



Peer Support Among International Migrant Sex Workers at the Mexico-Guatemala Border

Background

Peer support has been identified as a critical HIV/STI and violence prevention intervention for sex workers. However, little is known about access to peer support or its role in shaping health and social outcomes among migrant sex workers in Central American border regions.

The Question

What is the role of peer support in shaping vulnerability and resilience related to HIV/STI prevention and violence among international migrant sex workers at the Mexico-Guatemala border?

The Study

A team of U.S., Canadian and Mexican researchers, in partnership with local community-based HIV, sex work, and women's organizations conducted interviews with 31 international migrant sex workers in three communities situated at the Mexico-Guatemala border region from November 2012 to January 2014.

The Results

Peer support among international migrant sex workers was found to be crucial for:

- Reducing social isolation;
- Improving access to HIV/STI knowledge, prevention and resources; and
- Mitigating workplace violence.

Challenges to accessing peer support were also noted. These included difficulties establishing long-lasting relationships and other forms of social participation due to frequent mobility, as well as tensions among peers within some work environments. Variations in access to peer support related to **country of work, work environment, sex work and migration stage**, and **sex work experience** were also identified.

"My peers told me that I needed to protect myself. They said I should do everything with a condom. They told me everything from their experience, so I wasn't left with any [question]."

(Guadalupe, 29 years old).

The Policy Implications

- Community empowerment interventions should be developed in leadership by, or close collaboration with, migrant sex workers and local organizations to build upon sex workers' resilience and agency, and to address the unique needs faced by migrant women working in the sex industry.
- These peer-led interventions must be further supported with broader public policy and structural changes to better support the health, safety, and rights of migrant sex workers.

Belen Febres-Cordero, Kimberly C. Brouwer, Teresita Rocha Jimenez, Carmen Fernandez-Casanueva, Sonia Morales-Miranda, Shira M. Goldenberg. Influence of peer support on HIV/STI prevention and safety amongst international migrant sex workers: A qualitative study at the Mexico-Guatemala border. *PLOS ONE*, 2018.