

*The Trans PULSE Canada project collected survey data from 2,873 trans and non-binary people in 2019. This report presents results from the first national data on health and well-being among trans and non-binary sex workers.*

# HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AMONG TRANS AND NON-BINARY PEOPLE DOING SEX WORK



## Highlights

Among trans and non-binary participants:

- 58% of sex workers reported living in low-income households.
- 72% of sex workers had fair or poor self-rated mental health.
- Two times as many sex workers as non-sex workers reported having experienced physical or sexual assault in the past 5 years.
- 87%-96% of sex workers did not anticipate fair treatment from police and the legal system if they were to be assaulted.

## Context

Transgender (trans) and non-binary people appear more likely than cisgender people to do sex work.<sup>1,2</sup> A previous study estimated that 14% of trans people in Ontario had ever done sex work and 3% were current sex workers.<sup>3</sup> Trans-specific reasons for doing sex work may include employment discrimination, housing insecurity, the need to fund gender-affirming care, and benefits including access to community and affirmation of gender identity.<sup>1,2,4</sup> Much existing research on trans sex workers focuses on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) risk,<sup>2,5</sup> but has also identified other important health concerns and social determinants of health including high levels of violence, limited access to justice, and stigma in healthcare settings.<sup>1,2,4,6,7</sup>

The health of sex workers in Canada is shaped by the criminalization of sex work. In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down Canada’s previous sex work criminalization laws as unconstitutional. In response, in 2014 the government passed legislation that criminalizes sex workers’ clients. Sex worker rights organizations opposed this legislation, and recent studies indicate it has negatively impacted health and safety among marginalized sex workers.<sup>8</sup> Despite these important policy changes, Canadian research on trans and non-binary sex workers is limited, and research inclusive of trans men and non-binary sex workers is scarce globally.<sup>5,6</sup> This report provides the first quantitative nationwide profile of the health and well-being of trans and non-binary sex workers in Canada.

## Trans PULSE Canada

Over a 10-week period in 2019, the Trans PULSE Canada research team collected survey data from 2,873 trans and non-binary people age 14 years or older and living in Canada. Participants were able to complete the full survey or a 10-minute short form online, on paper, via telephone (with or without a language interpreter), or on a tablet with a Peer Research Associate (only in major cities). The 10-minute short form contained key items from the full survey, and both versions were available in English or French. The Trans PULSE Canada survey included questions from Ontario’s Trans PULSE project, questions from Statistics Canada surveys to allow for comparisons to the general population, and questions developed by trans and non-binary people based on community priorities. This report especially highlights questions developed by the team’s Sex Work Priority Population Team.

## How to Interpret

This report presents results comparing those who did sex work in the past year to those who did not do sex work in the past year. Sex work was not defined for participants, though those who reported doing

**Table 1: Distribution of sex workers and non-sex workers across provinces and territories**

|                                   | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Current province/territory</b> |                           |                                |
| Alberta                           | 10                        | 19                             |
| British Columbia                  | 15                        | 19                             |
| Manitoba                          | 2                         | 3                              |
| New Brunswick                     | 4                         | 2                              |
| Newfoundland and Labrador         | 0.8                       | 1                              |
| Nova Scotia                       | 2                         | 4                              |
| Ontario                           | 33                        | 36                             |
| Prince Edward Island              | 0.8                       | 0.5                            |
| Quebec                            | 31                        | 11                             |
| Saskatchewan                      | 2                         | 4                              |
| Northwest Territories             | 0                         | 0.1                            |
| Nunavut                           | 0                         | 0.04                           |
| Yukon                             | 0                         | 0.3                            |

sex work were asked to indicate the types of work they were doing. Questions on employment and income, including sex work, were limited to participants aged 16 and older. 4.8% (n=133) of all survey participants were current sex workers.

Although Trans PULSE Canada used multiple approaches to make the survey accessible, it was not possible to conduct a random sample of the trans and non-binary population. Thus, results cannot be assumed to represent true population demographics. For instance, that 4.8% of participants were doing sex work, does not mean exactly 4.8% of all trans and non-binary people in Canada are doing sex work.

The final column of all comparative tables in this report contains a p-value. A p-value indicates whether there is a statistically significant difference between groups - here, the groups are current sex workers and non-sex workers (Tables 2, 3, 5, 6, 7) or gender identity groups (Table 4). P-values that are less than 0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant, while p-values that are greater than or equal to 0.0500 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference.

