 2011, Presidential Decree 936/2011 on the Comprehensive Protection of Women also prohibited “notices that promote offers of sex”, on the basis that these advertisements promote the exploitation of women and facilitate human trafficking, and established the Office of Monitoring of Publication of Sex Trade Offer Notices.

Although no federal law prohibits independent sex work, Amnesty International [62] reports the 2012 anti-trafficking law has been used in practice to criminalize autonomous indoor sex work. The original law, passed in 2008, contained a clause that required victims to prove they had not consented to being trafficked, despite pressure from anti-trafficking NGOs and the US government to make consent irrelevant regardless of age. The legislature finally revised the law in 2012 due to public outrage after the accused traffickers of well-known trafficking victim Marita Verón were acquitted (Araujo, Caminos, Colombo, Encinas, and Rodriguez interviews 2015). While this revision satisfied many anti-trafficking activists, however, its lack of clear distinction between consensual sex work and sex trafficking has proven problematic for many sex workers. The law considers exploitation an “aggravating factor” of trafficking, which authorities have interpreted to mean that any “form of involvement in the organization of sex work” is trafficking ([62], p. 27). Sex workers who facilitate the sex work of others, for instance by managing a shared apartment, can thus be considered traffickers

⁸ For a history of this law and other prostitution legislation in Argentina, see Guy’s *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* [61].

⁹ All quotes translated from Spanish by the author.

under the law [62]. Individuals who consider themselves autonomous sex workers may be treated as trafficking victims even if they insist they are not [62].

Additionally, indoor autonomous sex workers are often subjected to “code inspections” of the residences in which they work [62]. Police may claim they need a business license and post signs that the business has been shut down, as though the location were a business and not a residence, despite the fact that no business licenses exist for sex work [62]. Sex workers reported that it was unclear under what law police were conducting these inspections [62].

Misdemeanor codes penalize various forms of prostitution, particularly in spaces that are visible to the public, in every province except for Neuquén, Río Negro, Santa Fe, Santiago del Estero, Entre Ríos, and Córdoba [63]. Law enforcement may charge sex workers with “offensive or scandalous public behaviour” [64]. In the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Law 1472, Article 81 criminalizes the offer and demand of sex “in an ostentatious manner in non-authorized public spaces”. Although most cases of violations of this law are thrown out due to lack of evidence, Buenos Aires sex workers, particularly transgender sex workers, are often asked by police to show identification and can be given fines or probation [62]. Sex workers therefore face limitations on the spaces they can use, both by explicit legislation and by law enforcement’s interpretation of legislation, even if the actual exchange of sex for money is legal.

4.1.2. Sex Worker Organization

Sex workers in Argentina began organizing in 1994, when a group of Buenos Aires street prostitutes founded the Association of Women Prostitutes of Argentina (AMMAR) to oppose police abuse [65]. After being granted office space by the Central of Argentine Workers (CTA) union in 1995, AMMAR officially joined the CTA in 2001 [65]. AMMAR now has branches in nine provinces and the city of Buenos Aires and fights for the recognition of sex work as legitimate work and an end to police harassment and abuse of sex workers.

In 2003, however, a group of members of AMMAR in Buenos Aires broke from the organization and formed AMMAR-Capital on the basis that they did not agree with the conception of prostitution as work. Considering themselves “people in a situation of prostitution”, they now call themselves the Association of Argentine Women for Human Rights (AMADH) to distinguish themselves from AMMAR and have branches in the capital and the provinces of Tucumán and Santa Fe. They take an abolitionist stance towards prostitution and work to help women who want to leave prostitution to find other job opportunities.

Buenos Aires is also the headquarters of the Network of Sex Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean (RedTraSex), which incorporates sex worker organizations in 15 countries, currently headed by founder and former president of AMMAR Elena Reynaga.

4.2. Sex Workers’ Use and Experience of Space

Sex work in Argentina occurs both indoors and outdoors in diverse types of spaces. Brothels operate undercover, either within private apartments or within legally registered businesses such as bars or nightclubs. Some independent sex workers operate out of their own residences individually or share private apartments with other sex workers. Sex workers may also operate independently out of existing businesses, soliciting clients there and then taking them to a nearby hotel. In Buenos Aires, many sought clients in bars and clubs, either as an independent customer or as a hostess or dancer employed by the business. Other sex workers interviewed for this research solicited clients in late-night cafés. Few legal businesses where sex work takes place remain in existence in Buenos Aires, however, due to the increased enforcement of anti-brothel laws since the passage of the 2012 anti-trafficking law. Sex workers also solicit on the street and in parks, typically engaging in sex in the client’s car or a hotel.

4.2.1. Brothels

Consistent with the literature on brothels, brothels in Argentina provide advantages and disadvantages to sex workers: they provide a level of protection from the dangers of the street, but they also subject sex workers to the power of the brothel owner and typically take 50% of their earnings. Despite their disagreements about whether prostitution is inherently exploitative, both the abolitionist and sex workers' rights organizations interviewed believed brothels are exploitative. RedTraSex explicitly opposes brothels and any third parties who profit off sex workers, preferring independent sex work.

Since the passage of Argentina's 2012 anti-trafficking law, law enforcement in Buenos Aires has cracked down on businesses selling sex. Rather, brothels operate out of private apartments called *privados* (privates). While none of the sex workers interviewed were currently working out of a *privado*, several of the women had worked in one in the past, and many knew of someone else who had. The women there work short turns of about 15 min and often must service many clients in a day. Clarisa,¹⁰ a sex worker in the *microcentro*, complained that in *privados* she had to work 12-h shifts and could not choose her clients. "It's really ugly", she said. Violeta, who works in Once, worked six years in *privados*, but she moved to the street because the *privado* took 70% of her earnings. Many of the *privados* too were being closed due to the anti-trafficking law, except, according to AMADH, those that paid bribes to police.

The *privados*, because of their clandestine nature, sometimes serve as sites of trafficking or sexual exploitation of minors. Mónica, a female sex worker now working out of a café in the *microcentro*, saw minors when she went to a *privado*: "The woman went to look in Paraguay, in Misiones, for 13, 14, 15-year-old girls. But the girls wanted to, eh. The girls wanted to [go to Buenos Aires to sell sex]." Viviana, a sex worker in Once, also saw Paraguayan minors when she worked in *privados* many years ago. The girls were not being forced, she said, but had likely been misled about the conditions they would face and didn't realize they would be working "without rest". Mónica, however, did witness one 15-year-old who was not allowed to leave. "She stayed there always, in the . . . apartment." Mónica gave the girl her phone number and told her she ought to work on her own. "What happens is the owner arranges things with the police. It's all a mafia." Sandra, a friend of Mónica's, had also witnessed human trafficking in the *privados*. She began working in a *privado* after moving to Buenos Aires from Uruguay, where she had worked in the country's legalized brothels.¹¹ "The *privados* here were horrible. Horrible. I had to leave in a hurry because I saw the, uh, kidnapped girls." The girls came from Peru and Chile under promises they would be doing domestic work, but once in Buenos Aires, they were held without any contact with the outside world. Sandra reported the incident. "Here in Argentina", she said, "the police, judges, lawyers, all of them are involved in prostitution . . . and they don't do anything because they're making money too."

Not all *privados* are places of exploitation, however. The term *privado* can also refer to an apartment that sex workers rent and work out of collectively, each keeping their own earnings, or to a private apartment used by a single sex worker. AMMAR and RedTraSex view this model of independent sex work as ideal, because it provides sex workers the most autonomy. Unfortunately, the police seemed not to distinguish between residential apartments run by independent sex workers and those run by a third party, sometimes treating the former as if they were sites of trafficking. AMMAR complained of police raiding sex workers' apartments and taking their belongings, consistent with the Amnesty International study in which every indoor sex worker interviewed reported experiencing raids, often involving "violence, intimidation, and theft of personal property" [62]. "Where can I work, in what place can I work, without being persecuted?" asked AMMAR General Secretary Georgina Orellano.

¹⁰ All names are pseudonyms unless last name is included.

¹¹ Uruguay is the only country in Latin America that has expressly legalized sex work through regulated brothels.

The existence of *privados* is ever present in Buenos Aires. After the federal government prohibited the advertising of sex work in 2011, sex workers and sex work businesses began advertising on Facebook pages and printing out *papelitos*, little papers, that they plaster on poles and signs across the city (see Figure 3). The city of Buenos Aires then passed a law in 2012 to prohibit flyers advertising commercial sex in public spaces, to no avail. In response, abolitionist groups have run campaigns to rip all the papers down. While abolitionists see the *papelitos* as advertising the exploitation of women, independent sex workers view them as a necessary resort for finding clients. When the municipality of Buenos Aires created a public campaign in August 2016 to urge people to tear down and report sex work advertisements, AMMAR created mock *papelitos* reading “Sex Work is NOT Trafficking”.



Figure 3. *Papelitos* advertising sex work. Photo by author.

Multiple sex workers mentioned the ban on sex work advertising as a problem, preventing sex workers from obtaining clients. The ban, in combination with the closing of *privados*, has forced sex workers to wait for clients in any bar that remains open or in the street, said Río, a female sex worker who works out of a café in the *microcentro*. According to Amnesty International [62], the law against sex work advertising has contributed to an increase in street sex work.

4.2.2. Bars

The Argentine government and NGOs' attempts to fight trafficking have also led to the shutdown of many bars where sex workers used to operate. Buenos Aires used to be full of cabarets, *whiskerías*, and *boliches* (clubs or bars) known for having sex workers. Sex workers sometimes used these terms to refer to brothels that took a percentage of incomes, but more often they referred to businesses that allowed them to keep their own earnings. Many of these locations got around the prohibition against brothels by registering as bars and hiring women as dancers or hostesses who also offered sex on site or in a nearby motel [66]. As employees, the women could receive a 50% commission on drinks clients bought, and the bar benefitted from the increased business. Other bars treated sex workers like any other customer, merely charging them an entrance fee or requiring them to purchase a drink, and the actual sexual exchange occurred elsewhere.

