

SOME FACTORS PROMOTING SEX EMPLOYMENT IN ETHIOPIA

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Extensive surveys on HIV prevalence have been carried out in urban settlements of Ethiopia in 1988 -1989, among females involved in multi-partner sexual contacts (MPSC) (1,2). Pre- and post-test counselling was a permanent component of these surveys. Through individual interviews preceding blood drawing, valuable information was collected on the social status and STD/pregnancy protection practiced by the target group (3,4). The questionnaire however did not cover several important subjects such as factors provoking prostitution and economic status of the MPSC females. In order to obtain this information, a limited scale survey was carried out in three cities: Addis Ababa, Assela and Nazareth in 1989, among 339 MPSC females selected at random (113, 128 and 98 individuals in each town respectively).

A number of reasons have been reported to the ACP counsellors that led the females to turn to MPSC practice (table 1). Most of the reasons identified related to family or social problems faced in the past. Death of a parent while the second parent was not able to support the family, or disagreement with a step parent, would force the adolescent to look for additional income or to separate from the family. Some females, specifically those married at a very young age, had to break their marriage due to reported misbehavior (drinking, extreme domination) of their husbands, their low income or infertility. One of the reasons for leaving their parental families was premarital pregnancy, which for traditional reasons would not be acceptable. Many females, who were studied in the town where they lived, or those immigrated from rural areas and given up their education, mentioned the lack of employment possibilities, leaving no choice but to start MPSC practice.

Girls leaving schools due to lack of financial support, even graduates, were the major pool for MPSC females. About one third of the prostitutes indicated divorce as a reason for turning to their present occupation. Some females, though limited in number, reported that they joined MPSC practice of their own will. For many inexperienced adolescents, the life style of the bar girls reportedly looked appealing from outside. However, after being employed, they suffered from both their employers and clients. Money earned barely covered day to day expenditures for food and clothing, leaving nothing to save for payment of medical treatment or life security .

Frequent alcohol consumption and chewing chatt led some females into addiction. Their partners insist on promiscuity and mis-behaviour to get reimbursed by the adventure they

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paid for. 90.3% of females responded to the question concerning their monthly income through MPSC practice in Addis Ababa (table 2). The monthly income ranged from Birr

12.50 to Birr 500.00 and the average was Birr 116 (US \$1 = 2.07 E. Birr). In Nazareth, the minimum monthly income was of Birr 11, the maximum of Birr 220 and the average of Birr 57.90. In Assela 10 out of 128 (7.8 %) did not respond; among the respondents the income ranged from Birr 7.50 to Birr 175, averaging at Birr 58.20.

Apart from the income earned by MPSC practice, 142 females (44.6%) reported earnings by working at bars, hotels or tella (local beer), tej (local wine) houses where they also solicit their sexual partners. 45 out of 113 (39.8%) females in Addis Ababa had no other source of income except the MPSC practice. The remainder

Table 1. Reasons for involvement in prostitution as reported by MPSC females

	Addis Ababa	Assela	Nazareth	Total
Divorce	23(20.7)*	36(29.3)	37(37.8)	96(28.9)
Disagreement with parental family	29(26.1)	16(13.0)	24(24.5)	69(20.8%)
leaving schools due to lack of financial support	45(40.5)	64(52.0)	25(25.5)	134(40.4)
leaving parents' house due to premarital pregnancy	7(6.3)	7(2.1)		
Out of their own will	7(6.3)	7(5.7)	12(12.2)	26(7.8)
Total respondents	111	123	98	332

- Number of persons; in brackets: percentage of all respondents.

have reported earning from Birr 20, to Birr 430 with the average of Birr 47.36, monthly. In Nazareth 35 of the 98 females reported to have no source of income other than MPSC. The remainder said employment at bars, hotels, etc. gave additional earnings of a minimum of Birr 10 to Birr 100 a month. In Assela, 51.6% earned through employment (Birr 7.50 to 90 Birr) at the beverage establishment .

The females were further asked if they would stop MPSC practice if they had another job or a substitute payment. In Addis Ababa, 108 persons (95.6%) were found to be willing to give up the practice. The remaining five didn't want to change their occupation. The minimum requirement to substitute monthly income was reported Birr 20 to Birr 300. From 98 females in Nazareth, 95 (97%) preferred to stop MPSC practice if they could get a job or substitute payment averaging Birr 102.64.

In Assela, out of 119 persons who responded, 116 (90.6%) were willing to give up MPSC if provided with a job or other source of income; 3 females did not want to give up MPSC. From those who would be willing to give up MPSC practice, 12 females did not respond to the question on the amount of monthly income required as substitute. The remainder had identified Birr 30 to Birr 200. The amounts more frequently mentioned were Birr 50 in Addis Ababa and Assela, and Birr 100 in Nazareth town.

Table 2. Income of the females involved in MPSC
in Ethiopian Birr

Addis Ababa Assela Nazareth

Monthly income:

Minimum 12.50 7.50 11.00

Maximum 500.00 175.00 220.00

Mean 116.00 58.20 57.90

Mode 60.00 45.00 75.00

MPSC as a single

source of income

Persons (%) 45(39.8) 62(48.4) 35(35.7)

Income from

other than MPSC

Sources:

Minimum 20.00 7.50 10.00

Maximum 430.00 90.00 100.00

Mean 47.60 33.30 35.10

Mode 40.00 20.00 30.00

Willing to change

occupation for(x)

Birr a month:

Minimum 20.00 30.00 30.00

Maximum 300.00 200.00 400.00

Mean 96.84 74.44 102.64

Mode 50.00 50.00 100.00

CONCLUSION

The majority of the 339 MPSC females questioned in three towns of Ethiopia were forced by one or another reason, to start practicing prostitution. The major reasons were lack of financial support for continuing education and problems within parental, or their own families. Most of the family problems related to breaking traditional customs or behaviour of husbands.

The monthly income earned from prostitution ranged from Birr 7.50 to Birr 500 a month. About half of the females had an additional income of Birr 7.50 to Birr 430 a month, being employed mainly at the beverage establishments, where they usually practiced prostitution. Finally, 94.1% of the prostitutes would like to change their occupation if given a chance to earn, on an average, about Birr 100 a month.

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