

# Writing Headlines

WHEN DISCUSSING IM/MIGRANT SEX WORK

What are SWAN Vancouver's guiding principles?



Sex work is work



We believe in rights for workers,  
not rescue



Sex work must be understood from an  
anti-racist and intersectionally feminist  
point-of-view



We use intersectional feminism, anti-  
racism, equity, self-determination, and  
rights-based practice in our approach



We want safety, rights, and freedom for  
im/migrant women engaged in sex work

It's still common to refer to sex workers through the direct or indirect use of terms connected to **human trafficking** or **sexual exploitation**.

While we acknowledge that victimization can occur in the sex industry, the assumption that all im/migrant sex workers are victims of human trafficking is **inaccurate**. Indeed, this assumption can prevent im/migrant sex workers and trafficked persons' voices from being heard.

–The Harms of Anti-Trafficking, Kimberly Mackenzie and Alison Clancey

## YES, SEX WORKERS ARE REAL PEOPLE

Just like you, sex workers enjoy different events and hobbies outside of their paid work. Whether it's exploring the city they live in, hanging out with their pets, or taking a walk outside in nature, it is unfair to paint sex workers with a generalized brush.

## WHAT ARE THE REPERCUSSIONS OF WRITING A MISLEADING HEADLINE ABOUT IM/MIGRANT SEX WORKERS?

It dehumanizes and silences them.  
It can jeopardize their safety

When misinformation about the industry spreads, unjust and unsafe conditions continue. Sex workers should be able to talk about the things they need, and while we understand the importance of media in amplifying those perspectives, we want to see a balance between the writing done by journalists and what the im/migrant sex worker is speaking about.

# Writing considerations for headlines

We understand there are important factors in determining headlines; for some news outlets, that includes writing for search engine optimization, or SEO.

Let's look at some examples of problematic headlines, and why they're an issue.

## OUR THREE BAD EXAMPLES:

“Sex workers should be saved:” new reporting system for ‘bad dates’ to launch later this year

Local resident takes tirade about “dirty, diseased sex workers” to Twitter

Five shocking secrets about sex workers’ lives

# Why doesn't headline #1 work?

“SEX WORKERS SHOULD BE SAVED:” NEW REPORTING SYSTEM FOR ‘BAD DATES’ TO LAUNCH LATER THIS YEAR



- It pushes the victim mentality: many workers don't need saving. Pushing a victim mentality takes away from a worker's **self-determination, autonomy, dignity, and integrity.**
- It also pushes a long-standing narrative we know needs to change, and is part of a larger host of problems that can impact someone's **safety and security.**

# Why doesn't headline #2 work?

LOCAL RESIDENT TAKES TIRADE ABOUT “DIRTY, DISEASED SEX WORKERS” TO TWITTER

- Using words like “dirty” and “diseased” **pushes a stereotype** that can create problems for im/migrant sex workers
- While the headline makes use of what would be talked about as direct quotes in a story, it still creates sensationalist, click-bait content
- Put yourself in a worker's shoes: would you want to be referred to as “dirty” or “diseased?” Words can hurt.

# Why doesn't headline #3 work?

FIVE SHOCKING SECRETS ABOUT SEX WORKERS' LIVES

- The use of the word ‘shocking’ plays to the idea of click-bait content
- This headline ‘others’ the worker, negating the person's individual humanity. How does that play into the dignity and respect they deserve?

# Taking everything into consideration...

Can the headline be taken out of context, or is it clear about the topic being reported on?



Does the headline silence the im/migrant sex worker(s) interviewed through the use of certain words?

Does the headline perpetuate some of the already debunked myths/misconceptions about im/migrant sex work?



Please note: Not everyone's primary identity centers around their job. Not all who engage in sex work will self-ID as a sex worker, despite the broad language that is sometimes used to refer to this community.

For more resources for journalists, please visit

[ResponsibleReporting.ca](https://ResponsibleReporting.ca)



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