



International Migration & HIV/STI Risk Among Sex Workers in Vancouver, Canada

Background

While research from Latin America, Africa, and Asia shows that migrant women in sex work often face increased risks of HIV/STIs, there is little research on the health and working conditions of migrant women in sex work in high-income countries like Canada.

The Question

What factors are associated with international migration and HIV/STI risk among women in sex work in Vancouver, Canada?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **650 in-depth interviews with sex workers in Vancouver, Canada** between January 2010 and August 2012. 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

163 women (25%) of the 650 sex workers interviewed were migrants who were born outside of Canada. They were mostly Chinese and were working in formal, indoor sex work venues.

International migration was associated with:

- Finishing high school
- Supporting dependent family members
- Paying a manager in a formal, indoor sex work venue

International migration was not associated with:

- Having HIV
- Using injection drugs
- Inconsistent condom use

Only 5% of migrant women in sex work were found to be living with HIV & STIs, versus 25% of Canadian-born women in sex work. However, migrants faced very high levels of HIV/STIs, client violence (19%), and police harassment (17%) compared to the general population.

The Policy Implications

- This study suggests that the health impacts of migration depend on the social and structural context of sex work. More research, in collaboration with sex work and migrant communities, needs to be done looking at how these factors impact HIV/STI risk and risk mitigation.
- This study shows a need for culturally appropriate and evidence-based HIV/STI prevention initiatives for migrants.

Goldenberg SM, Liu V, Nguyen P, Chettiar J, Shannon K. International migration from non-endemic settings as a protective factor for HIV/STI risk among female sex workers in Vancouver, Canada. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 2014.