



In New Orleans, most individuals who are arrested for sex work related offenses are Black women (inclusive of cis and transgender women) and femmes who are living below the poverty line and engaging in sex work for survival. This is not surprising given the institutionalized and systemic racism that has been deeply rooted in the history of our city. Gentrification and lack of economic opportunities have pushed marginalized, Black women further away from sustainable income, supportive services, and resources. Coercion by poverty and circumstance cause some individuals to choose illicit street-based economies as a means of survival.

Between 2016 and 2018, 430 people have were and held in jail for charges of prostitution. 143 of those arrests were for felonies and 222 were charged with misdemeanors. 68% of arrests were of Black individuals, while the population of New Orleans is only 59% Black. These numbers do not include the number of individuals given citations for charges related to sex work, due to a lack of transparency and archaic record keeping. In Orleans Parish, there is a history of a lack of information around arrest and precipitating factors. Our city's criminal justice system is currently in the works to enhance record keeping and data sharing.

When that work is criminalized, and the individual is arrested and incarcerated the impact is not felt by the individual alone. Women arrested on prostitution related charges are often the sole caretakers for their families. According to statistics from The Data Center, 48% of households in New Orleans are led solely by women. Furthermore, 67% of the women responsible for those households are working full time yet 58% are living in poverty. The type of disruption caused by removing the primary caregiver from their families, which are already in tenuous and often dire circumstances, can range from traumatizing to destabilizing as children, homes and jobs can be taken away.

Women With A Vision (WWAV) began by providing health promotion and harm reduction services to community members who had been marginalized by systemic racism and predatory policing. Our programmatic and policy work was and still is led by those that we work with in community. Therefore, our approach to change is a roots up, harm reduction approach viewed through a Black Feminist lens. It is this approach that drives our work. As a Queer led, Black Feminist organization that serves community members at nearly every intersection of marginalization our work connects with movements that demand the equitable treatment of all.

We examine how predatory policing tactics, draconian laws enforced by overzealous district attorneys and the human trafficking movement have come together to shackle sex workers in New Orleans and the Deep South. We work to unravel the nuances of consensual and coerced sex work to honor and respond to the multi-faceted truths of sex work without further fueling the carceral feminist movement. While millions of dollars are given to anti sex trafficking organizations that require consensual sex workers to take on a victim status, little to no resources are afforded to those who have been ensnared in the carceral trap that the trafficking movement has set.