



## Experiences of Men, Two Spirit and Trans Individuals in Sex Work

### Background

There is a great deal of diversity in sexual and gender identities among sex workers and buyers in Vancouver, but our understanding of the experiences of sexual and gender minorities in the sex industry is very limited.

### The Question

How to gender and sexual identities shape the experiences with sex work of men and trans people in Vancouver?

### The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team conducted **qualitative interviews with men and trans people who currently buy and/or sell sex between 2012 and 2013**. This study focused on 45 participants who identified as gender or sexual minorities. This project is part of CHAPS (Community Health Assessment of Men Who Purchase and Sell Sex) a community-based, participatory research project on health and safety of men in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and HUSTLE (a peer-led outreach and support program by and for sex workers) at the Health Initiative for Men (HIM), in collaboration with a range of community partners.

### The Results

- All 45 participants identified as gender or sexual minorities (e.g. gay, bisexual, queer, two spirit, trans)
- Some workers used sex work to express or explore their sexual and gender identities, often not having this opportunity due to stigma surrounding queer or trans identities.
- Many participants moved from rural areas and small cities where they experienced homophobia and transphobia to large urban cities in hopes of finding a more open and accepting environment.

*“I couldn’t just be openly gay at school or with my friends or at home. It’s like, the outlet I found was going to the street and expressing it through that.”*

### The Policy Implications

- This study supports the repeal of current sex work laws (PCEPA) and the development of policies that address the barriers to health care and safety that sex workers experience due to criminalization.
- There is a need for better services in rural areas to help sexual and gender minority youth cope with stigma and violence.
- The voices of sex workers and buyers who belong to sexual and gender minority groups need to be included in policy discussions around sex work.

Matthen P, Lyons T, Taylor M, Jollimore J, Taylor C, Shannon K. ‘I walked into the industry for survival and came out of a closet’: How gender and sexual identities shape sex work experiences among men, two spirit, and trans individuals in Vancouver. *Men and Masculinities*. 2016.