



Drug Sharing Among Sex Workers & Clients: Risk of Violence, Harm & HIV

Background

Research has looked at links between violence, condom use and drug sharing among intimate partners, and the increased risk of HIV that goes with it, but little information exists on drug sharing among women in sex work and their clients, and the risks that it may involve.

The Question

How does drug sharing with clients relate to sexual and drug-related harms among women in street-based sex work?

The Study

Researchers from the Maka Project and what is now called the Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI), as part of a **community-based research partnership and extensive peer-led outreach interviewed, gave questionnaires and offered confidential HIV testing to 198 women in street-based sex work in Vancouver, BC, between September and November 2004**. GSHI now carries on this research as part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), a ongoing study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC in collaboration with a range of community partners. AESHA has outreach to both indoor and outdoor sex work venues (by both experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results

The narratives of sex workers interviewed showed:

- 59% (117 women) reported sharing drugs with clients in the last 6 months;
- Crack cocaine was the primary drug shared.

More than half of sex workers interviewed reported drug sharing with clients.

Sharing drugs with clients was associated with:

- Borrowing a used crack pipe;
- Intensive/daily crack cocaine smoking;
- Inconsistent condom use by a client;
- Having a recent 'bad date' (verbal harassment, physical and/or sexual assault).

The Policy Implications

- This study shows that drug sharing with clients is linked to unprotected sex and intensive crack cocaine smoking, factors previously found to be associated with an increased risk of HIV/STI.
- There is an urgent need for HIV prevention and harm reduction initiatives focusing on women *and* their clients, including support for community and peer-driven sex work initiatives.

Shannon K, Kerr T, Bright V, Gibson K, Tyndall MW. Drug sharing with clients as a risk marker for increased violence and sexual and drug-related harms among women in survival sex work. *AIDS Care*. 2008; 20(2): 235-41.