**Table 2: Socio-demographics**

|   | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Age</b>  |                           |                                | 0.024                |
| 14 - 19   | 5                         | 10                             |                      |
| 20 - 24   | 30                        | 22                             |                      |
| 25 - 34   | 44                        | 37                             |                      |
| 35 - 49   | 17                        | 21                             |                      |
| 50 - 64   | 4                         | 8                              |                      |
| 65 +  | 0.8                       | 1                              |                      |
| <b>Gender</b>   |                           |                                | 0.003                |
| Woman or girl   | 35                        | 24                             |                      |
| Man or boy  | 13                        | 25                             |                      |
| Indigenous or cultural gender                                 | 3                         | 2                              |                      |
| Non-binary or similar   | 50                        | 50                             |                      |
| <b>Sexual orientation (check all that apply) <sup>b</sup></b> |                           |                                |                      |
| Asexual   | 7                         | 14                             | 0.017                |
| Bisexual  | 32                        | 28                             | 0.360                |
| Gay   | 10                        | 13                             | 0.249                |
| Lesbian   | 20                        | 16                             | 0.256                |
| Pansexual   | 41                        | 31                             | 0.016                |
| Queer   | 47                        | 54                             | 0.090                |
| Straight or heterosexual                                      | 10                        | 7                              | 0.206                |
| Two-Spirit  | 2                         | 4                              | 0.482                |
| Unsure or questioning   | 7                         | 8                              | 0.561                |
| <b>Relationship status</b>                                    |                           |                                | 0.007                |
| Not in a relationship   | 47                        | 46                             |                      |
| In a monogamous relationship                                  | 23                        | 33                             |                      |
| In a non-monogamous or polyamorous relationship(s)            | 31                        | 21                             |                      |
| <b>Legal marital status</b>                                   |                           |                                | 0.003                |
| Single, never married   | 78                        | 63                             |                      |
| Separated or divorced   | 8                         | 11                             |                      |
| Widowed   | 0.8                       | 0.4                            |                      |
| Married or common-law   | 13                        | 26                             |                      |
| <b>Indigenous in Canada</b>                                   |                           |                                | 0.692                |
| Indigenous in Canada  | 7                         | 8                              |                      |
| Not Indigenous in Canada                                      | 93                        | 92                             |                      |

**Table 2: Socio-demographics, continued**

|  | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Racialization</b>   |                           |                                | 0.077                |
| Racialized   | 19                        | 13                             |                      |
| Not racialized   | 81                        | 87                             |                      |
| <b>Immigration history</b>                                       |                           |                                | 0.846                |
| Newcomer (past 5 years)  | 4                         | 4                              |                      |
| Immigrant (non-newcomer)   | 11                        | 9                              |                      |
| Born in Canada   | 86                        | 87                             |                      |
| <b>Urban / rural <sup>c</sup></b>                                |                           |                                | 0.394                |
| Rural or small town  | 5                         | 7                              |                      |
| Not rural or small town  | 95                        | 93                             |                      |
| <b>Parent (including adult children)</b>                         |                           |                                | 0.039                |
| Parent   | 10                        | 17                             |                      |
| Not a parent   | 90                        | 83                             |                      |
| <b>Disability identities (check all that apply) <sup>b</sup></b> |                           |                                |                      |
| Autistic   | 14                        | 14                             | 0.891                |
| Blind  | 0                         | 0.4                            | 1.000                |
| Crip   | 2                         | 2                              | 1.000                |
| Deaf   | 0                         | 1                              | 0.642                |
| Disabled or living with a disability                             | 28                        | 19                             | 0.019                |
| Chronic pain   | 23                        | 22                             | 0.814                |
| Neurodivergent   | 38                        | 31                             | 0.094                |
| Psychiatric survivor, mad, or person with mental illness         | 57                        | 44                             | 0.002                |
| Other  | 5                         | 7                              | 0.539                |
| <b>Education (age ≥ 25) <sup>d</sup></b>                         |                           |                                | 0.005                |
| < High school  | 6                         | 3                              |                      |
| High school diploma  | 12                        | 7                              |                      |
| Some college or university                                       | 31                        | 21                             |                      |
| College or university degree                                     | 43                        | 48                             |                      |
| Grad/professional degree   | 8                         | 21                             |                      |
| <b>Employment situation (age ≥ 25) <sup>d</sup></b>              |                           |                                | 0.0004               |
| Permanent full-time  | 24                        | 44                             |                      |
| Employed, not permanent full-time                                | 53                        | 33                             |                      |
| Not employed or on leave   | 19                        | 16                             |                      |
| Not employed and student or retired                              | 3                         | 7                              |                      |

