



# The Role of Trust and Respect in Reaching Indoor-Based Sex Workers: A Participatory Research Project

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## Background

- Outreach volunteers from the Supporting Women's Alternatives Network (SWAN) have been conducting outreach visits to off-street sex workers in the Lower Mainland Area since 2002.
- The purpose of these visits is to offer culturally appropriate and language-specific support for indoor sex workers (e.g. in massage parlours) using a harm reduction and human rights based approach.
- Outreach has also been done in collaboration with street nurses from the BC Centre for Disease Control.
- Indoor sex-workers make up almost 80% of the Canadian commercial sex industry.
- Immigrant and migrant women in indoor-based sex work are a stigmatized and criminalized group of women who face many risks and barriers when seeking information, service, or assistance.

## Objectives

Massage parlour outreach workers were interviewed to:

- Gather evidence-based data on how to reach and provide service to indoor sex-workers while respecting their rights, choices, and realities
- Assess current outreach methods so as to improve future service delivery directed at women in off-street sex work

## Methods

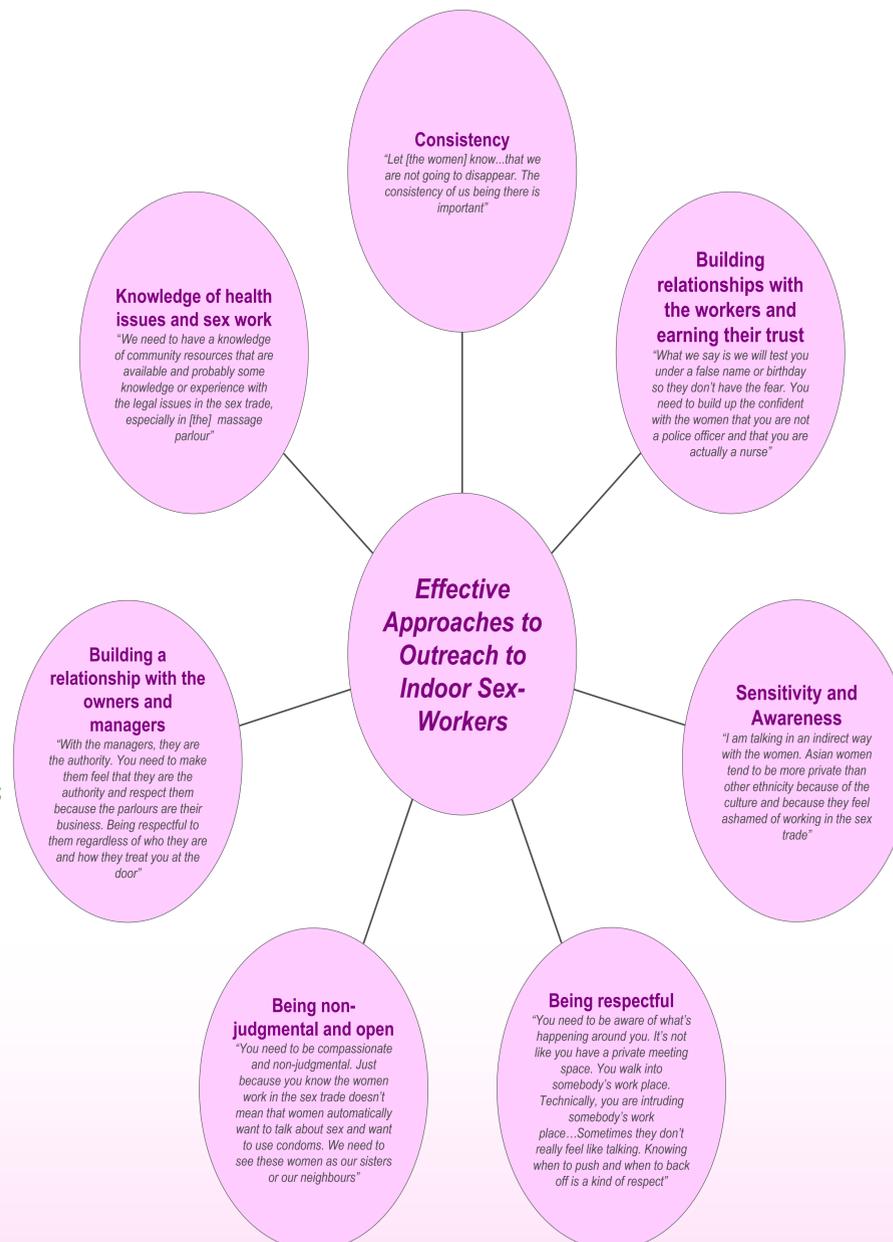
- 4 massage parlour outreach workers were interviewed; personal observations and experiences also informed the research
- A 6-item questionnaire was developed and verbally administered
- Research participation was voluntary and written informed consent was obtained prior to administering interviews
- Confidentiality of the data was maintained
- Thematic analysis was conducted

## For more information

For more information, visit us at [www.swanvancouver.ca](http://www.swanvancouver.ca) or contact us at [info@swanvancouver.ca](mailto:info@swanvancouver.ca).

## Findings

Research findings point to 7 common themes that are considered to be good practices for conducting outreach with indoor sex-workers in massage parlours. These themes and accompanying quotes are illustrated below:



## Additional Findings

### 1. Services that are seen as being helpful to workers

- Free and confidential services, especially safer-sex supplies and information, testing for STIs, and vaccinations (e.g. flu shots)
- A wide range of language skills so that the outreach team can establish rapport and better communicate with an immigrant or migrant indoor sex worker

### 2. Difficulties in the outreach process

- Building a relationship and fostering trust: All participants experienced being turned away and denied entrance into different massage parlours before gradually being allowed access.

### 3. Factors that may improve future service delivery

- Provide language-appropriate packages explaining all the services available in the community
- Educate women and their managers on their legal rights, fostering trust and self-empowerment
- Improve the language skills of outreach workers to help improve communication and build trust

## Discussion & Implications

- Although indoor sex workers were initially reluctant to engage with SWAN outreach workers, building a relationship based on consistency, respect, trust, sensitivity, and service is absolutely crucial to accessing this hard-to-reach population.
- Providing services that are identified as being beneficial to the workers themselves is important to providing culturally appropriate and relevant support to indoor sex workers.
- To be most effective, organizations aiming to access indoor sex workers must ensure that they are consistent and aware of the basic barriers faced by immigrant and/or migrant indoor sex workers in accessing information and services.
- Taking time and care to establish trust and demonstrate respect for women's work environments will result in more effective interventions than short-term interventions that are based on unsubstantiated fears or assumptions about sex workers.