

Gender Differences in the Association between Sex Work and Housing Status among People Who Inject Drugs in Montreal, Canada

Vakili F^{1,2}, Høj SB¹, Bruneau J^{1,2}, Larney S^{1,2}

¹ Centre de Recherche du Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal; ² Département de Médecine Familiale et Médecine d'Urgence, Université de Montréal. Contact: Farzaneh.vakili@umontreal.ca

Background

- Housing is an important social determinant of health and people who inject drugs (PWID) are potentially more likely to experience housing instability [1-3].
- Gender differences in housing instability and gender-specific relationships with other risk exposures remain understudied [4,5].
- Few studies looked at varying degrees of housing instability, potentially masking important insights [6,7].
- We examined gender differences in housing instability and associated factors, with a focus on sex work experience.

Objectives

- To examine gender differences in housing status among PWID.
- To estimate the association between sex work and housing status.
- To explore gender differences in the associations.

Methods

Setting and participants

- Cross-sectional data from the Hepatitis C cohort (HEPCO) of PWID in Montreal, Canada (2011-2022).
- Participants were at least 18 years old and had injected drugs during the past six months.

Measures

- Housing status was categorized as stable, precariously housed, and unsheltered based on The Canadian Observatory on the Definition of Homelessness.
- Sex work experience was defined as lifetime and current engagement in sex work.

Data analysis

- We used multinomial logistic regression to assess relationships between sex work and housing status.
- Gender differences were assessed through stratified models.

Key Findings

- 911 PWID (748 men, 163 women) were included.
- The majority of men and women were stably housed (Figure 1).
- Women were more likely to report lifetime and recent sex work experience than men (Figure 2).
- Women differed from men in contextual risk and correlates of unstable housing (Table 1).
- In the total population there was no evidence of an association between current sex work and being precariously housed or unsheltered (Table 2). It was also the same for the lifetime experience of sex work (Table 3).
- Analyses were underpowered for interaction terms.
- Gender-stratified models showed some differences between men and women, however, due to low power, confidence intervals were wide.

