



Condom use among female sex workers in Ethiopia, 2002 – 2008

The Wise-Up Project

The following analysis examines demographic and condom use trends among female sex workers in Ethiopia. The analysis is based on the Behavioral Surveillance Survey (BSS) 2002, BSS 2005, and The Wise-Up Project's (Wise-Up) baseline research (2008)¹.

As Table 1 below indicates, the mean age of sex workers and percentage of sex workers under the age of 20 have remained relatively constant since 2002. A study by Family Health International (FHI) in 1989 indicated that sex workers had a mean age of 31.5. If representative, the decrease in mean age from the late 1980s is worrying given that younger sex workers are less likely to influence condom-use behaviors of their partners.

Table 1 - Compiled data on condom use by sex workers in Ethiopia

	BSS1² (2002)	BSS2³ (2005)	DKT / HAPCO⁴ (2008)
Mean age of sex workers	22.2	25.1	22
Percent of sex workers under the age of 20	30.0%	36.5	33.8%
Mean number of clients per week	3	3	5
Sex workers condom use with most recent clients – last 7 days	91.6%	98.3%	99.4%
Sex workers condom use with clients – consistently over the 30 days preceding the interview	90.8%	93.3%	86.2%
Sex workers condom use with non-paying partners – consistently over the 30 days preceding the interview	--	78.3%	67.5%
Sex workers condom use with non-paying partners – consistently over the year preceding the interview	70.5%	70.2%	56.3%

This trend analysis indicates a significant increase in sex workers' mean number of clients per week, from three in 2002 to five in 2008. This trend entails an increased number of unprotected sex acts (provided condoms use remains the same or decreases).

¹ Wise-Up's baseline research used questionnaires based on BSS questionnaires, but targeted to venue-based sex workers. As such, there is consistency between the BSS and Wise-Up surveys.

² The study targeted Bahir Dar, Nazareth, Liben-Borena, Awassa, Gambella, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and included venue and street-based sex workers.

³ The study targeted Adama, Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar and included venue and street-based sex workers.

⁴ The study targeted 10 major towns and included venue, but NOT street-based sex workers.



In this regard, the data is mixed. For example, 91.6% of sex workers used condoms with their most recent client (last seven days) in 2002 compared to 99.4% in 2008. At the same time, 90.8% of sex workers used condoms consistently with clients over a 30-day period in 2002 compared to 86.2% in 2008.

The trend in sex workers' use of condoms with non-paying partners is worrying. In 2002, 70% of sex workers used condoms consistently with non-paying partners during the one-year recall period compared to 56% in 2008.

The above trends should be viewed with some caution given differences in methodology and changing social norms that make reporting non-use of condoms more acceptable. In terms of methodology, the BSS surveys included both venue and street-based sex workers whereas Wise-Up focused only on venue-based sex workers. Though it is not clear how this might affect condom use, this difference requires caution.

In addition, given the ever-increasing acceptability of condoms, sex workers in the BSS 2002 and 2005 surveys may have felt more desire to report condom use than sex workers in the Wise-Up survey ("social desirability bias").

The BSS 2009 and Wise-Up follow-up assessment in 2011 will provide additional insight into these apparent trends.