

RISKY BUSINESS PALAU:
Hostessing, sex work
and HIV prevention in Koror



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Risky Business Palau

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sex workers are a key target group for HIV prevention activities in Palau where HIV incidence is low, but there are significant risk factors for transmission.

Sex work undertaken by hostesses in the entertainment and hospitality industry is the main form of sex work in Palau.

Effective prevention programs for sex workers must be acceptable to, and be able to engage, hostesses more generally in order to effectively reach sex workers.

A hostess role is part of many jobs undertaken by migrant women employed in Palau's entertainment and hospitality industry. Not all hostesses in all entertainment venues sell sex.

The majority of hostess workers in Koror, the capital of Palau, come from China or the Philippines, and the workplaces typically differ by the country of origin of the workers. The circumstances, concerns and needs of Chinese hostess workers with regard to paid sex and HIV and STI prevention differ in many respects from those of Filipino hostess workers.

Due to language limitations, few in-depth interviews could be held with Chinese hostesses. Therefore, the interview data reported on in this document predominantly reflects the experiences, needs and concerns of the Filipina interviewees.

Hostesses in KTV bars are required to wear revealing clothing and present themselves in a sexualised way. The hostess role is to serve drinks, dance, sing and/or talk with customers. Kissing, cuddling and being physically handled by male patrons who pay for drinks is standard practice in most hostess establishments. VIP and other private rooms afford in-house venues where sex can take place.

Some establishments also provide call-out services. Clients frequently expect that hostesses and masseuses who are booked for callouts will also negotiate sexual services.

Interviewees say that it is the worker's decision whether or not to provide sexual services.

Employment agents in the Philippines routinely mislead prospective hostess workers over the nature of the role and the salary, and charge high fees for placements.

Although some hostesses had been misled about the job that they were contracting to do, all the hostess workers had freely chosen to come to Palau, had entered the country legally, and had been granted valid work visas before entry.

Similarly, while some hostesses were unhappy in their employment, financial considerations and visa conditions constituted a strong deterrent to terminating contracts. No hostesses were held against their will or prevented, by employers, from returning home.

Few hostesses arrive in Palau intending to engage in sex work, however a number of contextual factors create strong incentives to undertake paid sex.

In addition to the hostess dress code, the behaviours necessary to hostess success sexualise hostess workers, and employment practices position them as employers' chattels - available to be bought. While these factors along with debt and low wages created incentive and opportunity to undertake sex work, none of the hostesses had been coerced into selling sex.

Due to stigma and fears of prosecution and deportation, hostesses are unwilling to identify as sex workers. HIV prevention programs for sex workers should be embedded first in hostess programs.

There are numerous barriers to hostess-sex worker engagement with HIV prevention programs. These include:

- Weak hostess networks and a lack of trust of outsiders
- Lack of social supports: isolation, stigma and absence of community
- Lack of legal supports: lack of legal and workplace rights
- Police use of condoms as evidence of sex work
- Conflation of sex work with human trafficking

In order to be effective, programs will need to engage hostesses and foster the development of information pathways and support networks. More specifically those programs should:

- Deliver condoms and other resources to workplaces and ensure they are available both in-house and in accommodation barracks
- Provide access to a wider range of sexual health services
- Include information on workplace rights as well as on health services
- Make information available in the languages of hostesses countries of origin
- Engage hostess workers, or ex-hostess workers, from the Philippines and China as peer educators
- Offer a social outlet for hostesses and aim to generate community
- Employ an interactive rather than didactic model of delivering information
- Include an internet or social media based component
- Enlist the support of venue management.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Palau is an island nation located in the southwest portion of the North Pacific Ocean. The estimated midyear population in 2010 was 20,879, consisting of 73% Palauans and significant migrant groups from Philippine Islands, China, Taiwan and Japan (Office of Planning and Statistics Palau, 2010). Around 70% of the population of Palau resides in Koror, which is the economic centre and major port. The economy of Koror, which reflects that of the nation as a whole, is centred on tourism and fishing but is highly dependent on foreign aid (Asian Development Bank, 2009). While the incidence of poverty is low, a substantial proportion of the population are rendered economically vulnerable as a result of high levels of debt, informal lending, and minimal savings (Otto, 2007). There have been reports of grey and black-market activity at the port as well as trafficking in drugs and persons (Shuster, 2012; Schloenhardt, 2008; United States Department of State, 2010 & 2014).

Prevention is a cornerstone of the response to HIV in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICT) and while, outside of Papua New Guinea, the reported incidence of HIV remains low it has been increasing across the region. There are significant risk factors for HIV transmission in PICT: high prevalence of other STIs, significant population mobility, deficits in educational, health and economic capacities, and the proximity to HIV epidemics in neighbouring countries leave Pacific Island populations vulnerable (Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), 2007).

Reported incidence of HIV is low in Palau. Since testing began in 1989 there have been 10 reported cases, all of which were of Palauan ethnicity and from Koror (Palau Ministry of Health, 2012). It is difficult to fully ascertain the status of HIV in Palau, as no adequate information exists for many key indicators (ibid.). Second-generation surveillance surveys conducted in 2006, aimed at investigating knowledge and behaviours surrounding HIV and other STIs, failed to gather data from crucial groups (Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project, 2008). The uptake of 'walk in' testing for HIV remains very low and reflects the stigmatization of the disease and the perception that HIV is a foreign problem (Palau Ministry of Health, 2012). Given the small and close-knit population on the islands, perceived issues of confidentiality present a significant barrier to higher rates of testing (ibid.).

