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Addressing HIV vulnerabilities of women from the entertainment industry in Cambodia: A labour rights approach

Richard Howard, ILO HIV/AIDS Regional Specialist for Asia and the Pacific, howard@ilo.org

Eric Steiner Carlson, ILO HIV/AIDS Specialist for the South Cone of Latin America,
carlson@oitchile.cl

Chuong Por, ILO HIV/AIDS Focal Point for Cambodia, chuong@ilo.org





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Issues

The economic crisis has driven thousands of Cambodian women out of failing factories and into the entertainment industry in search of a means of survival for themselves and their families.

As entertainers in karaoke bars, massage parlours and beer gardens, these workers face low wages and labour rights abuses that expose them to HIV risk.



Description

During October-December 2009, the International Labour Organization (ILO) conducted an assessment of the HIV vulnerabilities of informal sex workers during the financial crisis in Cambodia.

The study interviewed women who had begun indirect sex work during the crisis, with a particular focus on their working conditions, and consulted with enterprises, unions and Ministry of Labour officials on how best to reduce HIV risk and vulnerabilities.



Lessons learned

Most informal or indirect sex workers are not receiving HIV education at the workplace and do not benefit from condom access programmes.

The study identifies several other key factors that contribute to vulnerability: workplace violence, lack of negotiation skills, inability to access condoms at entertainment venues, forced substance abuse, and low condom use with non-commercial partners.

The study found that abuse of women and girls is part of a continuum of human rights and labour rights violations: from child labourers with low wages and harsh working conditions being laid off with little or no compensation to workers in the entertainment industry where they are under pressure to sell sex in unsafe conditions.



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Next steps

The ILO and its partners will continue to promote HIV committees in entertainment establishments, provide HIV information for indirect sex workers, and advocate for condom distribution services in entertainment venues.