

SEX WORKERS' EXPERIENCES IN CANADA

A Literature Review by the McMaster Research Shop for SWAP Hamilton.



The Sex Workers' Action Program Hamilton (SWAP) is dedicated to advocating for the decriminalization of sex work, ensuring universal health access, and fostering economic empowerment for sex workers. Their goal is to address the systemic challenges faced by this marginalized group and to support meaningful policy change.

GOAL: SYNTHESIZE EXISTING RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN SEX WORKERS, FOCUSING ON:



FOCUS
Studies published after the 2014 **Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)**, which criminalized the sale/trade of sexual services for the first time in Canada.

OUR STRATEGY

REVIEW

17 studies published between 2018 and 2023.



Included **peer-reviewed** articles and **community-based** reports.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

Studies involving **Canadian** sex workers.



Published after 2014 (**post-PCEPA** implementation).

Studies with **diverse demographics** and research designs.

KEY WORDS

disadvantage
marginalization
healthcare
exclusion
political
access
police
isolation
prejudice
experiences
law
sexworkers
stigma
discrimination
enforcement

LIMITATIONS

Exclusion of **undocumented** community experiences.



Limited representation of **rural** and **remote** sex workers.



OUR RESULTS

POLICE INTERACTIONS

Issues: Stigma, victim-blaming, and dismissal of abuse reports.

Disproportionate Impact.



Trans and **non-binary** sex workers face unreasonable stops and harassment.

Im/migrant sex workers encounter racial profiling and heightened surveillance.

Result: Widespread mistrust of law enforcement, deterring sex workers from seeking help in emergencies.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Issues: Stigma, condescension, and judgment from providers; Lack of culturally competent care for im/migrant sex workers.

Unmet Needs.



Nearly two-thirds report **unmet healthcare** needs.

Significant mental and physical health **disparities**.

What's Working: Peer support, non-judgemental clinics, and gender affirming care improve experiences.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Issues: Stigma within and outside the sex work community.

Impact.



Economic vulnerability, mental health struggles, and **isolation**.

Barriers to collective action due to **stigma** and hierarchies.

What's Working: Peer support networks; safe spaces for sharing resources, advocacy, and mutual support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

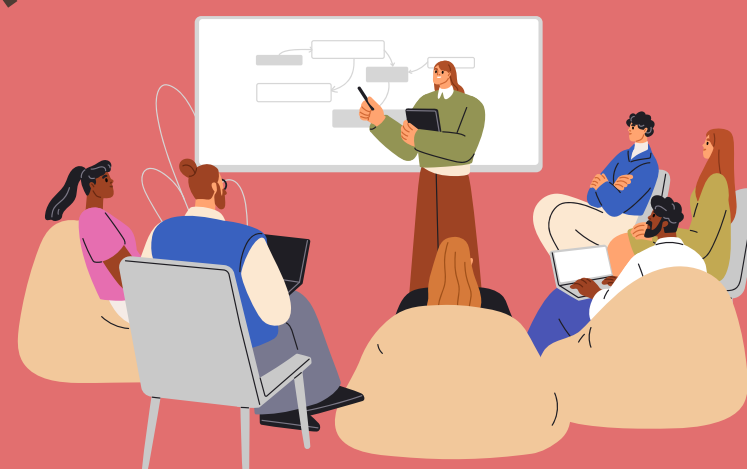
Decriminalize sex work



Decriminalize sex work and repeal harmful legislation like PCEPA.

Reform anti-trafficking policies to reflect the voices of sex workers.

Training



Police and healthcare provider training on anti-stigma, anti-racism, and cultural competency.

Future Research



Conduct representative studies to capture diverse experiences and challenges.

Meet Community Needs.



Establish sex worker-led health services and peer support networks.

Provide funding and resources for community advocacy.