Sex Worker-Centered Harm Reduction

Facilitated by Justice Rivera, Reframe Health and Justice Consulting

Hosted by NASTAD Drug User Health Team

In collaboration with SWOP USA, SPARC Women’s Center, and Rocky Mountain Sex Worker Coalition

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Funded by the CDC through cooperative agreement PS19-1909 – National Harm Reduction Technical Assistance Center
WHO: A non-profit, non-partisan national association founded in 1992 that represents public health officials who administer HIV and hepatitis programs funded by state and federal governments.

WHERE: All 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, seven local jurisdictions receiving direct funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Pacific Island jurisdictions.

MISSION: NASTAD’s mission is to end the intersecting epidemics of HIV, viral hepatitis, and related conditions by strengthening domestic and global governmental public health through advocacy, capacity building, and social justice.

VISION: NASTAD's vision is a world free of HIV and viral hepatitis.
Facilitator

Justice Rivera

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Webinar Overview

**Goal:** To discuss harm reduction as applied to sex work including the values/principles of sex worker-centered harm reduction and programmatic priorities of sex worker-centered harm reduction

**Objectives:** To develop knowledge of infectious disease prevalence and prevention among people who trade sex; to understand overlapping activities, interventions, and approaches between people who trade sex and people who use drugs; to explore different types of services and partnerships that advance sex worker health

**Audience:** People running sex worker harm reduction programs or interested in running sex worker harm reduction programs and people supporting (through funding or governance) sex worker harm reduction programs
Webinar Agenda

01 Grounding

02 Intro to sex work harm reduction

03 Program examples

04 Q&A
Access Needs and Disclaimers

- This 75-minute webinar is in English. Mics are muted. Feel free to turn your camera on or keep it off, come and go as you please as a break is not built-in. Interaction is encouraged in the chat – please introduce yourself and your program.

- This webinar is being recorded and will be available online after the presentation. We want this information to go viral and request that the source of information be included with the information where possible.

- This webinar will provide information about wellness services for people who are criminalized. This is not medical or legal advice. We will provide resources for you to be able to find out more about this topic as it relates to your program and location.
Poll: Where do you reside?

01 West coast (including Southwest and Northwest)
02 Midwest
03 South (including mid-Atlantic)
04 East Coast (including Southeast and Northeast)
Poll: What is your interest in this topic?

01 HIV, viral hepatitis, and STI prevention and harm reduction data and messaging specific to sex work

02 My program is interested in providing resources to people in the sex trade

03 Community-based interventions and partnerships
Sex Worker-Centered Harm Reduction Overview
What is Sex Work
Adapted from SWOP Chicago, Harm Reduction, 2016

Sex work is
a commercial exchange of a sexual service for money or other benefits like housing, transportation, and other survival needs.

used to refer to a broad range of transactions.

used to refer to people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds who are involved in the sex trade.

a term that has been adopted by health, labor and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the World Health Organization.
What is Sex Work

"A broad definition of sex work would be: ‘the exchange of money or goods for sexual services’, either regularly or occasionally, involving female, male, and transgender adults, young people and children where the sex worker may or may not consciously define such activity as income-generating’.

Sex work may be formal or informal. In some instances, sex work is only a temporary informal activity. Women and men who have occasional commercial sexual transactions or where sex is exchanged for food, shelter or protection (survival sex) would not consider themselves to be linked with formal sex work.

Who are Sex Workers

- MSM
- People who have sex with other genders
- Transgender individuals
- People who use drugs

People across HIV (and other infectious disease) prevention priority populations
Sex Work and HIV

- 20 – 40% of women at high risk of HIV infection reported having sex in exchange for money or drugs within the last year.¹

- Transgender sex workers are nearly 6 times as likely to be living with HIV (15.32%) than the general trans population (2.6%) and 25 times as likely to be positive than the general population (0.6%).

