



JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY



SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY

Sex workers globally face human rights violations, health inequities

NEW book co-written with sex workers exposes ongoing harms, highlights fight for health & safety policy change

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, April 26, 2021 Sex workers around the world face serious health and social inequities, including an elevated burden of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and violence, according to a new book led by a team at the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity, Simon Fraser University, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, and Johns Hopkins University. Despite ongoing and harmful human rights violations, the book shows how sex workers organize and mobilize to resist these harms and advocate for better health and safety regulation.

Sex Work Health and Human Rights: Global Inequities, Challenges and Opportunities for Action is a collaboration between academic researchers and sex workers and sex worker-led organizations around the world. Launched on *World Day for Safety and Health at Work*, this ground breaking book highlights the acute inequities sex workers face in accessing the protection of health and safety laws. Like many other precarious workers, sex workers have been deeply impacted by COVID-19 and associated public health measures. Unlike other workers, however, sex workers in most countries operate under criminalization, relegated to work and live without legal protections, and with their health, safety and rights constantly under threat.

The book draws upon both academic and community perspectives to synthesize research evidence as well as case studies across different global settings. Co-written with sex workers, it is a rich body of information that documents the needs of sex workers as well as best practices for meeting them. “Our unique approach addresses the unequal power dynamics shaping mainstream approaches to sex work-related research, service delivery and policymaking,” said **Dr. Shira Goldenberg**, co-editor and Director of Education at the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity. “Each chapter reflects the contributions of academics partnered with sex work community authors, who were identified and connected through the Global Network of Sex Work Projects.”

Sex Work, Health and Human Rights moves beyond individualistic approaches to sex work research to consider the broader structural factors that influence health and labour outcomes for sex workers. “The criminalization of sex work, stigma and discrimination, lack of health and safety protections on the job, and unequal access to sexual and reproductive health care all disproportionately harm sex workers and violate their human rights,” explained **Dr. Stefan Baral**, co-editor and professor at Johns Hopkins University.

The book could not come at a more critical time, according to **Ruth Morgan Thomas**, co-editor and sex worker advocate. “The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the longstanding inequities faced by sex workers, exposing the urgent need to respect and protect sex workers’ human rights and improve access to health and justice,” she said. “Since the pandemic began, sex workers across diverse regions of the world have faced severe hardship and injustice, including loss of livelihood, increased police harassment, eviction from homes and businesses, and increased stigma and discrimination.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, sex workers have often been unable to access government protection schemes, such as emergency and ongoing financial employment-related support, particularly in settings where sex work is criminalized, Ms. Thomas continued. “These barriers are further amplified for migrant workers, who also face barriers to social protections due to undocumented migrants being excluded, as well as fears of engagement with authorities that could lead to arrest and deportation.”

Despite these troubling findings, the evidence points to something else: the resistance and resilience of sex workers in their fight to overcome systemic oppression. “The book highlights community empowerment and mobilization strategies as critical tools used by sex workers to confront the health and human rights challenges they face, and affect real world change,” said Dr. Goldenberg. Prioritizing community empowerment in research programming and policy is one of 10 evidence-based recommendations the book makes. Other recommendations include the decriminalization of sex work, the recognition of sex work as work, and the elimination of punitive policing and surveillance.

Read the book

Sex Work Health and Human Rights: Global Inequities, Challenges and Opportunities for Action is an open access publication that received partial funding from SFU and the Open Society Foundation. It is published by Springer and freely available [here](#).

Attend the book launch

A virtual book launch for *Sex Work Health and Human Rights: Global Inequities, Challenges and Opportunities for Action* takes place April 28 at 9:00 a.m. PT.

More information

Learn more about the book, editors and community partners [here](#).

MEDIA CONTACT

Dr. Kate Milberry | UBC Communications Lead at CGSHE
236.818.7763 | comms@cgshe.ubc.ca

About the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity: *CGSHE is a UBC and SFU academic centre housed at Providence Health. The CGSHE’s mission is to provide leadership in gender equity and sexual health for all in BC, Canada and globally, through rigorous community-engaged research that meets the highest scientific and ethical standards, evidence-based policy development, and fostering the implementation of innovative, patient-centred and equity-oriented clinical and community practices through guidelines and education. CGSHE is located on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.*

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health *advances research, education and practice to create solutions to public health problems around the world, striving to keep millions around the world safe from illness and injury by pioneering new research, deploying knowledge in the field and educating tomorrow’s public health leaders.*

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects *is a registered not-for-profit organization that upholds the voice of sex workers globally and connects local, regional and national networks across the globe advocating for the rights of female, male, and transgender sex workers.*