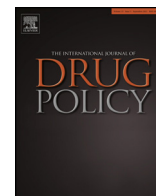




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Research paper

Police sexual coercion and its association with risky sex work and substance use behaviors among female sex workers in St. Petersburg and Orenburg, Russia



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ABSTRACT

Background: Extensive research documents that female sex workers (FSWs) in Russia are very vulnerable to abuses from police, including police sexual coercion. However, despite qualitative data suggesting abusive policing practices are more likely for FSWs contending with substance abuse issues and risky sex work contexts, there is a paucity of quantitative study evaluating these associations specifically in terms of police sexual coercion. Such research is needed to guide structural interventions to improve health and safety for FSWs in Russia and globally.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence of police sexual coercion among FSWs from two Russian cities, St. Petersburg and Orenburg, and to determine whether riskier sex work behaviors and contexts and substance use behaviors, including both IDU and risky alcohol use, are associated with increased risk for sexual coercion from police.

Method: FSWs in St. Petersburg and Orenburg were recruited via time-location and convenience sampling and completed structured surveys on demographics (age, education), sex work risks (e.g., violence during sex work) and substance use. Logistic regression analyses assessed associations of substance use and risky sex work with police sexual coercion, adjusting for demographics.

Results: Participants ($N=896$) were aged 15 and older (94% were 20+ years). Most (69%) reported past year binge alcohol use, and 48% reported IDU the day before. Half (56%) reported 4+ clients per day. Rape during sex work ever was reported by 64%. Police sexual coercion in the past 12 months was reported by 38%. In the multivariate model, both current IDU (AOR=2.09, CI=1.45–3.02) and past year binge alcohol use (AOR=1.46, CI=1.03–2.07) were associated with police sexual coercion, as was selling sex on the street (not in venues) (AOR=7.81, CI=4.53–13.48) and rape during sex work (AOR=2.04, CI=1.43–2.92).

Conclusion: Current findings document the substantial role police sexual violence plays in the lives of FSWs in Russia. These findings also highlight heightened vulnerability to such violence among self-managed and substance abusing FSWs in this context. Structural interventions addressing police violence against FSWs may be useful to improve the health and safety of this population.

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Introduction

Sex work in Russia is linked to a number of health and human rights concerns including drug use, organized crime, violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS (Aral & St. Lawrence, 2002; Aral, St. Lawrence, Dyatlov, & Kozlov, 2005; Aral et al., 2003; Crago,

Rakhmetova, Karadafov, Islamova, & Maslova, 2008; Decker et al., 2012; Hughes, 2002; Stachowiak et al., 2005). Sex work is not legal in the country, and is subject to administrative fine (up to approximately 2000 rubles or US\$60) though not imprisonment (“Code of Russian Federation on administrative offenses, Article 6.11.”). Studies document a highly structured social organization of sex work in Russia, with different venues (e.g., street, hotel, brothel, etc.), time FSWs work (hours per day and days per week; intermittent), positions and functions that make up the social organization and control of FSWs (pimps, guards, drivers,

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police, etc.), and level of power and control experienced by FSWs (Aral & St. Lawrence, 2002; Aral et al., 2003, 2005; Stachowiak et al., 2005). These factors intersect and vary from city to city and over time in Russia, affecting FSWs' health and safety in a dynamic fashion (Aral & St. Lawrence, 2002; Aral et al., 2003, 2005; Smolenskaya, Yakovleva, Kasumov, & Gheorgitsa, 2004; USAID/Stellit, 2007). Nonetheless, across contexts, controlling and abusive policing practices are documented as a major concern for FSWs in the country (Aral & St. Lawrence, 2002; Aral et al., 2003, 2005; Crago et al., 2008; Decker et al., 2012). This study seeks to examine one important aspect of police abuse of FSWs, police sexual coercion, and its association with risky sex work and substance use.

While police abuses are widespread and well documented in Russia, FSWs are particularly vulnerable to such abuse, particularly in the form of sexual coercion (Aral & St. Lawrence, 2002; Aral et al., 2003, 2005; Crago et al., 2008; Decker et al., 2012). Police in the country exploit the illegal nature of sex work, demanding sex for free from FSWs in lieu of paying a fine upon being arrested or in exchange for leniency towards FSWs and their pimps (Aral et al., 2003; Decker et al., 2012; Stachowiak et al., 2005). Such demand for free sex is sometimes viewed as an expected sexual service for militia or police, and in the FSW context is known as "subbotnik" (Aral et al., 2003; Stachowiak et al., 2005). In the USSR the word "subbotnik" meant a free labor performed at leisure time for the benefit of society; however, by late Soviet times, it was regarded as an inevitable and unpleasant duty. In a qualitative study of 32 street-based FSWs in Moscow (Stachowiak et al., 2005), women who reported experiencing subbotnik describe being treated well by the police, such as being provided dinner or time to rest and using condoms. However, other research indicates that subbotnik is generally required of, and sometimes used to define, the FSWs who are of lowest status (Aral et al., 2003).

