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# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Narratives of Managing Security Threat and Harassment among Sex Workers in Nairobi, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*Most researchers studying sex work have focused on the risks of sexually transmitted diseases, predominantly HIV, for sex workers, their clients, and subsequent partners. Security threats and Harassment against sex workers often go undocumented and unnoticed. Consequently, few researchers have addressed security threats and harassment against sex workers, and these few have generated limited evidence about the nature of security threat and harassment from the sex-worker's perspective. In this study, we used qualitative methods to explore the characteristics of security threats and harassment against sex workers and how such dangers influence their personal and societal health risks. The participants were selected using purposive, snowball and direct sampling techniques. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 38 sex workers. The results revealed that security threat and harassment against sex workers could be clustered into five categories, security threat and harassment from other sex workers, clients, relatives or partners of the clients, law enforcers, and vigilante groups and support staff in establishments where sex work takes place. Because they are disadvantaged and engage in illegal employment, these sex workers were trapped in a circle of threats. To reduce security threats and Harassment, sex work should be decriminalized along with strategies to decrease poverty and social inequality. Sex workers' labor rights must be promoted, including through occupational health and safety standards. A specialized agency needs to be established to protect the rights and safety of sex workers. Finally, Policy and programming should invest in communities to promote collectivization and sex worker capacity through legal literacy and access to justice.*

**Keywords:** Sex work, security threat, harassment, violence, Kenya and qualitative

### **1. Introduction**

Security threats and harassment against sex workers are the primary forms of violence that have been reported worldwide, both on a physical and psychological level, with perpetrators being violent clients and pimps. Studies suggest that workplace violence among sex workers is collective. Wahab (2005) reports that 50–100 per cent of those working in outdoor (street-based) settings experience violent encounters while on the job; in their study (which includes both indoor and outdoor workers), about 27 per cent of their sample suffered violence at the hands of a customer. Deering KN, Amin A, Shoveller J, et al., 2014 notes that sex workers experience disproportionately high lifetime rates of workplace violence, ranging from 45% to 75%. In the US, Canada, Britain, and Australia, studies on violence against FSWs report that their clients have physically or sexually assaulted 40% to 82% of female sex workers (Valera, Sawyer, Schiraldi, (2001); Farley & Barkan, 1998 and Shannon, Kerr, Strathdee, Shoveller, Montaner & Tyndall 2009. Studies in LMIC have yielded similarly high prevalence estimates of client-perpetrated physical and sexual violence, ranging from 55% to 77%. (Pando, Coloccini, Reynaga, Rodriguez, Gallo, Kochel, et al., 2013; Choi, Chen & Jiang, 2008 and George, Sabarwal & Martin, 2011). In Southern India, 26.4% of FSWs reported physical or sexual violence in the past year (Beattie, Bhattacharjee, Ramesh, Gurnani, Anthony, Isac & et al., 2010; and 9.6% reported experiencing client violence in the past six months (Deering, Bhattacharjee, Mohan, Bradley, Shannon, Boily & et al., 2013. In a study of brothel-based FSWs in Abuja, Nigeria, 52.5% had experienced violence in the past six months (Fawole & Dagunduro; 2014), including sexual and physical abuse (41.9% and 35.7%, respectively). In Kenya, one-third of sex workers reported sexual violence in the past year (Chersich, Luchters, Malonza, Mwarogo, King'ola & Temmerman; 2007, and in Thailand, 14.6% of FSWs experienced client-perpetrated physical or sexual violence in the week prior to the survey (Decker, McCauley, Phuengsamran, Janyam, Seage & Silverman, 2010). In Nigeria, 37.7% of brothel-based FSWs reported economic violence (e.g., defined as "exploitation") by clients (Fawole OI, Dagunduro AT (2014). In Hong Kong, 18.6% reported refusal of payment by clients, and 14.2% reported being robbed (Li,

2013). Overall, 64% of FSWs reported experiencing economic violence in the form of robbery, theft (e.g., stolen cash), or refusal to pay for services (Li, 2013). In Uganda, economic violence against FSWs was common and involved their receiving less pay than negotiated (72%) or no pay at all from a client (56%) (Schwitters, Swaminathan, Serwadda, Muyonga, Shiraishi, Benech & et al., 2015)

The victims are predominantly women, including in extreme cases, murder both inside and outside the workplace. Women working as sex workers experience more levels of violence against them than women working in other fields (Rodríguez et al., 2015). Male, female, and transgender sex workers face alarming levels of violence at work, from police and in their homes and Neighbourhoods. (Decker and others;2013 and UNFPA, UNDP, and the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers (2015). Clients frequently attempt to maintain a power balance that favours them over sex workers. This is often done through different methods of violence, such as sexual, emotional, and physical (Barnard, 1993). Pimps have been identified as the primary perpetrators of violence against sex workers with 53% of sex workers in one study reporting that violence at the hands of pimps is a significant problem, 33% of subjects interviewed in that same study said that the main benefit of having a pimp is the protection from potential assault (EBSCO, 2015). Sex workers from a range of work settings also support the claim that the environment of the workplace shapes violent encounters, as well as other features of the social context of their work (Bretns and Hausbeck 2005; Church et al., 2001; Fang et al., 2007; Giobbe et al., 1990; Katsulis, 2009; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; Lopez-Jones, 1999; Plumridge and Abel 2001; Willman, 2008).

The adverse health effects of workplace security threat and harassment against sex workers include depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, unplanned pregnancy, and death. (Amnesty International,2016; Bar-Johnson & Weiss; 2015 and Hynes; 2015). Further, it is noted policy, gendered relations of power, economy, and stigma are influential socio-structural factors shaping sex workers' risk of violence. (Landers, Closson, Oldenburg, Holcomb, Spurlock and Mimiaga 2014; Shannon, Kerr, Strathdee, Shoveller, Montaner, Tyndall 2009; Fujimoto K, Wang P, Ross MW, Williams ML,2015 and Benoit, Ouellet, Jansson, Magnus and Smith .2017).

Due to the illegality of sex work in many parts of the world, sex workers often have to service clients in discreet and isolated spaces where they are less likely to get caught by the police. Because of this isolation, sex workers are made more vulnerable to attacks by their clients. According to a study conducted on one hundred and thirty people working in San Francisco as street sex workers, 82% had been physically assaulted, 83% had been threatened with a weapon, and 68% had been raped while working as prostitutes (Farley, 1998). Studies also show the myriad ways in which sex workers experience, manage, or attempt to avoid violent encounters while working in these settings (Bowen et al. 2006; Downe 1999; Kinnell 2008; Kurtz et al. 2004; Maher 2000; Otutubikey Izugbara 2005; Sanders 2004; Shannon et al. 2008; Sterk and Elifson 1990; Whittaker and Hart 1996).

