



**Living on the Edge – Sex Workers’ Lives in Myanmar:
A Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) Project**

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ACRONYMS/GLOSSARY

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Community Support Organisation
FSW	Female Sex Worker
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GEN	Gender Equality Network
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ID card	Identity Card
MDM	Medecins du Monde
MSI	Marie Stopes International
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRC	National Registration Card
NSPAW	National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013–2022)
NSP II	National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2011–2015
PEER	Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research
PR	Peer Researcher
PSI	Population Services International
SMP	Socially Marginalised Populations
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SWiM	Sex Workers Network in Myanmar
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

KEY TERMS

KTV	Entertainment venues providing karaoke, alcohol and female entertainment workers. They range in size from small to very large (50–100 women). Sexual services may be available on or off site, although some KTVs are ‘entertainment’ only.
Laks	Numbering system equivalent to 100,000.
Kyat	The Myanmar currency. At the time of writing, £1 (sterling) was equivalent to approximately 1,500 kyats. 1 US\$ was equivalent to 1,000 kyats.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results from a Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) study among Female Sex Workers (FSWs) in two cities (Yangon and Mandalay) in Myanmar. The study was undertaken in November and December 2014 with FSWs in Yangon and Mandalay to provide insights into the lives and working conditions of FSWs in Myanmar. The results will inform CARE Myanmar's Socially Marginalised Populations (SMP) programme to empower the country's poorest women and girls.

The objectives of the study are to:

- improve understanding of FSWs' level of agency, especially in regards to control over their income, working conditions, and career choices;
- provide insight into the context in which FSWs live and work;
- assess the level of risk of abuse and exploitation of FSWs and their coping mechanisms; and
- explore FSWs' experiences of accessing formal support services (including health, legal, police, and psychosocial services) and how to improve the responsiveness of duty bearers.

The research aims to generate robust evidence on women's experience of sex work to inform the development of CARE Myanmar's policy and advocacy strategy, and thereby support women and FSW's rights, including improving access to health and support services, addressing structural factors that marginalise women and FSWs, and strengthening restitution for abuse.

METHODOLOGY

PEER is a participatory qualitative research method that captures the voices of ordinary members of a community, and obtains an insider's view of their daily contexts. PEER works particularly well in capturing the 'voice' of marginalised or vulnerable populations, who may be stigmatised as a result of their practices, beliefs, or profession. 'Ordinary' members of the community under study are recruited and trained to conduct conversational interviews with people within their trusted social networks. PEER was chosen as the most appropriate research method, as it excels in researching 'sensitive' issues, such as women's experiences of abuse and discrimination as sex workers¹.

The narrative interview data were analysed thematically and key findings triangulated with PEER Researchers (PRs) and CARE Myanmar and SWiM programme staff. Results are presented in Section 4, and recommendations for specific actors detailed in Section 6, with a particular focus on recommendations for advocacy strategies to empower FSWs.

KEY FINDINGS

Entry into Sex Work

- The primary reasons that women gave for entering sex work were their family obligations and the need to support their families. Sex work offers a larger income than other livelihood options would provide.

¹ PEER adheres to a strict ethical framework. For more information on this and PEER, please go to www.options.co.uk/peer or contact Options Consultancy Services Limited.

- A combination of underlying factors led to entry into sex work, including poverty, duties to support family, and limited education. This decision usually had a trigger, such as debt, medical bills, or a relationship breakdown, combined with an enabler, including having friends or family working in sex work, and widespread informal recruitment networks.

Experiences of FSWs in the Workplace

- Overall, FSWs experienced very poor working conditions and high levels of abuse and exploitation.
- Abuse, exploitation, and violence usually varied by sex work location, with women in street- or brothel-based sex work faring the worst, with no recourse for exploitation or abuse from customers or the police.
- Women working in venues reported abuse embedded in oppressive rules and obligations, including restrictions on their mobility.
- All FSWs experienced multiple forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation by the police, including non-payment for sex and/or forced sex, not using condoms, beating/harassment, and gang rape on the street, in venues, and in custody.
- Amongst the worst violence reported by FSWs was violence at the hands of the police.
- Both current and former FSWs reported high levels of arbitrary arrest under the *Law on Suppression of Prostitution (1949)* and were often denied due process.
- Sex workers reported that payments – in the form of free sex – were often made to the police to prevent arrest through free sex.
- Payments were also often made to the police (and other actors in the legal system) after arrest, in order to: prevent being harmed, reduce the length of time detained, reduce the length of sentence, and improve treatment once in prison.
- Women working in KTVs and/or massage parlours were most likely to have better protection from the police from the venue owners/managers.
- FSWs experienced many problems with clients, including beatings, gang rape, and not being paid for services.
- FSWs unanimously did not consider the police or judiciary as a viable means of pursuing crimes against them, such as violence or theft. Criminalisation of sex work has resulted in the denial of basic human rights.

Discrimination against FSWs

- FSWs are exposed to discrimination from institutions (health services, government offices, landlords, employers), the community, family, and individuals (including internalised stigma).
- Discrimination/perceived discrimination in terms of alternative livelihood options acts as a barrier to leaving sex work, and was often cited as a reason for returning to sex work.
- Discrimination faced by women in health settings increased their vulnerability to HIV by creating an environment in which they were reluctant to ask for condoms, be tested, or seek treatment.

Social support

- Women reported few sources of reliable functional support in their lives, with sponsors most frequently reported as sources of financial support.
- Social/emotional support was most often provided by friends, who are often other sex workers.

Future Lives of FSWs

- Many of the FSWs interviewed strongly disliked their work. However, they also felt that they were able to provide adequately for their families and children through this work, which compensated for negative feelings about their profession.
- Many FSWs wanted to leave sex work but could not, since jobs in other sectors paid too little; for many, this would mean that they would no longer be able to support their families.
- Many found saving money difficult, and a common aspiration was to be given a lump sum, which could be used to set up a business.

Recommendations for Tackling the Drivers of Women's Marginalisation

FSWs conducted a joint analysis of the research findings with the research team, and gave detailed and wide-ranging recommendations to tackle the main sources of stigma, discrimination, and violence against them. These are outlined in brief in Box 1.

The authors' recommendations are described in Section 5.1, drawing upon current policy analysis conducted by CARE, FSWs' own proposals, and the findings of this report. These are outlined in brief below.

- **RECOMMENDATION 1: Addressing widespread stigma and discrimination towards FSWs, which was found to have a strong impact on their private and work lives**

- Continue to advocate for legal reform of laws that promote exploitation, stigmatisation, and isolation of, and discrimination and violence against, FSWs.
- Raise awareness of the difficulties that FSWs face, their rights, and the strong and important role that they play in supporting their families' livelihoods

- **RECOMMENDATION 2: Advocating for legal and policy reform, to a) decriminalise sex work, and b) mainstream addressing FSWs' economic and social empowerment within other gender-based policies**

- Decriminalise sex work in line with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obligations and those outlined in the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2011–2015 (NSP II).
- Commit to improving the conditions of FSWs' lives in the places where they work in line with national policies seeking women's empowerment.
- Address specific practices that contribute to women's marginalisation, including arrest for sex work (using possession/use of condoms as evidence of being a sex worker).

Box 1: Recommendations from FSWs

a) Legal reform/police behaviour change, including:

End abuse by those in the legal system and abuse by police when conducting arrest; reduce overlong sentences; and improve treatment of FSWs in prison.

b) Improve working conditions, including:

Ensure protection from violence at the hands of police, venue owners, and customers; provide access to health services (Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)/HIV/AIDS risk reduction); improve employee rights; facilitate women's movement (ending restrictions on women's movements).

c) Improve access to harm reduction/risk prevention information and services.

d) Training/vocational support, including skills-building relevant to FSWs.

e) Financial support to be able to develop the long-term goal of leaving sex work.

f) Guidance/direction and role models, including role models as motivators of change.

- Integrate elimination of violence against sex workers into the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2012–2021)
- **RECOMMENDATION 3: Developing joint plans to work with local decision makers and duty bearers (including local authorities, police, and penal and legal staff) to address the processes that marginalise FSWs from legal services and restitution, including training, informational, and accountability approaches**
 - Offer comprehensive training to judicial, legal, and penal staff to raise awareness of marginalisation and Gender-based Violence (GBV) against FSWs.
- **RECOMMENDATION 4: Focusing on specific areas of work with the police, including training and policy reform, to address a major source of exploitation and abuse towards FSWs**
 - Undertake specific work with police to remove a major source of discrimination and violence against sex workers, including developing a joint action plan on training/advocacy, and advocating for police to follow procedures around arrest, remove quotas for arrest, and improve record-keeping, so that violence against FSWs is prosecuted.
- **RECOMMENDATION 5: Developing policies and practices that can improve FSWs' workplaces, using a firmer regulatory framework**
 - Develop guidelines with venue owners to improve working conditions, including reducing risk of STIs/HIV/AIDS, and responding to violence against women.
 - Ensure access to comprehensive information and support services for women to reduce their vulnerability to STIs/HIV/AIDS.
- **RECOMMENDATION 6: Supporting and empowering FSWs to have better access to services (health, legal, and other)**
 - Raise FSWs' awareness of their rights and of services available to support these rights.
 - Work with leaders in the justice and penal system to promote better understanding of the difficulties in the lives of FSWs, and their rights to access justice to protect their rights.
 - Expand support mechanisms for FSWs, such as support groups, to improve disclosure of information and support for restitution.
 - Train peer motivators (ex-FSW role models) to provide guidance and life coaching for FSWs.
 - Encourage partnership with training/vocational skills-building programmes.
 - Encourage the introduction of anti-discrimination policies to health facilities.
 - Set up systems of redress for poor quality of care and discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results from a Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) study among FSWs (FSWs) in two cities (Yangon and Mandalay) in Myanmar, and forms part of CARE Myanmar's project to empower the country's poorest women and girls. The research aims to generate robust evidence on abuses of women's rights to inform the development of CARE Myanmar's policy and advocacy strategy, including strengthening legal redress for abuse of FSW's rights.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 CARE Myanmar's Programme

CARE has operated in Myanmar since 1995 to fight poverty by empowering the country's poorest women and girls. In the past, CARE Myanmar has focused the bulk of its programming in rural areas; however, in 2012, it developed a new programme design that responds to the increasing poverty and marginalisation in urban areas: the Socially Marginalised Populations (SMP) programme.

The findings from this study will be used to inform CARE Myanmar's SMP programme to:

- empower FSWs;
- advocate for change to the way FSWs are treated in their communities; and
- advocate for change to the punitive legal and policy frameworks which surround sex work and women's empowerment.

The SMP programme seeks to address the underlying causes of poverty and focuses on empowering vulnerable populations that are often clustered in peri-urban areas of major cities. To achieve this, the key areas of intervention for the programme are: income options, access to services, protection, and inclusion. The goal of the programme is to ensure that 'the impact group is equitably accessing safe employment and has a legitimate voice.'

The sex worker component of the SMP programme is being implemented in two peri-urban townships in Yangon (Hlaingtharya and Thaketa) and five in Mandalay (Aungmyaythazan, Chanayethazan, Mahaangmyay, Chanmyathazi, and Pyigyitagon).

The purpose of this partnership with FSWs in Myanmar is to support partner organisations' organisational development, project cycle management, and professional skill development in the area of gender, advocacy and policy engagement. The aim is to achieve the programme goal of strengthening capacity building, FSWs' legal and social representation, and protection of their rights, so that they are able to live in safety and with wellbeing.

2.2 Research Rationale

The high levels of stigma and marginalisation to which FSWs are subjected have been recognised in several of Myanmar's recent policy documents. However, to date, interventions addressing sex workers have predominantly focused on a public health approach, responding to a need to tackle Myanmar's HIV epidemic.

There is now recognition that women, in their roles as sex workers, play a strong role in financially supporting their families and communities, but nonetheless face very high levels of stigma and discrimination associated with their profession. Addressing FSWs' vulnerabilities, and advancing their rights, involves taking steps to improve legal and policy frameworks, re-framing how sex workers are viewed, addressing perceptions which may perpetuate or justify their marginalisation, and ensuring that duty-bearers (those in the government or enforcement agencies) take responsibility for the equal treatment of women.

A recent report on sex workers' rights and accountability in Laos (CARE Laos, 2009) found that inconsistencies in the application of laws and policies were problematic for the advancement of sex workers' rights, as well as the lack of legislation to address their rights³. There was poor legal knowledge of laws directly relevant to women's lives, such as protection from domestic or sexual violence. This report also used the PEER method, to capture the contexts and ways in which women as sex workers were marginalised, gathering an insider's perspective on the issues FSWs themselves wanted addressed.

Working in a similar way, this research project sought to gain an insider's view into FSWs' lives in Myanmar. The PEER method produced findings that were analysed with the PEER Researchers (PRs) themselves to identify areas where CARE Myanmar's empowerment approach could best support women, including addressing legal barriers to FSWs' empowerment in their lives and places of work.

2.3 Policy Analysis – FSWs within Myanmar's Legal Code

2.3.1 Sex work and social marginalisation in Myanmar

Myanmar has a diverse and widespread sex work industry, with male, female and child sex workers operating in a variety of sex work settings, including brothels, KTVs, massage parlours, and the street, among others. In 2007, it was estimated that there were up to 60,000 FSWs working in Myanmar (with a range of 40, 000–80, 000)⁴. In addition, the trafficking of women and girls to neighbouring countries for sexual exploitation continues to be a substantial problem. In 2003, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that 10,000 women were trafficked annually into Thai brothels. Rapid rates of urbanisation and industrial growth within Myanmar, coupled with poor labour rights and unreliable employment for women, suggest that the sex industry will continue to thrive if not grow in the foreseeable future⁵.

There is a strongly punitive and repressive legal framework for sex work within Myanmar, as the buying and selling of sex is illegal. The *Law on the Suppression of Prostitution Act (1949)* has been repeatedly identified as a key source which results in high levels of stigma, discrimination and marginalisation of women from society. The illegal nature of sex work means that there is a high risk of violence, discrimination, and exploitation for women across all settings within the sex industry.

³ CARE Laos (2009) "Just Beginning: Qualitative Baseline Analysis of the Risks of Abuse and Exploitation of Sex Workers in Vientiane Capital and Subsequent Access to Legal Services."