Such mistreatment of FSWs by police is a characteristic of the nature of police treatment of FSWs and other groups engaging in illicit behavior, such as people who inject drugs (PWID), in the context of Russia and other former Soviet states (Crago et al., 2008; Kon, 1997; Rhodes, Simić, Baroš, Platt, & Žikić, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2012). Recent quantitative research with a small sample of FSWs in Moscow found subbotnik to be common, reported by 37%, and associated with current STI/HIV prevalence (Decker et al., 2012). Further research is needed to document how such sexual coercion from police affects STI/HIV risk. Likely, heightened vulnerability to both police sexual coercion and HIV/STI exposure occurs for those sex workers contending with substance use and riskier sex work, but there is lack of data exploring this issue. This study hypothesizes greater vulnerability to police sexual coercion among those FSWs engaging in risky substance use, including heavy drinking and injection drug use, as well as those exposed to riskier sex work, as indicated by more frequent sex work, more sex work clients, and greater abuse from clients.

To consider police sexual coercion and how it is affected by FSWs' risky substance use and sex work, two Russian cities with distinctly different sex work profiles were included for study – St. Petersburg and Orenburg. St. Petersburg is a center of culture and education in Russia, a major tourist city with a population size of 5 million residents. The sex work industry in St. Petersburg is large, with about 10,000 FSWs operating in the city (Aral et al., 2005). FSWs in St. Petersburg are mostly (approximately half) available on the street and transportation routes connecting the city center with suburbs, these street sex workers largely come to sex work due to injection drug use and work on their own often on an as needed basis for drugs or money (Aral et al., 2005). Other sex workers are venue-based, in brothels, massage parlors, saunas and hotels; these FSWs can be "ordered" at venue sites or via catalogues, newspapers or internet sites (Aral et al.,

2005) Many of these venue-based sex workers are managed by others, though a small proportion manage themselves (Aral et al., 2005). In contrast, Orenburg is a city of approximately 600,000, bordering Kazakhstan and is an industrial area where gas and oil are mined and processed. Sex work is an economic means of survival in this area where job opportunities for women are limited. Venue-based sex work is more common in Orenburg, with FSWs mostly working in the three city hotels, at "leisure agencies", and on call. Advertisements of sex work in this smaller setting occur through print advertising on columns, stops and fences along large roads, as well as via co-operation with the managers of bath-houses, saunas and taxi drivers. Self-management of FSWs is less common in Orenburg, even among street-based FSWs who, in Orenburg, often work with pimps; injection drug use among FSWs is also less common in Orenburg (USAID/Stellit, 2007). Use of these distinctly different cities provides important insight into how police sexual coercion operates in different contexts of sex work. However, both cities have an annual HIV incidence that exceeds the national average (Pokrovsky, 2012), contributing to Russia being one of the few nations in the world where the HIV epidemic is growing (Pokrovsky, 2012; UNAIDS, 2011). Understanding the role of police sexual coercion of FSWs in these two cities can guide development of interventions for FSWs to reduce risk for HIV as well as other concerns.

Method

This study involved cross-sectional quantitative data collected from FSWs ($N = 896$) recruited from the Russian cities of St. Petersburg and Orenburg. Survey data were collected from June 2007 to March 2008. This study was reviewed and approved by the ethical review board of the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Deviance and Social Control Department.

Sampling procedures

Sampling procedures were developed for each city with the goal of reflecting structural features of sex work, including location and type of prostitution. In St. Petersburg, sites for street sex worker recruitment were determined using key informant and observational input to create a time-location sampling procedure, i.e., a listing of locations street FSWs work by time of their work. A sample of 73 time-location clusters (different times/days across 15 locations) was selected for inclusion into the study with representation based on the above described location characteristics and with a probability proportional to the total number of FSWs for each location. For venue-based FSWs in St. Petersburg, Stellit's relationships with managers at six brothels and two hotels facilitated recruitment. In Orenburg, key informant and observational input was also used to create a time-location sampling procedure. Twenty-five locations of street sex work were identified where an average of 5 women presented at each site throughout the day. All street FSW sites and all three hotels in Orenburg were included in the study. Brothel-based FSWs were not approached in this city because of absence of any outreach work with brothels and thus absence of established contacts and trust with the managers. In both cities, each selected cluster was visited 2–3 times, and all available FSWs at each visit were invited into this study. FSWs available solely via calls (e.g., call girls, escorts) were not able to be included in the study due to lack of connection to location.

Recruitment and participation

Recruitment involved trained research staff from Stellit approaching women directly at street sites and with support from

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