

## Sex Work: What you need to know



Sex work is the exchange of money or other goods for sexual services provided by a consenting adult.



It includes escorting, street-based sex work, cam work, cyber sex, exotic dancing, pornography and more.



Sex workers are women, men, transgender, and non-binary individuals. Marginalized individuals who sell/trade sex (such as Indigenous women, people of colour, transgender or non-binary individuals, those in extreme poverty, or those struggling with physical and mental health issues or addiction) experience greater vulnerability.



Selling sex in Canada is not illegal, although many activities associated with it are.



Because of location, stigma and the quasi-criminal nature of the work, street-based sex workers experience high levels of violence and exploitation.



**5% to 20%** takes place on the street; **80% to 95%** takes place indoor (homes, hotel rooms, massage parlours, bathhouses, etc.) Sex workers who work indoors are less visible and face different issues (e.g. eviction, neighbor complaints, business licensing issues, etc.)

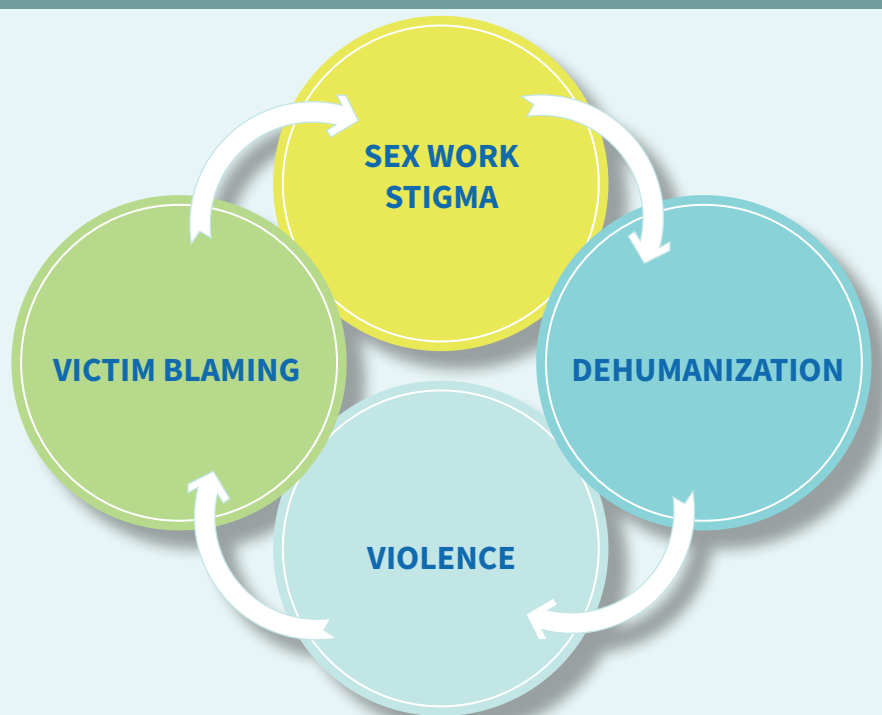
last resort  
autonomy

**REASONS**  
TO ENGAGE IN SEX WORK

earn a living  
flexibility

## STIGMA

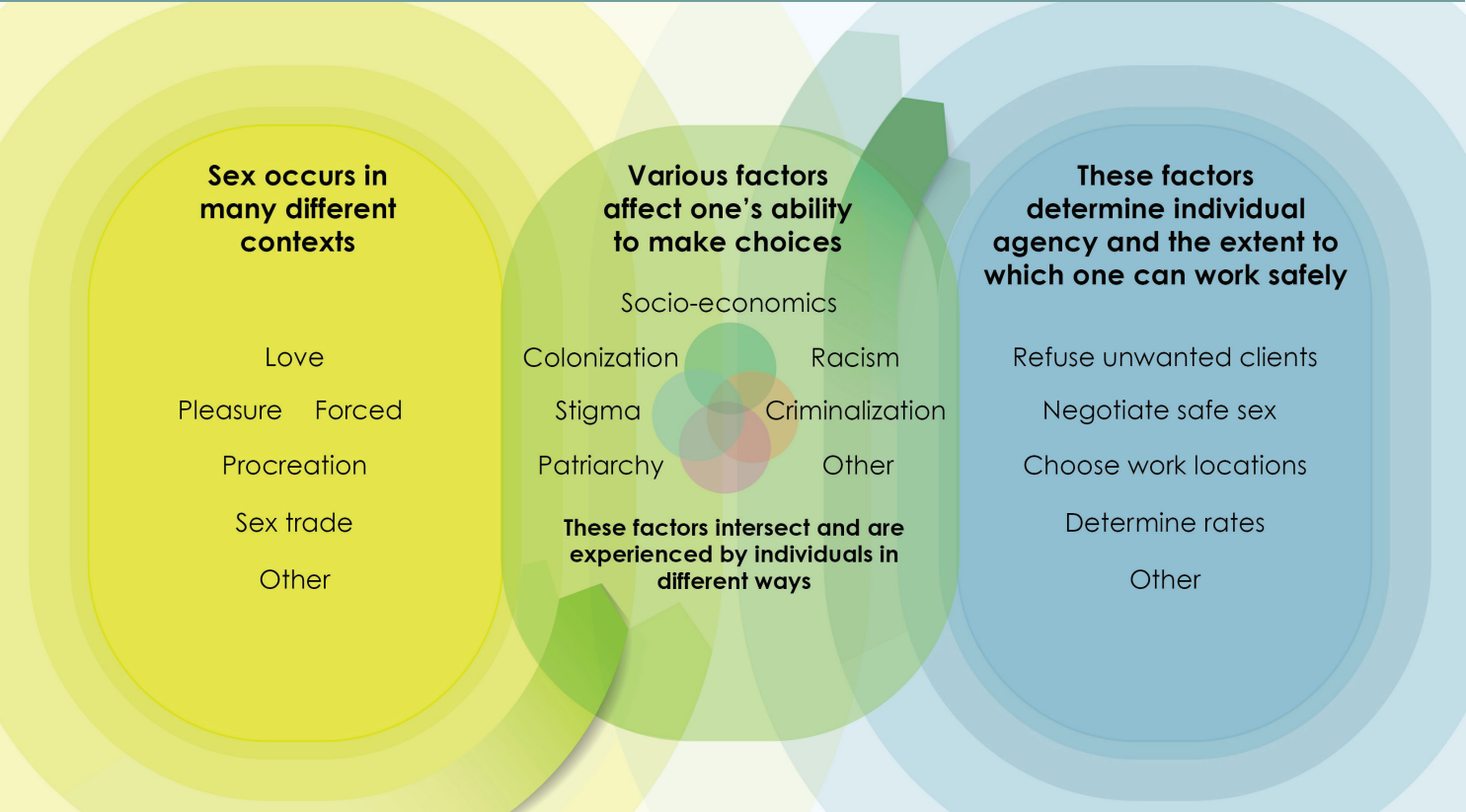
Sex work is stigmatized in society. Because sex work is stigmatized, sex workers are de-valued and dehumanized. Because individuals who sell/trade sex are dehumanized, they are targeted for violence and face barriers to supports. Because of the stigmatized nature of sex work, they are blamed for the violence that they experience.



~~DIRTY~~ **FRIEND** ~~PROSTITUTE~~ **MOTHER** ~~IMMORAL~~ **SEX WORKER**  
**PARTNER** ~~DISEASED~~ **SON** ~~WHORE~~ **SIBLING** ~~HOOKER~~

Stigma perpetuates violence against sex workers.

