
‘They won’t change it back in their heads that we’re trash’: the intersection of sex work-related stigma and evolving policing strategies

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Abstract In Vancouver, Canada, there has been a continuous shift in the policing of sex work away from arresting sex workers, which led to the implementation of a policing strategy that explicitly prioritised the safety of sex workers and continued to target sex workers’ clients. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 cisgender and five transgender women street-based sex workers about their working conditions. Data were analysed thematically and by drawing on concepts of structural stigma and vulnerability. Our results indicated that despite police rhetoric of prioritising the safety of sex workers, participants were denied their citizenship rights for police protection by virtue of their ‘risky’ occupation and were thus responsibilised for sex work related violence. Our findings further suggest that sex workers’ interactions with neighbourhood residents were predominantly shaped by a discourse of sex workers as a ‘risky’ presence in the urban landscape and police took swift action in removing sex workers in the case of complaints. This study highlights that intersecting regimes of stigmatisation and criminalisation continued to undermine sex workers citizenship rights to police protection and legal recourse and perpetuated labour conditions that render sex workers at increased risk for violence and poor health.

Keywords: sex work, structural stigma, structural vulnerability, policing

Introduction

Mounting evidence suggests that much of what has been identified as harmful in prostitution is a product, not of the inherent character of sex work, but rather of the specific regimes of criminalisation and stigmatisation that shape the working conditions, health and safety of sex workers (Bruckert and Hannem 2013, Zatz 1997). Globally, sex work is highly stigmatised (Scambler and Paoli 2008) and the dominant policy approach to sex work has been criminalisation and police enforcement. Enforcement-based approaches and policing within criminalised frameworks have consistently been linked to elevated risks for violence, reduced ability to

negotiate safer sex transactions and increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV (Rhodes *et al.* 2008, Shannon *et al.* 2015, Shannon and Montaner 2012, Simić and Rhodes 2009, WHO *et al.* 2011). Indeed, it has been estimated that the full decriminalisation of sex work in Canada could reduce 39 per cent of new HIV infections among female sex workers and their clients over the next decade (Shannon *et al.* 2015).

The concepts of structural vulnerability/violence, everyday and symbolic violence have previously been used to frame the violence and poor health experienced by street-based sex workers (Shannon *et al.* 2008, Simić and Rhodes 2009). Structural violence is distinct from personal or direct violence, which has been the focus of much research on sex work, in that it is embedded in social structures and draws attention to how 'unequal power' shapes 'unequal life chances' (Galtung 1990). Structural violence has been conceptualised as the product of social arrangements embedded in the organisation of society that inflict injury upon vulnerable populations (Farmer 2005). These social arrangements are determined by large-scale forces (e.g. criminalisation of sex work, poverty, racism) that are rooted in historical and economic processes (e.g. colonialism, globalisation). Importantly, the institutionalisation and everyday internalisation of structural violence through, for example, policing practices and stigmatisation can render it invisible (Bourgeois *et al.* 2004, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois 2004), a process Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois (2004) refer to as 'everyday violence'. Symbolic violence refers to the mechanism that lead those who are at the bottom of the societal hierarchy to presume social inequality as the natural order of things and to blame themselves for their position in society's hierarchy. Through the mechanisms of symbolic violence, inequalities are rendered commonsensical and remain sustained (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Together, these concepts give focus to how various social and structural forces, such as the criminalisation of sex work and sex work related stigma, intersect to shape experiences of violence and poor health among sex workers.

The criminalisation of sex work is rooted in, and expressive of, a broader social and structural context where sex workers are highly stigmatised (Bruckert and Hannem 2013, Hallgrimsdottir *et al.* 2008, Simić and Rhodes 2009). Goffman (1963) conceptualised stigmas as 'discrediting' and 'undesirable' social labels that profoundly impact the social status of individuals. Goffman's work on stigma, as well as much of the subsequent work in the area, was primarily focused on the individual level effects of stigmatisation (Goffman 1963). More recent work has focused on how broader macro-level forms of stigma, including societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies constrain the opportunities, resources, and wellbeing of individuals and groups who are stigmatised (Biradavolu *et al.* 2012, Hansen *et al.* 2014, Hatzenbuehler and Link 2014). Parker and Aggleton (2003), drawing on Foucault and Bourdieu's writings, conceptualise stigmatisation and discrimination in relation to broader notions of power and domination. Stigma then is not simply an expression of individual attitudes or of cultural values but is central to the constitution of the social order and takes shape in specific historical contexts of culture and power (Parker and Aggleton 2003).

