

Relationship of Female Sex Workers and Gatekeepers: Implications for HIV/STD prevention

Chen Zhang¹, Yan Hong¹, Xiaoming Li², YaoFang Zhang³, Liuyuan Deng³, Yuejiao Zhou⁴, Ran Zhao⁵

1: Texas A&M Health Science center, School of Rural Public Health
2: Wayne State University School of Medicine
3: Beijing Normal University Institute of Developmental Psychology
4: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Guangxi Autonomous Region, China.,
5: Central University of Finance and Economics

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between Female Sex Workers (FSWs) and their Gatekeepers (GPs) by in-depth interview among 36 FSWs and 16 GPs in Guangxi, China. All qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis methods. The results showed that Gatekeepers and FSWs have reciprocal financial relationship. Gatekeepers sometimes do show sympathy and concerns for FSWs. The findings suggested that HIV prevention programs targeted the FSWs should take their Gatekeepers into consideration. It is a more cost-effective method.

Learning Objectives

- Understand how to conduct qualitative research with Female Sex Workers and their Gatekeepers in China
- Examine the relationship between Female Sex Workers and their Gatekeepers
- Explore culturally appropriate HIV/STD prevention interventions for Female Sex Workers in China

Background

- A majority of Female Sex Workers (FSWs) work in brothels or entertainment establishments
- Literature has documented the gatekeepers (establishment/brothel managers) exert significant influences on FSWs' HIV/STD prevention behaviors
- Data are rather limited regarding the relationship between the FSWs and Gatekeepers

Methods

- Research site: Beihai, Guangxi Province, P. R. China.
- Participants: We employed ethnographic targeted sampling to recruit 36 FSWs and 16 Gatekeepers from entertainment establishments that provide commercial sex services in Guangxi-China.
- For this study: In-depth interviews with 16 Gatekeepers and 31 FSWs by trained qualitative researchers
- Data analysis: All qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis methods guided by Grounded Theory.
- Software: Atlas ti (5.0)

Results

Table1: Participant characteristics—Gatekeepers (16 participants)

ID	Gender	Age	Establishment Type	Number of FSWs	Condom Provision
B1	M	46	restaurant	4 to 5	Not admit
B2	F	60	Massage Parlor	4-5 in low season, 10 in peak season	Provided by FSWs
B3	M	45	Massage Parlor	previous 15-16; now only 7-8	Free condoms from CDC
B4	F	42	Massage Parlor	previous 11-12; now only 6	Free condoms from CDC
B5	F	45	Hair Washing Room	Unstable employees, contacted by cell phones; total 20-30	Free condoms from CDC
B7	F	30	Hair Washing Room	Mostly unstable, 4-5 are regular "employees" over 10	Provided by FSWs
B8	M	36	Massage Parlor	over 10	Provided by FSWs
B9	F	24	Massage Parlor	7 to 8	Provided by FSWs
B10	M	48	Hair Washing Room	Unstable employees, contacted by cell phones. over 20	Provided by FSWs
B11	M	40	Sauna in Hotel	over 20	Free condom from CDC
B12	F	32	KTV	15 to 16	Free condom from CDC
B13	F	42	Sauna in Hotel	8 to 9	Provided by FSWs
B14	F	20	Sauna in Hotel	at most 10+	Provided by FSWs
B15	F	40	Tea house	Unstable	Provided by FSWs
B16	F	32	Sauna in Hotel	10+	Provided by FSWs

Participants characteristics-FSWs (36 participants)

- 50% of FSWs are over 30 years old; range (18-40)
- Only 5 misses start their career as FSWs, majority of them worked as factory workers, street vendor or waitress before entering commercial sex
- Length of working varied from 10 days to more than 10 years
- 2/3 of them had stable partners, including boyfriends, husband (usually at hometown or working in other places), or returning clients
- Half of them have experienced abusive clients, either verbal or physically
- Half of them had risky behaviors, including smoking, alcohol use, one used heroin before, inconsistent condom use with clients or boyfriends, repeated abortions
- 7 worry about health issue.
- 6 worry about money.