Since the passage of the 2012 anti-trafficking law, however, nearly all of these bars have closed. Río, a female sex worker, explicitly tied the closings to the anti-trafficking law. “They mix us up with trafficking”, she said. The anti-trafficking organization La Alameda led efforts to shut the bars down, sending people with undercover cameras to expose them and alleging the businesses were participating in sex trafficking. AMMAR has organized protests against La Alameda's leader Gustavo

Vera, a legislator of the City of Buenos Aires and friend of Pope Francis [67]. They criticize his attempts to “rescue” sex workers by shutting down their places of work, which AMMAR General Secretary Orellano claims only leads sex workers to conduct their work in public spaces, exposing them to greater rights violations [68]. In turn, Vera accuses AMMAR of supporting pimps and organized crime [66]. Attempts to contact Vera for this research were unsuccessful. Subsequent to my interviews in Buenos Aires, Vera and two other legislators passed an initiative to shut down all bars and other businesses operating as brothels [66].

At the time of this research only a couple bars remained in operation, which sex workers speculated had political connections. The closings have led female sex workers to crowd into the remaining bars, resulting in more competition and a reduction in earnings. I managed to interview two sex workers in one of the bars, Blue Star,¹² but as soon as the manager noticed, she asked me to leave, likely fearful that I might be working undercover to expose the bar.

Many of the street sex workers interviewed who had formerly worked in these bars viewed them positively and complained they now had no other place to work. Kelsi, a Dominican sex worker, believed they were “more just than *privados*” because they were less exploitative. The sex workers had never seen trafficking in the bars; all the women there, to their knowledge, were adults working of their own volition. The two women working in Blue Star, Casandra and Talia, asserted there was no trafficking there. Casandra suspected that Gustavo Vera used La Alameda to gain political power. “The police know there’s no trafficking here”, she said.

4.2.3. Cafés¹³

In addition to the bars, 17 interviews took place at two different *confiterías*, or Parisian-style cafés, in the city center, Montecarlo and El Mundial¹⁴. These businesses operate as normal restaurants during the day but at night, women would often sit inside at a table and wait for clients. The spaces provide them refuge and comfort compared with street sex work. Many of the women described this form of sex work as ideal; the cafés treated them like normal clients, profiting only off the increased business the sex workers brought in. The women could come and go when they chose, and they did not have to dress skimpily like they would in a *boliche*. Juliana, who worked out of El Mundial but had previously worked out of Montecarlo, said, “The best method of work is this, in a café.” Unlike in street sex work, where a client could easily come with bad intentions, the café has cameras. “I feel safer”, she said. Like in bars, the setting allowed sex workers to talk with clients and assess whether they might be aggressive or violent before agreeing to leave with them. Typically, a client would invite a woman over to his table to converse and buy her a drink, allowing each to decide whether they wanted to proceed with the exchange. “A girl who enters a car doesn’t have time to get to know the client”, said Juliana.

Like the bars, sex workers are losing access to these cafés. While Montecarlo used to be full of sex workers, they are now only allowed to stand outside the restaurant. A few months before my interviews, a girl came to the café with a hidden camera to expose the prostitution occurring there. Ever since, the owner refused to let the sex workers inside, telling them he would get in trouble with the police if he did. The women complained of the difficulties of being outdoors, where they had to stand on their feet for hours at a time in the cold. The policies prohibiting any business from promoting prostitution, far from rescuing these women from exploitation, made their working conditions more difficult. Clara, a sex worker at El Mundial, explained, “There are places [the police] closed that are almost like this, that they do close for the fact that you’re working. Then the girls end up in the [street] corners. For me, that’s more dangerous than being in a bar.” A similar café, Café Orleans, was shut down for having prostitution in 2015 [69]. Although the women at Montecarlo could move to El

¹² Name changed.

¹³ Many of the sex workers referred to these restaurants as *bars*; I call them cafés to distinguish them from bars that primarily sell alcohol.

¹⁴ Names changed.

Mundial, they received more clients at Montecarlo. The women in El Mundial were on average older than those at Montecarlo and less willing or able to stand outside in the cold for long periods of time. Sex workers chose the space that provided the optimal conditions for their needs.

Lack of access to indoor workspaces was a major concern for the women who formerly worked in Montecarlo. “We don’t have places to work anymore,” lamented Valentina. Because of their exclusion from indoor spaces, Rocío said, “we feel discriminated against.” When asked what she thought could be done to improve sex work conditions, Marina responded, “give us a place of work.”

4.2.4. Street Work

In the wealthier areas of Buenos Aires, including the *microcentro* and Recoleta, street sex work takes place only at night. Most of the sex workers in the *microcentro* are female, though there are some trans women as well. They generally charge about 70–110 USD for an hour.¹⁵ Male sex workers concentrate on a specific street corner in Recoleta. In lower-class areas, like Once, Flores, and Constitución, many sex workers work during the day. Both male and female sex workers work out of the Once subway station and plaza. They charge much less than the street workers in the *microcentro* or Recoleta, generally between 7 and 14 USD¹⁶ for 10–30 min and up to 29 USD¹⁷ for an hour. Another area of the city, the *bosques de Palermo* (Palermo woods), serves as a zone of tolerance for transgender sex work. At night, transgender sex workers fill the parks, and clients drive by to pick them up.

In addition to the physical strains of working in the street, sex workers perceived street work as more dangerous. The inability to assess a client before getting in his car puts them more at risk of ending up with a violent client, although most street sex workers interviewed had never or only once had a violent client. Andrea, a street sex worker in Once, explained, “Here anything can happen to you. You understand? Whereas in a *boliche* you do have security, understand?” Clara expressed similar sentiments:

“It bothers me when they go to a *boliche*, where high quality people go ... and [the authorities] make a fuss there because ... it’s not being in the street ... like a typical prostitute left in the street picking up guys in their car. By contrast I worked in a *boliche*, they closed it, I had to go to the corners, the street, that is, walk, and if a car stopped me I stopped, I got in.”

Boliches had registers of who entered, and in the café, her friends look out for her. “But in the street, no one is going to take care of me,” she said. “It’s very hard. You have to be very brave to work in the street,” said Clarisa. Street sex workers sometimes experience violence or robbery from homeless drug users or drunks. Estela, who works outside Montecarlo, explained she acts nice to the street youth so that when they’re drugged on *paco*, cocaine paste, they don’t attack and rob her.

Sex workers may also receive less money in the street than in a bar. Pilar, who works outside Montecarlo, said clients see street sex work as more desperate and degrading, “so they take advantage of you and offer you less money.” Now that the few remaining bars are so full of women, however, many make more money on the street because they receive more clients. Gisel, who now works on the street in Recoleta, charges about 145–220 USD for a turn, minimum 70.¹⁸ In the *boliches*, she said, women earn 360 or even 720 USD from a client, but now that there is so much competition, they might get only one client in a night, if any.¹⁹ Yesenia, who works in the *microcentro*, said she used to get about 220 USD for one *boliche* client, while in the street she makes about 70–110 USD.

¹⁵ 1000–1500 ARS at time of interview

¹⁶ 100–200 ARS

¹⁷ 400 ARS

¹⁸ 2000–3000 ARS, minimum 1000

¹⁹ 5000 ARS; 10,000 ARS

Although many sex workers did not want to work in the street, some preferred it. Andrea, who had previously worked in a *boliche* that required her to give up half her earnings, explained, “In a *boliche* you had to present yourself. Heels . . . or underwear. And the difference was they gave you half and half. Whereas we work like this, how we want, and all the money is ours.”

Not all street prostitutes have this freedom; some have pimps who take their earnings. Belén explained that these tend to be younger girls whose partners mistreat them and Dominican migrants who are forced to do prostitution to pay the debt of their passages. “I was seven years in the street under threat to my daughter [by my pimp],” said Margarita Peralta of AMADH. These cases can be considered human trafficking. Though many sex workers I interviewed had not witnessed pimping, Gonzalo, a male sex worker who works in the street and in gay clubs, had seen more organized crime. He had worked “under a boss” before and believed all the streets are controlled by “bosses” who charge sex workers a portion of their earnings.

In contrast to the Amnesty International report, most street sex workers reported having no problems with the police. Jessica, a trans street worker in the *microcentro*, described her relationship with the police as “very good”. A few did mention police raids, however. Sabrina at Montecarlo said the police normally do not bother them, but there are some times in which the police say they have to “clean the zone”, and they might give a sex worker a violation. After the third violation, they’ll arrest you. Dominicans are particularly likely to get violations, she said, because the police know they may be undocumented. Sandra mentioned that not long ago police were bothering sex workers, not letting them work, asking for their documents and taking them to jail.

Street sex workers, too, wanted a space to work. Jessica wanted sex workers to have “a place where we can all work, with hygiene, prevention . . . people who take care of us”. Some female sex workers, like Kelsi, wanted the government to grant them a similar zone to that for trans sex workers. AMMAR, however, opposes red zones; Georgina Orellano believes they ghettoize sex workers and expulse them from public life. Many Argentine sex workers viewed independent, indoor sex work as ideal, but policies restricted them to street-based solicitation. “We don’t have a place to work,” Ríó told me.

5. Case study: Ecuador

5.1. Background

5.1.1. Regulation of Sex Work

Like in Argentina, sex work in Ecuador is legal, though no law recognizes prostitution as work. Unlike Argentina, Ecuador permits the operation of brothels. Previously, the Health Code prohibited “the clandestine practice of prostitution” but explicitly stated that prostitution was “tolerated in closed premises”, prostitutes had to get regular health checks, and brothels must obtain sanitary permits [70].²⁰ In 2008, however, explicit references to prostitution were removed from the health law [70]. Multiple recent Ministerial Agreements by the Ministry of Health make brothels subject to controls and require them to fulfill certain health requirements. For example, Ministerial Agreement No. 4911, enacted in 2014, requires that brothels clean twice a day and provide basic amenities. They must also provide security and “[m]onitor the health of the sex workers”. Ministerial Agreement No. 1784, passed in 2010, gives the national police authority to “control the legality of activities in centers of tolerance” [71], and Ministerial Agreement No. 2521, passed in 2012, prohibits houses of tolerance from operating near “educational centers, hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, churches and residential zones” [70]. In July 2015, the Ministry of the Interior imposed regulations on the hours

²⁰ It is of note that the Argentine and Ecuadorian federal legislation took opposite approaches to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases through prostitution: Argentine legislation by prohibiting brothels but allowing sex work not in brothels, and Ecuadorian legislation by allowing prostitution only in regulated brothels.

brothels can operate, limiting the hours of “evening centers of tolerance” to 11 am–8 pm Monday through Saturday and “nocturnal centers of tolerance” to 4 pm–12 am Monday through Thursday and 4 pm–2 am Friday and Saturday [72].

