

Sex work & violence in Zimbabwe

Needs Assessment report

hands OFF!  hands OFF!

 **Aids
Fonds**

Hands Off!

Reducing violence against sex workers

The Hands Off! programme focuses on the reduction of violence against sex workers in Southern Africa through prevention, care and support activities. Violence is a key factor in the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS. It leads to inconsistent condom use and prevents sex workers from accessing valuable legal support and health care. Hands Off! works with sex worker-led groups, law enforcement, health and support services, legal centres and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on human rights.

Research findings on sex work and violence in Southern Africa

This report presents the main findings of a study in Zimbabwe examining violence against sex workers. It is part of a regional study in the Southern African region under the Hands Off! Programme.

The research was designed by sex workers and partner organisations in the Hands Off! consortium. Sex workers in the five programme countries – Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe - participated in the implementation of the research and the dissemination of results. Regionally the quantitative research part entailed more than 2000 surveys conducted by 37 sex workers who were trained to interview their peers. For the qualitative part of the study researchers conducted 125 semi-structured in-depth interviews and 40 focus group discussions with sex workers. Topics included: violence; social networks; police attitudes; safety, security and risk mitigation strategies.

Country reports and fact sheets on sex work and violence are available for:

Botswana
South Africa
Mozambique
Zimbabwe
Namibia
Southern Africa (regional)

Collaborating institutions

Sexual Rights Centre
Pow Wow
VU University, Amsterdam

July 2016



Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	4
Executive summary	5
1 Introduction	7
2 Methods	9
Definition of violence	9
2.1 Quantitative methods	9
2.2 Qualitative methods	9
2.3 Study sample	10
3 Zimbabwe country context	12
3.1 Legal framework	12
3.2 Context of sex work in Zimbabwe	12
4 Violence against sex workers	15
4.1 The community	15
4.1.1 Family, friends and partners	15
4.1.2 Clients	16
4.1.3 Other sex workers	16
4.2 The role of police officers	17
4.3 Health	19
4.3.1 HIV/AIDS	20
4.3.2 Supporting organisations	20
5. Conclusion	22
5.1 Conclusion	22
5.2 Recommendations	22
References	24
Credits and acknowledgements	25

Abbreviations and acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
SRC	Sexual Rights Centre
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
VOVO	Voice of Voiceless
VU	Vrije Universiteit
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Background

Violence is a key factor in the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS. Violence prevents sex workers from accessing valuable information, support and services that help to protect them from HIV/AIDS. With the Hands Off! programme Aids Fonds (www.aidsfonds.nl/handsoff!) and partners¹ aim to reduce violence against sex workers in Southern Africa. The programme, a regional response, offers a comprehensive and joined-up approach to working with sex workers, police, law enforcement and service providers in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Methods

A mixed method community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was used. All partners, including sex workers, contributed to the design and implementation of research and tools. Both quantitative and qualitative components were developed in cooperation with the Vrije Universiteit (VU University) in Amsterdam. In Zimbabwe, 8 sex workers were trained as research assistants working alongside a social scientist specialising in qualitative methods. They conducted 453 surveys, 11 in-depth interviews and 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with, 78 participants in Bulawayo, Forbes, Plumtree and Victoria Falls. Participants were selected through snowball sampling techniques, whereby each respondent invited a fellow sex worker to participate in the survey.

Results

Sex workers in Zimbabwe experience many forms of violence ranging from social stigma, discrimination, and humiliation to beatings, rape and theft. The main perpetrators are clients and police, but sex workers can be violent towards each other also. **Sixty-three percent of sex workers experienced violence in the past year.**

The relationship between the police and sex workers in Zimbabwe varies but is generally negative. Maltreatment of sex workers by police is commonplace. Police regularly force their authority on sex workers by means of sexual violence. In this way, rather than protecting sex workers, police have become an actual threat to sex workers' safety. Protection can be secured by paying bribes, either in money or in sex. Sex workers tend to mistrust police and are reluctant to get involved with them because of their repressive and abusive behaviour. Fifty-eight percent of the sex workers were arrested within the last 12 months. Reasons for arrest were: being known as a sex worker, being caught in a police raid, soliciting on the street and carrying a condom. On arrest, 61 percent of sex workers experienced violence.

In Zimbabwe, the key risk factors associated with higher levels of violence are: the level of alcohol and drug use, the amount of working days and geographical area of the sex worker. Sex

workers working in Bulawayo, Forbes and Plumtree face more violence than sex workers from Victoria Falls.

Forty-five percent of the sex workers were HIV positive and forty percent were HIV negative; others did not know their HIV status (8%) or did not want to discuss their status (7%). Eighty-three percent of those in need of anti-retroviral medication received regular treatment.

Conclusion

Sex workers in Zimbabwe face unacceptable levels of violence, stigma, discrimination and other human rights violations, which make them considerably more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. To secure the safety and wellbeing of sex workers in the country, the government needs to decriminalise sex work, strengthen sex worker movements to protect and defend sex workers' rights and raise awareness of sex workers' legal rights. In addition, specialised training and sensitisation of police officers and improved police accountability are required.

¹ The partners under the Hands Off! programme are the African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA), BONELA, Sisonke Botswana, Sisonke South Africa, Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), Rights not

Introduction.

1. Introduction

Violence is a critical factor in the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS. It prevents sex workers from accessing valuable information, support and services that can help protect them from HIV/AIDS. It also puts them in situations that make them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Modelling estimates show that a reduction of almost 25 percent in HIV infections among sex workers can be achieved when physical or sexual violence is reduced [1]. A systematic review indicated a correlation with violence and condom use and HIV infection. Evidence also shows that psychical² and sexual violence increase HIV infection and decrease condom use [2].

