Global Health Matters

As pointed out by Couture et al., patrons of sex workers are at high risk for contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and contribute to the spread of infection in the general population through unprotected sex. In fact, clients are considered a bridge population, potentially transmitting infection between the sex workers and women from the general population. This transmission makes the wives, girlfriends, and casual sex partners of sex worker patrons especially vulnerable to HIV infection. What is particularly interesting in this article is the examination of the relationship between HIV risk behaviors and intimate partner violence (IPV) among men in Haiti.

The results of this study support previous findings suggesting that men perpetrating IPV engage in sexual behaviors that increase the risk of STI and HIV for intimate partners, in particular, non-condom use. As a result, abusive men may put their intimate partners at higher risk of contracting HIV/STIs. This finding is a cause for concern among clients of sex workers who are at higher risk of HIV and spreading the disease in the general population. The findings by Couture et al. highlight the importance of culturally adapted interventions addressing both violence and HIV risk behaviors. Other studies^{1,2} have also demonstrated that HIV prevention programs integrating IPV can reduce negative attitudes and violence.

Intervention programs in Haiti should take into consideration societal norms concerning violence against women, considering the high occurrence of violence in this culture. Community-wide prevention programs are key to dealing with this major public health challenge, which has only been exacerbated by the other extraordinary stressors on the people of Haiti.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST INTIMATE PARTNERS AND ASSOCIATIONS WITH INCONSISTENT CONDOM USE AMONG CLIENTS OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN HAITI

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Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, and the majority of the population lives in extreme poverty.¹ Although the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic is considered “generalized” (i.e., a prevalence of >1% among pregnant women) in Haiti,² the prevalence of HIV is highest within specific groups, such as female sex workers (FSWs). Clients of FSWs are also at high risk for contracting HIV/sexually transmitted

infections (STIs) and may play an important role in spreading the infection in the general population through unprotected sex. In fact, clients are considered a “bridge” population, potentially transmitting infection between FSWs and women from the general population.³ This transmission makes their wives and girlfriends particularly vulnerable to HIV infection.

Results from several studies conducted in different contexts suggest that violence is an important risk factor for HIV infection.⁴⁻⁷ Violence can be perpetrated by strangers, but intimate partner violence (IPV) is more common. Several mechanisms have been hypothesized for increased risk of transmission of HIV to women experiencing violence:⁴ (1) direct transmission of HIV during coercive sexual intercourse with an infected partner; (2) violence that may diminish women’s control of sexual behaviors, such as negotiation of condom use; (3) experiences of violence during childhood and adolescence, which may promote adoption of risky sexual behaviors later in life; and (4) disclosure of HIV-positive serostatus, which may put women at risk