

Physical and Sexual Violence Among Female Sex Workers in Rwanda: Findings from the IBBSS 2023

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General

Category: E7: HIV and development synergies

Country of research: Rwanda

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Abstract Text (max 350 words)

Background: Female sex workers (FSWs) in Rwanda face disproportionately high risks of physical and sexual violence, with an HIV prevalence of 35.5%, significantly higher than the 3% prevalence in the general population. This violence exacerbates vulnerability to acquisition of HIV and positive health outcomes. This study, part of the Integrated Bio-Behavioral Surveillance Survey (IBBSS) 2023, assessed the prevalence and dynamics of physical and sexual violence among FSWs in Rwanda and its implications for HIV prevention, care, and support.

Methods: The IBBSS 2023 was a cross-sectional study involving 2,541 FSWs aged 15 years and older across Rwanda. Participants were recruited using privatized network sampling. Data on lifetime and past 12-month experiences of physical and sexual violence were collected through structured interviews. Prevalence estimates with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated, disaggregated by violence type and timeframe, and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: Among FSWs, 20.9% (95% CI: 18.1–23.9) reported experiencing physical violence, and 16.8% (95% CI: 14.1–20.0) reported experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime. In the 12 months preceding the survey, 55.5% of those reporting physical violence and 55.3% of those reporting sexual violence experienced these forms of violence. Additionally, 33% (95% CI: 24.8–42.3) of FSWs experienced both physical and sexual violence in the past year.

Conclusions: The prevalence of physical and sexual violence among FSWs in Rwanda is alarmingly high, with over half of the victims reporting recent occurrences. These findings highlight critical gaps in violence prevention and support mechanisms for FSWs. Addressing these risks is essential to achieving HIV prevention and treatment goals, particularly the 95-95-95 targets, as violence disrupts care continuity and increases vulnerability. Interventions should integrate violence prevention, and trauma-informed care to enhance the safety and well-being of FSWs. Future studies should explore the intersection of violence with HIV treatment adherence and health outcomes to guide comprehensive policy and programmatic responses.

Additional questions

Ethical research declaration: Yes

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