⁴ UNAIDS, (2010) "HIV and Sex Work: Myanmar", HIV and AIDS Data Hub for Asia Pacific, Evidence to Action

⁵ CARE Myanmar (2011) "Situational Analysis of Poverty in Myanmar", unpublished report

A small-scale qualitative research project conducted in 2003 with young FSWs identified that the drivers of vulnerability for the young women were multi-factoral (personal, environmental, and familial) and interlinked⁶. The main motivations for the women to enter the sex industry were: family financial problems; marital problems; persuasion by friends; having sex workers amongst family members (19% of informants had a family connection to sex work); and the exploitation of vulnerabilities by brokers or pimps. The incidence of the selling of virginity was quite high (38%), with sex workers as young as 11 years of age: child sex work is a reality. In the majority of these encounters, no condom was used. These young women also faced high levels of stigma and discrimination within the communities where they worked, and had relatively few sources of social support. Despite the difficulties of working within the sex industry, many women cited the higher incomes of sex work as a main reason for wanting to stay within the profession, and in one study, over half of female respondents cited family responsibilities for entering into sex work⁷. The relatively low pay and insecurity for female migrant workers may leave women with few realistic choices of alternative employment if they have financial responsibilities for their families. In addition, there has been some evidence of active recruitment of female migrant workers by brokers/pimps into specific sex work locations, such as massage or KTV parlours.

Women are known to be highly vulnerable to sexual violence within sex work. A report by the Gender Equality Network (GEN) found that women in general in Myanmar often face difficulties in accessing restorative justice or support services in cases of domestic violence. This is especially the case for female (or male) sex workers, as local authorities may refuse to engage with their case because of the stigma associated with their profession. Within sexual entertainment or sex work locations, 'protection' may be offered by brothel or setting owners, especially against arrest by the police, but this is often done in return for free sexual services. Women's movements in and out of brothels may be controlled, and the use of physical, verbal, and emotional violence and control is widely reported.

Owing to the stigma and illegal status of their profession, FSWs appear commonly to expect that in cases of violence, abuse of their rights, or poor workplace conditions, they will be unable to rely on due process or access to restorative justice through the local authorities. In many cases, women who do seek access to justice or legal redress can face the risk of being arrested by the police or local authorities, purely on the basis of their profession. Women's are at particular risk of violence and coercion, and being denied access to legal services, during periods of arrest and detention: women may be forced to accept guilty pleas in return for light sentences, and experience physical or sexual violence from the police during detention⁸. Relationships with police are particularly difficult. Police are reported to have monthly arrest quotas, with sex workers an easy target. Furthermore, police often use possession/use of condoms as evidence of sex work being conducted, in direct contravention of a specific order⁹.

⁶ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/Save the Children (2010) "Assessment of Young Female Sex Workers in Myanmar", Yangon: UNFPA and Save the Children

⁷ CARE Myanmar Gender Team (2013) "CARE Myanmar's Socially Marginalized Population programme: A Gender Analysis of Female Migrants and Sex Workers"

⁸ CARE Myanmar Gender Team (2013) "CARE Myanmar's Socially Marginalized Population programme: A Gender Analysis of Female Migrants and Sex Workers"

⁹ Order 1048 (1/2000) contravenes the use of condoms as legal evidence of sex work, as it discourages condom use and thus increases sex worker's vulnerability to contracting STIs/HIV

CARE Myanmar recently conducted a policy analysis which identified four main ways in which FSWs are marginalised:

- **Income and Workplaces:** the criminalisation of sex work means that workplaces are unregulated and existing labour policies to protect worker's rights are not applied. Pervasive poverty and the lack of economic options for women continue to drive supply of the sex work industry. While labour markets are 'feminised', employment options are often low-paying and insecure, with poor labour rights.
- **Access to Services:** Female (and male) sex workers have a high need for access to health services (particularly Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) testing and treatment services), though often face stigma in doing so as a result of their profession. Furthermore, women face similar barriers to accessing legal services, since legal authorities tend to rule against sex workers, and lawyers are reluctant to take on cases which they perceive as likely to fail.
- **Protection Issues:** sex workers are at risk from physical and sexual violence within the workplace and from those who may control the gains of their work, as well as from intimate partners and families. However, women may have difficulties in claiming protection from enforcement or protection agencies, such as the police and local commune authorities, in cases of violence.
- **Social Inclusion:** FSWs often face high levels of discrimination within their communities, owing to the stigma of their profession. Their ability to participate in local governance processes and make their voices heard is often limited, either by self-discrimination, or by being actively discouraged from participating.

While sex workers' abilities to ensure their health and safety within the workplace and their relationships will have a direct impact on maintaining their health, the predominant response to date in Myanmar has primarily entailed a public health rather than rights-based approach. More recently, some projects have recognised the need to improve FSWs' rights, and increase the availability and use of social services. Greater involvement of sex worker networks, such as the Sex Workers in Myanmar (SWiM) organisation, in the design and debate around informational and empowerment approaches is required.

2.3.2 Policy responses – addressing whose needs?

While the predominant legal and policy framework for sex workers is punitive, there are numerous opportunities for changing the policy framework to provide better support for sex workers to realise their rights within the short term.

The national constitution of Myanmar ensures and recognises gender equality (though in some places there are references to 'male only' employment) but, problematically, does not define gender-based discrimination. Myanmar is, however, a signatory to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which recommends making sex work legal in certain countries, tackling discrimination, and addressing all forms of violence against women (recommendation 19).

Currently, the greatest source of discrimination against FSWs is the *Law on the Suppression of Prostitution Act (1949)*, which was recently updated (in 1998) to increase sentencing terms. The Myanmar National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2011–2015 (NSP II) includes reform of the laws on sex work as a direct aim, but the level of government ownership of this important policy aim has been questioned. There are nonetheless numerous provisions within the NSP II to address discriminatory police practices, including eliminating the possession/use of condoms as evidence of sex work, setting up Self-help Groups (SHGs), and improving sex worker's access to recovery and reintegration services. However, NSP II does not directly call for support to expand women's employment skills and choices.

One of FSWs' primary concerns is addressing employment opportunities and exiting sex work. This is referenced in the NSP II. The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013–2022) (NSPAW) has a strong focus on women's empowerment, building skills for economic development and entry into the labour market. However, while there is a strong focus on addressing workplace vulnerabilities of female groups such as migrant workers, FSWs are not mentioned. NSP II does call for improvement in the laws, systems, structures, and processes regarding women's Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), and for the elimination of all forms of violence against women, including training judicial and enforcement authorities on how better to support women affected. In terms of employment, NSPAW calls for equality of access to economic benefits and opportunities, as well as enforcing regulatory frameworks to better ensure women's health and safety within the workplace. All of these domains are highly relevant to sex workers' lives, health, and wellbeing. Lastly, GEN is also supporting the drafting of a law on violence against women, which should further strengthen women and FSWs' rights to restitution.

While these policy instruments present opportunities for the advancement of FSWs' rights, direct reference to this group and their marginalisation is often absent, further reinforcing stigma directed against sex workers. Many of the core issues identified for the improvement of women's lives – protection against violence, and restitution against perpetrators, access to economic opportunities and skills building, and living without discrimination – are also sex workers' concerns.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction to the PEER Method

The PEER methodology was identified as the best tool to gather information for this study. PEER is a qualitative and ethnographic monitoring and data collection tool that can be used to inform the design of communications and advocacy programmes. PEER produces rich, contextualised data usually associated with anthropological techniques, but in a matter of weeks rather than months or years. It is based upon training members of the target community in a three-day participatory workshop to conduct semi-structured conversational interviews with trusted members of their social networks on key themes identified by the programme. The aim of the PEER interviews is to collect narratives and stories that provide insights into how anonymous interviewees conceptualise and give meaning to the experiences and behaviour of other people in their social network, and the impact of programmes and services on the lives of people of similar backgrounds/circumstances.

One of the key aspects of the PEER method is that it reveals the contradictions between social norms and actual experiences. This is crucially important when working with marginalised groups such as FSWs, where dominant narratives of the ‘correct’ moral behaviour stigmatise certain populations and their behaviours, making them difficult to talk about and research. PEER explores how people understand and negotiate behaviour, and the (sometimes hidden) relationships of power¹⁰. The PEER approach elicits a rich and dynamic social commentary in the form of the PEER narratives.

The PEER method was chosen for this study for the following reasons:

- It generates in-depth and contextual data on a range of issues related to the research topic;
- Existing relationships of trust between PRs and their informants mean that findings are more detailed and insightful than if they had been gathered by an outside researcher;
- PEER involves the participation of the target group from the early stages of the research, and as such, is part of adopting an empowering strategy, as well as ensuring cultural appropriateness;
- The method is particularly suitable for carrying out research on sensitive topics because of the use of third-person questions, which enables respondents to talk about sensitive issues without personal attribution.

3.2 PEER Objectives

This PEER research focused on exploring FSWs’ perceptions of their daily lives, including the difficulties that they faced, discrimination and abuses of their rights, and systems of support and redress. This provides CARE Myanmar with insights into the types of rights abuses that sex workers experienced and how these could be addressed, as well as ways to work with the ‘enablers’ of abuse against women and girls, such as sexual entertainment venue owners, local leaders, and police, amongst others.

The PEER research objectives were to:

- provide insight into the context in FSWs live and work;
- assess the level of risk of abuse and exploitation of FSWs and their coping mechanisms;
- improve understanding of FSWs’ level of agency, especially in regards to control over their income, working conditions, and career choice;
- explore FSWs’ experiences of accessing formal support services (including health, legal, police, and psychosocial services) and how to improve the responsiveness of duty bearers

Selection Criteria – FSW PEER Researchers

- 15 (Yangon) and 16 (Mandalay) FSWs (total of 31 women)
- Works in sex work (KTV, massage parlour, brothel, freelance, street-based, nightclub/restaurant)
- Lives within 30 minutes of the target area
- Willing to participate in the PEER study
- Not a PEER Educator or member of CARE/SWiM team

These same selection criteria were applied to interviewees selected by the PEER Researchers.

A final workshop was held with FSWs in both Yangon and Mandalay to identify what FSWs themselves identified as the most important abuses of their rights, and strategies to address these,

¹⁰ Price, NL and K Hawkins (2002) “Researching sexual and reproductive behaviour: A peer ethnographic approach”, *Social Science & Medicine*, 55:8, 1327-1338

in order to inform CARE Myanmar's interventions. The results of these workshops are summarised in Section 4.6 and in the Conclusions section.

3.3 Sampling

Fifteen FSWs in Yangon and 16 in Mandalay were selected to be trained as PRs. All PRs were sex workers, 'ordinary' members of the community, with no prominent role in CARE Myanmar's current activities (e.g. as a community volunteer/advocate) or other health-related activities or NGOs.

Given the difficulties in accessing FSWs in a systematic random way, the study used convenience sampling, recruiting through CARE Myanmar's partner on the programme, SWiM, which has a small community-based office in both project areas, offering sexual health services, support, advice and advocacy to FSWs. The PEER project was advertised; applicants who fitted the selection criteria were then invited to participate. FSWs across a range of sex work types or venues were sought, as abuse and discrimination are known to vary across settings, from the street, to brothels, to massage/karaoke venues.

Thirty-one women (15 in Yangon, 16 in Mandalay) were trained by a PEER specialist to conduct interviews with two interviewees each on separate occasions. In Yangon, women interviewed their friends on three themes, whereas in Mandalay a more rapid version of PEER was used, and PRs interviewed their friends twice. 'Friends' were those who fitted the same selection criteria as the women themselves (actively working in sex work), and were people that PRs felt that they could trust within their social network. In one case, a PR was discontinued from the training as she held a significant role as a volunteer within a partner organisation. In a few cases, PRs chose to interview formerly rather than currently active sex workers, as they had a greater degree of trust in these individuals. In total, either two or three interviews were conducted with 62 interviewees (93 including the PRs). The number of interviewees, as with many qualitative studies, is not large enough to give statistically significant results, but instead generates rich data and insights into the target population.

The demographics of the PRs and their interviewees are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of PRs and their interviewees

	Yangon	Mandalay
Number of Participants		
PRs	15	16
Interviewees	30	32
Total	45	48
Mean Age	27	30
Marital Status		
Married	15	23
Boyfriend	17	1
Single	4	8
Divorced/separated	11	16
Widow	2	3
Mean Number of Children	0.9	1.1

	Yangon	Mandalay
Place of work		
Street	16	12
Brothel	7	7
KTV	10	26
Massage	8	0
Phone only	2	1
Restaurant	0	0
Nightclub/beer station	2	1
Education		
Graduate/ some university	1	3
Illiterate/no school	3	8
Average number of years of school (excluding those who had attended university)	6.1	5.6
Years in sex work		
Mean	5	6
Range	3 months – 25 years	Less than 1 month – 17 years

3.4 Training of PRs

In both research sites, the PRs attended a training workshop where they developed interviewing skills, designed and reviewed thematic prompts for guiding conversational interviews, and learnt about how to obtain consent and research ethics. Training in Yangon lasted for three days, and for two in Mandalay. All training and workshops were held in Myanmar (translated in situ from English). Participatory design of the research tool ensured that the study was framed within the conceptual understanding of the PRs. All questions and prompts were produced in Myanmar language. As all of the PRs could read and write fluently, visual prompts were not needed.

Neither the PRs nor the interviewees received financial incentives for participation. The PRs received a travel allowance and a small per diem for attending training and debriefing sessions.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

In PEER, data collection and data collection monitoring take place through debriefings between each PR and the PEER specialist, held within a day of the PR's interviews with her friends. The PEER specialist takes detailed notes throughout each debriefing. Analysis occurs through two processes: continuing grounded analysis and a final PEER research analysis workshop, conducted at the end of the project.

Throughout the data collection period, the PRs regularly met with the supervisors in neutral locations, in this case at the SWiM Drop-in Centres in each city. All debriefings took place within 24 hours of each interview. The debriefings were held in Myanmar language, with on-site translation, which was immediately typed up. Interviews were led by either the PEER specialist, or CARE Myanmar's PEER facilitators. During the supervision process the supervisors were able to build up a strong rapport and relationship of trust with the PRs. This enabled the supervisors to probe more deeply into issues raised by the interviews.

The main themes of the interviews are presented below in Table 2. PEER questions are asked in the third person, eliciting a narrative on attitudes among the sex worker ‘community’, as well as the geographically bound communities where sex workers may live. They are best understood as conversational prompts, rather than questions that need to be repeated verbatim.

The full PEER questions for both research sites are presented in Annex I.

Table 2: Summary of interview themes and questions

Theme		Questions
1	Life as a sex worker	What do other women like us say about their lives as sex workers?
		What do women like us say about their husbands/boyfriends?
		How do women become sex workers?
		How do other people in our area marginalise/discriminate against women like us?
		Who solves problems of people like us?
		Please tell me a story about what we have talked about today
2	Experiences in the workplace	Where do women prefer to work and why?
		What are the difficulties that they face in the workplace?
		How do bosses treat women?
		What difficulties do they face with customers?
		What difficulties do women face with the police?
		Please tell me a story about what we have spoken about today
3	Effecting change	How can women’s safety be improved in the workplace?
		What rights do women want in the workplace?
		How would women like the law on sex work to change?
		How would women like the police to treat them differently?
		What stops women from leaving sex work?
		What help do women want to leave sex work?
		Please tell me a story about what we have talked about today.

