



Aboriginal Women in Street-Based Vancouver: Generational Sex Work & HIV Risk

Background

In Canada, Indigenous women are over-represented among new HIV infections and street-based sex workers. Research suggests that Aboriginal women's HIV risk stems from the intergenerational effects of colonization and racial policies, but there is little research looking specifically at generational sex work involvement and how this impacts the HIV risk of Aboriginal women.

The Question

How does generational sex work involvement (having a family member who exchanges sex as a means of survival) impact the HIV risk of Aboriginal women in Vancouver, BC?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **questionnaires and baseline interviews with 225 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC from April 2006 to May 2008**. This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an ongoing 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 225 AESHA participants:

- 107 women (47.5%) were of Aboriginal ancestry,
- 22% reported generational sex work (having a family member who had engaged in street-based sex work),
 - 68% of those reporting generational sex work were of Aboriginal ancestry.

Aboriginal women were three times more likely to experience generational sex work than non-Aboriginal women.

Generational sex work was associated with:

- Aboriginal ancestry,
- Homelessness before the age of 16,
- Older age, and
- HIV infection.

Policy Implications

- There is a clear need for our communities to acknowledge the over-representation of Aboriginal women among the most marginalized aspects of the sex industry.
- **This study supports evidence-based calls to move from criminalization to a public health and human rights approach to sex work in Canada.**
- Policy reform and HIV prevention efforts should involve Aboriginal voices and leadership.

Bingham B, Leo D, Zhang R, Montaner J, Shannon K. Generational sex work and HIV risk among Indigenous women in a street-based urban Canadian setting. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2014.(epub ahead of print)