

Study on socio demography, behaviours and knowledge on STIs among brothel based sex workers in the district of Colombo.

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The study was carried out among 340 brothel based female commercial sex workers in the district of Colombo using an interviewer administered questionnaire. The mean age of the study sample was 31.8 years (SD 8.0 years, range 15 to 57 years). Fifty percent of the women were from outside the Colombo district. One third of the women were married. Most women have attained some reasonable education going beyond primary education the majority (95) of female sex workers entered this profession due to economical hardships. Eighty percent of women continued in the profession and had been in sex trade for more than 12 months. A statistically significant association was observed between duration of prostitution and fee per partner ($p < 0.05$). Unprotected sex was common with only 50 using condoms continuously and consistently. Around 29 of the study population had engaged in sex during menstruation. Among female sex workers, 27 use alcohol, heroin (1.2), and Ganja (0.3) currently. Unprotected sex was common among substance abusers. Pregnancy being an occupational hazard, 80 practice some form of contraception. The average number of clients per week was 10. There was a statistically significant association between condom use and fee per partner. When assessing the knowledge of STI, it was observed that most of them had heard about STI (91) and HIV (92). The STI they were able to name were gonorrhoea (55), syphilis (45), warts (37), herpes (17). Awareness on the availability of STD clinic service was poor. Only 30 of female sex workers have been exposed to condom promotion programmes. Consistent condom use among brothel based female sex workers had statistically significant ($P < 0.005$) associations with variables such as education, marital status, duration in prostitution, substance abuse, fee per partner and having regular partners. This study sample which consisted of women who started their sexual life at a younger age, with a fairly good education background and were married had a good knowledge on basic facts of STI including transmission methods of HIV infection. High risk behaviours such as inconsistent condom use, multiple partners per week, anal sex, sex during menstruation, unprotected sex for a higher fee were observed among them.