



The Role of Dyad-Level Factors in Shaping Risks among Sex Workers with Intimate Partners

Background

Despite a high HIV burden among sex workers globally, and relatively high rates of client condom use, research on the intimate partnerships as potential HIV risk pathways is limited. Intimate partner relationships are an important determinant of sex workers' health and well being, including shaping HIV-related vulnerability and risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The Question

What is the role of dyad-level factors in inconsistent condom use among sex workers with 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.

Dyad-level factors associated with inconsistent condom use with intimate partners among sex workers in this setting include:

- Having a cohabiting or non-cohabiting intimate partner;
- Providing drugs or financial support 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 prevalence and risk of HIV, fewer clients per week, and increased condom use with clients.

Intimate partnerships are a source of emotional support, described by some sex workers as a 'safe haven' enhancing feelings of inclusion and wellbeing.

The Policy Implications

- This study suggests the reasons for inconsistent condom use among sex workers and their intimate partners are complex and involve intersecting emotional, physical and economic dimensions.
- Efforts to reduce HIV/STI risks to sex workers through intimate partnerships should incorporate gender-focused and empowerment-based strategies, and interventions involving male partners.
- Integrated violence and HIV prevention 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.