

Changing demographic and HIV risk behaviors of clients of female sex workers in Karnataka, India

Presented in the CAHR 2020 Virtual
May 1 & 2, 2020

Abstract ID: 5811 Program ID#: EPHP6.06

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Acknowledgements to Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT)



Background & Context

Introduction

- **Avahan**, a BMGF funded program, for the prevention of HIV in India - tasked to deliver prevention interventions to high-risk community groups (HRGs) in 6 Indian states
- Sankalp, the Avahan program in Karnataka, India was implemented by University of Manitoba in partnership with KHPT conducted a comprehensive behavioral & biological assessments of HRGs (IBBA)

Geography

- Karnataka with a 64 Million population has > 1% antenatal mothers & >5% STD HIV+ patients
- Two rounds of IBBA covered 5 districts in Karnataka during 2005-2010, but the current study focusses on 4 districts (*Belgaum, Bellary, Shimoga & Bangalore Urban*) for the current analysis
 - The selection of districts was purely to keep consistency in timings of round 1 and round 2.

Context

- In an HIV epidemic, transmission is linked to number of active Female Sex Workers (FSWs)
- This study focusses on the clients' perspective & tries to assess the changes in risk behaviors of clients of FSWs in Karnataka

Method

- Data from two rounds of cross-sectional, Integrated Behavioral and Biological Assessments surveys conducted among client during 2006-11
- Bivariate analysis was used to describe changes in risk behaviors over time.

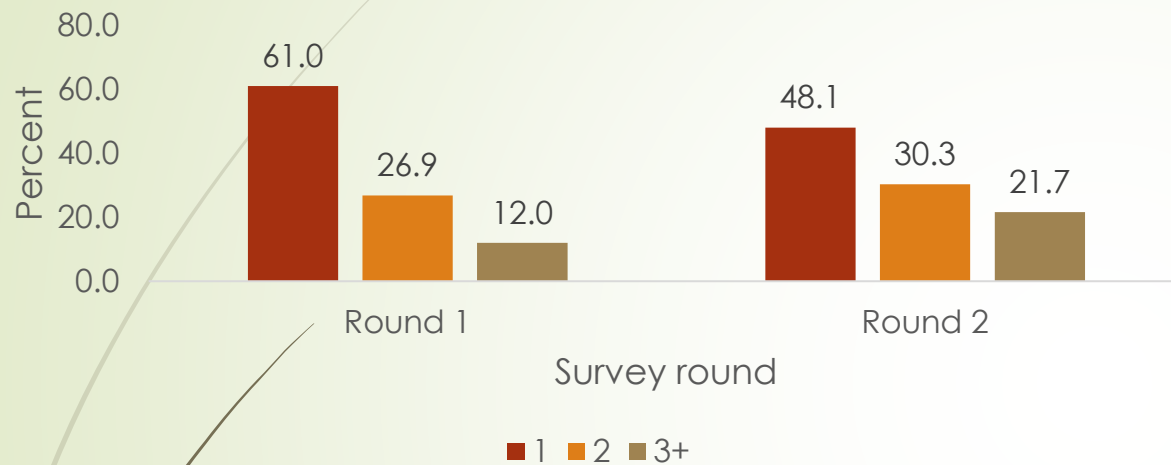
Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Key Parameter	Round 1	Round 2
Number	1,974	1,886
Mean age of the respondents	30.3	31.1
Percent currently married	61.3%	71.2%
Percent currently cohabiting	67.1%	72.9%
Percent high school and above education	47.9%	46.7%
Percent ever travelled outside their place of work	57.3%	61.1%
Age at first sex (Above 18 yrs)	85.2%	94.5%
Percent travelled 2+ places in the past year	53.1%	77.0%
Mean age at first sex	20.1	20.6
Mean age at first paid sex	21.4	22.0
Mean duration since first paid sex	8.9	9.1

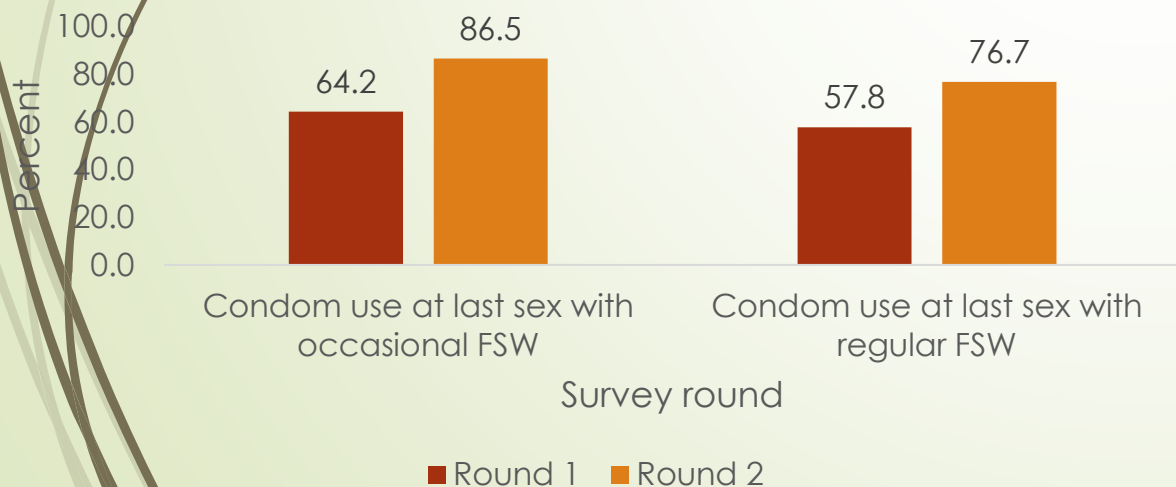
- Changes in profile evident over time among clients of FSWs
- Increased percent currently married or cohabiting
- Travelling more places increased among the clients
- Age at first sex, paid sex and mean duration since first paid sex remained unchanged over time

Key Insights

Percent of clients by number different FSWs had in the past one month and by survey round



Percent of clients using condom at last sex with type of FSW and by survey round



Type of sexual partners	Round 1	Round 2
Number	1,944	1886
Only occasional	64.4%	67.3%
Only Regular	8.9%	11.9%
Both occasional & regular	26.8%	20.8%

- Perceptible shift seen in sexual behaviors.
- A higher percent of clients had multiple number of FSWs in the past one month.
- Mean number of FSWs in the past one month increased significantly by 31%.
- Despite an increased sexual partners, significant increase in condom use at last sex with occasional or regular FSWs was noticed between two rounds (occasional from 64% to 87%, $p < 0.001$ and regular from 58% to 77%, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion & Program Relevance

- Clients of FSWs serve as potential bridges for HIV transmission from the high-risk FSWs to the low-risk general population, making them a key target for intervention.
- Past studies focused on the client volume of FSWs to understand the HIV risk and transmissions, however, this study shows that clients risk changes over time; increased number of FSWs, higher percent are currently married/cohabiting.
- This study underscores the need for comprehensive and regular clients' surveys to provide critical insights into the sexual behavior to design interventions for a sustainable control & monitoring of high-risk behaviors.
- Relapse of HIV trends in India can be dangerous. To avoid this we need to urgently undertake behaviors studies of our high-risk groups and their partners/clients for effective/innovative design of intervention.