In Kenya context, the National AIDS Control Council (NACC) estimated that there were 138000 female sexual workers (FSW) with approximately 28000 in Nairobi in 2012 (National STI/AIDS Control Programme- NASCOP, 2012). Previously the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) estimated that 6.9% of women nationally in 1999 had engaged in prostitution. Further the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) in 2014 estimated that 3% of men aged 15-49 had paid for sex, 3% of the men aged 30-39 had paid for sex, 8% of men who are divorced, separated or widowed had paid for sex and also 11% of urban men are more likely to have paid for sex than rural area men. A more recent study of sex workers in Kenya by the National Aids Control Council and National AIDS and STI Control Program estimated the number of sex workers in Kenya to be 133,675 while the Kenya Network of Sex Workers estimated the number at 400,000. As in many parts of the world, national and municipal by-laws in Kenya criminalize sex work (Government of Kenya [GOK], 2008). Often, only sex workers not clients are arrested and taken to court for "loitering to sell sex," "importuning," and "indecent exposure" (FIDA Kenya, 2008; Ngugi, Morris, Moses, Gikuni, & Schwartz, 2004). Criminalization, as noted in the UN General Assembly Report, "represents a barrier to accessing services . . . Leading to poorer health outcomes for sex workers" and "diminish[es] the 'bargaining power' of sex workers in choosing clients and negotiating condom use" (UN Report, 2010). Though the adverse effects of Kenyan anti-prostitution laws are well documented, there are no reports that these laws curb sex work supply or demand in any way. (FIDA Kenya, 2008; Okal et al., 2009)

Sex workers in Kenya, like in many other parts of Africa, are particularly vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI), unintended pregnancies, and sexual and physical violence, as noted by Elmore-Meegan, Conroy, Agala, & Bernard, 2004. Further HIV prevalence in recent studies among female sex workers in Kenya ranges between 24 and 47%, considerably higher than the prevalence of 7% in the general population (Fonck et al., 2000; KAIS, 2007; Kaul et al., 2004; Kimani et al., 2008; Luchters et al., 2008; McClelland et al., 2010; Simonsen et al., 1990, National AIDS Control Council, 2016; UNAIDS' AIDSinfo,2019). Kimani et al., 2008 noted that the overall rates of HIV infection have declined in recent years in Kenya, a trend also noted among sex workers, where reductions in prevalence predated those in the general population by over a decade. According to Chersich et al., 2007; Geibel et al., 2008; Luchters et al., 2008; Schwandt, Morris, Ferguson, Ngugi, & Moses, 2006). There are no declines in levels of violence among sex workers in the country, with about a third reporting recent sexual violence and 12-17% physical abuse. The current study sought to establish how sex workers in Nairobi mitigate the security threat and harassment they face in their current job by mirroring views of sex workers only.

## 2. Methodology

This study was carried out in Nairobi County, Kenya. The selection of Nairobi County by the researchers was purposively made because it is one of the places in the Country, which has consistently recorded high numbers of transactional sex (Kimani et al., 2013).

This study employed an ethnographic research design. The target population for this research was mainly male and female prostitutes/sex workers. The researchers used non-random sampling techniques, mainly purposive, snowball sampling, and direct approach sampling. The choice of the target population was purposive. As a starting point, the researcher only selected individuals who self-confessed were involved in sex work. In addition, the study only wanted to deal with sex workers residing in Nairobi and operating sex work in Nairobi and consented to participate in the research, while for those who exchange sex for free, sex workers operating outside Nairobi and sex workers operating in Nairobi and did not consent to participate in the research were not part and parcel of the sampling frame. While most researchers of sex work primarily focus on female sex workers, this study emphasized the need for both female and male sex workers to be interrogated. In selecting participants for this research, the snowball sampling technique was used. In this case, the researchers made some contacts with one male sex worker and female sex worker who had the required characteristics for this study; That is, they self-defined themselves because they were engaging in sex for exchange of money, favors or material gains and were residents of Nairobi County. After gaining their consent and interviewing them, they later helped the researchers identify other participants. Through this referral process, adequate participants from different categories of sex work were interviewed. The justification for using the snowball sampling technique for selecting the participants was mainly because it's very stigmatizing for people to be associated with sex work, and also sex work is illegal in Kenya and against the penal code. Based on these significant factors, then it is not easy for those practicing sex work to come out openly and claim so.

Consequently, this necessitated the researchers to use the snowball technique of sampling. While using snowball sampling, the researchers reached for 22 sex workers. The last sampling technique used by the researchers was that there were some instances where no references were coming from the contact person because of how sensitive the research was. Some of the sex workers would quarrel and even fight if they found out that their friend directed use to them. This, therefore, made the researcher resort to another method of approaching sex workers, which is a direct approach, using the approach enriched the study due to diversity gained from contacting participants who came from different categories of sex work. The researcher interviewed 16 sex workers. In total the sample size for the study was 38 participants. To ensure the information obtained from the study are reliable, there was the inclusion of diversities among the research participants. Such diversities included; age, gender, the form of sex work, location of operation (City divided geographically, level of formal education, marital status, time of operation (Day or night) or sex worker on a full-time basis or part-time and level of income of the sex worker. Some other factors that can influence sample size needed to reach saturation and which were cautiously considered included; quality of interviews, number of interviews per participant, sampling procedures, and researcher experience.

In-depth conversational interviews were used to collect data from sex workers who were selected using either snowball sampling or direct approach methods. Besides note-taking during the interviews, the researchers also used the tape-recording technique, especially for those participants who gave their consent to be recorded. Before recording the interviews, time was taken to explain to participants how their information was kept confidential. But for those who feared being recorded, the note-taking technique was used. To some, fear was borne out of their experience with people using recorded information against others. While others did not want to be tape-recorded, as a tactic to avoid their voices being recognized by their relatives and friends in circumstances where data are lost. Despite tape recording being the major part of data collection, short notes were concurrently taken to ensure that all-important information was captured in case of technology failure. The tape recording of interviews was beneficial in recollecting the scenes all over again, especially regarding the tone of voice and the expressions, which was not possible from short notes. After recording each day, we transferred the voice information to our computer, which was encrypted and password protected.

The recorded interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of being conducted. This was to ensure that the researchers are still familiar with the information. The effort to ensure that the real meaning behind the voice was captured by comparing the notes taken separately with the voice record. After transcription, open coding was done. During this stage, errors were corrected, including ensuring that voices recorded are anonymous, inserted notations according to voice tones. Following the bulkiness of the information, the researchers had written from the recorded voices, Nvivo software was used for better utilization of the data and analysis.

To uphold the principle of confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher discouraged participants in using their real names, and therefore, pseudo names were used. Second, no outsiders accessed files containing interview information, the information was encrypted. This was necessitated by the fact that everyday after data collection, they passworded the files on a computer. In scenarios where the recording of the interviews was permitted, both the recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer, which was not accessible to any other person except the researchers. The recordings were encrypted, and transcripts individually password-protected. Participants were asked before the interview whether they consented to the conversation being recorded and were asked to sign a consent form indicating this. However, in some instances, interviewees refused to be recorded, and as a result, field notes which were also highly protected were used.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### *3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

The socio-demographic characteristics of sex workers who participated in the study are shown in Table 1 below.