HIV is mainly sexually transmitted in the region and sex workers have been identified as a vulnerable group in need of prevention resources (United Nations Development Programme Asia Pacific Regional Centre, 2011; Palau Ministry of Health, 2012). As sex work involves multiple partners and occurs in conditions in which the negotiation of condom use may be difficult, it is associated with an elevated risk of HIV transmission (Shannon et al., 2009). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) have both identified sex work as a key area to be addressed in the response to HIV and expressed the necessity to qualify the nature and context of sex work in the region in order to develop effective policies and programs (SPC, 2007; UNDP, 2011). Analyses of sex work considering STI and HIV transmission risk factors and prevention needs have been undertaken in a small number of island nations, including Fiji (McMillan and Worth 2010 & 2011a; Mossman et al 2014), Kiribati (McMillan and Worth, 2010a; Toatu, 2007), Vanuatu (McMillan and Worth, 2011; van Gemert et al., 2011) and PNG (Kelly et al., 2011; Bruce et al., 2011; Fletcher and Gonapa 2011; Gare et al., 2005; Jenkins 2000). However, there is a lack of data on sex work in other Pacific island countries, including Palau, and reporting on the conditions under which sex is sold has been highly speculative.

Sex workers were identified as a sub-population at higher risk for exposure to HIV in Palau's 2012 country report to UNAIDS (Palau Ministry of Health, 2012). While this group remains undefined, the principal form of sex work in Palau appears to be undertaken by female migrant workers employed as hostesses in karaoke bars, nightclubs and other entertainment venues (United States Department of State, 2010; Palau Ministry of Health, 2012; Shuster 2012).

Sex work is illegal in Palau. Informal solicitation as well as established brothels face harsh penalties under the law (UNDP Pacific Centre, 2009). In addition, the policing of sex work in Koror has been politicised in a focus on sex work as human trafficking. In 2006, four foreign nationals were charged with forcing migrant workers into prostitution through coercive tactics, including food deprivation, confinement to barracks and illegal salary deductions (Tia Belau, 2006; United States Department of State, 2010; Shuster, 2012). Again in 2014, following the release of a controversial Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report (U.S. State Department 2014), police raids on a

massage parlour resulted in human trafficking charges. The consequent political furore¹ led to the resignation of the Attorney General (Tia Belau 2014 & 2014a).

Between July 2008 and 2013 Palau's Ministry of Health hosted an HIV/STI prevention program targeting migrant female workers employed in karaoke bars and euphemistically labeled, 'Ladies in the Entertainment Business' (LEB). The program was funded by the SPC through the Response Fund. The project office was based at the Palau Ministry of Health and the program delivered condoms and provided in-house HIV/STI prevention information and education sessions to hostess workers. Program staff identified a need for more information on the conditions under which sex work is undertaken within hostess work and on hostesses workplace experiences as well as their sexual health needs and concerns.

This study arose from, and contributes to, the International HIV Research Group's (UNSW) "Risky Business" project: a series of studies investigating the circumstances and context of sex work in Pacific Islands countries, and on local opportunities to reduce risk. The studies aim to provide an evidence base necessary to guide effective interventions, programs, policy, resources and services that will reduce the risks of HIV transmission. "Risky Business Palau" was initiated at the suggestion of the program manager of "Ladies in the Entertainment Business"(LEB).

This study was funded through an Australian Research Council Grant and received ethics approval from the University of New South Wales (UNSW Australia) Human Research Ethics committee (Approval numbers HC12275 and HC12276), and from the Palau Institutional Review Board (Protocol number PIRB-2012-04).

¹ Ostensibly over whether or not the migrant workers involved in the case were free to leave the country, the conflict centred on the claim that the actions of the Attorney General served "other" (i.e. non-Palauan) interests and agendas.

2.0 STUDY METHODS

This qualitative investigation into sex work in Palau is grounded in interview data collected in face-to-face in depth interviews with hostess workers working in a number of entertainment venues in Koror.

An extensive period of discussion and planning with the program manager of LEB preceded the initial visit to Koror by the researchers. The initial visit enabled in-person stakeholder consultations and a scoping of types of sex work venues, organisations involved in sexual health delivery, and community capacity as well as the identification of any potential barriers to data collection and the conditions under which recruitment and interviews would need to take place. Observation of work sites, familiarisation and communication with the target community, preliminary introductions to hostesses, and the assembling of a local team were all undertaken at that time.

Data collected in face-to-face interviews with hostesses were the key focus of the study. The process of recruitment and interview and the contextualisation of resultant data were informed by a participant observation approach and by informal interviews with key informants.

Researchers spent three periods in-country between 2012-14. Key informant, observational and venue information data collection began in September 2012. Interview data was collected during May 2013 and March 2014.

2.0.1 Key Informants included regional and local HIV prevention program staff and community and government representatives. Other informants included Koror taxi drivers, Palauan business people and employers of migrant staff, frequent tourists, and expatriate men living in Koror. Interviews were largely informal and designed to provide context: information on current and past efforts to engage hostess workers, services available, employment and visa regulations, and local attitudes to and beliefs about hostess work, as well as facilitating decisions on potential venues for data collection.