Historically, the stigma related to sex work is rooted in women transgressing the norms of acceptable femininity which includes immoral sexual behaviours, and being viewed as a source of transmission of STIs into mainstream society (Pheterson 1993, Scambler 2007). Sex workers are believed to be a risk to society by threatening family values and are viewed as a disruptive and dangerous presence in urban landscapes (Hubbard and Sanders 2003, Sanders 2004). As a result spatial displacement through law enforcement or community protesters from the urban landscape has been the most typical 'geopolitical' strategy in the repression of sex work (Hubbard 1998). Sex work related stigma has also been linked to reduced access to health care services (Lazarus *et al.* 2012, Scambler and Paoli 2008, Scorgie *et al.* 2013) and HIV prevention, including access to condoms (Scorgie *et al.* 2013, Shannon and Montaner

2012) and increased experiences of physical violence (Blanchard *et al.* 2005, Rhodes *et al.* 2008). While sex work related stigma cuts across all segments of the sex industry (e.g. Sanders 2012), how sex workers experience, negotiate and resist stigma is influenced by social, material and interpersonal factors, including poverty, ethnicity and gender identity. For example, sex workers who work in indoor environments maybe better able to conceal their labour identity compared to primarily street-based sex workers due to the public nature of their work (Bruckert 2012). The negative effects of stigma and criminalisation of sex work are amplified for sex workers who live in poverty, are members of visible minorities and for those who use illicit substances (Bruckert 2012, Katsulis 2008). Sex workers who live in poverty are more visible, as they are more likely to work in street-based settings and are, therefore, more likely to be subjected to discrimination and police intervention (Lazarus *et al.* 2011, Sanders 2004). Similarly, in Canada Indigenous women are over-represented among sex workers, in particular among those working in the lowest paying, street-based settings (Culhane 2003). The complex vulnerabilities Indigenous women face are closely linked to the multigenerational effects of entrenched poverty, subordination and colonisation. Sex workers of Indigenous ancestry face a multilayered reality of racism and discrimination that intersects and exacerbates sex work related stigmatisation (Bourassa *et al.* 2004, Culhane 2003). For example Indigenous women in Canada experience rates of violence 3.5 times higher than non-Indigenous women and in particular, women involved in sex work are at heightened risk of violence (Amnesty International 2009, Shannon *et al.* 2009). Gender identity and expression among transgender sex workers is linked to experiences of stigma and violence both by clients and police, and thus also intersects with sex work related stigma to shape gender non-conforming sex workers' interactions with police and community (Infante *et al.* 2009, Lyons *et al.* 2015, Poteat *et al.* 2014).

Increasingly, stereotypes also position sex workers as victims at perpetual risk of violence by their clients, pimps and by traffickers and in need of rescue (Bruckert and Hannem 2013, Cook 2014, Sanders 2009). This stance is influenced by radical feminist conceptualisations of prostitution as an inherent form of violence against women, and links are often made between human trafficking and sex work by such groups (e.g. Farley 2004). Ever more, in discourses of sex work, a distinction is made between forced and chosen prostitution. Women who are forced into prostitution are seen as victims in need for protection, while those who are unwilling or, due to various structural impediments, unable to exit prostitution are denied their social and civic rights (Bruckert and Hannem 2013, Koken 2010). The construction of sex workers universally as victims, undermines sex workers' sexual and economic agency, precludes understanding sexual labour as a rational choice of income generation (albeit in the case of many street-based sex workers a constrained one), precludes the institution of a labour rights approach to sex work and importantly conceals examination of how sexual labour is organised within a broader social and structural context, including its gendered, class and racial dimensions (van der Meulen 2013). The deeply embedded stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'risky' and 'at risk', at once victimiser and victim, exist in tension and are reproduced widely, including in sex work legislation, law enforcement strategies, by municipal governments, neighbourhood associations and in media discourses (Bruckert and Hannem 2013).