No legislation specifically addresses sex work that does not occur within these enclosed centers of tolerance. This lack of legislation leaves street sex work in “a gray area of jurisdiction” [34], which has resulted in the use of “public order offenses” to charge outdoor sex workers [64]. Activism by sex workers to exert their rights to public space and expose police abuse, however, has led to greater tolerance of street sex work in recent years.

5.1.2. Sex Worker Organization

Ecuador was the first country in Latin America where sex workers officially organized. On 22 June 1982, over 300 women from the brothels of El Oro province united in Machala and founded the Association of Autonomous Female Workers “22nd of June” [10,73]. The organization’s success in organizing a sex workers’ strike throughout the province and negotiating better treatment from brothel owners in 1988 inspired other sex workers across the country to form their own collectives [65,73]. According to Lourdes Torres, the president of the brothel-based sex workers’ organization Association Pro-Defense of Women (ASPRODEMU) in Quito, Ecuador is the only country in the world in which every province has at least one sex workers’ organization. Machala is currently home to the headquarters of the Latin American Platform of People Who Exercise Sex Work (PLAPERTS) (see Figure 4), the Latin American branch of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). Unlike the RedTraSex, PLAPERTS and the NSWP do not oppose third parties who facilitate and profit from sex work, like brothel owners (though they do oppose trafficking and exploitation by third parties). These organizations advocate for sex work to be recognized as legitimate work, fight to improve the working conditions sex workers experience, and educate their members about their rights and necessary health precautions.



Figure 4. Latin American Platform of People Who Exercise Sex Work (PLAPERTS) headquarters in Machala. Sign reads, “International Office of Sex Work and Public Policies.” The logos at the bottom, from left to right, are for the Association of Autonomous Female Workers “22nd of June”, Collective Flor de Azalea, and PLAPERTS. Photo by author.

5.2. Sex Workers’ Use and Experience of Space

Sex work in Ecuador takes place primarily in brothels or on the street. In brothels, sex workers typically pay the owner a fixed price per day, per week, or per client. In street sex work, sex workers solicit clients on a street or in a plaza or park and then usually take them back to a hotel; the client pays the sex workers’ fee and the hotel cost. Others use the Internet and social media to find clients.

5.2.1. Brothels

Sex workers in Ecuador generally believed brothels provide more security than street sex work. The brothels consist almost exclusively of female sex workers, who tend to be younger than female street sex workers. Like in Buenos Aires, younger sex workers choose brothels for their greater protection and privacy, and brothel sex workers expressed preference for working indoors because they perceived the streets as more dangerous. They also experienced less violence than street workers; most brothels have security guards and cameras outside the rooms, and many also have panic buttons in the rooms.

The quality of conditions in brothels varies. One brothel in Quito, Habana Club, provided relatively good conditions, cleaning the rooms regularly and providing sex workers with toilet paper and condoms, unlike some brothels that charge women for these items. They charged clients \$21 for a 20-min turn in a room. To incentivize women to come to work early, the club allowed them to keep \$20 per client if they showed up before four pm and \$15 if they showed up after four. The women also earned two dollars per drink a client ordered for them. The club's owner had a close relationship with sex worker leaders, particularly Lourdes Torres, the president of ASPRODEMU. One woman at Habana, Gabriela, said the owner was much better than other brothels where she had worked. "It makes me want to cry when a place like this closes," she said. "In this establishment there's a lot of security," said another woman, Susana. "Here they have always treated me super well."

Other brothels provide poorer conditions and exploit sex workers economically. According to Karina Bravo, director of PLAPERTS and president of Collective Flor de Azalea in Machala, brothels in some cities hold women's identification documents and only pay them at the end of the week, claiming the practice protects them from robbery. If they must leave in the middle of the week, the women may earn nothing. Many brothels operate in violation of health regulations, while others illegally charge sex workers for access to hygiene supplies like soap or toilet paper. Brothels may also overcharge sex workers for their rooms. Juanita, a sex worker at the largest brothel in Machala, La Puente (see Figure 5a,b), complained that after paying \$220 per month for her room, she is left with only \$200. Women at La Puente also complained about lack of security. Although an administrator of the brothel assured me if something happens in a room, the women can easily call him, only one of the four women interviewed at La Puente felt secure. Juanita worried that with the noise of the music, no one could hear if something happened in the rooms. "You have to take care of yourself," Fiona said. By the time the guards get to the room, she explained, the client could have killed you.



Figure 5. La Puente brothel in Machala, Ecuador. Photos by author.

Lack of transparency in government regulations of sex work establishments posed challenges to some brothels' operation. The two businesses interviewed in Quito wanted to comply with regulations, but they struggled to find out what the regulations are. "We aren't against them imposing laws or norms on us," said David, the manager of Habana Club. He favored protection of sex workers

but described the regulations as a game between the municipal and national government, with the municipality telling businesses one thing and the national government another. Elizabeth Martinez, the owner of Akersshuz, complained the municipality would not provide businesses with the necessary documents to obtain a permit and then punished them for not having one. Permits to operate a brothel could cost \$800 or more, and fines for not complying with regulations could cost more than \$1500. The municipality of Quito, she said, wants to make all sex work businesses relocate outside of the city. Shortly before these interviews, the government had temporarily closed Habana Club for not sending a requested document, even though the brothel said the document was in the mail. “We are persecuted by the authorities,” lamented Martinez.

Sex workers favored regulations that led to improved sanitary conditions but found the recent regulation of brothel hours harmful. The hour limitations eliminated times they normally receive clients, such as weekday early morning or Sundays. According to several sex worker leaders, the government made the decision without consulting sex workers or analyzing their schedules and economic situations. “The government has never listened to the voice of the workers,” said Bravo. Ariana, a sex worker at Guayaquil brothel Las Rosas (see Figure 6), recounted that prior to the hours change, the brothel operated 7 am to 8 pm. The hours worked well for her because she could drop her children off at school in the morning, come to work, go back to pick them up after school, and return to work in the evening. Whereas she used to receive many clients in the mornings, the brothel is empty with the later opening time. She also liked being able to work Sundays in the past to earn more money. “I would like for the President . . . to help us sex workers on this point . . . It’s just the hours, nothing else. It’s the only thing that harms us, the hours.”

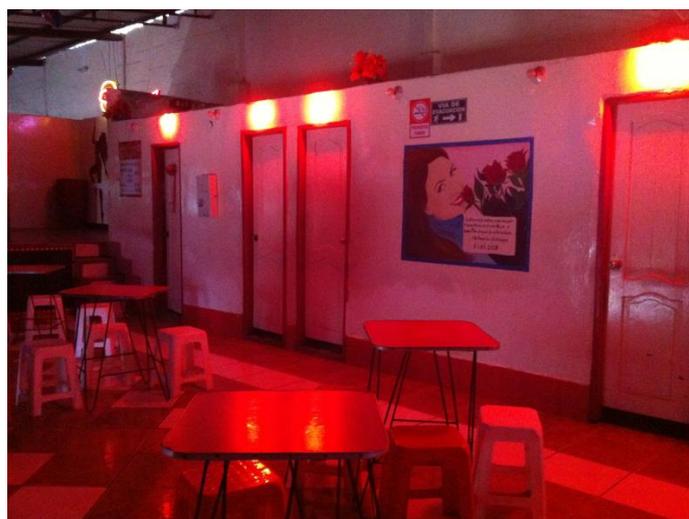


Figure 6. Brothel Las Rosas in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Photo by author.

5.2.2. Street Work

Despite the relative greater security brothels can provide, some sex workers preferred working in the street. Teresa said she prefers the street because she earns more and gets to manage herself. In the club she used to work in, she had to be there from 10 am–8 pm, and if she left early, she wouldn’t receive her earnings. In the street she also has less competition. The club was crowded with over 50 women, and there were often drunk clients and fights. Alexandra, a Quito sex worker who had left nightclubs to work on Avenue Amazonas, said, “The difference [between brothels and the street]

is that here in the street we don't have a control, that nobody takes our money."²¹ Claudia, another female sex worker on Amazonas who had previously worked in brothels, said that although the street is more dangerous, it's better than brothels because in brothels you have to follow a set schedule, they exploit you, and you are obligated to drink. The ability to set one's own hours was a drawing point of the street for many sex workers. Hours are especially important to the many sex workers who are mothers, "because they can set their schedules around their children's needs" [34]. In choosing to work in the street, sex workers trade some of their safety for greater autonomy.

Other sex workers worked out of the street not because they preferred it, but because their identities made brothels inaccessible to them. Many older female sex workers were forced to work in the streets because of their age. Concepción, a 40-year-old woman in the Historic Center of Quito, used to work in a brothel on Avenue 24 de Mayo and preferred working there than on the street, because the conditions were "calmer" and the police sometimes "bother" street sex workers. She now works in the street because brothels will only hire young girls, she explained. Aurelia, a 55-year-old sex worker, would also prefer to be in a brothel because she thought it more secure, but said she can't at her age because the girls in brothels are younger and have more plastic surgery. Transgender sex workers nearly all work in the street, because there are no brothels or clubs for transgender sex workers. The spaces sex workers use thus do not always reflect their personal preferences, but what spaces are available to them.

One of the negative experiences of working in the street was harassment and insults from passerby. Female sex workers like Teresa complained about people in the street insulting them with words like *puta*, whore. Trans sex workers experienced transphobic insults; Donna complained of being called *maricón*, fag.

Street sex workers also reported high levels of violence. Although not all sex workers in the streets had experienced violence, many more relayed stories of violence than those in brothels. Because street sex workers may go in a client's car, where they have little control over the situation and little ability to escape, and the hotels where they service clients may not have the same kind of surveillance as a brothel, they are more vulnerable to client abuse. Clients sometimes beat, rob, or refuse to pay sex workers. Interview participants recounted that many sex workers have been found killed in hotel rooms or on the street. Rosa, a female sex worker in the Historic Center, told me that just two weeks previously a client had almost killed her, and the owner of the hotel rescued her. Britney, a female sex worker who worked at night on Avenue Amazonas in Quito, once had four men rape and beat her till she bled. Alexandra, another female sex worker on Amazonas, recounted several stories of client violence. Once, two clients tried to push her and her cousin off the second floor of a hotel for refusing to perform certain acts. Another client threatened her with a gun because he didn't want to pay her, and she was forced to give him oral sex without a condom and then jump from his car to escape.

