

Condom Negotiation During Transactional Sexual Exchanges.

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BACKGROUND

- Transactional sex refers to selling, trading or purchasing sex in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other items [1] and trading sex has been associated with increased risk of STI and HIV.
- Most studies of transactional sexual behaviors have been conducted in developing countries or in major metropolitan cities.
- Therefore, our understanding of protective health behaviors including condom use among women and men engaging in transactional sex in the Midwestern United States is quite limited.
- In order to create effective STI control programs, we must first understand the context of disease acquisition; especially any factor that could be moderated by preventive health behaviors.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish behavioral and socio-cultural risk factors correlated with STI in the study population.
- Examine sources of condom knowledge, attitudes, acquisition, and use among women engaging in transactional sex and their male sexual partners.

METHODS

- Incentivized snowball sampling was used to recruit women and men engaging in transactional sex
- “Seeds” were women recently arrested for prostitution recruited from the Marion County Community Court (Indiana)
- Participants collected a self-administered specimen for STI testing, completed a semi-structured interview, and received a \$20 incentive; Each female participant was able to recruit 3 women and 3 men in her social network with histories of incarceration, substance abuse, or commercial sex work and was paid \$10 for each referral who participated.
- Open-ended questions about condoms, included, “What do you know about condoms?” and “In what situations would you (would you not) use condoms?”
- Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using qualitative analytic strategies.

RESULTS

- The sample included 45 participants 19-65 years old (mean=37).
- Nearly all of the participants (40/45) had recently exchanged sex for money or drugs.
- Seventeen participants (15 women and 2 men) tested positive for at least one STI.
- Motivation and ability to negotiate condoms varied by gender with women more consistently reporting desire to use condoms but overall, reported condom use was low.
Interviewer: “How easy was it for you to use condoms with your tricks?”
Participant: “Not easy at all because a lot of them don’t want to. They say putting a condom on during head makes it so they can’t get off as easy. But, some of the men do, because they want to be safe too.”
- Most participants reported negative some condom associations.
“I know that condoms can’t always protect you from AIDS and other STDs because they either come off, bust, or can get stuck inside you.”
- However all acknowledged, *“It’s a little bit safer than going raw.”*

CONDOM USE BY WOMEN was impacted by

- **Male partner desire to use condoms**
“I try to use condoms as much as possible but there’s times when you can’t use anything. You don’t have it, they don’t have it and the money’s there.”
- **Drug and alcohol use**
“Women who have drug habits are- its really different for women than it is men. I don’t know why. Men can still hold down jobs. Women for some reason, we can’t, you know. It debilitates us to where, we’ll just do what we have to do to get it.”
- **Type of sex act**
Condoms, when used, were mainly used during penetrative intercourse but not oral sex.
“It is uncomfortable for me as well [to use condoms during oral sex.] Very rarely do I use them for oral sex which is probably 85%-90% of my business when I’m out there. It’s just quick and easy, you know what I mean?”
- **Increased compensation for non-use**
“Sometimes they say ‘Let me give you extra \$20 to do it without a condom.’ but I tell them ‘No, it ain’t that serious.’ (You never did it once without a condom?) No, never once! That can cost my whole life or something.”
- **Perceived likelihood of acquiring an STI from a particular partner**
“Depends on who it is. A lot of times I use a condom when I give the blow job because some guys are really nasty and I’m real picky...So I guess it just depends on their appearance if I use a condom or something or give a blow job.”

CONDOM USE BY MEN was motivated by

- **Physical pleasure**
“They hamper the sensation. Sex is not as enjoyable with them on for me.”
“It’s like taking a shower with a raincoat on, I don’t like them.”
- **Previous negative experience with condoms**
“I just know they look like they ain’t safe because when I’d be fucking my girl I got now, it breaks”
- **Belief that their female partner was infected with a STI**
“Well, if I knew she had AIDS, put it that way, if I knew she had AIDS, it’s definitely be, condoms would be used.”
- **Type of relationship**
“Uh, yeah, if it’s a stranger I’ll put one on.”

DISCUSSION

- The respondents in this sample were disproportionately infected with STI.
- Motivation and ability to negotiate condoms varied by gender but overall, reported condom use was low.
- Interventions to increase condom use among sex workers and clients need to recognize gender-specific motivations.
- Increased understanding of the factors motivating condom use may improve STI control efforts for this vulnerable and marginalized population.

LIMITATIONS

- These pilot data are limited by sample size and by potential recall bias.
- Future studies will address these limitations by expanding the sample and focusing on event-level behavioral determinants.

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REFERENCES

1. Bobashev, G.V., et al., *Transactional sex among men and women in the south at high risk for HIV and other STIs.* Journal of Urban Health, 2009. **86 Suppl 1**: p. 32-47.