



# HIV/AIDS

## AND

## SEX WORKERS SEX TRADE

### Defining Sex Work

- Sex work can be broadly defined as “the exchange of money or goods for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally, involving female, male and transgender adults, young people and children where the sex worker may or may not consciously define such activity as income-generating or traditional prostitution.”<sup>1</sup>
- Although women and girls compose the majority of the sex worker population, the number of men, boys and transgendered individuals are increasing.<sup>1</sup>
- Although the reasons behind sex work vary (homelessness, poverty, substance use, survival sex and LGBT issues) it was overwhelming reported that 85% of sex workers were sexually abused as children and 70% reported incest.<sup>1</sup>

### What We Know

- Sex workers have high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. 2008 study statistics include high rates of gonorrhea (12.4%), chlamydia (6.8%), syphilis (1.8%) and herpes (34.3%).<sup>3</sup>
- STIs increase the likelihood of acquiring HIV. Furthermore, genital trauma caused by frequent and forced intercourse also increases HIV risk.<sup>2</sup>
- Reliable data about sex workers is limited, mainly due to the covert nature of the industry.<sup>4</sup> However, a 2008 study found 22.4% of drug-using female sex workers and 26% of male sex workers tested HIV-positive.
- High rates of STIs among sex workers may foreshadow the potential rapid spread of HIV among sex workers, their clients, families, and extended sexual networks.<sup>5</sup>

### Critical Issues / Barriers to Service

- High rates of infection among sex workers may not be due to the fact that they have multiple partners but rather due to a combination of factors that compound this risk. These factors include: poverty, low education and HIV/AIDS knowledge levels, limited access to healthcare, gender inequalities, social stigma/status, drug or substance use and limited condom negotiation skills.<sup>1,5</sup>
- In a study of indoor sex workers (brothels, massage parlors, escort services), many respondents indicated that comprehensive health care, counseling, stable housing and peer support were among the many areas of need.<sup>6</sup>
- It is also important to remember that the customer or “John” plays a larger role in tackling issues of sex work. Generally the worker is seen as the criminal not the “John” adding more complexity to this issue.<sup>6</sup>

HIV/AIDS is devastating communities of color in our state. Know the facts, and join in the fight against HIV/AIDS!

For more information on HIV/AIDS or for testing sites in NY, contact New York State's AIDS Hotline at 1-800-541-AIDS



Care Coordination Committee  
Minority Concerns Workgroup

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS Inter-Agency - HIV/AIDS, Gender and Sex Work 2001

<sup>2</sup> WHO - Violence against sex workers and HIV Prevention 2005

<sup>3</sup> CAPStudies - Sex workers' HIV prevention needs April 2008

<sup>4</sup> Prostitutes' Education Network - 2004

<sup>5</sup> UNAIDS - Sex work and HIV/AIDS June 2002

<sup>6</sup> Urban Justice Center - Behind Closed Doors 2005