

Some Tipped Employees Consider Sex Work Amid COVID-19 Closures

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As bars and clubs shut down amid COVID-19, some displaced employees are looking to sex work to supplement their income.

JOLT Harm Reduction Program Director Chris Schaffner said his organization is “seeing some new faces” in their online survey of central Illinoisans looking to meet clients.

"So think like a dancer who might rely solely on her income from a dance club and now that's been taken away," he said. "These are usually contract employees. There's no protection, there's rarely insurance."

Schaffner said dancers are by no means the only people looking for alternative forms of income. He said they're seeing more people from a number of tip-based, customer service oriented professions.

He said the most effective way for people to stay safe while pursuing this line of work is to follow social distancing guidelines by not engaging in physical activities — and some are already taking those precautions.

“What we're finding out is that many of them are engaging in web-based activity to minimize the need for contact, whether that's camming or selling videos or pictures online,” he said. “That's a viable source of income for some people.”

But Schaffner said limiting physical contact may not be possible for everyone.

He said some meeting clients in-person are setting up sanitizing stations in their home, doing temperature checks on clients, limiting kissing and face-to-face positions, or performing in-person without actually touching the clients.

Schaffner said while these are not foolproof provisions, they can help somewhat reduce the risk of contracting communicable diseases, including the novel coronavirus.

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