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Conflict, migration, and sexual health risk among female sex workers in Ukraine post-Russian invasion

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BACKGROUND

Armed conflicts increase the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections because of increased migration and displacement, sexual violence, worsened economic conditions, decreased access to healthcare, and other social disruptions.

FEBRUARY 2022: The Russian government launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leaving millions internally displaced and at increased risk of infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted infections.

Female sex workers (FSWs) who have been displaced or relocated from heavily-affected regions may face even greater risks.

OBJECTIVES

We sought to compare post-migration sexual health risk behaviors and perceptions among groups of displaced or relocated FSWs in Ukraine with different migration trajectories and personal experiences.

METHODS

A **peer-driven intervention** conducted by the Alliance for Public Health in Ukraine interviewed **2,058** women engaging in paid sex work in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih, and Odesa, Ukraine, between September 2023 to January 2024.

We conducted a **latent class analysis** to identify groups of women who had relocated since the Russian invasion based on shared migration experiences, histories of displacement, and past exposures to violence.

We used model fit statistics to determine the best fitting number of classes, then used **weighted standard deviation ellipses** to characterize the spatial distribution of relocated FSWs' former cities of residence by class assignment and former city of residence.

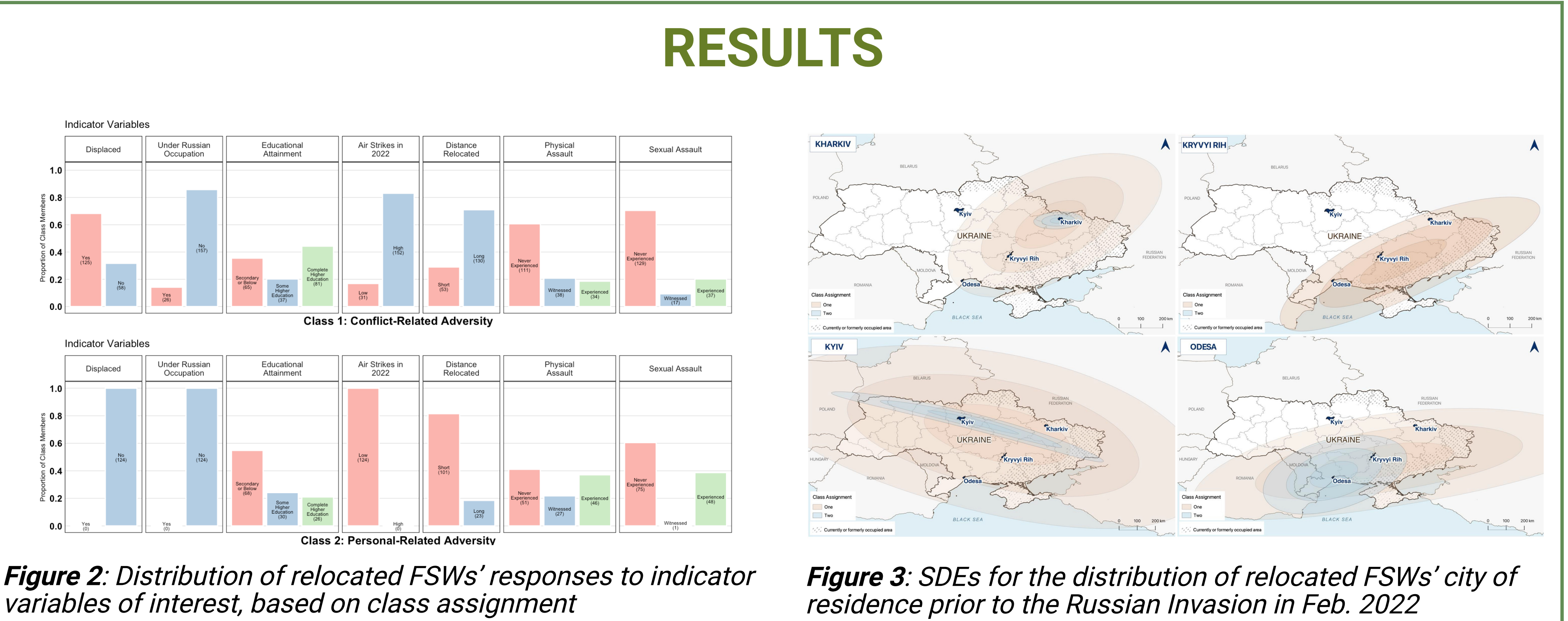
We examined four sexual health outcomes:

1. Post-invasion entry into sex work
2. Perceived change in sexual risk post-invasion
3. Inconsistent condom use in the last 30 days
4. The number of sexual partners in the last 30 days

We used **logistic regression analyses** to assess our first three outcomes of interest, and **negative binomial regression** analyses for our fourth.



Figure 1: Map of the locations of the four study sites and their proximity to currently and formerly occupied areas



DISCUSSION

Understanding differences in sexual risk behaviors based on migration trajectories can inform future HIV prevention interventions in countries experiencing conflict-related internal displacement.

For women engaged in sex work, harm-reduction services may reduce health and safety risks, while broader economic and social-protection interventions may expand livelihood options for women living in conflict-affected areas.

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