Variable	Category of Variable	Frequency(N=38)	Percentage (%) =100
Age	Less Than 19	1	2.6
	20-36	32	84.2
	38+	5	13.2
Gender	Female	35	92.1
	Male	3	7.9
Marital Status	Divorced	5	13.2
	Married	6	15.8
	Separated	1	2.6
	Never Married/Single	26	68.4
Level of Education	College	14	36.8
	Primary	4	10.5
	Secondary	17	44.8
	University	3	7.9
Religion Denomination of Sex Workers	Christian	32	84.2
	Hindu	2	5.3
	Muslim	4	10.5
County of Origin of Sex Workers	Foreigner	6	15.8
	Kenyan	32	84.2
Age of Entry into Sex Work	Less than 18	1	2.6
	19-23	33	86.9
	24+	4	10.5
Duration into Sex Work	<=1	2	5.3
	2-14	31	81.6
	14+	5	13.2
Whether Sex Workers Have Children	No	14	36.8
	Yes	24	63.2
Number of Children by Sex Workers	<=0	14	36.8
	1-2	20	52.6
	3+	4	10.6

Table 1: Socio- Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents  
Source: Researchers, (2019)

Majority (84.2%) of respondents were between 20-36 years. The youngest age in the study was 19 years, with the oldest sex worker being 54 years of age. The mean age of the sex workers sampled in the survey was 28.11; this indicates that sex work is rife among the youthful generation. In terms of gender of the participants, the majority (92.1%) were female, while 7.9% were male sex workers. This implies that sex work is no longer a preserve of female but is practiced by both genders. Concerning the marital status of the respondents, the overall proportion of those currently married was 14.3%. The percentage of single participants in terms of marital status was the highest among sex workers (68.4%). This can be explained by the fact that for those that are married, it's not expected of them to be engaging in sex work, and if they do, they have to do it in hiding. These single-sex workers included those never married. We also had those separated or divorced from their partners. The Single sex workers and those separated or divorced from their partners have the full responsibility for financial support for their families, and with fewer employment opportunities and the family setup degenerating, they find themselves burdened and therefore are pushed into sex work to provide for them. They thus venture into sex work as a source of income and economic independence.

Majority of the sex workers who were interviewed were literate, with 89.5% having attained secondary and post-secondary education. From this finding, it's clear that sex work is also practised by the educated and not necessarily school dropouts. This is mainly as a result of lack of employment opportunities which force the unemployed to use the only resource that they have that is their bodies to earn a living. With respect to religion, majority (84.2%) of the sex workers who participated in the study were Christians. For majority of the sex workers being Christians, it is just a mere reflection of the country's populous religion. Other religious denominations such as Muslims (10.5%) and Hindu (5.3%) were also found to be represented in the study. These findings are contrary to the teachings of all religions where members are all prohibited from promiscuous life but from the study each religion denominations are represented. Concerning the country of origin of respondents, 84.2% of the sex workers were found to be citizens while few were foreigners. Apart from the citizens, some foreigners are also trying to earn a living through sex work.

Regarding the first age that sex workers engaged in commercial sex work, it was established that 2.6% were involved in sex work while they were less than 18 years. The minimum age of entry into sex work was found to be 18 years, while the maximum age of entering into sex work was 28 years. Early entry into sex work could be an indicator of

life challenges putting even the young ones to venture into sex work. A majority (86.8%), though, entered into sex work at the age of 19 – 23. The mean age of entry into sex work was found to be 20.92 years, a clear indication that most sex workers begin the trade at their youthful stage. However, few also enter into sex work at 28 years or more due to life challenges, particularly as single parents. The study found that the majority (81.6%) of the sex workers had stayed in their line of duty between two (2) years and fourteen (14) years with a mean duration of 7.18 years in sex work. This implies that the study gathered information from sex workers who understood the industry very well, and thus, with the experience they had, it is without reasonable doubt that the study collected reliable and valid information that will be used in understanding Security Threat and Harassment among sex workers in Nairobi.

More than half of the sex workers who participated in the study had children (52.6%). The maximum number of children was found to be four (4) among the sex workers with children with them having a mean of 1.08 children, which can be equated to 1 child for those sex workers with children since the initial results on the marital status indicated that the majority of sex workers are single. For some, being alone and with children, the burden of meeting their basic needs push them to engage in sex work.

### 3.2. Security Threat and Harassment Facing Sex Workers in the Study Area

The study observed five security threat, and forms of harassment to a sex worker; these are responded to by either individuals or groups of sex workers differently. These security threats and forms of harassment include; harassment from other sex workers, clients, relatives or partners of the clients, law enforcers and vigilante groups, the general public and support staff in establishments where sex work takes place. The next section discusses in length the various sources of security threat and harassment faced by sex workers and how they mitigate about them.

#### 3.2.1. Sources of Security Threat and Harassment for Sex Workers

The sources of security threat and harassment for sex workers are as expounded:

##### 3.2.1.1. Harassment from Other Sex Workers

Competition among sex workers often breeds anarchy between individuals or groups. This anarchy attempts to outshine one another. It is in such attempts that conflicts occur leading to harassment of those seen as competitors to scare them away. Under 18, a 26-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker shares:

I began sex work by visiting a famous street that was known for sex work. As usual, I attracted many clients being new and young then. This did not sit well with the other sex workers who were already on that street and a bit older. They saw me as a threat to their business. For this reason, they started abusing me, beating me and sometimes even sent county *askaris* to arrest me. However, this is not an isolated case. It happens to us in the streets and all other forms of sex work when you're coming in as a young and new sex worker. You could have practiced sex work elsewhere, but when you come as a newcomer in an area, clients tend to prefer new faces hence making you look like an enemy to those practicing there.

##### 3.2.1.2. Security Threat and Harassment from Clients

Incidences of security threat and harassment of the sex workers by their clients were also reported to be there in the study area. The sex workers said that some had experienced gang rape, some forced to have unprotected sex, others have been beaten, verbally abused, others denied payment after sexual encounters or given less money, and some of us abandoned in unsafe areas like forests. Katindi a 27-year-old, single with a college education and a club-based sex worker who is also an official of Keswa says:

Most of our members have suffered a lot in the hands of their clients. Some have been gang-raped, forced to have unprotected sex and forced into unconventional sexual practices, abandoned in dangerous places and denied pay, verbally abused, being stabbed or even thrown out of a moving vehicle.

##### 3.2.1.3. Security Threat and Harassment from Relatives or Partners of Clients

Another challenge that the sex workers noted in the study they had faced is sometimes harassment from relatives or spouses of the clients, especially when they are unmasked. In most cases, such incidences led to confrontations with sex workers being beaten, accused of being husband snatchers or being branded as a slay queen making the husband to starve his family. This form of harassment by relatives or spouses of the clients was reported to manifest mainly in club/bar/discotheque, sex den, brothel, call boy/ call girl-based sex work. For other forms of sex work, such threats were there but at a minimal level. Fauzia, a 35-year-old, married with two children, having secondary education and a bar-based sex worker asserts:

One time, while seated in our bar with a client, I was surrounded by a group of women who started pushing and shoving me and pulling my hair with shouts, I am a husband snatcher. They poured the drinks that were in my table to my body. At that time, my client slipped and ran away from the vicinity.

