Striking a Balance

Agency, Vulnerability & Harm Reduction among Young Women who Sell Sex
I CHOSE THE JOB THAT SUITS MY NEEDS

I'M WORKING FOR MYSELF ON MY OWN TERMS
I'M A STRONG INDEPENDENT PERSON
I WANT TO BE ACCEPTED BY MY PEERS
AND I'M A SEX WORKER

SEX WORKERS ARE HUMAN BEINGS NOT SO DIFFERENT TO YOU
TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT WWW.TURNOFFTHEBLUELIGHT.IE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIV AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO SELL SEX: A TECHNICAL BRIEF</th>
<th>Basic Overview on YWSS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 20-40% adult SW report starting sex work &lt;18 years</td>
<td>• Increased risk of HIV &amp; STIs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &lt;18 = officially “sexually exploited”</td>
<td>• Poor negotiation skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased biological susceptibility</td>
<td>– Less consistent condom use</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to attract more clients</td>
<td>– Higher gender-based violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Maintain longer working hours</td>
<td>• Programmes reluctant to include</td>
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Key Questions

• **CONSENT**: Old enough to have sex so old enough to sell it?

• **CHOICE**: Best available option, or universally abuse?

• **COLLABORATION**: How can we protect young women unless we acknowledge their agency?
Case Studies

• Cambodia 1998-2001: *No social welfare/ child protection*

• Ukraine 2008: *Heavy handed institutional measures*

• Zimbabwe 2010-2015: *Weak but engaged social services*
Young Vietnamese Women in Cambodia 1998-2001
Svay Pak, Phnom Penh

• Post conflict / UNTAC
• First HIV prevalence survey in 1997: up to 60% sex workers HIV+
• 22 brothels; \( \approx 300 \) young migrant Vietnamese sex workers
• Advance payment/ debt bondage system
• High migration turn-over (\( \approx 2 \) years)
• Age range 15-30, with majority 18-20
Pride in Helping Family

“Coming to Phnom Penh to work as a sex worker is easy to earn money. In Vietnam, working in the fields is very hard and not easy to earn money.”

(Sex worker, age 22)

“I decided to work as a sex worker but my mother disagreed. . . . I have two younger brothers in Vietnam, my father died, so nobody’s taking care of us. That’s why I decided to work as a sex worker.”

(Interview with sex worker, age 16)
Intervention research 2000-2002

- Drop-in & counselling center: *The Lotus Club*
- Outreach to brothel managers
- Daily participatory sessions to build social networks, groups skills, and confidence
Battle of the NGO responses

“Harm reduction” and empowerment

• Meeting immediate needs
• Advocacy to improve conditions
• Condom promotion, BCC, VCT referrals
• Community development

VS.

“Rescue and rehabilitation”

• Rehab and training centres
• Anti-trafficking w/ focus on children
• Relied on police to conduct raids
• Encouraged repatriation
International Policy Shift

• President Bush elected 2000

• Sex workers $\rightarrow$ “Victims of prostitution”

• Confusion between sex work & trafficking

• Funding for moral approaches to HIV

• Allegiance between some feminist & Christian constituencies
“These projects in Cambodia were initiated by USAID under the Clinton administration. But the Bush administration needs to ... shut down unethical ‘interventions’ with women and girls in brothels. Those who lack the moral capacity to know that slaves need freedom should never get funding again.”

Asian Wall Street Journal, February 27 2004
Impacts on the community

• Bribes to avoid custody increased debts
• Police presence & raids = more violence, fewer clients
• Pressure grew to maximise income → SW less able to insist on safer sex
• Distrust of NGO ↓ access to services
• Brothels increased number of children in the district as “higher value” risk compensation
Survey among Street Children in Ukraine 2008
Assessing Harm Reduction Needs
BACKGROUND

• Highest HIV prevalence in Europe
• 2007 BSS showed significant proportions of IDU and sex workers were aged 13-19
• Young people “on the street” increasingly visible group in urban areas
• Parental consent required for HIV testing
• Harm reduction services unavailable or limited to those aged 18+
Survey in 4 cities

