

**A Rapid Situation Assessment of Sexual Risk Behaviour
and Substance Use Among Sex Workers and their
Clients in Chennai (Madras), South India**



**World Health Organization
MSD/MER**

**A Rapid Situation Assessment of Sexual Risk Behaviour
and Substance use in Sex Workers and Clients of Sex
Workers in Chennai (Madras), south India**

**Final Draft submitted to
World Health Organization, Geneva**

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Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the sex workers, clients of sex workers, drug injectors who have shared their experiences. This work was sponsored by a grant from the World Health Organization, Geneva and executed on behalf of SAHAI Trust, Chennai, India by a team of researchers. We are grateful to the members of the Technical Advisory Committee for their valuable comments. We are grateful to the staff of SAHAI Trust who helped us in many ways during the rapid assessment. Dr. Mohan Gupte, Director of National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai, India and Dr. Manorama Pinagapany of CHES, Chennai, India guided the research team with valuable inputs. A number of key informants provided valuable information for this study and we thank each one of them.

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A Rapid Situation Assessment of Sexual Risk Behaviour and Substance use in Sex Workers and Clients of Sex Workers in Chennai (Madras), south India

Abstract

Objectives: To describe the relationship between substance use and high-risk sexual behaviour, among sex workers and their clients and to identify key features of the social, cultural and structural context, which influence sexual behaviour, substance use and sexual risk taking in order to develop appropriate interventions targeting substance use and sexual risk behaviour to minimize the adverse health consequences.

Methods: The Rapid Assessment and Response Guide on Psychoactive Substance Use and Sexual Risk Behaviour (SEX-RAR) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva was utilized in this study. Apart from ethnographic mapping of sex work places and observation, 27 key informant (health providers, law enforcement persons, sex workers using drugs/alcohol, brothel owners) interviews and 16 focus groups with drug/alcohol using sex workers and their clients were conducted. Furthermore, using a structured survey 203 drug/alcohol using sex workers and 100 clients were interviewed.

Findings: The female sex workers were in the age group of 15 to 55 and the majority of them were between the ages of 25-35. Majority of the sex workers were poor, had low socio-economic background, often deserted by their husbands, with children and in the profession to sustain their families' lives. Drug and/or alcohol related intoxication and the aggressive behaviour were the most important factors influencing safer negotiations for condom use. The male injecting drug users selling sex were reluctant to use condoms, expressed embarrassment and fear that use of condoms would prevent clients preferring them. Some settings like wine shops and brothels influenced sexual behaviour and risk. Use of condoms by sex workers was less with regular sexual partners, steady partners and pimps.

Conclusion: The norms relating to drug/alcohol use and sexual behaviour, in particular, aggressive behaviour under the influence of intoxicants must be addressed. There is an urgent need to establish interventions in settings like wine shops and brothels that

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