

Abstract

BACKGROUND: In sub-Saharan Africa, female sex workers (FSWs) are a vulnerable high risk group for the acquisition and transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV. **OBJECTIVES:** To study parameters of sexual behaviour and knowledge of STI and HIV, to describe health seeking behaviour related to STI, and to measure the prevalence of gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV-1, to provide baseline data for targeted STI and HIV prevention interventions. **METHODS:** In a cross sectional survey with snowballing recruitment, between February and March 2000, 503 self identified FSWs in a suburb in Mombasa, Kenya, were interviewed with a structured questionnaire and screened for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV-1. **RESULTS:** The mean number of sexual partners in the previous week was 2.8 (SD 1.6). The mean number of non-regular clients and regular clients in the previous week was 1.5 (1.0) and 1.0 (0.9) respectively. The median weekly income from sex work was \$US15. A total of 337 (67%) women had an alternative income in the informal sector. 146 (29%) and 145 (45%) never used a condom with a client and non-paying partner respectively. The prevalence of gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and syphilis was 1.8%, 4.2%, and 2.0% respectively. The overall HIV-1 seroprevalence was 30.6%. **CONCLUSIONS:** There is a large need for intensive STI and HIV prevention interventions in part time FSW