Regulatory approaches to sex work based on coexisting stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'risky' and 'at risk' have proven politically and rhetorically appealing in a growing number of settings. Evolving regulatory responses to sex work in the global West have shifted to the adoption of 'demand criminalisation' approaches, which criminalise the purchase of sexual services and conceive of sex workers as victims of sexual violence. To date, Sweden, Norway and Iceland, opted for 'demand criminalisation'. More recently, the European Union has voted in favour of this approach and the Canadian government in December 2014 implemented new legislation that criminalises the purchase of sex. The new Canadian prostitution act, is

tellingly termed ‘Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act’ – a name, that neatly summarises the government’s conceptualisation of sex workers as ‘risky’ to their communities and themselves and, at the same time, as ‘at risk’ of exploitation. The new legislation criminalises the purchase of sexual services, along with benefiting from the proceeds of sex work from another person in an ‘exploitative’ fashion. It also criminalises advertising sexual services and communicating for the purpose of selling sexual services near schools and playgrounds.

In Vancouver, even prior to the change in prostitution legislation in December 2014, there has been a continuous shift in the policing of sex work away from arresting and charging sex workers. This shift in policing towards the official prioritisation of sex workers safety took place over the span of a number of years and was influenced by a public inquiry of the botched police investigation into the disappearance of over 60 street-based sex workers, and strong pressure from sex worker and other community organisations, legal experts, and academics calling for reforms to local policing practices to better protect sex workers from violence (Oppal 2012). In January 2013 the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) implemented a new policing strategy, which explicitly prioritised the safety of sex workers and focused enforcement efforts on sex workers’ clients (Krüsi *et al.* 2014, Vancouver Police Department 2013). The novel sex work policing strategy set out to balance the needs of the community and the safety of the sex workers, it states that: ‘where there are nuisance complaints against survival sex workers, alternative measures and assistance must be considered with enforcement as the last resort’ (Vancouver Police Department 2013).

Drawing on the concepts of structural vulnerability and stigma, we undertook the present study to explore the complex ways in which coexisting stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as ‘risky’ and ‘at risk’ intersect with evolving sex work policing strategies to shape street-based sex workers’ civic rights, experiences of violence and the negotiation of sexual risk reduction. We will outline some of the specific ways in which sex work related stigma influences the risk of violence and poor health by normalising the violence experienced by sex workers and continuously displacing them from the neoliberal urban landscape, not merely by police force, but also by neighbourhood watch groups, private security and other mechanisms of urban gentrification.

Methods

This study is situated within a larger NIH-funded longitudinal qualitative and ethnographic study investigating the features of the physical, social and policy environments shaping working conditions, sexual health, violence, HIV/STI risks and access to care for sex workers in Vancouver, Canada. The research builds on ongoing community partnerships and is integrated with an epidemiological cohort of over 800 street and off-street sex workers, known as AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access) (Shannon *et al.* 2007).

This study draws on qualitative semi-structured interviews with 31 street-involved sex workers about their working conditions, interactions with police, and negotiations of health and safety with clients, in the City of Vancouver, Canada. These interviews were conducted over 11 months (January–November 2013), following the implementation of the new safety-focused sex work enforcement policy by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) in January 2013.

Interview participants were recruited through purposive sampling from the longitudinal cohort (AESHA). Sampling aimed to reflect variation in demographics (e.g. age, ethnicity, gender) and work environments (e.g. geographic neighbourhoods and transaction locales). Eligibility criteria for the in-depth interviews included: (i) current sex work defined as exchanged sex for money in the previous month in the City of Vancouver; (ii) identifying as a cis- or transgender woman (cisgender refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the biological

sex that they were assigned at birth); and (iii) aged 18 years or older. This specific study aimed to examine the experiences of street-involved sex workers (i.e. those soliciting and/or servicing on the street) given substantial evidence that stigma, criminalisation and enforcement disproportionately affect this segment of the sex industry (Lowman 2000, Sanders and Campbell 2007, Shannon *et al.* 2008).

