

# Understanding the Structural Factors that Influence Female Sex Work in Kampala, Uganda

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## BACKGROUND:

- ❖ Female sex workers (FSW) globally have higher risk of HIV infection than the general population
- ❖ Pooled odds of HIV infection of 13.5 (10.0–18.1) for FSW in LMICs compared to general population
- ❖ HIV transmission affected by interaction of Structural \* Social \* Interpersonal \* Individual factors
- ❖ Structural factors can be
  - Economic, social, policy, organisational
  - Barriers or facilitators for uptake of HIV prevention services

## FROM PREVIOUS EVIDENCE, WE KNOW THAT

- ❖ Sex work is illegal in Uganda
- ❖ Women who sell sex meet and provide services for their clients in<sup>1</sup>:
  - Venues (bars/lodges, massage parlours, markets, brothels)
  - Outdoor locations (streets/alleys, parking lots, stair cases)
- ❖ Places where the women work are fluid<sup>1,2</sup>
- ❖ Women working in outdoor spaces face more sex work related challenges
- ❖ The women face violent relationships with police, authorities and clients
- ❖ Stigma has negative effects on HIV prevention<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Mostly women with little or no education have been included in the studies<sup>4</sup>

## WHY THIS STUDY?

- ❖ My PhD: Investigating the role of behavioural factors in the relationship between structural factors and HIV risk behaviour/PrEP use
- ❖ Need to understand different contexts in which women sell sex
  - To understand structural\*interpersonal\*individual factor interaction for HIV transmission
  - Women selling sex using online platforms have been identified in other settings (Australia, Canada, USA, India)
  - Is the phenomenon of women selling sex online prevalent in Kampala, Uganda?
- ❖ Need for qualitative methods to answer these questions and to inform quantitative modelling

## METHODS:

- ❖ Study was part of PhD under the UPTAKE study
- ❖ UPTAKE = Universally Accessible HIV Prevention Technologies for African Girls and Young Women through Knowledge Applied from Behavioural Economics
- ❖ 20 qualitative indepth interviews (IDI) were conducted
- ❖ We included women (18+ years) from 2 samples with 10 women each:
  - Sample 1: selected from a women's health clinic cohort
  - Sample 2: selected by snowballing, starting with Instagram
- ❖ Interview guide was based on existing literature
- ❖ Framework analysis method used, Data managed using Nvivo 12

## REFERENCES:

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## RESULTS 1: THE WOMEN IN OUR STUDY

		Sample 1 - Cohort (n=10)	Sample 2 - Snowball (n=10)
Age	23-30	7	10
	>30	3	0
Education	No Degree	10	2
	Bachelor's degree	0	8
Does she use online platforms	Yes	3	9
	No	7	1
Is SW her main job	Yes	8	4
	No	2	6

## RESULTS 2: THE THEMES AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Theme	The structural factors
How female sex work is organised	- Meet clients: Private virtual spaces, public spaces, 'pimps' - Provide services: Private indoor (homes), public indoor, public outdoor - Collaborations and competition: Space of operation, physical attributes, information held about clients - How they negotiate (Online vs physical negotiations)
Entry into and exit from sex work	- Why and how they joined sex work (Financial/Economic need, childhood sexual abuse) - Why they remain in sex work (Financial responsibility) - Why the women would leave sex work (A stable comparable income, getting married)
The nature of relationships with	- Authorities (Violence + abuse + exploitation, protection in some cases) - Clients (Violence + abuse, support and friendship in some cases) - Fellow sex workers (Jealousy, mistrust, hatred, friendship in some cases)
Effects of laws and regulations	- Illegal and criminalised, effects more pronounced for outdoor spaces
Stigma experienced	- Internalised stigma, Social stigma, Structural stigma

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- ❖ Our study documented women that advertise and meet clients using online platforms
- ❖ To a larger extent, women face similar structural factors regardless of where they get clients:
  - All face high risk (violence, rape, arrests, etc)
- ❖ Women meeting clients online have particular challenges:
  - Cybersecurity
  - Blackmail
  - Hard to reach by researchers and HIV prevention efforts
- ❖ All women in this study operate in high-risk environments, regardless of where they meet their clients
- ❖ Interventions against HIV transmission or acquisition should consider the differences in structural factors, challenges and risks in order to reach all women selling sex in Kampala



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