**Table 2: Socio-demographics, continued**

|  | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Personal annual income (past year, age ≥ 25)<sup>d</sup></b>                      |                           |                                |                      |
| None   | 1                         | 2                              | 0.001                |
| < \$15,000   | 34                        | 23                             |                      |
| \$15,000 - \$29,000  | 26                        | 24                             |                      |
| \$30,000 - \$49,000  | 31                        | 21                             |                      |
| \$50,000 - \$79,000  | 5                         | 18                             |                      |
| \$80,000 +   | 4                         | 12                             |                      |
| <b>Income from social assistance or disability (past year, age ≥ 16)<sup>e</sup></b> |                           |                                |                      |
| Public social assistance or welfare  | 28                        | 8                              | <0.0001              |
| Public disability support  | 7                         | 7                              |                      |
| Both   | 4                         | 3                              |                      |
| Neither  | 60                        | 82                             |                      |
| <b>Portion of income received in cash (past 3 months, age ≥ 16)<sup>e</sup></b>      |                           |                                |                      |
| Most   | 14                        | 4                              | <0.0001              |
| Above half   | 9                         | 2                              |                      |
| Less than half   | 37                        | 15                             |                      |
| None   | 40                        | 79                             |                      |
| <b>Low-income household (past year, age ≥ 25)<sup>d</sup></b>                        |                           |                                |                      |
| Low-income household   | 58                        | 39                             | 0.001                |
| Non-low-income household   | 42                        | 61                             |                      |

a Values <0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

b Participants could select more than one option, so total will be more than 100%.

c Rural and small town includes participants who reported a postal code or forward sortation area for a town or municipality with population <10,000.

d Personal income, education, and employment are reported here for those age 25 and older; additional data on student status and other factors will be reported in our youth report.

e These variables were missing for 10% of participants or more.

## Socio-demographics

Table 1 shows that sex workers were similarly distributed across Canada to other Trans PULSE Canada participants but there was a notably higher proportion of sex workers living in Quebec (31% vs. 11%) and a lower proportion living in Alberta (10% vs. 19%).

Table 2 describes the sociodemographic characteristics of sex workers, as compared to non-sex workers. Most current sex workers were between 20-24 (30%) or 25-34 (44%) years old. Half of the sex workers identified as non-binary or a similar identity, as did Trans PULSE Canada participants overall. Sex workers were more likely to identify as women or girls than non-sex workers (35% vs. 24%). Over half (54%) of sex workers were in relationships and one in ten was a parent. Seven percent of sex workers were Indigenous and 15% were born outside Canada, similar to non-sex workers; however, sex workers were more likely to be racialized (19% vs. 13%). Sex workers were more likely than non-sex workers to identify as disabled (28% vs. 19%) or as psychiatric survivors or people with mental illness (57% vs. 44%). Sex workers differed from other Trans PULSE Canada participants with regard to education, employment, and income. Fewer sex workers reported full-time permanent employment (24% vs. 44%) and personal annual incomes above \$50,000 (9% vs. 30%). Sex workers were more likely to have received social assistance in the past year (28% vs. 8%), receive more than half of their income in cash (23% vs. 6%), and live in low-income households (58% vs. 39%).

## Health & Well-being

As shown in Table 3, sex workers had greater barriers to health care than other Trans PULSE Canada participants, including not having a primary care provider (26% vs. 19%), unmet health care need(s) (63% vs. 44%), and emergency room avoidance in the past year (20% vs. 11%). In contrast, sex workers were more likely to have been tested for HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs): half had been tested for HIV within the previous year, and 73% for

