The Health Needs of Sex Workers: A Descriptive Study

Chuck Cloniger, FNP¹ & Deborah Cohan, M.D.²

¹San Francisco Department of Public Health
²UCSF Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology
St. James Infirmary

- History
  - COYOTE, EDA
  - San Francisco DPH STD Unit
- Clinic goals
- Services offered
- Recruitment
  - Outreach
  - Pre-Trial Diversion
What Is Sex Work?

“Provision of sexual services or performances by one person (prostitute or sex worker) for which a second person (client or observer) provides money or other markers of economic value”

Psychosocial Intake

- Convenience sample
  - n=70
- Sept 1999-May 2000
- Peer Intake Counselors
- Demographics, Work history
- Prior health-care access, Drug Use History
- Domestic and Occupational Violence
Demographics

- **Gender**
  - 71% women, 20% men, 8% transgender

- **Age**
  - Mean 34 years (range 18-76)

- **Sexual orientation**
  - 36% bisexual, 33% straight, 22% gay/lesbian

- **Ethnicity**
  - 69% Caucasian, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 18% Latino, African-American, and other
Demographics

- **Education**
  - 13% some graduate school or degree
  - 55% some college or degree
  - 25% high school

- **Housing**
  - 84% stable housing
  - 16% unstable housing/homeless

- **Income**
  - 54% under $10,000
  - 24% $10-20,000
  - 11% $20-30,000
63% pap within past year
Last visit to provider
  ▶ 60% within 6 mos
  ▶ 25% within 1 year
Prior Health Care Access

- Disclosure to provider
  - 54% never, 20% always, 20% sometimes

- Reasons for not disclosing
  - 46% “afraid of disapproval”
  - 54% “didn’t think relevant”

- Provider’s reaction
  - 59% “fine”, 42% “mixed” or “negative”
Violence

- 46% past or current Domestic Violence
- 56% past or current Sex Work Violence
- Perpetrators
  - Customer 79%
  - Employer 56%
  - Police 36%
- 8% cases reported to police
Drug Use

- Overall prevalence 56%
- 20% cocaine/crack
- 16% amphetamines
- 9% heroin

- 13% IVDU
  - 44% of IVDU share needles/works

- 24% drug treatment in past
Medical Intake

- Convenience sample
  - n=146
- June 1999-May 2000
- 317 clinical encounters
  - Mean visits per client = 2.2
- Chief complaint, Sexual history
- Physical exam, Laboratory tests
### Sexual History

#### Mean # Partners in Past Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intimate Partners</th>
<th>Non-Intimate Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male n=46</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female n=253</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender n=18</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sexual History

- 7% current IVDU partner
- 47% past IVDU partner
Condom Use

- Anal receptive
- Anal insertive
- Vaginal
- Perform fellatio

Bar chart showing condom use frequency: always, some, never.
Condom Use during Last Sex

- **Main partner**
  - 67.9% no condom
  - 29.8% condom
  - 2.4% condom breakage

- **Non-intimate partner**
  - 29.2% no condom
  - 66.7% condom
  - 4.2% condom breakage
Health Care Needs

- STI prevalence
  - Chlamydia 0.9%
    - Jail Chlamydia Study, n=604 women
    - 11% among sex workers vs. 9% non-sex workers (p>0.05)
  - Gonorrhea 0.8%
- Culture neg PID 0.8% (2/253)
- Symptomatic UTI 2.8% (7/253)
Health Care Needs

- Primary care visits 40% (n=317)
- Mental health requests 36% (n=70)
- Tobacco Use 36% (n=70)
Study Limitations

- Self-reported behavior
- Selection bias
  - Municipal STI clinic
  - Non-random recruitment
  - Near Hall of Justice
  - Selective screening for STI’s
Conclusions

- Diversity in sex worker community
- High prevalence of workplace violence
- High prevalence of drug use
- Risky behavior with intimate partners
- Health problems broader than just STI’s
- Importance of community involvement
Acknowledgements

- Jeff Klausner, MD, MPH
- San Francisco Dept of Public Health, STD Prevention and Control Division
- Margo St. James, COYOTE
- Johanna Breyer, EDA
- St. James Infirmary volunteers