# SEX WORK IN CONTEXT



# TRAFFICKING

Trafficking is different than sex work.

Trafficking in Canada means the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control over the movements of a person for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour. This is a **human rights violation**.

Sex work, on the other hand, is a consensual transaction between adults, where the act of selling or buying sexual services involves consent and control. **Sex work is not a violation of human rights**.



**Impacts:** When trafficking and sex work are conflated, sex workers are treated like victims and exploited persons. Their rights may be taken away, and their health, safety and legal needs are negatively impacted.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO

| DO  | DON'T   |
|---|---|
| Do be aware of your own unconscious bias about sex work                             | Don't sensationalize sex work or talk about it in a gratuitous or voyeuristic way   |
| Do understand how pervasive stigmatizing images and language are in popular culture | Don't watch or consume media, video games, etc that are stigmatizing of sex workers   |
| Do recognize the unique life experience of each individual sex worker               | Don't assume that all sex workers are victims or have the same experience. Respect how sex workers describe their own experiences |
| Do address stigma and misinformation among peers, colleagues and family             | Don't be silent when you hear someone say something that stigmatizes sex workers  |
| Do educate yourself about sex workers' experiences and issues                       | Don't rely on popular culture to inform you about sex work  |

For more information, visit [www.livingincommunity.ca](http://www.livingincommunity.ca)