



'Stolen Generations': Child Apprehension and Enhanced Risk of HIV for Sex Workers of Aboriginal Ancestry

Background

The number of children in state care in B.C. continues to rise, with more Aboriginal children in care today than at the height of the residential school system. There is a historical legacy of child apprehension among marginalized and criminalized populations in Canada, particularly Aboriginal women and sex workers, but there is little research on their experiences with child apprehension.

The Question

How common is child apprehension among sex workers in Vancouver, B.C., and what factors increase women's risk of HIV and of having a child apprehended?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **questionnaires and follow-up interviews with 510 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC from 2010-2013**. 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

350 of 510 women reported having had at least one child and were included in the analysis. Of these:

- **38.3% had a child apprehended by Child Welfare Services;**
- 37.4% were apprehended themselves as children.

Analyses of the narratives of sex workers found several factors to be associated with increased odds of child apprehension, including:

- Servicing clients in outdoor public spaces - Outdoor sex workers were two and a half times more likely to have a child apprehended than indoor sex workers;
- A history of injection drug use; and
- Aboriginal ancestry.

59% of sex workers of Aboriginal ancestry reported having had a child apprehended.

Sex workers of Aboriginal ancestry were 66% more likely to have a child apprehended than other sex workers.

The Policy Implications

- **There is a need for decolonization approaches to child protection**, that promote healing and recognize the historical trauma of colonization; a scale up of support for sex workers who are mothers; and funding for Aboriginal-specific and -led services.
- **This study supports decriminalization of sex work** in order to allow for safer indoor sex work spaces which offer enabling environments for sex workers to keep and raise their children,

Duff P, Bingham B, Simo A, Jury D, Reading C, Shannon K. *The 'Stolen Generations' of Mothers and Daughters: Child apprehension and enhanced HIV vulnerabilities for sex workers of Aboriginal ancestry*. 2013.