The PEER data were analysed through two main processes. Firstly, the PEER specialist and the PEER facilitators reviewed, coded, and analysed the data thematically, identifying emerging themes through an inductive process, and testing through cross-checking that these theories held internal validity within the data. Key findings from the analysis were summarised and presented to FSWs in both Yangon and Mandalay, so that they could be validated or further explored. A useful part of the methodology is this joint analysis of research findings, and in the context of the final PEER workshops, PRs and facilitators identified recommendations that they felt would address some of the key issues faced by sex workers.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the key findings. Issues covered are:

- Entry into sex work
- Working conditions for sex workers
- Discrimination against sex workers
- Difficulties faced in the lives of women who are sex workers
- The future for sex workers and their aspirations
- Change/support suggested by sex workers to improve their lives.

Section 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for advocacy/interventions with key actors and types of approaches to empowering sex worker's rights, including informational, advocacy, and accountability approaches.

Quotations from PRs mainly represent typical examples of responses. Where a quotation illustrates an unusual perspective raised by only one or very few PRs it is highlighted within the narrative text. Quotations have been edited for clarity, but remain as close to the original language and sense as possible.

4.1 Entry into Sex Work

The PRs asked their friends about their reasons for beginning to work in sex work. This can be a sensitive area for discussion with sex workers as the question can often carries a moral implication that they could have chosen other options. However, as PEER uses trusted social networks, the data highlighted the variety of entry routes into sex work, as well as the complex motivations and factors which led to women selling sex. As will be explored, when women had decided to enter sex work, it appeared relatively easy for them to do so, as recruiter networks were extensive, as were locations where women could seek employment with the option of selling sex, or start to do so immediately. This section looks at the underlying factors, triggers, and enablers leading to women starting sex work.

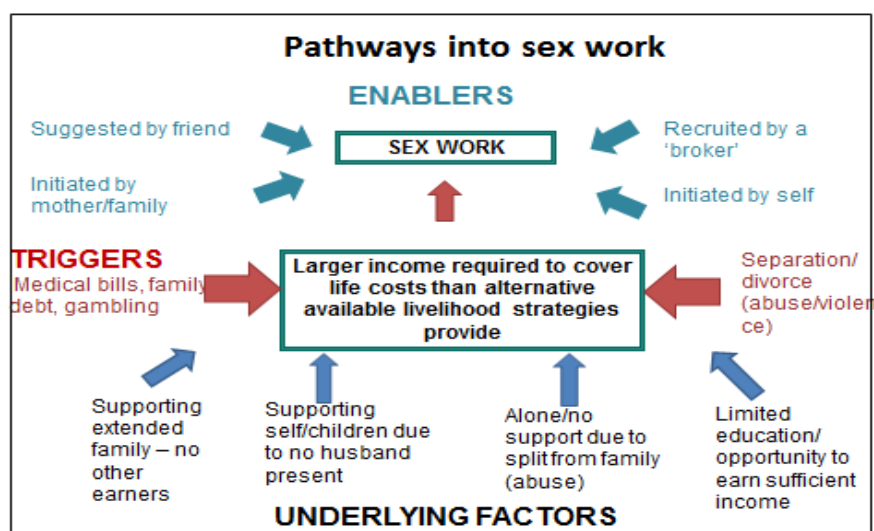


Figure 1: Pathways into sex work: underlying factors, triggers, and enablers

4.1.1 Pathways into sex work: underlying factors

The narrative data showed that the compelling financial reasons behind women making the decision to enter sex work were often complemented by other social problems. Many women cited the lack of work, and dependent family members and their duty to support them as the main reasons that they had entered sex work. These women often talked about having to support their mothers, especially in Yangon; younger siblings, who were frequently still in education, and unemployed male siblings were also often mentioned.

“She does not enjoy working as a sex worker. She is doing sex work because of her family. She dislikes the work. She has many family members. Although she does not want to do this type of work she cannot escape. Her mother is alive but her father has already passed away. This means everybody in her family depends on her, including her brothers, mother and children. ... She is the eldest daughter in the family, so she has the most pressure to look after everybody. If she cannot make money the family cannot eat well. If she makes money for her family then other people feel happy.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“She has family problems with her other siblings who don’t have regular jobs and they are fussy about what jobs they do – they are lazy and they don’t want to take just any job – they’d rather not work and they are always making trouble between themselves and she tries to support them – now she has called her mother to stay with her and she sends the others money. The other brother and sister stay with their stepfather – but he is OK – and they always call her and tell her about their problems and asking for money. She also supports the younger brother’s wife. ... She is the second daughter. [Interviewer: Do they know she works in the KTV?] They know and that is why they ask her for more money.” **KTV, Mandalay**

As the quotes above show, women who supported their families were often single, and the eldest or an older daughter, and unmarried. Once they were married, families could no longer rely on their labour to the same extent, but as single women, they had strong familial bonds. In many cases, entry into sex work was often triggered by demands to support extended family members. These relationships were often exploitative, and once it was known that women had access to the higher incomes available within sex work, family members came to depend on their salaries. In many of these narratives, women found it hard to resist this pressure to provide for other family members, even if they recognised that this meant that they had to stay in sex work.

“Before she worked as a sex worker her family members worked. Now that she works at KTV her family members know that she can make lots of money and now they have stopped work. Sometimes when she needs money she asks her sponsor. Sometimes she feels that she wants to stop the job but she has to earn money for her family so she must stay working as a sex worker. She does not want to do this job, but she has to for money.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“My friend told me that she wants to support her family because of her father’s health and her brothers and sisters are attending school so she cannot support her family with another job because she won’t earn so much money. She is the eldest one – she has one little brother and sister and they are now attending school so she is the one who has to earn money.... She needs

enough money to cover family costs including medical bills for her family.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

In only a few of these narratives, family members were reluctant to accept that it was necessary for women to work as sex workers; mothers, in particular, were reported to object to their daughters' work. Reports of mothers initiating their daughter's involvement in sex work featured much more frequently in the narratives (see Section 4.1.4 for examples of mothers' involvement in trafficking).

“In her family only her mother knows she is a sex worker. The others do not know. At first even her mother did not know. When her mother found out her mother said, ‘Why, why, why do you do that work?’ and she explained to her mother that she needs to get money. Her mother grieves and says please don’t do this kind of work, please do some other kind of work to make money for us. But currently it is impossible. There is no one to support her family. She does not want to do the work because it gives her a bad name amongst friends but she has to.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

A second group of women were often married, but with problematic relationships with their husbands, which often influenced their decision to enter sex work. Many references were made to the husband's unemployment or unstable jobs, with wages not meeting basic costs. In many other instances, however, husbands were alcoholics, and in some cases abusive towards their spouses. This often resulted in women deciding to make a living and to support their families as best they could. The relatively high remuneration offered compared to other livelihood options along with women's lack of education or work skills pushed them almost immediately into sex work.

“Her husband was really bad and always beat her and she has two children and she thought it is impossible to stay with him because he treated her so badly and she was worried about her children's future. She needed to work to support her children so she went to meet a broker who helped her to get a job – she heard about the broker from her friends who knew about her problems – the broker is about 45 years – an old woman – so she helped her to find a job in a massage.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

“At first my husband worked so we were OK because we didn’t have a child yet and then we lived with my family, two parents, and when they had a child they didn’t have enough money. I need to support my children and my parents so we have a big family, lots of family members so my husband cannot find enough money for my family and I met with a friend and she is a sex worker so I started from that time when I had that contact with her”. **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

In many such cases women often tried to keep their work as in the sex industry secret, in some cases for fear of further physical abuse from their spouse. Like families, in many of these narratives husbands were exploitative of the wife's labour once her work was openly acknowledged, and men expected to be provided for, offering little contribution to the household themselves. As will be explored below, this seemed to be especially the case if the husband had met the wife while she was working as a sex worker (see Section 4.4.2).

As with families, husbands are often a trigger for women to seek out sex work, and a reason that they remain in it.

“The girl from her next room is a sex worker, her husband works as a cycle driver... But he did not work very well on his job, he always delayed. So she worked as driver instead of her husband. The couple are fighting always and she was beaten by her husband. Finally she was depressed and she wanted to separate with her husband.” **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

Alcohol featured strongly in explaining why relationships had deteriorated or become abusive, and why women had decided to seek out other means of supporting themselves.

“She is from Yangon and at first her husband worked as a general worker and she worked as a helper in a restaurant and as soon as they got married to begin with her husband was OK but later he drank alcohol and beat her. He abused/beat her up many times and she couldn’t take it any more and she tried to run away from him – and she left the baby with her husband.”

Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay

A third group of women, typically younger women, were either alone (i.e. had no family left) or were experiencing difficulties with family relationships, such as sexual or other forms of abuse, prompting them to want to live independently of their family and leaving them vulnerable to involvement in sex work. However, even when women chose to live apart from their families, they were often still sending money home. As a result, the earnings required to both support themselves and contribute to their families’ incomes were often not met by the low-paid work accessible to them.

“My friend is the youngest one in her family and her family members they talk a lot and she ran away from the house and she stay in her friend’s house. She was a sales girl in plaza at first and so I went to my friend’s house and I asked her do you want to stay at your house – if so we will find you a new job. Her family have enough money but she doesn’t want to stay at home so that is why she works as sex worker. Her parents don’t let her go outside the house and they scold her so that is why she ran away.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“For one girl, her mother and father both have second marriages. She does not want to join either her mother or father so she wants to work in KTV to be independent and live separately.”

KTV worker, Yangon

In many of these narratives, women considered alternative forms of employment, but the financial pressures that they faced in providing for themselves and their families rendered most alternatives unrealistic. Their work options simply would not pay enough to meet their life costs and other financial demands. In some cases, salaries were not even enough to cover basic costs. For many of these women – largely those who decided to work in entertainment venues – awareness of other young women in their community earning higher incomes from working in such establishments often acted as a trigger when earnings from other kinds of work failed to make ends meet. Furthermore, the free accommodation and food provided by these establishments was often appealing to these women.

“She has also experience of trying to work in other places like selling DVDs – copies – but it is not enough to pay for the whole family.” KTV worker, Mandalay

“She told her that there is work selling at a shopping mall but it will pay only 25,000 kyats per month and she knew that that was not enough to pay for rent for a room, food, transport, and so it was impossible for her to take the job and she asked her friend about whether she earns enough at the restaurant and her friend explained that they provide food and accommodation and that the salary is 35,000 per month but she didn’t tell her that she was also working as a sex worker.” Street-based sex worker, Mandalay¹¹

4.1.2 Pathways into sex work: triggers and enablers

As will be explored below, the widespread availability of sex work venues and transactional sexual relationships which often led to beginning a career in sex work were major enablers of recruiting women into sex work. However, there were certain factors that repeatedly seemed to trigger women into considering a job in sex work. Non-voluntary and forced entry into sex work is discussed in Section 4.1.4.

Debt, often from the catastrophic costs of health care (mostly of a sick parent), was a strong trigger for many women to go into sex work. Women often assumed all of the responsibility of paying back the debt on behalf of their families.

“She is trying to stay happy about this life because she wants to pay back her debts and wants to think positively about her current life because she can earn money to pay for her family and debt – she gives about one lak to her family each month and she tries to save money each month – she doesn’t spend like others.” KTV worker, Mandalay

“She doesn’t want to work this job and she is finding money for her family and her mother and her medical fees – but she is pleased she can support her family but would rather not be doing it through this work.” Street-based sex worker, Yangon

Most often, it was a combination of factors (health problems, debts, the financial needs of dependents) that led to women making a decision to enter sex work.

“Her mother is not well. Her husband does not make enough money. Her children need to go to school. She met with a sex worker on the street and told her about her financial problems. She [sex worker on the street] explained how to become a sex worker and make money. Most sex workers begin this work due to financial problems.” Street-based sex worker, Yangon

In some cases, abuse, abandonment, extra-marital affairs or alcohol problems led to divorce; if the women had children, sex work offered one of the few sources of reliable income.

“She broke up with her husband and she began sex work to support her two children. She has one brother and at first he supported her for a while. Before she broke up with her husband they

¹¹ 25,000 kyats is approximately £25 at the time of writing

fought every day. The neighbour always heard and felt pity for her.” Independent sex worker (phone contact with clients), Yangon

For many women moving back into sex work (having made a decision previously to leave) there was migration between transactional sexual relationships with long-term partners (such as boyfriends or husbands), ‘sponsors’, and sex work. In some instances, the material support provided by a sponsor was not enough to cover costs of a woman’s dependents (e.g. wouldn’t provide support for children from previous relationship or extended family members), in which case they sought out sex work for extra revenue.

“This money wasn’t enough to support her children from Yangon – he only provided money for their child but not her other children in Yangon. She feels like she doesn’t need to worry for her daughter with the sponsor but she worries about her other children and she started to feel unhappy staying in this family.” KTV worker, Mandalay

Facilitators and Recruiters

Women’s descriptions of their pathways into sex work suggest that it is very easy to find either recruiters or intermediaries who could facilitate finding sex work. ‘Professional’ recruiters, such as brokers, appeared in the narratives, as did friends, neighbours, sponsors, and mothers. It is also likely that brokers are well known in their local areas, and are referred to with informal terms such as ‘friend’ (especially for voluntary entry into sex work). This demonstrates the widespread and relatively informal nature of recruitment networks, as well as the variety of relationships that women use along the way into sex work.

Women often talked about ‘friends’, though these could equally be local women or neighbours. It is of little surprise that women living in poor neighbourhoods or slum areas can quickly find other sex workers to advise them on finding sex work. The sex worker’s own narratives confirm that older sex workers may start working as recruiters to make ends meet as their own market value declines in the sex trade.

“At first they work in industry, then they look for another job. Industry work is not okay ... because the salary is not enough to cover the whole family’s expenses. Then a friend tells you about a massage parlour needing people. They need people to apply. Your friend tells you that it is just pure massage. In the beginning you don’t know that the work will include sex. Later you begin to know. Then you continue to work there.” Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

In many cases, women’s financial and social problems appear to be known about in their local areas or they decide to enter sex work on the advice of ‘friends’. In many instances in these narratives, sex work is presented as an option that pays much better than other jobs, and provides a daily wage and food/accommodation. The harsh realities of sex work – violence from customers, abuse from enforcement agencies, and marginalisation from the community – do not seem to be communicated to women entering sex work, and many accounts suggest that women were not made aware by ‘friends’ of the problems that sex workers often encounter. Sex work is frequently presented as ‘easy’ option.

