

Primary Prevention

HIV Prevention Interventions Targeting Asian Masseuses

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Project Description: Health Project for Asian Women (HPAW) is a four year community-level intervention study funded by NIDA. This study identified and described drug use and HIV-related behaviors among Asian female sex workers at massage parlors (Asian masseuses) in San Francisco. The study also conducted an exploratory intervention and evaluated the efficacy of the intervention modalities (Massage Parlor Owner Education Program and Peer/Professional Counseling Program) by addressing the determinants of the HIV-related risk behaviors in the cognitive and sociocultural contexts among the targeted Vietnamese and other Asian masseuses. This study is a community-based research project which has been developed in collaboration with API-focused AIDS service organizations.

Interesting Findings: A total of 25 massage parlors were identified in the City. 100 one-on-one interviews were conducted with Asian masseuses who had exchanged sex work for money. Nine interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. The study sample (N = 100) included 81 Vietnamese, 5 Thai, 4 Korean, 2 Hong Kongnese, 2 Taiwanese, and 6 missing. The average age was 32.8 years old. All participants were born outside of the U.S. and the average years living in the U.S. was 8.4. On average, Asian masseuses had worked as masseuses for 3.2 years, worked 10.5 hours a day for 5.3 days a week, and had sex with 26.6 customers a week. The participants reported that they always use condoms with customers for vaginal sex. However, they do not use condoms all the time for oral sex and manual release. 23% of the participants had a private sex partner in the past 6 months, however 17% of them reported always using condoms with a private partner. 32% of the participants reported that they had experienced breakage of condoms. A number of masseuse participants (62%) reported that they had been beaten by customers, and 16% reported being beaten by massage parlor owners. 22% of the participants reported being infected with Hepatitis B, and none reported HIV positive status. The majority of participants had consumed alcohol (82%), while 22% had used marijuana, 14% had used crack, and 3% had used cocaine. (Nemoto T, Takenaka M. HIV risk behaviors among Asian massage parlor workers in San Francisco. Int Conf AIDS. 2000 Jul 9-14;13:abstract no. WePeD4786.)

A total of 18 male clients who engage in sex with Asian female masseuses were recruited from 22 massage parlors in San Francisco for focus groups. The majority of participants reported rarely or never using condoms for oral sex with masseuses, although they were more likely to report using condoms for vaginal sex. Many participants described frequently having sex with Asian masseuses while under the influence of alcohol, and some described paying additional money to have unprotected sex with masseuses. Participants tended to perceive Asian women as exotic and submissive and described feelings of power over the masseuses with whom they had sex. Moreover, participants described rarely using condoms for vaginal sex with private partners, indicating a potential risk for HIV and STDs for private partners as well. (Nemoto T, Iwamoto M, Wong S, Le MN, Operario D. Risk for HIV/STDs at Asian massage parlors: Male clients' perspective. Int Conf AIDS. 2004 Jul 11-16;15:abstract no. ThPeC7353.)

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