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Addressing the health and rights: Needs of sex workers in Tanzania

Today, HIV/AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is recognized not only as a major public health concern but also a social, economic and developmental problem in Tanzania as in most African countries. In the year 2013, there were a total of 1.4 million people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in Tanzania. A survey conducted in Dar es Salaam in 2010 reported HIV prevalence among sexual workers to be 31.4% compared to the prevalence of 10.4% in the general population. Sex work is illegal in Tanzania and it is punishable by law. Despite this fact, the findings of many studies have revealed that several people engage in sex work due to an increased poverty which is an important source of income for many women. Health risks include contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV. Yet sex worker health needs remain largely unmet. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the current challenges on health and rights needs and suggestions to improve HIV prevention policy and programming for sex workers in Tanzania. The research was based on interviews conducted in two highly STDs and HIV infected regions of Dar es Salaam and Pwani in Tanzania to selected household members among sex workers regarding their sexual behaviors, risk factors for STDs/HIV epidemics and ways of preventing from transmission. The study found that criminalization of sex work, community and service provider stigma, marginalization and limited access to health services and prevention commodities contribute to the high HIV burden evident among female sex workers in Tanzania. Furthermore, restrictive policy and laws towards sex workers are harmful and should be removed to increase sex worker safety and enhance the inclusiveness of the HIV response.

Biography

Nichoderms Mwaduma is an innovative person with over 40 years of senior management experience and holding various technical advisory positions with both local and international institutions. He has solid knowledge and research experience on social and economic issues including doing researches related HIV/AIDS prevention and cure particularly with at-risk populations. He has pursued his MSc degree in Development Studies specializing, Social Science Research and a master's degree (MA) in Economics including a Diploma in Public Health. He is the Director and Senior Research Consultant of Dar es Salaam Abandoned Children, a local non-profit organization incorporated in the laws of Tanzania in 2006.

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