



Policing, Violence & Outdoor Sex Work: Barriers to Condom Use

Background

Women in street-based sex work experience high rates of violence and an increased health risks including HIV infection. Research and HIV prevention has largely focused on the individual, such as by encouraging condom use, but little research has looked at how structural factors and the work environment act as barriers and impact women in sex work's ability to negotiate condom use.

The Question

How do structural factors and the work environment impact women in sex work's ability to negotiate condom use in Vancouver, BC?

The Study

Researchers from the Maka Project and what is now called the Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) drew upon **data collected from 205 women in sex work in 2006, and mapped 'hot spots' where more women reported being pressured into unprotected sex by a client** to assess HIV risk. GSHI now carries on this research as 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. AESHA includes ongoing outreach to indoor and outdoor sex work venues (by both experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results

Analyses of the narratives of sex workers showed:

- **Working conditions shape the HIV risk of women in sex work.**

Factors related to an increase in women's HIV risk through pressure to have unprotected sex, include:

- Having an individual zone restriction;
- Working away from main streets because of policing;
- Borrowing a used crack pipe;
- Client-perpetrated violence;
- Servicing clients in cars or in public spaces.

The Implications

- Given the high rates of violence, murder and health risk among women in street-based sex work in Canada, and global calls to address how sex work criminalization has impacted the health and safety of sex workers, this study shows how the current sex work laws and enforcement-based policies may directly increase women's sexual HIV risk.
- There is an urgent need to move beyond HIV prevention focused on individuals, such as giving out condoms, to HIV prevention that focuses on the work environment and facilitates women's ability to negotiate their risk environment in safer sex work settings.

Shannon K, Strathdee SA, Rusch M, Shoveller J, Kerr T, Tyndall MW. Structural and environmental barriers to condom negotiation with clients among female sex workers: Implications for HIV prevention strategies and policy. *AJPH*: 2009; 99(4): 659-65.