Similarly, Clementaine, a 27-year-old, married with one child with a college education and a brothel-based sex worker says, "Sometimes we have had commotions in the brothel when wives of our clients track their husbands and find them buying sex here."

Besides Osborne, a 26-year-old, married with one child with a college education and a call boy sex worker elaborates: "I was once cornered by a husband to one of my lady clients, and the experience was so embarrassing to me in

town. I was beaten thoroughly for being a wife snatcher, and the woman was nowhere to be seen. I almost quit my business.”

Fauzia, Clementaine and Osborne’s sentiments sum up the experience of sex workers at the hands of relatives and spouses of clients.

#### 3.2.1.4. Security Threat and Harassment from Law Enforcers and Vigilante Groups

Sex workers still emphasized that law enforcers especially county *askaris*, the regular police and vigilante groups such as *Mungiki* were a significant security threat and source of harassment to them. The harassment and threat by law enforcers and vigilante groups manifested itself through arbitrary arrests of sex workers, beating of sex workers, constant extortion and defrauding of money. Jamila a 19-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker mentions:

Our main threat in the streets is not our clients but the county *askaris*. They beat us, ask us for money, and force us to have unprotected sex with them as a way of buying our freedom. The normal police force is better they are not as rough as the county *askaris*, but still they harass us especially when they are broke and its mid-month.

Similar sentiments are shared by Tina, 21-year-old, single with university education and a strip-based sex worker who shares:

Incidences of police raids at our strip joints and arrest us whenever they want is not something new. Such arrests are frequent, and they stamp us even with charges that we do not understand when they take us to court. Wish they could give us a break to earn our living just as they make theirs without any disturbances from others.

To further emphasize why there are cases of physical harassment and threat of sex workers by law enforcers it was reported that most of the law enforcers were doing so due to hiding under the pretext that sex work is illegal. Most sex workers in focus group discussions said,

The police raids and arbitrary arrests by county council *askaris* and police are mainly as a result of the two categories of people hiding under the pretext that sex work is illegal and hence use it as an avenue of reaping money from us.

Similarly, accounts of Jamila, Tina and those from focused group discussions concurs with Tomlinson (2013) in a Daily Mail article on ‘Hundreds of police raid brothels, sex shops, and lap dancing clubs’ where it documented the police brutality and arrest of sex workers and drug dealers who hide in brothels and clubs.

Apart from the stated law enforcers, the study also identified vigilante groups like *Mungiki* being a thorn in the flesh concerning activities of the sex workers in various hotspots where such sects operated. Such sect members operated under the disguise of being moral overseers within their jurisdiction. Nasimiyu, a 38-year-old, divorced and mother of two, having secondary education and a sex den-based sex worker sums up,

Our sex dens have had a rough time with members of the prescribed *Mungiki*. Many a times they raid our bases and harass us; beat us and even claim they do not want to see us because we are spreading HIV and AIDS in the area.

#### 3.2.1.5. Security Threat and Harassment from the Support Staff of Establishments Where Sex Work Takes Place

Support staff such as waiters, bouncers, bar managers, and brothel managers in establishments where sex work occurs were also identified as sources of physical threat and harassment for sex workers in the study area. Incidences of beating, regular extortion of money and in some cases, continuous asking of free sex by such support staff were found to be a common phenomenon. Regina, a 29-year-old, married with two children, having a college education and a call girl says:

Previously, I worked in a brothel, but I quit because the brothel manager always wanted free sex from me. Initially, I thought it was a one-time thing, but when it kept happening, I left the brothel altogether, and that is why I prefer to operate as a call girl.

Sharing similar sentiments as Regina is Wanjiku a 22-year-old, single with primary education and a bar based sex worker who states that “At our bar, if one does not sleep with the bar manager once in a while, you can be assured you will not be allowed to solicit for clients within the premises. Girls who have refused such overtures have been chased away from the hotspot.”

Wanjiku further sums up “If it’s not sex that the bar manager wants, the waiters are on your neck every time wanting to be given money even if they have not hooked you up with a client”.

### 3.2.2. Managing Security Threat and Harassment by Sex Workers

The study established that sex workers in managing security threat and harassment use various means either at individual or collectively as discussed below:

#### 3.2.2.1. Managing Security Threat and Harassment from other Sex Workers

Self-defense begins with self-confidence, and sex workers know it better. The study established that sex workers would mostly fight each other until a mutual cease-fire is reached. Confrontation is one of their significant responses to harassment by fellow sex workers. Bano, a 24-year-old, single with one child, having a college education and a club-based sex worker, explains:

I was beaten, chased, and abused in several clubs by other sex workers before I was able to settle. Each time I would run away and go back to my house without having a single client. I could no longer take it. I decided to

confront my attackers. I had just spotted a client, and one girl was trying to push me away from the potential client. I retaliated and firmly told her I was also entitled. This seems to have shocked her because she expected me to run away. The potential client also wanted to know why we were fighting. I clearly explained to him that I was a newcomer in the club looking for the company and that the girl did not want me there. I told him she claims to own all men in that club. She retorted, claiming that she knows me to be a crook and she was chasing me to protect him. At this point, I got angered and told her that if she fears that she is getting old, she should try other jobs because clients need to have a younger girl to spice up their lives. The client supported me and told her to look for another client. This was the end of my misery in the club. No other girl ever tried to point the finger at me.

As a way of avoiding conflicts with each other sex workers informed the study that they tend to consistently restrict themselves to certain localities (street, club, sex den, brothel, massage parlor). They only limit themselves to areas that they are known. Jamila, a 19-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker explains, "Remembering the trouble I underwent when I was a newcomer in this street, I can never imagine myself being subjected to such a nightmare again. I am here to stay in this street where other sex workers know me".

Another tactic that was found to be adopted by sex workers in an attempt to avoid harassment from other sex workers within the various forms of sex work was forming groups in which members watch over each other for protection. Such groups demarcate their territory of operation, and they keep off any intruders. Such tactics are collective solidarity in an attempt to keep other antagonizing sex workers at bay. Night Sisters, a group of seven (7) sex workers are one of such groups that was born out of the way of dealing with harassment from other sex workers. Members said:

As you can see, the seven of us joined this street almost at the same time, and we were mistreated mainly by the seniors we found there. During such periods, we started friendships among ourselves, and this became a strong bond and led us to be keepers of one another from the harassment of the seniors in the street at that time. Were it not for us coming together we would have scattered from this street, or the seniors could still mistreat us. Long live our group for being the voice against harassment by other sex workers in our streets.

