



# Experiences of Men, Two Spirit and Trans Individuals in Sex Work

## Background

There is a great deal of diversity in sexual and gender identities among sex workers and buyers in Vancouver, but our understanding of the experiences of sexual and gender minorities in the sex industry is very limited.

## The Question

How are the sex work experiences of men and trans people in Vancouver shaped by their gender and sexual identities?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team conducted **qualitative interviews with men and trans people who currently buy and/or sell sex between 2012 and 2013**. This study focused on 45 participants who identified as gender or sexual minorities. This project is part of CHAPS (Community Health Assessment of Men Who Purchase and Sell Sex) a community-based, participatory research project on the 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

### Diversity of sexual and gender identities:

- All 45 participants identified as gender or sexual minorities (e.g. gay, bisexual, queer, two spirit, trans)

*“I couldn’t just be openly gay at school or with my friends or at home. It’s like, the outlet I found was going to the street and expressing it through that.”*

### The expression and exploration of sexual and gender identities through sex work:

- Some participants used sex work to express or explore their sexual and gender identities, often not having this opportunity in dominant society due to stigma surrounding queer and trans identities;
- Some clients went to sex workers in order to explore stigmatized aspects of their sexual identities.

### Migration to large urban centres

- Many participants migrated to escape homophobia and transphobia, leaving rural areas and small cities for large urban centres in hopes of finding a more open and accepting environment.

## The Policy Implications

- This study supports the repeal of the current sex work laws (PCEPA) and the development of policies that address the barriers to health care and safety that sex workers experience.
- There is a need for better services in rural areas to help sexual and gender minority youth cope with stigma and violence.
- The voices of sex workers and buyers who belong to sexual and gender minority groups need to be included in policy discussions around sex work.

Matthen P, Lyons T, Taylor M, Jollimore J, Taylor C, Shannon K. ‘I walked into the industry for survival and came out of a closet’: How gender and sexual identities shape sex work experiences among men, two spirit, and trans individuals in Vancouver. *Men and Masculinities*. 2016.