Numerous studies indicate a high level of violence towards sex workers, and linkages have been made between criminalising laws and increased vulnerability to violence [3]. Sex workers experience violence in different forms and on different levels. It ranges from blatant physical and sexual violence to social stigma, discrimination, intimidation, coercion and harassment. Perpetrators are clients, pimps and brothel owners, but also family and community members [4], [5]. Even police are involved and in some cases increase violence rather than protect sex workers from it. Thus violence against sex workers is not only widespread, but legitimised and accepted by many [6].

Laws and policies that criminalise sex work, leave sex workers very vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse. Sex work is currently criminalised in most Southern African countries through national laws and municipal by-laws. Criminalisation contributes to an environment in which violence against sex workers is tolerated. Lack of protection of street sex workers and those working in isolated places is generally the result of anti-prostitution laws and police policies. The criminalisation of sex work also means that sex workers often operate in unhealthy and unregulated conditions.

An overarching study by Decker et al. [7] reviewing 800 individual studies provides evidence of the global burden and impact of human rights violations against sex workers on HIV. The reviewed studies indicate that the rates of homicide are 17 times that of the general public, 7-89 percent of sex workers indicated sexual violence and 5-100 percent indicated psychical violence. Four to 75 percent experienced arbitrary arrest and detention, while 7-80 percent had condoms confiscated. Impunity or the failure to investigate and report police threats and violence is reported by 39-100 percent, highlighting the importance of sensitising police officers [7].

Through the Hands Off! programme, Aids Fonds (www.aidsfonds.nl/handsoff) and partners³ aim to reduce violence against sex workers in Southern Africa. The programme offers a comprehensive and joined-up approach to working with sex workers, police, law enforcement and service providers in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Hands Off! involves the meaningful

participation of sex workers and is based on sex workers' own priorities and needs.

The programme aims to make health clinics more accessible to sex workers and uses community rapid response methods⁴ and sex worker-led protection systems as intervention strategies. Police sensitisation is employed to work towards a police force that respects the rights of sex workers. In addition, the programme partners work to improve sex workers' access to justice by providing legal services and facilitating reform by bringing legal cases to court. Hands Off! has a strong capacity building component focusing on sex workers and sex worker-led organisations in the region. Lobbying and advocacy activities are carried out on law reform, and policies and practises involving sex workers. Research is carried out to generate evidence and knowledge on the effectiveness of the implemented intervention strategies.

Lack of reliable data makes the provision of comprehensive violence reduction and HIV prevention challenging. Data and information on human rights violations towards sex workers is often underestimated. Lack of systematic documentation of cases amongst this highly mobile target group challenges insight into the extent of the problem. In addition many of the strategies to reduce violence against sex workers have not been formally researched and evaluated[1]. To help bridge this gap, Hands Off! studied the needs of sex workers in Southern Africa using a team of 11 researchers, 37 sex workers trained as research assistants and five coordinators.

² Physical violence: Any deliberate use of physical force against sex workers with the potential for causing harm. This includes, but is not restricted to, beating with hands or objects, kicking and pushing.

³ The partners under the Hands Off! programme are the African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA), BONELA, Sisonke Botswana, Sisonke South Africa, Sex workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), Rights not Rescue Trust, Pathfinder, Tiyané Vavassate, Sexual Rights Centre, Women's Legal Centre, North Star Alliance and COC

⁴ Sex worker-led referral network for medical, psychosocial and legal support

Methods.

2. Methods

A mixed method community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was used. This means that all partners, including sex workers, contributed to the design of the research and tools, selection of the hired researchers, gathering of the data and writing up of the results. Through the involvement of sex workers themselves, the programme aimed to reflect the actual needs of the sex worker community.

The research has two components - a quantitative and a qualitative aspect - and both worked with informed consent. During the initial meeting of the Hands Off! programme staff, experts and sex workers from all the participating countries developed the Theory of Change and established a topic list for the research. Based on this list both the qualitative and quantitative tools were developed in cooperation with the VU University in Amsterdam.

Definition of violence

For the purpose of this report, violence has been categorised and defined as:



Physical violence: Any deliberate use of physical force against sex workers with the potential for causing harm. This includes, but is not restricted to, beating with hands or objects, kicking and pushing.



Sexual violence: Any sexual act, or attempt to obtain a sexual act, to which consent is not being given. This includes, but is not restricted to, rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and sexual harassment.



Emotional violence: Any act that diminishes sex workers' sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth, including threats, harassment, belittling and shaming and being made to feel unworthy. This includes, but is not restricted to, discrimination.



Economic violence: Any act aimed at depriving sex workers from their money, including, but not restricted to, exploitation, theft, and clients not paying for sex workers' services.

2.1 Quantitative methods

The survey questionnaire was established following participatory principles. The questionnaire was based on the established topic list and took into account existing questionnaires on violence related topics. Drafts were shared with experts and partner organisations within the five participating countries, and discussed among sex workers through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in each country. The final questionnaire had 88 questions and an approximate duration of 1.5 hour focusing on the following themes: 1) aspects of sex work (such as working location, economic incentives, clients, immigration and reasons to enter sex work), 2) social network of violence 3) violence and law enforcement 4) prevention strategies, harm reduction and risk mitigation 5) health and services and 6) demographic variables.

In total 37 sex workers were trained as research assistants, based on standardised training focusing on different aspects of the questionnaire administration. In Zimbabwe, eight research assistants were trained. The following issues were part of the training: 1) violence as a concept 2) different research methods and tools 3) open versus closed question 4) the research protocol 5) different types of violence 6) sampling techniques 7) effect of attitude of interviewer 8) ethical consideration and referrals. There were many opportunities to practise using the tool in the field.

