

# Examining the impact of sex work decriminalisation on sex workers in Victoria, Australia

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## Background:

The Victorian government initiated a two-stage approach to decriminalise sex work on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022 to reduce social and structural barriers to sex worker health and wellbeing. The aim of our survey was to examine the impacts of the first stage of decriminalisation on sex workers' sexual practices and STI/HIV testing.

## Methods:

An anonymous, online survey in English was co-designed by MSHC, Vixen and Scarlet Alliance and disseminated by these organisations to sex workers in Victoria between December 2022-April 2023. This survey asked about changes in sexual practice, including condom use, and sexual health check-ups following May 10th 2022.

## Results:

A total of 100 participants (62 cis and trans females, 21 non-binary individuals, 14 cis and trans males, and 3 people who were gender fluid or gender queer) were included in the study. The median age of participants was 29.5 years (IQR: 25-33), majority of participants selected English as their preferred language (97, 97.0%) and had worked in sex work for at least a year (87, 87.0%). The majority of participants were aware that not using a condom with clients was no longer a criminal offence after decriminalisation (72, 72.0%). Of those who engaged in each sexual practice, the majority of participants reported no change to condom use after decriminalisation for giving oral sex (81/92;88.0%), receiving oral sex (79/87;90.8%), receptive vaginal sex (73/80;91.3%), insertive vaginal sex (37/41;90.2%) receptive anal sex (45/50;90.0%) or insertive anal sex (37/42;88.1%). Likewise, the majority of participants did not change their testing frequency for STI/HIV (60/99;60.6%), although 19/99 (19.2%) tested more frequently and 19/99 (19.2%) tested less frequently than before the first stage of decriminalisation.

## Conclusion:

The majority of sex workers in our study did not change their condom use or sexual health testing frequency following the commencement of the first stage of decriminalisation of sex work in Victoria.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis & Sexual Health Medicine recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.

*No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.*