

Vancouver sex workers struggling to find proper and affordable places to live

The housing crisis is putting sex workers at risk of illegal evictions and sudden rent hikes

When Nikki repeatedly got rejected by landlords seeking renters, that's the moment she knew she'd better hide the fact that she is a sex worker if she still wanted a place to stay and work from.

"The moment when I answered his question of what I do for a living, they (the landlords) just stopped responding to my messages right away," she said.

Fearing that her landlord might find out she has been providing sexual services at his apartment, Nikki did not sign a legitimate rental agreement, meaning the landlord does not need to follow the housing and rental guidelines.

"I don't feel safe here. If my landlord or neighbors find out what I'm doing, I might be forced to get out of here anytime," she said.

Even though full-service sex work is not outlawed in Canada, sex workers are not allowed to meet clients at their residences, and landlords can face penalties for permitting them to rent a property.

[A recent report](#) about sex workers in the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island shows that only 65% of respondents were safely housed in rental homes or subsidized housing, while 7% were homeless and 5% were couch surfing.

"Stigma against sex work continues to see sex workers denied housing, facing evictions or being forced out due to surveillance, outing and criminalization," says the sex worker advocacy group PACE society.

SWAN Vancouver Program Manager Kelly Go believed that the housing crisis is particularly putting migrant workers at risk, who often cannot access the regular housing market due to their inability to provide proof of income, employment history or references.

"Some of the people that we supported are here with precarious immigration status," she said.

“If the neighbors find out and call the police, they might face different types of issues that are more serious than evictions. If the worker is working with a precarious immigration status or visitor visa, the fear of police getting called and possible deportation is very real,” said Kelly.

Kelly said many sex workers often turned to shelters if they lost their homes, but in the end they might still end up couch surfing or homelessness as a lot of shelters do not allow them to take back clients and limit their ability to continue to earn a living.

“The reason why it's difficult for everyone to find housing is because the government is not doing anything. Along with all the stigma and criminalization around sex work, it just exacerbates their situation.” Kelly said.