

Adolescent and young adult sex workers more likely to experience muscle dysmorphia, find study

November 10 2023



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Using data from over 900 participants in a large, diverse, and national sample of Canadian adolescents and young adults from the Canadian

Study of Adolescent Health Behaviors, a new study [published](#) in the journal *Sexual Health* has found significant associations between sex work and muscle dysmorphia.

Sex work, in its various forms, is highly stigmatized in Canadian society, and sex workers are often victims of harmful stereotypes. It is estimated that roughly 4% of Canadian adolescents engage in selling sex, and research has shown that those involved in [sex work](#) are more at risk to experience substance use problems, poor mental health, and physical injury. However, no known research has previously focused on the association between sex work and muscle dysmorphia.

"The association between sex work involvement and muscle dysmorphia symptoms is likely complex and explained by multiple mechanisms," says lead author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "For example, engagement in the pursuit of muscularity via compulsive exercise may be a coping mechanism to manage the [psychological distress](#) and stigma related to sex work."

The authors also speculate that individuals involved in sex work may pursue a more muscular, lean, and strong body to adhere to socially desirable and attractive body ideals.

The authors conclude that, while these findings detailing the relationship between lifetime sex work involvement and symptoms of muscle dysmorphia are novel, further research is needed especially in regards to the evolving nature of sex work utilizing digital and online venues.

"These findings extend prior research that has described poor mental health, depression, anxiety, and [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) among individuals involved in sex work," says Ganson. "Clinical and community health professionals should be alerted to these findings and

consider screening for both sex work and [muscle dysmorphia](#) symptomatology among young people."

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Involvement in sex work is associated with muscle dysmorphia symptomatology among a sample of Canadian adolescents and young adults, *Sexual Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1071/SH23157](#)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: Adolescent and young adult sex workers more likely to experience muscle dysmorphia, find study (2023, November 10) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-adolescent-young-adult-sex-workers.html>

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