



IOM Ghana

Migration and Health - HIV and Population Mobility



A map showing the eight sites visited while conducting

HIV Vulnerability Among Female Sex Workers Along Ghana's Tema-Paga Transport Corridor

In April 2013, IOM Ghana released the behavioural study, *HIV Vulnerability Among Female Sex Workers Along Ghana's Tema-Paga Transport Corridor*.

Although mobility and migration are not singularly definitive HIV risk factors, migrants are more vulnerable to high risk sexual behaviours during the migration process as they are separated from regular sexual partners and practices for varying periods of time.

There are two main categories of FSWs found in Ghana: roamers and seaters. Roamers are described as individuals who are mobile, often traveling within or between cities/towns to actively seek clients in bars, night clubs, hotels, food and drink locales, entertainment areas and on the streets. Whereas, seaters are stationary and work out of their homes or brothels, and may also live as part of a structured environment or hierarchy.

To put the situation of FSWs in perspective, Ghana has a population of 24.6 million people and an overall prevalence of HIV infection at 1.5% in 2011. The exact figure of FSWs is unknown but their population is estimated to range between 47,786 and 58,920, and among these women 90% are categorized as roamers. The overall prevalence of HIV infection among FSWs in Ghana was estimated at 11.1% in 2011 with a prevalence of 6.6% among roamers and 21.4% among seaters. Although, this data alone does not explain behavioural

practices and potential causes for vulnerability among both groups of FSWs.

In 2011, with funding from UNAIDS, field research was conducted by IOM Ghana in partnership with Management Strategies for Africa (MSA) and the West African Program to Combat AIDS and STI (WAPCAS) among FSW operating along Ghana's Tema-Paga transport corridor. This North-South corridor is the longest and busiest transit route in the country. It traverses through six of Ghana's ten regions, and serves as a link to transit and trade hubs in Burkina Faso, northern Niger, Mali, Guinea and northern Cote d'Ivoire.

The overall objective of the study was to gather data on HIV and mobility linkages to enable the development of more effective HIV programming for FSWs in Ghana. The data collection was focused on four key areas: profile of FSWs; mobility characteristics; HIV vulnerability similarities and difference between roamers and seaters; and the identification of HIV vulnerability (risk) factors.

In terms of methodology, the research team visited eight sites along the Tema-Paga transport corridor based on known hot spots, trading centres, rest areas and prevalence of HIV infection. A cross-section of 559 FSWs (75% roamers, 25% seaters) aged 16 years or more and who had engaged in sex work in the past month were

interviewed in person at the location where they operate. FSW vulnerability to HIV infection was measured by inconsistent condom use with clients in the three months prior to the interview.

Key Findings

Basic characteristics of the FSWs interviewed revealed that 91% were Ghanaian nationals and 59% entered into sex work due to poverty. Further, 75% were introduced to sex work by friends, while 87% continued sex work due to economic hardship. When asked if they intended to stop sex work, 91% said yes, however, 83% of those FSWs cited the need for financial assistance to quit sex work.

FSWs were generally found to be in their late 20s (mean age 27.9 years) and most reported they initiated sex work in their early 20s (mean age 22.2 years). On the last day worked before the interview, respondents had an average of 4 clients and earned an average of Ghana cedis (GH¢) 66.20 (USD 42.4).

Questions related to inconsistent condom use reveal some important behaviour data. For instance, of all 559 FSWs interviewed, 55 reported inconsistent condom use with clients during the previous three months. Breaking this down further inconsistent condom use among roamers and seaters was 11.46% and 5.0% respectively. However, even though consistent condom use was high with clients (90.2%), the majority of respondents (53.3%) were inconsistent condom users with their non-paying partners.

FSWs are also on the move with 46% of all respondents having travelled (420 total visits) within Ghana for the purpose of sex work during the three months prior to the interview. The majority of those who travelled moved once a month or once every week. These women travelled both along and outside the Tema-Paga transport corridor. The most popular destinations FSWs visited along the corridor were Kumasi (16.9%), Tema (7.9%), and Techiman (5.2%).

Roamers were on average more than ten years younger than seaters (mean age 24.8 and 37.3 respectively) and more likely to be single (80.9% vs 25.7%). Roamers also reported fewer clients on the last day worked before the interview than seaters (mean number of clients: 3 vs 4) and earned double the income (mean income: GH¢76.90 vs. GH¢34.30). However, roamers were also found to have significantly more non-paying partners than seaters (59.9% vs 34.29%) and were less likely to always carry or have condoms while at work and bought fewer condoms.



Trucks at the ports of Paga (right). © IOM 2011 (Photo: Valentina Amados)

Researchers also uncovered risk factors for inconsistent condom use with clients which included being a roamer, not always carrying of having condoms, having one or more non-paying partners, perception that condoms should not be used every time when having sex with anyone and location of work (Tema, Nkawkaw and Bolgatanga/Paga).

Additionally, data gathered from FSWs interviews showed that seaters had a higher intention to stop sex work than roamers (97.9% vs 89.0%).

Conclusion

The overall finding with regards to behaviour and HIV vulnerability revealed that roamers are more vulnerable to HIV infection than seaters because of their frequent movements, concurrent multiple non-paying partnerships and not always having condoms while at work. Findings also indicate that seaters are older, less mobile, have more dependents and earn less income from sex work than roamers. The perceived ability to end sex work was linked to a financial support, especially among seaters.

IOM and its research partners recommend revamping HIV prevention programmes to target not only FSWs but also their non-paying partners and clients with behaviour change communications (BCC) messages. For roamers these messages and other programming should focus on typical places of interaction between roamers, their clients and partners. Successful HIV prevention projects for seaters may include income generating activities to support those intending to stop sex work.

Read the full report [here](http://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/pbn/docs/HIV-Vulnerability-among-FSWs-along-Tema_Paga-Transport-Corridor.pdf) :
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