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SA Time: August 26, 2011 8:33:26 PM PDT

'Cops still abuse sex workers' rights'

August 26 2011 at 01:10pm
By LYNNETTE JOHNS

Sex workers say they continue to be harassed by police, and this action by authorities account for up to 50 percent of reported cases of human rights abuse.

Attorney Stacey-Leigh Manoek, speaking at the Cape Town Sex Workers Open University seminar on "Sex work and the law", said the Women's Legal Centre had been monitoring human rights abuses against sex workers.

It found that of 309 complaints, 50 percent were about abuses by the police, including harassment, unlawful arrest and physical abuse.

Sex workers were often not told of their rights when arrested for loitering, a charge the police use to arrest them.

Also, police did not allow HIV-positive sex workers who were on antiretrovirals to phone their families to ask them to bring them their medication.

The Open University is hosted by the Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (Sweat).

Close to 100 sex workers and members NGOs attended the seminar, which discussed the implications of the full decriminalisation of sex work as opposed to those of partial criminalisation.

Maria Stacey, Sweat's national outreach and development manager, said there were an estimated 250 000 sex workers in the country, and each supported between four and eight people.

A sex worker said if the government were to clamp down on them, hundreds of thousands of people would be plunged deeper into poverty.

Already, she said, the government supported only children, the aged and the disabled.

Tim Barnett, a former New Zealand MP who was instrumental in getting sex work decriminalised in his country, said they got the law right because it was a practical and not a moral law. He said it was the



Police did not allow HIV-positive sex workers who were on antiretrovirals to phone their families to ask them to bring them their medication for them in jail.

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