Our sample of participants reflects the broader community of street-based sex workers in Vancouver, where women of Indigenous ancestry are over-represented, due to a legacy of colonialism, subordination and racism (Culhane 2003, Duff *et al.* 2014). Interview participants included 26 cisgender and 5 transgender women sex workers (total $n = 31$). The mean age of participants was 38 years (range: 24–53). Overall, 21 identified as White, eight were of Indigenous ancestry (inclusive of First Nation or Métis) and two participants were of other visible minorities. All participants had experience with street solicitation. The majority (77%, $n = 24$) reported street solicitation as their primary way of connecting with clients, while others (23%, $n = 7$) primarily used phone/text solicitation to connect with clients. Just over half (55%, $n = 17$) primarily serviced clients in vehicles or outdoor public spaces, while 45 per cent ($n = 14$) primarily serviced clients in informal indoor venues (e.g. hotels, client's place, or their home).

The 31 semi-structured interviews were conducted by two experienced qualitative interviewers (AK, CT) and facilitated by an interview guide encouraging discussions of working conditions, police interactions, and negotiation of sex work transactions with clients, post-VPD policy implementation in January 2013. The interview guide was developed based on existing knowledge of the research team and in collaboration with our community partners. We conducted all interviews at one of two field offices in the City of Vancouver. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. All participants provided informed consent and were remunerated with a CAD \$30 honorarium. The study holds ethical approval by the Providence Healthcare/University of British of Columbia Research Ethics Boards.

Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. All textual data were analysed using an inductive and iterative process facilitated by the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.TI (Atlas.ti, Berlin). The research team discussed the content of interviews, emerging themes and coding framework throughout the data collection and analytic processes. The initial coding framework was based on key themes reflected in the interview guide, participants' accounts and fieldnotes. To advance beyond thematic description, we drew on concepts of structural vulnerability, structural stigma and everyday violence to interpret the emerging themes and give focus to how the criminalisation of sex work and sex work related stigma, intersect to render sex workers' disproportionately vulnerable to harm. Verbatim narratives are reported using pseudonyms assumed by sex workers to ensure anonymity.

Results

Our results indicated that stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'at risk' and 'risky', both victims and victimisers, coexisted and profoundly shaped sex workers' experiences of evolving policing and policy efforts. Regardless of gender, ethnicity and primary place of solicitation, participants reported that their interactions with police when soliciting sex work clients have become more positive over the years and generally focus on their safety. Women who had been supporting themselves through sex work for many years cited the detrimentally flawed police investigations into the disappearance of 60 women in street level sex work in Vancouver and the, at the time of data collection, ongoing constitutional challenge on sex work laws in Canada as important drivers for change in the policing of sex work over the years.

Women's narratives articulated a clear shift in police interactions over the years that is in line with an increased conceptualisation of sex workers as victims rather than deviants. While police used to threaten sex workers with arrest, order them off the street and follow them, current police interactions focused on inquiring about violent costumers and reminding women to stay safe:

I've seen a huge change [in policing]. Before they would come up and they'd say if we see you on the street again we're gonna arrest you. [...] That's what it used to be. Now it's like just be safe. Make sure that you report any bad dates (Charlotte, Cisgender White).

However, while sex workers welcomed the more positive police interactions and that police no longer threaten them with arrest, some participants were critical of the newfound concern for their safety and expressed that underlying stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as deviants continued to coexist with the more recent police focus on sex workers' safety:

It comes out in their [police] expressions that they don't really like you. [...] But generally they haven't really been harassing as much lately, but that attitude is still there. I don't think they'll change it back in their heads that we're trash (Violet, Transgender White).

