



A qualitative study to understand intimacy and its association with intimate partner violence among the traditional *Devadasi* sex workers in northern Karnataka, India

Ramanaik S, Prakash R, Pujar A, CAMS, Kavitha DL, Javalkar P, Thalinja T, Platt L, Heise L, Isac S, Collumbien M, Bhattacharjee P

SVRI Forum 2017
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
18-21 September 2017

SAMVEDANA PLUS | Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Against Female Sex Workers



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA



Devadasi tradition

- Young girls from lower caste are dedicated to Goddess (Yellamma) and enter to sex work
- Devadasi are not allowed to marry a 'mortal man' but they do develop intimate relationships.
- Devadasi tradition is legally prohibited but carries on





My life and my destiny



Rekha says- I have had Enough! I write my own destiny now...

A story of many other women dedicated to Devadasi tradition in the Northern Parts of Karnataka, South India

Background

- Targeted HIV prevention tends to focus on clients only
- Low condom use and widespread violence within intimate partnerships
- Needs better understanding



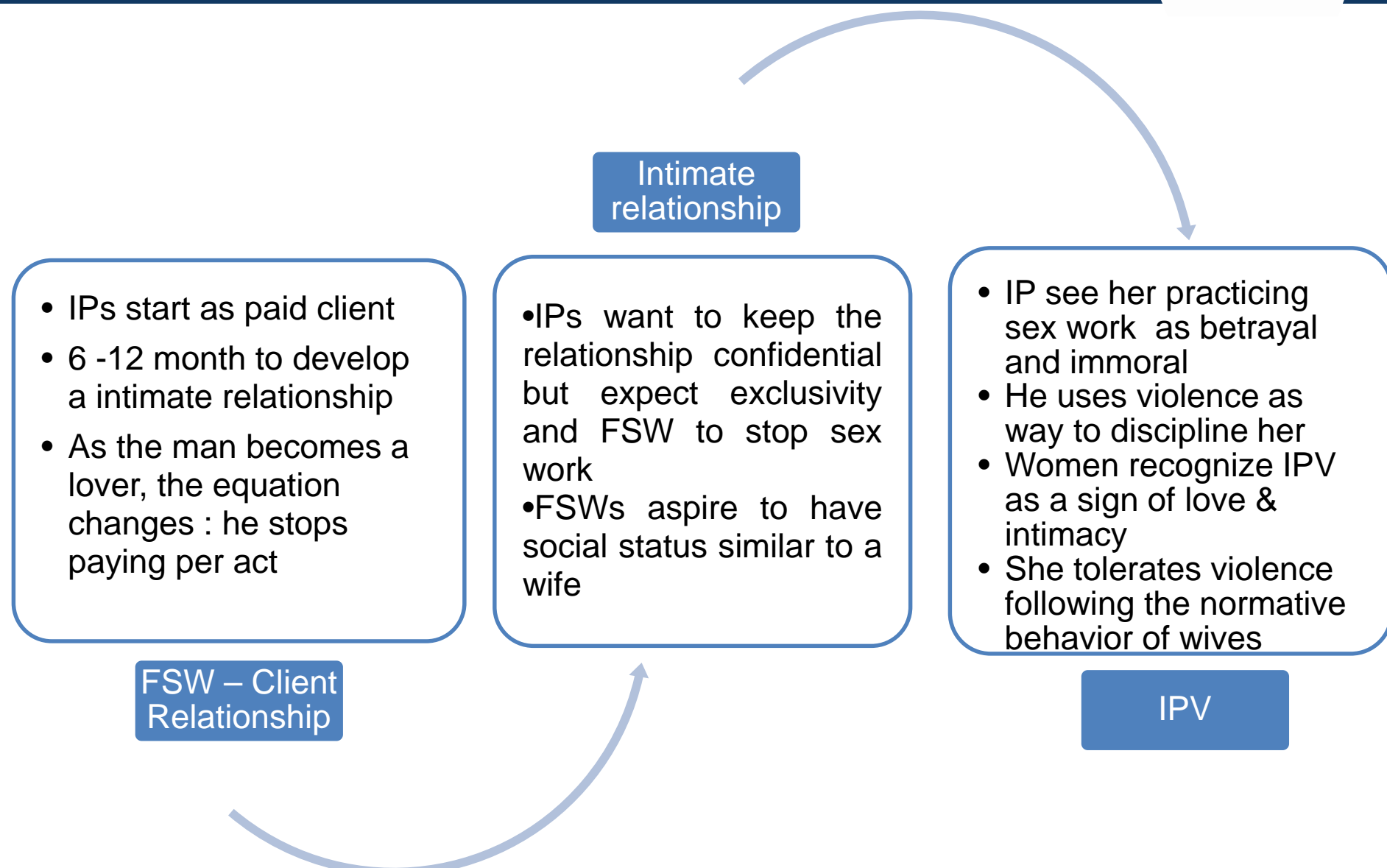
- Longitudinal qualitative case study design, using community based research approach
- Sample:
 - 38 cases interviewed (13 FSWs, 5 IP and 10 couples) in 2 rounds
 - 6 FGDs using vignettes
- Thematic content analysis
- Ethics approval from St. John's medical college, Bengaluru, India; LSHTM, London, UK and University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

