



The impact of construction and gentrification on an outdoor trans sex work environment

Background

Trans sex workers – those whose gender identity or expression differs from their assigned birth sex – often face a high level of violence, generally shaped by racism and economic barriers. This study aimed to investigate how road construction and gentrification impacted sex workers in a trans outdoor work environment in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

The Question

How do environmental and structural changes to an outdoor work environment impact trans sex workers in Vancouver, Canada?

The Study

The issue of changes to the work area arose during qualitative interviews with 33 trans sex workers that were held between June 2012 and May 2013. In response, ethnographic walks that incorporated photography were undertaken with trans sex workers. Participants were recruited from an open prospective cohort of sex workers (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access) and three open prospective cohorts of individuals who use drugs.

The Results

Changes to the work environment were found to increase vulnerabilities in three areas:

- **Violence** – Disrupting traffic patterns increased sex worker vulnerability to violence. More traffic caused by the construction contributed to unsafe working conditions, and also discouraged client traffic.
- **Displacement** – Gentrification resulted in a loss of work space and increase in resident complaints about sex work being conducted in the area.
- **Policing** - Within a criminalized context, construction and gentrification contributed to harassment from police and residents

“Scarlett discussed how she has complaints from the café on that block because they don’t like that traffic comes down to the area for sex work and not for their business. She felt frustrated by this response since she has been working there for over 15 years and is a business owner herself in her line of work.”

The Policy Implications

- This study cautions against environmental and structural changes that disrupts where trans sex workers conduct their business. Trans sex workers must be meaningfully included in community consultations and urban planning discussions to avoid further marginalizing this population.
- This study supports structural interventions that aim to improve the health, safety, and economic security of trans sex workers.
- This study also supports the decriminalization of sex work as a method of increasing safety and protecting the rights of trans sex workers.

Lyons, T., Krüsi, A., Pierre, L., Small, W., and Shannon, K. The impact of construction and gentrification on an outdoor trans sex work environment: Violence, displacement, and policing. *Sexualities*, 2016.