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Examining Participant Perspectives on Social and Structural Constraints on Research Involving Sex Workers

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Fordham RETI
Cohort 1
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- **Collaborations: Local government, Universities, NGOs**

- **Surveyed 498 female bar/spa workers
47 managers (54 venues)**

- **Qualitative Ethics Research**
- **Pilot of a Human Rights Intervention**

Community-based Intervention Research in the Philippines (2006-2014)

Funded by: UC Office of the President Pacific Rim Research Project; UCLA International Institute, Fordham RETI (R25DA031608 PI: Fisher)

Sex Work and Its Associations With Alcohol and Methamphetamine Use Among Female Bar and Spa Workers in the Philippines

Urada LA, Strathdee SA, Morisky DM, Schilling RF, Simbulan N, Estacio L, Raj A.

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1 in 5 who traded sex used meth

Over 4 times more likely to be sexually abused (lifetime)



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Background

Emergent themes of my MRP included sex worker issues in the Philippines with trust (e.g. research in general, project interviewers), intrusiveness of survey questions, sense of being forced by government to do surveys, and the belief that nothing would happen as a result of the research.

Both FSW and managers expressed dissatisfaction with government support and were frustrated with their inability to stop police raids and bribes.



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Methods of MRP

Face-to-face, 1-on-1 semi-structured to unstructured interviews with 20 female entertainers, 10 managers (30 min.-1 hour).

Showed former survey & consent form to participants to elicit feedback about the consent process & surveys.

Scripted narrative probes kept interviews hypothetical (vignettes).



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Themes- Social and Structural Constraints on Research Participation

Consent (lack of voluntariness)

Confidentiality mistrust (absence
of a COC)

High risks (signatures and audio
recording waived)

Benefits not seen in the
community



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Reactions to survey questions

Surveys evoked “fear, shame, embarrassment, surprise... Personal questions about my profits, how many customers I had, if I had sex with them, was drunk during sex, or used condoms with them, if I used drugs...These questions ‘hit below the belt’...”

- Female bar/spa worker, Metro Manila



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Lack of voluntariness

“We are forced to join because it was the Health Department doing the interview.”

“Sometimes we are being forced to participate in a survey even if we do not want to because of being afraid that our manager would be angry or kick us off our job when we do not participate with them.”

– Female bar/spa workers



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Distrust of Confidentiality

“We are afraid you will report us to the police...Here in our industry we cannot blame people using drugs because this can help them boost their guts in this kind of work. There are many programs implemented by government about drugs...but of course [we] will be afraid to ask for help.”

-Female bar/spa worker

“Almost half at my work use drugs. Some are afraid to ask for help for drug use...afraid of getting kicked out of the job...Others refuse to take an HIV test which might detect their drug use.”

-Female bar/spa worker



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Risks

“Police raid establishments so that they can profit from us, especially during Christmas...Some plant condoms to use as evidence to file charges on us. We do not have the capacity or power to do anything against the police.”

- Female bar/spa worker

“Government cannot help stop police raids, even for Managers’ Association members”

- Bar Manager



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Unseen Benefits

“We do not experience any results...so we feel sometimes we are just being studied.”

- Female bar/spa worker



“Kapihan” Intervention, Metro Manila **Five 4-hour single-session groups (n=96)**

Funding: Fordham University HIV Prevention Research Ethics Training Institute (R25DA031608 PI: Fisher), UCLA International Institute



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Questions (scales 1-10)

How much do you know about human rights for sex workers or entertainers, women, and youth?

How much do you know about your rights as research participants?

What are your intentions to test for HIV in the next 3 months?



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Reproductive health & violence against women/children Philippines Law

The Responsible Parenthood & Reproductive Health Act

Anti-Violence against Women & their Children Act

Anti-Rape Law

Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act



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Knowledge of human rights

	Pretest Score (range)	Posttest Score (range)	Wilcoxon sign rank/ Mann Whitney test	<i>p</i> - value
Male (street)	3 (1-6)	6 (4-8)	-3.462	0.001
Females (street)	5 (3-6)	8 (3-10)	-2.827	0.005
Females (venue)	10 (8-10)	10 (9-10)	-0.790	0.430



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Knowledge of rights as research participants

	Pretest Score (range)	Posttest Score (range)	Wilcoxon sign rank/ Mann Whitney test	p-value
Male (street)	3 (1-5)	6 (1-9)	-2.513	0.012
Females (street)	4 (1-8)	8 (4-10)	-3.337	0.001
Females (venue)	9 (7-10)	10 (8-10)	-3.006	0.003

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Intent to test for HIV in next 3 months, medians & Wilcoxon signed rank tests

