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Abstract

CDC0674 - HIV prevention in sex workers: looking beyond condoms

M. Shahmanesh¹, S. Wayal², S. Mendoza², F. Cowan³, V. Patel⁴, D. Mabey⁵

¹University College London, Centre for Sexual Health and HIV Research, Panjim, India, ²Positive People, Panjim, India, ³University College London, Centre for Sexual Health and HIV Research, Harare, Zimbabwe, ⁴London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Porvorim, India, ⁵London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom

Background: Evidence suggests that core group interventions in sex workers (SWs) are an effective way to control the HIV epidemic. We describe some of the problems with such targeted interventions with SWs.

Methods: During a cross-sectional study (12/2004-12/2005) SWs were recruited using respondent driven sampling. Participants completed an interviewer-administered structured questionnaire. Dry-blood-spots were tested for HIV antibodies (Virinostika II+0, Labsystems, Murex).

Results: 326 women participated in the study. Prevalence of HIV was n=77 (23.6% CI: 19.2-28.7). Women worked in a variety of settings, median age was 26 (IQR: 22-35), and 71 (21.8% CI: 17.5-26.7) were literate. N=247 (75.8% CI: 70.7-80.3) had regular male partners (RMP); with whom only 28 (8.6% CI: 5.9-12.3) consistently used condoms. 79 (24.2% CI: 19.8-29.3) thought they were at risk of contracting HIV from their RMP compared with 187 (57% CI: 51.8-62.8) from customers. 233 (71.5% CI: 66.2-76.3%) had used a condom with their last customer. 95 (29.1% CI: 24.3-34.5) reported customers forcing them to have sex without condoms and 46 (14.1% CI: 12.6-18.5) admitted to agreeing to sex without condoms in lieu of more money. The women supported a median number of 3 people and 170 (52.1% CI: 46.6-57.7) were in debt. 108 (33.1% CI: 28.1-38.6) experienced violence from RMP, 126 (38.7% CI: 33.4-44.2) expressed suicidal ideation and 73 (22.4% CI: 18.1-27.4) had attempted suicide over the preceding three months. 51 (15.6% CI: 12-20.2) deliberately harmed themselves in the past. 197 (60.4% CI: 54.9-65.8) reported no one to turn to for support. 146 (44.8% CI: 39.3-50.4) drank alcohol and 68 (20.9% CI: 16.7-25.8) drank every day. Only 51 (15.6% CI: 12-20.2) were forced to stay and work in Goa, 232 (71.2% CI: 65.9-76) felt that Goa was a desirable place to live, and 164 (50.3% CI: 44.7-55.9) stayed because of their RMP.

Conclusions: De-contextualising SW raises questions about the efficacy of myopic interventions that focus on HIV prevention in isolation from the many other issues that SWs face such as violence, self harm and their complex emotional relationship. These findings suggest that HIV prevention interventions need a more comprehensive approach to health of SWs, including mental health, social support and de-addiction services.