

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST POPULATIONS AT HIGH RISK FOR HIV IN ZAMBIA

popcouncil.org

Nanlesta Pilgrim<sup>1</sup>, Maurice Musheke<sup>2</sup>, H. Fisher Raymond<sup>3</sup>, Ryan Keating<sup>4</sup>, Harold Witola<sup>5</sup>, Lunda Banda<sup>2</sup>, Drosin Mulenga<sup>2</sup>, Lyson Phiri<sup>2</sup>, Scott Geibel<sup>1</sup>, and Waimar Tun<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Population Council, Washington DC, USA; <sup>2</sup>Population Council, Lusaka, Zambia; <sup>3</sup>San Francisco Department of Health, San Francisco, USA; <sup>4</sup>University of California, San Francisco, USA; <sup>5</sup>National AIDS Council, Lusaka, Zambia

## 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 and 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 population 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 8 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 theme 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 sex by potential clients:
  - 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.

*The risks we go through...like we said especially about men...a man proposes you...you go to that room...it's not every man who is normal...maybe you don't know that that man is a savage...maybe he will handle you roughly...there are men who are very rough...they can end up having you without even using a condom...maybe he even beats you up...maybe it's at his house or its where else...so we pass through a lot of things...you see....*

—FGD, aged 20–29

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

*...and then I do take alcohol so there things like maybe I am drunk...and I am thinking that he has put on a condom...only to find that he has removed it.*

—IDI, age 25

- 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.

*...you would not even talk to [client], they [middle men] will just tell you that you will go in that vehicle.*

—IDI, age 22

*...they [referring to middle men] do force saying "sleep with him, you just have to sleep with him, he gives you some money" [Hits table to emphasize].*

—IDI, age 42

## RESULTS

### People who use drugs

- In 41% of transcripts, PWUD explained that when women are high on drugs:
  - Men often have sex with them without their consent.
  - Gang rape occurs.
  - Rape occurs and women are unable to recall it but know they had been sexually penetrated.
  - In all instances, condoms were not used.
- From a FGD, participants aged 19-25:

*This guy met this girl... Now...this girl smokes too much...so when he was with this girl...he was saying...that girl agreed that... Now...we were four... [laughs]. We all went into the girl...[laughs]....*

—Participant 5

*When you say we all went into the girl, what do you mean?*

—Facilitator

*They had a foursome....*

—Participant 3

*You slept with her? At that time was she high or not?*

—Facilitator

[Laughs]

—Participant 5

*Was high...[laughs]...extremely....*

—Participant 5

- In 74% of transcripts, instances of non-physical sexual violence were described whereby drug dealers require sex in exchange for drugs when they do not have money.

*Okay, HIV and STIs, you, sometimes you become vulnerable, if you are a drug addict, you are much more vulnerable than some others who haven't taken drugs...like the lady drug users...are much more vulnerable...yeah, because mostly some of them they won't have the money...so sometimes they would want to use their bodies to, to support their habit, unlike the men.*

—IDI, aged 38

## CONCLUSION

- 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 in 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 facilitated violence toward FSWs. Education and sensitization about alcohol use and misuse is urgently needed.

## FUNDING, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND CONTACT INFORMATION

This study was supported under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Zambia (CDC 5 U2 GGH000463-04).

Suggested citation: Nanlesta Pilgrim, Maurice Musheke, H. Fisher Raymond, Ryan Keating, Harold Witola, Lunda Banda, Drosin Mulenga, Lyson Phiri, Scott Geibel, and Waimar Tun. 2017. "Sexual violence against populations at high risk for HIV in Zambia." Scientific pitch presented at SVRI, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 18–21 September.

For more information, contact Nanlesta Pilgrim (npilgrim@popcouncil.org).