“But some of her friends encourage her to do sex work. Her friends say sex work is a way to make money easily. It is true that sex work is an easy way to make money but sometimes we cannot withstand the discrimination from the community. Sometimes she would like to stay away from the community because they are so jealous of the money she makes and they discriminate. But sometimes she thinks about her family and if she was not here her family would not survive, so she continues on with sex work.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“Her father had bleeding in his stomach and they needed money and he went to hospital to stay and her family requested her can she get some money or borrow from friends and then she borrowed one lak from her friends to give to her father and she told another friend about her problems and her debt and she said that her salary can’t cover her costs and her friend told her about a job at a KTV as a cashier at a KTV in Lashio in Shan state and if you work there you won’t have to pay for rent.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

As the former quote above suggests, there is an element of dishonesty about the nature of the work being offered. However, this type of recruitment was especially important for entertainment venues, such as restaurants, massage parlours, or KTVs, where women could join in non-sexual work roles, but then often found themselves offering sexual services at a later stage. Once they had joined, the influence of being surrounded by those with higher earnings as a result of transactional sex meant that women eventually agreed to provide sexual services, though in many venues this was to clients of their choosing (although the degree of choice reduced as financial responsibilities increased or the sex worker grew older and less attractive to clients).

“The next day the girls said to her, ‘Why do you think you are special and you don’t need to have sex with customers? You have to have sex with customers – that is what happens here.’ They also said, ‘If you are like that how can you stay here? You look like a virgin and this is not the right kind of place for you.’ Later she thought it is impossible to try to escape having sex with customers so she decided that if she wanted money for her family she must have sex with a customer.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

4.1.3. Pathways into sex work: the role of sponsors

In some cases, entry into sex work started with sponsors financially supporting women, who later decided to find other means of selling sex for money. Sponsors were present at all stages of women’s lives in sex work: at entry into sex work, as important customers while they were working in sexual entertainment venues, and, in a few cases, as a means of exiting sex work. Sponsors were very distinct from boyfriends, who were described as men with whom respondents had sexual relationships for pleasure and emotional closeness, or with the intention of marrying in the future. In contrast, sponsors were only for financial support. It was also often evident that boyfriends could not presently support them financially, or in many cases, that women were supporting them. Sponsors, however, were recognised as being essential for livelihoods. Some women spoke fondly of their sponsor(s), and a few reported marrying them; others described a functional rather than emotional attachment to their sponsor.

“Most customers are married and they can spend money on them – the girl becomes like a ‘keeping’ (mistress/bit on the side) – this is usually for the old guys but for the young guys the

girls like them and they have feelings for them and they have fun with them and enjoy their time and the girl will pay for things and she feels uncomfortable asking them for money – mostly they ask from old guys.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

In settings outside venues, sponsors, like ‘friends’, often identified women in their area who were known to have financial difficulties. However, these extra-marital transactional sexual relationships were not always recognised as sex work. Women appeared to be taken on as mistresses, although, as the quote below suggests, some seemed unaware that a sexual relationship was expected.

“At the time one man from the streets lent her money and at first she thought he had pity for her which is why he gave her money but she couldn’t return the money and so the man said if you have sex with me I won’t take the money back from you. She couldn’t give the money back so she accepted this idea and had sex with him. The relatives of the man know about her having sex with the man and so the relatives came to talk to her to stop the relationship with the man. The man is rich and they say to her that she wants to get his money and that she should go away and leave him alone.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Sponsors also appear to play a vital role in transitioning women into other forms of sex work. This could either be through gaining additional sponsors to support themselves, or through accepting that they will start selling sex, and seeking out places to do so on a more regular basis.

“At first she was working in a factory but then one of her friends told her to find a sponsor and at the time she thinks she will get money without sex but the sponsor wanted to have sex and so she got money from that. ... Now she has different sponsors and they’re her regular customers.” **Street-based sex worker (phone contact with clients), Yangon**

In KTVs, many women seemed to hope to find ‘good sponsors’ who frequented these venues, specifically richer men who could support them on a longer-term and regular basis. This was partly so that women could have more reliable sources of income (in contrast to their male partners or family members, who often had unreliable daily wages), reduce the number of other customers they needed to have (and thus reduce risk), or so that they could have consumer goods (and improve their social status).

Sponsors may have expected exclusive sexual rights to a woman, but once women were selling sex, they often wanted to make as much money as possible to support their families. In a few cases, sponsors supported women fully, but these relationships usually tended not to last beyond six months to three years: the sponsor’s own family often intervened, at which point women often opted to return to sex work.

“She stayed for a month in this guest house and then she transferred to a restaurant as singer, then she transferred to another restaurant and finally she stayed with one sponsor, he rented a house for me but after three months later his wife come to see her and shouted at her and finally they separated. ... She requested her friends to help her but she not get (any help). She met with a new guy again and she works as a street-based sex worker.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

Some workplaces (entertainment venues) were clearly favoured, as they offered more opportunity to meet a sponsor. These were usually locations where younger, more physically attractive women could 'do well', and possibly make enough money to leave the trade.

"I am upset [about doing this work], I wanted to work in a KTV, a girl from KTV can have a lot of money to spend and they have chance to meet with a good sponsor. But it can only work for young and smart girls. If I have money saved I want to become a seller [shop owner]." **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

4.1.4 Pathways into sex work: forced entry into sex work and trafficking

In this section, we explore non-voluntary migration into sex work. In some instances above, women were deceived about the expectation that sexual services would be provided; these cases would therefore be legally defined as trafficking¹². However, there were specific types of force used that women clearly differentiated from others in these narratives. These stories were common in the data and were often only apparent because respondents knew of women who had managed to escape such situations or had been sent back to Myanmar.

Forced migration appeared to be more common in Mandalay than Yangon, which is likely to be because of the geography of Mandalay and its proximity to China. Some narratives referred to well-evidenced routes through Mandalay to China: women reported being locked up in Chinese brothels and forced to provide sex, while others were imprisoned as sex slaves by an individual in China, or impregnated to provide a son. Women were often tricked into being transported to another location on the basis that legitimate employment would be provided.

"I was sold to Chinese guy for marriage by a broker. They told me that you will receive a job when I arrive to this China town. But I did not receive it. When we arrived to this Chinese town, I was locked at the warehouse and many watchmen are watching us. I found so many Myanmar girls, Shan girls are in this warehouse as a sex slaves." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

"She came to Mandalay and stayed with her friends in Mandalay and her friend suggested that she go to work in China in a restaurant – they were her friends since she was younger. When they arrived in China her friend sold her to the brothel – at first she didn't realise what had happened. She [the friend] took her to a restaurant and her friend said, 'Wait for me here for a while - I will meet some other friends about work so please wait here for me.' Then later a Chinese guy came to take her and when they arrived at his home she asked, 'Where is my friend?' and the guy explained that he had bought her from her friend. This guy said, 'Now I own you and when I want to I can have sex with you.' She tried to escape but the guy beat her and finally she had sex with him. She stayed with him for two years in his house. ... She managed to escape when the Chinese guy wasn't at home and she ran and met a Myanmar lady and this lady showed her how to go back to Myanmar and helped her to go back." **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

¹² The UN Palermo Protocol defines trafficking as occurring through force or deception for the purposes of exploitation. See http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf

In these data, it was frequent to find that women had been recruited by brokers (often when they were young or single) in return for payment to their families. Those most likely to sell women into sex work were mothers; brothels were the type of venue to which women were most commonly sold. In several instances, mothers regularly contacted the venue owner (brothel and massage mainly) to 'borrow' money (take advances on their salaries), which caused great distress to the women.

"And then she worked a factory as a helper but it could not cover the daily expenses of her home. Her mother borrowed money from others and they needed to pay it back. Therefore her mother brought her to brothel and asked to work as a sex worker. She cried many times and told her she really does not want to work as a sex worker but she has no choice due to her mother and money." **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

"When she went to work at restaurant in Sittwe [upon instruction from her mother], she had many customers because she is young and pretty. Sometimes she had sex many times within one day. It makes her really tired and upset. She was not happy because her mom used her money easily. She cried a lot because she did not want to work in Sittwe but she cannot refuse her mom." **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.2 Experiences of Sex Workers in the Workplace

This section focuses on the experiences of women in their working lives as sex workers: their working conditions (i.e. earnings, safety/risk, treatment by bosses¹³, degree of agency etc.); the level of exploitation and abuse by the police; and their treatment by clients.

Overall, FSWs experienced poor working conditions and high levels of abuse and exploitation. While those on the street or living outside venues had more agency in terms of working hours and mobility, the threat of abuse and exploitation from customers and police was higher, with no recourse against exploitative or abusive practices. Women working in venues reported abuse embedded in oppressive rules and regulations: restrictions on their movement outside the venue or to different establishments, long working hours, being on-call 24 hours a day, and sleep deprivation. While working inside some establishments offered a degree of protection from clients and police, this was not always the case, and for many, reduced mobility resulted in a lack of access to information, services, and social support available outside the venue.

Although the factors, triggers, and enablers resulting in women embarking upon sex work were similar across the narratives, experiences of sex work differed considerably depending on where women worked (i.e. street, brothel, massage parlour, KTV, phone only etc.). Even within categories of sex worker, women's experiences were diverse, and were influenced not just by venue/location but also by factors related to the disempowerment of women: age, looks, indebtedness (family debt, or money owed to a broker or owner from initiation into sex work), poverty/dependency of others

¹³ The term 'bosses' has been used to capture both managers and owners. In massage and KTVs women are likely to deal with a manager rather than the owner directly. In large KTVs there are likely to be two layers of management with the women dealing directly with the 'lady controller' rather than the business manager who deals with paying bribes, other aspects of the business and accounts etc. and not managing women. In brothels, women are likely to be managed directly by the brothel owner.

on income (by children, extended family members, etc.), and number of sponsors retained. The success of a woman in sex work is dependent on a combination of age, good looks, and an ability to navigate relationships with, and to manipulate, key actors, including customers, managers/owners, other sex workers, waiters, informers, and the police. These factors contribute to the degree of agency of each sex worker, and reduce the sex worker's choice and ability to negotiate, leaving her more exposed to exploitation, discrimination, and abuse in the workplace.

4.2.1 Earnings

Sex workers, at their peak, are largely able to earn a greater income than women with similar demographics working in the types of low-paid work otherwise available to them (e.g. maid, factory worker, low-grade clerical staff, salesgirl, waitress, food seller, agricultural worker, etc.). Younger, attractive women working in KTVs were the highest earners, with older street- and brothel-based sex workers earning the least. The older and less attractive to customers women become, the less they are able to earn, and the more they are exploited financially by various actors. Overall, slightly higher earnings were reported in Mandalay than in Yangon. In the narratives, decisions about where to work involved trying to maximise income, but women were also strongly concerned with ensuring their safety.

“My friend said that KTV is more suitable for me because I can get more tips and earn more than other work places. In massage, money is earned by each session, so she can get money only if she do for the massage sessions. So she gets tired, because it needs strength to do massage. But KTV girls are more earn than massage girls because it is only entertainment for customers such as only to singing, and only to treat the customers. When they like her, she can get more tips from them.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

For those working in venues such as KTVs and massage parlours, earnings were comprised not just of charges for sex but also of tips and session fees/salaries. These women had the potential for higher earnings but also faced competition from other women in the venues, which could result in fewer customers – especially as they aged. In such cases, FSWs often moved to a different type of venue with worse working conditions (e.g. a smaller and less reputable KTV with sex permitted within the KTV compound, a brothel, or the street). Those in large KTVs reported the highest earnings after deductions¹⁴ (mean: 150,000–400,000 kyats), followed by massage (mean: 150,000–250,000 kyats), smaller KTVs (mean: 100,000–200,000 kyats); with brothel- (mean: 50,000–100,000 kyats) and street-based FSWs reporting the lowest earnings (mean: 60,000–100,000 kyats).

All FSWs encounter many and various financial costs associated with undertaking sex work; these reduce their overall earnings considerably. Sex workers are supporting the income of many actors within the workplace. For street-based FSWs, such costs are largely limited to theft by clients or the police taking earnings; for some, payments are made to pimps or other sex workers for customer referrals. On a good day, a street-based sex worker is able to take home a higher proportion of her earnings than other FSWs, but the unpredictability of financial exploitation from one day to the next can leave street-based sex workers vulnerable and entirely without earnings.

¹⁴ These are the amounts stated by respondents after the costs associated with their work, such as the boss's cut, and payments to police/informers, brokers/pimps etc., have been subtracted.

The range of charges to a customer for sex varied considerably depending on the type of sex worker. At the lower end, older women working in brothels and on the street reported charging as little as 2,000 kyats (approximately £1.30) for sex, while those in KTVs reported rates as high as 1.5 laks (approximately £65) for sex (where the woman stayed with the man overnight). The typical charges for sex for each type were: street: 4,000–10,000 kyats; brothel: 3,000–10,000 kyats; KTV: 30,000–50,000 kyats; and massage: 5,000–20,000 kyats¹⁵. For those working in venues, especially those living in venues, food and accommodation costs are covered by the venue.

Women working in brothels reported the highest number of customers for sex per week, followed by those working in massage parlours, small KTVs, and on the streets; those in large KTVs reported the lowest number of clients.

Sex transactions were negotiated differently depending on venue. Street-based sex workers, those working in KTVs where sex takes place outside the venue, and some FSWs in massage parlours negotiated directly with clients. In brothels, and in some KTVs and massage parlours, negotiations were conducted by other actors, such as managers/owners, who took a cut. Transactions negotiated by an intermediary reduced the risks of non-payment to sex workers but resulted in reduced charges (a proportion of the fee being taken by the intermediary) and reduced agency (earnings being withheld and paid at a later stage).

For venue-based sex workers, for whom earnings are usually guaranteed either daily or on a specified pay day, the venue owners and managers, waiters, brokers, older sex workers and lady controllers¹⁶ (KTV only) all take a cut of the women's earnings, whether it be to facilitate sessions, pay off the police, buy them goods from outside the venue, or to refer clients etc. For these women, a large proportion of their earnings are paid to managers/owners.

In some large KTVs (especially larger establishments with reputation for 'entertainment' rather than sex) and some massage establishments, managers distance themselves from transactional sex and focus on the 'primary purpose' of the establishment (i.e. karaoke or massage services). In these cases, managers were reported to turn a blind eye to sex with customers and had no involvement in the transaction. For these managers, money from session fees or from tips are paid on a discretionary basis by the women to win the boss's favour rather than a cut being deducted from the charge for sex.

4.2.2 Sex workers' agency in the workplace: choice of customer, degree of mobility

FSWs in KTVs were reported to have the highest degree of agency related to choice of customer for sex; those in massage establishments had some degree of agency, while brothel-based sex workers reported little or no choice of customer, although this differed depending on the venue management/owner. Those on the street could choose customers, but on days where police or clients took their earnings, or where there were few customers, their level of choice was drastically reduced.

¹⁵ 10,000 kyats is equivalent to £6.50 or US\$10.

¹⁶ 'Lady controllers' may be men or women who work as managers within venues. They work to pair clients with sex workers, and may negotiate prices for sexual services. As such, they wield a great deal of power over women's livelihood.

In terms of working hours, those on the street had more choice about when to work, but again this was influenced by ability to earn the required income on a particular day. For those working in venues, especially those living inside the venues, they had little control over hours worked or time spent outside the venue. Women reported strict rules around when they were able to leave the venue, with those in massage establishments reporting the strictest rules (e.g. women were not allowed to leave the venue for up to three months at a time). Women also reported being fined for leaving or charged to leave the venue, resulting in further reductions in earnings. In KTVs, women reported being on call 24 hours a day, depending on when customers required services.

