

Researching Sex Work in Southeast Asia: Epistemological, Methodological, and Ethical Considerations

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Researching sex work often include questions of safety and security, anonymity and privacy, abuse, health, and human rights. These dimensions vary in complexity in offline (establishment-based, such as bars, spas, etc.) and online (Internet, webcamming, social media platforms) contexts. This observation is informed by how much of the scholarly debates centers on anti-trafficking interventions. In various ways, the academic projects involving sex workers are used to craft policies that does more harm than good. Also, these policies, potentially driven or not by research, become forms of state-sponsored violence and epistemic injustice in the academia, especially with exclusion of sex workers' narratives and experiences. With the growing interest on investigating sex work amongst young academics and feminists, this panel problematizes, critiques, and reflects on the various epistemological, methodological, and ethical strategies employed by academics in conducting research on sex work in Southeast Asia. The panel also aims to examine the state of scholarship on sex work, particularly the dominance of public health contexts (HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections), the exclusion of or lack of attention on men and LGBTQIA+ sex workers, the politics of knowledge production (i.e representing sex workers vs. speaking for sex workers, etc.), dynamics of various sex work contexts (i.e establishment-based and online), and institutional politics. All these academic concerns largely consider how various socio-cultural contexts and time periods (before and during the pandemic) inform the direction of scholarship on sex work. Lastly, the panel hopes to start a cross-cultural dialogue among scholars in the region to do collaborations for future research and start thinking of new ways to address sex workers' rights.

(single or double session)

We invite papers from various scholars researching on sex work in Southeast Asia.