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## **FACTORS RELATED TO FEMALE COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STI) PREVENTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Sexually transmitted infections are still a public health problem in the world, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia. The spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI) among female commercial sex workers cannot be eradicated but may be reduced through prevention efforts.

**Aims:** This study aims to determine the factors related to female commercial sex workers' attitude towards STI prevention.

**Methods:** This study used quantitative research type with cross sectional approach and purposive sampling to obtain 66 respondents through questionnaire as study instrument.. Data analysis used chi square statistical test.

**Results:** The study revealed that 42.4% was in the young age, 50% had low education level, 54.5% had income more than minimum regional wage, 53% had good knowledge of STI Prevention, 65.2% had support from friends and landlady and 57.6% had good attitude. After the chi square test there was no significant relationship between age, education, income, and friends' supports to attitude of commercial sex workers toward STI prevention. Knowledge was found as the only variable associated to commercial sex workers' attitudes toward STI prevention.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that there was a significant relationship between knowledge and the attitude of respondents in the efforts of STIs prevention.

**Keywords:** Age, Education, Income, Knowledge, Support, Attitude

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS remains a public health problem in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia. Although STI programs have been implemented nationally and globally [1] but it continue affects women and their babies. STI is not only deteriorate women's health but also be transmitted to the fetus during pregnancy. Moreover, an untreated sexually transmitted infection will result in more severe health effects including impaired fertility, chronic hip bone pain, cervical cancer and adverse effects for children born from infected women during pregnancy [2].

Sex work is widely acknowledged as the primary context for heterosexual HIV/AIDS transmission worldwide, including many parts in Asia. The Ministry of Health of Republic Indonesia reported, about 39% - 61% of female commercial sex workers in various cities in Indonesia suffered from chlamydia or gonorrhea in 2015. In addition, it is estimated that more than 3 million men in Indonesia are occasionally

buying sex, whilst half of those men have a permanent partner or wife. Thus, it can be estimated that transmission can continue to the wife [3-5].

Female sexual workers are at higher risk because they are subjected to inappropriate sexual treatment such as anal sex and the failure of condom use and refusal of clients regarding condom use [6]. Women engaged in industrial sex have a high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases compared to women from countries with a high prevalence of sex [7]. Although condom use interventions have been widely implemented, [8, 9] but low bargaining power of female sex workers will result in rejection of condom use, and finally, the female sex workers will be more vulnerable to be infected by sexually transmitted diseases. Studies also found, poor knowledge and low awareness of the infection predicts the risk of STIs among sex workers. It was found, 36% of women and 30% of men had never heard HIV/AIDS and 66% of women and 60% of men were unaware of Sexually Transmitted Infections [10].

According to Central Java Provincial Health Office, there was an increased on the cumulative number of STIs, from 1,214 in 2013 to 2,023 in 2005. Data from the Semarang Municipal Health Office in 2007 showed that some STIs decreased compared to 2006, because in 2007 PTT (Periodic Presumptive Treatment) activity was conducted in all STI clinics in Semarang [11]. Clinical data of PKBI OXFAM NOVIB in the sukosari localization of Wirukan Village of Bawen Sub District from January until December 2007 recorded 147 Female Sex Workers were infected by cervicitis, 55 were infected by cervicitis and bacterial vaginal (BV) and 35 were infected by bacterial vaginal. Based on the data from Bergas Public Health Center, the number of women infected by STI was increased but the STI type was decreased. Therefore, this study aims to analyze factors related to the attitude of female commercial sex workers in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

## **METHODS**

This study employed quantitative research with cross sectional design. Sixty six female sex workers residing at Sukosari localization of Bawen Semarang were involved in the study, selected purposively from the population with these following inclusion criteria: ever exposed to STIs and is willing to be involved in the study. Female Sex Workers who refused and did not living in the Sukosari localization were excluded from the study. Prior to the survey, permission from the Semarang District Health Office, and Bergas PHC and Sub-district as well as to the civil service police station and landlady were obtained.