2.0.2 Participant observation was conducted during 2012, 2013, and 2014, i.e. during each period spent in Koror, Palau, and focused on venues where local informants had advised that sex work could be negotiated or arranged. Researchers engaged with local and foreign customers as well as hostesses, bar staff and managers. While the sensitive nature of the research required discretion, researchers disclosed their

intentions and the purpose of the study to individuals they conversed with.

The observational data collection provided preliminary insights into the conditions under which sex work takes place in Koror. The process itself constituted an important introduction to the entertainment/hospitality industry milieu and to the hostess worker community. The data gathered signalled to ways in which hostess sex work and incentives to undertake sex work are woven into the hostess role.

2.1 Hostess Interviews

In-depth formal interviews were conducted with 22 hostesses from 10 work venues. Interviewees were all female and aged between 22 and 48 years. Most were in their mid-thirties.

2.1.1 Interviewee recruitment: Recruitment strategies included key informant introductions, peer recruitment and chain referral. An outreach worker from LEB provided the first introductions to hostess workers. Researchers also discussed the study with hostesses in venues they visited. Hostesses were individually and discretely invited to participate in the research. Suitable meeting places were discussed and appointments arranged with those who were interested in participating. One ex-hostess worker employed on the research team also acted as an ambassador for the study. She provided introductions to hostesses working at a range of venues and who sometimes undertook sex work. All invitations to interview included an invitation to bring peers and interviewees were invited to refer other hostess workers. The utility of a referral approach was ultimately limited by the fact that hostesses seldom have contact with peers working in other establishments.

All migrant workers with sufficient English and whose employment included a hostess role were eligible to be interviewed. Interviewees received either an airtime card, redeemable for mobile phone calls or internet access, as a thank-you for participation or \$5 to cover transport if they travelled to the interview.

2.1.2 Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted in private. Prior to the interview beginning, potential participants were given an information sheet, were also verbally informed of the contents and encouraged to ask any questions they had about the study and the process of the interview. Participation was completely voluntary and interviews took place after written consent was obtained. Hostess interviews were recorded, except in two cases where interviewees consented only to written notes being taken.

Interviews were conducted by two UNSW researchers, and one Palauan member of the study team. A general interview guide was used, listing topic areas to be covered in the interview. The guide method ensures that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee, but also permits the interview to be directed by what the participant has to say.

Interviews were semi-structured, topic based, and enquired into:

- Personal background and work history
- Economic and other functions of hostess work
- Conditions of work, including a wider consideration of risks and consequences
- Sexual relationships with clients and with others
- Condom access and use, including negotiation with clients
- Access and use of sexual health and treatment services
- HIV and HIV transmission knowledge and attitudes.

Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their daily life in Palau, to narrate events and situations they had experienced, to discuss their major hopes and fears, and to describe the circumstances around their behaviours and choices.

Most hostess interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour. Several were substantially longer.

3.0 RESULTS

Thematic analysis of interview data focused on factors impacting on hostess engagement in paid sex, the extent of hostess agency and specific vulnerabilities in employment. The reporting here organises those factors under key topic areas.

Data on key topics are described and summarised. Direct quotations appearing in text boxes are included to augment the summary and to give voice to the participants. All names have been changed.

The data gathered signalled ways in which the conditions of hostess sex work, including incentives to undertake sex work, are underwritten by commonplace migrant employment practices and an overall lack of rights for migrant women workers in Palau, as well as specific business practices both in Koror and by agents in the Philippines.

3.0.1 Limitations: The study sample is non-random and as such can only claim to represent the experiences of those hostesses interviewed. For this reason our reporting of results focuses on presenting overriding commonalities in the interviewees stories, and on areas where interview data can be triangulated with key informant and observational data. In addition, due to the researchers language limitations, the findings and the conclusions will better reflect the experiences, needs and concerns of Filipino hostesses, than those of Chinese hostesses.

3.1 Overview of the hostess role

In Koror, hostess work is not limited to karaoke bars. A hostess role is part of most hospitality and entertainment industry work for migrant women, including in many restaurants and massage parlours as well as in nightclubs and bars. Bars with snooker (8 ball) tables assign hostesses who will stay with the customers to rack up the balls as well as bring the drinks and make conversation. In some restaurants the waitress acts as hostess, joining the table and drinking with the group, as well as serving food. Ultimately, most entertainment and hospitality industry jobs for migrant women involve drinking and talking with customers.

Local Palauan women are not employed as hostesses and the few 'Palauan' bars (those aimed at attracting exclusively local Palauan custom) do not employ hostesses. Hostesses are generally migrant workers from the Philippines and the People's Republic of China. Sex work takes place in many karaoke (KTV) bars and also a

range of other bars, nightclubs, and hospitality venues. Sexual services are also available at numerous massage parlours. However, sex is not sold by every hostess, nor in every entertainment venue. Despite this, many foreign males expressed an erroneous belief that sex could be negotiated with any migrant female service industry worker.

