Community-Based Research Canada
Recherche partenariale du Canada

Toronto Metropolitan University

Responding to Socioeconomic Impacts of Political Unrest:

Ukrainian Migrant Women who Engage in Sex Work

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Dr. Kateryna Metersky, Dr. Areej Al-Hamad, Kristina Tsvygun & Valerie Tan

SSHRC CRSH

INTRODUCTION

Key Facts and Figures

- Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022
- **1/3rd of Ukraine's population displaced**
- **87%** of Ukrainian migrants **are women and children**
- As of April 2024, Canada welcomed nearly 300,000 Ukrainians through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) initiative
- Program does NOT grant official refugee status

INTRODUCTION

Barriers to Employment

- Must secure employment opportunity shortly after arrival in Canada
- Limited knowledge of English language
- Lack of North American employment history

OUR STUDY

This intersectional, community-driven, and action-oriented research uncovers the narratives of Ukrainian migrant women.

Team Members

Principal Investigator

Dr. Kateryna Metersky

Co-Investigators

Dr. Areej Al-Hamad, Kristina Tsvygun & Valerie Tan

Community Partner

Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker's Action Project

PROJECT PLAN

1

Executive Report

- For dissemination to Maggie's Board of Directors
- + Other community organizations

2

Knowledge Dissemination

- Qualitative study
- Document analysis
- Conference+ other presentations

3

Actionable Items

- Modify/develop Maggie's supports
- e.g., Support groups, information packages, 1-1 meetings

METHODS

2-Phase Qualitative Approach

Phase 1: Critical interpretive phenomenology

Sample size: 5 participants
Data collection: individual semi-structured interviews
Data analysis: hermeneutic analysis
Theoretical framework: Social Identity Theory and Critical Feminist Theory

Phase 2: Critical interpretive document analysis

Data collected: n=9 explicit and n=22 implicit online sex work advertisements
Data analysis: thematic and critical discourse analysis
Theoretical framework: Digital Feminist Surveillance Studies approach

STUDY FINDINGS

Phase 1

- **Migration-centered Vulnerabilities Leading to Sex Work**
- **Precarity, Survival and Lived Realities of Sex Work**
- **Health Risks and Consequences of Sex Work**
- **Coping, Resilience, and Support Needs**

Migration-centered Vulnerabilities Leading to Sex Work

"At the beginning of the war, it felt like the earth had disappeared from under me.

There was no footing, no understanding of where to live, how to live, or for how long.

It was complete darkness, but I had to pull myself together and make decisions."

Precarity, Survival, and Lived Realities of Sex Work

“You know, you have to do everything to stay in Canada. Everything. You should be ready to commit any crime, forge documents, anything—get married, do whatever it takes to live in Canada”.

Health Risks and Consequences of Sex Work

"But men do a lot of things… they know that you discuss beforehand that this or that shouldn't happen, but they still do it… they still try to do it somehow. Sometimes, they try to remove a condom during sex."

Coping, Resilience, and Support Needs

"I wouldn't know how to act if someone attacked me, but I know that riding public transport without a ticket will get me fined. I understand these things because they were explained to me."

STUDY FINDINGS

Phase 2

- Increasing Job Accessibility by Elimination of Barriers
- Benefits and Incentives as Enticement Strategy
- Requirement of Direct Communication for Job Details

Increasing Job Accessibility by Elimination of Barriers

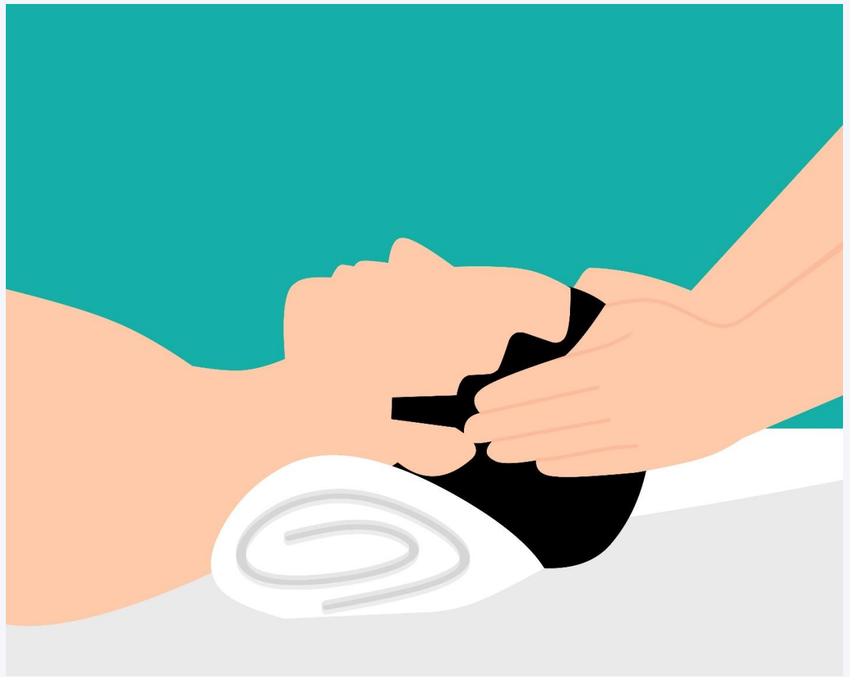
- "knowledge of English is not required"
- "no experience needed"
- "females to work from home"
- "looking for active girls/women for online collaboration"
- "free training"

