



## War-Related Abduction and Incarceration Linked to HIV among Sex Workers in Northern Uganda

### Background

In Northern Uganda, a two-decade long conflict led to human rights violations including abductions of young people and children by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). In conflict-affected areas, young women may engage in sex work to meet economic needs, but there has been little research on factors associated with HIV among sex workers in within conflict-affected settings.

### The Question

How are structural factors such as war-related abduction and incarceration associated with the HIV burden of sex workers in conflict-affected Gulu, Northern Uganda?

### The Study

A research team made up of the Gulu branch of The AIDS Support Organization (TASO), sex workers, and community organizations in northern Uganda **interviewed 400 young women in sex work in northern Uganda between 2011 and 2012**. TASO offers comprehensive HIV testing, care and treatment to over 80,000 people living with HIV, through 11 branches in Uganda. The Gulu Sexual Health Project is a joint research project launched in 2009 between TASO and the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI), supported in part through the Gender, Violence and HIV Team.

### The Results

Of 400 sex workers interviewed:

- 34% were living with HIV;
- 33% were previously undiagnosed.

*Having been incarcerated or abducted during wartime were found to be associated with an increased risk of HIV for women in sex work in Northern Uganda.*

### Abduction & Incarceration

- 32% had been abducted by the LRA, with a median age of 13 at the time of abduction; and
- 27% reported having been incarcerated (jail or prison), mainly for sex work-related charges or public disorder.

### The Policy Implications

There is a need for more research to better understand and address human rights violations and the impacts of criminalization among marginalized sex workers in conflict-affected settings.

Programmes & policies that support the health and human rights of sex workers are needed, including:

- Preparedness efforts to integrate HIV and sex work into planning;
- Emergency response efforts such as outreach, HIV, sexual and reproductive health services;
- Long-term efforts to reduce vulnerability and address structural issues, including sex work-led approaches to addressing human rights violations and ensuring ongoing access to care!

Goldenberg SM, Nguyen P, Muzaaya G, Akello M, Birungi J, Shannon K. War-related abduction and history of incarceration linked to high burden of HIV among female sex workers in conflict-affected Northern Uganda. *JAIDS*. 2016.