For trans sex workers, who must deal with transphobia in addition to stigma against sex work, violence is especially rampant. Cristina, a trans sex worker in Machala, told me she has lost many of her friends to "homophobic people". Donna, a trans sex worker in the Historic Center of Quito, said a client once pulled a pistol on her; she managed to escape and tell the hotel owner, and he was sent to jail. According to Carolina Alvarado, the president of the Association of Trans Sex Workers of Quito (AsoTSTUIO), working on the streets at night is even worse than during the day. Although they get more clients, it's cold, there's more danger, and more "homophobes". She too had experienced her share of violence; she once had a client hit her in the eye with his keys because he didn't want to pay, and she has a cut on her hand from another client. Because sex workers and transgender people are both seen as deviant members of society, clients who commit violence against them face few to no consequences. María, a trans sex worker in Quito, said police are more likely to believe a client than a

²¹ Sex workers may have partners or family members who take their money by force or pressure. However, this abuse occurs both in brothels and in the street.

transgender sex worker. The less social capital sex workers possess, due to poverty, homelessness, age, or gender identity, for example, the greater their risk of violence.

Street sex workers in Ecuador, up until very recently, also faced high levels of police violence. Even though no law against street sex work exists, police frequently detained and abused street sex workers. In Quito, police often gassed sex workers to get them to move from the streets [34]. Sex workers in Quito also recalled the police would chase them in motorcycles, beat or rape them, insult them, force them to jump into the pond in Park La Carolina, and drop them far from the city and take their shoes or cell phones so they couldn't get home. In Machala, Karina Bravo told me, police would arrest sex workers for being in the street more than ten minutes and drive them around the city in open trucks to humiliate them. Police especially abused transgender sex workers; trans sex worker María recalled police cutting transgender women's hair (presumably as a method of removing their expressions of feminine identity).

However, sex workers developed modes of resistance against abuse and state attempts to limit their workspaces. During her research with street sex workers in the Historic Center of Quito from 2009–2013, Wilking [34] observed sex workers "actively subvert police control through creative strategies, often coordinated with other sex workers, to defy police orders and maximize their solicitation via covert opportunism" ([34], p. 11). The organization of sex workers played a key role in resisting state control. Bravo described how in 2004, her organization for street sex workers in Machala, Collective Flor de Azalea, exposed the police's abuse. When police came to chase away a group of sex workers, Bravo and over 70 other sex workers refused to move, so the police took them to jail. In the police truck, they audio-recorded the police's beatings and insults on their cell phones and then alerted a feminist organization, which threatened to file a report against the police. For the first time, sex workers had evidence of police mistreatment, resulting in an end to the high levels of police harassment in Machala.

In Quito, a legal counsel project by transgender rights organization Project Transgender, called the Legal Patrol, contributed to a decrease in police abuse of transgender sex workers by teaching sex workers about their constitutional rights and holding trainings with police [37]. Now, Ecuadorian sex workers generally express a better relationship with the police than before. Alexandra, a female street sex worker in Quito, said the improvement in police treatment came after sex worker leaders went to speak with President Rafael Correa in 2009, who subsequently said on TV that sex workers should not be detained [74]. "As soon as he said no, it ended," she said. Although police treatment has greatly improved, however, some police still insult sex workers, explained multiple interviewees. While some sex workers felt comfortable seeking police help with a violent client, other still feared police. In their relatively successful organization against police control, however, sex workers asserted their rights to public space and maintained collective power over their workspaces. Their refusal to accede to police removing them from the streets, despite the violence they experienced as a consequence, demonstrates the value they place on the street.

Conflict over Space in the Historic Center of Quito

The conflict between the municipal government of Quito and street sex workers over the Historic Center of Quito, where I conducted 18 interviews, particularly demonstrates how sex workers relate to their workspaces and respond to policies regulating these spaces.

Historically, sex workers in the Historic Center worked both on the streets and in the houses of tolerance on Avenue 24 de Mayo (see Figure 7) [41]. Starting in 1999, however, the residents and businesses of the area began organizing against sex work businesses, for they disliked the presence of loud noise, alcohol, and the sex workers' boyfriends or husbands, many of whom abuse the women and act as pimps [41]. The community's organizing efforts led to the shutdown of the 15 houses of tolerance on Avenue 24 de Mayo, resulting in about 450 women being displaced to the streets between 2000 and 2001 [41].

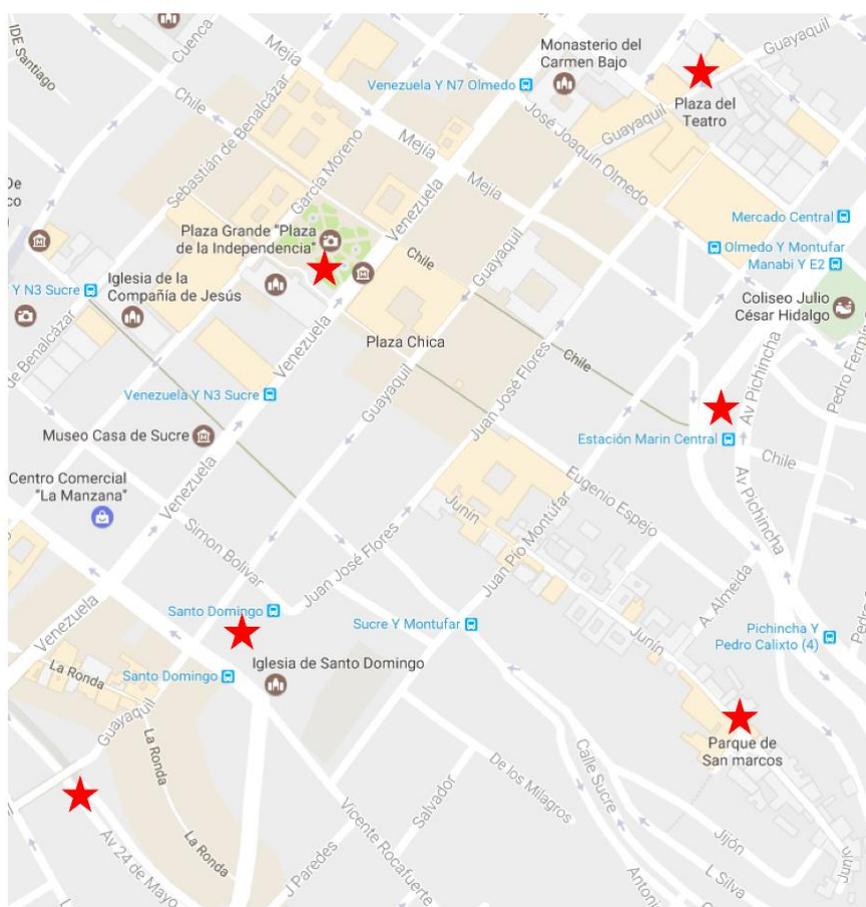


Figure 7. Map of the Historic Center of Quito. Red stars indicate approximate locations where street-based sex workers concentrate, based on interview data and Álvarez and Sandoval [41]’s findings. Map from Google Maps.

To address the problem, the municipality of Quito relocated the sex workers in 2006 to the area La Canterra in the neighborhood of San Roque, where they permitted several brothels to operate [41]. Here, the organization of brothel sex workers ASOPRODEMU opened Danubio Azul, which ASOPRODEMU president Lourdes Torres claimed remains the only brothel outside the Netherlands operated entirely by sex workers. The municipality and sex workers alike originally viewed the project with optimism, hoping the relocation would provide increased safety and better working conditions. By the time of this study, however, nearly everyone who mentioned the project viewed it as a failure. The location is far from the center, high on a hill and difficult to get to, said Nelly Sánchez of the Quito Commission of Constructions. Further, the area is dangerous, with high levels of crime and risk of rocks falling [75,76]. As a result, most women have returned to the streets and plazas.

Other than La Canterra, Álvarez and Sandoval [41] identify four areas where sex work is concentrated in the Historic Center of Quito: Boulevard 24 de Mayo; the areas of Plaza Santo Domingo, San Marcos, and La Marín; Plaza del Teatro; and Plaza de la Independencia. According to Ecuadorian newspaper *El Comercio*, as of January 2016, there were 65 women working on Boulevard 24 de Mayo, 260 in the Plaza del Teatro, and 48 in Plaza de Santo Domingo [75].²² All my interviews in the

²² As sex workers are a highly mobile population, these numbers may vary greatly; during the time of this study, the president of Association For a Better Future, Alexandra Flores, claimed her organization had 280 members, 1st of May had over 60 members, and Hope for the Future had over 60 members [77].

Historic Center took place in the Plaza del Teatro. Three sex workers' organizations operate in this area: the Association For a Better Future, the Association 1st of May, and the AsoTSTUIO. The three organizations have significant overlap, with many sex workers belonging to more than one.

At the time of interviews, the street sex workers were engaged in a struggle with the municipality of Quito over the use of public space. The municipality wanted to permanently relocate the sex workers from the streets and La Cantera to a government-constructed house of tolerance and were looking for a space near the Historic Center where they could construct the house. Dayana Morán, Director of Governance in the Secretariat of Security, said the house would provide a specific place for sex work to occur, with three floors, 60 rooms, security, a parking lot, an eating area, and green spaces. It would function only during the day, from morning to 6 pm, and would not have alcohol.

The municipality gave three reasons for this move. First, they said sex work must be moved from the streets to preserve "cultural patrimony" of the Historic Center. Because sex work is not illegal, nor is standing in the street, the municipality cannot prohibit street sex work. However, the city's Ordinance 280 on the use of public space prohibits the issuance of permits for commercial activity to self-employed workers in the Historic Center and in "regenerated areas of the Zonal Administrations" because of Quito's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site [78]. Although sex work is not legally recognized as work, municipal officials interpret the ordinance as applying to street sex work and other informal vendors. Sara González of the Quito Secretariat of Social Inclusion explained the move is "not to exclude them from the Historic Center, but rather because by *law* . . . for the Historic Center to be considered a World Heritage Site, certain requirements must be preserved, and as the girls pass . . . they wear away the spaces" (emphasis hers). The city was concerned about the presence of sex work's effect on tourism; the ex-Mayor of Quito, Paco Moncayo, told newspaper *EL COMERCIO* that the Historic Center "cannot be a big brothel or a big popular fair because the development of the city depends largely on tourism" [1]. No ordinance that specifically addresses sex work exists, and González favored the creation of such an ordinance, which could potentially allow sex workers to remain in the Historic Center.