Benefits and Incentives as Enticement Strategy

- "need money quick and every day"
- "earn over $1000 a day"
- "flexible work schedule"
- "possible accommodation...cozy home environment"
- "private suite for accommodation"

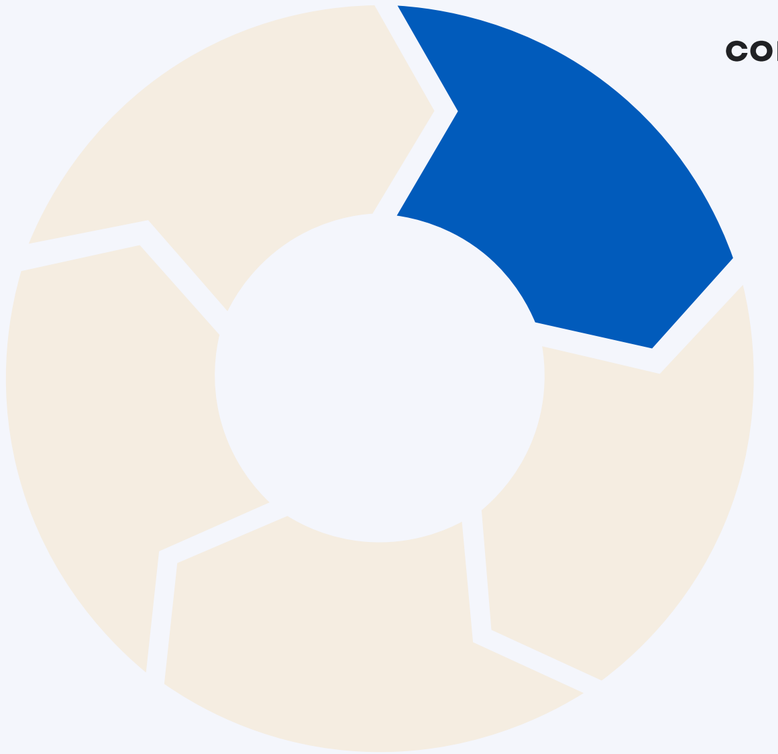
Requirement of Direct Communication for Job Details

- "all details in person"
- "additional information by phone"
- Generic/misleading job titles like "massage therapist" "assistant manager"



PROCESS

Community partnerships in research



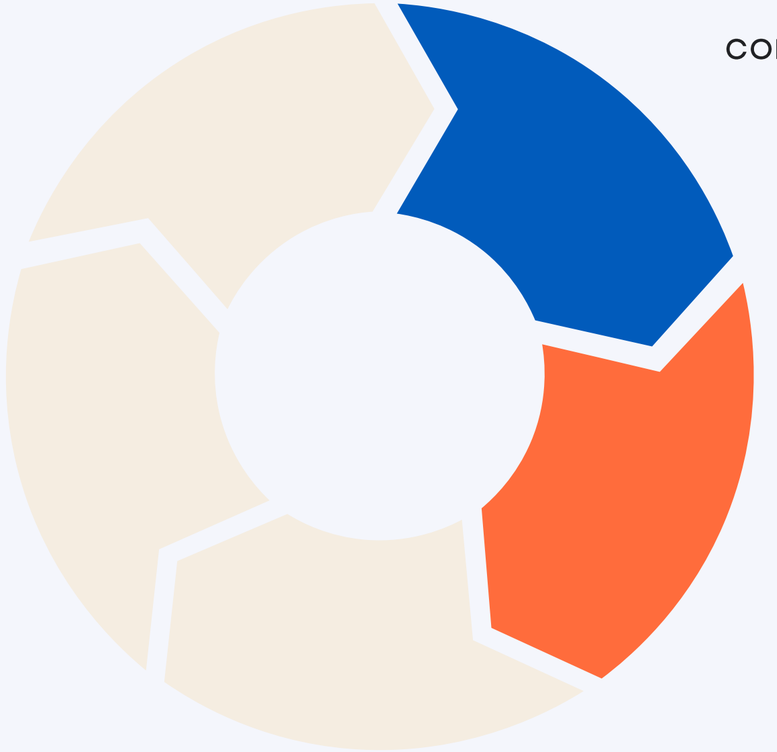
conception → funding + IRB approval → design → execution → sustainability

