

Sex Work Practice and Health Seeking Behavior among Hiv Positive Female Sex Workers in Rural Karnataka, India

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Abstract : Background: The anecdotal evidences indicate that utilization of HIV services especially in Government facilities is affected by stigma and discrimination among HIV positive female sex workers (FSWs) in Karnataka. To our knowledge, there is no quantitative study on this issue. In this study an attempt is made to examine these aspects among positive FSWs exposed to prevention programs. Methods: This is a cross-sectional quantitative survey of HIV positive FSWs in the 3 districts of northern Karnataka using a structured questionnaire. The list of HIV Positive FSWs was organized by stratification, and 607 positive FSWs were selected using a systematic random selection. The data were analyzed using both bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques. Results: Half of the sex workers (52%) are traditional (devadasi, dedicated to the temple), 22% are widowed and the mean age is 33 years. The FSWs practice sex work on an average 13 days a month with 2.3 clients per day and was in sex work for about 13 years. Almost all of them (97%) used condom with the clients they had on the last day of sex work. About 74% were ever registered in the ART center and 47% of them reported being ever on ART, of which 6% dropped out. Multivariate results support the hypothesis that the interventions addressing stigma and discrimination enabled accessing health services in the government facilities (AOR=1.37; p=0.17). Conclusions: Based on the results of the study, programs addressing stigma, discrimination and positive prevention can be implemented in places where government health services are not utilized by HIV positive FSWs. However, the study may be limited by the fact that majority of the FSWs entered into sex work through the traditional devadasi system, which may not be the case in other parts of India.

Keywords : sex work, HIV/AIDS, female sex workers, health

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