

**Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance Survey among Female Sex
Workers in
Pokhara Valley – Round III
June - August 2008**

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SUMMARY

This fact sheet summarizes the findings of the third round of the Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) survey conducted among 200 female sex workers (FSWs) in Pokhara Valley. The study shows HIV prevalence among FSWs is three percent and active syphilis infection is 1.5 percent. HIV and syphilis prevalence remains same throughout the years 2004, 2006 and 2008. Though, consistent use of condom with clients and regular clients is improving over the years only two third of the respondents (65%) had used a condom in the last sex act. Proper knowledge of HIV preventive measures among FSWs is low. More than half (54%) of the FSWs are reached by peer educators (PEs) or outreach educators (OEs) and 24 percent FSWs have used VCT and STI services.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY AND WHY WAS IT DONE

This study was conducted as per the Second Generation Surveillance Plan of the National Center for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) for generating strategic information needed for monitoring the national HIV/AIDS program in Nepal. Moreover the study was part of the Monitoring and Evaluation plan of FHI/Nepal, which uses such information for monitoring and evaluation of the FHI/USAID supported HIV/AIDS programs in Pokhara Valley.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was designed to measure the prevalence of HIV and syphilis infection among FSWs in Pokhara Valley. FSWs who reported to sell sex in cash or kind and who had been involved in such sexual activities for at least six months prior to the date of interview were eligible for the study. Blood sample was collected from all the study participants and was tested for HIV and syphilis. HIV was detected by using Determine HIV 1/2 test, Uni-Gold test and SD Bioline HIV 1/2 test; and syphilis by RPR and TPHA tests. National guidelines were followed in performing these tests in SACTS laboratory at Kathmandu. A total of 200 FSW were sampled. Demographic and sexual behavior data were collected through a structured questionnaire by trained female interviewers. Study participants were interviewed after the witnessed oral consent and blood samples were collected with a pre-test counseling. Ethical approval was obtained from Nepal Health Research Council and Protection of Human Subject Committee, USA. The study participants who were willing to know the test results were provided with a post-test counseling. Syndromic treatment of STIs was provided at the time of interview by a staff nurse.

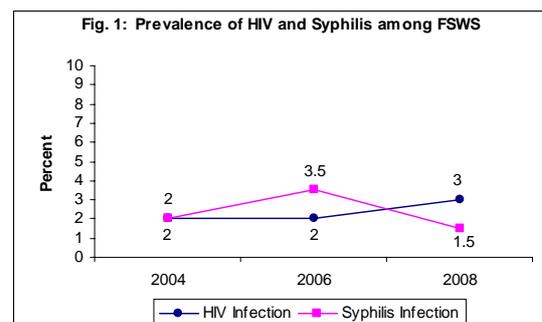
MAJOR FINDINGS

HIV and syphilis prevalence among FSWs has not changed since 2004: The HIV prevalence rate (2% in 2004 and 2006, 3% in 2008) and the active syphilis infection (2% in 2004, 3.5% in 2006 and 1.5% in 2008) have not changed significantly through the years (Fig. 1).

Condom using behavior has increased: Condom using practice of FSWs with their clients and regular partner has increased significantly since the first round of the survey. FSWs using condom consistently with clients have reached to 50 percent in 2008 from 36 percent in 2004 and 37 percent in 2006 survey. Similarly, the consistent use of condom with regular clients has increased to 72 percent (79/110) in 2008 from 52 percent (69/134) in 2006 and 48 percent (73/153) in 2004. However, many FSWs still do not use condom with their non-paying partners as such the consistent use of condom with non-paying partners has remained low even in the third round of the survey. Moreover, use of a condom with the last client (65%) in 2008 has significantly decreased from 2006 survey (75%).

