



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

Background

Previous research has focused on links between violence, decreased condom use and drug sharing among intimate partners, and the subsequent increased risk of HIV, but little information exists on the predictors of drug sharing among women in sex work and their clients.

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, interview-administered questionnaires and confidential HIV testing for 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 longitudinal ethnographic and qualitative 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 ongoing outreach to both indoor and outdoor sex work venues (by both experiential and non-experiential team).

The Results

Analyses of the narratives of sex workers interviewed showed:

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

Sharing drugs with clients was found to be 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).

More than half of sex workers interviewed reported drug sharing with clients:
Drug sharing with clients linked to factors associated with increased risk of HIV/STI transmission

The Policy Implications

- This study shows that drug sharing with clients is linked to unprotected sexual encounters and intensive crack cocaine smoking, factors previously found to be associated with an increased risk of HIV/STI transmission.
- There is an urgent need for HIV prevention and harm reduction initiatives specifically for women *and* their clients. These should include support for community and peer-driven sex work initiatives to address the structural factors that facilitate HIV transmission.

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.