“They can only go out one time per week – only seven at one time – there are 50 girls and they can go out one day but only until 5pm. ... Most large KTVs don’t allow girls to come from [live] outside because it is more risky ... they want them to stay there so they don’t get problems. ... In large KTVs the manager takes responsibility for problems inside the KTV but they don’t take any responsibility for what happens outside.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

Establishments with the strictest criteria for recruitment such as KTVs usually had the strictest rules for women in terms of mobility. Debt to the venue manager/owner was used as a tool to control women from moving to another place of work.

Those in KTVs were seen to have a greater degree of choice about where to work and when to move to another establishment, especially those who were younger and more attractive. Women in brothels or massage parlours were more likely than other FSWs to report being indebted to the venue from the outset. Their debts arose from having been sold by a broker or family member, or as a result of debts arranged with the venue-managers.

“She told me about another friend who worked in a brothel. At the brothel she had to cook and wash all the clothes and did all the housework. ... She requested to the owner to get money in advance to send to her parents but the owner wouldn’t give the money to her. The owner only assigned only bad guys to her for sex, like those who were drunk. The owner didn’t give her money so she doesn’t have debt, but he won’t allow her to leave and work somewhere else. The owner threatens her: ‘If you go I will inform the police.’ The owner keeps her clothes so she can’t leave the brothel and the owner doesn’t pay her all the money he owes her so she can’t leave. She thought about leaving her clothes but the fact is that the owner has the money and this means she can’t leave. The other girls are not treated like this – only she is treated in this way. She arrived at the brothel because of the broker while the others came by their own will, so the owner paid money for her to work there.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

4.2.3 Relationships with managers/owners

The relationships women have with their managers/lady controllers/owners are critical to the quality of their working life and potential to earn. These relationships were typically complex, exploitative, and abusive, with managers/lady controllers/owners using various mechanisms to disempower women. For a young women living within a venue, in the absence of other adult relationships beyond sex workers and clients in their day-to-day lives, her manager/lady controller/owner is the key authority figure or influencer. Negotiating with managers is an important

aspect of life within these venues, and women's relationships with their managers differed considerably even within the same establishment, based on the woman's ability to earn, popularity with customers, and willingness to use strategies to win favour with the boss.

Lady controllers are a layer of management unique to KTVs, responsible for allocating women to customers. While the majority are reported to be male, some lady controllers are female – usually older women who previously worked as KTV girls. In KTVs, the women's interactions with management/owners were largely limited to those with the lady controller, who acts as a buffer between the women and the management/owners. Disputes, problems with customers, enforcing rules and fines, i.e. all day-to-day management issues, are the responsibility of the lady controller. While female lady controllers had the potential, in some cases a realised potential, to understand better the FSWs' needs and problems and play a more supportive and sympathetic role, this was rarely reported to be the case. Some women felt more comfortable with male lady controllers whom they felt better able to influence.

"The lady controller is not very nice. He takes the role of assigning girls to customers and also girls have to give their tip money to the lady controller when he assigns girls to customers – he chooses girls he likes best for customers. Everything depends on the lady controller because he is the only person to talk to the manager about the girl – he can influence what the manager thinks about the girls." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

Women across all types of establishment reported violence and abuse from managers/owners. Furthermore, there are various overt or indirect financial control mechanisms used by venue owners/managers across all venues to limit the agency of women, including: withholding payment; loaning money to women, resulting in debts; denying access to customers by reducing their sessions and earnings; fines; and taking cuts from their earnings.

"If girls want an advance like one lak or 50,000 kyats they give this in advance. If this happens and the girl has debt it makes it difficult later for the girl to resign from the KTV and they are frightened of the owner or manager to refuse or say something later." **KTV worker, Yangon**

"At the end of the night the owner asks is there any problems at your home? Do you need money in advance? And if they request he gives money in advance, which is really good for them. My friend has some debt to the owner – at least two lak – she took 50,000 kyats to send to her mother and then she needed some money for herself. She worries she can't leave until she has paid it off. There are many girls who owe money to the boss. They begin a tab because their parents come to the workplace and ask for money from their boss and this is how their tab starts." **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

Fines were commonplace in KTVs, with women being fined for returning late to the venue, not pleasing customers, arguing with customers, and not signing in at the assigned time. A common issue reported by those in brothels was owners not paying or underpaying women. Other mechanisms for controlling women included withholding their identity cards (ID cards) or other documentation.

Women reported that sex is often required with managers, with some managers having sex with multiple women within venues without condoms. Sex with managers/lady controllers was seen as a tool for winning favour, resulting in more sessions with customers and, thus, higher earnings. It was reported that multiple women within the same establishment, where HIV-positive women were working, have sex with managers without condoms. This could indicate a lack of awareness of the risk this presents to women and/or is indicative of a lack of agency and a prevailing exploitative relationship between bosses and sex workers within venues.

Case study: life inside a KTV

This study yielded rich data on the experiences of women living and working in KTVs in Yangon and Mandalay. There are potentially thousands of women working within KTVs across Myanmar. Large KTVs report having up to 100 women working within them, with many of these women residing in the KTV. Women in large KTVs tend to be young (mean age range 18 to 25 years) with limited experience of adult life beyond this environment, and very limited opportunities for exposure to their families and peers living on the outside pursuing other lines of work.

Although some women in KTVs are able to develop a range of transferable skills including sales skills (such as service industry/client relationship skills), many are exposed to a culture and range of risk factors that limit their opportunities to move beyond this environment and to make positive choices for their future. At the same time, earnings are high for these young women (although decline with age) and women report a lack of role models or people in their lives to provide a positive influence or direction for the future. For women within KTVs, their priority is developing strategies to ensure that they are assigned sessions, and in the process of achieving this they are exposed to multiple risk factors.

KTV culture and risk factors:

- High rates of alcohol and some drug abuse
- High rates of gambling
- High rates of debt – associated with gambling, and purchasing clothes, cosmetics, and other goods
- Low rates of condom use with clients, boyfriends, husbands, sponsors, and managers
- High rates of unprotected sex, resulting in pregnancy, abortions, and repeated use of emergency contraception
- High rates of STIs and some cases of HIV-positive women reported
- Sex with managers reported as a strategy to ensure sessions
- Some HIV testing reported but concern about stigma associated with attending services for FSWs/associated with HIV
- Fighting/competition amongst women – with HIV stigma used as a tool to reduce competition, i.e. women tell customers that popular women are HIV-positive
- Lack of access to Peer Educators (management resistant to allowing access)
- Limited opportunity to save earnings, distrust of banks/other people in KTVs.

Although women working in KTVs earned a relatively high income at a young age (reported to be up to ten lacs per month, with the mean range being three to four lacs per month), there were few reports of women who save money, leave sex work, and enter another successful livelihood option.

For most women, their aspiration is to obtain one or more sponsors¹. Sponsors offer the potential for a lump sum payment to pay off debts and start a new line of work, and provide an opportunity to reduce the number of clients and thus associated risks.

Women working in KTVs, while difficult for Peer Educators/Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to access, are a 'captive audience', presenting a potential avenue for intervention to break the sex work cycle. They require guidance and direction to capitalise on their skills, earnings, and potential to save money, so as to avoid their exposure to the risks associated with being an older sex worker, working in other sex work environments such as brothels or the street.

“The manager gives favours to the girls who are nice to him. Some girls have sex with the manager.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

“The lady controller has sex with the girls and then he’ll give favour to the girls. Mostly they don’t use condoms, this is what I’ve heard. And some of the girls get pregnant and have abortions.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

A small minority of women reported positive aspects to these relationships, such as transport home for those living outside the venue, loaning money, monthly visits from a doctor/routine blood tests, provision of condoms, and some degree of protection from customers (see Section 4.2.3) and police (see Section 4.2.4). Managers were not reported to play a role in condom use/negotiation with clients.

“The boss said if you are going to have sex with customers outside the only thing I can do for you is give you condoms. She is going to take them for testing every three months.” **Message-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.2.4 Levels of exploitation and abuse by enforcement and the judiciary

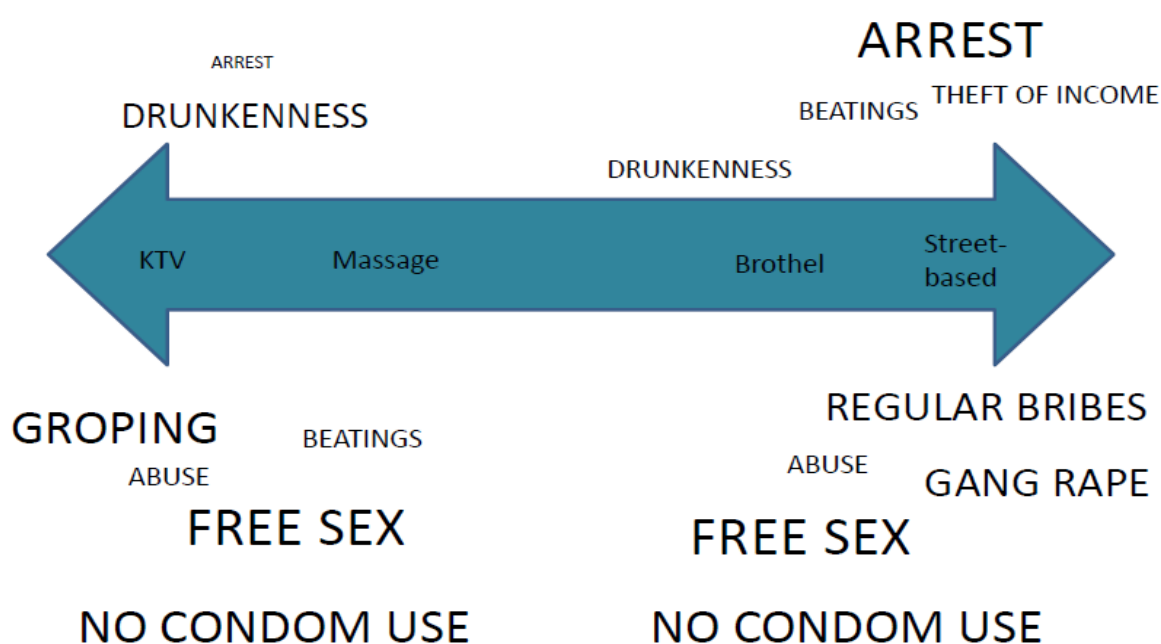


Figure 2: Levels of abuse by type of sex worker. Size of type denotes frequency of reports in the narrative data.

Violence, abuse and exploitation

All sex workers, including those in indoor sex work venues, had experienced multiple forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation by the police, on the street, in venues, and in custody, including non-payment for sex, not using condoms, beatings, bullying/harassment, and gang rape. The violence experienced at the hands of the police was amongst the most severe reported in women’s narratives.

Women working as street-based sex workers experienced the most extreme and recurring incidents of violence and abuse. Street-based sex workers were an easy target for police officers, and women were regularly required to pay bribes to police as well as to have sex with them for free.

“The police often come to ask for money or to have sex – like twice a week, so sometimes she can’t take money back home – so sometimes she will have worked all day to earn money and then the police will come to take money – all her earnings for that day. She is afraid because the police say if you don’t give money they will arrest her.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

“The police asked her, ‘Are you sure you can’t give me the money tonight? If not, follow me,’ and he wanted her to have sex with him and sometimes it isn’t just one police it is more than one police and she doesn’t have the choice to refuse. ... Most of the police notice the sex workers because they see their faces and it is most of the police that do this not just a few. ... Some police don’t really want money – they want sex so they take the money and say it isn’t enough and then demand sex too.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

“One time the police asked her for one lak and she begged him not to take the money and asked him to give her extra 24 hours and told him about her family and he made her have sex with him and then the next day he asked her for the money.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

These transactions were frequently accompanied by other forms of violence, such as gang rape, beatings, and threats, and occur both outside and inside the police station.

“My friend is working at a brothel and she stays outside the brothel. There are some police who used to check around the ward and if the girl refused to have sex with the police, the police would beat the girls genitals with their shoes and this is usually what happens at the brothel place – the owners of the brothel never protect the girls.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

“Once she met with the police and the police brought her to a bush beside the road to have sex and then he also hit her in her head and so she thinks sometimes she can’t remember – she thinks that her memory is damaged since then. Most police are violent because police know they are sex workers and they know they can do whatever they like to them. ... She doesn’t want any abuse or hatred or police asking for money from her. Sometimes sex workers get injured and the police don’t see sex workers as humans and don’t understand their lives.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Across all types of sex worker there were numerous reports of police forcing sex with women without condom use. There were also examples cited in Mandalay of police taking sex workers as a mistress/‘keeping’ or acting as sponsors for sex workers. There were reports of policemen in both cities known to have HIV and to not use condoms. Sex workers are powerless to negotiate condom use with police, and venue owners are also reported to have little on condom use by police within their establishment.

“When the police came the boss warned the girls to be careful. The police wanted to have sex with her. The police did not want to use a condom, but she did. She cannot make the police use a

condom so she told her boss. The boss explained that you have to use a condom to prevent disease. But the police would not accept what the boss said. The police said, 'You have put a sign saying massage parlour, but we see sex workers here. This is like a brothel so we can catch you. I can put you in the jail. There are so many laws. We will close your massage parlour.' So the boss accepted that the police do not use condoms. There were two police and they both slept with her without using a condom.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

Venue-based sex workers – especially brothel-based women – also experience violence, abuse, and exploitation from police, but to a lesser degree than street-based sex workers. Women working in KTVs were most likely to report having to entertain the police for free as the main problem, preventing them from earning from other customers. Other problems reported by venue-based sex workers include beatings, drunkenness, threats, groping, swearing, verbal abuse, and taking sex for free (inside venues where this is against the rules).

“Sometimes police come to the KTV. During the times when she serves the police she cannot leave the room. She cannot even go to the bathroom. She must serve them the whole time. Sometimes it takes about four or five hours. During this time she cannot see any other customers so for this day she does not get any money. If you do not want to serve the police you have to, you cannot refuse. Sometimes girls ask policemen for tips but then the police say, 'Would you like to be arrested, or would you like to go freely?'" **KTV worker, Yangon**

“She doesn’t have many problems with the police but sometimes they insult her – call her names like bitch and she doesn’t like that. She wants that the police treat them nicely.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

Those in brothels were less likely than street-based FSWs, but more likely than KTV- and massage-based sex workers, to experience beatings, gang rape, and other forms of violence.

Women across all types of sex work reported that payments are made to the police to prevent arrest through free sex (potentially with multiple partners in one event) or money. Financial payments were made directly to police (largely by street-, phone-, and some brothel-based FSWs), while for women working in massage parlours and KTVs, their boss was more likely to have paid the police (although such payments are largely recouped through a cut taken from the women’s earnings). In some massage parlours, FSWs reported having to pay money directly to the police, in addition to payments made by the boss, or paying the boss to pay the police.

