



Use of Injectable Hormonal Contraception predicts HSV-2 Acquisition among Sex Workers in Vancouver

Background

A growing body of data suggests that depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) may increase the risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV and other STIs among women. Despite high rates of unmet reproductive health needs and heightened vulnerability to STIs among women sex workers, there has been limited research on the effects of DMPA on HSV-2 and HIV acquisition.

The Question

What are the effects of injectable hormonal contraceptives (specifically DMPA) on the acquisition of HSV-2 among women sex workers in Vancouver, BC?

The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data collected through **semi-structured interviews and laboratory data with 143 seronegative for HSV-2 women sex workers in Metro Vancouver between 2010 and 2014**. This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an ongoing quantitative and qualitative study with a cohort of over 800 women sex workers 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

During the study period **19 women (13%) reported using DMPA** for pregnancy prevention.

DMPA use was found to be **higher among marginalized populations** already at risk of poor health outcomes.

Rates of genital herpes acquisition among women sex workers in Vancouver were among the **highest rates ever reported worldwide**.

DMPA exposure was independently associated with approximately 4 times increased risk of HSV-2 acquisition.

There were **39 HSV-2 seroconversions** (incidence rate: 17.1 cases per 100 person years).

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The Policy Implications

- These findings raise strong concerns about the provision of optimal reproductive and sexual health care to women sex workers in Vancouver.
- There is an urgent need to engage women sex workers in the development of tailored reproductive health services and to improve access to a wider range of contraceptive methods.

Socias ME, Duff P, Shoveller J, Montaner JS, Nguyen P, Ogilvie G, Shannon K. Use of Injectable Hormonal Contraception Independently Predicts HSV-2 Acquisition in a Cohort of Street and Off-Street Sex Workers in Vancouver, Canada. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 2016.