Fig1. Housing status in the total population and based on gender

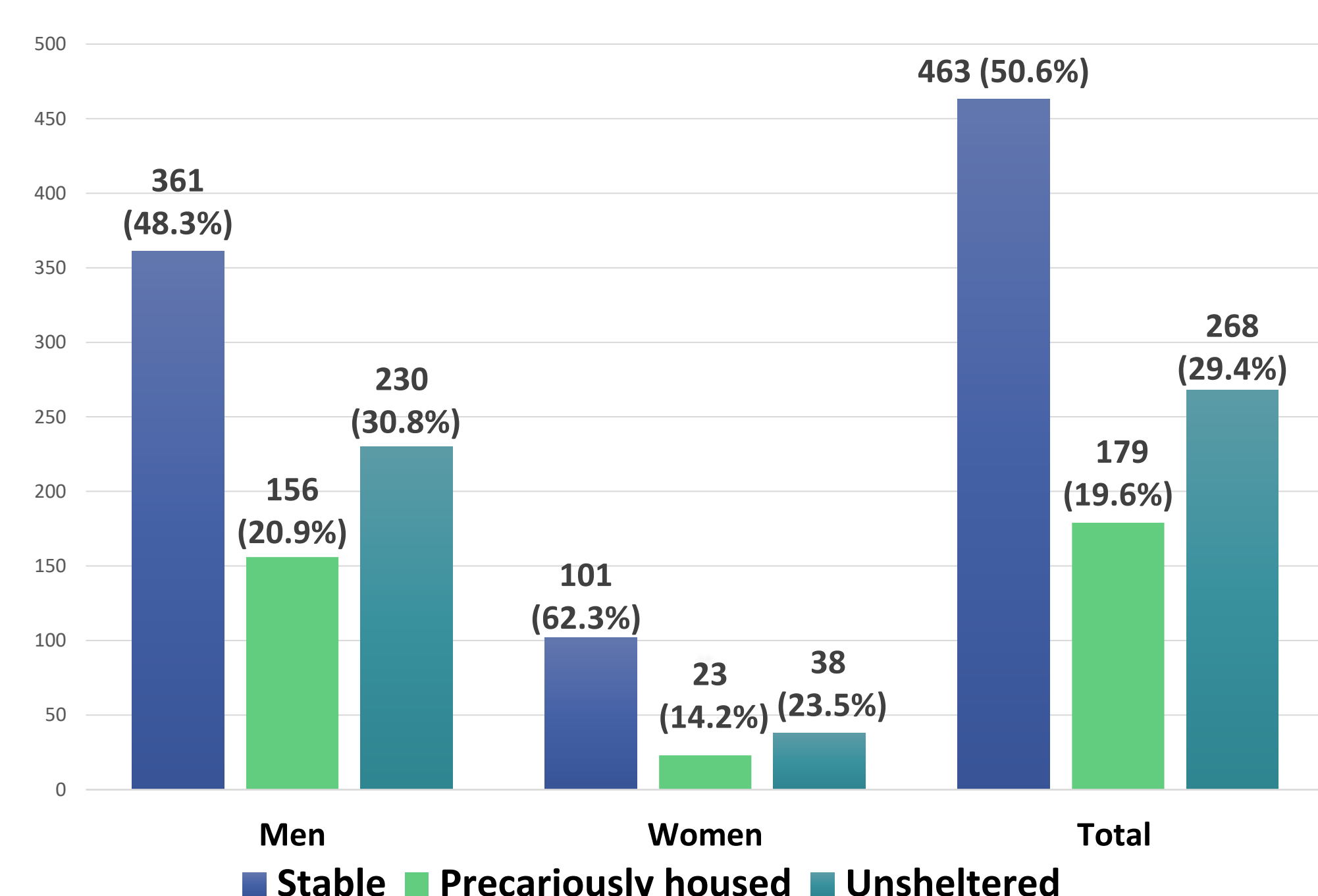


Fig 2. Percentage of men and women who had sex work experience

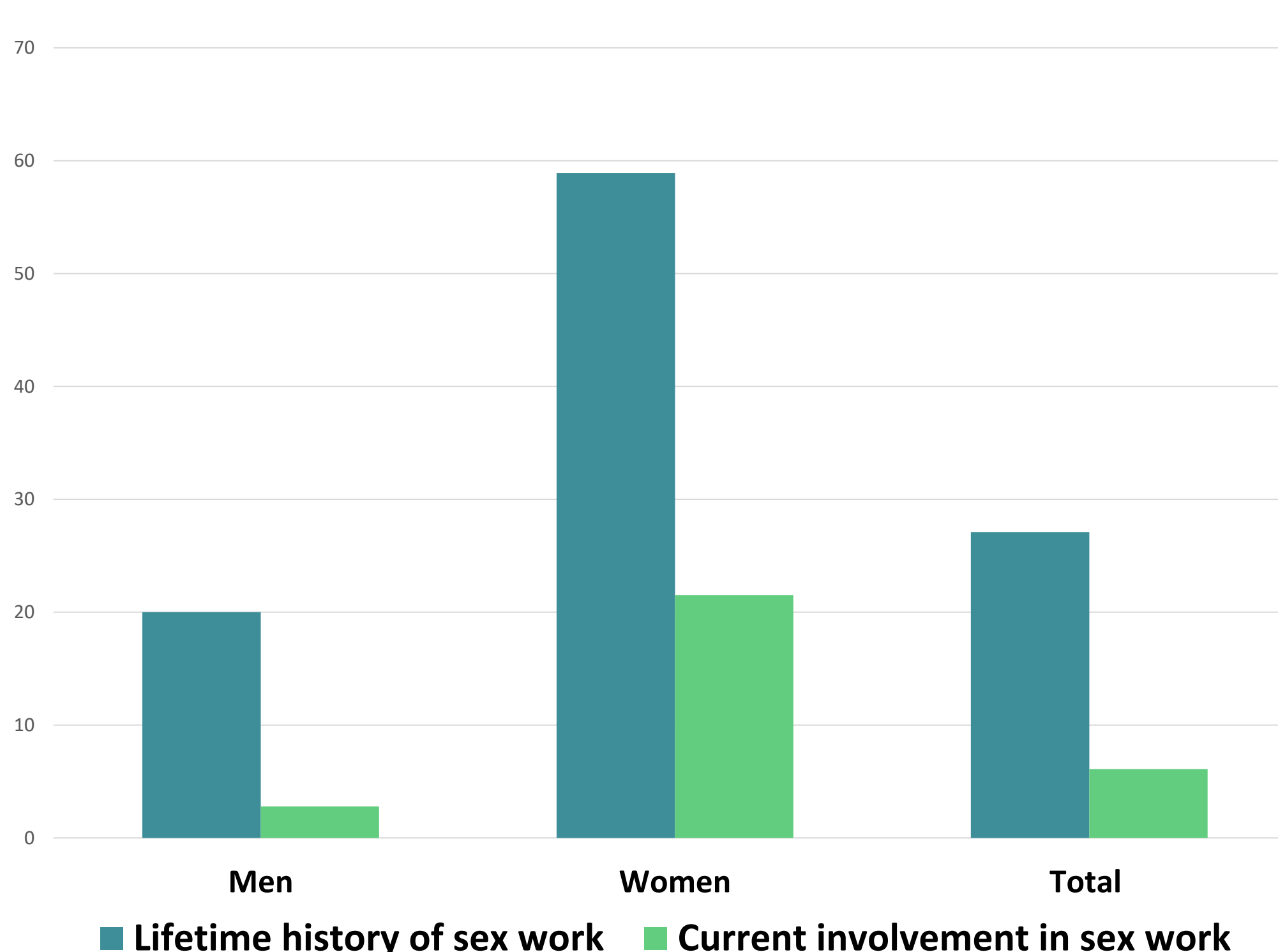


Table 1: The characteristics of men and women who inject drugs.

Variables	Total n (%) or mean ± SD	Men n (%) or mean ± SD	Women n (%) or mean ± SD
Age, years	40.36 ± 10.46	41.34 ± 10.26	35.88 ± 10.25
Highest level of education			
High school completion or less	594 (65.4)	502 (67.1)	92 (56.8)
Beyond high school	316 (34.6)	246 (32.9)	70 (43.2)
Income			
<600 CAD per month	122 (13.4)	100 (13.4)	22 (13.5)
>600 CAD per month	789 (86.6)	648 (86.6)	141 (86.5)
Currently living with someone like a marriage	108 (11.8)	69 (9.2)	39 (23.9)
Part-time or full-time employment	141 (15.5)	119 (15.9)	22 (13.5)
Cocaine			
Yes	703 (77.0)	588 (78.6)	115 (70.6)
Other opioids			
Yes	415 (45.5)	336 (44.9)	79 (48.5)
Heroin			
Yes	347 (38.0)	269 (36.0)	78 (47.9)
Amphetamine			
Yes	312 (34.2)	249 (33.3)	63 (38.7)
Detention			
Yes	125 (13.7)	112 (15.0)	13 (8.0)

Table 2: Multivariable analysis of the association between current sex work and housing status in cohort population (n=911)

	Stably housed aOR (95% CI)	Precariously housed aOR (95% CI)	Unsheltered aOR (95% CI)
Current sex work	1.00 (REF)	1.38 (0.6-3.2)	1.61 (0.7-3.2)
Female	1.00 (REF)	0.65 (0.3-1.1)	0.72 (0.4-1.1)
Employment	1.00 (REF)	0.74 (0.4-1.2)	0.32 (0.1-0.5)
Detention	1.00 (REF)	5.51 (3.2-9.4)	3.45 (2.0-5.8)

Also adjusted for age, education, currently living with someone like a marriage, injection frequency, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, and other opioids (in the past three months).

