Developing a typology of the Latino immigrant sex industry in a new receiving community to aid in HIV prevention efforts

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Agenda

• Background
• Research goal and objectives
• Theoretical framework
• Findings about sex work typology
• Implications
• Conclusion
Background

- Latino immigrant men are prone to hire services of sex workers
  - 28-45% report paying a woman for sex in the past year
- FSWs are vulnerable to HIV/STI infection and onward transmission
- Little is known about the context of sex work among this immigrant population to inform local HIV prevention efforts
Research Goal

- To characterize the risk environment of formal and informal sex work in the local Latino immigrant population and develop appropriate harm reduction strategies
Framework

Macro-level factors
(e.g., local policy regarding sex work, stigma towards FSWs)

Venue & Micro-level factors
(e.g., condom availability, manager support for safe sex)

Individual-level factors
(e.g., age, education, cost per sex act)

Venue Typology
(e.g., brothel-based vs. street based)

HIV Risk

Research Objectives

1. To identify the context and risk environment of sex work services utilized by foreign-born Latino men in Baltimore
   1a. To develop a rudimentary typology of sex work
   1b. To develop a survey focused on variations within the sex work risk environments identified
Methods

• Ethnographic observation
• In-depth semi-structured
  • 14 Latina sex workers
  • 17 Latino immigrant clients
  • 7 Key Informants (house manager, tarjetas)
• Analysis: modified constant comparison technique
Note: It is unclear if these are actually always connected

- Most are run by NY-based owners; others in VA, MD, NJ and NY
- 2-3 girls are in a house for one week then moved
- Some girls work the weekend only then live elsewhere during the week
- Trafficking involved; not clear to what extent
- Bosses require HIV testing; condoms used often; grain alcohol used as vaginal cleaner by some; may have private doctors do HIV screenings
- Men drive in trucks handing out cards to advertise women
- Women may be in car with them
- Only mentioned by one person who said this was new
- May be related to the houses who also advertise by cards
- Men purchase drinks for women at high price and this buys company and various levels of touching
- Can pay extra for sex with different rules by bar/club
- Bar managers aware and can make money too
- Competition between women
- BUT, often girls don’t acknowledge each other as selling sex
- High use of alcohol
- Violence from men who feel played
- High participation of underage girls
- Rare among Latina immigrants; know very little
- Majority are women with immigrant parents/
- Most (all we have encountered) addicted to heroin and/or cocaine
- Men and women perceive street workers negatively and consider them at highest risk for HIV/STIs
- Websites provided are social networking sites and not sex-specific
- FSW may work independently or with a pimp
- Girls who are trafficked are also in this market
- Women are picked up in a van and pose as house cleaners (if questioned)
- Driver takes them out of town to various hotels
- An organizer arranges client meetings
- The women are spread out, not at one location and wait for the men to come to them
- Hotel is paid for, women must provide food
- There is no one at the hotel to provide protection or oversight to the women
Themes

Clients and FSW

• Low perceived risk of HIV/STIs
  – Some women develop “rules” to reduce risk (i.e., assess looks, meet friends first)

FSW

• Selling sex is the norm: “most women do it”
• Transactional sex as empowering
  – Overcoming hardship of immigrant life
  – Changing gender role dynamics: the woman is in charge
• Low perceived risk of violence
  – Many of the “rules” serve to reduce risk of violence
Themes

Clients

• Street workers are prostitutes, other FSW are decent women
  – Dramatic difference in perception of street workers vs. other FSW
  – May also explain low perceived risk of HIV/STIs
Preliminary Implications/Conclusions

- Latina women in Baltimore enter the sex industry willingly and through coercion
  - Tied to immigration (for self and children) and financial opportunity
  - Many FSWs women reported a desire for English classes and better work opportunities

- Reported condom use is high (use is the norm)
  - Many reports of condoms breaking and use while intoxicated or at bars less consistent

- Despite low perceived risk, the risk of violence is high
  - Many of the women have been abused by clients
  - FSWs also may be at risk from each other

- No social cohesion exists among women

- Women are at risk for developing alcohol and/or drug habits
Thank you!

Contributors

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