



# The Impact of Social, Policy and Physical Venue Features and Social Cohesion on Condom Use

## Background

Around the world, sex workers have been shown to have many unmet reproductive and sexual health needs, including in Canada where sex workers experience high rates of unintended pregnancies, along with poor health access to contraceptives, and face barriers to accessing support and services.

## The Question

How do the social, policy and physical features of indoor venues, and social cohesion, impact sex workers' negotiation of condom use?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon **data from interviews with 588 indoor sex workers between January 2010 and February 2013**. Researchers developed a **'Safer Indoor Work Environment Scale'** to measure the 'structural support' of venues in promoting sex workers' ability to control their health and safety. 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

Of 588 indoor sex workers interviewed, 63.6% reported using barrier contraceptives, such as condoms.

Using the **'Safer Indoor Work Environment Scale'**, features found to be associated with condom use included:

- Managers practices and venue safety policies, such as women's only spaces, posting 'bad date' sheets, and using video cameras;
- Access to sexual and reproductive health services/supplies, like condoms and STI testing;
- Access to drug harm reduction, such as safer injection supplies, and referrals to services; and
- Social cohesion among workers, including mutual aid, trust, connectedness and support.

*'Safer indoor venues with supportive policies and practices, together with strong policy support for sex worker's to work collectively, represent structural avenues through which to promote and protect sex workers' safety and health.'*

## The Policy Implications

- This study shows that safer workplace models that include supportive venue and management practices, such as security policies and access to health resources and services, and where social cohesion between workers exists, are key to ensuring sex workers' health and safety and should be supported by any new legal and policy frameworks regulating sex work.

Duff P, Shoveller J, Ogilvie G, Montaner J, Chettiar J, Dobrer S, Shannon K. The Impact of Social, Policy and Physical Venue Features and Social Cohesion on Negotiation of Barrier Contraceptives Among Sex Workers: A Safer Indoor Work Environment Scale. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 2014.