



Sexual & Reproductive Health Care for Sex Workers: A Women-Only, Sex Work-Specific Drop-In Centre

Background

Access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, prenatal care, family planning and abortion care, has largely been ignored in relation to sex workers, despite evidence of substantial disparities and barrier to access. As such, there is a critical need to look at strategies that promote linkages to sexual and reproductive health services for sex workers.

The Question

How is sex workers' access to sexual and reproductive health services impacted by their use of a women-only and sex work-specific drop-in service?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from interviews and questionnaires with 547 sex workers over 30 months between 2010 and 2013. This project is 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 547 women in sex work interviewed, 330 (60.3%) reported using WISH Drop-In Centre services over the 30 month period.

Use of WISH Drop-In Centre services was found to be associated with:

- Older age (+35 years old),
- Aboriginal ancestry,
- Accessing sexual and reproductive health services,
- Injecting drugs, and
- Exchanging sex for drugs.

WISH Drop-In Centre

- *A women-only, sex work-tailored service and support organization for street involved women in sex work in Vancouver, BC.*
- *Open 7 nights/week, serving approximately 200 women per night with hot meals, showers, hygiene items, clothing, harm reduction and safety supplies and referrals to social and health support services.*

The Policy Implications

- This study found high uptake of a women-only and sex work specific drop-in space for street-involved sex workers, showing that these, safe, non-judgmental 'enabling environments' can effectively link marginalized women to sexual and reproductive health services, overcoming known barriers including stigma, criminalization, violence and policing.
- There is a critical need for policy and program support to scale up these programs alongside community and social support models, community empowerment and sex worker leadership.

Kim R, Goldenberg S, Duff P, Nguyen P, Gibson K, Shannon K. High Uptake of a Women-Only and Sex Work-Specific Drop In Centre: Independently Linked to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Sex Workers. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2014.

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