Sex Trading, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health Problems Among Indigent HIV Positive Women: Implications for HIV Treatment, Adherence, and Diversion

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Abstract

Aims: Few studies have examined the factors affecting HIV treatment utilization and ARV medication adherence and diversion among indigent, HIV positive substance abusers. This study sought to determine the relationship of past year sex trading on substance use, mental health, HIV treatment utilization, ARV medication adherence and diversion (the unauthorized transfer of antiretroviral medications from legal sources to illicit markets) among a sample of indigent, substance abusing, HIV positive women.

Methods: 204 HIV positive, substance abusing female in urban South Florida completed a comprehensive health and social risk assessment including demographics, substance use and dependence, and mental health status. Results: Study participants were predominately African American (73.9%), with a median age of 46. Compared to non-traders, past year sex traders were more likely to meet criteria for substance dependence (p=.001) and report homelessness (p=.000). Recent sex trading was also associated with more mental health problems including depression (p=.001), anxiety (p=.002), traumatic stress (p=.000), and increased victimization (p=.003). In terms of treatment utilization, sex traders reported less time spent with primary source of HIV care (p=.002) and more difficulty in accessing medical specialists (p=.023). Sex trading was also associated with ARV medication diversion (30.6% vs. 49.6%; p=.007) and lower levels of past month ARV treatment utilization, ARV medication adherence and ARV diversion.

Results: Sex traders identified by an endorsement of past year sex trading to obtain drugs, money or drugs, it is important to understand the implications of ongoing substance abuse and dependence (7.1 days missed vs. 12.7 days missed; p=.002).

ARV diversion (3 past months) 49.6% 30.6% 2.66 5.44 1.69, 8.55 2.51, 10.66 2.53, 9.53

Discussion

Sex traders had nearly four times higher odds of severe victimization.

Conclusions:

1. This is the first study that documents the diversion of ARV medications by HIV positive, substance using women.

2. Sex traders are especially vulnerable to substance dependence and mental health issues, participate in ARV diversion more often, and have less access to HIV treatment and care. Due to the significant health consequences resulting from ARV non-adherence and diversion, these findings have important public health implications

3. Despite more frequent attendance at HIV support and education groups, sex traders reported higher levels of internalized HIV related stigma, less social support, and more psychological distress which may render them more vulnerable to substance dependence.

4. Due to the significant health consequences resulting from ARV non-adherence and diversion, these findings have important public health implications for treatment specialists and practitioners in order to provide better support for their patients.

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References