Through snowball sampling, whereby respondents invited fellow sex workers to participate in the study, a total of 1800 questionnaires were administered in the region. All questionnaires were uploaded in SPSS, a software package for statistical analysis. In Zimbabwe 453 surveys were administered in English.

2.2 Qualitative methods

For the qualitative section, which consisted of FGDs and in-depth interviews/life stories, a local social scientist with expertise in qualitative methods was hired in each country. The sex worker community was part of their selection process to ensure an open and trusting relationship. The in-depth interview/life stories and FGDs were grouped around four central themes: 1) violence 2) police 3) social networks and 4) prevention strategies, harm reduction and risk mitigation. All the FGDs started with a warm up activity, such as a drawing exercise, to break the ice and ensure that each FGD focused specifically on one of the different topics. In Zimbabwe, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted and 12 FGDs held with between five and seven participants. In total, 78 participants were involved in these FGDs.

2.3 Study sample

This study sample (N=453) includes sex workers from Bulawayo (N=183), Forbes (N=101), Plumtree (N=86) and Victoria Falls (N=83). Most sex workers in this sample were female (96%), others were male (3%) and transgender (1%).

The majority of sex workers in this sample were single (57%), others were in a relationship but not married (29%), divorced (8%) and widowed (6%). Most sex workers in the sample have children (82%), with an average of two.

The average age the sex workers started in the sex industry is 23 years (minimum 12 and maximum 45 years). Most common reasons for entering sex work were: need for money (92%), looking for a better life (86%) and the situation forced them (77%). Sex workers indicated that other reasons to start were: they needed to take care of the children (74%), liked the job (43%), and the freedom that comes with it (31%). Several sex workers (13%) were forced into sex work and others (7%) indicated that drug use played a role.

Most sex workers in Zimbabwe operate from clubs (77%), from a bar/tavern/shebeen (69%), and brothels (52%). Other working locations that were mentioned are: streets (47%), hotels (43%), truck stops (42%), casinos (25%) and market places (20%). Sex workers stay in touch with their clients through their phone (86%) and through the Internet (37%).

A significant proportion of sex workers (38%) had additional sources of income such as selling clothes (25%), having a food or beverage stall (7%), working at the market (5%), cleaner or domestic worker (4%), nanny (2%) and working in an office (2%).

**Country
context.**

3. Zimbabwe country context

3.1 Legal framework

While it is officially not a crime to sell sex, it is illegal to solicit clients, live on the earnings of sex work and to facilitate and procure sex work in Zimbabwe. Criminalisation of activities associated with sex work is enforced by means of different sections of The Criminal Codification and Reform Act. Laws targeting Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people also regulate sex workers.

The Criminal Codification and Reform Act

- Public soliciting for the purposes of prostitution is illegal and might lead to a fine or imprisonment for a period up to six months (section 61).
- Living off or facilitating prostitution. Those found guilty of the offence are liable to a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years. Any person who keeps a brothel or demands from a prostitute any payment or reward in consideration of the person doing the following is guilty of this offence: keeping, managing or assisting in the keeping of a brothel in which the prostitute is, or has been, living for immoral purposes; having solicited other persons for immoral purposes on behalf of the prostitute; having effected the prostitute's entry into a brothel for the purpose of prostitution; having brought or assisted in bringing the prostitute into Zimbabwe for immoral purposes; or demands from a prostitute any payment or reward in consideration for any present or past immoral connection with the prostitute (section 82).
- Procuring in order to engage in 'unlawful sexual conduct' is considered an offence and might lead to a fine and imprisonment up to 10 years. In this section procuring is understood as follows: to become a prostitute, whether inside or outside Zimbabwe; to leave Zimbabwe with the intent that the other person may become a prostitute; or to leave his or her usual place of residence, not being a brothel, with the intent that he or she may become an inmate of or frequent a brothel elsewhere (section 83).
- Other sections of the Act. Section 85 states that any person detaining another against their will in a brothel or in any premises with the intention that such person should engage in unlawful sexual conduct with him or her shall be guilty of an offence. Section 86 targets owners of places allowing unlawful sexual conduct while section 87 targets parents and guardians allowing children under the age of eighteen years to be employed as sex workers.

Municipal by-laws

In Zimbabwe sex workers are often harassed and arrested under municipal by-laws, particularly on the grounds of 'loitering', 'blocking the pavement' and 'nuisance'. In a study

of African countries including Zimbabwe, Scorgie et al [5] observe that in practice authorities seldom formally prosecute sex workers for offences under the criminal code since these are difficult to prove and enforce.

LGBT rights

Criminalisation of sodomy under The Criminal Codification and Reform Act leads to greater vulnerability for Men who have sex with Men sex workers, as they are often subjected to extortion, blackmail and threats on the basis of their presumed sexual orientation or engagement in the criminal act of 'sodomy'.

2013 Constitution

The 2013 constitution for the first time provides an opportunity for the legal protection of sex workers. By including rights to equality and non-discrimination (Section 56), to privacy (section 57), freedom of association and assembly (Section 58), freedom of conscience (section 60), and freedom of movement (section 66), police officers are now hindered from targeting sex workers. The constitution also offers the potential for decriminalising crimes of morality such as sex work.

3.2 Context of sex work in Zimbabwe

The most recent studies estimating the size of sex work populations in Zimbabwe date back to the early-mid 1990s. In 1992, a capture-recapture study was conducted in Bulawayo, which estimated the population of women socialising in a random selection of bars as 3,894. The total bar-based sex worker population was estimated at 9,500, including women who did not solicit in bars. The total sex worker population was estimated at almost 12,000. More recently, (The United States') President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Zimbabwe estimated 85,949 sex workers in Zimbabwe and 51,306 sex workers in the 36 scale-up districts [8].

