

Health Initiative for Men (HIM)

HIM is a nonprofit society that aims to strengthen health and well-being in communities of self-identified gay, bisexual, and queer men and gender diverse people in BC. HIM offer a full spectrum of health-based programming and services to meet the sexual, mental, physical and social health needs of these communities, including the Hustle Program and other programs for masc, trans, and Two-Spirit sex workers.

Brett Koenig, B.A., M.Sc. — Program Manager, Vancouver Sex Work Community Alliance

Brett Koenig is the program manager for the Vancouver Sex Work Community Alliance. They are also affiliated with the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research where their research focuses on the intersecting impacts of sex work criminalization and stigmatization on the occupational health and safety of sex workers.

Sex worker services and advocacy is usually targeted towards women and femme sex workers. **Men and masc sex workers exist too**, though they are often ignored in sex work policy and their experiences are not seen as being as valid as women's experiences. Language describing sex work is typically gendered and **often presents sex workers as exclusively women**. This can invalidate men/masc sex workers, minimize their involvement in the sex industry and contributes to **limited resources available to men/masc people** in the industry.

Additionally, because men's/masc people's sex work often (but not always) happens online, it is largely **hidden from the public's perception of sex work**. To help bring their voices to the forefront, SWAN Vancouver has collaborated with Brett's Koenig from [HIM](#) to create this resource on men and masc sex workers.

MEN DO SEX WORK!

- This includes both trans and cis men, as well as nonbinary/Two-Spirit individuals who may identify as men in certain situations.
- Men/masc sex workers are diverse, identifying across race, ethnicity, ability and socioeconomic status.
- Not all men/masc sex workers identify as gay or queer—even if they provide services to other men.
- While most clients are men, men/masc sex workers provide sexual services to all demographics, genders, and sexual orientations.
- In addition to stigma against sex work, men/masc sex workers may experience homophobia (even if they do not identify as gay), transphobia, racism and stigma toward substance use and homelessness which adds an additional barrier to accessing services.

LANGUAGE

- “Sex work/sex worker” is not a universally accepted term among men/masc people, but is often used as an umbrella term to convey a specific industry and to frame sex work as a legitimate form of labour.
- Not all men who do sex work would identify with the term “sex worker”—some prefer escort, cammer or adult companion (among others).
- “Hustling/hustler” is a gendered term that men/masc sex workers have historically used, often referring to street-based sex work, which some may continue to use today.
- Some language may be acceptable when sex workers themselves use it, but may be problematic and/or stigmatizing when used by others.
- Ask people what terms they use to describe their involvement in sex work and if they are comfortable using the term “sex work/sex worker” for any article being written (it is also important to clarify pronouns).
 - If you can’t speak with someone directly, it is often safest to use the term “sex work/sex worker” if you are unsure

Remember...

You might not always be able to speak directly to a sex worker. It takes **time and genuine effort to build relationships** with a criminalized population and this does not fit well with current journalistic timelines and pressures. If you can’t speak with a sex worker and you are unsure of the language you plan to use in your article, **seek the expertise of sex work support organizations** that work with the communities you are writing about.

LACK OF RESOURCES

- Sex work is not inherently violent, but men/masc workers can face violence while working and deserve support when this happens.
- Men/masc sex workers may not report violence on the job or seek support for a number of reasons:
 - having their experiences discounted by police because they don't fit the dominant gendered narrative of "victim/survivor"
 - an inability to find or access services that are geared toward men/masc sex workers—this is especially true when resources are limited, as women/femme sex workers are prioritized by most organizations
- Men/masc sex workers face high levels of stigma from healthcare providers, friends/family, broader society in general and the queer community in particular, which can make accessing support services difficult.



Important to note:

Canada's **current laws contribute to the risk of violence in sex work**—the industry is pushed underground and there are many **barriers to accessing the justice system or occupational supports**, in addition to the **risk of criminalization**.

