

Investigating STI risk within the social environment of exotic dance clubs in Baltimore, Maryland

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Background

Transactional sex (i.e., selling sex for money or drugs) and drug use are associated with increased risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Despite evidence of high rates of transactional sex and illicit drug use in exotic dance clubs (EDCs), dancers are an understudied STI-risk population.

Social support and other social factors may mitigate STI risk behavior among key STI-risk populations.

The objective of this analysis was to investigate the association between social environmental factors of EDCs and STI risk behavior among exotic dancers.

Methods

Anonymous surveys were administered across 26 EDCs to dancers (n=180) and staff (n=118) in Baltimore City and County in the summer of 2013.

Surveys measured perceptions of the EDC economic, drug, policy, and social risk environments in 65 likert-scale items.

Individual STI risk behaviors of dancers in the club included: selling vaginal, oral, or anal sex (direct risks); and using heroin, crack, or pills, e.g., Adderall, Percocet, OxyContin (indirect risks)

Social environment risk measures included: financial support; emotional support; competition between dancers; and dancers' feelings of safety in EDCs.

Using chi-square tests, we compared the perception of risk behaviors and social environment reported by dancers vs. other staff and estimated associations between social environment characteristics and STI risk behaviors.

Results

Table 1. Participant demographics, social environment characteristics, and sexual risk behaviors reported by EDC staff at 26 EDCs in Baltimore, MD (n=298)

Characteristic	Dancer (n=180)	Non-Dancer (n=118)	P-value ^c
<i>Participant demographics</i>			
	n (%)	n (%)	
Age (yrs), mean (range)	25 (18-47)	36 (21-76)	0.000
Sex, female	180 (100.0)	37 (31.4)	0.000
Time worked in clubs (yrs), mean (range)	5.7 (0.3-30.0)	8.7 (0.3-43.0)	0.000
<i>Social environment characteristics</i>			
Financial support ^a	131 (72.8)	79 (70.5)	0.678
Emotional support ^b	155 (86.6)	108 (96.4)	0.006
Competition between dancers	138 (76.7)	88 (75.2)	0.774
Dancers feel safe in the club	161 (89.4)	113 (95.8)	0.050
<i>Sexual risk behaviors occurring in the club</i>			
Dancers sell vaginal, oral, or anal sex	47 (27.3)	18 (15.7)	0.021
Dancers use heroin, crack, or pills	97 (53.9)	47 (39.8)	0.018

^athere are people who work in this club that dancers could borrow \$25 from

^bif a dancer had a personal problem they have at least one friend she works with that she could really talk to about it

^cPearson chi-square test excluding missing item responses, significant at alpha=0.05 indicated in bold

Table 2. Proportion of reported social environment characteristics and sexual risk behavior at 26 exotic dance clubs in Baltimore, MD (n=298)

Characteristic	Dancers Sell Sex			Dancers Use Drugs		
	Yes	No	P-value ^c	Yes	No	P-value ^c
Financial support ^a	70.8	71.6	0.902	75.0	68.9	0.248
Emotional support ^b	89.1	91.3	0.589	93.1	87.8	0.125
Competition between dancers	87.7	72.1	0.010	86.1	66.7	0.000
Dancers feel safe in the club	84.6	95.1	0.005	91.0	92.9	0.550

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^bif a dancer had a personal problem they have at least one friend she works with that she could really talk to about it

^cPearson chi-square test excluding missing item responses, significant at alpha=0.05 indicated in bold

Conclusions

Both dancers and staff reported high levels of perceived financial support, emotional support, and safety among dancers. Concurrently, the majority of participants reported competition between dancers.

Dancers may have different perceptions of club activities and/or they may be more willing to report risky behaviors compared to other staff (e.g., bartenders, managers).

Presence of support in the club did not appear to be associated with selling sex or using drugs. Perceptions of competition and safety may be associated with sexual and drug risk behaviors among dancers.

Given the complexity of the social environment, these associations should be further investigated.

Methods used to capture the risk environment of EDCs may be applicable to other settings where drug and sex-related risk behaviors occur.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful for the support of the Baltimore City Health Department, recruitment and data collection by the STILETTO study team, and the dancers and staff who participated in the study.

This study was supported by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA R21 DA033855; PI Sherman) and the Johns Hopkins Center for AIDS Research (JHU CFAR; NIAID 1P30AI094189; PI Chaisson). M.L. Reilly was supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID T32 AI050056-12).

