Feasibility and outcomes of tracing women who disengage from targeted health services for female sex workers in Zimbabwe

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BACKGROUND

- The Sisters with a Voice programme provides comprehensive HIV and sexual and reproductive health services for female sex workers (FSW) across 57 clinics in Zimbabwe.
- Although many women engage with these services only once, little is known about unmet needs among those disengaging.
- The Sisters programme piloted an approach for tracing women who had not returned for more than six months.

METHODS

- We identified 134 women who attended between January 2018 and June 2019 but did not return before September 2020 in one site. Trained outreach workers attempted to trace these women.
- Home tracing consisted of up to five home visits. If unsuccessful, this was followed by phone tracing and asking other FSW and peer educators about their whereabouts.

RESULTS

- Some 114/134 women (85.1%) had either a home address or phone number held by the clinic system.
- Of these, 60 (52.7%) were successfully traced: 25 via home visits, 23 via phone tracing, 10 via engagement with other FSW and peer educators and 2 were determined to have died.
- 31/56 (55.4%) were still active in sex work, and 50/56 (89.3%) still required Sisters' services.
- Reasons for disengaging included having migrated (31; 55.4%), other work commitments (5; 8.9%)
- Those aged 25+ years were more likely to be successfully traced than those aged <25 years

CONCLUSIONS

- Our findings demonstrate the feasibility of a community level tracing intervention for FSWs, and suggest HIV programmes should retain contact information of FSW guardians/friends for tracing.
- The next step for this programme activity will be to determine the percentage of women who re-engaged with the programme following tracing efforts.