Men/masc sex workers' **clients are diverse**. While "bad dates" can happen with clients—or aggressors posing as clients—this is not usually the case. Many men/masc sex workers have **positive relationships** with their clients.

“Men and masc sex workers are valued members of the community”

THE ISSUE OF (ANTI-)TRAFFICKING

- Like women/femmes working in the industry, or like any other worker in any other industry, men/masc sex workers can experience violence and exploitation in sex work. However, since anti-trafficking narratives frequently equate sex work to violence against women, men/masc people are precluded from experiencing violence in anti-trafficking discourses.
- Instead, anti-trafficking narratives exclusively frame men as perpetrators of violence against women.
 - For example—depictions of “pimps,” which are almost exclusively gendered as men, perpetuate the idea that men are only involved in the industry in exploitative roles, instead of as workers
- Because anti-sex work and anti-trafficking discourse frames sex work as violence against women, when violence against men/masc people does occur it is not taken seriously or believed.
 - Men/masc sex workers that report violence experience homophobia, transphobia, and dismissal or disbelief based on their gender and they will often not report abuse in order to avoid these experiences
- Gender is just one factor that shapes experiences doing sex work. By only focusing on women and framing sex work as a women-only industry, anti-trafficking narratives ignore the systems that actually contribute to dangers in sex work—such as criminalization, discriminatory policing, racism, colonialism, im/migration policies, etc.
- There is tension between recognizing that sex work is not inherently violent while simultaneously recognizing that men/masc sex workers can experience violence as well as women/femmes in the industry.



It is critical to remember that [current laws increase risks](#) associated with sex work and [evidence points to full decriminalization](#) as the most effective means of **preventing violence, exploitation and even human trafficking.**

ADDITIONAL POINTS FOR MEDIA

- When talking about sex work, are you assuming all sex workers are women?
 - Are you talking to a diversity of sex workers, sex work advocates or sex work organizations? Just because men and masc sex workers are not being mentioned doesn't mean they aren't impacted by the issue at hand
- Men and masc sex workers are under-resourced, especially in rural and remote areas—just because you can't find a source such as a sex work support organization or advocacy group that represent men/masc people doesn't mean that there are no men doing sex work in the area.
- Ask how your portrayal of the sex industry may erase important experiences?
 - Discussing their existence and experiences can help legitimize men and masc sex workers in the broader discourse
- How does the portrayal of sex work as a women-only industry contribute to myths about sex work?
 - The criminalization and stigmatization of sex work is dependent on views that sex work is 'violence against women'—by showcasing the industry's gendered diversity, you can disrupt the dominant understanding of sex work as inherently exploitative of women
 - Men/masc sex workers are positioned outside the dominant narratives of the "ideal victim" and are therefore not seen as legitimate when reporting violence
- If you do mention men/masc sex workers, are you generalizing about them?
 - Men/masc sex workers are diverse and include cis men, trans men, non-binary people, queer people, hetero people, and people of different races, ethnicities, abilities, socioeconomic statuses and geographic locations (not just urban centers!)
 - Men/masc sex workers' clientele are similarly diverse
- Are you assuming that men/masc sex workers do not experience marginalization?
 - Men/masc sex workers often experience stigma against sex work, homophobia, transphobia and racism
 - They often experience assumptions about whether they use drugs
 - They face legal barriers to doing their work
 - They face barriers to accessing healthcare and other resources and supports (also due to underfunding for this population)

- Are you assuming that all men/masc sex workers are oppressed?
 - Just like any job, there are diverse reasons why men/masc sex workers enter the industry—for many, it is the best decision at the time and can offer a number of benefits such as financial security, flexibility in the hours they work, and emotional satisfaction
 - While some men/masc people who do sex work would rather be doing other work, it is not helpful to assume that all men/masc sex workers are being harmed by sex work as this contributes to the stigmatization of the industry, leading to the aforementioned harms and barriers

Men/masc sex workers are **whole human beings** and **should not be reduced to their occupation**—Just like any other person who does any other kind of work, **sex workers are valued members of our community.**



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