

key issues for male sex workers  
pcv - Apr 94

\* Male sex workers have shared issues with all sex workers - sexual health, rape/violence, economic need, housing, blah de blah. This document is not in any way intended to ignore the issues for women and transgender workers, rather to highlight the realities for men working in the industry.

\* Some of the issues are exaggerated for male sex workers, and others that women face may not be as central to male's experiences.

\* All staff/volunteers need to be sensitive to how various issues impact on male and female and transgender sex workers.

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The Key Issues for Male Workers are:

\* HIV/AIDS - All sex workers are scapegoated for HIV in the general community. Male sex workers are more closely linked in the public's eye (including women workers) with HIV transmission.

As a group of sex workers who have increased contact with the "gay community", male workers get information on almost a daily basis about HIV and the high risk they are at.

Consequently our self-identity is inextricably linked with HIV/AIDS and all the emotional fall-out and questions unanswered that goes with it.

Generally, there is also a greater experience of grief related to the virus: male sex workers are more likely than female workers to know friends/lovers with HIV or those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Multiple loss is common, too, and compounds the issues of both grief and self-identity.

AIDS Council reports that such experiences can result in men who have gay sex engaging in HIV-risk activity. This is related to such things as low self-esteem, multiple loss, isolation and anger, even to the point where men will seek (consciously or not) to become HIV+.

\* Stigma - men carry the burden of three stigmas at once: homophobia, HIV/AIDS phobia, and sex worker-phobia. This is regardless of HIV status and sexual preference/activity. The gay community can be incredibly judgemental as well, not to mention GOSSIP.

\* Sexuality - the implications of the above stigma/s are internalised by many male sex workers and can result in confusion over sexual preference, lack of self-esteem, amongst other things (too many to mention here)

\* Isolation - there is only one brothel in Vic employing men, leaving the other 1500 or so to work in isolation (privately, in escort, through sugar daddies and/or on the street). Bad news for peer support and education.

\* Lack of services - only one worker (Chach) to deal specifically with male sex worker issues, combined with a host of judgemental services (general, plus in the gay community).

\* Violence/sexual assault. In one year when PCV got 22 reports of sexual assault of males, the police received only 7. No-one wants to know about it. VAC sounds like it's finally getting it's shit together on this one, but I ain't convinced just yet. SECASA is the best CASA for men to go to. Unfortunately, Dona reports that they've got problems with sex work issues. You can't win.

Male sex workers can experience all the things women do with regards to assault (see your Working Girl, #15 "Sexual Assault" article). One key difference is that there is a major unlikelihood for men to adopt the identity of "assault victim/survivor": men aren't supposed to be victims in our society. This further isolates men, and reduces their likelihood to access or demand appropriate rape services.

\* General ignorance of the industry: people almost always conjure up images of women when thinking about the sex industry, despite the fact that 1 in 5 workers are male. The misrepresentation/denial of existence pisses a lot of male workers off. It also contributes greatly to the sense of isolation (see above).

\* Long-term work options: 95% of males' clients want young (under 25 years) men. Career prostitution therefore is out of the question for the majority of men. This, compounded by isolation issues, means there's a reduced likelihood to identify as a sex worker and be contactable by Chach. It also means that a lot of 26 year olds need skills training.

The good news for male sex workers is that men are better than women at accessing services, but who can blame us with all this going on?

xxx Keith, Chach and Richard

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