

Mental health mediates violence and condom use among women in sex work with intimate partners in Karnataka, India

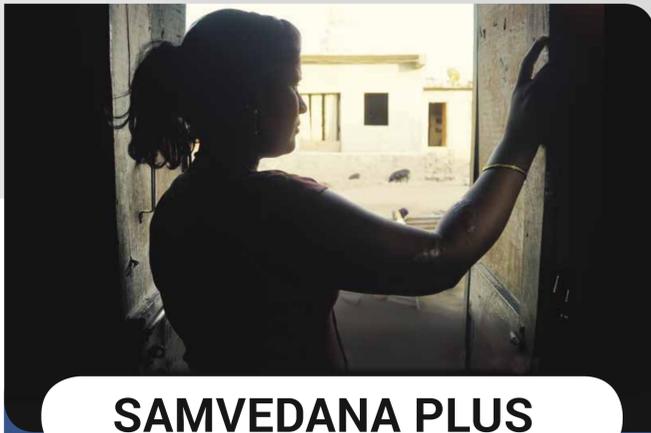
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INTRODUCTION

Studies have examined the association between violence and condom use, and subsequently between violence and poor mental health status. Limited attempts have been made to understand the relationship between poor mental health and elevated risk for HIV. This study examined the relationship between forms of violence and the likelihood of condom use, as a measure of HIV risk, among female sex workers in an intimate relationship. It used data from Samvedana Plus, an intervention to reduce violence and increase condom use in the intimate relationships of female sex workers.



SAMVEDANA PLUS

Samvedana Plus organises female sex workers (FSWs) into collectives, strengthens the capacities of sex worker community based organisation (CBO), provides individual and couple counselling to FSWs and their partners and engages with local communities. The programme intervenes with men who are violent, women who face abuse and the wider society to:

- change disempowering gender norms
- reduce violence
- increase condom use among sex workers in their intimate partnerships

Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) is implementing Samvedana Plus, with 800 female sex workers and their intimate partners, in partnership with Chaitanya AIDS Tadehattuwa Mahila Sangha (CATMS), a community based organisation (CBO) of sex workers in northern Karnataka, India. This programme runs from 2015 to 2017 with support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF), What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls consortium and University of Manitoba, Canada. Within the DFID-funded STRIVE consortium, KHPT and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) are evaluating the impact of Samvedana Plus on violence and condom use in sex-workers' intimate relationships.



METHODS

A cross-sectional quantitative study, it was conducted in June 2014 in Jhamkhandi and Mudhol talukas of Bagalkot district in northern Karnataka, India. Data was collected from 620 FSWs, aged 18 years and above, who reported a relationship with an IP.

The analysis measured poor mental health as "ever thought of ending their life". Chi-square test determined the association between the experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) and mental health, and subsequently between mental health and condom use with a partner.

The Institutional Ethics Committee, St. John's Medical College and Hospital, Bangalore, India and the Intervention Research Ethics Committee, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the United Kingdom approved the study. Witnessed oral informed consent was obtained individually, before data collection.

RESULTS

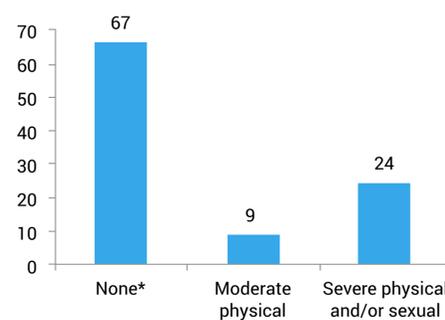
The mean age of the respondents was 35 years. Majority of the respondents were non-literate (90%), devadasi (96%) and had children (86%). Seventy seven per cent of study participants solicited clients at home, followed by a public place (15%) and through phone/others (8%). On an average, sex workers had three clients in a week.

Poor mental health was found to be significantly associated with low condom use among the sex workers.

a) Experience of intimate partner violence and mental health condition

- About 24% of the FSWs experienced severe physical and/or sexual violence
- Another 9% experienced moderate physical violence from their IPs in the past six months before the survey

Figure 1: Percentage of FSWs reported experiencing different forms of violence from their IPs in the last six months



* Also includes 18% FSWs who experienced only emotional violence

- Overall, 9% of the FSWs reported poor mental health as measured as "ever thought of ending their life."

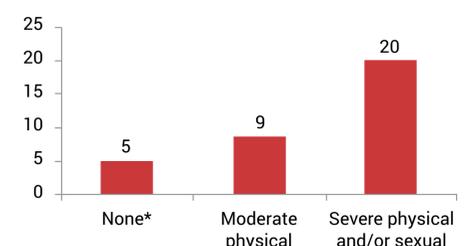
CONCLUSION

The study found that intimate partner violence adversely impacts mental health and condom use behaviour among female sex workers. Intervention approaches to reduce violence among sex workers must also include components to address the consequences of violence on their mental health.

b) Association between intimate partner violence and mental health condition

- FSWs experiencing violence from their IPs in the past six months reported poor mental health condition (20%) as compared to those who reported moderate (9%) or no violence (5%)

Figure 2: Percentage of FSWs by poor mental health condition* according to type of violence experienced from their IPs in the last six months

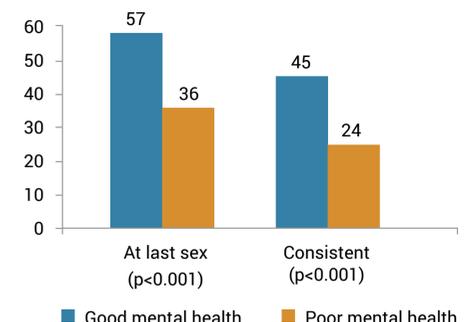


* Ever thought of ending their life

c) Association between mental health and condom use

- FSWs with poor mental health were less likely to use a condom at last sex (36% vs 57%; $p < 0.001$) and consistently in every sexual activity (24% vs. 45%; $p < 0.001$) with their IPs compared to FSWs with a good mental health condition

Figure 3: Percentage of FSWs who used condoms at last sex and consistently at every sex with their IPs by their mental health condition



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Shreya Jain, 129 Degrees Design Studio, designed the poster.

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