Violence

Up until now, a limited number of studies have shed light on violence against sex workers in Zimbabwe. Most of the information is about violence perpetrated by the police, showing alarmingly high levels. It is common for sex workers to be arrested on a weekly basis. However the majority of the sex workers that are arrested - sometimes en masse - do not see the inside of a court room. The media have reported rampant abuse of sex workers and women suspected of being sex workers by the police and other non-state actors. This abuse reflects the state's failure to exercise their protective duty towards women and marginalised communities.

Health and HIV

Data on HIV prevalence among sex workers in Zimbabwe is scarce. Zimbabwe has, however, been reported as one of the countries with the highest HIV prevalence amongst sex

workers as compared to prevalence rates within the wider population [9]. PEPFAR Zimbabwe estimated 38-70 percent HIV prevalence among sex workers in the country[8]. In 2013 a survey conducted among 2,722 sex workers estimated HIV prevalence among the population at 56.4 percent. Only 61 percent of those living with HIV knew their status [10].

Limited access to sexual and reproductive health services such as pap smears and breast screening has a detrimental impact on the health of sex workers. There are numerous barriers to sex workers accessing healthcare services. Many sex workers report problems with medical staff in state hospitals who refuse to treat sex workers unless they bring their partner for treatment. The criminalisation of sex work also prevents sex workers from full disclosure about their profession and their specific health needs.

There is considerable evidence to indicate that it is critical to ensure that sex workers are proactively involved in prevention programmes. Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Research (CeSHHAR) is the leading organisation advocating for healthcare services for sex workers as a marginalised population. There are now a growing number of services seeking to meet the needs of sex workers. However, with few clinics servicing male sex workers, discrimination against this already criminalised population continues.

Results.

4. Violence against sex workers

This study revealed that in the past year, 63 percent of sex workers in Zimbabwe experienced violence. This violence takes different forms and means that sex workers are confronted with physical, sexual, economic and emotional violence on a regular basis.

that they do not have particular problems with police or clients. As one said: *'I do feel safer as a male sex worker because I do not get isolated as much as female sex workers'*. Another said: *'We don't have cases of being arrested as MSWs so we don't have any problems with the police'*.

Type of violence against sex workers by perpetrator experienced in the past twelve months

	 client	 police	 health worker	 community	 other sex worker
physical	38,5%	31,7%	0,4%	13,7%	21,8%
sexual	33,0%	22,9%	-	10,1%	-
economic	57,6%	27,1%	-	-	34,0%
emotional	-	40,7%	22,5%	-	-

4.1 The community

All sex workers in this research spoke of the moralising language that normalises and permits violence towards sex workers, whether emotional, physical, sexual or economic. As one sex worker said: *'as a sex worker you are not free; people are always insulting us'*. Verbal abuse was experienced in many locations such as the church, home and bars. Sex workers spoke of neighbours being abusive to them and their children and even blackmailing them. Churches and traditional leaders were mentioned as encouraging influencing moralising ideas on sex work.

“ Most of them start or have met us in a bar when we are working, then they become regulars, then refuse to pay claiming that they want to be our boyfriends. Some also stop wearing condoms at this stage. ”

- FDG participant Bulawayo

Attitudes towards sex workers have clear moral and gender dimension. In Bulawayo, it was reported that people say: 'how can you have a baby without a husband?' and that sex workers are being called a 'whore' at a funeral (an extremely important social function in Ndebele culture). As one sex worker in Bulawayo notes: *'If we do not conform to our cultural roles we are pushed out'*. The violence sex workers experience is significantly gendered as well. Male sex workers commented

In all four areas sex workers mentioned the harassment of sex workers' children by neighbours, other children and the community at large. These experiences range from abuse of the sex workers themselves including forced abortion to not wanting children (within the family) to visit them to direct harassment and bullying of sex workers' children. Sex workers in Victoria Falls mentioned that children are called abusive names and physically abused. As one sex worker said: 'a neighbour beat my child because she had gone to the river with the neighbour's children. He told his children they were not allowed to play with my children because I was a whore'. Two sex workers in Victoria Falls spoke of sending their children away because 'it is not a good environment for them to grow up in'.

“ The problem with these boyfriends is that they start as clients then after a while they turn into boyfriends because they do not want to pay regularly and we do not want to make them pay every time. ”

- FDG participant Bulawayo

4.1.1 Family, friends and partners

Violence experienced by sex workers in the domestic or private sphere, was mentioned by several sex workers.

Sex workers spoke of boyfriends, husbands and partners as being economically violent. As one sex worker said: 'They

claim to love us so as to manipulate us'. Sex workers spoke of being breadwinners, and that, often, partners or boyfriends 'start demanding money and demanding things'. A sex worker in Plumtree mentioned that she discovered it was easier and cheaper to be single because her boyfriend demanded money from her. It was explained that boyfriends also prevent sex workers from working or give threatening 'glances and stares' as they worked. Issues of emotional violence emerged as well. It was explained that boyfriends can be 'possessive' and, for example, can monitor sex workers' calls.

4.1.2 Clients

The survey results revealed that clients are the main perpetrators of violence against sex workers in Zimbabwe. In the past 12 months, more than half (58%) of sex workers experienced economic violence by clients. More than third (39%) experienced physical violence and more than a third (33%) experienced sexual violence from clients.

The situation with regard to police officers seems to be changing. Research (OSF, 2012) shows that police officers are the most significant perpetrators of violence against sex workers in Bulawayo and Victoria Falls. But sex workers in Bulawayo themselves say that: 'the situation has changed and it used to be the police [being the worst perpetrators of violence], but now it is clients'.

