

HIV Prevention

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VALORIZATION

Valorization

The research presented in this thesis adds value to existing knowledge on the relevance of gatekeepers within the immediate environment of female sex workers (FSWs) in enhancing HIV prevention efforts. Consistent use of condoms is documented as one of the most effective strategies for prevention of sexual transmission of HIV and also as a cost effective public health approach for population level HIV prevention. The Strengthening HIV prevention for Most at Risk Populations (SHiPs for MARPs) program, a behavioural intervention for HIV prevention for key populations within which most of this research is based, is adopting some recommendations from this thesis to facilitate consistent condom use by FSWs within the country using brothel leadership.

Results reported in this thesis emphasize the increased vulnerability to HIV of brothel based female sex workers compared to their non-brothel based counterparts. It further underscores the importance of the social context surrounding sex work and its influence on the social norms and culture prevalent within sex work establishments in line with similar studies conducted in other countries in Asia and the developed world. The research described in chapters 5, 6 and 7 identifies different positive roles brothel leadership plays in improving consistent condom use by brothel based FSWs within the Nigerian context which is currently lacking in published literature. Consistent condom use with all sexual partners is necessary to reduce HIV transmission and improve the health and wellbeing of FSWs. The attitudes, beliefs and practices of brothel leaders can influence the immediate environment within which FSWs reside and consequently have impact on their adoption of consistent condom use behaviours. Involvement and participation of brothel leaders in HIV prevention programs provides social support including condom availability and access, as well as the establishment of policies supporting consistent condom use by FSWs. The resolution of conflicts and harassments and support provision to new entrants into sex work are also important benefits derived from their inclusion.

The economic consequences of HIV infection can translate into deleterious effects such as a reduction in labour supply and productivity as well as reduced economic growth. The social and economic value of this research is highlighted by its investigation of

relevant demographic and social factors influencing the vulnerability of female sex workers to HIV/AIDS. Identifying these factors provides a platform to better understand how they can be addressed within current programs. An important economic milestone to be achieved by this research is a reduction in the individual health expenditure for the female sex work population. This also extends to the health expenditure for the sexual networks of FSWs and the wider society who are also indirectly affected.

The findings described in this thesis conforms with existing research showing that condom use behaviour is influenced by a continuous interplay between individual and environmental factors. It is important that HIV prevention programs focusing on improving condom use behaviours should address these multiple levels of influence. The additional costs to be incurred by the inclusion of gatekeepers to HIV prevention interventions is minimal and any drawbacks identified is outweighed by the added value. Prevention is cost effective, and the additional costs incurred with the inclusion of brothel leadership into prevention programmes can be submerged within current peer and community mediated approaches without significantly increasing the funding amount.

Our findings suggest a complementary research perspective addressing and evaluating the inclusion of brothel leaderships' influence on consistent condom use with different FSW sexual partner types especially their non-paying partners. This study also calls for the creation of consistent condom use awareness amongst clients and non-paying sexual partners of female sex workers towards improving their knowledge and use of condoms.

This study is the first of its kind in Nigeria documented in peer-reviewed publications and brings to the fore the paucity of data on environmental factors influencing FSW sexual health in the country. Additional studies further investigating the effect of both individual and environmental (i.e. support from gatekeepers) factors are needed to inform the design and implementation of future HIV prevention interventions targeting condom use behaviours of female sex workers. Such studies should involve policy

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makers, development agencies, prevention experts, FSWs and gate keepers to ensure that the results are acceptable to all parties involved. The documentation of more studies will support in-country guideline improvement and can be used to influence funding priorities and future implementation efforts.

This research targets government policy makers, the ministry of health, program implementers and relevant regulatory and funding mechanisms including bilateral donors, the United Nations and other multilateral donors. It has practical implications for public health policy in HIV prevention in the country. The revision of the current guidelines for the implementation of HIV prevention interventions for female sex workers in the country should take into account the results of this research. The existing guideline developed in 2014 merely identifies gatekeepers as entry points into sex work establishments during the start off of interventions. Gate keepers within the immediate environment of FSWs are influential and our findings recommend their active participation as facilitators and mediators within interventions addressing condom use behaviour. Gatekeepers can set up and enforce consistent condom use policies within their establishments and make it mandatory for both FSWs and their clients. It is important that gatekeepers are made aware of their unique role in HIV prevention efforts and are supported to contribute to influencing community norms and practices. Concerted efforts should be made by program managers and health agencies to prioritize gate keeper inclusion in the implementation of health interventions for sex workers and other key populations at risk of HIV infection.