



# The Loss of 'Boystown' and Safety Protections of Online Sex Industry: Voices of Men Sex Workers and Clients

## Background

The vast majority of research and policies have focused on women in sex work, with limited evidence on the lived experiences of men and trans sex workers or clients (sex buyers). Over the last decade, the main outdoor sex work stroll for men in Vancouver (Boystown) has been shut down leading to a shift to online sex work.

## The Question

How has the loss of 'Boystown' and shift to online shaped the strategies and barriers to safety and health protections for men sex workers and clients of men in Vancouver, Canada?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) and HUSTLE (sex worker-led outreach program) conducted **qualitative in-depth interviews with 43 self-identified men sex workers (trans and cisgender) who currently buy and/or sell sex**. This research is part of the CHAPS (Community Health Assessment of Men Who Purchase and Sell Sex) Project, a community-based, participatory research project aimed at better understanding the experiences and barriers to health and safety amongst men in the sex industry. Interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2013, prior to the enactment of PCEPA that further criminalized sex work, including third party advertising and purchasing of sex.

## The Results

### The loss of 'Boystown' is linked to:

- Gentrification and urban planning
- Reduced social support and solidarity – key safety mechanisms
- Increased social isolation.

### The shift to online allowed sex workers:

- Greater control over working conditions
- Better screen prospective clients
- Negotiate terms of transactions (e.g. price, location, condom use)
- Reduced stigma and police harassment



*"It's [online] way safer, like I say you can read the profiles of your clients before you even meet them, you know? And then everything's arranged before you even meet them so when you meet them it's all good, right? You either say nay or yay. . . . Totally different from like having to get into a car and then if you don't wanna do it and the guy gets violent with you in the car you're fucked, you know? And you can say no online and not worry about bringing retribution of violence right, so."*

-Cisgender men sex worker voice

## The Policy Implications

- Given the clear evidence of the safety and health protections afforded by online sex work, this research raises serious concerns of the new criminalized (PCEPA) that criminalize third party self-advertising
- There is a critical need to include the voices of men and trans sex workers and buyers in policy and program discussions around sex work

Argento E, Taylor M, Jollimore J, Taylor C, Jennex J, Krüsi A, Shannon K. The Loss of Boystown and Transition to Online Sex Work: Strategies and Barriers to Increase Safety among Men Sex Workers and Clients of Men. *American Journal of Men's Health*, July 2016, Epub Ahead of Print.