**Female Sex Workers in Andhra Pradesh, India:**

**Housing Instability and HIV Risk**

Project Parivartan is a research study on the impact of structural interventions to prevent HIV among female sex workers in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. It analyzes the context of HIV risk among these women and the community mobilization interventions addressing that risk. Data was collected from 2005 to 2012, and includes serial cross-sectional surveys, ethnographic methods, and a comparative case study design.

Parivartan is administered by the Center on Health, Risk and Society at American University, Washington DC (grant ID # 30183), directed by Kim M. Blankenship (PI), and funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Avahan India AIDS Initiative.

The southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh has one of the highest rates of HIV in the country. Its female sex workers (FSWs) are among the principal populations affected by the epidemic.

Beyond individual risk behaviors such as unprotected sex, FSWs’ HIV risk is related to several structural factors including housing instability and experience of violence.

Data on housing instability and experiences of sexual and physical violence were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 673 FSWs by Project Parivartan in Rajahmundry, East Godavari district in March - May 2007. A publication analyzing this data forms the basis for this brief.
SEX WORK AND HOUSING INSTABILITY

FSWs face particular challenges in maintaining stable housing. Some FSWs who become known to engage in sex work report immediate eviction from their homes. Characteristics of their work that can make it difficult to earn a stable income can also affect FSWs’ ability to pay for housing. For example, FSWs who cannot work due to sickness (their own or a family member’s) or because they have been arrested, may rapidly find themselves unable to bear housing costs. The earnings of some FSWs may also depend on the season. Many FSWs report having to take on extra debt to pay housing costs, or to make difficult choices between paying for food or health care and paying for their housing.

Unstable housing or homelessness may also increase the chances of engaging in risky sex (for example, for more money), as well as experiencing violence (such as by living in an unsafe place or meeting clients in an unfamiliar environment).

In this sample of 673 FSWs, a fifth reported high residential instability (19.6%), defined as being evicted, on average, more than once per year over the last 5 years. These women were more likely than the rest to have worked longer as sex workers: 30.3% of those with high residential instability as compared to 21.6% of those with less residential instability reported having worked for more than 12 years. They were also more likely to have a temporary husband (boyfriend or male partner with no legal attachment to the FSW), or to be divorced.

HOUSING INSTABILITY INCREASES EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE & LIKELIHOOD OF STI SYMPTOMS

FSWs with high rates of eviction were more likely than those with lower eviction rates to have recently experienced sexual violence or physical violence. For example, 26.5% of those with high residential instability reported being sexually assaulted in the past 6 months and 53.8% reported experiencing physical violence in the past 6 months, as compared to 8.7% and 25.9%, respectively, of those with less residential instability. Women with high rates of eviction were also more likely to report accepting more money for sex without a condom, and having at least one STI symptom.
Moreover, FSWs with high residential instability were more likely to have had an STI symptom regardless of whether they had recently had condom-less sex, or experienced recent sexual and/or physical violence. Additionally, experiences of both sexual and physical violence were associated with recent STI symptoms, suggesting that violence plays an important role in the relationship between high eviction rate and experience of STI symptoms.

HIV interventions for FSWs must take their life contexts into account, including the flux in housing situation that FSWs often experience. More stable housing would decrease FSWs’ risk of STI, as well as their risk of violence, both of which contribute to FSWs’ risk of HIV. Focus on individual risk behaviors alone cannot address the complex mix of factors that make them vulnerable to HIV. Approaches to prevention that go beyond the individual level are necessary.

REFERENCE:

**HOW CAN FEMALE SEX WORKERS FIND STABILITY IN HOUSING?**

**COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOs) CAN**

1. **Assist FSWs facing impending eviction** to obtain safe housing;

2. **Create awareness of existing central- and state-sponsored housing programs and schemes**, such as Indira Awaas Yojana, INDIRAMMA, Rural Permanent Housing, and Urban Permanent Housing, and **assist FSWs to access them**;

3. **Encourage CBO Crisis Intervention Teams to include eviction and impending eviction of FSWs as crisis situations**;

4. **Promote awareness of housing related rights** and protections to CBO members and non-member FSWs.