

The Influence of Structural Determinants on HIV among Female Sex Workers

Background

Female sex workers bear a disproportionately large burden of HIV infection worldwide. Despite decades of research and programme activity, the epidemiology of HIV and the role that structural determinants have in mitigating or potentiating HIV epidemics and access to care for female sex workers is poorly understood.

The Question

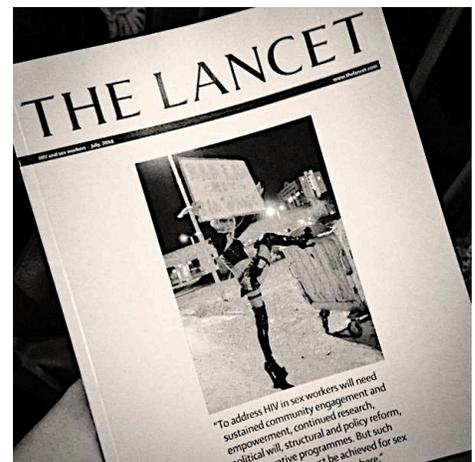
How do various factors, including laws, policing, violence, sex worker-led efforts, and access to prevention and treatment, impact the course of HIV epidemics among sex workers in diverse settings?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team, in co-authorship with researchers and sex workers from the global south and north, modeled how changes in key factors could shift the course of the HIV epidemic in sex work across diverse settings. 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

- In the global response to HIV and sex work, a focus on medical interventions is not enough as structural drivers, such as the legal, policy and political environments in which people work, play a critical role in HIV risk, health, safety and well-being.
- Across the diverse settings of Canada, Kenya, and India, **decriminalization of sex work could have the largest impact on HIV epidemics, averting 33-46% of HIV infections in sex work** over the next decade through its immediate effect on violence, policing, and safer work environments.



The Policy Implications

- Global control of HIV will not be achieved unless the legal, social, and political factors are recognized by global and national policy makers.
- **The decriminalization of sex work would have the single greatest effect on the course of HIV epidemics in all settings studied.**

Shannon K, Strathdee SA, Goldenberg SM, Duff P, Mwangi P, Rusakova M, Reza-Paul S, Deering K, Pickles MR, Boily MC. Global epidemiology of HIV among female sex workers: influence of structural determinants. *The Lancet, HIV and Sex Work Series*, 2014, pp. 13-29.