In recent years, the use of weapons, particularly in Bulawayo has increased. There have been a number of murders in the city recently and reports of particularly violent clients. Sex workers in Bulawayo spoke of the use of weapons on them including guns, knives and knob carries (hard wooden stick).

“ I was once beaten up by a client. I had refused to have unprotected sex and he beat me up. He asked how a sex worker could advocate for safe sex, because according to him sex workers were responsible for spreading STIs and HIV. I refused to have unprotected sex with him because I love my health. ”

- Female sex worker

Prevention strategies and risk mitigation

To avoid violence, sex workers in Zimbabwe use several strategies. Sex workers prefer to work from 'safe' venues such as lodges and hotels. Others prefer to work from their own houses, sometimes for very practical reasons: *'Imagine... walking to my house in that mini skirt. the whole of Plumtree would be in uproar because the outfits we wear at night are not meant for the day'*.

To avoid clients stealing or not paying for their services many sex workers spoke of hiding money, for example in their arm

pits or hair. When bringing clients home, sex workers said they hide their money in 'the mealie meal container' or 'the (bath) tub'. Sex workers also stressed the importance of ensuring that clients pay them upfront, prior to any services being given. One sex worker mentioned that she uses Ecocash, a mobile payment system, as a safe way of receiving her money.

Many sex workers also spoke about taking direct action, particularly if a client owed them money or had refused to pay. Carrying money as a back-up was seen as important. And carrying a passport was considered useful, especially for sex workers in Victoria Falls who might be dumped by clients at the other side of the border.

“ He took me home to his place. As we were going there he was calling or chatting to his friends telling them to come or whatever. After three minutes we got to his place. There was a knock at the door. Three more guys came in. I have never told anyone this... they beat me up and did all sort of things. They beat me up and took turns. ”

- Male sex worker

4.1.3 Other sex workers

The survey results show that more than third (34%) of sex workers experienced economic violence from other sex workers and a significant group (22%) experienced physical violence. In Plumtree, sex workers even considered other sex workers as more violent than clients.

In general, violence among sex workers is linked to competition. Sex workers spoke of initiation of sex workers as 'some sex workers gang up and beat you up' and 'some take your money away'. In Victoria Falls sex workers highlighted competition particularly over good clients that pay well.

Sex workers also mentioned conflicts around age and class. Respondents spoke of being a 'higher' class (based on wealth) and having better makeup or 'nails' and drinking more expensive drinks. This sets them apart from other sex workers and makes them vulnerable to violence due to jealousy. Age was mentioned particularly in Plumtree and Victoria Falls: *'There are intergenerational gaps. the young (sex workers) fighting with older sex workers'*. In Plumtree, huge tension arises as well between sex workers from within Plumtree and those from outside the area.

Boyfriends were identified as another main reason for violence amongst sex workers: *'We almost fought that day with this sex worker because she was now claiming that the man [her client] was her boyfriend, then I asked her if it was her boyfriend then why did he pick me up by the corner?'*

Prevention strategies and risk mitigation

Sex workers from Bulawayo and Victoria Falls mentioned the importance of having sex worker friends who, for example: *'warn each other of dangerous clients or clients with STIs.'* Sex workers write down the number plates when their friends go into a car, which enables them to report it if anything happens. In Bulawayo, sex workers also use a WhatsApp group to let other sex workers know where they are going with clients, and to record clients' number plates.

“ We stand in solidarity as sex workers....I will not stand by and watch her getting beaten up, no, I will help her. ”

- FGD participant Victoria Falls

Sex workers in Bulawayo and Plumtree also spoke about taking collective action against violent clients. In Bulawayo, sex workers had agreed to help each other: *'Since now we know the police no longer mind us and they do not work in town as they used to, we have agreed that if someone attacks us we gang up on him and beat him up'*. A sex worker from Plumtree shared an example of having her phone stolen by a client: *'I called the group of sex workers that I hang out with and we went to his house to get my cell phone. When we got to his house we threatened to beat him up, that is how I got my phone back'*.

Sex workers noted the importance of having other 'friends' and allies - especially security guards and bar staff - to protect them and help out when needed. However, , in many cases these 'friends' have expectations with regard to free 'sexual favours'.

What fuels violence?

Certain working conditions and circumstances increase the chances of violence. The more working days a sex worker has



Many working days



Alcohol use

Risk factors



Drug use



Geographical area

the more violence they will experience. The level of alcohol and drug use is positively correlated to the level of violence. Sex workers working in Bulawayo, Forbes and Plumtree face more violence than sex workers from Victoria Falls.

4.2 The role of police officers

Police officers, are major perpetrators of violence against sex workers in Zimbabwe. More than third (32%) of sex workers in the sample experienced violence by police officers in the past 12 months. Sex workers experienced beatings (30%), forced sex (26%), their earnings being stolen (21%) and their condoms being stolen (21%). Sex workers reported being picked up by police and dumped far out of town at night, being raped by plain clothes officers at their place of work, being arrested and raped by multiple officers, being detained in cells with police dogs and being tortured.

“ What testimony could we possibly give about people we buy beers for until they are drunk and then when they are in uniform they start harassing us? ”

- FGD participant Victoria Falls

Sex workers noted being tracked by police officers during the day, both while at work and when not working. As was explained in a FGD in Bulawayo: *'They will try to harass you, they will ask you for money and if you don't give it to them they will threaten you'*. Similar incidences were reported in Victoria Falls and Plumtree.

In Victoria Falls, sex workers said they were targeted by police after thefts or other crimes too: *'Whenever there are thefts they [police] will go to all the sex workers' houses and pick us all up....the police always assume where a sex worker is you will find a thief as well'* (FGD participant).

