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Challenging the Stigma of Sex Work: Creating the Framework to Train Student Doctors in Providing Affirming Care

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Challenging the Stigma of Sex Work: Creating the Framework to Train Student Doctors in Providing Affirming Care

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Background

- ☞ The term “sex work” is used as an umbrella term to describe “different types of erotic labour such as street work, brothel work, in-calls, lap-dancing, web-camming and pornography [and] may involve direct and indirect sexualised interactions between provider and client”¹ in exchange for something of monetary or economic value² between consenting adults.
- ☞ Globally, it is estimated that 40 million people are commercial sex workers (SWers)^{2,3} and an estimated 2 million live in the U.S.². The narrative surrounding the character of SWers combined with societal stigma remain at the crux in equitable access to healthcare for this community^{2,4,5}.
- ☞ Women – though men, transgender individuals, & non-binary people also engage in this work – have reported experiencing abusive language, public humiliation, confidentiality breaches, & denial of care at the hands of healthcare providers upon disclosing their status as a Swer⁵. This results in later reticence in seeking care, as well as a loss of faith in the medical community. People with intersecting identities (poor, minorities, LGBTQ+, active drug users, disabled) are at even higher risk of experiencing discrimination.

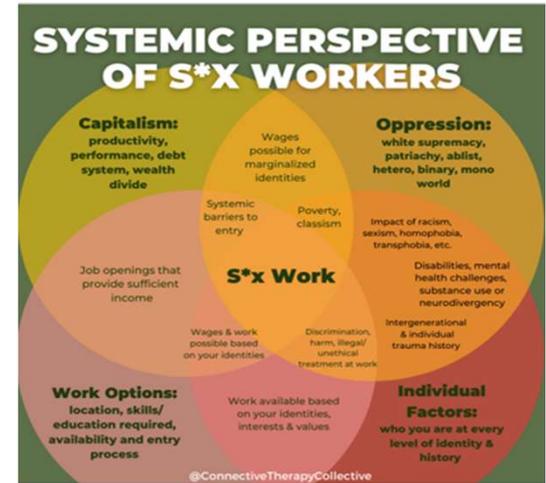


Fig 2: Systemic Perspective of S*x Workers (Courtesy of @ConnectiveTherapyCollective)⁶

Proposed Intervention

Four overarching themes have been identified and provide the framework to build a workshop facilitation guide:

- ✓ **Clearly define sex work, understand why people engage in sex work, and have a clear understanding of the differences between sex work and human trafficking**
- ✓ **Identify the barriers in access to healthcare** that many sex workers face and the stigma encountered within the healthcare system
- ✓ **Encourage student doctors evaluate their own beliefs and value judgements regarding sex work**, how these beliefs influence the care they deliver, as well as how it impacts the health of sex workers
- ✓ **Understand the overlap between sex work & the law**, as well as social, political, & economic influence on sex work and healthcare.

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References

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Objectives



Fig 1: Steps to Constructing a Workshop in SWer-Affirming Care

Conclusion

The intention of this proposed intervention is to **provide a foundation for medical students to include affirming care for SWers in their future practice by understanding the complex institutional violence & discrimination experienced by this community**. Additionally, dispelling misconceptions surrounding sex work is another foci of the service project. **Future physicians can combat the stigma by providing patient care that centers Swer agency, harm reduction, & judgement free strategies**. Making the workshop guide open access allows other medical schools and special interests groups to incorporate a social justice framework into their medical practice.

Limitations

While the proposed intervention appears to be a viable avenue for addressing the health inequities faced by SWers, without conducting a large-scale study examining the perceptions of sex work & SWers by medical students both before and after attending the workshop, we are unable to definitively say how such education will affect the way future physician will incorporate this education into their practice.