“Sometimes police come into the KTV and ask for money not to catch the girls. The girls do not need to face the police directly, the police just talk to the boss and he sorts it out and pays them.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

In some brothels, women are offered a degree of protection if the owner is on good terms with the police. However, brothels are an easy target when the police need to meet quotas: even where bribes had been paid to local police, brothel owners would not always be warned if a raid was

planned¹⁷. There were also reports of bosses requesting that the police arrest sex workers if the brothel owner owed the sex worker a sum that he was unwilling or unable to pay.

“At the brothel and massage the bosses give money to the police so they do not need to be as afraid of the police.” Brothel-/street-based sex worker, Yangon

“The owner and police have a close relationship so if the police are planning a raid to meet their quotas then the police will tell the owner and the owner will ask one girl to go with the police for sex and then he doesn’t arrest her but police are usually rough. Sometimes the police tell the brothel that they should close because they are doing raids but if they need a person to show for their quotas they will ask at the brothel. The owner gives money to the police so they have a close relationship.” Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon

Experiences of arrest, detention and sentencing

Street-based FSWs were more fearful of arrest than other groups, and likely to have been arrested multiple times and to have spent years in prison. Sex workers are arbitrarily arrested under various laws and are often denied due process. Police arrest sex workers without evidence (based on past history/blacklist or suspicion only), falsify evidence, and continue to use possession/use of condoms as evidence of sex work¹⁸.

Knowing that a woman has been a sex worker can lead to arrest without evidence, which acts as a disincentive to women to leave sex work. Arrests without evidence of sex work, such as when women were standing on the street or at a bus stop, or being out after 7pm (in Mandalay), were commonplace. Women also reported fabrication of evidence, such as changing the time of arrest to night-time or using condoms as evidence for arrest. Women also reported cases where women were set up for arrest, using informers and marked notes. Police were reported to have raided guest houses to check temporary passes; customers were not detained even if caught in the act with a sex worker, but FSWs were arrested for engaging in sex work.

“They should not arrest me as soon as they see condoms in my hands. They should not arrest us with suspicion even if we are just standing at a bus stop. They should not arrest us for talking in a friendly way to police informers and customer.” Street-based sex worker, Yangon

“They are arrested without evidence, they only have to be on the street at night to be arrested – that is enough. Some girls have a date with their boyfriends and if they come back at like 10.30pm the police can just come and take them away with no explanation. If they have quota to arrest the sex worker they just take them in. The police arrest as they like – all the time. If the sex worker is on the blacklist and if the police see them on the street they have to stay in jail for one month to one year – most of us are on the blacklist – they shouldn’t catch them just because they are on the blacklist. ...They should use evidence to arrest them.” KTV worker, Yangon

¹⁷ Police are said to have monthly arrest quotas, and may select sex workers as an easy option for meeting their targets. (See CARE Myanmar Gender Analysis Team (2013) “CARE Myanmar’s Socially Marginalized Population Program: A Gender Analysis of Female Migrants and Female Sex Workers”.)

¹⁸ Current policy prohibits using condoms as evidence of sex work, but as this report shows, this is an ongoing practice by enforcement agencies.

“One of my friends was just sitting in the street and the police came to ask her, ‘Why are you sitting here?’ and she replied, ‘I feel so tired I am resting,’ but the police didn’t believe her and he took her to the police station and wrote that they arrested her at night even though this happened in the daytime and if this kind of problem happens, no one can help them and she was sent to prison for one year and she was charged with a 3a and they changed the evidence and she couldn’t argue and that is one of the problems with the police.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

Women in KTVs and massage parlours were unlikely to have experienced arrest: they felt relatively protected from arrest by owners/managers (if they were known to have a good relationship with the police, have a licence, and to make regular payments to the right people). Women rarely reported KTVs being raided or girls working within KTVs being arrested. Women in KTVs felt more protected than other FSWs, but some are still fearful of arrest, especially those in smaller KTVs where sex is allowed inside the KTV compound. Whereas girls working in large KTVs rarely reported experience of arrest, there was a greater number of stories of smaller KTVs being raided. Large KTVs were reported to have managers employed to deal with the administrative side of the business – largely meeting with government and police officials to pay bribes. FSWs working in KTVs but living outside were more likely to have faced arrest – especially in Mandalay, where women moving about the city late at night are a target for police. These women were likely to receive shorter sentences or to be released as a result of their KTV boss intervening.

“When they go back by motorbike sometimes the police arrest them and at that time most managers don’t take responsibility but if it happens they don’t get a long sentence – they just get one month – shorter than the sentence that girls from the brothel or street get. The difference is the way she is arrested and when she is taken to the police station she says that she is working at the KTV and she gives the contact number for the manager and the police ask the manager and he says, ‘She is from my KTV,’ and that is why the time is less. For street- and brothel-based girls there is no one to vouch for them or recommend for them. Sometimes the police ask for a list of all the girls and they want to check.” **KTV, Mandalay**

Raids on KTVs were rarely reported; however, when KTVs were raided, women were unlikely to have remained in custody or prison for an extended period: the KTV owners would pay the police to release them.

“My friend’s KTV is a very large KTV – the police came as a group – men and women and they weren’t wearing uniform just normal clothes and they came like they were a group of employees coming to the KTV – they were dressed up smartly and then firstly they called the manager to make a booking and asked how many girls are there in the KTV and they booked three large rooms and they booked their time – all girls and managers had to stay in the rooms and the police arrested everyone, girls and managers, but they released the waiters – and then one girl tried to run away from them – but all of them were taken to the prison for three months – the girls were put in prison but not the managers or the lady controller – the owner took responsibility and gave the police about 150 lak and then the girls were released after 3 months in prison. All the girls came back to the KTV because the boss gave the money.” **KTV, Yangon**

The degree of protection offered to those in brothels from police appeared minimal. Where owners were on good terms with the police, they might be informed in advance of raids, but women in brothels were generally seen as easy targets for arrest. Brothel owners took no responsibility when women were arrested and did not make any payments to police to reduce FSWs' sentences or secure them better treatment when in prison.

Women also reported experiencing physical and sexual violence by police during arrests and periods of detention. This violence was amongst the most severe reported by women. Psychological and physical abuse by police and prison officers were frequently reported.

"When they get to the police station, if they have long hair the police cut it. The police beat them at the police station. They abuse them. The police beat them until they admit that they are a sex worker. If they have to stay in jail for one month then the police come to the jail and abuse them there too." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

"The police came and arrested her – another five girls were also arrested. ... The policewoman kicked her legs and said, 'You are a sex worker and you are having sex with the husbands of other women.' At the police station they questioned her for the whole night, asking her questions over and over again. There were other girls there – one pretty girl was included but the police brought the pretty girl and had sex with her and then they released her. In the morning they tried to make them sign with their thumb and they were sent to prison for three years." **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

"The police did not abuse her. But when she was in jail senior female prison officers bullied her because she was a sex worker. [Interviewer: What did they do?] They said, 'You are a sex worker, so you have to do as we say.' Some prisoners have to work in the jail. They have to clean inside and outside. They make her clean for them." **Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon**

Payments are also made to the police (and other actors in the legal systems) after arrest in return for not being harmed, to reduce the length of time detained, to reduce the sentence, and for better treatment once in prison. Women are badly treated in prison: they are beaten and given the worst chores; their rations are cut, and items brought by visitors are not handed over. Some women specifically mentioned that some of the most severe acts of cruelty, violence, and abuse had been delivered by female officers.

"They are treated badly in prison. Some sex workers give money to the prison officer so they don't get beaten by others. If they don't pay money they cut off their hair and sometimes they beat the sex workers. Even though they have to stay in prison they have to use money to stop abuse." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Sex workers unanimously do not consider police or the judiciary as a means of seeking restitution for crimes against them, such as violence or theft, and expect that any cases, should they be brought, would be dismissed because of their profession. The unregulated context in which sex work takes place allows violence to occur and creates an environment of impunity for perpetrators.

In Mandalay, compared to Yangon, there were some reports of stricter practices around evidence required for longer sentences. Where police arrested women without evidence, such as for standing on the street, a sentence of one month was sometimes given, compared to the standard one- to three-year sentence frequently cited in Yangon. Where police obtained evidence from marking notes, or women were set up by an informer, or caught with a customer, then longer sentences of one to three years were reported.

In Mandalay, police conduct towards sex workers was predominantly portrayed in a very negative and disturbing light; however, there were a few more positive examples of police behaviour. Some FSWs, working in large KTVs, reported that police conduct had improved recently, with fewer attempts to force sex, and a reduction in groping and harassment when inside the KTV. This was perceived to be the result of good relationships with the owner, or possibly of advocacy to police to change their behaviour.

It is evident that police misuse their state-bestowed powers to perpetrate sexual violence, psychological humiliation, and physical abuse. Sex workers did not see reporting cases of police violence as an option, indicating a high level of institutional impunity. This research supports the findings of other recent research with sex workers to suggest that these physical, sexual, emotional, and economic acts of violence go far beyond the police's mandate, within and without their sphere of duties, and that police officers misuse the criminal status of sex workers and their overt police power to perpetrate violence with impunity (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2014).

4.2.5 Women's experiences of clients

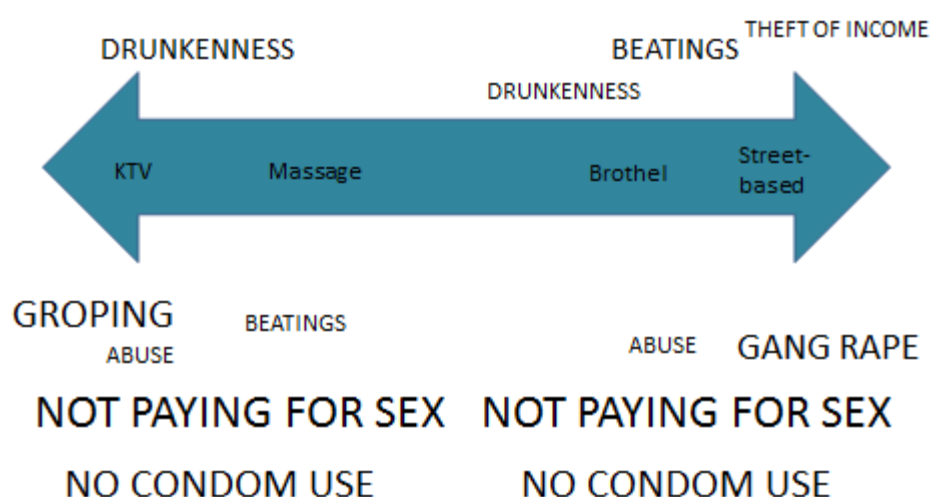


Figure 3: Types of abuse reported by FSW type. Size of text denotes frequency of mention in the data.

Most women had experienced multiple client-related problems, with the most frequently cited problems being non-payment for sex, no condom use, gang rape, and beatings. There were variations by type of sex worker: street-based FSWs and those working outside venues, such as phone-contact/nightclub-based FSWs and some brothel-based sex workers, experienced the most

severe problems. Generally, those in KTVs and massage parlours experienced less frequent and/or severe incidents of violence than other types of sex worker.

Women across all types of sex work mentioned incidents of beatings and other forms of physical violence from clients. Nearly all women had experienced violence, with sexual violence being the form most commonly reported. Most women, with the exception of some younger women in large KTVs, had experienced gang rape (mostly with insufficient payment to cover the number of clients) and beatings. For street-based and phone contact sex workers, or women having sex with clients outside venues, violence was reported to be a regular occurrence and a source of constant anxiety.

“The customer took her for sex but she didn’t know the place and when she got there, there were four customers and they beat her and they all had sex with her one by one. She was exhausted and they took all her money, and took her by car and they dropped her out of the car on the way back to Mandalay; just dropped her by the road. She was unconscious and only woke up in the morning and remembered what had happened. She tried to walk on the main road and she realised she was a long way away and she requested a driver to take her back to Mandalay. She didn’t tell the police about this problem because they would have arrested her.” **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

“When the guy approaches her in the club they say it is only him, but sometimes then there are three other friends. The problem of one girl and three guys is common. It happens often. The girl does not want to do it, but she has to because she needs the money. Having sex with three men makes her feel really upset. ... One offers her money for sex and she follows him to a hotel. Then when she arrives at the hotel it is not only one customer. The customer that only gave her 20,000 kyats [\$20] is there, and other boys. There are three boys and she has to have sex with all of them. She has to accept. They pay her only 20,000 kyats (\$20) for three boys. The boys are drunk. Sometimes if she talks back they beat her. They slap her cheek.” **Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon**

“Sometimes the customer and her talk about a price for sex and get agreement and the customer says, ‘I know a safe place – don’t worry – you will have sex only with me,’ but then when they arrive at the place there are more men there who want to have sex and she explains to them that it isn’t good for her to have sex – not good for her health to have so many men but they do not agree and they make her. She can’t cope with three men when there is only her so she has no choice.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

There were frequent reports of customers being drunk, using drugs and requesting or forcing anal or oral sex.

“Some customers are not normal – for example they take drugs to get more satisfaction and so it takes longer than normal and makes her really tired and some penis of some guys are very large and this kind of men are taking drugs. The customers ask her to do oral sex and she doesn’t want to do it.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

"Sometimes they want different positions such as the customer has anal sex. She felt so bad and dislikes this behaviour and at that time she thought that she had been into hell even though she is alive. But she has no choice because of her family expenses. Then they sit beside her and throw alcohol liquid into her vagina and they watch her. She is so ashamed and sad. She feels depressed and she said, 'I did it because of money for family. My family needs more money.'"

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

"Some customers ask her to have sex like in a sex movie, and some have sex in a car and if the girl refuses to do what they ask they beat the girls and sometimes pull their hair. Some try to take a movie of them while they are having sex. Some ask to have anal sex and then they also make links with other friends by whistling to other guys who are waiting."

Street-based sex worker, Mandalay

Vaginal injuries were also reported, especially where there were multiple clients, where clients were drunk or had inserted objects inside their penis to enhance the sensation and size.

"Some customers put small things like glass marbles in their penis so it is really painful and sometimes she gets bleeding after sex. One time two customers wanted to have sex at the same time and she only got 2,000 [\$2] for each man."

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

In settings such as brothels, where women were rarely protected from client violence by their owners/managers, one of FSWs' few options was to request that other women would serve them. As these narratives show, women were often disbelieved when they talked of being forced to have sex. Some women based in massage parlours reported these incidents to their boss, but there were few stories of action being taken against clients.

"Sometimes she has some difficulties with customers when they beat her but even though she has been hit she has no choice – she can't fight back or react. It is different in massage – there the girl can tell the owner if there is any violence."

