

Environmental health and safety of Chinese sex workers: A cross-sectional study

Eleanor A. Holroyd^{a,*}, William C.W. Wong^{b,1},
Sister Ann Gray^{c,2}, Davina C. Ling^{d,3}

^a*Professor of Asian and Gender Nursing, Head of Division of Nursing and Midwifery, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia*

^b*Department of Community and Family Medicine, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Room 408, School of Public Health, Prince of Wales Hospital, Shatin, Hong Kong, China*

^c*Action for Reach Out, P.O. Box 98108, TST Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China*

^d*Department of Economics, California State University, Fullerton, 800 N. State College Boulevard, Fullerton, CA 92834, USA*

Received 4 November 2005; received in revised form 21 April 2006; accepted 26 April 2006

Abstract

Aim: This paper presents a Hong Kong (HK) data on the effect that sex work has on women's environmental health and safety. An outreach role that highlights safety and human rights is suggested for nurses working with female sex workers (FSWs) as clients.

Background: In HK it was estimated that there were at least 200,000 FSWs in 2002 and the total population involved as workers, support staff, clients and partners of the clients exceeded half a million in a city of 6.8 million people. Despite these numbers, both locally and internationally there are very limited outreach nursing services that address the FSW's occupational health needs.

Method: A cross-sectional survey, was undertaken over a 5 month period commencing in October 2003. A validated Chinese version of the World Health Organisation Quality of Life Measure was administered to a convenience sample of 89 female street sex workers. A focus group interview was later conducted to gain contextual information.

Results: The predominantly mainland Chinese FSWs had a mean age of 36.1 years. These women tended to be less educated and older than the general population of FSWs. They worked long hours with most of their income sent back home to China. Many lived in sub-optimal conditions and risked being abused while at work. The women scored significantly lower in the environmental domains when compared to the general female population.

Conclusion: Highlighted is the critical importance of developing a new role, both international and within the Asian region, for community nurses working in an outreach capacity. This role should be visible, affordable and accessible, for at risk populations such as FSWs. The primary focus of the new role would be to establish a close working relationship between sex workers, sex industry owner/operators, health agencies and local authorities. Risk awareness

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 27701065; fax: +852 27701201.

E-mail addresses: eholryd@cuhk.edu.hk, eleanor.holroyd@rmit.edu.ac (E.A. Holroyd), cwwong@cuhk.edu.hk (W.C.W. Wong), afro@iohk.com (S. Ann Gray), dling@fullerton.edu (D.C. Ling).

¹Tel.: +852 22528772; fax: +852 26063791.

²Tel.: +852 27701065; fax: +852 27701201.

³Tel.: +1 714 278 8216; fax: +1 714 278 3097.

programs developed and conducted by community nurses should embrace the complexity of occupational health issues. Such programs would also have the benefit of affirming the health rights of sex workers and public health.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Sex workers; Occupational health; Chinese

What is already known about the topic?

- Environmental and occupational health of sex workers has been largely ignored in the international literature.
- Nursing interventions for female sex workers (FSWs) occupational health that exist have been unsuccessful because they fail to address the socioeconomic context of FSW's lives and take into account the multiplicity of their health concerns.
- In HK, the role of nurses for these clients is minimal despite increasing numbers, this is part due to the stigma associated with the industry.

What this study adds

- Provides first time assessment data on the occupational health of HK FSWs including working hours, risk of rape, robbery, verbal and physical assault.
- A socio cultural context of community outreach nursing for vulnerable populations which focuses on the centrality of a human rights basis from which to address service provision.

1. Introduction

Sex work is characterized by a “complex organizational structure” (Davis, 1993, p.5) and a multitude of associated health, occupational, legal, economic and political implications. Furthermore, migration for sex work is an increasing worldwide phenomena, yet hard to measure statistically. This is particularly so given the lack of documentation of what in most countries is regarded as an outlawed and underground activity, and the multitude of activities world wide that constitute sex work (Kempadoo and Doesema, 1998). In Hong Kong (HK), it was estimated that there were at least 200,000 female sex workers (FSWs) in 2002 (Chan et al., 2002) and the total population involved as workers, supporting staff and partners of the male clients exceeded half a million in a city of 6.8 million people. This is further fuelled by closer integration and high volume of cross-border travel between China and HK in the recent years (Abdullah, 1996; Lau and Thomas, 2001). In recent years there has been a considerable rise in the number of Mainland Chinese FSW. For example, in 2001 there

were 3057 mainland Chinese arrested on suspicion of engaging in prostitution and in 2002, there were 8455 arrested similarly (Human Rights Law Review, 2003).

2. Background

Previously studies have concentrated on sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates and HIV prevention, objectifying sex workers as reservoirs if not ‘vectors’ for the transmission of STDs with few personal negotiating abilities. The WHO advised that successful interventions prevent HIV infection associated with prostitution “...have been most effective where prostitutes are empowered to determine their working conditions” (Global Programme on AIDS and Program on STD, 1989). Arguments for and against the work place support of sex workers are abundant in the literature. Instead of regarding women as being forced or lured into prostitution, pro-sex work campaigners argue that sex work should be treated as an occupation deserving occupational safety (Pateman, 1998).

The international literature notes that prostitutes do not play a decisive role in the spread of disease. Significant recommendations being that all research and interventions should directly address the socio-economic context of FSW's lives and take into account the multiplicity of their health concerns. In HK, sex work and the social processes behind it have largely been ignored or overlooked. The visible face to the public has however been that of media reports of the increasing number of police raids on mainland women who enter HK illegally to engage in this industry (Lee and So, 2002; Chan, 2003).

The context of economic necessity and illegality of sex work renders (migrating) sex workers extremely vulnerable to public stigma, occupational injury and harassment. This in turn has been postulated to violate their human rights in numbers of ways. Weinberg et al. (1999) recently compared working routines of FSWs in the streets of San Francisco. Among the findings were street FSWs were more likely to have a regular work schedule, work more days per week, see more clients, spend less time with their clients, and earn more when compared with FSW employed in other establishments.

In HK however, only 12 studies that have focused exclusively on FSW (Chan, et al., 1999; Wong et al., 1994; Lau et al., 2002, 2003; Lee and Shi, 2001; Lau and Wong, 2001, 2002; Abdullah et al., 2000; Lau and Siah,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1077818>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1077818>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)