

Heroin use among female sex workers

The paper contains descriptive primary data collected from the female ward of the Welikada Prison, Colombo. A non random sample of 19 heroin using female sex workers was interviewed face to face using a questionnaire for a survey on drug use among female drug offenders at the Welikada Prison during March 2000, which represented 12% of the inmates of the female ward.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the sex workers were aged between 31 and 40 years and 26% were between 26 and 30 years. Half of them (53%) were either cohabiting or separated 16% of the sex workers were married, 5% divorced. 21% were widowed. While seven (37%) of them had never been to school, 10% had completed G.C.E. (Ordinary Level). the majority of the sex workers (89%) had children.

The heroin using sex workers were multiple drug users. In addition to heroin, they had used cigarettes (95%), alcohol (31%), cannabis (26%) and hashish (5%). They had also experimented with psychotropic drugs such as flunitrazepam, diazepam and barbitone.

Nearly a third (37%) of sex workers had started on heroin below 20 years of age and 16% had started below 15 years. All of them were daily heroin chasers (Chinese method). However, 11% had experimented with intravenous drug use and discontinued it due to fear of contracting HIV. While 79% used between 4 and 6 packets of heroin, 21% used between 7 and 10 packets a day. A third (32%) had been treated for sexually transmitted diseases (STD) at the STD clinic in the Colombo Hospital.