Table 3: Multivariable analysis of the association between lifetime sex work and housing status in cohort population (n=911)

	Stably housed aOR (95% CI)	Precariously housed aOR (95% CI)	Unsheltered aOR (95% CI)
Lifetime sex work	1.00 (REF)	0.94 (0.3-0.9)	1.12 (0.7-1.6)
Female	1.00 (REF)	0.67 (0.3-1.1)	0.84 (0.5-1.3)
Employment	1.00 (REF)	0.73 (0.4-1.2)	0.31 (0.1-0.5)
Detention	1.00 (REF)	5.47 (3.1-9.3)	3.50 (2.0-5.9)

Also adjusted for age, education, currently living with someone like a marriage, injection frequency, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, and other opioids (in the past three months).

Disclosure of Interest Statement

Vakili receives Bourse de Mérite de la Faculté de médecine de l'Université de Montréal. Høj receives salary from a Canadian Institutes of Health Research grant, unrelated to the present work. Bruneau holds the Canada Research Chair in Addiction Medicine, and receives funding from Fonds de recherche du Québec, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and Gilead Sciences. She has received advisory board fees from Gilead Sciences, unrelated to the present work. Larney is a Fonds de recherche du Québec Research Scholar. She has received advisory board fees from Gilead Sciences, unrelated to the present work.

Conclusion

- Our study highlighted gender differences in housing status and associated factors that may contribute to health risks while unstably housed.
- Links between sex work and housing instability among women who inject drugs should be further explored to pave the way for tailored responses and gender-sensitive harm reduction strategies.

Selected References

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