Entrapment was another problem raised by sex workers. In Bulawayo, police officers will drive in private vehicles pretending to be clients. If sex workers approach them they are grabbed and arrested.

Another significant issue that may be specific to Zimbabwe is that of language. In all four areas sex workers raised the issue of language as contributing to their harassment by police officers. The results suggest that sex workers who are unable to speak Shona are confronted with increased violence.

Arrest

Encounters between sex workers and police are often surrounded by the threat of arrest. In the past year, more than half of sex workers (58%) were arrested at least once. Specific grounds for arrest were: 'because of their sex work (62%), during a police raid (51%), soliciting clients on the street (49%), carrying a condom (26%) and stealing from a client (22%).

The average amount of times that sex workers had been arrested was 12 times, and most of them were detained for 12 hours per arrest. Sex workers agreed that, although male sex workers are harassed, it is mainly women who are targets of arrest. They reported the use of weapons usually baton sticks and teargas - as well as dogs when police make arrests. A sex worker from Bulawayo described her arrest: *'They would place us in the back of trucks with police dogs in cages... It was a very frightening experience as we would have to sit still because if we moved the dogs would start growling'*

"Sometimes when you are arrested with a client and you are being taken to the police station, the police officer will release the client and ask for a sexual favour, promising to release you early. If you refuse you can go to prison. One police officer did that to me. He came to my house and I refused to sleep with him. He told me that he has profiled me and I was going to be in trouble. When I met him one night he arrested me for public drinking and yet I wasn't carrying or drinking any alcohol. I was taken to a prison cell for more than three nights and no one could tell me why I was arrested. One police officer asked and none of the others could respond to his questions on my detention."

Violence upon arrest

The majority (61%) of sex workers in the sample experienced violence by the police on arrest. Sex workers spoke of the humiliation, intimidation, harassment and inhumane treatment they face on arrest and in detention. Although the new Constitution makes significant statements about the rights of citizens on arrest, based on the experiences shared by sex workers, these rights are still far from being realised.

Sex workers spoke of being held without charge: *'If you do not have money, you can spend up to three days in the cells'*. In Victoria Falls, respondents spoke of police changing arrest times. This can be considered an attempt to pervert the course of justice because sex workers in Zimbabwe are not supposed to be detained for more than 48 hours without appearing in court. A sex worker in Plumtree was arrested whilst trying to help her friend who was being beaten by the police. She was threatened with a long prison sentence if she did not plead guilty: *'The police officers told me that if I did not plead guilty to the charges they had invented then I would be found guilty and I would go to jail for a longer time'*.

When arrested sex workers are not always detained in police cells which is where, by law, they should be detained. A sex worker from Victoria Falls recalled that once she was held in a fence outside 'like goats'. A sex worker from Bulawayo was held 'in riot rooms inside the police station. A plain clothes [police officer] held us behind the counter and other [police] units held us in other random offices in the police station'.

Another significant issue with regard to arrest is access to medication for sex workers who are HIV positive or living with other chronic diseases. In detention, sex workers are often denied medication or forced to take them on an empty stomach.

"I once fainted at a police station after I had been held for 48 hours without food, water and my pills. I had refused to have sex with one police officer so he arrested me during an operation and made sure I was not released until the next morning."

- FGD participant

Seeking police assistance

Respondents note significant barriers to sex workers reporting cases and accessing justice. They report that sex workers rarely receive protection from police, assistance with their safety and security, or any help with recourse to justice for crimes committed against them. As one sex worker in Victoria Falls said: *'We rely on friends or on ourselves because the police basically despise us'*. Although there is a high incidence of police sexually abusing sex workers, cases are never reported out of fear of repercussions.

In our sample, 30 percent of sex workers filed an incident of violence with the police of which 20 percent had follow up. Over three-quarters of sex workers (77%) who filed a case were unhappy with the process.

All the respondents felt that the police are not willing to assist sex workers. As one from Plumtree noted: *'the police do not entertain cases from sex workers'*. Sex workers note that police are slow to attend to their matter, 'if they attend to it at all'. Results suggest that sex workers who do not speak Shona experience increased discrimination in accessing police assistance. In some cases, officers side with violent clients. In others, sex workers are blackmailed and extorted. In Bulawayo, sex workers said a peer ended up in a newspaper article after reporting their case to the police. According to them, the police look out for 'sensationalist' stories in order to sell them to tabloids.

"Police officers would explain to us that sex work is illegal in Zimbabwe. Then he would make us pay a fine for that before he would take our case."

- FGD participant

Corruption

Sex workers frequently spoke of corruption within the police force. Police make sex workers pay bribes before they take their cases: *'What they usually did is to only attend to cases of sex workers when there was a bribe involved'*. Defendants bribing police in order to drop cases was mentioned several times in all three areas. As a sex worker from Bulawayo explained: *'Sometimes clients get abusive, therefore, we have to go to the police to report such cases, however, because of bribery they will claim it is not a criminal offence and the case will be dropped'*.

While threatening with arrest, it is common for police officers to demand money or sex bribes from sex workers in exchange for their freedom. To prevent arrest, in the past year, 58 percent of sex workers paid a bribe, and 27 percent had sex with a police officer in exchange for their freedom. Sex workers spoke of police refusing to take money as a bribe, and instead wanting sex. A sex worker in Bulawayo said: *'If you refused his sexual advances he would make your life hell. He would either lock you up for a while or walk for a long time continuing his tour with you tagging along until you agree to have sex with him'*.

