



# Client Demands for Unsafe Sex: Factors Impacting HIV Risk Among Sex Workers

## Background

Sex workers are often told to use condoms to protect against HIV, but growing research shows how other factors such as the environment, government policies and the law, drug use, poverty, violence and client demands, also shape women in sex work's HIV risk.

## The Question

What factors, such as drug use, violence and client demands for sex without a condom, impact condom use among sex workers in Vancouver, BC?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team looked at data collected from **questionnaires and interviews with 490 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC from 2010-2011**. This project is part of 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. The project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access) with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

## The Results

**Sex workers were more likely to be offered more money for sex without a condom if they:**

- Used speedballs;
- Had a higher number of clients per week;
- Had clients who also see other sex workers;
- Had difficulty getting condoms;

**Sex workers more likely to accept if they:**

- Were a sexual or gender minority (lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit); and
- Experienced client violence;
- Used crystal methamphetamine less than daily; and
- Had been moved to another area by security.

**Sex workers were less likely to accept if they:**

- Were older (average age 35);
- Worked indoors.

**Almost 75% of sex workers interviewed said they had been offered more money for sex without a condom in the last 6 months.**

**20% of sex workers interviewed said they accepted more money for sex without a condom because the client asked for it.**

## The Policy Implications

- Research and interventions should focus on getting clients to take responsibility for condom use and safer sex, taking into account gendered power imbalances.
- This study suggests the safety of indoor sex work, and the need to change policies that criminalize sex work and contribute to sex workers financial dependence on sex work.

Deering KN, Lyons T, Feng CX, Nosyk B, Strathdee SA, Montaner J, Shannon K. Client demands for unsafe sex: the socio-economic risk environment for HIV among street and off-street sex workers. J Acquir. Immune Defic. Syndr. 2013 (ahead of print!)