



Dr. Shirin Heidari is Senior Research Fellow at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, and principal investigator of a multi-country research project on sexual and reproductive health and rights in forced displacement. She is also Senior Technical Consultant on Gender at WHO, Gender, Equity and Human Rights unit.

Before joining the Global Health Centre, Dr. Heidari was the Executive Director of Reproductive Health Matters and Editor-in-Chief of its peer-reviewed journal, and prior to that she oversaw the Research Promotion Department of the International AIDS Society and was the editor of Journal of the International AIDS Society. She received her doctorate degree from Karolinska Institute in

2001, where she continued as an HIV researcher until she moved to Geneva in 2007.

She has been a board member of Amnesty International, Sweden and is the founding chair of the Gender Policy Committee of the European Association of Science Editors (EASE). She is the lead author of the Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines and has given a TEDx talk encouraging gender sensitive research and scholarly communication. She is also founding president of GENDRO, an association with the mission to advance gender-sensitive research and data analysis.

She has served at several international expert and scientific committees, and is the author of more than 40 publications. She has more than 15 years of experience in health research, policy and advocacy, and is a vocal gender-equality and human rights advocate.

«Transactional sex in forced displacement: implications on sexual and reproductive health and rights»

The number of people forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of war, conflict, persecution, and natural disasters has been exponentially increasing in the past few years. Displaced populations face significant hardship. They often have livelihood and employment opportunities and lack access to food, housing and basic essential services including sexual and reproductive health services. Conflict, disasters and displacements are experienced differently by men, women and transgender persons and have different impacts. Crises often exacerbate gender inequalities and reinforce gender hierarchies with serious implications on the sexual and reproductive health of individuals. Displaced persons, in particular, women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity experience heightened vulnerability and are at greater risk of abuse, assault, and harassment during conflict and crises, but also during their migration journey and after arrival to the host country.

There are emerging indications that widespread sexual- and gender-based violence, social exclusion, food and housing insecurity, loss of economic options, family separation, among many other factors result in precarious conditions that facilitate engagement in transactional sex. Transactional sex is, for some, one of the very limited or even the only option of earning an income in order meet their basic needs. There are also reports of women “making deals” and engaging in transactional sex in exchange for safety and for security purposes. Refugees may also engage in transactional sex to raise sufficient money and continue their journey. Others may be coerced into sex work or be subject to sexual exploitation and violence in the face of “threats, violence or abuse of authority”. Refugees who engage in transactional sex often risk violence because perpetrators know that there is a low likelihood of them reporting the incidence. Refugees who engage in transactional sex may also face greater risk of SRH needs due to increased risk of gender-based violence, HIV/STIs and unwanted pregnancy, while at the same time face greater barriers to access services.

Despite the significant public health and human rights ramifications on transactional sex in forced displacement, there is a dearth of robust evidence on the phenomenon and its sexual and reproductive health implications. Our research is a multi-country study that aims at shedding light on the various factors that facilitate transactional sex, with a focus on understanding the root causes and implications of SRHR.

Join the seminar on Thursday, 14 November 2019 at 1:00 pm in room 220!