Migration to other localities where sex work is done or to a different form of sex work was also found to be one of the ways that the sex workers have adopted to try and deal with harassment from other sex workers. This was found to be very common with sex workers who considered themselves to be frail or fragile and have got no one to help them in the territory they are venturing into. Mutheu, 22-year-old, single with university education and a home-based sex worker shares,

I started as a street-based sex worker three (3) years ago, but within two months life was unbearable in the streets due to constant harassment from other older sex workers who were not happy by me being a hot cake for most clients. They chased me away, and I vowed never to go again to the streets, and I found myself as a home-based sex worker. At home, I have all the space I need to work without fearing harassment from other sex workers.

For some sex workers to avoid harassment from other sex workers within their locality, they have gone to the extent of paying some form of protection fee to the various leaders of various groupings of sex work in a particular territory. Frasia a 25-year-old, single with one child, having secondary education and a club-based sex worker explains:

For me to be allowed freely to be soliciting clients in this club, you have found me in it was not easy when I was a newcomer other girl and their leaders used to chase me away. Then one day one of the security guards in the club hinted to me to look for something small and give to the leader of sex workers in the club. The day I gave the money, the harassment ended, and I was accepted as one of the girls in the club.

Similarly, Armstrong (2011) in a study on 'managing risks of violence among sex work' found that due to stiff competition for clients, sex workers fight and quarrel amongst themselves. Due to violence by other sex workers, some sex workers change the location of operation; others bribe the security guards to protect them while still others bribe sex work leaders.

### 3.2.2.2. Managing Security Threat and Harassment from Clients

To deal with such harassment and threat, sex workers have come up with different techniques to deal with the harsh conditions they encounter in the hands of their clients. One of the ways that they adopted were forming groups of sex workers within their locality of operation and used them as a reference point when trying to finalize a transaction with a client. Parinita, a 30-year-old, single with a college education and a bar-based sex worker emphasizes:

At our bar we have formed a group among ourselves, and before leaving with any client a sex worker has to mention to others where she is going with the client we tell them I am not alone here I am with my sister (who is actually a fellow sex worker), and I have to tell her where we are going with you. If it's a client who had bad motives at that instance might decide to terminate the transaction, and on my side, I am spared from physical harassment.

Another tactic that sex workers in the study area were found to utilize to deal with physical threat and harassment from clients was that others resorted to carrying pen knives, razor blades and sprays in some instances and chloroform spray in extreme cases. Wamaiko, a 43-year-old, separated with three children and secondary education and a street-based sex worker says,

At any given time as long as I am soliciting for clients in the street, my handbag must have a penknife, razor blade, and chloroform spray. These are my tools of self-defense in case I meet a troublesome client.

Wamaiko further adds:



To ensure clients do not harass us, once a car stops we could pretend to surround it as a group waiting to get the attention of the client but in some cases we are actually investigating the number of occupants in the vehicle and if our colleague is being picked one of us could mention loudly the number of plates of the vehicle picking our colleague and even photograph the vehicle that way it instills fear in the client picking one of us in the streets.

Consequently, Sanders, (2001) in a study on 'Female street sex workers, sexual violence, and protection strategies' found that most sex workers especially those working on the street are harassed by their clients. Consequently, sex workers have devised techniques and strategies for dealing with violent clients, such as forming associations.

Wamaiko is not the only sex worker who arms themselves as protection from clients who physically threaten them. Jacinta, a 27-year-old, married with a college education and a call girl based sex worker sums up, "The clients we meet are mostly foreign to us or unknown, and on my first date I carry a penknife and acid sprays for use just in case the new client is troublesome".

Other sex workers were found to have networked with bouncers and waiters in the club where they were soliciting for clients and in case the clients were starting to bring trouble to them the bouncers or waiters or security guards swung into action to protect the sex workers. Most of the sex workers gave the bouncers money or even free sex for appreciation. Shiro, a 28-year-old, single with college education and a discotheque-based sex worker shares.

I have befriended most of the bouncers and waiters in my place of solicitation, and whenever I have an issue with a client, I call any of them who rush and deliver me from the jaws of troublesome clients.

Terenane, a 23-year-old, single with a college education and a strip-based sex worker, also shares similar sentiments by stating:

In our form of sex work, most of the potential clients are normally drunk during our shows and some under the influence of alcohol and disturb us a lot. Our safe haven is some of the bouncers and waiters at the strip joints who come to our aid in dealing with such kind of clients, and we return the favor later by tipping them or giving them free sex.

Further networking helps them to deal with clients who could be rough on sex workers. Some of the sex workers have befriended security guards in some of the buildings within where they solicit clients once they get the client, they insist on having sexual acts within such structures as the security guards offer protection outside. With such arrangements, they are free from clients' physical threat and harassment. Megan, a 26-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker, asserts:

My protection in streets is guaranteed by security guards who give us space to have sexual acts in the buildings they manage as they keep an eye on us from the outside. When I am done with the client, I give the security guard some small token for giving me a temporary space for sex with a client and also some protection from being abused by the client.

The use of scary language by sex workers when talking with a client was also identified as one of the ways through which sex workers use to go about mitigating on being harassed by clients. They use such language immediately they notice that the client has started being troublesome just after they have agreed on the sexual transaction and they are almost ready. Rebecca, a 54-year-old, divorced with four children, having primary education and a sex den worker pours out:

When a client comes to our sex den and starts bringing chaos sometimes most of us use scary language or even death threat to scare the hell out of them. I once told a client who was joking with me by failing to pay after sex that he was playing with fire and as he can see me at that moment am just out police cell on bond having stabbed a troublesome client like him. Once the client heard, he paid promptly. This technique has worked for me and most of the sex workers for a great period.

Other sex workers as a way of dealing with the physical threat and harassment from clients they principally ensure that they do not drink alcohol or they drink moderately. Filipino, a 25-year-old, single with secondary education and a male street sex worker shares:

In male sex work, especially us who sell sex to other men being alcohols free is critical. We have heard cases of some male sex workers being sodomized by clients or gang-raped and in some cases, not being paid. To deal with this as we have been educated in male sex workers forum, we avoid taking alcohol, especially when soliciting for clients. This way, we can make good judgment when a client starts being troublesome.

Another sex worker who shares similar sentiments as Filipino is Mummy, a 30-year-old, single with two children, having secondary education and a discotheque-based sex worker who mentions:

When I started as a discotheque-based sex worker six (6) years ago, I messed up a great deal by always drinking so much and not being cautious. There are instances when I found myself in a hotel room the following day without memory of how I got there, the client having slept with me without protection and in some cases finding myself abandoned in a hotel room without being paid after sex, and this was mainly because of being too drunk. After many such ordeals, I decided that whenever I solicit for clients, I do not drink and in case a client buys for me alcohol I organize with the waiter without knowledge of the client to put water in the beer bottle that way the client does not notice and I end up being sober with the client. At that time, since the client himself is drunk, and I am not, I can control him.