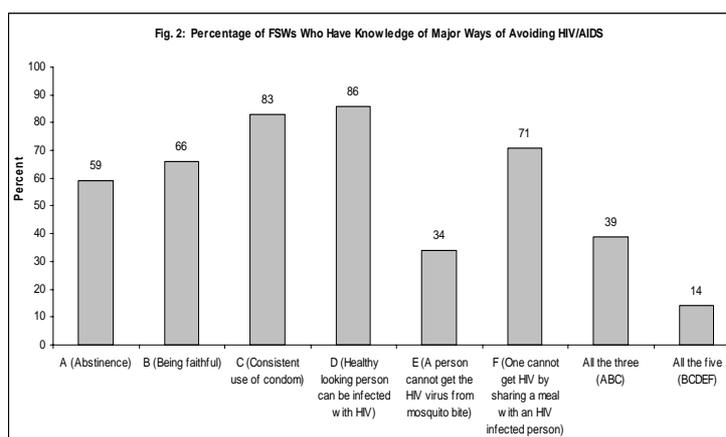
New and teenage girls are entering into sex trade: The median age of the FSWs was 21 years. Nearly forty percent (38.5%) were less than 20 years of age. Half of the respondents (49%) had entered the sex trade less than a year (6-12 months) before the survey. Illiteracy among FSWs was 41 percent. Sixty-five percent was at least once married.

Two-third FSWs have transport workers/drivers as regular clients: The FSWs' clients belonged to a wide variety of profession. Nearly two-third of sex workers (64%) had transport workers/drivers as their most frequently visiting clients. Similarly, service holders/professionals, businessmen, migrant workers/wage laborers, foreign employees, police/army personals and students were also the frequently visiting clients of FSWs. Mean number of clients served by FSWs per day was 1.7.



FSWs have easy access to Condoms: Ninety percent of FSWs could get condoms within ten minutes from the place of their work. Around 62 percent of the FSWs had access to free condoms, which they mostly obtained from clients and NGO/health workers. The three most popular brands of condoms among them were Number One, Panther and Black Cobra.

Proper knowledge about HIV/AIDS is low: Knowledge of HIV was universal among the FSWs. Though, all of the respondents had heard about HIV/AIDS, only 39 percent of them correctly identified HIV preventive ‘ABC’ measures and 14 percent of them had comprehensive knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission i.e. ‘BCDEF’ (Fig. 2).



Thirty percent FSWs reported having STI symptoms: Thirty percent of the sex workers had experienced at least one of the STI symptoms in the past year. Forty out of 60 respondents who experienced the symptoms in the past year did not seek treatment.

Fifty-four percent FSWs are reached by PEs/OEs: During the preceding year more than half of the FSWs (54%) had met/discussed with PEs/OEs, 26 percent had visited a Drop-in-Centre (DIC), 13 percent had visited an STI clinic and 35 percent had visited a Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) center at least once. The participation of FSWs in different STI/HIV/AIDS awareness raising programs was eight percent in the preceding year.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- The data indicate that new and young girls are entering the sex trade every year. Hence, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns should target youth and adolescent groups.
- Although condom use appears to have increased in recent years between FSWs and their clients, consistent condom use was still low with their steady partners (husbands, male friends). Therefore, prevention programs should focus more on the need for consistent condom use with all kinds of partners. Information campaigns should focus on changing attitudes that create barriers to regular use of condoms.
- Outreach and other intervention efforts should be expanded further to include comprehensive and complimentary programs as well as to increase coverage to all high-risk populations including clients of FSWs. The quality of these programs should be evaluated, and where necessary, strengthened.

IBBS Key Indicators among FSWs		Results (N=200)
HIV Prevalence	%	3.0
Syphilis Infection	%	1.5
Age <20 years	%	39
Median age at first sexual intercourse	years	16
Mean duration of FSWs involved in sex work	months	22
Average clients per day		2
Average clients in the past week		4
Average income from sex works in the past week	Rs.	3,000
Condom use with last client	%	65
Consistent condom use with clients in the past year	%	50
Knowledge of HIV preventive measures ‘ABC’	%	39
Comprehensive knowledge on HIV ‘BCDEF’	%	14
Reported STI symptoms in the past year	%	30
FSWs reached by PEs/OEs in the past year	%	54
Visited DIC in the past year	%	26
Visited STI clinic in the past year	%	13
Visited VCT centers in the past year	%	35
FSWs reached with targeted HIV prevention (e.g. BCC with OE/PE or DIC or STI Clinics or VCT or community events / trainings or drug treatment or rehabilitation)	%	57
FSWs reached with HIV prevention program (Knows where to receive HIV test result and received condom)	%	46
FSWs that have received an HIV test in the last 12 months and who know their results	%	31

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For more information, please contact:
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