**Table 3: Health & well-being**

|  | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Has primary health care provider</b>  |                           |                                | 0.038                |
| Yes  | 74                        | 81                             |                      |
| No   | 26                        | 19                             |                      |
| <b>Unmet health care need(s) (past year)</b>   |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Unmet need(s)  | 63                        | 44                             |                      |
| No unmet need  | 37                        | 56                             |                      |
| <b>Avoided emergency room (past year)</b>  |                           |                                | 0.011                |
| Yes  | 20                        | 11                             |                      |
| No   | 64                        | 68                             |                      |
| Never needed ER care   | 17                        | 21                             |                      |
| <b>Gender-affirming medical care status</b>  |                           |                                | 0.898                |
| Had all needed care  | 26                        | 26                             |                      |
| In the process of completing   | 32                        | 32                             |                      |
| Planning, but not begun  | 14                        | 14                             |                      |
| Not planning   | 14                        | 12                             |                      |
| Unsure if going to seek care   | 14                        | 16                             |                      |
| <b>Self-rated health</b>   |                           |                                | 0.033                |
| Excellent or very good   | 26                        | 38                             |                      |
| Good   | 42                        | 36                             |                      |
| Fair or poor   | 32                        | 27                             |                      |
| <b>Self-rated mental health</b>  |                           |                                | 0.0003               |
| Excellent or very good   | 10                        | 17                             |                      |
| Good   | 18                        | 29                             |                      |
| Fair or poor   | 72                        | 54                             |                      |
| <b>Considered suicide (past year)</b>  |                           |                                | 0.026                |
| Yes  | 39                        | 30                             |                      |
| No   | 61                        | 70                             |                      |
| <b>Attempted suicide (past year)</b>   |                           |                                | 0.015                |
| Yes  | 10                        | 5                              |                      |
| No   | 90                        | 95                             |                      |
| <b>Experienced violence or harassment (past 5 years, check all that apply)<sup>b</sup></b> |                           |                                |                      |
| Verbal harassment  | 80                        | 68                             | 0.002                |
| Physical intimidation or threats   | 52                        | 37                             | 0.0004               |
| Physical violence  | 29                        | 15                             | <0.0001              |
| Sexual harassment  | 71                        | 41                             | <0.0001              |
| Sexual assault   | 52                        | 24                             | <0.0001              |

**Table 3: Health & well-being, continued**

|   | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Avoided public spaces for fear of harassment or outing (past 5 years)<sup>c</sup></b>                              |                           |                                | 0.236                |
| No avoidance  | 20                        | 15                             |                      |
| 1 or 2 types of spaces  | 17                        | 20                             |                      |
| 3 or more types of spaces   | 63                        | 64                             |                      |
| <b>Avoidance of specific spaces for fear of harassment or outing (past 5 years, check all that apply)<sup>b</sup></b> |                           |                                |                      |
| Public spaces   | 36                        | 26                             | 0.012                |
| Public bathrooms  | 55                        | 62                             | 0.098                |
| Schools   | 24                        | 11                             | <0.0001              |
| <b>Housing security</b>   |                           |                                | 0.001                |
| Secure  | 81                        | 91                             |                      |
| Insecure <sup>d</sup>   | 19                        | 9                              |                      |
| <b>Household food security (past year)</b>  |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Always had enough to eat  | 68                        | 86                             |                      |
| Sometimes did not have enough   | 20                        | 11                             |                      |
| Often did not have enough   | 12                        | 3                              |                      |
| <b>Timing of most recent HIV test</b>   |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Less than 1 year ago  | 50                        | 21                             |                      |
| 1 to less than 2 years ago  | 10                        | 9                              |                      |
| 2 or more years ago   | 11                        | 19                             |                      |
| Has never had an HIV test   | 29                        | 51                             |                      |
| <b>Timing of most recent STI test</b>   |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Less than 1 year ago  | 73                        | 27                             |                      |
| 1 to less than 2 years ago  | 7                         | 12                             |                      |
| 2 or more years ago   | 6                         | 21                             |                      |
| Has never had an STI test   | 13                        | 40                             |                      |
| <b>Ever taken PrEP for HIV prevention</b>   |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes, currently  | 6                         | 0.8                            |                      |
| Yes, in the past  | 8                         | 1                              |                      |
| No  | 86                        | 98                             |                      |

a Values <0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

b Participants could select more than one option, so total will be more than 100%.

c Of 14 spaces given as options in survey (e.g., public washrooms, schools, being out on the land, public transit).

d Includes living in shelters, motels or boarding houses, temporarily with partners/friends/family, on the street, in a car, or in an abandoned building.

