

The Cambodian Young Women's Health Study (YWHS)

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Project Description

This multidisciplinary study includes epidemiological research on prevalence and incidence of HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and human papillomavirus (HPV), as well as rates of drug use including amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) among young women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia working in the sex and entertainment service sectors and who have multiple sexual partners. Medical anthropology and psychological experts will assess cultural mediators of risk and preventive behaviors, including uptake of HPV vaccine. This is the second wave of this prospective study.

YWHS is a collaboration between CWDA, a small, women-run NGO, and the NCHADS. Using a community participatory approach, CWDA will conduct qualitative research recruitment of study participants, and ensure that retention of study participants is maintained at high rates through follow up within established community-based networks in Phnom Penh. NCHADS clinical staff including health care and HIV counseling staff will assess biological outcomes, risk and provide ongoing HIV prevention and treatment access.

The study will:

- Enroll 300 women aged 15-29 who report more than two sexual partners within the past month or engaging in transactional sex within the past three months.
- Screen the women for HIV, STD and HPV infections.
- Administer a behavioral interview on demographics, sexual risk and drug-use behaviors.
- Assess ATS use using urine screening.
- Conduct HPV testing and gynecological assessments to assess HPV infection, cytology and cervical disease.

All consenting participants will be followed prospectively for up to two years with quarterly follow-up visits. Recruitment and follow-up strategies will be monitored in preparation for future larger prevention research studies including HIV vaccine, microbicide, and chemoprophylaxis trials.

Interesting Findings

In the first wave of the YWHS:

- Median age was 21 (range 16 to 29).
- Almost half (40%) had no education.
- Half (49.4%) were widowed, divorced or separated.
- Women reported working in the entertainment or sex industry for a median of 51 months (~ 4 years) and most (71.2%) were working freelance or in the entertainment service sector (beer promotion girls, waitresses, karaoke girls, dancers and massage girls).
- HIV prevalence was 23%.
- Almost half (42.5%) reported any ATS use, including Yama (41%) or Crystal/Ice (23%).