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

"She said some customers abuse her like pulling her hair and being rough – at first the customer said he wanted just pure massage then he tried to rape her – she tried to escape from the room but the door was locked and she wasn't as strong as this guy so she couldn't escape. She had sex with him and then in front of her boss he complained and said she didn't give a good massage and blamed her – the owner thought she was lying when she explained what had happened and she cried a lot. The next day the customer came again and she said to him in front of the owner 'Do you want massage or sex?' and he said he wanted sex so they charged him the full charge."

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

In larger KTVs, the main problems cited related to customers groping, drunkenness resulting in abuse, swearing, roughness, and some violence (including being hit with glasses and bottles) during sessions within the KTV. Waiters and lady controllers are often at hand to manage conflict and defuse confrontations, and there is sometimes more than one woman in each room with clients. Where customers severely beat women in KTVs, some reported that the clients were not allowed to return to the KTV, although others reported that women were forced to resign if problems occurred

with a client (this is likely to be related to the woman's value in terms of earnings to the KTV). Overall, since women in KTVs reported having a greater degree of choice over the customers with which they have sex (usually outside the KTV) they cited fewer bad experiences with customers during sex transactions than other kinds of sex workers.

Non-payment for sex is a common problem for street-based, phone contact, nightclub-based, and some KTV-based sex workers (those who negotiate transactions independently of the venue). For most massage- and brothel-based sex workers, the financial transaction usually occurs with the owner/manager, ensuring that payment is made.

"One of the difficulties is that customers tell her to have sex with him and only him and will give 5,000 and then she followed the guy and there are actually about five guys and she had to have to sex with each man one by one and they should give her more money but they give only 5,000 (\$5)." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

All categories of sex worker reported that clients frequently refuse to use condoms and a large majority of women reported having sex without condoms – sometimes for a higher fee.

"Most guys dislike using condoms – but not all – but some prefer to use. Most refuse." **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.3 Discrimination against Sex Workers

PRs asked their friends about ways in which they felt discriminated against. Women reported direct and indirect emotional/social and functional/financial discrimination from institutions, people in the community, their family, and from other sex workers. While workplace-related abuses were often the most severe forms that women experienced, the stigma that they experienced within their communities was particularly damaging and upsetting for women, and also often impacted on their children and families.

Table 3: Type of stigma and discrimination experienced by sex workers in their community or at the hands of institutions

	Community	Family	Individual/ internalised stigma	Institutional
Emotional/ social	Physical and emotional abuse: spitting, kicking, gossip/rumours, hostility, distrust (perceived as threat to marital relationships) Conflict: fighting/arguments Isolation: excluded from religious events/festivals, ignored/avoided, cut off from friends/relationships terminated, children	Physical and emotional abuse: gossip, shame articulated by family members Isolation: relationships terminated, cut off/avoided	Isolation: relationships terminated, cut off/avoided, perceived to be distrusted by others	Health services: abuse, hostility/criticism, ignored, refused/referred treatment if HIV-positive

	excluded/marginalised			
Functional/ economic	Income generation: won't buy goods sold by women thought/known to be/have been sex workers, won't employ them Housing: landlords don't repair homes, won't rent to them, unable to pay rent in advance so can only access poor accommodation options			Health: poor service, longer waiting times, reluctance to treat or refer (HIV), disrespectful, no privacy Government offices: charged more for services than others, not given equal/fair treatment in disputes Employers: distrustful, require blood tests – dismissed if HIV-positive

4.3.1 Discrimination from community/family/individual

In many instances, women clearly kept their lives as sex workers secret from family and local people, mostly by travelling to other places to work, or keeping regular hours like those in other work (such as factory workers) may keep. In other cases, women lived within the sexual entertainment premises, to evade being detected by the authorities. In many instances, their working practices would become apparent, and local gossip often concerned how their families or even husbands found out that they had started sex work.

There was often reference to gossip and abuse directed at sex workers in the communities where the nature of their work had been made known. This malicious gossip functioned to taint the women, and ensured that other people in the community did not seek out their friendship or company.

“The previous ward she stayed nobody knew she was working as KTV and sex worker but in her ward where she is now some people know she is a sex worker. In the ward some people used to talk about her – let’s see that girl who has learned her lesson i.e. she used to have husband, sponsor, money and now look at her – she has nothing.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

“The people in the community say, ‘She is a sex worker! If you go with her everybody will think you are a sex worker too. Don’t go with her. If you are friends with or go anywhere with her everybody will think you are a sex worker too.’” **Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon**

Others described more overt taunting and abuse.

“In her ward the other people know they are working at KTV and they accuse them of being sex workers. Even young boys about 13 or 14, when they see the girls they know they are working in the KTV, ... the young boys taunt them and ask them to have sex with them. They [sex workers] don’t do anything – they just stay in their home but some people throw stones at their home because they know they are working at a KTV. It doesn’t matter how much they try to be friendly and polite they still discriminate.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

In many cases, women gave up or were forced to give up on previous friendships once they became sex workers: others did not want to be associated with them for fear of gossip or drawing attention to themselves from the authorities. In many cases, sex workers appeared to withdraw from maintaining social connections with friends or neighbours, even if they had previously been an important source of local support. Women were often very distressed about their children or families being excluded. Children were said to be excluded in school, and more severely punished or blamed in fights with other local children; other parents would refuse to let their children play with sex workers' children because of their mothers' profession.

"People from her neighbourhood know she is a sex worker. They do not talk to her. Some of them do not let their children play with her children. ... Sometimes someone in the neighbourhood has a donation event at their house – it can be religious, or a birthday – and they make her eat alone. Nobody will sit and eat with her." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

"People from the community also said that, 'You are working as a sex worker and people should look down on you – it is good for you for people to look down on you.' People from the community say that, 'Because of you our streets are shameful – you live here and you are doing sex work,' and parents from the neighbourhood don't let their children play out because they don't want them with my children." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Women also reported being discriminated against by others who are aware of their status, such as landlords or employers outside sex work. Women reported negligent landlords and being forced to move on once their status as a sex worker was known by a landlord.

"They don't have their own house – they rent from an owner who became to know that she is working as a sex worker and owner wants them out ... so the owner doesn't make any repairs and the house doesn't even look like a house – it has just cloth for walls. If they move to another house they have to give six months' rent in advance but they don't have enough money and in this place she only has to pay monthly so they can't move." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

For those attempting to move out of sex work and into other employment, discrimination often resulted in a return to sex work. Women perceived that they were distrusted by their employers, and employees across a range of occupations were required to undergo blood tests. This acted as a perceived barrier to women.

"I have two friends who were sex workers in the past but now one works in industry and the company asked her to make a blood test and the result was positive and when they found out they sacked her and she went back as a sex worker. The other friend worked as a maid and she worried about this and ended up leaving and working again as a sex worker." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

"We would like to work in other places with dignity but most employers ask for a blood test. One of our friends was working as a cleaner at a clinic but the employer asked her to do a blood test and the next day she resigned. We want to work in good places but there is gossip, blame and

blood tests so I am angry that we get discrimination from people and end up returning to sex work.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.3.2 Discrimination from institutions: health, government offices, employers (outside sex work)

Health services

Women reported receiving direct discrimination from health workers at government clinics in the form of abuse, unequal treatment, poor treatment, or refusal of treatment. Women reported being shouted at or ignored, their questions not being responded to, and medical staff wearing two pairs of gloves or not wanting to touch them. As a result of discrimination received at government facilities, many women now seek health services from specialised clinics for sex workers, such as TOPS, MDM or Marie Stopes International (MSI). If using a government clinic, FSWs try to conceal their status as sex workers and do not provide identifying information; some women avoid all clinics or health services since they expect that they will be discriminated against. Reports of experiences at NGO clinics were more positive, with sex workers reporting better treatment and a more open environment than in government or other private clinics.

“I went to the clinic in the street and the people from that clinic know that I am a sex worker and they discriminated against me – they said, ‘Why are you being impatient – you are a sex worker – what do you expect?’” **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

“She went to the government service clinic and she felt discrimination against her, so she went to MSI and they did not discriminate. She feels they [government health workers] do not want to talk closely with her once they know she is a sex worker. She feels this way from their body language. At MSI you can speak openly about your work and no one cares. At government health services you feel ashamed and there is no privacy.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“At the hospital they asked for her details: name, husband details, what is your work? She explained honestly that her husband drinks and she is a sex worker and the staff from the government hospital said to her, ‘Why do we have to do this delivery free of charge? You’re a sex worker, why should you get it free of charge?’ They didn’t care for her much.” **Massage-based sex worker, Mandalay**

Discrimination faced by women in health settings increased their vulnerability to HIV by creating an environment in which they were reluctant to ask for condoms, be tested, or seek treatment. However, the NGO clinics appeared to be well known and used by sex workers, because of their better client care.

Government administrative offices

At local government offices, women reported unequal treatment in terms of resolving disputes and higher charges for services provided. They felt that, as sex workers, they were not entitled to a fair hearing or would automatically lose. This was most evident in discussing disputes resolved through the local ward ‘office’ where local officials would arbitrate in cases of disputes between families, neighbours, or spouses. In many cases, women were directly told that they were not entitled to any form of hearing or arbitration in one case, a respondent was even threatened with being arrested by

the police. This makes it very difficult for women to address the abuses and hardships that they face in their relationships.

“If there is a problem between me and my husband I can’t say to the community leader that there is a problem. The community leader will say I don’t want to judge between you and your husband that is your business – you are a second wife and you are working as a sex worker¹⁹. You sort it out. [Interviewer: Would they help a woman if she wasn’t a sex worker?] If the other couple has a problem the government office would try to resolve the problem – they would help them but for KTV couple they won’t help and sometimes they also inform the police.” **Message-based sex worker, Mandalay**

Some respondents said that they could only rely on support from the local council if they had enough money to be able to pay for access to justice (effectively bribing local officials). This also meant that women relied on support from sponsors and rich customers to support their cause, further reinforcing their dependence on support garnered within the sex industry.

“Help from the community leader means if there is fighting with other people you can give the community leader money and they will be on your side. [Interviewer: What might a community leader do for a sex worker if they gave them some money?] They tell the other side to not mind the sex worker and to leave her alone.” **Message-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.4 Difficulties Faced in the Lives of Women Who are Sex Workers

The section above highlights the problems faced by women in their working environment. This section focuses on the common issues faced by women in their broader lives as sex workers, such as: debt; relationships with intimate partners and children; alcohol, drugs, and gambling; and health-related issues such as STIs/HIV, pregnancy/abortion, and access to services. These were the main difficulties faced by these women and play a key role in women’s difficulties in leaving sex work (see Section 4.5).

4.4.1 Debt and difficulties saving earnings

Debt was a critical issue, with most women reporting debt to a range of actors, including lenders in the community, venue managers/owners, other sex workers, and customers/sponsors. Women discussed how debt reduces women’s agency and increases their likelihood of exploitation – especially by bosses (see Section 4.2). Debt was cited as a common barrier to women leaving sex work.

The majority of women reported debts due to paying for family-related problems, such as medical costs, costs when arrested, gambling debts, and spending on clothes/cosmetics required to ensure their appearance is suitable for work (e.g. in a KTV). In Mandalay, there were fewer reports of unexpected family-related expenditures, such as ill health/medical bills: as internal migrants, many women are disconnected from their families in their home villages.

¹⁹ ‘Second wives’ are essentially mistresses, and would not have a legally binding marriage.

“They have debts – everybody has debt even the brothel owner who had to borrow money when her sister-in-law was arrested and the interest has become very large for this debt.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

Venue-based sex workers have a greater range of options for borrowing than street-based sex workers: in addition to borrowing money from managers/owners, women in venues reported lending to each other with high rates of interest.

“Her sister is not feeling well. She needs to go to the clinic but the family does not have enough money. One of the other KTV workers said she will help and gave money. The money needed to be given back later with interest.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

Women in brothels, with a lower income and less control over access to income than those in other venues, were highly likely to be in debt to the brothel owner, either due to having been sold by their family or by a broker, having been given an advance on their salary, or having borrowed money.

Women in some venues had the potential to borrow from each other, sponsors, or their managers; options for street-based sex workers to borrow money were more limited and were subject to harsher interest and repayment conditions. Interest on loans from lenders in the community accumulates rapidly and at a very high rate. Women can fall into a dangerous cycle of debt and desperation, which frequently results in their engaging in more risky relations with customers, such as not using condoms, submitting to gang rape, or having sex with ‘unsavoury’ customers that they might refuse if the financial consequences were less severe.

“She has debts. She needs to pay back creditors about 150,000 kyats. When morning has come she needs to pay 3,300 kyats daily to creditors before 10am but it needs an ID card [NRC card] to borrow money from the creditor. We must give our ID card to them until we have repaid all the debt. Sometimes we don’t have our ID card and so we have to hire another ID card from another person. We must give them 10,000 kyats per month for two months of hiring charges and we also have to pay the broker who links the debtor to the creditor. So we must give him 10,000 kyats. We are afraid of him because he can be very bad to us. If we can’t pay the increment in time to the creditors he will threaten us and will destroy things in our house. So if we borrow one lak we only get 80,000 kyats because we need to we need to pay the broker. We are all facing this experience in our wards.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

As outlined above, sex workers are supporting the incomes of many actors - from family to police, prison officers, informers, venue-managers/owners, brokers, waiters, and other sex workers. As a result, there are few examples of women who are able to save money from the earnings – even amongst high earners in KTVs.

“Sometimes she is able to save money but then there is a problem like she has to pay the police and then she loses her savings again and she never has enough saved for her business ideas and she said she isn’t just supporting her family she is supporting the police.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

For many saving is a challenge because they send a substantial proportion of their earnings home to their families. Women working in KTVs are required by the management to meet certain standards in terms of clothes and cosmetics to maintain an appropriate appearance, which is costly.

Practical options for saving were also reported to be limited. Some women reported sending money home in the hope that their families would save a proportion of their income for their future. There were no reports of this succeeding in practice, and some women reported disappointment, anger, or a loss of trust in their families as a result of their money being spent by family members and not saved or invested as intended. Keeping money or possessions in the venue or in the safe keeping of venue management was not seen as an option by women.

“Some save at a bank but some try to buy gold necklace and save like that because they worry that saving in the bank is not safe and some banks will take their money because mostly they are non-government/private banks but they buy gold because gold prices always increase so they will make more interest than the bank. Some worry that if they keep their money then someone will steal it and if they lend money to others they can’t trust that they will pay it back and some try to buy jewellery so they can keep it on them. Some girls get drunk at the KTV and then someone steals their necklace and they also don’t trust their parents because their parents easily spend the money and they worry that they will use their money or sell their jewellery. [Interviewer: Do bosses ever keep money or jewellery safe for women?] [Laughter.] This is not safe – they wouldn’t keep it safe for them.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

A distrust of private banks and the inconvenience of saving at a government bank (time taken to pay in money) were mentioned as barriers to saving.