The everyday violence of reporting sex work related violence to police – 'you're not a beat up worker'

Despite more positive police interactions and increased concern for sex workers' safety the vast majority of participants expressed that they continued to be reluctant to report theft, fraud or violence that might occur in the context of sex work to police. While there was a uniform reluctance among participants to seek police protection when they needed it, particularly participants of Indigenous ancestry recounted negative experiences in the context of reporting sex work related violence to police. This highlights the multi-layered reality of stigma and racism sex workers of Indigenous ancestry face (Bingham *et al.* 2014, Bourassa *et al.* 2004, Culhane 2003). As underscored by excerpts from Sonia and Erica, both participants of Indigenous ancestry, many sex workers experienced seeking police protection as a form of everyday violence, in that the police response normalised their experiences of violence as an inherent part of selling sex. Participants felt they were denied their citizenship rights for police protection and legal recourse by virtue of their 'risky' occupation:

My views on the police, especially the VPD changed dramatically when I had a cop, sergeant with the VPD tell me that I cannot charge my date [client] for sexual assault because I was a hooker [...] I was supposed to write a complaint against it, which I still haven't done. I want to but I fear repercussion [...] I won't go to cops [in case of violence], not after that sergeant. There's just no point, not if I'm gonna get shot down and belittled. I'm not going to waste my precious breath on somebody who doesn't give a rat's ass (Sonia, Cisgender Indigenous).

Police say oh if you're in the trade you take risks and you know what's gonna happen. You're gonna get hurt. There's nothing we can do about it [...] Where does it say if you're a hooker you're gonna get hurt? You don't get paid to get beat up. You're not a beat up worker, you know? (Erica, Transgender Indigenous).

Participants' narratives bring to bare how in a context where sex work is conceptualised as inherently dangerous and sex workers are increasingly understood as victims in need for

saving, blame for sex work related violence continues to be shifted to sex workers themselves for continuing to engage in this dangerous practice. Thus, the deeply embedded stigmatising assumptions of sex work as inherently dangerous and Indigenous sex workers as 'disposable' (Hunt 2013) can function to alleviate some of the police responsibility in protecting the civic rights of sex workers. This increases sex workers' structural vulnerability to violence as they have to operate outside the societal protections other citizens can take for granted.

Neighbourhood stigma

Neighbourhood nuisance concerns and neighbourhood renewal also profoundly shaped sex workers' working conditions and are closely linked to sex work related stigma and policing. Our results indicated that stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'at risk' and 'risky' coexisted after the implementation of the safety-focused VPD sex work policy and profoundly shaped the geography of where sex workers can work. Most participants recounted confrontational interactions with residents, neighbourhood watch groups and security guards. Women's narratives indicated that these interactions were shaped by a discourse of sex workers as a risky presence in neighbourhoods, rather than by conceptualisations of sex workers as victims in need for safety as delineated in the sex work enforcement policy. Harassment by residents and community groups often took the form of verbal degradation, pursuing sex workers on foot until they leave the neighbourhood and noting down licence plates of clients presumably to pass on to police:

Residents will drive by, stop and tell us where to go in not such nice words. I had a guy come after me and two of my girlfriends with a rake. He literally chased us off the corner with a rake. He came at us. I'll never forget it (Julia, Cisgender White).

Neighbourhood watch they suck. They are annoying. They'll follow you from the ends of the world, holy cow! They're terrible. It's basically almost like they're stalking you. You can't work. It is like they're harassing you. I swear one night I walked a mile and a half and they were still behind me following me. That's total harassment you can't do that to someone (Joy, Cisgender White).

Private security guards also profoundly shaped sex workers working conditions. Participants experienced these interactions as more overtly disruptive than current policing practices, as security guards are not bound by the enforcement and policy standards applied to official policing. Participants also described how security guards employ discourses that characterise sex workers as deviants who need to be evicted from their area of surveillance:

[Security guards] they're horrible, they're worse than the cops. [...] They just say 'you fucking whore'. They're not professional. They'll go and park so you have to keep moving and then if they decide to get a hard on for you they'll follow you around everywhere. So wherever you try to work they'll be in an area where the dates will see. They're worse than the cops [...] It fucks it up obviously cause then the dates [clients] can't tell the difference or they just think if anybody's watching then they're nervous right (Gloria, Transgender White)

