

UVic study seeks to shed light on sex work as an occupational choice

More than 200 sex workers in six communities across Canada involved in the research

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A recent study out of the University of Victoria is contradicting public perceptions of why sex workers end up in the industry, although the study's authors admit the sample of sex workers used "is not statistically representative of the population of sex workers in Canada."

The study led by professor Cecilia Benoit surveyed more than 200 sex workers in six communities across Canada, and found that sex work can be an occupational choice.

The sex workers surveyed were between the ages of 19 and 61, and about 70 per cent had a high school education.

Benoit says the jobs available to them were usually low-paying with little job security.

While a third of sex workers reported entering the industry due to critical life events — including abuse or trauma — Benoit was surprised that a quarter said they find the work appealing.

She says many respondents were making calculated decisions about their involvement in sex work.

Benoit says the results show that prostitution laws need to be reconsidered to support the needs of sex workers who are not all being coerced or exploited.

The researchers say the study may have been biased through non-participation by those sex workers who either chose not to, or were prevented from participating.

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