Prevalence of and factors associated with HIV, Syphilis and HSV-2 among female sex workers: findings from a national biological and behavioral survey in Tanzania

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BACKGROUND

While widely held that FSWs in Tanzania suffered a greater HIV burden than the general population (6%), national-level data on this population was unknown. This first national-level HIV Bio-Behavioral Survey provides HIV/STI prevalence and HIV-related risks among FSWs to inform policies and intervention efforts.

METHODS

A total of 1914 FSWs aged ≥18 years who reported selling sex in the last 3 months and living in 7 regions in Tanzania: Dar es Salaam (N=346), Iringa (220), Mbeya (244), Mwanza (350), Tabora (229), Shinyanga (320) and Mara (205) were recruited through respondent-driven sampling (RDS) (March-September, 2013).

The survey elicited information on HIV-related risks and participants were tested for HIV, Syphilis and Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV-2).

Population-based estimates of HIV and STI prevalence were conducted in RDSAT for each of the 7 study sites, adjusting for network size and recruitment patterns. Bivariate analyses were also conducted in RDSAT to ascertain potential factors that might be associated with HIV, Syphilis and HSV-2 infection.

RESULTS

Bivariate analyses suggest that:

• HIV infection was associated with both Syphilis and HSV-2 infection.

• Older age, greater number of paid clients, not using a condom at last sex with a paid client, and consuming alcohol during sex were associated with higher HIV prevalence across regions.

• Syphilis was positively associated with number of clients, non-use of condom with client, experience of physical violence (four regions) and HIV infection.

• While condom use at last sex with paying clients was over 80, it was under 50% with a steady partner. Among HIV-infected FSWs, condom use was significantly higher with steady partner.

CONCLUSIONS

• HIV prevalence among FSWs in the seven regions was almost five times higher than in the general population.

• Age, greater number of sexual contacts, unprotected sex with clients, alcohol consumption during sex work, and experiencing physical violence contribute significantly to the risk environment of female sex work.

• Considerable regional differences and the high HIV and Syphilis prevalence suggest the need for more locally appropriate approaches to HIV prevention for FSWs, focusing on better linkages to care and treatment and presumptive STI treatment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• The findings support the investment in the development of comprehensive programs that address HIV prevention, care, and treatment for key populations.

• Efforts to link positive individuals to care and treatment are critical and urgently needed.

• Prevention of secondary HIV transmission to clients and sex partners for FSWs deems important.

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