



## Learn More About: Male Sex Workers

### A Lesser-Known and Underserved Community

Emerging evidence clearly identifies that male sex workers make up a significant portion of sex workers both in Canada and abroad. And yet, there is a disproportionate societal response seen in the glaring lack of specific attention given to men involved in sex work across legal, advocacy, research, and service delivery sectors.

Male sex workers (MSW) are often invisible in the discourse surrounding sex work, and services which are tailored to men are often limited or lacking altogether. As a result, there is a general lack of awareness and understanding about the realities of men involved in sex work and the sex industry.

Many male sex workers work only with male clients, but a significant proportion will also see women and couples as clients.

### Male Sex Workers Online

Traditional methods of sex work have historically been on-street, print advertising, phone chat and escort service/brothel. A notable trend has developed in recent years – due to the advent of the internet and gentrification of former strolls – with marked increases in the number of individuals involved in the sex industry who are members of virtual or online communities. As more traditional methods of sex work diminish, an increasing number of sex workers are utilizing the internet as their working medium, especially with the existing laws that currently regulate the sex industry.

**Because male sex workers (MSW) are often not acknowledged in debates about sex work, their voices have not been included in the discussion of laws and policies that affect them.**

**Add to this the societal misconceptions regarding MSW and it is little wonder that many of them experience increased risks to their overall health and safety.**



## Myths and Misconceptions about Male Sex Workers

### Effective Services and Supports

Male sex workers often do not freely access services in the community; hence, effective support services must reach out to MSW 'where they are at.' In response, initiatives like the Vancouver-based HUSTLE program (How You Survive This Life Everyday) from the Health Initiative for Men Society (HIM) provide accessible and inclusive programming. HUSTLE is an outreach and support program for self-identified men in the sex industry that is designed and delivered by experienced individuals.

Due to stigma, isolation, and criminalization, men who are involved in the sex industry face significant barriers to accessing services. Factors that serve to further isolate this community include (but are not limited to) gender and sexual phobias, drug addiction, and opinions that men always enter the sex trade by choice when in fact some were pressured to engage in sex work as youth and young men. A 2006 study noted that 63% of a sample of 40 male workers entered the sex industry before the age of 18 years and 78% had a history of being sexually violated.

Conditions of exploitation and male-on-male violence are often underplayed due to the perceived greater physical strength of men. Popular societal myths and stereotypes that men are strong and capable of defending themselves and that violence and exploitation don't affect them are false.

**In fact, male sex workers are just as vulnerable to victimization from clients, law enforcement, and other parties as other sex workers, and may be even more vulnerable when the layers of shame and stigma that they experience are factored in.**

MSW consistently report high rates of violence and victimization, and the vast majority of this violence is not reported to the police.

Statistically, MSW earn less than female sex workers, and experience a significant amount of homophobia (whether or not they identify as gay). This increases their marginalization and social exclusion, particularly from the communities and movements that are meant to include them, such as the sex worker and LGBTQ+ rights movements.

#### Resources:

- McIntyre, S. (2006). "Under the Radar: The Sexual Exploitation of Young Men - British Columbia Edition."
- Health Initiative for Men. (2016). "Position Paper: Sex Work Law Reform Implications for Male Sex Workers in Vancouver and Beyond."

**Living in Community** is a unique initiative that brings together diverse stakeholders to collaboratively improve the health and safety of sex workers. We undertake public education, policy advocacy, and sharing of our unique model of collaboration with the goal of creating communities that are healthy and safe for everyone.

Learn more at: [www.livingincommunity.ca](http://www.livingincommunity.ca)