- Researcher and community partner are both engaged due to mutual interests, shared community involvement
- Research questions stem from a social justice imperative AND driven by community's expressed needs
- Research ideas identified by/in collaboration with impacted community

(Collins et al., 2019)

PROCESS

Community partnerships in research



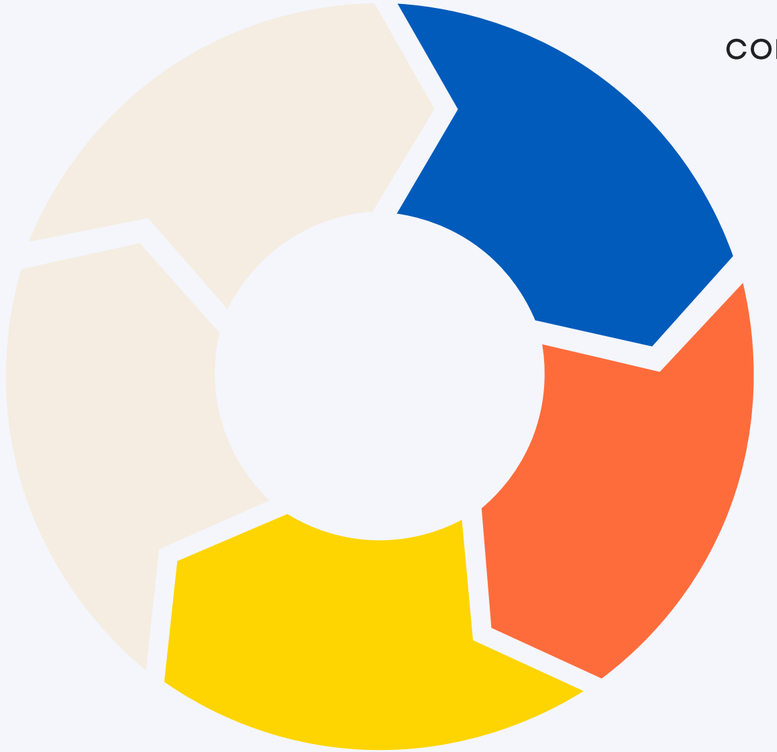
conception → **funding + IRB approval** → design → execution → sustainability

- Communities and researchers collaborating during research funding securement
- Funding available for current research, longer-term engagement, and community capacity building
- IRB approval from researcher's institutions + partner oversight protects well-being of the community, values, ethics, and interests

(Collins et al., 2019)

PROCESS

Community partnerships in research



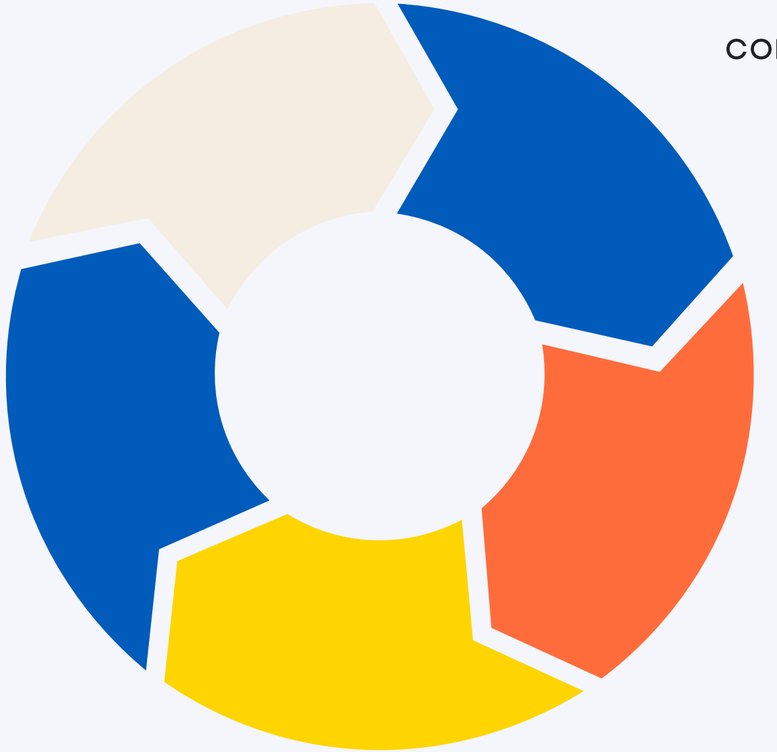
conception → funding + IRB approval → **design** → execution → sustainability

