

Language Guide

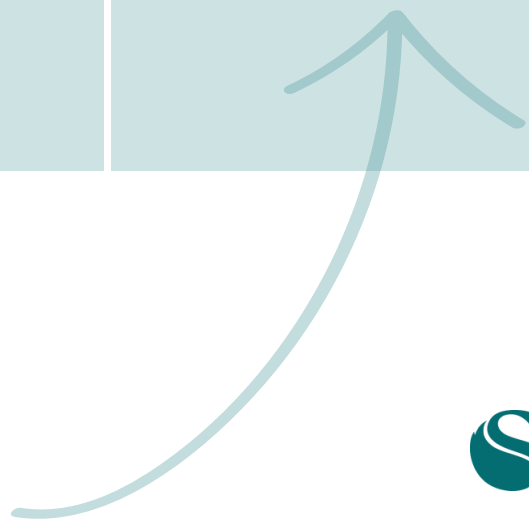
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SWAN Vancouver has developed an introductory language guide to help journalists adjust their use of language describing sex work. This list is not exhaustive and it is important to note that terminology can and will change after time of publication. Always look for up-to-date language.

AVOID...	BECAUSE...	CONSIDER...	IF APPLICABLE, TRY USING...
Hooker, prostitute, prostituted woman	These terms are judgmental, stigmatizing, and outdated. 'Prostituted woman' is often used by anti-trafficking advocates, and when it is used to describe sex workers, it implies they don't have any agency and is infantilizing. These terms also have connotations of criminality and immorality.	Why not refer to people in a less labelling way? E.g., People/women (etc.) engaged in sex work. When possible, ask people how they would like to be referred to.	Sex worker (note: not everyone who engages in sex work or works in the sex industry self-identifies as a sex worker) (The term sex worker was coined in 1978 by sex worker activist Carol Leigh. It frames sex work through a labor rights lens and recognizes that sex work is work)



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Whore, slut	<p>These terms are rooted in sexism and misogyny.</p> <p>Sex work is work, and the stigmatization of this work takes away from efforts to ensure workers are appropriately protected.</p>	<p>Words like 'whore' and 'slut' can be demoralizing in the context of sex work. Using terms like 'whore' or 'slut' adds to the perpetuation of negative and unnecessary stereotypes. Some sex workers may reclaim these terms but they should not be used by journalists.</p>	<p>Sex worker</p> <p>(note: not everyone who engages in sex work or works in the sex industry self-identifies as a sex worker)</p> <p>(The term sex worker was coined in 1978 by sex worker activist Carol Leigh. It frames sex work through a labor rights lens and recognizes that sex work is work)</p>



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<p>High-risk lifestyle</p>	<p>The definition of high-risk could be subjective, based on a person's realm of possibilities and life experiences. Suggesting sex work is high-risk also individualizes systemic violence against sex workers/women.</p> <p>The choice to engage in sex work exists on a spectrum, as does any choice about employment and securing an income. Additionally, an activity may be "high risk" because of harmful laws and policies rather than inherent dangers.</p>	<p>Is the person's lifestyle really high risk, or is it being framed in a particular way to serve a group's interest?</p>	<p>Systemically marginalized</p>



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Freedom, liberation, rescue	Those who engage in sex work may not need saving. They may be just fine doing what they do.	Does someone really need to be rescued or saved? Or does this idea come from a saviour mindset among people external to the industry?	Support, decriminalize
Chains, shackles, etc.	Context is extremely important. Is a person bound (physically or metaphorically) or is this idea working off a longstanding stereotype perpetuated by myriad figures in abolitionist and anti-trafficking circles?	There is overlap here with words like 'freedom,' 'liberation,' and 'rescue.' Is the person really being bound by physical or metaphorical chains and shackles?	Systemic/institutional barriers, spectrum of choice

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<p>Modern slavery, slavery, slaves, sex slaves, captivity, etc.</p>	<p>Common in mainstream anti-trafficking/abolitionist circles, these sensational terms do not accurately describe sex work.</p> <p>Use of the term “slavery” also equates criminalized exploitation (human trafficking) with historical state-sanctioned enslavement of Black people. Conflating sex work and trafficking while simultaneously undercutting the historical significance of slavery does nothing to empower or assist those who may actually be experiencing exploitation.</p>	<p>Within a spectrum of choice, people choose to engage in sex work. Using a word like ‘slavery’ discredits the agency of choice utilized in this work and conflates sex work with human trafficking.</p>	<p>N/A. Just don’t use these terms!</p>

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Brothel, whorehouse	These terms are outdated and rooted in sexism and misogyny.	There are negative historical connotations tied to these words. It is worth noting that some of these words do appear in Canadian laws. Some sex workers may reclaim and use “brothel”, but this should not be used by journalists.	Massage business, women working together
Seedy, dodgy, sketchy, dirty, etc.	These terms paint an intentionally negative image of sex work and perpetuate misconceptions and stigma.	Painting all sex work with the same brush using the words ‘seedy,’ ‘dodgy,’ ‘sketchy,’ or ‘dirty’ perpetuates a negative stereotype that contributes to stigma and violations of the rights of sex workers.	Working conditions, labour rights

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