**Table 4: Sex work experiences by gender identity among current sex workers**

|  | All sex workers<br>n=133<br>Mean (SD) | Women<br>n=46<br>Mean (SD) | Men<br>n=17<br>Mean (SD) | Non-binary, Indigenous, or cultural gender<br>n=70<br>Mean (SD) | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>Age first started sex work</b>                    |                                       |                            |                          |   |                      |
| Age  | 23.14 (6.65)                          | 26.55 (10.32)              | 18.72 (5.92)             | 21.78 (5.50)  | 0.010                |
|  | %                                     | %                          | %                        | %   |                      |
| <b>Types of sex work (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>    |                                       |                            |                          |   |                      |
| Escorting  | 44                                    | 57                         | 49                       | 33  | 0.152                |
| Camming  | 37                                    | 36                         | 49                       | 35  | 0.820                |
| Sugar baby   | 32                                    | 26                         | 34                       | 36  | 0.757                |
| Domme-ing  | 28                                    | 30                         | 0                        | 31  | 0.345                |
| Porn   | 27                                    | 26                         | 17                       | 28  | 1.000                |
| Subbing  | 25                                    | 19                         | 32                       | 28  | 0.661                |
| Massage  | 17                                    | 20                         | 17                       | 14  | 0.787                |
| Modelling  | 16                                    | 13                         | 32                       | 16  | 0.510                |
| Phone sex  | 13                                    | 10                         | 16                       | 14  | 0.775                |
| Street-based   | 8                                     | 17                         | 16                       | 0   | 0.012                |
| Dancing  | 5                                     | 10                         | 0                        | 2   | 0.496                |
| Other(s)   | 5                                     | 3                          | 19                       | 5   | 0.376                |
| <b>Reasons for starting sex work <sup>b</sup></b>    |                                       |                            |                          |   |                      |
| Necessary for living expenses                        | 54                                    | 58                         | 17                       | 57  | 0.208                |
| Lack of jobs/income                                  | 48                                    | 32                         | 65                       | 57  | 0.079                |
| To feel attractive                                   | 48                                    | 38                         | 65                       | 52  | 0.378                |
| Good pay   | 39                                    | 36                         | 34                       | 41  | 0.935                |
| To affirm gender identity                            | 22                                    | 31                         | 0                        | 19  | 0.198                |
| Suggested by friend or lover                         | 23                                    | 32                         | 17                       | 17  | 0.302                |
| Community  | 17                                    | 14                         | 16                       | 19  | 0.896                |
| Felt forced or pressured                             | 14                                    | 14                         | 16                       | 14  | 1.000                |
| Learned from those around me                         | 14                                    | 28                         | 0                        | 7   | 0.029                |
| Necessary for gender-affirming medical care expenses | 12                                    | 14                         | 32                       | 7   | 0.129                |
| Other(s)   | 15                                    | 14                         | 19                       | 15  | 1.000                |

a Values <0.0500 indicate that differences between gender groups are statistically significant.

b Participants could select more than one option, so total will be more than 100%.

**Table 5: Support and safety**

**Sex workers**  
n=133  
%

### Primary health care provider's support for your sex work <sup>a</sup>

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Very or somewhat supportive | 11 |
| Not very supportive         | 3  |
| Not at all supportive       | 0  |
| They don't know             | 86 |

### Spouse or partner's support for your sex work <sup>b</sup>

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Very or somewhat supportive | 76 |
| Not very supportive         | 4  |
| Not at all supportive       | 4  |
| They don't know             | 16 |

### Your child(ren)'s support for your sex work <sup>c</sup>

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Very or somewhat supportive | 9  |
| Not very supportive         | 0  |
| Not at all supportive       | 0  |
| They don't know             | 91 |

### Works with clients in-person

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Has in-person clients           | 62 |
| Does not have in-person clients | 38 |

### Perceived safety when negotiating rates <sup>d</sup>

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Very or mostly safe     | 44 |
| Neither safe nor unsafe | 25 |
| Somewhat unsafe         | 25 |
| Very unsafe             | 6  |

### Perceived safety when negotiating condom use <sup>e</sup>

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Very or mostly safe     | 38 |
| Neither safe nor unsafe | 25 |
| Somewhat unsafe         | 30 |
| Very unsafe             | 6  |