- Flexible design + iterative research process, especially in early phases
- Community input is valued
- Researchers use inductive methods and practice reflexivity
- Communities co-design interventions via participation on advisory boards, consultant roles
- Interventions and programming are designed based on researchers', stakeholders', and community input
- Reflect scientific and clinical standards +community's interests, knowledge and values

(Collins et al., 2019)

PROCESS

Community partnerships in research



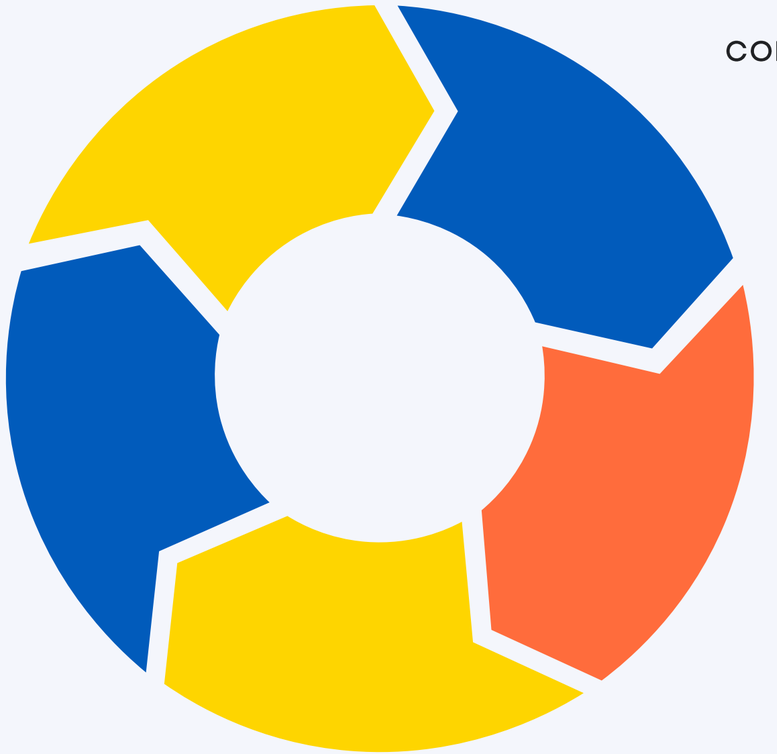
conception → funding + IRB approval → design → **execution** → sustainability

- Community members as co-authors/co-owners of research products
- Research disseminated in multiple formats and across various venues for accessibility
  - e.g., community reports vs. scholarly manuscripts
  - Accessible language - English, Ukrainian, Russian

(Collins et al., 2019)

PROCESS

Community partnerships in research



conception → funding + IRB approval → design → execution → **sustainability**

- Plans for sustaining programming/interventions designed during the research timeframe built into the research timeline and funding
- Data/findings are available to the community for future funding requests
- Researchers work with community beyond a single funding cycle

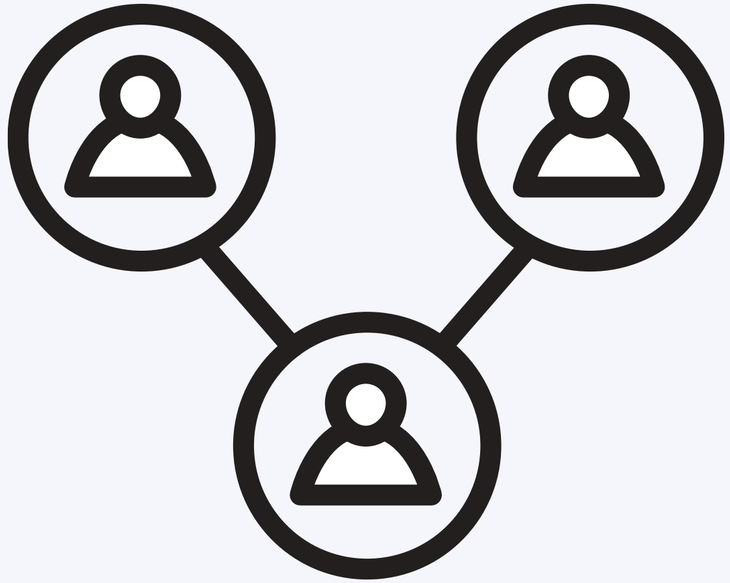
(Collins et al., 2019)

POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

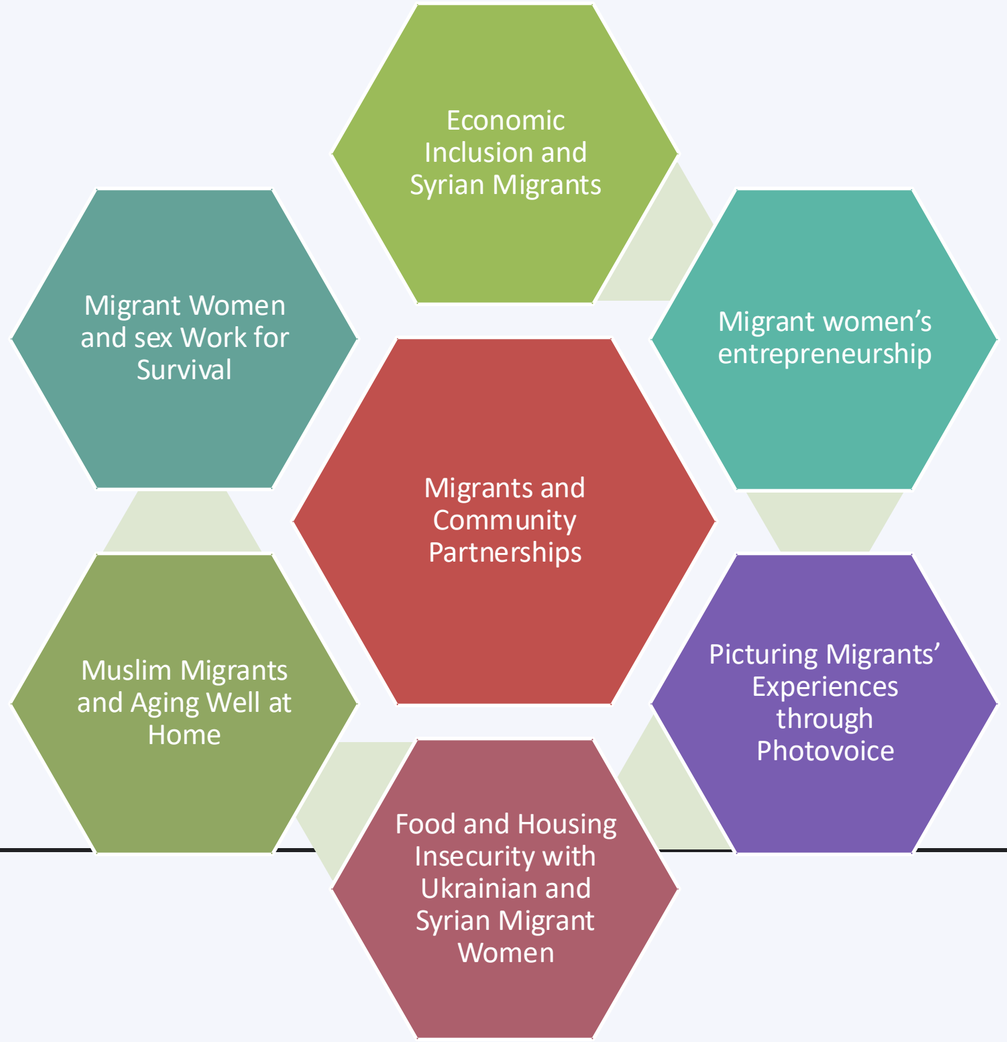
"You have allowed me to process this, not even for you but for myself. It's a lesson for me-how I should behave, where my "blind spots" are, where the gaps in my awareness are, what I don't know. These are important questions. I am a woman raising a future woman; I have to teach her. This is extremely important to me. ***It's as if my consciousness has grown- my awareness has grown****."*

CONCLUSION

- Community-based research is a powerful tool for responding to crises and informing action.
- Findings are being mobilized beyond academia to inform community programs, services, and policy recommendations.
- Strong community partnerships ensure research translates into meaningful change.



OTHER COLLABORATIONS



Thank You

For Your Attention!

Contact Information:
Dr. Kateryna Metersky kateryna.metersky@torontomu.ca
Dr. Areej Al-Hamad areej.hamad@torontomu.ca

REFERENCES

Please scan the QR code to view references.

Q&A Period