KTV bars are a highly visible part of the nightscape in Koror. During the data collection period 15 karaoke bars were open for business along the main road. Researchers regularly frequented 10 of those bars. Two smaller Chinese KTV bars off the main road were also frequented and a range of other bars, restaurants and massage parlours were visited repeatedly. Night entertainment establishments are primarily operated by foreign business people (Taiwanese, Chinese) but are owned always in partnership with a local Palauan, as mandated by business ownership legislation.

The KTV bars are managed by a "mamasan" who coordinates the bar and the hostesses. The mamasan evaluates clients as they enter, and assigns a hostess to serve drinks and entertain them for the evening. The choice the mamasan makes is based on her perception of the client's intention and her knowledge of her staff. Hostesses who are willing to engage in sex work will be assigned to clients who the mamasan perceives to be looking for sex.

Hostesses attract custom and retain patrons by singing, talking, or otherwise entertaining them. Ultimately, however, the hostess role is to encourage clients to spend money on alcohol. Although not all hostesses will have sex for money, physical contact between hostesses and clients who are spending money on drinks is the norm in most KTV bars.

While the prelude to and negotiation of sex takes place in the club or bar, paid sex itself may take place on or off premises. Private VIP rooms can be hired out with accompanying hostesses at an additional cost. That cost is for the room and company only and does not constitute payment for sex. Any sex that occurs in VIP rooms is negotiated by the individual hostess and not by the venue.

*Once the door is closed it is very private. What any girl does in there with her client no one can know.
(Lorna aged 34)*

At least one KTV venue operated a call-out service where hostesses could be picked up by clients or delivered to client's homes or hotels. Similarly massages may take place in a parlour cubicle, or be provided in hotel rooms and private residences. Clients regularly expect that hostesses and masseuses who are booked for callouts will be prepared to negotiate sexual services. Workers who attend callout bookings often face pressure from clients to provide sexual services and say they feel less empowered to negotiate the terms of the transaction. Because of this, in some establishments callouts to unknown clients are disliked by workers and are said to be assigned to staff members who fail to draw regular custom in-house, or those are unpopular with management for other reasons.

The cultivation of regular customers ensures hostess income from drinks bought and alleviates boredom, thereby serving the interests of hostesses as well as management. When clients visit a bar regularly they may develop a long-standing relationship with one particular hostess. The Filipina hostesses refer to these frequent clients as "boyfriends" and each hostess may have a number of boyfriends at any given time. Given the limited access to hostesses, the relationship with boyfriends may occur predominantly or exclusively within the confines of the hostesses work venue.

3.2 Hostesses

All of the Koror hostess workers interviewed came from mainland China or the Philippines. Although a small number of venues do employ both Chinese and Filipino hostesses, typically Chinese and Filipino workers are employed in different workplaces.

Due to language limitations, only basic information could be gathered from most Chinese hostesses. However, the data that was collected suggested that the circumstances, concerns and needs of Chinese hostess workers with regard to paid sex and HIV and STI prevention differ in many respects from those of Filipino hostess workers. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, the interview data reported on in this document reflects the experiences, needs and concerns of the Filipino interviewees.

Chinese and Filipina hostesses alike invoked economic hardship, lack of employment opportunities and the difficulties of supporting themselves in their respective

countries when explaining the circumstances leading to employment abroad.

*I am here because what else do I have?
(May aged 30)*

3.2.1 Chinese hostesses

Chinese hostess workers and their managers were very open and happy to talk. Researchers were made welcome, both during and outside work hours, and were invited to spend afternoons and evenings in two different Chinese KTV venues. In most cases, the English spoken by Chinese workers was rudimentary, and as researchers lacked the ability to speak either Mandarin or Cantonese, few in-depth interviews were possible. However the many conversations and observations were enabled by time spent in the company of Chinese hostesses, which augmented data collected from a small number of formal interviews. These indicated that, as well as having a greater freedom of movement, the recruitment experiences, the representation and expectations of the job and consequently the way workers felt about their employment and their working conditions was markedly different from that of the Filipina hostess workers.

Although there were no restrictions on the movements of Chinese hostesses, they appeared to have little interest in socialising outside of the workplace. During the day Chinese hostesses could be found in the karaoke lounge watching TV, talking, reading, cooking and cleaning: domestic activities typical of any household.

Chinese interviewees expressed no dissatisfaction with their contracts. While many had been surprised by how small and quiet Koror was, the Chinese hostesses said that they were fully aware of the type of work they would be doing and that there was no deception or misrepresentation involved. Many had worked in similar jobs in Chinese cities. The Chinese hostesses had been recruited to work in Palau through friends and previous colleagues, and in some venues the staff all shared the same hometowns. Most were over 30 years of age and all were unmarried when they came to Palau. Two

*None of us would be here if we had a husband to
look after us (Geeling, aged 42)*

Chinese interviewees had married subsequent to first arriving in Koror; one to a Palauan and another to a U.S. citizen.

Condom distribution was welcomed by Chinese hostesses, as was information on any free sexual health services. However when asked about HIV and STI testing as well as cervical smears and other routine check-ups, the Chinese workers said that they preferred to test when they returned to China because of language and cultural difficulties, and also because they were unsure of the cost.

3.2.2 Filipina hostesses

While some hostesses from the Philippines had renewed their contracts numerous times and were happy with their work and salary in Koror, many Filipina hostesses expressed great dissatisfaction with their contracts and working conditions.