“ Usually the police officer that targets you every day is the one interested in you. At the police station they will remove you from the rest, take you to the toilet and ask for sex. If you give them sex they let you leave using the back door. ”

- FGD participant

Moral policing

Moral policing by police appeared as a recurrent theme throughout the interviews in Zimbabwe. The reasons that sex workers give for their arrests or harassment from the police are often linked to broader social and moral issues around women's bodies and women's sexuality. Sex workers who have attempted to report cases of sexual violence have been told 'it is not possible to rape a sex worker' and 'what do you expect because women should not behave like that'. In Bulawayo sex workers spoke of victim blaming when sex workers attempt to report a case to the police and questions such as 'why were you going to that area in the first place?'

A sex worker in Bulawayo recalled an incident when she was being beaten by a police officer: 'He said women were not allowed to be walking at that time of night'. A sex worker from Plumtree mentioned an officer arresting her for loitering 'because of the way I am dressed'. In Victoria Falls, reporting cases of attempted rape was considered 'pointless' because 'the police would only question me about why I was out so late at night'.

Changing attitudes

In a landmark case on the 24th of March 2016 the High Court of Zimbabwe ordered that the arrest of three women for the crime of "loitering for the purposes of prostitution" was illegal.⁵ This court ruling represents notable progress in the protection of the rights of sex workers, but also appears to have some negative repercussions.

In the study, sex workers discussed this 'court ruling', indicating that sex workers can now work without arrest. According to them, however, since this court ruling, police avoid being associated with sex workers. For example, it was noted that police do not want to handle sex worker cases anymore.

“ There was a sex worker that was axed recently (by another sex worker) and when she tried to report it the police officers refused to take her case on the grounds that we had won the court case banning police from arresting us. ”

- FGD participant

Protectors

Survey results indicate that whereas sex workers experienced negative behaviour from the police (37%) and were discriminated by them (41%), some receive positive assistance from the police (46%). The interviews suggest that police officers offer sex workers protection in exchange for free sex. Several sex workers also spoke of having police clients who would occasionally warn them about raids. As one respondent said: *'Sometimes they will only know that a raid is happening that night and they will phone to let you know not to move around that night and stay at home'*. Sex workers noted, however, that relationships with police might change as soon as an officer is on duty: *'When they are wearing their uniform they no longer care about you'*.

4.3 Health

This study revealed that in the past 12 months, almost a quarter (23%) of sex workers experienced discrimination in accessing health care services. Slightly more sex workers (27%) experienced being verbally abused by health workers. It was mentioned, however, that 'there are clinics that treat us nicely and with speed' (FGD participant Bulawayo).

Sex workers from Plumtree particularly complained about the attitude and behaviour of nurses and medical staff. Some sex workers even cross the border to Botswana to seek medical assistance because the doctors and nurses in their own area are unfriendly to them.

5 www.chronicle.co.zw/high-court-tells-cops-to-refund-prostitutes/

As an example of negative attitudes, respondents said that medical staff share sex workers' HIV results amongst themselves in coded language. Medical staff will ask each other if a result is 'Buddie or Telecel' (local mobile phone providers), in which Buddie stands for positive and Telecel for negative.

“Nurses, especially the young ones, are rough. When they know that you are a sex worker they do not treat you with dignity and respect. Some even refuse to treat us because of the work that we do.”

- FDG participant

tests and contraceptives. Sisters Clinic 'used to give sex workers medication for free and when they had STIs they received free treatment'. Sisters Clinic has since closed down in Plumtree and the reason cited was that the government clinic offers the same services for free. However, according to sex workers these government services are neither friendly nor particularly accessible for marginalised communities.

A sex worker from Bulawayo said she received legal assistance from the SRC after being harassed by the father of her child and they helped resolve the problem. The same respondent also spoke of her experiences with Pow Wow and VOVO: 'It is a group of sex workers who meet to talk, share ideas and help each other with problems'.

4.3.1 HIV/AIDS

Within this study, almost half (45%) of sex workers were HIV positive; some (8%) did not know their HIV status and others (7%) preferred not to talk about it. Of those who indicated being HIV positive, 83 percent receive regular treatment. The majority of sex workers in this sample (85%) use condoms always while selling sex, 14 percent use condoms sometimes while selling sex and one percent never.

HIV prevalence



40% HIV negative

45% HIV positive

7% does not want to disclose status

8% has never been tested

4.3.2 Supporting organisations

Organisations:

In this sample all sex workers (100%) are linked to a NGO. Several sex workers (18%) are linked to a sex worker group as well. The organisations listed were Sexual Rights Centre (SRC), North Star Alliance, Voice of Voiceless (VOVO), Pow Wow, Sisters Clinic and Gays and Lesbians Zimbabwe (GALZ).

Regarding health services, sex workers said the organisations provide them with free HIV testing and treatment, pregnancy

Conclusion.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Sex workers in Zimbabwe experience many forms of violence ranging from social stigma, discrimination, and humiliation to beatings, rape and theft. The main perpetrators are clients and police, but sex workers can be violent towards each other also.

The relationship between the police and sex workers in Zimbabwe varies but is generally negative. Maltreatment of sex workers by police is commonplace. Police regularly force their authority upon sex workers by means of sexual violence. In this way, rather than protecting sex workers, police have become an actual threat to sex workers' safety. Protection can be secured by paying bribes, either in money or in sex. Sex workers tend to mistrust police and are reluctant to get involved with them because of their repressive and abusive behaviour.

Certain working conditions and circumstances increase the chances of experiencing violence. Factors that fuel violence are the level of alcohol use and drug use. When the amount of working days increases, this also increases the risk of violence. Lastly specific geographical areas are associated with higher levels of violence.

Within this highly violent context, sex workers have various strategies for risk mitigation. They try to work from safe locations, and hide their money. They also stress the importance of building relationships and collaborating with other sex workers.

