



Factors Associated with HIV/STI Risk among Sex Workers with Intimate Partners

Background

Globally, sex workers face high rates of HIV. Despite evidence showing high rates of condom use with clients, little is known about condom use with intimate partners. Intimate partnerships are an important determinant of sex workers' health and well being, including shaping their HIV and STI risk.

The Question

What factors are associated with inconsistent condom use among sex workers and their intimate partners in Vancouver, BC?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data from **in-depth interviews with 369 women in sex work in Vancouver, BC conducted between January 2010 and August 2013**. This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an 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, with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results

Of the 369 women in sex work interviewed who reported having an intimate partner, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ reported inconsistent condom use with their partner in the last 6 months.

Factors associated with inconsistent condom use with intimate partners included:

- Having a cohabiting or non-cohabiting intimate partner;
- Providing drugs or money to an intimate partner;
- Having an intimate partner provide physical safety;
- Physical intimate partner violence; and
- Non-injection drug use.

Sex workers with intimate partners reported lower rates of HIV, fewer clients per week, and increased condom use with clients.

Sex workers reported that intimate partnerships are a source of emotional support, a 'safe haven', enhancing feelings of inclusion and wellbeing.

The Policy Implications

- Reasons for inconsistent condom use among sex workers and their intimate partners are complex, involving emotional, physical and economic factors.
- Efforts to reduce HIV/STI risk to sex workers within their relationships should be gender-focuses, empowerment-based, and involve male partners.
- Integrated violence and HIV preventions is needed within sexual and reproductive health efforts.

Argento E, Shannon K, Nguyen P, Dobrer S, Chettiar J, Deering KN. The role of dyad-level factors in shaping sexual and drug-related HIV/STI risks among sex workers with intimate partners. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2015.