



Incarceration and Exposure to Internally Displaced Persons Camps Associated with Reproductive Rights Abuses Among Sex Workers in Northern Uganda

Background

Women sex workers in Sub-Saharan Africa face a high burden of HIV, gender-based violence, and unintended pregnancy, and have limited access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Little is known concerning access to safe and non-coercive abortion services for this population, particularly within conflict-affected settings.

The Question

What are factors associated with abortions for young women sex workers in Gulu, northern Uganda, and what are the correlates associated with unsafe and coerced abortions amongst this population?

The Study

This analysis drew on data from the Gender & Sexual Health Initiatives' Gulu Sexual Health Project, a community-based cross-sectional study in Gulu District, northern Uganda (May 2011-January 2012). 400 young women sex workers were recruited through peer/sex worker-led and community outreach. The study was conducted by Canadian and Ugandan researchers in partnership with The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) and other local community partners.

The Results

Of 315 sex workers who had ever been pregnant, 62 (19.7%) had experienced at least one abortion. Factors that increased experiences of abortion were:

- Workplace violence
- Childhood mistreatment/abuse
- Considering oneself in a good financial situation

Of these 62 women, 64.5% (n=40) had undergone an unsafe abortion, of which the majority were self-performed, and almost 1/3 (29%, n=18) reported having been coerced into having an abortion.

Lifetime exposure to incarceration was found to be independently associated with increased odds of coerced abortion. Living in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp was positively associated with experiencing unsafe abortions.

The Policy Implications

- These results suggest a critical need for removal of legal and social barriers to realizing the sexual health and reproductive rights of all women, and ensuring safe, voluntary access to reproductive choice for marginalized and criminalized populations.

Margaret Erickson, Shira M. Goldenberg, Monica Akello, Godfrey Muzaaya, Paul Nguyen, Josephine Birungi, Kate Shannon. Incarceration and exposure to internally displaced persons camps associated with reproductive rights abuses among sex workers in northern Uganda. *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*, 2017.