



The Loss of Boystown and the Move to Online Sex Work

Background

Our understanding of the working environment of men in the sex industry is very limited. Over the last decade, men sex workers in Vancouver have largely moved from street to online sex work, coinciding with the loss of “Boystown”, the main outdoor sex work stroll for men.

The Question

How have the Internet and loss of ‘Boystown’ shaped the strategies and barriers to increase safety of men sex workers and clients of men in Vancouver, Canada?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team conducted **qualitative interviews with 43 cisgender and trans men who currently buy and/or sell sex between 2012 and 2013**. This project is part of CHAPS (Community Health Assessment of Men Who Purchase and Sell Sex) a community-based, participatory research project on health and safety of men in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and HUSTLE (a peer-led outreach and support program by and for sex workers) at the Health Initiative for Men (HIM), in collaboration with a range of community partners.

The Results

The loss of ‘Boystown’ is linked to:

- Gentrification and urban planning;
- The loss of a tight-knit community;
- Reduced social support and solidarity; and
- Increased social isolation.

“It’s way safer, like I say you can read the profiles of your clients before you even meet them, you know?...And you can say no online and not worry about bringing retribution of violence...”
- 53 year old sex worker

The move to the Internet allowed workers:

- Greater control over working conditions;
- Negotiate terms such as price, location, condom-use, and services, in advance;
- Better screening of clients, reducing risks of violence, stigma, and police harassment.

The Policy Implications

- The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) that targets clients and self-advertising, raises concerns for human rights, health, and safety of men in the sex industry that primarily advertise and solicit online.
- Going forward, there is a critical need to include the voices of men and trans sex workers in law reform and policy discussions around sex work.

Argento E, Taylor M, Jollimore J, Taylor C, Jennex J, Krüsi A, Shannon K. (2016). The Loss of Boystown and Transition to Online Sex Work: Strategies and Barriers to Increase Safety among Men Sex Workers and Clients of Men. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 2016.