Second, the municipality cited complaints about sex work from other residents of the area. Morán said the municipality received complaints from residents of the Historic Center about sex work in the streets. ". . . we have many complaints, many demands from inhabitants who are affected by the presence of sex work . . . because regrettably, often where there is sex work, there is crime . . . there are drugs, many, infinite things that collude with sex work," she explained.²³ The relocation into a house, she said, would allow sex workers to be an accepted part of society but in a specific place for them, where residents won't complain that they are bad for their businesses. Quito wants to move towards a model similar to other countries that allow sex work only in specific streets or zones. "It's not that we want to hide them," said Morán. "We simply want to have one focus, sex work, in a single space." Sánchez, too, favored the creation of a red-light district.

Third, the municipality believed the move would improve sex workers' conditions. What we want most, Sánchez told me, is to improve their conditions and make their work more dignified. "[We want to] give the sex workers a place where all of them are and where they exercise their work without any problems, where neither the national nor the metropolitan police bother them, because it's a specific place for them to exercise their work," said Morán. González explained that many of the hotels street sex workers currently work out of have inadequate sanitary conditions, charge them extra for rooms, or don't give them condoms or running water. She said the municipality wants sex workers to have a space with clean conditions and security.

The street sex worker organizations in the Historic Center, however, strongly opposed the move. Many sex workers emphasized the independence they exercised and freedom from a set schedule when explaining why they wanted to remain in the streets. Elizabeth Colobón, president of the Association

²³ González identified the association of sex work with crime as a common stereotype that her office tries to eliminate.

1st of May and vice president of For a Better Future, claims in a video called *Sex Workers of Quito: Right to the street*, “. . . our work is not meant to be enclosed, our work is free and democratic. We don't have anyone who orders us, who manages us” [77].

Sex workers also worried about overpopulation and competition within the house. In the same video, Alexandra Flores asks, “What are we going to do in a space where there will be overpopulation of sex workers?...Here in the city of Quito come thousands of sex workers” [77]. Many said the move would harm older sex workers, who would be unable to compete with the younger sex workers in the brothel. Josefina, a female sex worker in the Plaza del Teatro, stated a house is for younger girls and asked what the older women would do. Teresa similarly questioned how the city could mix the older and younger women and predicted there would be fights between women over clients. When asked about this concern of the sex workers, Nelly Sánchez responded that such competition with younger workers exists in every type of work. “Sex work is that. Work. And in every type of work there is competition.” Transgender sex workers also rejected the move on the grounds that they have always worked in the street, not in an enclosed space. They worried they would be unable to compete with female sex workers in the same space, and that they might face violence if clients confused them with females only to find out in bed that they were trans.

Beyond the practical reasons for preferring the street to an enclosed space, sex workers seemed to identify strongly with the Historic Center as a space and preferred the familiarity of the streets, Sara González explained that even though the municipality had proposed the new space be like a “residential complex,” with an outside patio area that would be like streets so the sex workers could continue soliciting outdoors, the sex worker leaders were still opposed. “They don't want to leave the street, the plaza . . . if we tell them okay, Historic Center, two streets up, they already don't like it,” she said. For that reason, her office was trying to do workshops with them on their rights but also on their co-responsibility to society and the use of public space. They have also done workshops for the rest of society to try to reduce stereotyping and stigma against sex workers; in June 2016, they displayed photography and letters made by the sex workers in the Plaza del Teatro and Avenue 24 de Mayo for residents to walk by and look at. Sex workers felt they had a right to the space and belonged to it. “We are part of this Historic Center,” said Flores.

The conflict between sex workers and the municipality came to a head in October 2015, when the municipality shut down all the hotels out of which the sex workers were working. González justified the closure, saying it was done because the hotels were not fulfilling basic conditions. Some hotels in the Historic Center would just place a mattress in the kitchen on the floor, she said, “and that's what the municipality doesn't want to exist.” However, the move left the street sex workers without the ability to work. Teresa told me the hotels were closed for 15 days, and the sex workers had no money. They responded by organizing a large, multi-day protest that gained national news when one sex worker had sex in the streets. “They don't give us another alternative if they don't reopen the hotels,” justified the women [1]. Teresa recalled that police abused the protesters, cutting her hand and detaining, hitting, insulting, and gassing women.

As a result of the protest, the municipality allowed three hotels that fulfilled health regulations to reopen, but only temporarily, until the city could construct the new proposed space. The sex workers proposed an alternative; they wanted the city to give them a street within the Historic Center that they could occupy. Aurelia, a female sex worker in the Plaza del Teatro, wanted the government to give them a boulevard where they could work, “something dignified”. The sex worker leaders proposed Avenue Pichincha, which Alexandra Flores said was currently full of drug addicts and drunks. They wanted to beautify the street with murals and install security cameras and police to make it a safe zone of tolerance for sex work. Dayana Morán rejected the proposal when asked about it, saying the neighbors would complain.

Some sex workers did want a space like that the municipality proposed. Aurelia, although she proposed a boulevard, also said the mayor “ought to as mayor create a residential complex”. Claudia, a street sex worker interviewed not in the Historic Center but on Avenue Amazonas, wanted the

government to put sex workers in a calmer place, like a “house”. Donna, a trans sex worker in the Historic Center, also asked that the government give them “a pretty house” to work in.

Regardless of sex workers’ opinion on the type of space they wanted, having a space where they could work was one of their primary requests of the government, along with help getting a different job. Erika, when asked what she thought could be done to improve sex workers’ conditions, said she wanted the government to help women leave sex work and start their own businesses, to not discriminate against sex workers, and “that they let us work freely in the streets”. Rosa, who also opposed the municipality’s proposal and preferred to stay in the street, said, “All we want is for them to give us a space, nothing more.”

6. Discussion

6.1. The Importance of Space

In both Ecuador and Argentina, the spaces in which sex workers operated played a crucial role in determining the conditions they faced. Although sex worker views of different spaces varied, most found that indoor spaces provided more comfort and security than outdoor spaces. Sex workers perceived that working in the street was more dangerous, particularly because they were more vulnerable to client abuse. These findings are consistent with many other studies on sex worker victimization [4,18,44,79]. Many sex workers, however, viewed brothels and other sex work businesses as exploitative. Brothels in both countries often took large percentages of sex workers’ incomes, and sex workers experienced less control in these spaces because they had to follow set schedules and other rules. When asked about their preferences between brothels and the street, sex workers explained their preferences in terms of trade-offs between safety, agency, and earnings. Depending on how much they valued each of these factors, they might sacrifice one to obtain more of another. The spaces sex workers worked in reflected, therefore, sex workers’ attempt to maximize utility based upon their preferences for specific conditions, given the spaces that were available to them. These findings are simplified in Table 6, with a more detailed breakdown of conditions in Appendix B.²⁴

These three key trade-off factors are highly consistent with Abel and Fitzgerald’s findings that New Zealand sex workers’ “justifications . . . for their choice of sector revolved around money, autonomy and safety, with participants in each sector placing a different emphasis on each factor” ([4], p. 17). They similarly found that managed workers were willing to give up earnings and autonomy for more safety, while private and street-based sex workers were willing to sacrifice safety for greater earnings and autonomy [4].

Because their workspaces have such strong influences on their lives, government limitation of these spaces was one of the greatest concerns for sex workers in Argentina and Ecuador. Many stressed that they wanted the government to give them a space to work. They opposed the government shutting down or forcing them out of spaces where they perceived sex work was taking place voluntarily, whether bars in Buenos Aires or the hotels street sex workers used in Quito. Sex workers in both countries emphasized harms from the government closing or regulating their spaces without considering the desires of sex workers themselves. In Buenos Aires, the closing of businesses where sex work occurred left many with nowhere to work but the street. Bans on advertising and police raids on private apartments owned by sex workers also impeded their ability to work indoors independently. These obstacles to independent indoor sex work are concerning given recent research finding that home-based sex work can provide positive work conditions and greater safety than street-based sex work [16,17,80]. In Ecuador, national limitations on brothel hours kept many brothel-based women from working at their desired times, and street sex workers in Quito worried the municipality’s project to move them to an enclosed space would reduce their autonomy, cause

²⁴ These tables are partially inspired by a similar table by Weitzer [15] on characteristics of different types of prostitution.

overpopulation and competition between sex workers, and prevent older and transgender sex workers from obtaining clients.

Table 6. Levels of security, agency, and earnings in different sex work spaces. ⁱ

Space	Security ⁱⁱ	Agency ⁱⁱⁱ	Earnings ^{iv}
Street	Low	High	Depends
Brothel	Moderate to high, depending on the brothel	Low to moderate	Depends
Business at which sex worker is employee ^v	High	Moderate	Depends
Business at which sex worker is customer ^{vi}	High	High	Depends
Private premise owned or rented by sex worker	Moderate	Very high	Depends

ⁱ Table refers to sex workers working independently, that is without a pimp or trafficker. ⁱⁱ Security is defined as protection from violence and theft. ⁱⁱⁱ Agency is the ability of the sex worker to make choices about their work, including the ability to set their own schedule, choose their clients, dress as they please, and avoid consuming alcohol if they wish. ^{iv} Earnings depend on price charged, number of clients, and percent of earnings paid to a third party. ^v For instance, a bar or nightclub where a sex worker is employed as a hostess or dancer. ^{vi} For instance, a bar, nightclub, or café where a sex worker pays an entrance fee or the cost of a drink.

It seems at first contradictory that many sex workers in Buenos Aires complained of policies closing indoor spaces and forcing them into the streets, while many in Quito complained of policies forcing them from the streets into an indoor space. Though they had different preferences regarding the type of workspace they wanted, however, each group's concerns reveal harms from policies governments made to limit sex work space without considering the full ramifications for sex workers based on specific contexts of their lives and sex workers' own preferences. In both countries, police corruption and abuse in enforcing control of sex work space exacerbated these harms, subjected sex workers to further violence, and prevented them from seeking and receiving police help with crimes committed against them.

