



Sex Workers Face Barriers to Pregnancy and Parenting Services and Support

Background

Despite research showing that many sex workers experience pregnancy and motherhood, little is known about sex workers as mothers, or the challenges that they face as pregnant and parenting women.

The Question

What barriers to sex workers in Vancouver, BC face while pregnant and/or parenting?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **questionnaires and follow-up interviews with 510 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC from 2010 to the present**. 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

399 of the 510 women interviewed reported having been pregnant.

Over one third reported facing barriers to health and social support services while pregnant/parenting, including:

- Lack of financial support
- Fear of partner violence
- Lack of social support from family members
- Fear of child apprehension
- Fear of stigma due to sex work or drug use.

The most common barrier reported by pregnant/parenting women in sex work was poverty, or a lack of financial support.

Some barriers were **social** (stigma, lack of support, homelessness, education) while other barriers were **structural** (poverty, child apprehension concerns, policing, lack of support services).

The Policy Implications

- This study shows a need for supports and services for pregnant and parenting sex workers that are non-judgmental and targeted, integrate drug treatment, and address structural barriers.
- The decriminalization of sex work would likely reduce stigma, violence by police, clients and partners, while improving peer support networks and access to services and supports.

Duff P, Shoveller J, Chettiar J, Feng C, Nicoletti R, Shannon K. Sex work and motherhood: Social and structural barriers to health and social services for pregnant and parenting street and off-street sex workers. *Health Care for Women International*. 2014.