The study instrument used here was questionnaire. The univariate statistic test used percentage whilst chi square test with significance level of  $<0.05$  was employed in bivariate analysis. Knowledge was assessed from a set of questions posed to the respondents, with a cutoff point as follows: good if the respondents' correct answer respondents above 75%; intermediate if respondents' correct answer ranged between 60-75%; and poor if correct answer below 60%. Variable support was measured by the respondents' perceived of support, whether he/she obtained any support from others, expressed in yes or no. Attitude variable was measured by using likert scale using favorable and unfavorable statements which then be scored. Respondents are categorized into positive attitude if their score  $\geq T$ , whilst those whose score lower than T will be regarded as having negative attitudes.

## **RESULTS**

The study results of factors related to the attitude of female sexual workers in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections are presented in the table below:

Factors	Attitude		P value
	Negative (n=28)	Positive (n=38)	
Age			
12-20	42.9	42.1	0.976
20-35	35.7	34.2	
>35	21.4	23.7	
Education			
Elementary School/Junior High School	46.4	47.4	0.348
High school	42.9	52.6	
University	10.7	0.0	
Income			
≥UMR (≥ Rp. 715.000)	42.9	47.4	0.909
< UMR (< Rp. 715.000,00)	57.1	52.6	
Knowledge above STIS			
Good	32.1	68.4	0.014*
Intermediate	39.3	18.4	
Poor	28.6	13.2	
Support			
Without support of friends and landlady	67.9	63.2	0.893
With support of friends and landlady	32.1	36.8	

Respondents with positive attitude were mostly the younger ones with elementary or junior high school and with income above the minimum regional rate. Based on chi square test, the P value was 0.976 which showed that there was no significant relationship between respondent's age and attitude (P value > 0.05). Likewise, there was no significant relationship between education and attitude (P value > 0.05). Chi-square test on income also showed that there was no significant relationship between income and attitude (P-value > 0.05).

Those who have good knowledge mostly have a good attitude, whilst among those who have intermediate level of knowledge, mostly have negative attitudes. Chi square test showed the p-value was 0.014 which mean there was a significant relationship between knowledge and attitude.

## DISCUSSION

The study found, there is no association between respondents' characteristics to their attitudes toward STIs. This is because the respondents of all ages have equal opportunity in receiving information given by health officers, friends, landlords either in the form of direct and indirect counseling and information through mass media and electronics. In some instance, younger female sex workers are usually have better attitudes because at a young age, it is easier to receive outside information about STIs. Theoretically, income affects female sex workers' knowledge and attitudes toward STIs. Female sex workers from lower economic status are vulnerable because they will refrain from negotiating condom with clients before agreeing on prices [12]. The absence of relationship between education and attitude is due to not all information obtained from educational path in which most of respondents had low education level. This study is not in accordance with Notoatmodjo theory that education level of someone will influence in giving response to something from outside. While the absence of relationship between income and attitude is due to with high income someone is more concerned with the physical condition or other needs that function to achieve social status, so the need for optimal health itself is neglected. This study is consistent with the study conducted by Hadi

that characteristics of sex workers (age, education and income) had no significant relationship with attitude towards HIV/AIDS prevention [13, 14].

The study found that respondents' knowledge affects their attitude. This is because respondents often obtained information about STIs through other sources of information such as mass media, electronic media as well as from fellow FSW friends. In general, knowledge will from a certain attitude within a person and this influences daily actions. This study is consistent with the previous studies that revealed knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention had a significant relationship with attitude [13, 14] since knowledge (cognitive and conceptual) was a major supporting component and factor that greatly influenced a person in acting.

There was no significant relationship between support of friends and landlady with respondents' attitude. This is due to the respondent actually got support but they still lack of confidence or duration of working. Social interaction is influenced by the length of employment of sex worker women which will also influence support so that they will be vulnerable to be infected with STIs. Female sex workers with regular clients are less likely to be HIV/STI Positive than women without regular clients. Similarly, male partners from female sex workers who have regular clients tend to be infected with HIV/STIs.[18]

## CONCLUSION

From the study, knowledge variable was the only variable that has significant relationship with attitude. Good knowledge will affect the attitude of female sex workers in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, especially condoms use. With an adequate knowledge, it is expected that female sex worker more open themselves about information and social interaction and would have positive attitude in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. With this research, it is expected that the localization environment will improve the social relationship between FWS because with the existence of good social relations will improve the attitude of FWS in preventing STIs and for the government should be more strengthen STI in localization environment.

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