10 Years of Experience: Comprehensive Sexual Health Care for Female Sex Workers (FSW) in Cologne

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Background

- **Prostitution Act 2001**
  - Prostitution is acknowledged as legal business.
- **Infectious Diseases Act 2001**
  - Prevention is a public responsibility.
  - Public health offices are responsible for universal access to STI diagnostic and treatment.
  - For vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations anonymous counselling and clinical services as well as outreach work should be established.

Objectives

- Prove effectiveness of strategy
- Data of all women ever reporting sex work (FSW) who used the medical facilities between 2002 and 2012 were analysed using EpiInfo Software.

Methods

- In routine work, socio-demographic and clinical data were documented in an Access data base.
- Comprehensive Sexual Health Care at the Cologne Municipal Health Office
  - anonymous and free of charge
  - STI screening
  - gynaecological care
  - counselling for family planning and contraception
  - outreach activities in female sex work venues
  - multi-professional and multilingual staff

Results

- 2117 FSW made use of the medical facilities between 2002 and 2012.
  - FSW had 83 different countries of origin.
  - Mean age at first visit was 27.5 years (maximum 62, minimum 16 years).
  - 77% of migrant FSW and 24% of German FSW had no medical insurance.
  - 37 were injecting drug users.
  - 3 knew of their HIV positive status already at first visit.
  - Patient fluctuation was high.
  - Mean number of visits was 5.12 (599 FSW one, 298 FSW 10 and more, maximum 98 visits)
  - Only 15% used the services for more than 5 years.

Conclusions

- Sexual health needs of female sex workers go far beyond mere STI screening.
- Responding to contraceptive needs and screening for cervical cancer is essential from an individual as well as from a public health point of view.
- Comprehensive gynaecological and sexual health services together with outreach work allow access to STI screening even for so called “hard-to-reach” FSW.
- High fluctuation rates
  - follow general migration patterns,
  - require multilingual and culturally sensitive staff, continuous outreach activities and regular evaluation,
  - suggest that for most women, sex work in Germany is only a temporary job.
- More investigation is needed to understand patterns of mobility and job alternatives to sex work.