6.2. Ideological Influences on State Control of Prostitution Spaces

Ecuador and Argentina's motivations for controlling sex workers' space, however, differed. The Ecuador case supports Hubbard and Sanders' theory that states control sex work space to maintain "socio-spacial order" ([21], p. 82). The state's attempt to control space in Ecuador, particularly in Quito, was motivated by a desire to balance competing interests of residents and sex workers and to create an orderly, clean city with everything in its proper place. Federal zonal requirements regarding houses of tolerance, Castillo Muñoz explains, are intended to prevent brothels from "interrupt[ing] public order" ([70], p. 36). This planning of sex work spaces with the idea that they are inherently disorderly has been discussed extensively by Prior and Gorman-Murray [24], Prior, Crofts and Hubbard [33], Crofts [56], and Prior et al. [81], among others. Multiple other factors may influence planners' attempts to hide sex work businesses, including beliefs that they are immoral, concerns about resident complaints, or desire to make locations more appealing to heterosexual, monogamous families [29,33]. Accordingly, the municipality of Quito expressed concern that sex work brings crime, leads to resident complaints, and could harm tourism. Elizabeth Vásquez of Project Transgender describes the conflict in the Historic Center of Quito:

"Here not only is the surface of the city—the facade of postcard-perfect colonial Quito—at stake, but so is the substance: the notion of the city being argued for. The debate about the regulation of street sex work is a debate on what presences are allowed and even celebrated in public space, and what others are discouraged, are "ordered" rigorously, or point-blank hidden." [82]

The state's efforts to remove sex workers from public outdoor space into a designated indoor space reflect an attempt to make sex work less visible, but not to eliminate it, supporting Hubbard and

Sanders' claim that "the intention [of the state] has never been to completely destroy prostitution, rather, to enact a mechanism of regulation that serves to enclose it" ([21], p. 82).

This claim, however, does not apply to the Argentine case. The Argentine federal government and the city of Buenos Aires' approach to prostitution represent an alternative, ideological motivation for controlling sex work space: a desire to abolish prostitution in the name of ending exploitation. Although brothels were illegal in Argentina prior to the passage of anti-trafficking legislation, largely motivated by concerns about the spread of STDs [61], only after the 2012 anti-trafficking law was passed did the government, at least in the capital, begin really cracking down on underground brothels and other businesses where sex work was occurring. These actions were spurred largely by pressure from abolitionist civil society organizations like La Alameda. The Argentine government itself actively takes an abolitionist position. Officials and staff in anti-trafficking offices of the government explained in interviews in July 2015 that Argentina as a country is abolitionist and does not consider prostitution work, but rather a violation of rights [83,84]. NGOs made similar comments. In an August 2015 interview, Viviana Caminos, coordinator of the Stop Trafficking Network (RATT), explained, "In Argentina, we don't say 'sex workers.' We say women or men or transvestites in a 'situation of prostitution' because *we are an abolitionist country* . . ." (emphasis added) [85]. The executive director of Foundation Women in Equality, Monique Altschul, similarly stated, "Our country is abolitionist. Even if we believe that every woman can do what she wants with her body, we don't believe that prostitution should be regarded as legitimate work" [86]. The closings of spaces of prostitution in Argentina were therefore precisely intended to eliminate prostitution's existence.²⁵

These statements contrast sharply with the Ecuadorian government's understanding of prostitution. Although Ecuador does not legally recognize prostitution as work, Ecuadorian federal and municipal institutions refer to prostitution as sex work, likely as a result of lobbying by sex worker organizations. Quito municipal officials all used the term "sex work" in their interviews and were more open to the idea of establishing it as a job. Dayana Morán and Nelly Sánchez both expressed the belief that prostitution should be recognized as work. "Sex work is . . . a job like any other, which needs to be regulated" Sánchez stated. Whereas Argentine officials working on trafficking made little distinction between voluntary prostitution and sex trafficking, the anti-trafficking office of the Ecuadorian Interior Ministry said their office's work was not relevant to research on sex workers' conditions because they deal with trafficking, not voluntary sex work. Joseph Mejía of the Quito Secretariat of Social Inclusion also stated that trafficking "is a different subject" than sex work and is dealt with by different offices. Although sex workers are still fighting to have the government officially recognize sex work as a job, the ideological position that prostitution is a form of work appears to influence Ecuador's method of controlling sex work space. The government does not try to combat prostitution per se, but rather to relegate it to specific places and times where they perceive it will not interfere with the functioning of the rest of society.

Nonetheless, Rosa Manzo, director of Machala-based Foundation Quimera, which works both on trafficking and sex workers' rights in Ecuador, still expressed concern about abolitionist anti-trafficking efforts' effects on sex workers. She said many sex work businesses in Ecuador are also being closed in the name of ending trafficking and saw the closure of these spaces as ultimately more harmful to those who relied on sex work for a living than it was successful in combatting trafficking. Abolitionism and the conflation of sex work and sex trafficking may, therefore, have some influence on the closing of spaces of prostitution in Ecuador, though this ideology was not nearly as present among government and NGO actors in Ecuador as in Argentina.

Although abolitionist efforts in Argentina were intended to stop exploitation and improve the situation of women, very noble causes, many female sex workers perceived these efforts as worsening their conditions. The closing of bars where prostitution occurred did not assist the women interviewed

²⁵ See further discussion on the influence of abolitionist feminism on Argentine anti-trafficking policy by Varela [87,88].

for this study in leaving prostitution; it merely displaced them to the street. The café Montecarlo provided a clear example of how attempts to abolish prostitution limit sex workers' access to space; after the girl came with a hidden camera to expose the prostitution occurring there, the sex workers could no longer use the space. If the goal of filming Montecarlo was to end prostitution and help women, it failed on both accounts; the women continued to sell sex, but they experienced more difficult working conditions and greater social exclusion than before. These findings support Weitzer [9]'s criticisms of "the oppression paradigm."

Abolitionism does not by necessity lead to the closure of spaces of prostitution. The abolitionist group of Argentine women currently and formerly in situations of prostitution, AMADH, focuses not on exposing places where prostitution happens, but on empowering and providing other opportunities to women who want to leave prostitution. Argentine abolitionism as applied by the state and other actors who are not prostitutes, however, has reduced Buenos Aires sex workers' access to their desired workspaces.

Though both Ecuadorian and Argentine governments engaged in limiting sex work spaces, the way in which they limited these spaces differed in a manner corresponding with their different ideologies towards prostitution. These two examples indicate that ideological debates and feminist theories about prostitution have important consequences for policy regarding sex work spaces, and therefore for sex workers' lives.²⁶

6.3. Sex Worker Resistance

Interviews and secondary sources reveal that sex workers in both countries engage in resistance to government limitation of their workspaces, primarily through sex worker organizations. In both countries, these organizations lobby government officials and protest policies that reduce sex workers' access to space. State control of space alters the way sex work takes place as sex workers seek out new strategies for obtaining clients, whether through alternate forms of advertising or movements from brothels and other indoor spaces to the streets. Although individual sex workers may have little power to alter policies regarding their workspaces, when organized, they can make policy enforcement difficult. Resistance can take the form of small, subversive actions like AMMAR's mock *papelitos*, or larger and more shocking actions, like the Quito sex worker who protested hotel closings by having sex in the streets. Consistent with Hubbard and Sanders [21] and Prior, Boydell and Hubbard [81], sex workers engaged in constant negotiations with the state over space. Sex worker organizations gave sex workers more negotiating power and made these negotiations more formalized, taking the form not only of evasions of state control but also of meetings with government officials. Sex workers thus took ownership over the spaces they used and actively worked to maintain and improve them.

6.4. How Should States Address Sex Work Space?

The varied preferences for certain spaces over others amongst sex workers, particularly brothel versus street work, suggest that no one type of space can encompass the needs of all sex workers. Sex workers reported experiencing harms when the government limited their access to any type of space where they were used to working. These results support a policy approach to sex work space that allows sex workers maximum freedom to choose where to work. This approach must be combined with anti-trafficking policies that distinguish between voluntary sex work and sex trafficking and can monitor these spaces for minors or adults who are being coerced.²⁷ Promising legal models include those of New Zealand and NSW, Australia, where all sectors of sex work are decriminalized. Preliminary research has found that decriminalization provides improved conditions for sex workers in

²⁶ For more on feminism's influence on prostitution and sex trafficking law, see Halley et al. [89].

²⁷ For instance, in Ecuador, police sometimes enter brothels to check IDs and shut down those where minors are working, incentivizing brothel management to strictly enforce age checks.

diverse sectors, including improved health, safety, and confidence in the legal system [90–93]. Sullivan also suggests that a legal regime allowing sex workers more choice over the spaces they work in “moderates the power of sex-business operators and allows workers to organize in protection of their safety and rights” ([91], p. 104). When sex workers have more choice of spaces to work in, they have more negotiating power and are less likely to stay in exploitative situations.

The case study results support the view laid out in the background that a legal approach allowing brothels with appropriate health and labor regulations may provide better conditions for sex workers than criminalizing brothels. Consistent with Chapkis’s assertion that closing sex work businesses drives sex workers to more dangerous spaces, the closure of legally registered businesses where sex work was occurring in Buenos Aires led sex workers to the move to street and more hidden private apartment brothels [51]. Without legal regulations of brothels, sex workers in Buenos Aires brothels were subject to high levels of exploitation. Legal brothels must be accompanied by well-enforced, transparent regulations that provide for basic health, safety, and labor conditions. In Ecuador, sex workers in brothels that did comply with regulations generally had more positive experiences of sex work. Sex workers had negative experiences in brothels that did not comply with regulations, suggesting that Ecuador needs to better enforce its brothel codes. Enforcement of standards must occur in collaboration with sex workers themselves, however, because sex workers experienced harms when the state limited brothel hours or suddenly shut down their places of work for failure to comply with conditions, leaving them with no source of income. A legal approach that works in tandem with brothel-based sex workers can also facilitate anti-trafficking work, because sex workers can help law enforcement identify victims.

