



# Client Demands for Unsafe Sex: Socio-Economic Risk for HIV Among Sex Workers

## Background

Safer sex practices are typically framed as the responsibility of sex workers, but growing research is looking at how environmental risk and structural factors such as poverty, unstable housing, structural violence and government policies, shape sex worker vulnerability to HIV.

## The Question

How is condom use impacted by social, drug use, sex work, environmental-structural and client-related factors among sex workers in Vancouver, BC, Canada?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **questionnaires and follow-up interviews with 490 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC from 2010-2011**. This project is part of a longitudinal ethnographic and qualitative 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. The project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access) with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

## The Results

Almost 75% of participants reported being offered more money for sex without a condom in the last 6 months, with 20% reporting accepting more money according to client demand.

**Researchers identified that sex workers were more likely to be offered more money for sex without a condom if in the past 6 months they had:**

- Used speedballs;
- A higher average number of clients/week;
- Difficulty accessing condoms;
- Clients who visited other sex workers.

**Sex workers were more likely to accept if they were a sexual or gender minority (lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit), who in the past 6 months:**

- Experienced client violence;
- Were displaced by security; and
- Used crystal methamphetamine less than daily.

**Sex workers were less likely to accept more money for sex without a condom if they:** were older (median age 35), and if they solicited for clients indoors.

## The Policy Implications

- Research is needed to understand how to reduce demand for sex without a condom and address client responsibility for safer sex practices, considering gendered power dynamics.
- This study adds to global evidence suggesting the safety of indoor sex work and the need to change policies that criminalize sex work and contribute to economic disempowerment.
- Sexual and gender minorities, who experience marginalization and stigma, and youth, may require interventions that address the increased risks of violence they face.

Deering KN, Lyons T, Feng CX, Nosyk B, Strathdee SA, Montaner J, Shannon K. Client demands for unsafe sex: the socio-economic risk environment for HIV among street and off-street sex workers. *J Acquir. Immune Defic. Syndr.* 2013 (ahead of print)