

Sexual Behaviour And Risk Perception Of Hiv/Aids Among Female Sex Workers (Fsws) In Kathmandu City, Nepal

Khaniya R^a and Joshi AB^a

HIV is most commonly transmitted from an infected individual through semen and vaginal fluids during unprotected sex without use of condoms. Sex workers are the most vulnerable groups for the contraction and transmission of HIV /AIDS and other STDs, not only due to their nature of work but also because of sexual relationships with rapidly changing multiple partners¹.

A Cross-Sectional Descriptive study was designed with the objectives to determine the knowledge and types of sexual behavior that place FSWs at risk of contracting HIV/ AIDS and the reason for the sex work initiation; the use of condom during sexual activity and the source of condom use; and to determine the use of drugs during sexual activity. Different areas of Kathmandu city were selected purposively. The study population consisted of women who were known as waitress in cabin restaurants of Kathmandu as profession and as an extension to the job, worked as Female sex workers for the satisfaction of the clients. Sample size was determined by selecting the service areas of PSI. Thirty percentages of PSI service areas were selected with 5 respondents in each area making a total of 45.

Among 45 FSWs, 55.50 percent of the respondents fall in the age group 15-20 and 26.70 percent fall between the age group 20-25. Majority of the respondents (55%) were involved in the sex work for fun/imitation of friends and 44 percent of the respondents were involved in the sex work because of financial problems. The respondents were practicing only vaginal sex. They perceived themselves being at risk for the HIV/AIDS, 100 percent of the respondents replied that they were at risk of being infected if had unsafe sex and have multiple partners. For the majority of the respondents, social workers from different NGOs/INGOs were the source of information regarding HIV/AIDS. All of the respondents replied that they had used condom last time when they had sex with a client. For majority of the respondents (75%) it is the client who bought the condom and for 24 percent was themselves. For 60

percent of the respondents, the reasons for using condom was to prevent both from getting infected with HIV/AIDS and getting pregnant, while for 40 percent it was to prevent from getting infected with HIV/AIDS. The pharmacies were the major condom outlets, where more than 78 percent of the respondents obtained the supply, while the cabin restaurants provided the condom for 11 percent of the respondents. Majority (89%) of the respondents said that they use alcohol. Among the users, 96 percent of the respondents replied that they had never forget to use condom because they had alcohol and 4 percent replied that they had not used condom because they had have alcohol.

For most of the sex workers the reason behind involvement in the sex work was for fun or the imitation of friends and most of them were adolescents. This shows that peer have marked influence during adolescence and the program needs to be more focused on them. A similar finding has also been documented. The sex work initiation among adolescent prostitutes is more determined by peer group pressure and sexual experimenting than economic needs². Knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases was high. Almost every respondent perceived their high risk to HIV/AIDS infection, judging from their present sexual behavior. The frequency of condom use was satisfactory and they knew from where to get it. It is usually the client who bought the condom and less frequently by FSWs, which is probably because of hesitation and shyness. Pharmacy was the major source for the condom while least goes for the restaurant. As they hesitate to buy it from other institutions, the condoms should be made more accessible at the restaurants they are working in and not relying them on their clients for the condom. Most of the FSWs consume alcohol making the chances of having unprotected sex higher. There is also evidence about the effects of intoxication from drugs and alcohol during sex work on the ability of sex workers to negotiate safer sex practices, with some studies finding an impact and some not³. In the view of the respondents,

Corresponding Author: Rina Khania, ^a Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.¹¹

use of alcohol in limited amount does not seem to increase the risk of having unprotected sex.

The study concludes that young women are involved in the sex work because of fun and the imitation of friends. Awareness about HIV/AIDS among FSWs is high, including awareness about various protective options. Sex workers perceived that they are at a high risk and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection and were aware of risk reduction options. They seem to have good knowledge regarding the reasons for condom use and they were found to be using regularly though it is the client who often bought it. Because of the hesitation, FSWs were reluctant to buy it. Study suggests availability and easily accessibility of condom at the working site and encourages the proprietors to ensure condom availability at these places.

Key Words: HIV/AIDS, FSWs, Condom.

References

1. UNAIDS/WHO. Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections. 2004.
2. Schwartz U, Costigan A, Ngugi E, Kimani J, Moses S, Plummer F. Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases among Female Sex Workers in Western Province, Kenya. *University of Nairobi / University of Manitoba IMPACT Project*. 1999. Unpublished.
3. Leggett T. Drugs, Sex Work, and HIV in Three South African Cities. *School of Developmental Studies*. 2004.