The safety-focused sex work enforcement policy explicitly outlines that, in the case of sex work-related nuisance complaints, police are to respect the rights and safety of sex workers. However, participants' described that, in the case of community complaints, police without exception ordered sex workers to leave. In effect, sex workers continued to be displaced; however in contrast to the past, police prefaced their order with a reference to neighbourhood complaints. This practice highlights how discourses of sex workers as deviants who threaten the

moral and social order coexisted and intersected with police enforcement that purports to prioritise the safety of sex workers and profoundly shaped the working condition of street-based sex workers. Given the criminalised status of sex work and the power imbalance between police and sex workers, participants had limited options in managing community complaints:

If they [police] get complaints than they'll tell us to move. It's just like in certain areas. You know like the residents will call and, you know. So they [police] will be like OK we got complaints. You gotta walk (Amber, Cisgender Indigenous).

It might go for a couple weeks where, they [police] will just keep driving by but if neighbours are phoning in then that's when they come for the complaints. They say, the neighbours called in that's why we're here. They are polite, they're not rude or mean. They don't search me, they don't really say move, you can't stand on the corner, but they say, we just have complaints from neighbours, so can you find it in your courtesy to kinda like, not be around for a long time, they just put it like that, right? [Okay, so not like, get out of here?] No, they don't say it in those words, but basically that's what they mean (Ruby, Cisgender White).

These narratives of policing readily assisting residents in known sex work areas by removing sex workers stands in stark contrast to sex workers' narratives about the everyday violence they experience in seeking police protection. In contrast to the inaction of police regarding sex work related violence, participants witnessed police taking swift action to address neighbourhood nuisance complaints. It is in these discrepancies in policing where the power imbalance between sex workers and neighbourhood residents materialise to shape the working conditions and curtail the civic rights of street-based sex workers through displacement from the urban landscape and the denial of police protection and legal recourse in case of violence.

Neighbourhood renewal – 'god forbid there's a hooker on the condo street'

Neighbourhood renewal also profoundly shapes the work environment of sex workers and is intimately connected to the stigma and policing of sex work. Participants' narratives outline how neighbourhood renewal is directly linked to increased presence of security guards and police. The continued criminalisation of clients exacerbates the effects of gentrification as it gives police the power to continue to govern where sex work can take place and thus allows for removing sex workers from areas of urban renewal. As outlined by Parker and Aggleton (2003) stigma and discrimination are central to the constitution of the social order and deployed by concrete and identifiable social actors seeking to legitimise their own dominant status within existing structures of social inequity. Participants' narratives here outline how policing strategies intersect with sex work related stigma in an attempt to increase the value of newly gentrified inner-city neighbourhoods:

The minute that they're bringing the new condos next thing you know there's security cars, there's cop cars, god forbid there's a hooker on the condo street. The minute someone buys the building, puts in a condo, it's a whole new set of fucking rules. It's totally changed since they're, I don't even recognise it, and you don't see any girls up there, where I used to work up on the corner of X and Y street. See the cops shift girls to certain areas, and if they deny it, they're lying (Ruby Cisgender White)

References to urban renewal and displacement of sex work strolls were particularly prominent in transgender participants' accounts, who were displaced and stigmatised not just because of their status as sex workers but also based on their marginal gender identity. Transgender sex

workers in the local context tend to work in well-defined geographical areas, where regular and new clients can find them with relative ease. Transgender participants in this study recounted several instances of displacement due to urban renewal in recent years, highlighting how marginal gender identities intersect with sex work related stigma to push transgender sex workers to ever more marginal spaces within the urban landscape:

I used to work at the corner of Street A and B, well there is no corner of Street A and B anymore, it's a park. They turned it into a park where the transsexuals worked. But there's still high track where the girls worked but there's no transsexual stroll. They closed it down (Violet, Transgender White).

Discussion

This study highlights that intersecting regimes of stigmatisation and criminalisation perpetuated labour conditions that render sex workers at increased risk for violence and poor health and undermined sex workers citizenship rights to police protection and legal recourse.