Sentiments by Wamaiko, Terenane, Rebecca, Filipino, and Mummy are all about physical threats and harassment by clients and strategies for dealing with violent clients. Similarly, Selby & Canter (2009) in their study on 'The relationship between control strategies employed by street prostitutes, levels and varieties of client violence' found that a majority of sex workers experience threats and harassment from their clients. This does not, however, scare them away from sex work

business, but instead, they adopt different strategies of handling violent clients. For instance, some sex workers use security guards, and others move to more organized sex forms such as brothels, clubs, or bars where security is high. In some instances, the sex workers facing the physical threat and harassment from clients opted to confront the situation they are facing head-on. Rude Mama, a 45-year-old, divorced with three children, having secondary education and a street-based sex worker informs:

I never let an abusive client go scot-free. I also hit back at them. That way, I am not pulled down. In our circles, fighting back for ourselves is the key. If we confront a client the next time, he comes to seek our services, and he also knows that we are tough, and he behaves himself.

Attracting attention from other sex workers or the general public within their locality by sex workers was also one of the ways the study established that were being utilized by sex workers to deal with the menace of physical threat and harassment by their clients. Some of the means of attracting attention was screaming, shouting louder or wailing when facing physical harassment from clients. Laurine, a 27-year-old, single with two children, having secondary education and a sex den-based sex worker asserts:

If a client sleeps with me and wants to go without paying the agreed amount, I create commotion and drama in the sex den. I even wail loudly calling people to come and see thief of sex. Such wailing attracts the attention of other sex workers in the den who come to my rescue, and the client is forced to pay.

To strengthen Laurine's sentiments Rude Mama, a 45-year-old, divorced with three children, having secondary education and a street-based sex worker sums up:

We have heard cases of police officers on patrol nabbing sex workers and their purported clients in the streets as they shout and become a public nuisance. Most of the times, the shouts are related to claims of sex workers complaining of lack of payment by clients after sleeping with them. Such incidences are normally embarrassing and to avoid a lot of shame the clients once they see the public milling around, they pay the sex worker.

Use of communication devices like mobile phones was also identified as a way of taming clients that physically threaten and harass sex workers. 23-year-old, single with a college education and a club-based sex worker, Rosina says:

Once I get a client in the hotspot, I immediately step outside and make a call to other girls informing them I have gotten a client and we are going to a certain place or hotel. I make the call in the presence of the client, and that deters the clients from harming me. Such techniques have saved most of us girls in the club.

Sex workers further advocated mobile phones in the way of dealing with payment of dues by clients. Some sex workers before sexual transactions insisted on being paid via Mpesa in this way they dealt with clients who beat them and take back their money after having sex. Rosina adds, "I emphasize that I am paid in Mpesa form by clients once I get the money, I forward to a colleague that way a client can't retrieve back money after sex".

Sentiments from Rosina suggest that the use of modern technology such as cell phones and other gadgets have enabled sex workers to maneuver through violent clients. Similarly, Wagenaar and Altink (2009) in their study themed 'To toe the line: Streetwalking as contested space' found that most sex workers have embraced communication technology and with gadgets such as mobile phones, sex workers call or message others in case of danger.

Besides, some of the sex workers mentioned that through the internet, they came across thoughts and experiences of Sue Maisha, a Kenyan sex worker building her brand by sharing her experiences in sex work. Through such readings, the sex workers said they were able to be prepared to deal with either good or bad clients. Hence Sue's writings came as a guiding principle at no cost. Bano a 24-year-old, single with one child, having a college education and a club-based sex worker says:

When I started as a sex worker, I did not know how to handle both good and bad clients. Then one day, I heard people talking of a sex worker called Sue Maisha, who was sharing her experiences as a sex worker on her blog page. I searched her page and read her experiences in handling clients, and since then, I have become a professional in dealing with both clients. God bless Sue.

Still, with use of communication devices to thwart physical threat and harassment by sex workers by clients in some sex work establishments like massage and brothels the owners have set up CCTV cameras, others that are visible and others invisible to the sight of the client. Such presence of such devices deters the clients from harming the sex workers. 24-year-old, single with one child, having secondary education and a massage-based sex worker, Tasha shares:

When I am with a client in my room, and he starts misbehaving and nagging sometimes, I just tell them the truth and show them the CCTV camera, and this scares them from misbehaving.

The same sentiments of Tasha are shared by Vivian 22-year-old, single, having secondary education and a brothel-based sex worker and a mother of two who proudly says,

The key to locking out troublesome clients in our brothel is the presence of CCTV cameras in our rooms, corridors, and our reception. Once a client sees that he cannot dare to threaten or harm our girls physically.

This study also established the mobile money transfer services has also come in handy in saving sex workers from exploitation by clients in that they are able to receive payment and immediately transfer it so that unscrupulous clients may not reverse such payments as was a habit discussed by the sex workers whereby a client would give money as payment but after enjoying the service they snatched the money back from the sex worker. Kadogo a 24-year-old, single with a college education and a home-based sex worker says:

I used to be paid cash when I was working as a street-based sex worker, but most times after having sex the client would beat me having a small body and take back the money, they had paid me. When I enrolled for Mpesa, that practice ended. I always emphasize that the clients send money and I forward it to one of my close friends that way the client cannot reverse the transaction, and I am paid for my service and this is common among most of the sex workers.

The study also identified the use of communication technology to some of the sex workers was playing a critical role in helping the sex workers to evade city council *askaris*, remain anonymous and thrive even if the law bars ownership and operation of brothels according to Articles 151 to 156 of the Kenya penal code. Kavenza 22-year-old, single with primary education and home-based sex workers says:

I started as a street-based sex worker, but life in the streets was not so rosy. I used to be arrested most of the times by the city-county *askaris*, but the day I discovered I could advertise for my services without going to streets it became a different game altogether. Nowadays, I operate from my house, and I am free from arbitrary arrests by law enforcers, and since I use fake names, I also remain anonymous.

In some instances, it was found that sex workers were using coded language among themselves to inform one another of potential physical threat and harassment by clients or even to confirm whether the sex workers are safe in the hands of the clients they are with. Atoti, a 23-year-old, single with primary education and a sex den-based worker collaborates:

In our sex den, we use coded language to communicate on our safety when inside with a client. We can knock on the wall twice to indicate that we are fine. Sometimes once a client leaves the room the other sex workers laugh in a funny style and call my nickname and if I don't laugh that way, they know things are not okay and they arrest the client before he vanishes.

To strengthen the use of coded language to curb incidences of harassment Shim a 25-year-old, single with a college education and a strip club-based sex worker narrates:

At our strip club use of coded language is advocated among ourselves in passing messages about a potential client. We use hand gestures to inform the girls about a particular client who is trying to seduce them, and we have knowledge the client is used to mistreating girls in our strip joint. Through such gestures, we save most of us from humiliation by cruel clients.

Atoti and Shim's account concurs with those of Sanders (2001) who notes:

Sex workers also interpreted the body language and mannerisms of the prospective client. Positive signals were assessed by eye contact and verbal communication. Thus, the decision to accept or reject a client is made on the streets within minutes (p. 14).