The state could also work to better ensure the safety of street sex workers. Street sex workers who were permitted to work in certain areas and did not feel they had to run from police could more easily go to police for help. Useful measures could include police training on addressing sex worker reports appropriately and mechanisms for sex workers to report police abuse. No clear solution emerged regarding where states should allow street sex workers to operate; though some sex workers wanted specific zones of tolerance, others viewed such zones as marginalizing. Problems with street sex work for governments primarily arose when residents complained about sex workers’ presence. Better monitoring of crime in these areas and programs that work to destigmatize sex workers in the community, like the photo project in the Historic Center of Quito, could reduce these complaints.

Sex workers’ particularly favorable views towards indoor, autonomous sex work suggest that governments should be especially tolerant of or even facilitate these types of spaces. However, sex workers often had limited access to these types of spaces, either due to lack of affordability or, in the Argentina case, because law enforcement treated them as illegally operating businesses or spaces of trafficking. In countries like Ecuador where brothels are legal, facilitation of autonomous indoor sex work could come in the form of providing sex workers with a facility they can run themselves. The Quito municipality’s attempts to provide sex workers with a house are a positive step, but they have not yet worked because, in the case of La Cantera, the location provided was too far away and lacked security, and in the case of the new proposed house, sex workers felt they were not being given a choice. In countries like Argentina where brothels are illegal, facilitation of autonomous indoor sex work could come in the form of tolerance of private residences that sex workers rent individually or together and of businesses that do not take sex workers’ earnings but merely allow them to solicit clients inside. These types of policies would likely lead to fewer sex workers operating in the street or in exploitative brothels. Existing research in NSW, Australia also suggests that residence-based sex work is less likely to cause complaints in the community and recommends treating home-based sex work like any other home-based occupation [16,17,80]. However, monitoring of these spaces to ensure trafficking is not occurring could pose a challenge and requires that police build trust with sex workers to facilitate reporting.

7. Limitations

The experiences of the sex workers in this study are specific to the geographic locations where they work. Time constraints limited interviews with sex workers in Argentina to Buenos Aires, and the dynamics of sex work in the capital city differ from those in the provinces. Interviews suggested, for instance, that police corruption allows brothels to operate much more easily in other areas of Argentina and that police persecute street sex workers more harshly. Further research should examine sex workers' use of space and the politics of this space in other parts of Argentina. Although the sample of sex workers in Ecuador was more geographically diverse, most interviews took place in Quito, and other research could look in more detail at the dynamics of sex work space in other Ecuadorian cities. The sex work spaces discussed in this study are not exhaustive, as sex work can occur in virtually any location where sex workers can find clients, but they represent some of the most commonly used spaces by sex workers in the areas studied.

The socioeconomic classes of the sex workers in the areas I conducted interviews likely also influence the results of this study. Most of the sex workers interviewed in Buenos Aires worked in upper-class areas of the city and were more affected by bar closings than were the sex workers interviewed in the lower-class neighborhood Once. Sex workers in the other lower-class areas of the city like Constitución, which I was unable to access for safety reasons, likely have very different experiences of space. In Ecuador, more of the sex workers interviewed were considered lower-class, particularly those in the Historic Center of Quito, and their experiences also likely differ from sex workers of higher class. Class appeared closely associated with the levels of violence sex workers experienced, with higher-class sex workers reporting less violence than lower-class sex workers.

This study also relied primarily on testimonies from female sex workers. Sex workers of different genders use space differently, often occupying different locations. Although this study did obtain significant insight into transgender sex workers' use of space in Ecuador, more interviews with transgender sex workers in Argentina and male sex workers in both countries would better reveal how these populations of sex workers experience space as compared with female sex workers.

As in any study of sex workers, the inability to obtain a random sample has the potential to introduce bias. Sex workers with pimps or abusive partners who might be observing them were probably less likely to agree to an interview. Such individuals likely experience different conditions and additional limitations on the spaces they have access to as compared with those who work independently. Additionally, because sex worker leaders introduced me to most of the sex workers I interviewed in Ecuador, it is possible that the sex workers interviewed there were more likely to have views similar to the leaders themselves. Sex work occurs in many forms and across many demographics such that no study can fully represent all sex workers, and the samples in this study should by no means be considered representative of the entire populations of sex workers in Ecuador and Argentina. In particular, the participant samples in both countries were lacking in sex workers working in the private sector due to difficulty of access to this population. The relatively large sample size from multiple demographics of sex workers in both countries, however, was able to capture a wide diversity of sex worker opinions and experiences.

8. Conclusions

This study adds to emerging research demonstrating that space is a highly important component of sex workers' lives. Sex workers in this study reported experiencing largely different working conditions in different workspaces. Brothels varied in the quality of conditions, but sex workers generally viewed them as safer than street work. However, sex workers sometimes saw brothels as exploitative because they took their earnings. Some sex workers preferred working in the streets because they could keep their earnings, set their own hours, and dress how they wanted. Many sex workers saw indoor spaces where they could operate independently, such as sex worker-owned apartments, and bars and cafés that treated them like a normal customer, as ideal because they provided more safety than the street and more agency than a brothel. Sex workers' use of spaces also depended

in part on their identities, with some spaces used only by sex workers of certain genders or classes. Although sex workers differed in individual preferences for specific spaces, they wanted spaces that provided the maximum possible safety, agency, and earnings. Because their workspaces had such a significant impact on their conditions, government limitation of these spaces was a major challenge for many of them.

The two case studies show that countries may limit sex work spaces for different reasons. In Ecuador, the state tried to contain sex work to specific locations and times to maintain public order, as well as to improve the conditions sex workers faced. The municipality of Quito, in their attempt to move sex workers out of the streets of the Historic Center, was motivated by resident complaints and the idea that sex work would harm the area's historic nature and make it less presentable for tourists, but they also recognized sex workers' need of a space to work. The case embodies a struggle over the shared use of public space and who has access. In Argentina, however, the state shut down sex work spaces not because they cared particularly about those spaces, but because they wanted to eradicate prostitution, which they saw as inherently exploitative. This case shows that states, in managing public and private spaces, are motivated not just by a desire to balance the interests of various stakeholders in that space, but also by ideological beliefs about the behaviors that occur in those spaces, an idea that has been explored by numerous scholars [31–33,40,94]. The Argentine government's self-definition as abolitionist, compared to the Ecuadorian government's leaning towards a conception of prostitution as work, influenced the way they regulated prostitution. Both reveal that feminist theory regarding prostitution can strongly influence government policy.

The harms that sex workers reported experiencing when states limited their spaces, even when these limitations were intended to help them, suggest governments should consult more with sex workers in deciding what kinds of sex work spaces to allow and how to regulate them. Sex work space closures meant to combat trafficking and the exploitation of women can have negative impacts on those who rely on sex work for a living and are subsequently displaced to spaces with more difficult conditions. Sex worker organizations were important in empowering sex workers to demand better treatment and voice their views about the workspaces they wanted, and policymakers could work with these organizations to craft policies that will provide the best possible conditions for those engaged in sex work.

The results suggest that policies allowing sex workers maximum freedom to choose their workspaces, including legalized and regulated brothels, best accounts for sex worker preferences. This supports findings that decriminalization of all sex work sectors may provide better work conditions [90–93], although further research on best practices for regulating sex work space and how sex workers in other countries experience space remains necessary. Sex workers in this study provided different recommendations for their ideal sex work policies, and different demographics of sex workers may have different preferred policies, consistent with Abel and Fitzgerald [4]'s findings. Prostitution policies should take into account the specific contexts of the area and the wide diversity of sex work that exists. Given the influence that the physical spaces of sex work have on sex workers' conditions, policies regulating sex work spaces in countries where prostitution is legal must prioritize the interests of sex workers to ensure they can exercise their work with safety and dignity.

Supplementary Materials: The following are available online at www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/6/2/42/s1, SA1: typical interview questions for sex workers, SA2: typical interview questions for NGOs, SB1: consent form for personal interviews with sex workers, SB2: consent form for other interviews, SC1: recruiting flyer for sex workers in Buenos Aires.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Personal interviews with sex workers in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Pseudonym	Neighborhood Where Was Working	Space of Solicitation	Gender	Age Range ¹	Country of Origin
Blanca	microcentro	café	F	27–33	Argentina
Clara	microcentro	café	F	27–33	Argentina
Clarisa	microcentro	café	F	27–33	Argentina
Juliana	microcentro	café	F	38–60	Brazil
Luna	microcentro	café	F	38–60	Paraguay
Mónica	microcentro	café	F	27–33	Paraguay
Rio	microcentro	café	F	38–60	unknown
Abril	microcentro	street	F	20–26	Argentina
Barbie	microcentro	street	F	38–60	Argentina
Catarina	microcentro	street	F	38–60	Argentina
Magali	microcentro	street	F	38–60	Argentina
Olivia	microcentro	street	F	38–60	Argentina
Sandra	microcentro	street	F	34–37	Uruguay
Yesenia	microcentro	street	F	27–33	Dominican Republic
Jessica	microcentro	street	T	27–33	Argentina
Fernanda	microcentro	street outside café	F	38–60	Brazil
Lucila	microcentro	street outside café	F	20–26	Peru
Maribel	microcentro	street outside café	F	20–26	Argentina
Marina	microcentro	street outside café	F	27–33	Argentina
Pilar	microcentro	street outside café	F	20–26	Argentina
Rocío	microcentro	street outside café	F	34–37	unknown
Sabrina	microcentro	street outside café	F	38–60	Argentina
Valentina	microcentro	street outside café	F	unknown	unknown
Vanesa	microcentro	street outside café	F	27–33	Argentina
Estela	microcentro	street outside café	T	36–60	Argentina
Gonzalo	mostly Recoleta and Palermo	bars/nightclubs and street	M	unknown	Argentina
Alma	Once	street/public transport station	F	38–60	Paraguay
Andrea	Once	street/public transport station	F	38–60	Argentina
Nia	Once	street/public transport station	F	27–33	Argentina
Rafaela	Once	street/public transport station	F	20–26	Argentina
Violeta	Once	street/public transport station	F	34–37	Argentina
Viviana	Once	street/public transport station	F	34–37	Argentina
Alfonsín	Once	street/public transport station	M	34–37	Argentina
Felipe	Once	street/public transport station	M	20–26	Argentina
Roberto	Once	street/public transport station	M	34–37	Uruguay
Belén	Once	street/public transport station	T	20–26	Paraguay
Casandra	Recoleta	bar	F	38–60	Argentina
Talia	Recoleta	bar	F	27–33	Argentina
Gisel	Recoleta	street	F	27–33	Argentina
Kelsi	Recoleta	street	F	27–33	Dominican Republic
Patricia	Recoleta	street	F	34–37	Argentina

¹ Age ranges are based on quartiles to preserve participants' identities: 1st quartile 20–26, 2nd quartile 27–33, 3rd quartile 34–37, 4th quartile 38–60.

