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Summary in Dutch

ISS onderzoekers ontvangen financiering van NWO voor onderzoek naar transactionele seks als overlevingsstrategie in crisissituaties

Onderzoekers Thea Hilhorst, Karin Astrid Siegmann en Silke Heumann gaan met de 750.000 euro die ze hebben gewonnen in de NWO Open Competitie (met als doel om excellent vrij, nieuwsgierigheidsgedreven onderzoek te bevorderen) vier jaar lang onderzoek doen naar de rol van transactionele seks die veel voorkomt in situaties van conflict, oorlog en rampen. Onder transactionele seks wordt verstaan seksuele relaties waarbij het geven en/of ontvangen van geschenken, geld of andere diensten een belangrijke rol speelt. In het onderzoek wordt bekeken waarom en hoe mensen hieraan meedoen en wat de consequenties daarvan zijn.

Het onderzoek zal worden uitgevoerd samen met onderzoekers in Congo, Pakistan en Colombia waarbij ook deelnemers aan transactionale seks in die landen betrokken worden als co-onderzoekers.

Full press release in English

ISS wins award in NWO Open Competition for research on transactional sex as livelihood strategy in crisis situations

The award has been granted to Thea Hilhorst, Karin Astrid Siegmann and Silke Heumann for their proposal 'Understanding transactional sex in situations of humanitarian crises and reforming institutional responses'. The project has been awarded Euro 750,000 funding by NWO Open Competition SSH.

The four-year project will focus on the role of transactional sex in livelihood strategies in humanitarian crises. Transactional sex is widely prevalent in contexts of conflict and disaster. It can help people survive or improve their situation but is also a precarious and risky strategy shaped by unequal power relations. Our understanding of this practice is hampered by biases and taboos that may (re)produce or even aggravate structural violence against the people involved.

The research seeks to understand why and how people engage in this and what consequences this has. It will also redress biases in humanitarian services and protection policies for vulnerable people. The research will be grounded in comparative country-based studies performed by national collaborators, including Marie Rose Bashwira (Democratic Republic of Congo), Saba Gul Khattak (Pakistan) and María Fernanda Olarte-Sierra (Colombia), with expertise in humanitarian systems and responses contributed by Clea Kahn. Central to its

methodology will be a Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) approach that involves people engaged in transactional sex as co-researchers, a methodology that “could serve as an example for the field”, according to the NWO assessment report. The project includes a vacant position for a PhD study for which recruitment is in preparation.

The selection committee expects that findings will be relevant for various fields such as humanitarian studies, international security, and gender studies. In its assessment NWO highlights its appreciation for the fact that ‘the project goes beyond current binaries often used in studies of sexual economies, which increases the likelihood that findings could alter policy and improve academic literature’.

About NWO Open Competition SSH

NWO Open Competition SSH aims to facilitate excellent, non-programmed, curiosity-driven research that primarily addresses a social sciences or humanities research question and research problem. It offers senior researchers the opportunity to carry out research into a subject of their own choosing without any thematic constraints. For more information, visit the [NWO Open Competition SSH page](#).

About the researchers

Thea Hilhorst is Professor of Humanitarian Studies. She is an expert in development in areas affected by disaster, conflict or fragility, with a special focus on aid-society relations. hilhorst@iss.nl

Karin Astrid Siegmann is Senior Lecturer in Labour and Gender Economics. Her research is about understanding how precarious workers challenge and change the social, economic and political structure that marginalize labour. siegmann@iss.nl

Silke Heumann is Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her research focusses on the intersections of gender, sexuality and social justice. heumann@iss.nl

About the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Based in The Hague, ISS is an international graduate school of policy-oriented critical social science. It brings together students and teachers from the Global South and the North in a European environment. Each year, approximately 160 Masters students complete a Masters in Development Studies. An additional 150 PhDs add to the research capacity of the Institute. ISS research focuses on global development and social justice

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