In establishments such as escort agencies or call boy and call girl centers the sex workers are generally told to report any signs of troublesome clients immediately, they notice such indications to the escort agency coordinator or call boy/call girl centers. That way, the coordinator can call the client and warn them to behave.

Seif, a 31-year-old, married with two children, with a college education and a male escort-based sex worker share:

One day, I landed a troublesome female client who was so nagging and going outside our initial agreement. At that point, I called our coordinator who talked with the woman, and she stopped nagging with issues that were not part of the agreement. Were it not using of coordinator I would have a bad day in the office that day.

Matami a 26-year-old, single with two children, having a college education and a call girl says: "Whenever I experience male clients who are troublesome, I inform our call girl coordinator who confronts the clients, and I am spared the agony of harassment".

By the mere mention of various tactics, sex workers are using to deal with physical threat and harassment by clients it proves that such risks are a reality and part and parcel of sex work business in the study area. Consequently, various studies have revealed how sex workers suffer in the hands of their violent clients. For instance, Church et al., (2001) in their survey of prostitutes in Edinburgh, Leeds, and Glasgow found that 81% of street prostitutes reported violence by clients at some point in their career and 50% reported client violence within the past six (6) months. In a survey of street sex workers in London, Ward et al., (1999) found that 68 per cent of 193 women had experienced physical assault. Hester and Westmarland (2004) reported that three-quarters of 125 street sex workers surveyed in Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Hull, Kirklees, and Hackney (London) had experienced physical violence, mostly from clients. Prostitutes are also disproportionately represented among female murder victims (Lowman, 2000; Miller & Jayasundara, 2001).

### 3.2.2.3. Managing Security Threat and Harassment from Relatives or Partners of Clients

Based on such threats and harassment, some of the sex workers faced with such challenges have been as the first in line defense run away from the scene of chaos. Shiro, a 28-year-old, single with college education and a discotheque-based sex worker shares, "Once I see any fracas or confrontations with relatives of my clients, I can never sit there to be humiliated. I flee the scene as fast as possible".

Furthermore, some of the sex workers to deal with such menace have networked with the support staff of the various establishments where sex work takes place to protect them and defend them during such fracas. Shiro adds:

Sometimes, when such a dispute occurs, the bouncers and waiters come and defend us. Some even chase the relatives and spouses telling them to go and wait for their husbands at home. If they are so loud the bouncers and waiters hide us in the offices behind the counter.

Attracting the attention of others within the hotspot was also found to be one of the ways sex workers meandered away from such threats from relatives and spouses of clients. Chuchu a 22-year-old, single with secondary education and a bar-based sex worker stresses, "Whenever such drama occurs, some of us shout and wail, calling other night nurses to come and protect one of their own".

For other sex worker's confrontation with the relatives and spouses of the clients is another option the sex workers utilize to face the predicament. Sarah, a 32-year-old, divorced with one child having secondary education and a sex den-based sex worker sums up, "When a spouse or relative of a client brings chaos to my territory, there is no mercy

for such clients. I confront them head-on. No one has got the right to cross my path in my territory, be it the client or their significant other”.

With sentiments of Fauzia, Osborne, Clementaine, Shiro, Chuchu, and Sarah then it's apparent that such tactics are a necessity when it comes to sex workers dealing with physical harassment and threats from relatives and spouses of clients. Consistent with studies by Nixon et al., (2002) and Sloss and Harpers (2010) who demonstrated sex workers' high exposure to violence from client's relatives, strangers, as well as family and partners of the sex workers.

#### 3.2.2.4. Managing Security Threat and Harassments from Law Enforcers and Vigilante Groups

To mitigate the physical harassment and threat by law enforcer's, one technique that has been embraced by the sex workers is bribing them with money or sex. Nasimiyu a 38-year-old, divorced and mother of two, having secondary education and a sex den-based sex worker adds: “Bribing the law enforcers or having free sex with them is the best protection strategy in our business and we never hesitate to cooperate when it reaches that time”.

A 37-year-old divorcee, and a mother of three with secondary education, a brothel sex worker, Mwanaisha further says: “For continuous survival of our brothel in the area, we give protection fees to the police twice a month. We ensure we are always prompt or else they will arrest us and also harass and embarrass our clients”.

Night sister's group members reported:

Each day, members give money to the treasurer of our group. We save the money to use it to pay for bond or fine in case the law enforcers have arrested one of us. Besides, we have befriended some of the law enforcers who warn us of impending swoops and arrests in advance, making us avoid our hotspots that day.

In the recent past and especially in the wake of dealing with HIV and AIDS epidemic, various stakeholders who focus on sex workers as key players in the control of the epidemic have also tried to address the legal ambiguity by sensitizing sex workers and law enforcement agencies on human rights enshrined in laws that would be invoked to defend sex workers. With such sensitivity, some sex workers are starting to form groupings to pursue legal redress whenever they may be violated individually or as a group by anyone under the guise of the illegality of sex work. Adhiambo, a 30-year-old, single with one child and having a university education and a street-based sex worker, says:

For many years county *askaris* have beaten and maimed us in the streets saying we are criminals in the eyes of the law, we keep bribing them not to be taken to court. A client will go and use you without paying for it, and when you demand your pay, they tell you to go to any court because they know you cannot. However, some human rights activists have been teaching us not to fear being arrested and taken to court and instead go and challenge our arresters to present their evidence of what charges they accuse us of. Some of my fellow sex workers have tried it and won the case, which has set some county *askaris* fearing to arrest or harass sex workers.

Megan, a 26-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker adds:

I have been doing sex work in the parking lot for the last five (5) years. However, except those who have been my client's other onlookers know me as the coffee girl. Having seen the way police officers and even the general public were harassing us saying that sex workers are criminals, I decided to vend coffee around parking lots as I look for clients who can buy sex. The only thing I do is to ensure that I flirt with potential clients when selling them coffee as well as ensure that my dressing invites sexual advances. This way, I have been able to sell sex with minimum harassment from the county council *askaris* and the police force.

Under 18, 26-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker laments,

Previously, I used to dress half-naked to attract a client in the street, but most often police and county *askaris* would pounce on my colleagues and me. With time we started noticing how they make traps to arrest us, and we changed tactic by dressing that way decently, we give them a hard time in easily identifying us as sex workers.

