

Intimate relationships: Perceptions and experiences of women involved in the sex trade

What you need to know

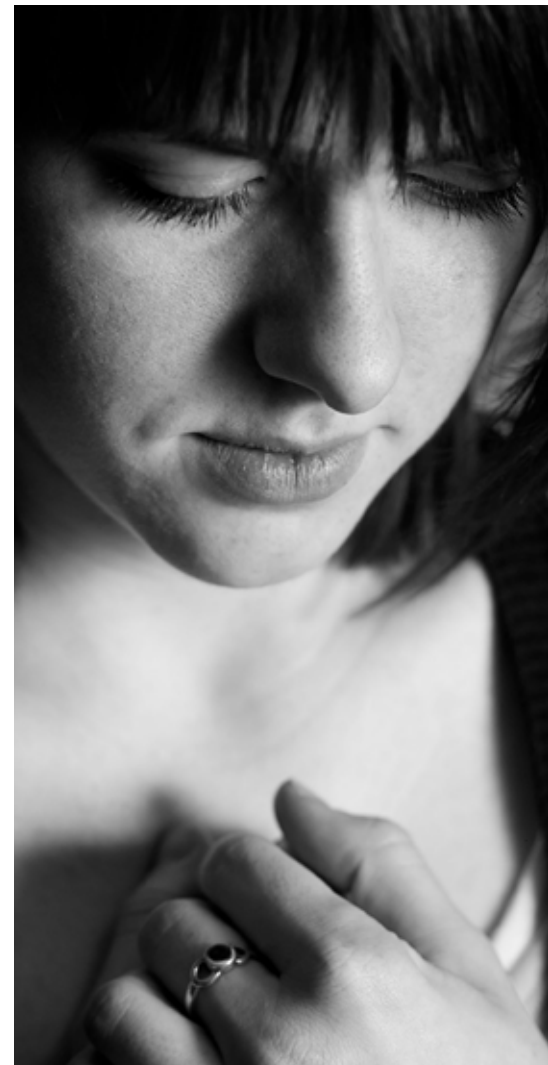
For women who work in the sex trade, intimate relationships can be a space for caring and sometimes healing from the stereotypes associated with their type of work. But, sometimes these stereotypes and beliefs can come into the relationship and affect feelings of acceptance and health.

What is this research about?

There has been little research that has looked into the private or home lives of women who work in the sex trade. Just like everybody else, women involved in the sex trade can also have intimate relationships with others outside of their job and this can affect their health in positive and negative ways.

What did the researchers do?

For this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 8 women working in the sex trade and 7 male partners of women in the sex trade (the male partners were not necessarily the partners of the women involved in the study) to explore how relationships can influence the women's general health and well-being.



KEYWORDS

sex trade, general health, emotional health, intimate relationships, inclusion

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What did the researchers find?

Some women in the study indicated that they want to be accepted for who they are and not be defined by their job. A number of the women look for acceptance in a relationship, but can be hurt by their partners if the partner is disrespectful or hold negative stereotypes about women who work in the sex industry. More specifically, the researchers found that:

- Having respect, acceptance, and trust in intimate relationships made some of the women feel safe and happy.
- Because working in the sex industry can be dangerous, feelings of physical safety at home and emotional support from their partner were very important to a number of the women.
- The women in this study find that when they are abused on the job, they are sometimes seen by the public as not deserving of

help because of their type of work.

- For the women and male partners interviewed, there was a need to separate the women's work relationships from their intimate relationships at home, in order to maintain their love and emotional closeness.
- In a couple of the relationships, there was no physical contact with each other after the woman finished her job, and sometimes the details of her job were never discussed.
- Sometimes the worlds of work and home became blurred. For example, a couple of the women had 'regular clients' with whom they felt safer than other clients, yet the women's intimate partners had some jealous feelings because of the more familiar nature of the work relationship.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can help inform public health, health promotion, and social service providers' practices by highlighting an area of the women's lives that is rarely looked at.

It can also help health care professionals, service providers and health promoters recognize that women in the sex industry should be treated with respect. They should also recognize that both the women's working lives and home lives shape their overall health and well-being.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lois Jackson is a Professor of Health Promotion at Dalhousie University. Her research interests include health and well-being of vulnerable populations, such as female prostitutes and injection drug users.