



## Learn More About: Transgender & Gender Diverse Sex Workers

### Transgender Sex Workers

Trans sex workers are highly vulnerable to the risk of violence as they work and live at an intersection of whorephobia and transphobia. In Canada, though specific and disaggregated data is not available, about 20 to 25 per cent of sex workers are trans or male.

Like other sex workers, trans sex workers work in a variety of ways. Working on a stroll can give transgender sex workers a level of safety and community. Seeing clients in cars, which is called “car calls,” can be dangerous, particularly if a client doesn't know that you're transgender. Working on a known stroll can provide a community to watch for you, and lets regular clients know who they are seeing when they pick up a worker.

Thanks to the internet and the ability to advertise online, many street-level sex workers nowadays can also access indoor sex work sites, providing further safety and reducing the reliance on car calls. Some trans sex workers in Vancouver band together for safety and operate out of pop-up brothels, but a majority work independently, advertising on the internet and sometimes participating in more than one form of sex work. Many trans sex workers also supplement their income by making pornography or performing on webcam sites.

### A Note About Terminology

The word ‘transgender’ is an umbrella term that encompasses those who identify across the gender spectrum, and is often abbreviated as ‘trans.’ Transgender women and transfeminine sex workers include people of a range of genders, but these terms generally mean that someone was once seen as “male-of-center” and is now leaning more towards the “feminine-of-center” state on the gender continuum. Historically, this population would be called transsexual, but cultural ideas have changed and evolved in such a way that there are so many more terms people use to self-identify, even if on the escort ad boards and on the streets the term “transsexual” still thrives. This fact sheet discusses the experiences and needs of trans and gender diverse sex workers.

**Criminalization, sex worker stigma, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, colonialism, HIV stigma, isolation, and racism are all issues that transgender sex workers face.**

## Discrimination & Barriers

Criminalization, sex worker stigma, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, colonialism, HIV stigma, isolation, and racism are all issues that transgender sex workers face. When it comes to accessing services specific to women, trans women sex workers may face barriers in providing ID and may be discriminated against due to not appearing “female enough.”

For those seeking medical interventions, some transition-related health care expenses are covered by the BC Medical Services Plan but most are not. Trans women who are sex workers already face economic barriers. Some of them will use sex work as a sole source of income, and some will use it as supplementary income to cover the expensive cost of transition, as well as their own needs for food, shelter, and other basic needs.



## Non-binary & Queer Sex Workers

While the terms 'non-binary' and 'transfeminine' may often overlap, sex workers who were once mis-identified as female and are now living as non-binary face unique challenges. Non-binary sex workers are often placed in a position of having to conform to feminine gender standards in order to work effectively, or ease their dysphoria (a state of unease with gender identity) at the cost of clients and reputation among clients.

Non-binary, queer, and transgender sex workers often converge in a queer sex worker community which organizes online and through social media apps. The sense of community in the queer sex worker scene can give a feeling of belonging that is lost through coming out as transgender, so being a queer sex worker can feel very close to one's sense of identity and security.

**Like all other sex workers, transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse sex workers must have access to appropriate services and supports that are non-stigmatizing and meet them where they're at.**

### Resources:

- Hailey Heartless
- Global Network of Sex Work Projects, <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/Trans%20SWs.pdf>
- Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (2006) *The Challenge of Change: A Study of Canada's Criminal Prostitution*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

**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.

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