

HIV, sexually transmitted infections and sexual practices among male sex workers attending a sexual health clinic in Melbourne, Australia, 2010-2018

Authors:

Turek EM^{1,2}, Fairley CK^{1,2}, Tabesh M^{1,2}, Phillips TR^{1,2}, Bradshaw CS^{1,2}, Rodriguez E¹, Chow EPF^{1,2,3}

¹ Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, Alfred Health, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

² Central Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

³ Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

Background:

There are limited data on HIV/STI positivity and sexual practices among male sex workers both globally, and particularly in Australia. This study aimed to explore demographic characteristics, sexual practices and HIV/STI positivity among male sex workers (MSW) attending a sexual health clinic in Melbourne.

Methods:

We analysed computerised medical records of all first-visit consultations with males aged ≥ 18 years who self-identified as current sex workers and attended the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC) between 2010 and 2018. Demographic data, sexual behaviour data and laboratory results for HIV, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhoea were collected as part of routine clinical care at MSHC.

Results:

Of the 190 MSW included in the analysis, the median age was 28 years (interquartile range [IQR]: 23 to 30), 30.4% (52/171) reported having condomless penile-anal sex with their clients, and 59.6% (102/171) reported having condomless penile-oral sex with their clients since their last STI screening. Most (85.6%) male sex workers had non-commercial sexual partners, including 56.5% with male partners only, 30.6% with female partners only and 12.9% with both. About half of male sex workers used condoms consistently with non-commercial sexual partners (regardless of partner gender). The positivity for HIV was 1.7% (95%CI: 0.0-5.0%), syphilis was 6.1% (95%CI: 2.6-10.5%), chlamydia was 9.6% (95%CI: 5.6-14.9%) and gonorrhoea was 10.8% (95%CI: 5.2-27.4%). MSW who exclusively had sex with females had a lower any HIV/STI positivity (0%) compared to MSW who had sex with males (15.7%) ($p=0.013$).

Conclusion:

Male sex workers fall into two groups; those had male clients and/or non-commercial partners who have a relatively high HIV/STI positivity and those who only had female partners or clients whose HIV/STI positivity is low. Both have a high proportion of condomless sex with clients and non-commercial sexual partners. Strategies to increase condom use during sex work are needed.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

E.P.F.C. is supported by an Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant (GNT1172873). C.K.F. and C.S.B. are supported by Australian NHMRC Leadership Investigator Grants

(GNT1172900 and GNT1173361, respectively). All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.