PREVALENCE OF MENTAL DISORDERS AMONG FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN ZAMBOANGA CITY

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Background:

For all individuals, mental, physical and social health are vital strands of life that are closely interwoven and deeply interdependent. As understanding of this relationship grows, it becomes ever more apparent that mental health is crucial to the overall wellbeing of individuals, societies and countries. Unfortunately, in most parts of the world, mental health and mental disorders are not regarded with anything like the same importance as physical health. Instead, they have been largely ignored or neglected. Partly as a result, the world is suffering from an increasing burden of mental disorders, and a widening "treatment gap".

The most conspicuous risk associated with the increasing number of sex workers is the increasing cases of sexually transmitted infections. Hence, campaigns have been focused merely on prevention of STI's especially, HIV. Amidst various programs for STI/HIV awareness and prevention, one aspect of health unfortunately remains least priority — *mental health, forgetting the* psychological implications of the nature of the job of this vulnerable group.

Objective:

General Objective: To determine the prevalence of mental disorders among female sex workers in Zamboanga City

Specific Objectives:

1. To compare the prevalence of mental disorders between registered female sex workers and freelance female sex workers

2. To identify the types of mental disorders seen among female sex workers

Methodology:

This was a cross-sectional descriptive study on the prevalence of mental disorders among female sex workers in Zamboanga City. This study compared the prevalence of mental disorders between registered female sex workers (RFSW) and freelance female sex workers (FFSW)and identified the types of mental disorders seen among female sex workers (FSW). Data were obtained from a self-administered questionnaire given to 198 respondents where 156 RFSW were gathered through cluster random sampling and 42 FFSW were gathered through snowballing method.

The respondents were screened for depression, substance abuse, mood disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal behavior.

Those who screened positive were referred to a psychiatrist for an in-depth evaluation. Included in this group were those found to have suicidal behavior, moderately severe to severe depression, and moderate to severe anxiety.

Results

The study findings showed that out of the 28 who underwent psychiatric evaluation, 71% of the registered female sex workers were with psychiatric findings while 86% of freelance female sex workers were with mental disorders. The prevalence of mental disorder therefore was higher among the freelance female sex workers.

Major Depressive Disorder was the most common mental disorder among the registered female sex workers accounting for 33% of the group. Substance abuse, on the other hand, was the most common mental disorder found in freelance FSW accounting for 33% of them. Other mental disorders identified were Bipolar Disorder I, Borderline Personality, Dysthymic Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Four women have been identified with certain personality traits but a diagnosis of disorder was not warranted at the time of examination. Overall, Major Depressive Disorder still leads as the most prevalent mental disorder found among female sex workers.

With the result of the study, the City Health Office issued a memo entailing mental health screening to be part of the requirement for granting health "pink" cards to female sex workers. This will be done annually using the screening tools utilized in this study but upon recommendation, a different screening tool for substance abuse may be used for a more specific result. Furthermore, screening tool for borderline personality disorder may also be added. Those who warrant further psychiatric evaluation will be referred immediately to Zamboanga City Medical Center – Psychiatry Department.