This study observed a multi-faceted approach in mitigating sexual and gender-based violence against sex workers, which influences sex work patterns. On the one hand are human rights activists who are working for the protection of sex workers as human beings and not just as sex workers. These groups work towards the empowerment of the sex workers to enable them to resist sexual and gender-based violations. This is done by enlightening them on collective responsibility and capacity building of their social groupings. These have resulted in sex worker's movements which are vocal in advocating for sex worker's protections as human beings. Katindi, a 27-Year-Old, Club, single with a college education and a club-based sex worker and Keswa official describes herself as a defender of sex workers saying:

Our organization, together with Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Program (BHESP), has worked in reducing harassment and discrimination against commercial sex workers. We have done so by educating sex workers on how human rights law, as well as Kenya law, applies to them and supports them to mobilize and act on issues of concern. Keswa was formed as an umbrella organization representing various sex work groupings in Kenya, which are a culmination of the sex worker's awareness of collective responsibility. Keswa regards sex work not just as a circumstantial engagement but a conventional career choice in which the workers should be protected and their human rights observed like that of professionals in any industry. Keswa being a lobby organization is involved in capacity building of sex workers towards fighting for their rights and especially so in prevention and redress of SGBV. The existence of Keswa has witnessed court battles by the sex workers against individuals as well as groups who acted in violation of a sex worker. Such scenarios have contributed to changing the practice of sex work whereby sex workers are less likely to hide under any practice but instead operate freely. Even with such lobby movements, SGBV continues to influence the practice of sex work because the law has not changed much and violators still take advantage of the legal ambiguity regarding sex work.

Similarly, a study by Crago, Rakhmetova and Shields (2010) on 'The police beat you up, demand money and will detain you until you pay' published by *Research for Sex Work Journal*, found that police after arresting the sex workers, they will harass and threaten them. They will demand bribe from the sex workers or take them in remand.

Networking with security guards and street children was also found to be another way sex worker used to go about physical harassment and threat from law enforcers and vigilante groups. Under 18, 26-year-old, single with secondary education and a street-based sex worker was categorical,

Security guards and street children are our darlings in the streets. They alert us when police are conducting swoops and even hide us inside their buildings, protecting us from the arbitrary arrests. Long live the security guards and street children.

Dress code while in the hot spots establishments of sex work was also highlighted as another way sex workers used to escape from law enforcers and vigilante groups. A 28-year-old, single with one child and having secondary education and a club-based sex worker, Linda says:

When I am soliciting for a client, I wear skimpy clothes, but once I get a client and we have to go to a nearby hotel or lodging, I dress up formally, and sometimes I cover myself with a shawl. Law enforcers and vigilante groups cannot pinpoint from the way that I am dressed that I am a sex worker, and they assume me and my clients are a couple.

Another way some of the sex workers utilized to circumvent from security threat and harassment from law enforcers and vigilante groups is that they thoroughly vet their clients before accepting their sexual advances more so for those sex workers who were working in the streets. Rude Mama, a 45-year-old, divorced with three children, having secondary education and a street-based sex worker, asserts:

Most of the girls here take time before accepting a new client. We don't accept a new client that easily. We look for clues to see whether they are genuine clients or law enforcers or vigilante group members. Sometimes we pretend they have offended us and we are going to report them. Once they genuinely apologize, we pick up from that that they are genuine clients. We can even pretend to them as part of the truce they buy us supper in one of the hotels open in the area. Once they agree and take us to the hotel, we try further to gauge their honest intention as we eat together as we finish most times, we are sure they are not law enforcers, and we then agree their overture.

Such efforts that sex workers use to deal with harassment from law enforcers and vigilante groups serves to show that in the hands of the two, sex work has been demonized as illegal and the only way such people can assume it as correct is only when sex workers part with their money and body and these groups turn their heads the other way pretending to be blind of the existence of sex work as they continue to benefit from such acts. Similarly, Sloss and Harper (2010), produced results that indicated a range of potential harm by police towards female sex workers in America.

#### 3.2.2.5. Managing Security Threat and Harassment from the Support Staff of Establishments Where Sex Work Takes Place

Compounded with such physical threat and harassment from support staff the sex workers have opted-in some instances to offers free sex to such people, give them money after a period of time, buy some of the drinks and if they are not satisfied, the sex workers completely abandon the establishments to another form of sex work that is free from such stresses. Katindi, a 27-year-old, single with a college education and a club-based sex worker summarizes:

To deal with physical threat and harassment of sex workers by support staff in hot spots we sleep with them for free, give them money and regularly buy them drinks whenever we are in the hot spot but if they do not appreciate our effort I have seen girls migrating to other forms of sex work to be at peace.

All these mentioned efforts go all the way in ensuring sex workers deal with the support staff of such sex work establishments. Consequently, findings from Marcus, Horning, Curtis, Sanson, and Thompson (2014) on 'Conflict and Agency among Sex Workers and Pimps' indicated how the support staff sometimes harass and physically abuse sex workers.

## 4. Conclusion

Sex workers in Nairobi face diverse forms of security threat and harassment from all sections of society with whom they interact, from harassment from other sex workers, clients, relatives or partners of the clients, law enforcers and vigilante groups, the general public and support staff in establishments where sex work takes place. All these sources of security threat and harassment act in tandem, helping to legitimize inequality, alienation, and powerlessness, raising crucial questions concerning the human rights of sex workers in Nairobi. The experiences of sex workers, as documented in this study, reflect an alignment and interaction of state, law, social discourse, institutions, philosophies, and general public opinions. They all revolve around the criminalization, sexual moralism, and associated stigmatization of sex work. Such attitudes are fuelled by the rise in conservative, religious fundamentalism that is evident in many parts of Kenya, and which condemns sex work - alongside homosexuality - and any rights-based discourse associated with them, as socially deviant.

These security threats and harassment forces in their daily lives can have a negative impact on the sex workers' health, both through apparent manifestations such as physical or verbal abuse, by compelling sex workers to conceal their identities and withdraw themselves from social networks, and through subtler processes such as those which generate or perpetuate vulnerability. This draws attention to the broader problem of the interconnections of place, culture, and health and the importance of understanding the marginalization and violence so commonly experienced by individual sex workers in terms of the spatial dimensions of sex work more broadly. Tackling these issues will require a pro-active, multilevel approach to sex worker health, which involves responding to both immediate health needs and to the social and

structural problems which perpetuate sex workers' security threat and harassment. For such measures to be effective, they must be implemented in a legal environment which recognizes the agency and human rights of sex workers and protects them from security threat and harassment on that basis, as well as traditional and complimentary services available to sex workers.

## 5. Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

- There is a need to change legal regulations regarding sex work in Kenya at the National and County level
- Policy and programming should invest in communities to promote collectivization and sex worker capacity through legal literacy and access to justice.
- Sex workers need access to a comprehensive package of health and support services, including HIV/STI diagnosis, treatment and care, sexual and reproductive health information and services; and gender-based violence response services, including psychosocial and legal support.
- Sex workers' labor rights must be promoted, including occupational health and safety standards.
- There is need for maintaining and sharing lists or reports of aggressors or incidents of violence against sex workers.
- There is need for Collaborative counseling with trained counselors, using reflective listening to support individual sex workers in identifying feasible steps to make themselves safer, and available local resources in case they experience violence.
- There is need to create safe spaces (drop-in centers) or shelters that allow sex workers to come together and discuss common issues and problems they face, including violence, and develop and exchange solutions
- There is need to provide immediate support to those who experience violence who present at a health facility. Providers should ensure confidentiality, be non-judgmental, provide reasonable care, ask about the history of violence, listen carefully without pressuring the person to talk, facilitate access to social support, resources, and services (e.g., legal if needed) and help develop a safety plan.

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