

HIV RISK BEHAVIORS AMONG ASIAN MASSAGE PARLOR WORKERS IN SAN FRANCISCO

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BACKGROUND

A number of studies describing HIV risk behaviors among female commercial sex workers in Asian countries reported low rates of condom use with customers. However, there is no information about HIV-related behaviors among Asian massage parlor workers (masseuses) in the U.S.

OBJECTIVES

- To describe HIV risk and protective behaviors in relation to sociocultural contexts among the targeted Asian masseuses in San Francisco.
- To suggest future intervention strategies to reduce HIV risk behaviors and violence among the target group.

METHODS

Instrument Development

- Conducted qualitative interviews with 7 Vietnamese and 2 Thai masseuses
- Based on the qualitative interviews and our previous studies, developed a structured questionnaire
- Measures: drug use and sexual behaviors, demographics, AIDS knowledge, positive norms toward condom use, fatalism, and reliance on subjective evaluation of customers
- Questionnaire: Translated into Vietnamese

Recruitment and Interview

- During off-peak hours, after verbally obtaining informed consent, conducted in-person interviews with masseuses at cafés, restaurants, or massage parlors by a Vietnamese outreach worker
- On average, one hour interview per participant
- \$40 being paid for her time
- A total of 107 interviews: 98 in English and 9 in Vietnamese (7 were discarded from analyses)
- Completed between May 1998 and February 1999

FINDINGS

Working Conditions

- On average, masseuses work 10.5 hours/day for 5.3 days a week (85% work 10 hours or more per day; 41% work 6 days or 7 days a week).
- Masseuses have 26.6 customers a week on average.
- Almost all masseuses have to pay the house a portion of the charges for their sexual services. Most masseuses pay 40% to 50% of their earnings to owners.

Sexual Activities

WITH CUSTOMERS:

- Masseuses' condom use with customers: 77% for oral sex and 100% for vaginal sex
- Condom breakage: 32% ever; 20% in the past 6 months
- Condom slip-off: 10% ever; 7% in the past 6 months
- Condom supply: 100% from the house without charge
- Sex while menstruating: 10%
- Douching after sex: 79% always

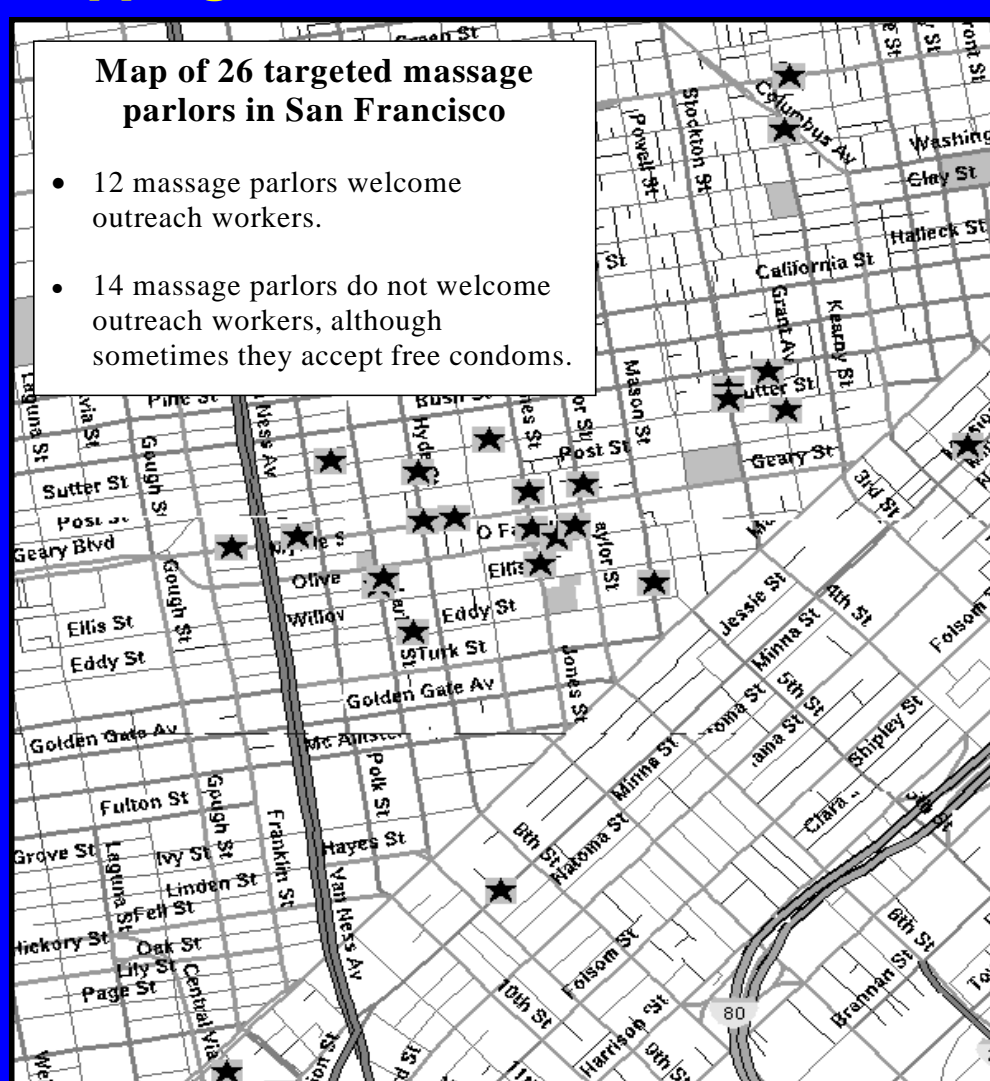
WITH PRIVATE PARTNERS:

