

THAILAND

Trauma-informed, community-engaged violence prevention for female sex workers in Thailand

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BACKGROUND

Globally, female sex worker (FSWs), suffer disproportionate rates of sexual and intimate partner violence. Their homicide rate is approximately 17 times higher than that of women in the general population. Severe physical and sexual violence victimization has been documented, perpetrators include intimate partners, police and clients. Prevalence estimates vary; the investigative team's past research found a past-week physical or sexual violence prevalence of 15% of FSWs in Thailand, up to 20% for women in urban Bangkok, and 29% for those working outside of the relative safety provided by venues. Consistent with findings from the general population, violence against FSWs is associated with poor health outcomes including sexual risk behavior, and STI/HIV infection.

Researchers, policymakers, and advocacy groups demand evidence-based violence prevention for FSWs. Evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) demonstrates the value of empowerment and skills training in reducing risk for adolescent women, and emergent research, including that of our own team, similarly demonstrates the value of working with FSWs themselves to reduce risk for victimization through bolstering cohesion, safety skills, and empowerment. This project will fill a void in the violence prevention landscape by adapting and testing a brief trauma-informed, safety promotion intervention with FSWs in Thailand.

PROJECT AIM

The aim of the project is to adapt via community-engaged processes, implement and evaluate a promising strategy for violence prevention for female sex workers in Thailand, in collaboration

with partnering NGO Service Workers IN Group (SWING), a national leader in advocacy and health promotion for sex workers.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct community-engaged intervention adaptation and initial feasibility assessment for a brief, trauma-informed violence-prevention intervention for FSWs.
2. Implement and evaluate the intervention's feasibility, acceptability, and impact on FSWs violence experiences, resilience, empowerment, and safety behaviors as compared with an unexposed comparison group
3. Disseminate findings to key stakeholders across academic, policy and practice experts through published manuscripts, conference presentations, and strategic dialogues.

PROJECT METHODS

Intervention & adaptation process: FSWs, FSW outreach workers and representatives from related organizations will be brought together to participate in a set of intervention development meetings. They will review and critically discuss: a) local and global data on the prevalence, nature, and health impact of violence against sex workers, 2) existing violence-related intervention strategies for FSWs, and GBV interventions for general populations. Through semi-structured discussion, participants will shape and adapt the intervention approach to meet local needs. The format and content of the intervention will be determined through our community engagement process. We anticipate engaging outreach workers to conduct brief, semi-structured discussions (2-5 minutes) with FSWs during their routine outreach activities, following a training. Community forum preferences will inform supporting materials such as safety cards, posters, or discreet reminders of intervention messages (e.g. keychains, lipstick tubes).

Evaluation: Women ages 18 and over who have traded sex in the three months prior will be enrolled in outcomes evaluation, and complete baseline and follow-up surveys. In each site, we will recruit a convenience sample through recruitment in SWING's

standard outreach locations, which are informed by a recent FSW mapping activity led by Dr. Phuengsamran. Measures include recent experiences of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by intimate partners, clients and others, safety behaviour and access to services, mental health, perceived support, resilience, and frequency of discussion of violence and safety with others. Acceptability and feasibility will also be assessed. Primary outcome analysis will be conducted via differences of differences analysis.

Dissemination. Findings will be disseminated with our community forum via roundtable discussion of policy and programmatic implications. We will develop peer-reviewed manuscripts and presentations for local and international academic and practitioner audiences. The target audience includes violence prevention academic and practitioner communities, and FSW advocacy networks such as the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers, and the Sex Worker Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN), with whom our team has close relationships. Short briefs will be developed for lay professionals and policy-makers.

WHAT WE WILL ACHIEVE

This work will result in:

- New knowledge in how to prevent violence among the high-risk population of FSWs
- A brief, semi-structured conversation intervention model that has been designed for low-dose, high-frequency implementation, and scalability in resource limited settings

