

## Stigma against female sex workers and the associated sexual risks

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## Overview

- HIV/STI epidemic in China
- Stigma among Female Sex Workers in China
- Study methods
- Findings
- Discussion

## HIV/AIDS Epidemic in China

- Living with HIV/AIDS: **740,000** (official estimate, 2009).
- Less than **6%** were actually tested.
- Male vs. female: **64% vs. 36%**.
- Age: 60% are 16-29 years old.
- Adult prevalence: <0.1%

## STI epidemic in China

- Close to **one million new STI cases** have been reported annually in recent years
- There was an average **annual increase of 30%** from 1985 to 2004
- The rate of congenital syphilis increased at an annual rate of **72%** from **0.01 per 100,000** live births in 1991 to **19.68 per 100,000** in 2005

## Global Literature on Stigma

- Goffman (1963): “a stigma is an attribute, behavior, or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way”... and defined stigma as a “special kind of gap between virtual social identity and actual social identity”.
- Stanford & Scott (1986): stigma is a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit.

## Stigma against FSWs in China

- **Social stigmatization:**
  - FSWs are against acceptable social norms and roles for women (e.g. being gentle, passive, and sexually innocent)
  - Stigma from all levels of society (e.g. clients, managers, general population)
- **Legal discrimination:**
  - Social evils
  - Fiercely crack down

## An example: Shenzhen police crack down on sex trade



Police officers stand on guard against prostitutes during a public parade in Shenzhen, south China. The booming city has initiated a two-month long sweeping campaign, aiming to snare underground sex workers and illicit sex trade.



A veiled sex worker, under heavy guard undergoes a public parade.

## Resurgence of commercial sex in China

- Growing economic disparities
- Greater freedom of population movement
- Increased income disparity
- Changing norms of sexuality
- The primary motivation is MONEY

## Commercial sex in China

- An estimate of **10 million** female sex workers in China.
- Operate in a complex hierarchy.



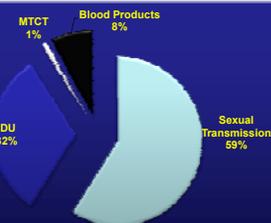
## Typology of Commercial Sex Establishments



## Commercial Sex: a driving force

- Majority of sexual transmission is through heterosexual transmission.
- A large proportion of heterosexual transmission is through commercial sex.

## Modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS in China (Total cumulative infections by 2005)



Source: UNAIDS and China Ministry of Health, 2009 Estimate for the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in China

## Sexual transmission of HIV

	2002	2005
Sexual transmission in total infection	7.2%	43.6%
	2005	2007
Sexual transmission in new infection	49.8%	60.0%

## Mental health status of FSWs



## Significance of current study

- Filling the literature gap and provide a valid psycho-matrix of stigma among FSWs
- Identifying factors related to stigma against FSWs in China
- Exploring culturally appropriate prevention strategies for reducing stigma of target population

## Research Questions

Q1: What factors attribute to stigma among FSWs in China?

Q2: Are stigma against FSWs increase the sexual risks and mental health problems among FSWs in China?

Q3: Whether the stigma against FSWs scale can be validated?

## Study Methods

- 1,022 FSWs
- Recruited through community outreach from different types of commercial sex venues
- Self-administered
- Cross-sectional
- Development of the stigma scale based on a previous qualitative study

## Findings

- Psycho-matrix characteristics of stigma scale
- Relationship of stigma and demographics
- Stigma and depression, condom use, IPV and STDs

## Psycho-matrix characteristics of stigma scale

Domains	Questions
Family	• The whole family loses face due to her work
Career	• Most FSWs have no choice of other work • FSWs should not be blamed because they make money by an alternative method • Most FSWs don't want to work hard, that's why they choose this career
Women Identity	• FSWs are only entertainment tools for men
HIV/AIDS	• HIV/AIDS is a retribution for some FSWs • HIV/AIDS is a self-inflicted disease for some FSWs
Social norms	• There is no difference between working for only one day and working for their whole life as FSWs • Once someone a FSW, she will have no good life forever • Most FSWs are lazy people • Most FSWs are not worthy of sympathy • It is difficult to rise head by working as FSWs • FSWs is unworthy of people's respect • Most FSWs have very low disposition • The society norms laughs at the poverty but not prostitution

## Scale of stigma against FSWs ( $\alpha=0.887$ )

Items	Item total correlation
1 Most FSWs have no choice of other work	0.197
2 FSWs should not be blamed because they make money by an alternative method	0.249
3 There is no difference between working for only one day and working for their whole life as FSWs	0.493
4 The whole family loses face due to her work	0.549
5 The society norms laughs at the poverty but not prostitution	0.419
6 Most FSWs don't want to work hard, that's why they choose this career	0.542
7 Once become a FSW, she will have no good life forever	0.615

## Scale of stigma against FSWs, cont. ( $\alpha=0.887$ )

Items	Item total correlation
8 Most FSWs are lazy people	0.618
9 Most FSWs are not worthy of sympathy	0.601
10 HIV/AIDS is a retribution for some FSWs	0.661
11 HIV/AIDS is a self-inflicted disease for some FSWs	0.667
12 It is difficult to rise head by working as FSWs	0.694
13 Most FSWs have very low disposition	0.653
14 FSWs are only entertainment tools for men	0.673
15 FSWs is unworthy of people's respect	0.647

## Demographic characteristics among FSWs: (Higher stigma vs. Lower stigma)

- Older FSWs are more likely to suffer stigma
- Comparing with never married FSWs, married FSWs have higher level of stigma
- The lower level of working venues, the higher level stigma that FSWs suffered

## Association between stigma and related sexual risks

	Stigma against FSWs (score)		
	Low level	Medium level	High level
Depression	14.67 (8.10)	17.93 (9.41)	19.86 (11.08) ****
Past or current STD infection	10.0%	42.9%	47.1%****
Drug use	22.3%	43.6%	34.1%****
Never HIV testing	34.6%	33.1%	32.3%
IPV from clients	1.28 (2.43)	1.81 (3.27)	2.43 (4.05)*
IPV from stable partners	2.06 (4.20)	2.83 (3.82)	3.06 (4.83) ****

## Multivariate logistic regression on association of stigma and sexual risks

	Inconsistent condom use w. stable partner	Inconsistent condom use w. clients	Intention of inconsistent condom use w. stable partner	Intention of inconsistent condom use w. clients	STD infection	Drug abuse	HIV testing	Depression
	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)	aOR (95%CI)
Stigma against FSWs (score)	1.002 (0.978, 1.028)	1.003 (0.99, 1.02)	1.01 (0.99, 1.03)	1.01 (0.99, 1.30)	1.083 (1.05, 1.12) ****	1.04 (1.02, 1.07) ****	0.99 (0.98, 1.01)	1.048 (1.030, 1.065) ****

Multivariate logistic regression by controlling possible confounders, e.g. age, education, marriage status, ethnicity, length of working, venue level and income

## Discussion

- The stigma scale has a high internal consistency and has been tested valid in the current study.
- The higher level of stigma that FSWs have suffered, the more likely that they have higher risk behaviors and mental health problems (e.g. drug use, depression, IPV).
- After controlling all possible confounders, stigma is significantly associated with depression, drug abuse, and STD infection.

## Discussion, cont.

- The stigma against FSWs has become a barrier for FSWs' HIV/STI preventive behaviors.
- It is important to advocate for their rights and implement constructive policies to reduce stigma.
- Economic empowerment and educational opportunities are urgently needed for FSWs.

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## Questions?



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