- Sex with a private partner in the past 6 months: 23%
- Using a condom: 17% always use

DISCUSSION

- Compared with previous studies in Asian countries, Asian masseuses in San Francisco reported higher rates of condom use with customers, even for oral sex.
- Condom breakage or slipping-off incidences, or low rate of condom use with private partners may account for relatively high rates of STD infection among masseuses.
- Masseuses' working conditions are further worsened by incidences of violence from customers, owners, and co-workers.
- The masseuses with no formal or less than high school education may engage in high-risk behaviors because of their less positive norms toward condom use and reliance on their perception of customers.

Mapping



Demographics (N = 100)

Ethnicity	Age: M=32.8 years
81 Vietnamese	(Range 25 - 64 years)
5 Thai	Immigrant Status: 100% Immigrant
4 Korean	Years in U.S.: M = 8.4 years
4 Chinese	(Range 2 - 20 years)
6 Other	Marital Status: 80% Single
Education	
No formal education	32%
Less than high school degree	39%
High school diplomas or equivalent	12%
Trade/Technical School or College	17%

Health

- 75% have had pregnancies and 54% have had abortions
- 24% have children
- 75 masseuses currently using or have used birth control pills
- 22% infected with Hepatitis B
- 47% had vaginal candidiasis in the past 6 months

Drug Use

- 83% ever drinking alcohol; 67% in the past 30 days
- 22% ever using marijuana; 12% in the past 30 days
- 14% ever using crack; 9% in the past 30 days
- No masseuse reporting injection drug use

Violence

- 62% physically abused by customers; 18% of them being hospitalized
- Threatened with physical harm by a customer (46%), by a manager (16%), by private partners (16%), and by co-workers (48%)

Sociocultural context

Masseuses with higher AIDS knowledge were more likely to have higher positive norms toward condom use and higher fatalistic views, but less likely to rely on their perception of customers for condom use than those who had lower knowledge. Levels of education were significantly correlated with AIDS knowledge ($r = .44, p < .01$).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further encourage 100% condom use with customers for all sexual services.
- Provide information about how to handle the accident (e.g., breakage and slip-off).
- Provide skill-training on how to avoid violence.
- Conduct community HIV prevention interventions targeting masseuses as well as massage parlor owners and customers.