Table A2. Interviews with sex worker/prostituted women's organizations in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Name	Organization	Position
Margarita Peralta	AMADH	Board of Directors
Argentina Ascona	AMADH	Spokesperson
Silvia Mónica	AMADH	Treasurer
Georgina Orellano	AMMAR	President
María Esther López	AMMAR Neuquén	Representative
Norma Beatriz Torres	AMMAR Entre Rios	Representative
Fátima Olivares	AMMAR Mendoza	Representative
Mónica Lencina	AMMAR San Juan	Representative
María Lencina	AMMAR San Juan	Representative
Mariana Alejandra Contreras	AMMAR Santiago	Representative
Elena Reynaga	RedTraSex	General Secretary

Table A3. Interviews with NGOs, government officials, and other actors in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Name	Institution	Position at Time of Interview	Year of Interview
Viviana Caminos (roundtable discussion in 2016 also included Maria Rios, Edgardo Calandra, Ricardo Prieto, Vanesa Morio, and Vivian Ravich)	Stop Trafficking Network (RATT)	President	2015, 2016
Luján Araujo	Foundation María de los Angeles	Press and Communications Director	2015, 2016
Carla Majdalani	Civil Association The Meeting House (La Casa del Encuentro)	Coordinator of Institutional Development	2015
Monique Altschul	Foundation Women in Equality	Co-founder and Executive Director	2015
Marcela Rodríguez	Counseling and Sponsorship Program for Victims of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (Programa de Asesoramiento y Patrocinio para las Víctimas del Delito de Trata de Personas)	Head	2015
Ana Bettina Casadei	Congress of the Nation of Argentina; General Labor Confederation;	Lawyer	2015
Cristian Encinas	Program of Rescue and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking	Legal Services Coordinator	2015
Marcelo Colombo	Prosecutor's Office for the Combatting of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons	Head	2015
Victoria Sassola	Prosecutor's Office for the Combatting of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons	Subsecretary	2015
Agustina D'Angelo	Prosecutor's Office for the Combatting of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons	Chief Dispatcher	2015
Octavia Botalla	Prosecutor's Office for the Combatting of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons	Official	2015
Aníbal Fernández	Cabinet of Ministers of Argentina	Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers	2015
Cecilia Varela	National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET)	Researcher	2015

Table A4. Personal interviews with sex workers in Ecuador.

Pseudonym	City Where Worked	Space of Solicitation	Gender	Age Range ⁱ	Country of Origin
Ana	Guayaquil	brothel	F	28–34	Ecuador
Ariana	Guayaquil	brothel	F	44–59	Ecuador
Ava	Guayaquil	brothel	F	44–59	Ecuador
Daniel	Guayaquil	social media	M	18–27	Ecuador
Elena	Guayaquil	street	F	44–59	Ecuador
Lourdes Toscano *	Guayaquil	street	F	44–59	Ecuador
Rosalinda	Guayaquil	street	T	28–34	Ecuador
Fiona	Machala	brothel	F	28–34	Ecuador
Juanita	Machala	brothel	F	44–59	Ecuador
Mari	Machala	brothel	F	28–34	Ecuador
Ronda	Machala	brothel	F	18–27	Ecuador
Cristina	Machala	street	T	18–27	Ecuador
Lucero	Machala	street	T	35–43	Ecuador
Soraya	Machala	street	T	35–43	Ecuador
Adolfo	Machala	street/park	M	18–27	Ecuador
Bryan	Machala	street/park	M	18–27	Ecuador
Marco Luis	Machala	street/park	M	18–27	Ecuador
Miguel	Machala	street/park	M	28–34	Ecuador
Tomás	Machala	street/park	M	18–27	Ecuador
Renata	Milagro	street	F	35–43	Ecuador
Belicia	Quito	brothel	F	28–34	Colombia
Gabriela	Quito	brothel	F	44–59	Colombia
Isabela	Quito	brothel	F	28–34	Colombia
Samantha	Quito	brothel	F	18–27	Ecuador
Susana	Quito	brothel	F	35–43	Colombia
Barbara Reyes **	Quito	internet/social media	T	28–34	Ecuador
Alexandra	Quito	street—Amazonas	F	28–34	Ecuador
Angela	Quito	street—Amazonas	F	28–34	Ecuador
Britney	Quito	street—Amazonas	F	28–34	Ecuador
Claudia	Quito	street—Amazonas	F	35–43	Ecuador
Ana Lucia	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Ecuador
Aurelia	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Colombia
Belinda	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	28–34	Spain
Cecilia	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	35–43	Ecuador
Concepción	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	35–43	Ecuador
Erika	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Ecuador
Josefina	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Ecuador
Luz	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	35–43	Ecuador
María Carmen	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Colombia
Rosa	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	28–34	Ecuador
Sandra	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	44–59	Ecuador
Teresa	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	F	18–27	Colombia
Ana Carolina Alvarado *	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	35–43	Ecuador
Dominica	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	35–43	Ecuador
Donna	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	35–43	Ecuador
Lohana	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	28–34	Ecuador
Maria	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	35–43	Ecuador
Suri	Quito	street—Plaza del Teatro	T	18–27	Ecuador

ⁱ Age ranges are based on quartiles to preserve participants' identities: 1st quartile 18–27, 2nd quartile 28–34, 3rd quartile 35–43, 4th quartile 44–59; * Actual name, published consensually; ** Working name, published consensually.

Table A5. Interviews with sex workers' organizations in Ecuador.

Name	Organization	Position	City
Jovita Valencia	Association of Autonomous Female Workers "1st of August"	President	Guayaquil
Elizabeth Colobón	Association of Female Sex Workers "1st of May;" Association of Female Sex Workers "For a Better Future"	President; Vice President	Quito
Virmania Montaña	Association of Autonomous Women "22nd of June"	Secretaria Jurídica	Machala
Brígida Reyes	Association of Autonomous Women "22nd of June"	President	Machala
Carolina Alvarado *	Aso TST UIO	President	Quito
Lourdes Torres	ASOPRODEMU	President	Guayaquil
Margarita	Flor de Azalea	Vice President	Machala
Lourdes Herrero Franco	Mujeres del Cantón Milagro	President	Milagro
Karina Bravo	PLAPERTS; Association of Women Sex Workers "Collective Flor de Azalea"	President; President	Machala
Alexandra Flores	Association of Women Sex Workers "For a Better Future"	President	Quito
Lourdes Toscano *	RedTrabSex Guayaquil	President	Guayaquil

* Also included in Tables A1 and A4.

Table A6. Interviews with other NGOs in Ecuador.

Name	Organization	Position
Angel Rivas	Agrupación GLBT Sembrando Futuro	Vice President
Rosa Manzo	Fundación Quimera	President
Elizabeth Vásquez	Proyecto Transgénero	Founder, Legal Coordinator
Ana Almeida	La Marcha de las Putas; Proyecto Transgénero	President; Executive Director
Amira Herdoíza	Corporación Kimirina	Executive Director
Yvets Morales	Corporación Kimirina	Consultant
Juan León	Ecuadorian Center for the Promotion and Action of Women (CEPAM)	Researcher, psychologist

Table A7. Interviews with government officials in Ecuador.

Name	Government Office	Position
Joseph Mejía	Secretariat of Social Inclusion, Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito	Coordinator of Human Mobility and Sexual and Gender Diversity
Sara González	Secretariat of Social Inclusion, Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito	Responsible for the Area of Sex Work for Promotion of Rights
Dayana Morán	Secretariat of Security, Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito	Director of Governance
Nelly Sánchez	Commission of Constructions, Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito	Curator of the Central Zone
anonymous	Zonal Tourism Administration of the Mariscal, Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito	anonymous

Table A8. Interviews with other actors in Ecuador.

Name	Business or Institution	Occupation	City
David	Habana Club brothel	manager at Habana Club brothel	Quito
Elizabeth Martinez	Akershuz brothel	owner of Akershuz brothel	Quito
Ivonne Alexandra Cruz Figueroa	Health Center Mabel Estupiñán	doctor	Machala
Jim	spa	owner	Machala
unknown	video cinema	owner	Machala

Appendix B

Table A9. Levels of security, agency, earnings, and other conditions in different sex work spaces. ⁱ

		Street	Brothel	Business at Which Sex Worker Is Employee	Business at Which Sex Worker Is Customer	Private Premise Owned or Rented by Sex Worker
Security	Material protections ⁱⁱ	Low	Moderate to high, depends on brothel	Moderate to high	Moderate to high	Low to moderate
	Ability to screen clients	Low	Moderate	High	High	High
	Proximity of people who can help in case of emergency	Depends on location and if works alone or in a group	High	High	High	Low, unless shared with others
Agency	Ability to set own schedule	High	Low to moderate	Low to moderate	High	Very high
	Ability to choose clients	High	Low to moderate	Moderate to high	High	Very high
	Ability to choose how to dress	High	Low	Low	Moderate to high	Very high
	Ability to avoid consuming alcohol	High	Moderate, depends on brothel	Low	Moderate in bar or club, high in café	High
Earnings	Price charged	Low, depends on location	Moderate, depends on brothel	High	High	High
	Number of clients	Depends on location & time	Depends on location & time	Depends on location & time	Depends on location & time	Depends on location & time
	Percent of earnings kept for self	High	Low	High	Moderate to high (may need to pay cover charge or make purchase)	High, but premise may be costly
Other	Privacy from public	Low	High	Moderate	Moderate	Very high
	Physical comfort ⁱⁱⁱ	Low	Moderate, depends on brothel	High	High	Very high

ⁱ Table is not exhaustive of types of spaces used or relevant conditions, but includes those that emerged as significant in interviews. Table refers to sex workers working independently, that is without a pimp or trafficker. ⁱⁱ Material protections include security guards, cameras, and panic buttons. ⁱⁱⁱ Physical comfort includes ability to sit down, protection from weather, cleanliness, and ability to get a drink or food while working.

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