### Condomless sex with regular or casual partner(s) (past year) <sup>f</sup>

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Had condomless sex | 61 |
| No condomless sex  | 39 |

### Condomless sex with client(s) (past year) <sup>f</sup>

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Had condomless sex | 32 |
| No condomless sex  | 68 |

a Among those who have a primary care provider (n=73).

b Among those who have a spouse or partner (n=50).

c Among those who have a child or children (n=11).

d Among those working with in-person clients who negotiate rates (n=32).

e Among those working with in-person clients who negotiate condom use (n=29).

f Among those working with in-person clients (n=48).

other STIs. They were also more likely to have ever used pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention (14% vs. 2%).

Sex workers tended to report poorer physical and mental health, including fair or poor self-rated mental health (72% vs. 54%) and past year suicide attempts (10% vs. 5%), than non-sex workers. These differences should be understood in the context of lower well-being experienced by sex workers, including higher levels of violence and harassment: sex workers reported about double the proportions of physical (29% vs. 15%) and sexual assault (52% vs. 24%) reported by non-sex workers. Housing (19% vs. 9%) and food insecurity (32% vs. 14%) were also more common among sex workers.

## Sex Work Experiences

Table 4 focuses on participants' experiences doing sex work, stratified by gender group (women, men, and non-binary genders). On average, participants started doing sex work at the age of 23. In the past year, participants had engaged in many types of sex work with the most common roles being escorting (44%) and camming (37%). Types of sex work did not differ by gender with the exception of street-based work, which only trans women and men reported. The most commonly reported reasons for starting sex work were to cover necessary living expenses (54%), lack of jobs/income (48%), and to feel attractive (48%).

Table 5 describes the support and safety available to sex workers. Most (86%) had not told their primary care provider about their work. Of sex workers with partners, most were supportive or very supportive of their work (76%). Among sex workers with in-person clients (62%), less than half said they felt very or mostly safe negotiating rates (44%) or condom use (38%) and 32% reported condomless sex with a client(s).

**Table 6: Lifetime experiences of discrimination<sup>a</sup>**

|   | Lifetime-Sex workers<br>n=337<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=1736<br>% | P-value <sup>b</sup> |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Refused care by health care provider</b>   |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 39                                 | 21                             |                      |
| No  | 61                                 | 79                             |                      |
| <b>Fired, dismissed, or turned down for a job</b>                                       |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 55                                 | 24                             |                      |
| No  | 45                                 | 76                             |                      |
| <b>Evicted or denied housing</b>  |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 23                                 | 8                              |                      |
| No  | 77                                 | 92                             |                      |
| <b>Unreasonably stopped and questioned, searched, or arrested by police or security</b> |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 43                                 | 16                             |                      |
| No  | 57                                 | 84                             |                      |
| <b>Unable to open bank account, cash a cheque, or get a loan</b>                        |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 20                                 | 5                              |                      |
| No  | 80                                 | 95                             |                      |
| <b>Unreasonably expelled or suspended from school</b>                                   |                                    |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes   | 11                                 | 5                              |                      |
| No  | 89                                 | 95                             |                      |

a Experiences happened “because of who you are,” including how you describe yourself and how others might describe you. For example, skin colour, ancestry, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexuality, age, weight, disability or mental health issue, income, or source of income.

b Values <0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

## Discrimination and Access to Justice

Lifetime experiences of discrimination among sex workers and non-sex workers are shown in Table 6. When asked about discrimination “because of who you are,” sex workers consistently reported much higher levels than non-sex workers, including denial

**Table 7: Interaction with and avoidance of legal and emergency response systems**

|  | Sex workers<br>n=133<br>% | Non-sex workers<br>n=2236<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Worried about being stopped or harassed by police or security<sup>b</sup></b>         |                           |                                | 0.015                |
| Agree  | 84                        | 69                             |                      |
| Neutral  | 8                         | 14                             |                      |
| Disagree   | 8                         | 17                             |                      |
| <b>Avoided calling 911 for police services (past 5 years)</b>                            |                           |                                | <0.0001              |
| Yes  | 48                        | 22                             |                      |
| No   | 16                        | 23                             |                      |
| Has not needed police services   | 35                        | 55                             |                      |
| <b>Anticipated fair treatment from police &amp; legal system if physically assaulted</b> |                           |                                | 0.0004               |
| Yes  | 13                        | 33                             |                      |
| No   | 87                        | 67                             |                      |
| <b>Anticipated fair treatment from police &amp; legal system if sexually assaulted</b>   |                           |                                | 0.001                |
| Yes  | 4                         | 19                             |                      |
| No   | 96                        | 81                             |                      |

a Values <0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

b Experiences happened “because of who you are,” including how you describe yourself and how others might describe you. For example, skin colour, ancestry, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexuality, age, weight, disability or mental health issue, income, or source of income.

