

# World's oldest profession seeks legal status

It is supposed to be the world's oldest profession, but still not legal in many countries, India included. Now, the Supreme Court of India has asked the government a simple, but tough question: Why not legalise prostitution if it cannot be controlled?

But the question begs other questions: if the government is not able to control crimes like murders, rapes and kidnappings, would these also get a legal stamp?

Well, these are not in the purview of this column, but yes, female sex workers are because HIV and AIDS are closely associated with the thriving of 'sex shops' in many cities.

"When you say it is the world's oldest profession and when you are not able to curb it by laws, why don't you legalize it? You can then monitor the trade, rehabilitate and provide medical aid to those involved," Justices Dalveer Bhandari and AK Patnaik told Solicitor-General Gopal Subramaniam.

The court said legalizing sex trade would be a better option to avoid trafficking of women and pointed out that nowhere in the world was prostitution curbed by punitive measures.

Though there are no statistics, India is estimated to have two million female sex workers. Ironically, many brothels work right under the nose of police stations and many such places are 'protected' by law-enforcing agencies.

At a recent convention of sex workers in Bangalore from across the country, these 'workers' from the world's oldest profession wanted the authorities to legalise their 'trade'.

Why? Sex workers say that once their profession gets a legal stamp, it would help them fight HIV-AIDS. Sex workers have been identified by National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) as the group most vulnerable to HIV-AIDS.

Secondly, legalization of prostitution would also end incidences of violence and discrimination against them.

Sex workers face harassment as police use force and violence against them. The society also discriminates against sex workers. All these violence and discrimination will end once the profession is legalized, say sex workers. The conclave, titled Sex Workers Rights Activism in India: Achievements and Challenges, was organised by Karnataka Sex Workers Union in association with several other groups like Aneka, Sangram, Veshya Anyay Mukthi Parishat and Sangama working for the rights of sex workers and sexual minorities in the country.