

Characterizing the patterns of HIV disclosure to clients among South African female sex workers in Port Elizabeth.

C. Wells¹, S. Schwartz¹, N. Phaswana-Mafuya², C. Yah¹, A. Lambert³, Z. Kose², M. Mcingana³, S. Ketende¹, S. Baral¹

¹Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Key Populations Program, Department of Epidemiology, Baltimore, United States, ²HSRC, Eastern Cape, South Africa, ³TB/HIV Care Association, Cape Town, South Africa

Background

- Female sex workers (FSW) in South Africa have a disproportionately high burden of HIV, even in the context of the largest HIV epidemic in the world.
- Disclosure of HIV status is encouraged between couples; however, less is known about the patterns and determinants of disclosure between FSW and their male clients.
- This study aimed to quantify the proportion of HIV positive FSW who disclose their HIV status to paying clients and to characterize predictors of disclosure.

Methods

- Adult FSW were recruited using respondent driven sampling (RDS) in Port Elizabeth, South Africa from October 2014-March 2015.
- A total of 410 participants completed a structured survey instrument. Of these, 213 knew they were living with HIV and were included in the analysis.
- Stata version 14.1 and logistic regression modeling were used to measure associations between disclosing HIV status to clients and individual/client characteristics.

Results

Participant characteristics:

- Mean age 27.8 yrs (SD=5.7), 92% identified as black, 88% had not completed the 12th grade.
- Involved in sex work for average of 7.2 yrs (SD=10.5) with a mean of 3.8 clients (SD=1.6) in a 24-hour period.
- Mean length of time since HIV diagnosis 5.2 years (SD = 5.0), 48% were on ARV treatment.

HIV disclosure patterns:

- Reported disclosure to paying clients: 35% (74/213)
- Reported disclosure to long-term partners: 76% (123/162)

Table 1. Bivariate associations of FSW HIV disclosure to clients with individual and client relationship characteristics

Explanatory Variable	Odds Ratio	95% CI
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>		
Currently on ARV treatment	1.14	0.65-2.00
Disclose HIV status to non-paying partners	2.93	1.25-6.90 **
Told family practiced sex work	1.84	1.04-3.26 *
<i>Client Relationship Characteristics</i>		
Talk to new clients about their HIV status	16.84	5.4-52.3 ***
Talk to regular clients about their HIV status	33.72	7.6-148.5 ***
Connect with clients online	0.45	0.23-0.86 *
Meet clients at hotel or guest house	0.56	0.31-0.99 *
Meet clients at brothel	2.48	1.05-5.85 *
Meet clients in a vehicle	2.16	1.21-3.85 **
Forced to have sex by new or one-time client	0.48	0.21-1.12
Physically hurt by a client in last 12 months	0.44	0.20 - 0.95 *
Condom use with clients	1.00	0.50 - 1.98

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 2. Multivariate adjusted associations of FSW HIV disclosure to clients with individual and client relationship characteristics

Explanatory Variable	Adjusted Odds Ratio*	95% CI	P-value
Disclose to non-paying partners:			0.056
Do not disclose to non-paying partners	1.00		
Disclose to non-paying partners	2.73	1.10-6.81	
No non-paying partners	1.48	0.51-4.29	
Told family practiced sex work	1.59	0.82-3.07	0.167
Meet online or at hotel	0.61	0.30-1.24	0.169
Meet at brothel or in a vehicle	2.37	1.15-4.90	0.020
Forced to have sex by client	0.45	0.18-1.15	0.094
Physically hurt by a client	0.68	0.28-1.65	0.398

*Adjusted for age, education and other variables in the table

Conclusions

- These results suggest that FSW are more likely to disclose their HIV status to clients if they have more open communication patterns with clients, family and non-paying partners.
- Meeting clients in unfamiliar surroundings and a history of violence appear to be barriers to disclosure.
- Disclosure behavior was not associated with condom use with clients or ARV treatment, therefore more research is required to fully contextualize these findings, including research on male clients' perspectives and HIV status.
- These preliminary findings suggest that service delivery partners and government may be able to increase disclosure through a combination of providing a safer sex-work working environment and efforts to increase communication skills.

Contact

Cassia Wells, MD, MPH
General Preventive Medicine Resident
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
615 N Wolfe St, WB605,
Baltimore, MD, 21205
cassiawells@jhu.edu



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