Most of the Filipina interviewees were aged in their 30s, they tended to describe themselves as Christian, usually Catholic, and most spoke excellent English. Many had a tertiary education or professional training and, aside from those who were on a second or third contract, none had been employed as a hostess before coming to Palau.

None of the Filipina hostesses interviewed was currently married. Many had children or other family members at home to support, or were saving for a future project such as a house or further education. Even the most upbeat of the interviewees became visibly upset when asked about their children.

I worry about my children growing up without me; they don't know me. I need to save some money as soon as I can, to get home to the children.
(Rose, aged 36)

Family and connections with home were very important to the Filipina interviewees and the expense of keeping in touch with loved ones at home was a major drain on their meagre incomes. Failure to live up to family expectations of income or the prospect of returning to unpaid debt was a major deterrent to quitting jobs with which hostesses were otherwise unhappy. Interviewees who were disappointed with their positions also said that they were too proud to let family know that the job was not what they had expected, and did not tell people at home about the work they are doing.

Many of the women explained that their parents had also been migrant labourers, and now it was the next generation's turn to support them and contribute to medical and other expenses for family members. A number of the Filipina interviewees had trained as nurses or teachers or had business diplomas but, even with educational qualifications, the prospects of earning a good income in the Philippines were described as poor.

The Filipina hostesses were initially reticent with researchers and appeared suspicious of motives, but during the course of the interviews they relaxed noticeably and became far more talkative and engaged. After the interviews most interviewees had numerous questions to ask, as their sexual health knowledge was extremely poor.

3.3 Recruitment agents

The Chinese hostesses had been recruited to work in Palau by previous bar employees, or someone they knew. While this was also the case for a few Filipina hostesses, most had been recruited by professional job placement agents in the Philippines: using either newspaper and online advertisements or personal 'shoulder tap' approaches in the street or at work. It is likely that the hostesses were recruited on the basis of an attractive appearance and an outgoing personality, as the interviewees were vivacious and pretty. Fees paid for job placement ranged from \$1000, to no fees when recruited by a friend.

The Filipina hostesses claimed that recruitment agents grossly misrepresented the nature of the employment and the working conditions and charged high fees. Prospective workers expected to have to pay agents for an overseas job placement and for the organisation of relevant visas, but many hostesses had thought the amount paid would reflect the quality of the position.

You need to pay out a lot of money to get a good job.
(Shelley aged 23)

Although Palau is close to the Philippines, very few workers knew anything about the country before they arrived. Palau's status as a US territory had been cited by employment agents, and some Filipina workers mistakenly assumed that a contract would give them access to work the United States.

Interviewees who had been recruited by agents, also complained that basic remuneration was much lower than promised, and that unavoidable deductions reduced that income and left them with little chance of saving.

While most Filipina interviewees complained that they had been misled about both the work and the salary, they said they could not afford to break the contract and to pay their own airfare home. In addition, as many had borrowed to pay recruiter fees, debt as well as pride deterred them from returning home empty handed.

3.4 Working conditions

Interviewee descriptions of their working conditions emphasised the long hours, boredom, heavy alcohol use and low salaries. Filipina hostesses also cited restrictions on movement and association, lack of social life, marginalisation from Palauan community (especially church), isolation from family, high cost of internet compared to wages, and shame, as major sources of distress. At the same time, despite the salary being disappointingly low for many, the ability to earn money and be able to save for future opportunities or contribute to family at home, was highly valued.

I am very tired, we work every night until late... We always must be happy for the customer... but this work is not so bad, I have worked in a factory, it was very hard and the money was less. (Denise aged 25)

Each venue provides accommodation for its hostesses either on premises or at alternate locations. Residence in these dormitories is mandatory and charges for rent and amenities are deducted from workers' salaries. Hostesses described conditions of up to 15 women sleeping in the one room and sharing one bathroom. As well as "barracks" accommodation, employers provide meals and a communally shared stock of flimsy dress and high heels for working in.

Hostesses receive a basic salary from which most employers make deductions for accommodation, food and clothes. Other deductions function as 'fines', and may be levied by management for a range of breaches of the terms of employment - including days off, leaving the premises outside of designated hours, and attracting complaints from customers. The salary for

Filipina hostesses is around \$US200 per month. This is supplemented by commissions on drinks ordered by clients and also on 'ladies' drinks' - drinks bought by customers for the hostesses and charged at a higher rate than other drinks. Ladies' drinks earn the hostesses a higher commission than clients' own drinks.

Drinks commissions are a crucial part of a hostess's income. This not only encourages the hostesses themselves to drink heavily, but is a major incentive to the women to please heavy drinkers and invites competition between the women for the attentions of heavy drinking clients. The nightly and weekly bar take is under constant surveillance by management: Bar staff, hostesses and mamasan all come under constant pressure to maintain, if not improve, the bar take. The most successful hostesses are rewarded with promotions and greater autonomy.

Work dominates and defines the lives of hostesses, who work every day except Sunday. Venues are typically open from 7pm until 2am and, in addition to these hours, hostesses are usually required to perform cleaning duties before opening time. Interviewees complained about the monotony of their life in Palau and a lack of day-to-day autonomy. While most expected that seeing out their contract would improve their financial position or contribute to the fulfilment of their aspirations after returning home, some despaired about an inability to save.