- In Canada and Kenya, modeling shows that the elimination of sexual violence could avert 17-20% of HIV infections among sex workers and clients.³

- Police frequently confiscate condoms as evidence to support prostitution charges.⁴

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Occupational Health and Safety Concerns

What harms need to be reduced

**HIV, HCV, STIs**
- **HIV**: 12 x higher globally
- **STIs**: 5-60 x higher in the U.S.
- **Viral hepatitis**: prevent, test, treat

**VIOLENCE**
- **Violence & Overdose**: found to be top two causes of non-natural death
  - **Sources**: Police & institutional harm, peer & community, intimate partner, client, pimps & manager

**SELF HARM**
- **Mental illness**: 2 x higher
  - **PTSD**: 20%
- **Suicidality**: 60% decrease on Entheogenic therapies

**ISOLATION**
- Dual identities
- Stigma
- Criminalization
- Trauma
Sex Workers & Substance Use

- A spectrum of behavior and experience
- Abstinence is not the goal for everyone
- Drug use and sex work are what someone does, not who they are
- Harm Reduction Framework
  - Prioritize autonomy, self-determination, and informed consent
  - Sex work and substance use have complicated relationships; drugs and sex are not always harmful

Adapted from Stephen Crowe, Harm Reduction Coalition
Harm Reduction Principles Applied to Sex Work

1. Views trading sex for money and resources as neither inherently harmful or degrading, or inherently stabilizing or empowering.
2. Focuses on who people are rather than what they do, and sees people as whole people.
3. Recognizes the myriad of reasons why people engage in the sex trade and seeks to help people meet goals as defined for themselves in non-judgmental and compassionate manners and atmospheres.
4. Recognizes the potential infectious disease and physical safety consequences associated with sex work, and seeks to help people mitigate these factors.
5. Seeks to provide holistic support rather than isolated interventions
6. Highlights the impact that the criminal justice response to sex work has on people in the sex trade, and seeks to eliminate sociopolitical barriers to care, safety, and general wellbeing. Understand stigma and its byproducts to be at the root of harm experienced by individuals involved in the sex trade, and that intersecting oppressions compound the harm.
7. Believes that incorporating a diverse range of sex workers into public health policies and discussions can be a gateway into community health. Understands that one individual’s experience does not equal that of all individuals in the sex trade.
Harm Reduction Is Evidence Based

Research that leverages the efficacy of the harm reduction approach with sex workers:

**The Lancet:**
“Straightforward and achievable steps are available to improve the day-to-day lives of sex workers while they continue to work.”

**Harm Reduction International:** Key harm reduction strategies to be utilized with sex workers are community engagement, community development, health promotion, and peer education.

**Johns Hopkins University:**
Comprehensive harm reduction for people who trade sex address access to resources, health needs, impacts of criminalization and the overall well-being of sex workers.
Sex Workers Outreach Project, national and local chapters

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Resources

- St. James Infirmary Occupational Health and Safety Guide
- Sex Worker Outreach Project USA
- Global Network of Sex Worker Projects
- SPARC Women’s Center
- Rocky Mountain Sex Worker Coalition
The National Harm Reduction TA Center seeks to build on proven methods of harm reduction technical assistance delivery—programmatic resources, peer support and mentoring, demonstration and program models—to provide coordinated TA to new and established community-led harm reduction efforts, including syringe services programs (SSPs), across the United States and territories.

NASTAD will work with AIDS United and other partners to field and respond to requests for TA and programmatic support from SSPs and community-based harm reduction organizations.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE NATIONAL HARM REDUCTION TA CENTER INCLUDES:

- Consultation on program planning, design, and implementation
- Monitoring and evaluation, including best practices on data collection and synthesis
- Capacity building, workforce development and training
- Consultation on funding and grant writing
- Education and resource development
- Policy analysis and guidance

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
- NASTAD.org/druguserhealth
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TO REQUEST TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:
- NASTAD.org/HarmReductionTA
Technical Assistance
Questions?

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