



Barriers to Condom Access and Sexual Health Decision-Making among Migrant and New Immigrant Sex Workers

Background

Migrant and new immigrant women who do sex work experience barriers to sexual health services which increase risks to their sexual health, as well as limit their capacity for negotiation with clients around condom use. Factors that affect this diversity in the sexual health experiences of migrant and new immigrant women include cultural norms, language barriers, immigration status and the criminalization of sex work.

The Question

What are some of the factors that can increase or decrease sexual health risks for migrant and new immigrant women who do sex work in Vancouver, BC?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **interviews with 182 international migrant and new immigrant women who were involved in either street or off-street sex work in Vancouver, BC between January 2010 and August 2013.** This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an ongoing study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC, in collaboration with a range of community partners, with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results

- Our study showed an association between **difficulty accessing condoms**, and inconsistent condom use by clients.
- Of 182 international migrants interviewed, **5.5% reported inconsistent condom use by clients.**
- Those who used condoms consistently were more likely to service clients in indoor sex work venues, and were more likely to have a high school or higher level of education.

Despite overall high levels of condom use among migrant and new immigrant sex workers, barriers to accessing condoms in sex work venues can undermine sex workers' ability to negotiate condom use with their clients.

The Policy Implications

- Improved access to sexual health services, including access in multiple languages, is needed in order to support migrant and new immigrant women who do sex work in decision-making in their workplaces.
- Laws, policies and programs that promote access to safer, decriminalized indoor work environments are urgently needed to promote health, safety and human rights for migrant and new immigrant workers in the sex industry.

Sou J, Shannon K, Li J, Nguyen P, Strathdee S, Shoveller J, Goldenberg S. Structural Determinants of Inconsistent Condom Use with Clients Among Migrant Sex Workers: Findings of Longitudinal Research in an Urban Canadian Setting. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 2015.