The meaning of intimacy

“We are intimate because, he loves me a lot and I too love him... he looks after the house, takes care our children, and so, I feel he is one among our family...our relationship is like husband and wife” (IDI with Radha, FSW)

“My relationship with my lover is like second wife...wife is not different and she is not different... it is like that. I share all my joys and sorrows and I listen to her as well” (IDI with Ramesh, IP)

Pathways to intimate relationship and its characteristics



IPs oppose lovers to practice sex work

- IPs emotional ties with lover (FSW) changes his expectations re her behaviour: similar to ‘wife’
 - *faithful and obedient to husband*
 - *tend to children, do household chores*
 - *provide love and sex to partner who ‘provides’*
- Implies giving up sex work
- Justifies violence if she makes that ‘mistake’

Violence is fundamentally tied to masculine identity...

- IPs don't like their lover to question them
 - *eg: condom negotiation, consumption of alcohol etc.*
- When FSWs failed to meet gendered expectations, violence was warranted
 - *eg: fulfil the sexual desires as & when*
- When the FSW challenges IP on their ability to provide financially, men often resort to violence.

FSW gain social approval from being seen in monogamous relationship ...

- ❑ Societal disapproval is rooted in her challenging traditional gender norms ie. taking sexual freedom to engage in sex with various men.
- ❑ While marriage is impossible she can win back some societal approval, abiding by gender norms and being seen in a committed, successful monogamous relationship with IP

FSWs accept violence as a social norm...

- Violence is socially expected: a husband has the right to beat his wife
- Use of intimate violence by men is not stigmatized
- Tolerance of violence cited as a wife's duty
- FSW tolerates violence following the normative behaviour of wives and her desire for social approval

SWs tolerate violence due to the need of support...

- ❑ IP play a significant role as provider for the family
- ❑ Father of her children
- ❑ As a figure who she treat as husband



The relationship always on fragile ground...



- Does not fit within the legal framework of marriage
- No one applauds these relationships except FSW and IP
- Ultimately she depends more on the relationship than him

Conclusion

- IPV in sex work context is complex and challenging to address
- Intervention need to address on FSWs empowerment, self esteem, negotiation and control over resources, but cannot ignore the power of gender normative expectations
- It is also important to work with the perpetrators of violence and other stake holders in the community



Samvedana Plus: An intervention Addressing the IPV among FSWs



Project Period: 2015 to 2018

Implemented by KHPT in partnership with CATMS – sex workers led CBO in 47 villages in Bagalkot district (rural areas with high proportion of *devadasi* sex workers)

800 FSWs and their intimate partners

Aims to reduce partner violence and increase condom use in the intimate partnerships of female sex workers

Intervention Design

Female Sex Workers : Participatory reflection sessions; development of safety plans; leadership building; 24 hours violence support; counselling support; linkages to health care and commodities

Intimate Partners: Regular one to one sessions; group reflection workshops; training male champions; couple events; linkage to services

Community: Community dialogue, street plays, folk shows and stakeholder meetings, community advocates

Community based organisation: Capacity strengthening of CBO board, crisis management teams , district level advocacy, networking and alliance building



Thank You

Satyanarayana Ramananik PhD

satya@khpt.org

www.khpt.org

SAMVEDANA PLUS | Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Against Female Sex Workers

