SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST POPULATIONS AT HIGH RISK FOR HIV IN ZAMBIA

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KEY MESSAGES

- Female sex workers and women who use drugs experience various forms of sexual violence that contribute to increased risk of HIV.
- Sexual violence screening, support, and care should be integrated into harm reduction services for women who use drugs and HIV prevention and treatment services for both female sex workers and women who use drugs.
- Sexual violence prevention programs must reach men who use drugs and clients of female sex workers.

BACKGROUND

- Female sex workers (FSWs) and people who use drugs (PWUD) are key populations at high risk of acquiring, transmitting HIV. Globally, the risk of HIV infection is between 10 and 50 times greater in key populations than in other adults.
- In Zambia, the behaviors of FSWs and PWUD are criminalized and highly stigmatized.
- Little is known about FSW and PWUD experience of sexual violence and their risk of HIV acquisition in Zambia.
- Conducted a qualitative investigation with FSWs and PWUD among key populations to describe the:
  - Experience of sexual violence experienced by FSWs and PWUD;
  - Factors contributing to sexual violence; and
  - Role violence plays in risk of HIV acquisition.

METHODS

- Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted from July 2013 to September 2015 in 6 districts in Zambia.
- 177 FSWs participated in 56 IDIs and 16 FGDs.
- 60 PWUD participated in 21 IDIs and 6 FGDs.
- Members of key populations with access to and knowledge of their peers and outreach workers from local organizations facilitated participant recruitment.
- Thematic content analysis was used for data analyses.
- After identification of themes, we quantified the presence and absence of the themes in the 83 and 27 transcripts for FSWs and PWUD, respectively.
- Participants provided informed consent.

RESULTS

**Female sex workers**

- In 31% of transcripts, FSWs described physical violence being used to force them to have sex or not pay for sexual services.
- Being beaten and drugged.
- Forced to engage in sex acts they normally do not practice (e.g., anal sex).
- In all instances, condoms were not used.

**People who use drugs**

- In 43% of transcripts, PWUD explained that when women are high on drugs:
  - Men often have sex with them without their consent.
  - Gang rape occurs.
  - Women are unable to recall it but know they had been sexually penetrated.
  - In all instances, condoms were not used.

Free from a FGD, participants aged 10-26:

- This guy met this girl... No, this girl doesn’t sleep much... so when he was with this girl, he was asking this girl that she does this... Now, we were both laughing. We all went into the girl... [laughs]... Participant 6

- In 11% of transcripts, FSWs mentioned denial of their rights to adopt measures to protect against HIV and STIs as well as task of agency to control how sex happens.
- Clients pokying holes in condoms.
- Clients’ condoms coming off during sex without their knowledge, especially when they were drunk.

**Results**

- In 40% of transcripts, FSWs described non-physical sexual violence whereby they had no choice in sexual partners because middle men (e.g., pimps, queen mothers), who controlled the money, told them who they could and could not have as clients.

**Conclusions**

- FSWs and women who use drugs experience various forms of sexual violence that contribute to increased risk of HIV.
- Violence can have psychological, emotional, and physical effects on a survivor. Sexual violence screening, support, and care should be integrated into harm reduction services for women who use drugs as well as HIV prevention and treatment services for both FSWs and PWUD.
- While HIV prevention, care, and treatment efforts have focused on FSWs, few have focused on the clients of FSWs. Innovative methods to reach clients and encourage behavior change are urgently needed. These programs must address sexual violence prevention with clients.
- Sexual violence prevention programs must also reach men who use drugs.
- Alcohol misuse often facilitates violence toward FSWs. Education and sensitization about alcohol use and misuse is urgently needed.

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