5.2 Recommendations

The study has three main recommendations:

1. Decriminalise sex work

Criminalisation of sex work in Zimbabwe has created a climate of stigma, discrimination and violence. It compromises not only sex workers' personal safety but also their right to equal legal protection [11]. Moreover, criminalisation of sex work leads to a 'climate of impunity' [7]. This enables police and other actors to perpetrate physical and sexual violence against sex workers with impunity whilst sex workers lack access to justice, legal aid and assistance [12] [13]. To reduce this violence it will be essential to remove laws that target the sex work industry. In a decriminalised setting sex workers will be able to report crimes to the authorities, receive protection from the police and have better access to health care. This will result in greater scope for the protection of sex workers' rights and the enhanced ability of sex workers to organise themselves and work together for improved safety and security.

2. Strengthen sex worker movements to protect and defend sex workers' rights

Protective support systems, such as community-led rapid responses⁶ are needed to care for victims of violence, but also prevent violence from happening. When working together, sex workers can protect each other from violent clients, or can assist each other when being arrested by the police. Rapid responses in both cases can be mitigation strategies to prevent violence from happening. Comprehensive support systems are needed to support sex workers. These should not only include medical support such as post exposure prophylaxes but also legal support to claim justice and change laws through strategic litigation.

3. Raise awareness of the legal rights of sex workers

Awareness of sex workers' rights and equal protection before the law are needed to address the climate of impunity around violence and discrimination against sex workers. This requires an enabling legal and policy environment which protects sex workers' human rights. Involvement of law enforcement authorities is key in developing such an environment.

⁶ Sex worker-led structure for immediate support and/ or referral to medical, psychological and legal support

References.

References

- [1] WHO, "Addressing violence against sex workers," 2010.
- [2] K. Shannon, S. A. Strathdee, S. M. Goldenberg, P. Duff, P. Mwangi, M. Rusakova, S. Reza-Paul, J. Lau, K. Deering, M. R. Pickles, and M.-C. Boily, "Global epidemiology of HIV among female sex workers: influence of structural determinants," *The Lancet*, vol. 385, no. 9962, pp. 55–71, 2014.
- [3] K. N. Deering, A. Amin, J. Shoveller, A. Nesbitt, C. Garcia-Moreno, P. Duff, E. Argento, and K. Shannon, "A systematic review of the correlates of violence against sex workers," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 104, no. 5, 2014.
- [4] S. Reza-Paul, R. Lorway, N. O'Brien, L. Lazarus, J. Jain, M. Bhagya, F. P. Mary, K. T. Venukumar, K. N. Raviprakash, J. Baer, and R. Steen, "Sex worker-led structural interventions in India: A case study on addressing violence in HIV prevention through the Ashodaya Samithi collective in Mysore," *Indian J. Med. Res.*, vol. 135, no. 1, pp. 98–106, 2012.
- [5] F. Scorgie, K. Vasey, E. Harper, M. Richter, P. Nare, S. Maseko, and M. F. Chersich, "Human rights abuses and collective resilience among sex workers in four African countries: a qualitative study," *Global Health*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 33, 2013.
- [6] WHO, "Violence against sex workers and HIV prevention: Violence Against women and HIV/AIDS: Critical Intersections," 2000.
- [7] M. R. Decker, A.-L. Crago, S. K. H. Chu, S. G. Sherman, M. S. Seshu, K. Buthelezi, M. Dhaliwal, and C. Beyrer, "Human rights violations against sex workers: burden and effect on HIV," *The Lancet*, vol. 385, no. 9963, pp. 186–199, 2014.
- [8] PEPFAR Zimbabwe, "Country Operational Plan (COP)," 2015.
- [9] UNAIDS, "The Gap Report 2014 on sex workers," 2014.
- [10] M. Kardas-Nelson, "Need for scaled up combination prevention for sex workers, Indian and Central American studies show." [Online]. Available: <http://www.aidsmap.com/Need-for-scaled-up-combination-prevention-for-sex-workers-Indian-and-Central-American-studies-show/page/2896528/#item2896532>.
- [11] United Nations, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights," *United Nations Gen. Assem.* UN Doc A/68/293, 9 August, no. May, pp. 1–24, 2013.
- [12] ARASA, "HIV and Human Rights in Southern and East Africa 2014," 2014.
- [13] J. T. Esausquin, E. Reed, and K. M. Blankenship, "Police-related experiences and HIV risk among female sex workers in Andhra Pradesh, India," *Journal of Infect. Dis.*, vol. 204 Suppl, no. suppl_5, pp. S1223–8, 2011.

Credits and acknowledgements

Authors

Sally Hendriks, lead researcher and manager of the sex work programme at Aids Fonds.

Sian Maseko, women's rights and sexual rights researcher

Research and coordination

Co-researcher: Kucaca Phulu, Human Rights lawyer and researcher. Research assistants: Siphon Ndlovu, Charmaine Dube, Sidanisile Mangena, Keith Sibanda, Lucy Sibanda, Nkomo, Charity, Mamvura.

Academic supervision and support: Lorraine Nencel, Rui Cai and Ineke Nagel.

Coordination: Mojalifa Mokoete, Maud Mogale and Ingeborg van Beekum.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted by research assistants with funding through the Hands Off! programme (Aids Fonds) from the Netherlands Embassy in Maputo. We thank the Sexual Rights Centre and Pow Wow for introducing us to its members. We are grateful to all the sex workers involved in this study for agreeing to participate and generously sharing their experiences.

Editing

Juliet Heller

Graphic design

De Handlangers, Utrecht (report)

Gaafisch, Amsterdam (icons)

Published

July 2016

Copyright © Aids Fonds

hands OFF! ☂ hands OFF! ☂

