ABSTRACT

The study is set within the context of brothel based FSW (FSW) sexual behavior of condom use/non-use with clients. This specific work exemplified attributes of culture of sex work to understand determinants of condom use; knowledge and attitudes towards condom use, its influence on practice of safe sex, barriers in condom use, and effects of non-use of condoms in terms of its implication on FSW health. The study grasped red light area’s sex work as a “micro–culture” in the larger domain of sexual behaviors in India. The basis for the study was high percentage of reported condom use among FSW of red light area complemented with intimidating prevalence of STIs/HIV. The glitch in adopting safe sex behavior was studied profoundly with anthropological perspective.

The study was conducted in the red light area of Pune city in the state of Maharashtra, India. Mixed methods were used to understand holistic context of condom use of FSW. Quantitative methods for statistical inferences followed by qualitative methods for flexibility and detailed probing for in depth information. The quantitative numbers were supplemented with illustrative, evocative, closer view of the community of FSW. The sample size was calculated based on IBBA guidelines for surveys among FSW in India. A sample size of 80 FSW was obtained. Two-stage sampling methodology was used; selections of clusters (brothels) with systematic random sampling method followed by selection of FSW from the selected clusters by convenient sampling. Mapping of the study area facilitated, list of brothels and approximate number of FSW in it. A subset of 20 FSW was selected purposively from the sample of 80 FSW for qualitative study. For key informants’ interviews, brothel owners, pan vendors of the red light area and a private medical practitioner were selected purposively. The tools included interview schedule with a scale and a pictorial tool that was used for quantitative study. Interview guide was used for qualitative study. Savitribai Phule Pune University’s ethics committee’s approval was sought for the study. Written consent was obtained from all the FSW (signature/thumb impression). Written consent with impartial witness (witness to the consent process) was taken for some respondents. The data collection was achieved after overcoming of series of challenges. Quantitative data analysis was mainly done using statistical tools of analysis with the help of SPSS 20 version. The Likert items
from the scale tool were subjected to reliability analysis to measure the internal consistency of the resulting scale. MAXQDA software was used to manage the qualitative data. The interview transcripts after reading and re-reading were developed into an open codes frame; codes were formed into categories and later transformed into themes. Patterns were studied in detail among the themes.

The mean age of sample was 29.8 years. 80% respondents could not read and write, but were aware about limitations of illiteracy, FSW from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh constituted major percentage of the sample followed by FSW from West Bengal, migration for sex work, presence of FSW from Bangladesh were found. More than one fourth respondent were married, three fourth have come willingly in sex work, 35% entered in sex work as minors justifying qualitative finding for demand for young FSW, rates negotiated in the red light area depends on the service provided and amount of time spent by FSW with clients, higher rates for sex acts without condoms. 90% respondents were aware about HIV/AIDS, accompanied with misconceptions about transmission of HIV; high proportion of FSW possessed mid-level comprehensive knowledge about correct condom use. Majority do not perceive the risk of getting infected with HIV, also has positive attitudes towards condom use, qualitative findings highlighted FSW negative attitude towards condom use, no significant association between knowledge about condom use and attitudes towards condoms was found. In all 70% respondents are in relationship with regular non-paying partners, around 90% FSW reported of not using condoms with regular partner consistently. Barriers included physical- clients reluctance to use condoms, claims that it reduces pleasure, entertaining drunken clients, FSW habit of drinking alcohol, sex work during menstruation and by seropositive FSW, financial barriers; experience of loss of income for insisting condom use, organizational barriers; uneven distribution of free condoms in the red light area, emotional barriers; non-use of condoms with regular partners (RPs) because of beliefs that RP is like their husband, love RP very much, trust, RPs wants to enjoy sex, desire to conceive, low self-efficacy to convince RPs about condom use. Effects of non-use of condoms include high prevalence of STI symptoms among FSW. Misconceptions around symptoms of STIs, incidence of induced abortion was found to be high.
Condom use among FSW with clients is determined by their socio cultural factors. FSW portrayed high to mid-level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and correct condom use, reported consistent condom use with all types of clients was found to be low. The study exhibited no significant association between knowledge about condom use with attitude towards condom use. High knowledge and positive attitudes towards condom use have failed to transform into practice of safe sex of consistent condom use with clients. On the basis of the study’s findings it recommends that the FSW in the red light area of Pune is in a crucial need of culture specific, HIV prevention program. Policies on condom use, currently focusing on FSW should emphasize on educating clients than FSWs alone. It is recommended that the IEC strategy needs to be designed to empower FSW for condom use, using technology and scientific evidence on appropriate methods. The study recommends that qualitative study methods are constructive in studying complex phenomenon as condom use among FSW.