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Indoor sex work much safer, study



By [Matt Kieltyka](#)
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B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS researcher Dr. Kate Shannon.

Contributed

The health and safety of survival sex-trade workers greatly improves when they have access to indoor workspaces, according to a new study.

Published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative – from the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and University of British Columbia – tracked 39 women living in low-threshold, supportive housing programs for sex workers.

Instead of working on the streets, in cars or alleyways, the women conducted their work indoors in property managed by Atira Women’s Resource Society and RainCity Housing and Support Society.

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In the minimal-barrier, high-tolerance environment, clients would have to check in with building staff and agree to be in a monitored, controlled environment.

As a result, lead author Dr. Kate Shannon found sex-trade workers felt safer, were more successful negotiating the use of condoms and had the risk of violence or contracting a sexually transmitted infection drop dramatically.

The workers also reported more positive interactions with police, according to the study.

“The research spoke real clearly within the context of increased control, safety and less risk of coming into contact with violent predators,” said Shannon. “From an evidence-based public safety perspective, we would like to see this model expanded.”

A recent decision by the Supreme Court of Ontario to strike down section of the Criminal Code that ban brothels was a “really important step” toward that hard reduction approach, said Shannon, but she cautioned the legal debate isn’t over yet.

The latest study is part of a large project from the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative studying the challenges faces by sex workers.

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