I can't save. I do this work for nothing. I'm wasting three years here - just waiting, waiting to leave. (Fay aged 30)

The daily movements and associations of the Filipina hostesses are highly restricted, typically they can only leave the workplace on Sundays – and then only with a chaperone. Business owners explain the restrictions as protecting the hostesses. However, these rules along with the system of fines imposed for breaking them, afford employers control over access to the women as well as over the women's movements. Businesses can effectively charge clients for socialising with the hostesses outside of the workplace, either directly or through the "fines" that the client must pay for the hostess. Moreover, in this way any romantic or affective relationships that hostesses might develop are already positioned as transactional, and even off-duty time spent with the women must be paid for.

Restrictions on movements seem only to apply to Filipina hostesses and were not apparent among the Chinese hostesses – even in a venue that employed both groups. Also in establishments where hostesses were recruited by friends and had paid no fees, rules were less restrictive.

Hostesses from some, mostly smaller, venues said they were happy with work and conditions and staff turnover was low with most workers renewing contracts and taking ‘holiday’ visits home. Staff in those larger venues that were least restrictive also tended to be most positive about their employment and express greater satisfaction with their salary.

Not all hostesses undertook paid sex, and none claimed that they were coerced into it. However it was clear that sex could be bought at all the venues under study, and management either tacitly or openly facilitated sex work. The hostess business model ensures the conditions and incentives to negotiate sex for money, along with constant opportunity. Women who arrive in Palau to take up hostess roles are often indebted to recruiters or have a range of other financial obligations and, after deducting costs of food and accommodation, find it difficult to save or send money home on the salary they receive. The disinhibiting effect of alcohol, the absence of social or familial consequences are other powerful incentives to supplement a meagre income through paid sex.

The salary we earn is not enough. We must pay for accommodation and food and we cannot save... Other girls they do more for the client and make more money but I only make money from ladies drinks (Lisa, aged 23).

3.5 Social conditions

Hostess workers suffer from not only boredom, but also social isolation. Isolation results from long working hours and restrictions on the workers’ movements,

Beyond the necessary intimacy of living so closely with immediate co-workers, hostess workers are isolated from their other peers and do not constitute a unified or cohesive community. Workers have no, or very limited, interactions with those in other bars. Restrictions on

movement, relatively short employment periods and constant employee turnover preclude the development of any sustained community.

Social connections and emotional supports from home are very important to hostesses, and they are heavily reliant on internet and mobile communication technology to maintain contact with families and communities in their country of origin. Given hostesses small salaries and imperatives to save or send money home, contact is limited by the cost of calls and internet access.

Although KTV bars and other venues employing hostess are all partly owned by Palauan citizens and are also frequented by locals, Palauans described hostess bars as a foreign phenomenon and were critical of what they considered to be an excessive Chinese and Filipino influence on life, and values, in Palau. This view coloured relations between locals and hostesses, as hostesses said they feel unwelcome and excluded from Palauan society, even at church. The migrant women described the stigma attached to being a hostess and believed that they are labelled prostitutes regardless of whether they sell sex or not.

This stigmatisation deters hostesses from using local sexual health services and even from accessing free condoms made available in numerous convenience stores around town. Filipina hostesses were generally aware of free sexual health services available at the hospital but believed that they would be misunderstood, judged and discriminated against if they accessed them. For those reasons they prefer to wait to return to Philippines to have any check ups or tests. Chinese hostesses claimed not to be aware of any health services available to them, and while they welcomed delivery of condoms and any services they could receive in-house, the Chinese hostesses also preferred to wait till they returned to their home country for check-ups or tests, citing concerns about language and cultural misunderstandings.

The lack of support available to hostesses has been exacerbated by the closure of the Philippines Embassy on July 31, 2012. Hostesses have nowhere to go for help with work or social issues.

I had no place to go. I don't know the law or who to believe. Who to trust? (Maree, aged 22)

3.6 Labour regulations

Migrant workers do not share the same protections and entitlements as local workers. Many hostesses had no problems with management or their bosses. Others claimed that, particularly Palauan, business owners “treat staff like their own personal property” and explained that they fear their bosses because of the control that they have over the lives of workers. If problems arise the worker cannot easily leave her employment. The only avenue of redress appears to be to make a statement to the police and lay a formal harassment complaint. Hostess workers interviewed said that they don’t know the law, or where to go to sort resolve employment disputes. One interviewee said that when she tried to complain about her boss, a government official told her that her work permit was a ‘fake’, and that if she persisted with any complaint she would be deported.

Hostesses gain working visas on the basis of contracts lasting up to three years.

Visa regulations and laws around the employment of foreign workers are designed to protect the interests of employers, and several factors ensure that hostesses work out the full period covered by their employment contracts. Working visas are conditional on a single employer and are technically non-transferable, so workers cannot choose to change employers. Visa conditions allow for migrant workers to be employed by only one business in a five-year period. These conditions prevent migrant workers seeking other employment once they have arrived in Palau, and termination of an unsuitable contract prevents workers from returning to Palau for 5 years. As termination of employment results in forfeiture of the visa, ex-workers must not only fund their own travel back to their country of origin, but also pay premium airfares as they are no longer eligible for the reduced fares available to holders of a valid work visa.

