Pregnancy Intentions Among Sex Workers: Recognising Rights and Wants

Background
Research on sex workers has largely focused on disease prevention and transmission, while overlooking the reproductive health needs and wants of women in sex work. The lack of research and practice attention focus on this issue, may contribute to the high level of unmet reproductive need among this population.

The Question
What factors are correlated with different pregnancy intentions among women in sex work in Vancouver, BC?

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 2010-2011 as part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), a longitudinal ethnographic and quantitative 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, with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results
Of 510 women in sex work interviewed:
- 394 (77.3%) reported prior pregnancy,
- 104 (27.5%) reported positive pregnancy intentions.

There was no difference in pregnancy intention by HIV status or by ethnicity (38.4% were of Aboriginal ancestry, 35.3% were Caucasian, 26.3% were Asian or new immigrant/ migrant workers)

Factors associated with increased odds of positive pregnancy intentions include:
- Servicing clients in formal indoor settings (e.g. massage parlours) vs. outdoor/ public settings,
- Inconsistent condom use by commercial clients,
- Being younger in age, and
- Experiencing intimate partner violence.

The Policy Implications
- This study shows a need for accessible HIV/STI prevention, harm reduction and reproductive health services for sex workers to work together to better support sex workers as mothers.
- A decriminalized model of sex work would likely increase access to formal indoor sex work establishments that better support sex workers’ reproductive right to have children.