

I. SUMMARY

This study was carried out to assess the socio-demographic profile, sexual behaviour, disease pattern, contraceptive practices and treatment seeking behaviour among 253 prostitutes attending the Central Venereal Disease Clinic (CVDC) Colombo during May-August 1991.

The data were calculated by means of interviewer administered questionnaire, clinical examination and diagnostic tests.

The average age of women studied was 26.7 years (SD=7.40, range 14-51 years). Seventy percent of the prostitutes were below 30 years. The mean age of entering into prostitution was found to be 23 years.

Sixty percent of the women had either no schooling or primary education. Majority (90%) of the prostitutes were either unmarried or separated from the spouse. Majority (60%) of the prostitutes were from the immediate suburbs of Colombo.

Majority (96%) of the prostitutes entered the profession due to financial reasons. The average monthly income was Rs.9600.00. On average each women had eight partners per week with the number increasing among the

under 30 year age group and those with more than six months in prostitution. While all practiced vaginal intercourse, 17% practised oral sex, and anal sex by a minute proportion (2%). The place of contact with clients varied, with the popular place being brothel house.

Pregnancy being an occupational hazard, 52% practiced some form of contraception. Female surgical sterilisation, a method usually sought by women who have completed their families was the most popular with 27% practicing it. The use of a method of contraception was significantly higher among the women who were above 29 years ($p < 0.05$).

Condom, one of the promising methods against STDS as well as conception was used always only by 34% of the clients. Although majority (80%) had requested the use to their clients but the latter's preference had been otherwise.

Prior to seeking treatment at the CVDC majority (60%) had resorted to some form of therapy for their ailments. Most 39% had preferred the allopathy method.

Among the sample studied 72% were infected with STDs. Mixed infections were seen in 47%. The leading infection among them was syphilis (45%), followed by

trichomoniasis (23%), chlamydial (13%), gonorrhoea (12%), candida (7%), genital warts (6%), and herpes (1.5%). None were positive for hepatitis B surface antigen and HIV antibodies.

A statistically significant larger proportion of women above 29 years were infected with syphilis ($p < 0.05$). The converse was true for chlamydia ($p < 0.05$) with a higher proportion in the upto 29 age group. The longer service in the trade (over 6 months) seems to have made women more vulnerable to syphilis, candida and herpes infection. Statistically significant higher proportions were seen with chlamydial and candida infections in prostitutes who had more than 10 clients a week ($p < 0.01$). Syphilis was found to be significantly higher among the contraceptive users than the non users. In prostitutes who had chlamydial and warts infections, there was a significant differences between patients who took treatment and who did not ($p < 0.05$).

Health education programmes which emphasise on STD prevention measures including the promotion of the use of condom, providing information to private western doctors with diagnostic algorithms and treatment regimens together with effective two way referral system of patients are recommended. Further, the necessity to

introduce diagnostic tests for chlamydial infection in STD clinics is also emphasised.