In reality, informal agreements do take place and employers do ‘sub-contract’ staff to other businesses if they wish to. In addition, contracts are sometimes ‘paid out’ to release a worker with no negative consequences. This happens, for instance, when a worker wishes to marry and to also stay in the country. Although creating some flexibility in arrangements, the practice leaves workers dependent on the goodwill of the employer, and further renders them a chattel of the business – one that might be bought and sold.

Workers have no place to turn to if they are unhappy with their contract or feel cheated or mistreated. While power overwhelmingly resides with the employer, this situation also leaves employers vulnerable; the only avenue for an unhappy worker to free themselves from an onerous or otherwise unbearable contract appears to be to lay a criminal complaint with the police.

3.7 Policing and justice system response

While legislation has a powerful effect on HIV prevention in sex work, law enforcement also has a major impact. In recent times in Koror, condoms found during police raids on premises have been taken and used as evidence of prostitution. Hostesses believe that any condoms in their personal possession will leave them open not only to charges of sex work, but also potentially embroiled in human trafficking charges.

In support of this view, numerous interviewees cited a high profile example of a police raid on a massage parlour that resulted in trafficking charges. In that case police considered the condoms found in workers lockers to be evidence of sex work. The staff members were taken into custody. Later they were given the choice of signing a statement to say that they had been forced into prostitution by management or, alternately, to face charges of trafficking themselves. Even employees who said that they were fully supportive of management, and happy in their jobs, were intimidated by officials into signing statements claiming that management forced workers into prostitution. Workers said they were scared and confused: they had no knowledge of their rights or whom they could trust for advice. Initially not permitted to leave the country, they had no income and their personal money had been confiscated along with moneys belonging to the business.

Another interviewee described another, more recent, incident where condoms had been taken as evidence of sex work. Police had been called by an intoxicated customer, who believed that his wallet had been stolen. During the consequent search of the premises, police found condoms and took them as evidence of sex work. At the time of interview the case had not come before the courts.

3.8 Sexual Health resources

Filipina interviewees said that they resented any hectoring or lecturing style of information delivery, and were more likely to accept condoms if they were made available more discretely. They were highly sensitive to a social perception that all Filipinas are sex workers and felt that the open delivery of condoms and STI information reflected and reinforced such a belief. Despite expressing antipathy and resistance to 'lectures' on sexual health and safety, at the end of the interviews the same interviewees had many questions about sexual health, HIV and STIs and how to protect themselves. The Filipina hostesses were more open, animated and relaxed when they could talk in pairs or small groups of friends after the interview, by which time they were joking with each other and eager to get information. Among hostesses in Palau, friends are an important source of information on sexual health; unfortunately the information shared is often inaccurate or incomplete.

None of the Filipina interviewees, and few Chinese, had any knowledge about HIV – what it was, how it was spread, or how to prevent it. While Chinese hostesses happily received condoms and understood they provided some protection from STIs, the Filipina hostesses believed that condoms were only for contraception. Some also said that they had difficulty reconciling condom use with Catholicism.

Interviewees had seen free condoms available in many convenience stores around Koror but would not take them because access was too public. Most had used sexual health services – STI testing and cervical smears – before, but only in their home countries and not in Palau. Hostesses believed that private services were too expensive and wouldn't use the hospital service because they doubted there would be any confidentiality. Interviewees also said that Filipinas were talked about badly, kept waiting and discriminated against.

4.0 DISCUSSION: PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

Effective initiatives to prevent HIV transmission during sex work in Palau will need to be: grounded in efforts to engage sex workers, designed to bolster sex worker agency, and attend to the creation of a more enabling environment for HIV prevention activities.

There are numerous barriers to engaging sex workers who are employed as hostesses in Koror's bars and clubs. Conditions of employment, marginalization and social isolation, migrant status and the illegality of sex work in Palau, all make the identification and engagement of hostess sex workers more difficult. The same factors work to limit hostess sex worker agency, thus increasing vulnerabilities to HIV and STIs. These circumstances, combined with a high turnover of hostess staff, render HIV prevention strategies directed by the workers themselves problematic.

Currently in Palau, economic imperatives, lack of labour rights and a conflation of labour exploitation with human trafficking combine to undermine sex worker agency and constitute barriers to prevention activities.

4.1 Engagement with the sex worker 'community'

The necessity for meaningful participation of sex workers in the development of HIV prevention programs is well established. Participation is best facilitated by self-organisation and collectivisation of sex workers and supported through partnerships between policy makers, health providers and sex workers (Hardy, Kingston and Sanders, 2010; APNSW et al., 2011). However much would need to change in Palau before sex worker organisation became a practicable or safe proposition.

The capacity of Koror sex workers to organise is limited by their precarious legal and economic status. The illegality of sex work is a powerful disincentive for sex worker organisation. The public visibility usually associated with organisation is anathema to individuals who need to remain hidden from the law.

Therefore, HIV prevention programming for sex workers in Palau will, initially at least, need to be embedded in programs for hostess workers. A program is needed that would support hostesses to collectivise, share experiences, identify and articulate key issues affecting them. Engagement with hostesses and an active

facilitation of the development of information pathways and support networks will be required.