Diagram1: Typology Commercial Sex Establishments

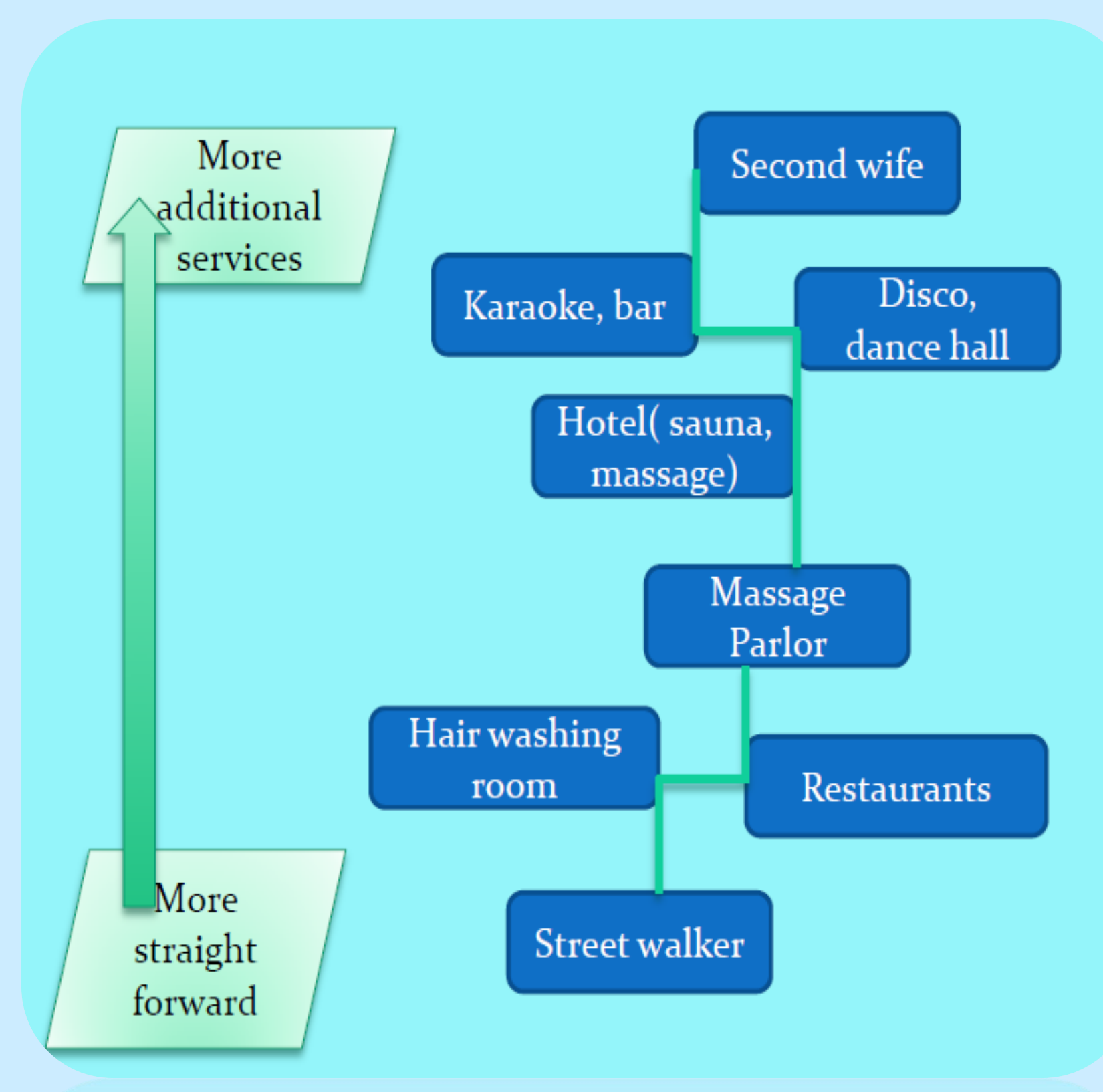


Diagram 2: Gatekeeper-FSWs Relationship



Explanation: Despite a big variety in their working conditions, establishment-based FSWs share a common characteristics: they work closely with their Gatekeepers (or so-called the "mommy" or "boss"). The Gatekeepers and FSWs have reciprocal financial relationship. Gatekeepers depend on FSWs to attract customers; FSWs rely on Gatekeepers to meet their clients, FSWs also need Gatekeepers' protection from abusive clients and law enforcement agencies. Gatekeepers sometimes do show sympathy and concerns for FSWs health and counsel women on personal hygiene and disease protection.

Conclusions

- Because of the closely-bound reciprocal relationship between the Gatekeepers and FSWs, Gatekeepers need to be included in HIV/STD prevention programs targeting FSWs.
- Qualitative research can provide important information on design and implementation of culturally appropriate HIV prevention interventions for FSWs in China.

Implications for future interventions

- Intervention programs that aim to reduce HIV risks among FSWs should also target their Gatekeepers due to their close relationship
- HIV/STD prevention intervention in future may target Gatekeepers. It is more cost-effectiveness
- We need to consider that whether we still stick to the traditional behavioral intervention featuring knowledge improvement, skill training and self-efficacy enhancement
- Most Gatekeepers and FSWs mention drunk clients are difficult to deal with—intervention programs also need to intervene with these clients.