



SEX WORKERS OFFERED MORE MONEY FOR SEX WITHOUT CONDOMS

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- The popular view of commercial sex workers is that they are responsible for much of the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Contrary to this view, previous research has shown that commercial sex workers often practice safer sex with their clients. However, commercial sex at the street level is naturally risky, with limited opportunity to negotiate the terms of the transaction.
- The role that clients of commercial sex workers play in sexual risk-taking and related decision-making has not been well researched. Researchers conducted a study to learn more about decision-making related to condom use in the context of commercial sex. They wanted to know how common it was for commercial sex workers to be offered and to accept financial incentives in exchange for unprotected sex. They also wanted to learn more about the characteristics of commercial sex workers who were offered more money to have sex without a condom.
- The study involved participants in the Vancouver Injection Drug Users Study who reported selling sex between June 2001 and December 2005.

FINDINGS

- Of the 232 commercial sex workers in the study (197 female and 35 male), 74% reported having been offered more money for sex without a condom, and 31% agreed to unprotected sex in exchange for more money.
- The finding that nearly three-quarters of commercial sex workers were reportedly offered more money to have unprotected sex suggests that client behaviour contributes significantly to the risk behaviour of commercial sex workers.
- The study also revealed that female commercial sex workers were more than twice as likely as male commercial sex workers to be offered more money to have sex without a condom.
- Commercial sex workers who were offered more money for unprotected sex were also more likely to have higher intensity addictions, being more likely to inject speedballs (a mix of heroin and cocaine), to inject heroin, and to smoke crack cocaine on a daily basis.

QUICK FACT

*CLIENT BEHAVIOUR CONTRIBUTES
SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE RISK
BEHAVIOUR OF COMMERCIAL SEX
WORKERS.*

IMPLICATIONS

- The results of the study suggest that some buyers of sex exploit the most vulnerable sex workers by using financial incentives to influence decision-making in sexual transactions.
- Given the power dynamic evident in this study, it is clear that clients should not only be included in prevention strategies, but should be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their role in the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections transmission.

Johnston CL, Callon C, Li K, Wood E, Kerr T. **Offer of financial incentives for unprotected sex in the context of sex work.** *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 2010; 29(2): 144-149.