of health care (39% vs. 21%), employment discrimination (55% vs. 24%), and discriminatory treatment by police (43% vs. 16%). Table 7 describes interaction with and avoidance of legal and emergency response systems. The results demonstrate substantial mistrust of police and emergency response. 84% of sex workers were worried about being stopped or harassed by police or security. Over the past five years, almost half (48%) of sex workers had avoided calling 911 for police services when they might be required, as compared to 22% among non-sex workers. Relatedly, the vast majority (87-96%) of sex workers did not anticipate fair treatment from police and the legal system if physically or sexually assaulted.

## Conclusion

About 5% of Trans PULSE Canada participants were current sex workers. Participants of all genders, including non-binary people and trans men, did a variety of types of sex work. Overall, this group experienced higher levels of poverty, disability, poor self-rated health, discrimination and violence as compared to trans and non-binary people who were not sex workers. Although Canada's current sex work laws purport to target clients rather than sex workers themselves, we found that most trans and non-binary sex workers surveyed were worried about being stopped or harassed by police or security. Trans and non-binary sex workers who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, and/or immigrants to Canada may be disproportionately or differently impacted. Future research (including qualitative studies or quantitative studies with larger samples) should take an intersectional approach to the health and well-being of trans and non-binary sex workers in Canada.

These findings have implications for practices and policies impacting trans and non-binary sex workers. For example, sex workers reported more health care barriers than other trans and non-binary people and most had not told their health care provider about their work. This indicates that efforts are needed to reduce sex work stigma in healthcare settings; even providers who are trans-affirming may not be sex work-affirming. Sex workers reported limited safety to negotiate the conditions of their work, high levels of experienced and anticipated discrimination and violence, and a lack of access to justice. Human rights and labour protections for sex workers, including full decriminalization of sex work, are needed and the unique experiences of trans and non-binary sex workers should be centered in discussions of sex work law and policy in Canada.

## Acknowledgments

The Trans PULSE Canada team includes 109 people who have contributed in different ways to the project. We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the following people, and 36 additional individuals: Aaron Devor, Adrian Edgar, Alisa Grigorovich, Alyx MacAdams, Ander Swift, Angel Glady, Anna Martha Vaitses Fontanari, Asha Jibril, Ayden Scheim, Bretton Fosbrook, Caiden Chih, Callie Lugosi, Carol Lopez, Charlie Davis, Connie Merasty, Dominic Beaulieu-Prévost, Drew Burchell, Elie Darling, Emily Nunez, Eva Legare-Tremblay, Fae Johnstone, Fin Gareau, Françoise Susset, Frédéric S.E. Arps, Gioi Tran Minh, Greta Bauer, Hannah Kia, Jack Saddleback, Jacq Brasseur, Jaimie Veale, Jelena Vermilion, Jordan Zaitzow, Joseph Moore, Julie Temple-Newhook, j wallace skelton, Keegan Prempeh, Kelen-dria Nation, Kimberly Dhaliwal, Kohenet Talia Johnson, Kusha Dadui, Kylie Brooks, Leo Rutherford, Marcella Daye, Mayuri Mahendran, Meghan Smith, Moomtaz Khattoon, M. Roberts, Naja, Nathan Lachowsky, Nik Redman, Noah Adams, Peetanacoot (Winnie) Nenakawekapo, Parker L., Rainbow Hunt, Randy Jackson, Reann Legge, Rebecca Hammond, Reece Malone, Renée Masching, Renu Shonek, Robb Travers, Rosalyn Forrester, Roxane Nadeau, Sharp Dopler, Shaz Islam, Siobhan Churchill, Skylar Sookpaiboon, Sophia Ciavarella, T.F., Todd Coleman, Tony Kourie, William Flett, and Yasmeen Persad. Thank you!

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This project is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