Other practical issues also inhibit the development of a hostess sex worker community, principally the lack of contact between hostesses. Restrictions on movement, short employment periods and high turnover mean that there is little interaction between workers. Ultimately effective HIV and STI prevention efforts will require the good will and support of management. Much time and repeated contact is necessary to build relationships and the necessary trust with the mamasans (floor managers) and business management. Fear of police raids impedes such relationships.

The data also revealed areas of potential for action. Characteristics of the everyday life and working conditions of hostesses provide a climate in which hostess interest in networks might be generated. Boredom, isolation and lack of support were significant factors in the lives of hostesses, and the alleviation of these could serve as a motivator to engagement in programs.

Friends are an important source of information on sexual health as well as social and legal matters, for hostesses in Palau. A peer program should be a key element of any initiative. A hostess HIV prevention initiative would benefit from being embedded in, or including, a support and advisory service, providing information on legal and employment rights, as well as sexual health information for hostess workers. Where possible, Chinese and Filipina staff with hostess experience should be trained and employed to work on hostess projects.

Social media was a popular method of communication for hostesses. A hostess-targeted initiative should consider incorporating a social media element. A provision of virtual community space overcomes problems of restrictions on movement and provides for sharing ideas and concerns and disseminating important information. In addition, social media may facilitate the development of closer links between the disparate groups of hostesses and foster the creation of a more cohesive community. The ability to ensure anonymity, and the security of information would need to be a central proviso.

4.2 Economic imperatives, exploitation and questions of trafficking

Hostesses consistently described seeking employment in Palau due to economic constraints in their countries of origin. This economically driven migration is a normative behaviour in both the Philippines and China and has occurred with increasing frequency since the 1980s (Manning, 2003). All interviewees arrived in the country by choice, legally, and with valid visas.

Desperation for employment, visa regulations, and a lack of labour entitlements leave hostess workers vulnerable to exploitation and dependent on the good will of employers. Working and salary conditions had been misrepresented by unscrupulous job placement agents in the Philippines, rather than by employers. Closer local oversight and regulation of recruitment agents, or the establishment of a local agency, would protect workers and also work to protect employers from the actions of disgruntled staff. Wider social and economic conditions and regulations underpinning hostess exploitation are not limited to hostesses, but also apply across the migrant workforce more generally.

Evidence from interviewees indicates that hostesses are not forced to work in Palau, and that while there are many incentives to undertake sex work, they are not coerced by management into selling sex against their will. The “Carnival Four” case demonstrated that forced prostitution has occurred in Palau and further reports suggest that it may still occur (United States Department of State, 2010; Tia Belau, 2006; Shuster, 2012). However, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of sex workers are not trafficked and there are profoundly negative effects of labelling them as such.

Labelling sex workers as trafficking victims influences societal views of the workers, it denies the validity of the choices that women who migrate for work make in their efforts to improve their own lives and those of their families, and obscures the economic and social realities driving those decisions. The reduction of sex work to sex trafficking embroils the sex worker in an additional layer of criminality and complicates the development and provision of health promotion and services (Zhang, 2009). Judicial actions against sex trafficking seldom focus on helping the ‘victim’. Positioning sex workers as victims further disenfranchises an already marginalised

group; sex workers become defined as powerless and without agency, and therefore unable to participate in the development of those programs targeting them (Aradau, 2004).

When migrant sex work is, semantically and legally, conflated with human trafficking, then any sex work – suspected or otherwise - undertaken by hostesses is defined as an instance of trafficking. In the process, the everyday exploitation of hostess workers through commonplace employment practices is elided and ignored. The local regulations and conditions underpinning that exploitation – along with local solutions - are obscured.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Outreach services are the first step. Until a time when functional hostess networks or sex worker organisations exist in Palau, condoms and sexual health information services need to be delivered to the premises where hostesses work and live.

Peer involvement is key. It is important that these services are acceptable to, and considered appropriate by, workers. Hostesses will respond better to someone they trust and can speak privately with. A fellow countrywoman would be ideal. It is imperative that peer educators are well informed and have access to reliable information. Peer educators must be properly trained and provided with ongoing support.

Incorporating a social element will maximise hostess engagement. Along with the choice of program staff, the style and modes of delivery will be important. Interactive and interpersonal approaches to information delivery should be employed. Small group sessions in a friendly and fun atmosphere will be more successful than lectures. Social media could also be utilised to enhance the development of community and provide links to important resources.

Condom access should be part of a wider package of resources. Hostess participation and uptake of HIV prevention services will be enhanced by the inclusion of access to a range of sexual health and other information services. Social and work related support would be valuable.

Address structural factors. Alongside a hostess targeted program, other actions will be necessary to reduce barriers to prevention activities and to create a more enabling environment. The most immediate and readily broached factors can be mitigated in the following ways:

- Regulate overseas employment agents, or create a local agency to assist job placements for prospective workers from the Philippines
- Ensure minimum labour conditions for hostess and bar workers
- Ensure workers have somewhere safe, and neutral, to go to settle labour or contract disputes
- Never use the presence of condoms to as evidence of illegal sexual activities
- Do not conflate labour disputes, or sex work, with sex trafficking.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
APNSW	Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers
LEB	Ladies in the Entertainment Business
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNSW	University of New South Wales
US	United States of America



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