• Total of 805 respondents
• Mean age 15
• 81.5% officially “minors” under 18
• 15.5% reported ever injecting drugs
• 56.7% girls had ever sold sex
• 52.2% girls had experienced forced sex
• 75.5% stopped or harassed by police
Child Rescue Approach

• Managed by Criminal Police for Minors
• Forcible removal from the street
• Return to family or placement in facilities
• High rates of running away from both families and facilities
• 78% respondents reported incarceration
  – Begging
  – Break ins/ Petty theft
  – Selling Sex
  – “Suspicious behaviour”/ drinking alcohol/ drug offences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>% All respondents</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>10–14 years</th>
<th>15–17 years</th>
<th>18–19 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception centre</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Shelter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Detention</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trial detention centre</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional labour institution</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penal colony</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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Physical Abuse in Institutions

- 16% of those who had been in orphanages
- 65% in pre-trial detention centres
- 60% in prisons

- All 36 respondents who had been placed in a homeless shelter reported experiencing forced sex while there
Establishing a comprehensive HIV/STI Programs for Female Sex Workers

Case study from Zimbabwe
‘Sisters with a Voice’

Established in 2009; now 36 sites nationally

Developed in close consultation with SWs and other stakeholders

- Clinical services (ART/ PrEP)
- Health education
- Over 20,000 SW clients
- Community empowerment
- Peer education

- Just <1% attendees are adolescents, despite our survey showing close to 20% sex workers are under 20.
HIV prevalence among SWs at baseline at 14 trial sites

Overall HIV prevalence 57.5% (95% CI 42.8-79.2)

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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% (min and max) *</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>233/655</td>
<td>36% (14-59%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>372/665</td>
<td>57% (38-76%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>649/948</td>
<td>67% (43-91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40</td>
<td>345/440</td>
<td>79% (57-97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2722</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* percents are RDS weighted and means of site values
Cascade of care for HIV+ SW by age

a) Sex workers <25 years of age

- 100% HIV positive
- 39% Know positive
- 21% On ART
- 13% Virally suppressed

Additional 16% virally suppressed not on ART

b) Sex workers ≥25 years of age

- 100% HIV positive
- 69% Know positive
- 48% On ART
- 37% Virally suppressed

Additional 16% virally suppressed not on ART
Reasons for entering into SW

“I could not collect my form 4 results because I had lost a textbook. My parents told me they didn’t have the money to pay and I was desperate to get my results because I knew I had done well and wanted to proceed to my A levels. I started seeing a certain older man who promised to pay for it and he did. In exchange I slept with him. I collected my results and noticed I passed all subjects except for Maths. I had to rewrite the subject but again had no money. So I started looking for men to sleep with in exchange for money to pay for my extra lessons. That’s how I started, I’m still doing it because I need the lessons and if will be writing my final exam end of this year.”
Challenges that YWSS face

- Condom use and price negotiation
- Dealing with rough older clients
- Harassment and bullying from older sex workers
- Abuse and assault by the police
- Fear of being seen at the SW clinic
- School interruption
Pros and Cons

“I have realised that a life of doing sex work has made me able to make a living without anyone troubling anyone. ... I have not had problems since I started sex work. My life started to improve for the better.”
(Age 18, has 1 child, started at 15)

“I wish I had gone to school and finished ... I would be having a good job right now.”
(Age 18, HIV+, pregnant, started at 16)
Reaching Young Women

• Development of Activity Pack
• Monthly meetings
• Training adolescent peer educators
• Engagement of Social Welfare authorities
• Planned Case Base management
• Evaluation of referrals
YWSS: Cross Cutting Issues

- Young people often have had negative experiences with Child Protection or other authorities
- Social services often nonexistent, abusive or weak
- Programmes & research can shy away from difficult situations
- Moral judgment about young people and sex biases the response
- Police are rarely the “good guys”
(My) Conclusions

• No “one size fits all” solutions: international decrees unhelpful
• Need to work with the realities on the ground, even if that means ignoring age and avoiding social welfare
• Patronising to label young people: they can characterise their own experiences
• Abuse and exploitation should be judged on individual circumstances, in consultation with the young people involved