Evidence both in Canada and globally has consistently highlighted the barriers sex workers face in accessing police protection (Okal *et al.* 2011, Richter *et al.* 2010, Shannon and Csete 2010, Shannon *et al.* 2008). Our findings illustrate that sex workers continued to be highly reluctant to report sex work related violence to police, despite the official police focus on safety. Particularly, women of Indigenous ancestry recounted negative experiences of reporting sex work related violence to police and were highly reluctant to seek police protection in the case of violence. In Canada, Indigenous women are not only over-represented in street-based sex work (Culhane 2003, Duff *et al.* 2014, Shannon *et al.* 2007) they also represent 31.9 per cent of all incarcerated women despite the fact that Indigenous women only make up 1 to 2% of the general Canadian population (Public Safety Canada 2011). These numbers highlight the disproportionate criminalisation of women of Indigenous ancestry face and draw attention to their multilayered reality of stigma and racism (Bingham *et al.* 2014, Bourassa *et al.* 2004, Culhane 2003).

Sex workers experienced seeking police protection as a form of everyday violence, in that the police response normalised their experiences of violence as an inherent part of selling sex, thus justifying their inaction. Our findings bring to bear that, in a context where sex work is viewed as inherently dangerous and sex workers are increasingly understood as victims, blame for sex work-related violence continues to be shifted to sex workers and police absolved themselves from the duty of safeguarding the legal protections of sex workers. As such, mechanisms of responsabilisation are applied to sex workers through contradictory discourses of sex workers as 'at risk' and 'risky'. Responsibilisation, Scouler and O'Neill (2007) argue, is presented as protecting vulnerable victims from risk and thus allows for dividing between responsible sex workers who exit and those 'risky' subjects who continue to put themselves at risk by selling sex (Scouler and O'Neill 2007). Those sex workers who cannot or will not choose the prescribed responsible route out of sex work are stigmatised and denied citizenship rights including safe working conditions that facilitate the negotiation of sexual risk reduction, labour rights and legal protections. Neoliberal ideology is implicated in rewarding those women who exit prostitution and take on a victim subjectivity and denying the most basic citizenship rights to those who do not. Instead of providing structural supports such as 'living' welfare rates and real alternatives for those women who want to exit sex work, the focus remains on individual sex workers' risky behaviours. This increases sex workers' structural vulnerability, as they have to operate outside the societal protections other citizens can take for granted. As such, our findings highlight that

the police rhetoric of safety for sex workers does not include the bestowing of citizenship rights and safer working conditions conducive of negotiating sexual risk reduction such as condom use; rather sex workers' safety is more narrowly defined as individual focused safety strategies with the ultimate state of safety being attained when exiting sex work.

In line with previous work, neighbourhood nuisance concerns and neighbourhood renewal also profoundly shaped sex workers' working conditions and ability to negotiate sexual risk reduction and were closely linked to sex work related stigma and policing (Hubbard 1998, Sanders 2004). Our results indicate that interactions between sex workers and neighbourhood residents and security guards were predominantly shaped by a discourse of sex workers as a risky presence in neighbourhoods threatening the social and moral order, as well as property values, rather than by conceptualisations of sex workers as victims in need of safety as delineated in the police' safety-focused sex work enforcement policy.

The safety-focused sex work enforcement policy explicitly outlines that, in the case of neighbourhood complaints, police are to respect the rights and safety of sex workers. However, our findings indicated that, in response to community complaints, police ordered sex workers to leave the area. In effect, sex workers continued to be displaced to industrial areas. However, in contrast to the past, police prefaced their order with a reference to neighbourhood complaints. As such, the ongoing neighbourhood stigma of sex workers as polluting the moral and social order coupled with the continued criminalisation of sex buyers resulted in the displacement of sex workers to isolated areas, despite police rhetoric of prioritising sex workers' safety. The negative effects of displacement to isolated industrial areas on the health and safety of sex workers have been well documented. Displacement to unknown, secluded, industrial areas, where there is little chance of receiving help when needed, is linked to increased risk of violence, rape and constrains sex workers' ability to negotiate the transaction on their terms, including condom use (Decker *et al.* 2010, 2012, Krüsi *et al.* 2012, Shannon *et al.* 2009b).

Our findings indicate that references to displacement and urban renewal were particularly prominent among transgender participants, who were displaced not just because of their status as sex workers but also based on their marginalised gender identity. The geographical displacement of the transgender stroll may increase the risk of violence for transgender sex workers as disclosure of their gender identity in the broader context of trans- and homophobia can place them at increased risk for potential violence (Infante *et al.* 2009, Poteat *et al.* 2014). This highlights how experiences of sex work related stigma and displacement are embedded in broader inequalities and social hierarchies (Katsulis 2009) and reflects previous findings that demonstrated that violent experiences among Transgender sex workers are shaped by racism and economic barriers (Iwamoto 2011).

Hubbard (1998) describes the policing of prostitution as a spatial process that perpetuates the marginalised status of those involved. In the urban landscape, territory is marked out for those who can legitimately and safely use it, while groups who are outside the mainstream are continuously pushed to the margins, away from view. Social boundaries are constructed and maintained through geographical ones that signify distinct ways of life (Pratt and Hanson 1994). Thus, the geographies of sex work are the outcome of a complex continuous struggle between different social actors, including sex workers, neighbours and businesses, private security and police (Hubbard and Sanders 2003, Sanders 2004). Our findings indicate that this struggle is marked by a significant power imbalance where neighbourhood complaints, rooted in stigmatising assumptions about sex workers as a threat to the moral order, in practice, outweigh the need for protecting the working conditions, health and safety of street-based sex workers.

For Parker and Aggleton (2003), stigmatising assumptions function at the point of intersection between culture, power and difference, and are central to the constitution of the social and moral order. Stigmatising assumptions of sex workers coupled with the power imbalance between sex

workers and other community residents allowed for the displacement of sex workers from urban space, despite police rhetoric of increasing sex workers' safety. Echoing previous work (Hubbard 1998), our findings further indicate that neighbourhood renewal was directly linked to increased presence of security guards and police. The intersection between sex work related stigma and the criminalisation of clients, despite police rhetoric about prioritising the safety of sex workers, allowed for the continued governance of where sex work can take place. In effect, the status quo, which renders sex workers susceptible to displacement from the urban landscape towards secluded, industrial areas, was maintained, thus perpetuating sex workers structural vulnerability to violence and HIV/STI (Deering *et al.* 2013, Okal *et al.* 2011, Shannon *et al.* 2009a).

In a policy framework that does not allow for full citizenship entitlement among sex workers, police and neighbourhood interactions reify the stigmatising and othering discourses of sex workers and continue to contribute to unsafe working conditions and constrain the negotiation of sexual risk reduction. Building on Bruckert and Hannem's (2013) work, our findings indicate that coexisting stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'risky' and 'at risk' are not only an impediment to sex workers' civic rights; they are the very foundation of regulatory approaches that criminalise sex buyers and allow for the continued marginalisation of sex workers. The very existence of specific laws to regulate sex work speaks to the stigma associated with sex work and the link between sex work legislation and morality (Bruckert and Hannem 2013). In Canada, as in most settings globally, there are already laws in place for targeting various forms of exploitation and nuisance that may arise in the context of sex work, such as coercion, sexual assault, trafficking persons and kidnapping. As such, our findings lend further support to calls for the full decriminalisation of sex work in Canada, consistent with international guidelines by global policy bodies (WHO 2011). Given the intersection between regulatory approaches and sex work related stigma, there is an urgent need for sustained efforts to broaden the public representations of sex workers to work towards unmask and redress the stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as victims and deviants.

This study has limitations. The lived experiences of participants represented in this study reflect street-involved sex workers and may not be representative of the experiences of sex workers in other segments of the industry, however sex workers of all segments experience occupational stigma and discrimination (Sanders 2012).

In sum, intersecting regimes of criminalisation and stigmatisation serve to increase the structural vulnerability of street-based sex workers. Coexisting stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'at risk' and 'risky', both victims and victimisers, deny sex workers the opportunity to engage as citizens, facilitate the removal of sex workers from public space and perpetuate labour conditions that render sex workers at increased risk for violence and poor health including increased risk for HIV/STIs due to constrained ability to negotiate sexual risk reduction.

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