“Sometimes at the bank they need to wait for a lot of time to pay money in – if an organisation can provide an easier way to save than the bank they might save more and trust more.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

Some invested money in gold and jewellery, which was seen as the most profitable and safest way to save – although once again girls become vulnerable to theft due to consuming large volumes of alcohol.

4.4.2 Intimate partner relationships

Problematic relationships and problems with relationships were common themes across the data: women reported failed relationships/divorce/separation, difficult or dysfunctional current relationships, and perceived limited opportunities to secure a non-abusive, working partner and a functioning relationship. There were frequent reports of intimate partner violence and abuse, often in the form of humiliation and physical abuse triggered by resentment surrounding women working as sex workers, alcoholism, gambling, and unemployment/exploitation of sex worker income.

“When she comes back from work late at night her husband sometimes hits her. Her husband thinks she is working as a sex worker but he hasn’t got proof but other people in the neighbourhood talk to him about it.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

As reported above, many relationships broke down as a result of violence and abuse, and this was a trigger to start sex work. Around a quarter of the women in the sample reported being divorced or separated from their husband and some had been divorced multiple times. For many women, a relationship breaking down resulted in the woman leaving the family home, thus leaving children with the husband's family. Others stayed with their husbands, providing the family's income and enabling their partner to drink alcohol/gamble.

"For some couples the husband cannot make enough money so he doesn't say anything to the wife because they need the money. Some husbands accept it because the wife can now make money for the husband to buy alcohol. Some guys are very lazy and like to take money from their wife." **Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon**

Older women in the sample with experience of failed intimate partner relationships talked of the unlikelihood of a woman who is a sex worker securing a stable, non-abusive, functioning relationship in the long term. Where women do marry they often find that they are a second wife resulting in a range of problems, including conflict and insufficient financial support.

"Working as a sex worker I met a really nice guy. He also tried to help support my family. The guy requested that I stop sex work. It was impossible, though, because the family had so many needs. When my father was seriously ill my mother was not at home. I tried to search for my mother. When she finally arrived back home my father had already died. I am working on the street so I don't have as many sponsors as others. But this guy is really good. He helped with my father's funeral. Then he proposed to me and we got married. But the guy already had a first marriage and after six months his first wife came and caused a problem." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Factors hindering the ability of a sex worker to develop a 'successful' relationship included: identity as sex worker becoming apparent to partner; access only to men who use services of sex workers, leaving women open to exploitation and abuse; women being second wives/mistresses; women continuing with sex work to provide additional income (i.e. to support family or children from previous relationship) leading to conflict.

"Some guys know about the girls' history because they met each other when he was a client so it seems like that guy can understand her but in reality he can't understand her and finally he treats her badly. This is my friend's experience – and this guy is trouble and he beats her and leaves her and there is a cycle that her friends are in where they fall for a guy who is a client and they think that they understand about them but they can't really and it always ends badly." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Women who were unmarried when they began working as FSWs found opportunities to meet men outside the sex industry limited. Options were largely limited to customers/sponsors or men working in the sex industry. There were some reports of women meeting customers/sponsors with whom a medium-term relationship developed, but these relationships typically became abusive, exploitative, or violent, and were rarely sustained over time. Such relationships were usually premised on securing financial support – at least initially – although sometimes evolved to provide other aspects

of an intimate partner relationship over time. Despite this, for many younger women, a key aspiration was to secure a customer or sponsor for a long-term 'relationship': someone who would support them, understand their life, and sympathise with their choice of work, resulting in them leaving sex work.

"When the girls get older some get married but most girls have trouble. They guys they marry tend not to be rich people – they're not good husbands – some get married to waiters or customers. The waiters can't make much money so their income isn't enough and so some girls need to work as a general worker or maid, washing people's clothes." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

In contrast, some younger women – especially those in KTVs – described having a boyfriend. Boyfriends were described as relationships for enjoyment, without financial benefits, and were usually with younger customers or waiters in sex work venues. Although sometimes described fondly or as a source of pleasure for younger women, the relationships were often blighted by conflict about their involvement in sex work, deception about their continued sex work, or a growing dependence by the male partner on their earnings. Women with boyfriends often talked about these relationships being exploitative, as the women often provided financial support to the boyfriend. Even in the unlikely event that these relationships graduated from 'boyfriends' to 'husbands', in cases where women had met their partners when they were already sex workers, relationships seemed especially harmful.

"He was a customer – at first he worked and supported her and asked her to stop sex work and she stopped working as a sex worker but later he stopped working and he let her earn the money and he asks her for money – he encouraged her to go back to sex work and to earn money and he started drinking and then she got pregnant. [Interviewer: why did he stop working?] Mostly he was drinking and he didn't value her and knew she could make money. She said to her husband now I am pregnant, I don't want to do sex work but her husband doesn't allow her to stop working and he forced her to keep working when she was pregnant." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

4.4.3 Relationships with children – living apart

Many sex workers in the sample, in Mandalay in particular, live apart from their children, who are often left back in the village with their family, with husbands or friends, or with the in-laws of the husband from whom they are separated or divorced. Children are often given to parents or in-laws when a marriage breaks down and the woman starts sex work to generate an income. Contact with children is often non-existent or very irregular, although women reported sending money to support the children. There were also reports of women who had lost their children as a result of being imprisoned.

"She left her daughter with her friends. She only goes back to see her daughter one time per month. It is difficult for her that she does not see her daughter very often." **KTV worker, Yangon**

Some reported that visits home made it difficult for them to come back to their work but the need to earn money to support their children acts as a deterrent from returning home to see children and family. A key reason cited for living away from their children is concern about the stigma

experienced by their children if their status as a sex worker were to be known to others in the community.

“Most of the women have children but they worry that their children and others will find out about them being sex workers so the children stay in other places like in the village with other family members and they worry about their children finding out. They worry that people will come to know.” KTV worker, Mandalay

4.4.4 Alcohol/drugs and gambling

Alcohol and drug use and gambling were reported as being problems experienced by sex workers. Respondents in Yangon were less likely to mention these behaviours spontaneously than those in Mandalay, where they were mentioned frequently. Such behaviours were reported to be most prevalent in KTVs, where drinking with customers to increase their expenditure on alcohol is encouraged as part of the job. Drinking and gambling were also reported amongst women working in brothels, but to a lesser extent than amongst those in KTVs, who had easy access to alcohol.

Women reported high volumes of daily drinking within KTVs: vomiting was a regular occurrence. Drinking alcohol is positively encouraged by the management within KTVs. Costs of alcohol drunk by customers and women during sessions are covered by the customers, so the greater the amount of alcohol consumed/purchased by all, the greater the profit for the owner. Customers tend to favour girls who can drink, and managers favour girls who can hold their alcohol. Women were reported to vomit in the mornings after a night of sessions.

Heavy drinking, dependence on alcohol, and alcohol-related violence and incidents were reported by the women. While women are encouraged to drink excessively with clients, they are also punished if they are unable to conduct themselves appropriately as a result of drunkenness. Reports of women being fined for disorderly conduct, arguing, violence, abuse to customers, sleeping in, and missing daily thumb print registration were cited.

“She heard about a friend who gets drunk and she can drink more than the customers and one day after drinking a lot she tried to beat a customer with a bottle of beer. The customer was really angry and beat her back. The other girls tried to take her away and the manager apologised to the customer, made the girl pay a fine and told her to resign.” KTV worker, Mandalay

Drug use was reported by some women. Drugs included Yabba (amphetamine) as well as a green tablet taken in low doses for coughs that reportedly made the girls feel more confident but dizzy – girls were reported to take as many as 30 in one go²⁰. Yabba was reported to be provided by customers, while the green tablets were bought from a pharmacy at 5 kyats per tablet.

Gambling – such as playing cards, lottery, or roulette – was also cited as a major problem amongst women in KTVs and in some brothels, largely due to being bored when waiting for sessions/customers. Women were reported to get into debt as a result of gambling.

²⁰ This could be a mild sedative often found in over the counter drugs, such as cough medicines.

“Now she has another habit – she plays cards in the afternoon when the girls are free so when they’re bored she plays cards – and now she is addicted and she has some debt now.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

4.4.5 Health problems

STIs/HIV/AIDS and other sex-related health problems

Many women were reported to have contracted STIs or to be HIV-positive. It is alarming that others, especially younger women or those relatively new to sex work, did not mention HIV/AIDS as a problem, worry, or risk in their discussions with women. In addition to this, numerous indicators suggest that women continue to be at high risk of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS and other STIs, despite efforts to raise awareness of risk and promote behaviour change amongst this population. The narratives reported: low/inconsistent condom use; intentional risky sex with customers by HIV-positive women; inability to negotiate condom use; widespread STIs; unwanted pregnancies and abortions; police and venue managers failing to use condoms when having sex with women (including with many women within the same establishments, some of whom are HIV-positive); customer resistance to or unfamiliarity with condom use; unwillingness amongst women to be tested/never having been tested, despite being known to be at risk; becoming aware of HIV-positive status not through testing, but only once health declines; stigma associated with attending services offering testing; and ,critically, very limited opportunity for health education amongst those working/living within establishments.

Condom use across all types of sex worker was reported to be either non-existent or inconsistent, with customers, managers, and police forcing sex with sex workers without condoms, and sex workers reporting few/poor negotiation skills. Women reported being likely not to use condoms with customers, especially if more money was offered, and very few women reported using condoms consistently, even when aware of the risks and able to access condoms.

“Her friend caught an STI and she had so many difficulties, she couldn’t let her husband see the medicine. She has two sponsors and so she is not using condoms with them and that is why she got an STI. She can’t persuade her husband to use condoms so she went to a health clinic [MDM] and got medicine but she didn’t give it to her husband.” **Phone contact sex worker, Yangon**

Factors influencing lack of access to or use of condoms included: lack of information about HIV risk; managers’/owners’ failure to supply condoms on premises, motivated by higher rates charged for unprotected sex; and restrictions placed on mobility, which prevented those in venues from accessing condoms easily.

For street-based sex workers, the fact that the police used condoms as evidence of sex work acted as a barrier to condom use. This suggests that inconsistent condom use by sex workers is associated with the criminalisation of sex work, and poor police practices, including harassment.

Alarmingly, the PRs also discussed during the analysis workshop women known to be HIV-positive intentionally engaging in risky sex with customers. They reported that it was common for women to feel angry and resentful that they have contracted HIV and so want to punish men/customers.

Concern was expressed by PRs at the lack of awareness of risks and low condom use amongst their peers. They reported that women in many venues did not have access to information on how to prevent infection, and that the only information available to them is passed on by other sex workers. Some venue owners were reported to be reluctant to allow access to PEER Educators and other NGOs working on HIV prevention into their establishments.

“The new manager provides condoms but he doesn’t like it if there is anyone coming to give education to sex workers – the managers worry that if that kind of prevention people come then the police will follow them so that worries them.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

While some respondents reported access to condoms within venues, sometimes facilitated by the venue manager/owner, others reported limited access to services and testing. Some sex workers in venues reported regular trips to clinics for testing, facilitated by NGOs or their managers, but for many, regular testing was not easy, as movement outside the venue was restricted. This was especially the case for women working in brothels, who reported problems accessing services for any kind of medical problem.

Women reported high rates of STIs and HIV amongst their peers, and reported that women who were aware of their positive status continued sex work within venues and on the street.

“There is one girl at our place who is positive but they don’t discriminate against her and they treat her well and sometimes she works as a sex worker.” **Street- and brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

Stigma associated with attending services for HIV/AIDS was reported amongst women in Mandalay, who were keen to avoid being labelled as HIV-positive as a result of attending a service. Women feared being discovered to have attended a service for testing: people in the community might gossip, and competing sex workers within venues might spread rumours about their HIV status to reduce their popularity with customers.

Women frequently reported injury to their genitals (increasing risk of HIV) and reported not knowing where to go for treatment: self-treating, applying powder or penicillin to the genitals, was reported.

Pregnancy, emergency contraception, and abortion

Although some women reported use of contraception (such as pills and injectables), frequent and repeated use of emergency contraception was reported, with women reporting taking double doses to ensure termination and consuming pills ‘like snacks’. There were numerous accounts of women who had had unwanted pregnancies, and consequently abortions, and had faced serious health problems or died as a result.

“Mostly they don’t use condoms; this is what I have heard. Some girls get pregnant and then they have abortions. I heard there was a girl who passed away because she was trying to make abortion. She kept taking medicine and it affected her health and she died. There is one girl who had sex with a customer and she became pregnant and then she tried to destroy the baby and later she was sent to the government hospital and she died. When she died it became a problem

because the people from the hospital came to the KTV to find out who had made her pregnant and to do an enquiry about what had happened but the customer said he didn't know this girl was trying to have an abortion and he didn't know she was pregnant - they didn't charge him or anything they just questioned him." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

Access to services

Women reported many barriers to their accessing the health services they required; those living in venues found access particularly problematic. In addition to the discrimination experienced by women (see Section 4.3.2), sex workers reported that long working hours and restrictive rules on leaving their workplaces limited their mobility and ability to access health services.

Some KTVs were reported to provide a free monthly visit by a (male) General Practitioner to the venue; however, women were treated largely for common ailments rather than those related to SRH, and reported a lack of support from their managers if they experienced health issues outside this monthly visit. Women reported using private clinics for other issues – especially those related to SRH – and rarely reported using government clinics.

"We went to a local NGO – like a small clinic – not international – not government. ... You have to wait for a long time but the service is good and they treat us OK. Sometimes they go to another clinic – a private clinic that is open at night – but it is free of charge and you can go in the day time – it is for anyone. You only have to pay 200 just to register and other services are free of charge. ... In the government hospital it costs more money so they try not to go there."

Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay

"Mostly she goes to the private clinic – at KTV if they are sick or if they want to go outside they can go on Saturday or Sunday but on weekday they can't go outside after noon. If they have health problem the manager will bring a doctor to see them." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

PEER Educators and organisations like MSI and Population Services International (PSI) are also able to access some KTVs, to raise awareness HIV testing, to provide transportation to HIV-testing services, and to offer incentives for having been tested. However, many establishments were reported to deny access to PEER Educators or NGOs.

"She goes to MSI and MSI usually come to the brothel as well and MSI also refer to government hospital. [Interviewer: Has she ever been there?] She hasn't been – just to MSI for blood tests – she has been only one time to MSI for a blood test. [Interviewer: What was her experience like?] They gave counselling and gave education and treated her well." **Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon**

"She went to MSI clinic and PSI clinic and their services are free of charge and really great and she really hopes that this kind of support can be provided by organisations. It will really support to change their lives." **KTV worker, Mandalay**

Another reported barrier to seeking treatment at government clinics, or receiving the full treatment required, was that women were obliged to provide personal details such as registration information.

“Government service asks for lots of information – like registration information. ...They feel afraid to give them their personal details.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

4.4.6 Lack of support from actors in the lives of sex workers

Women were asked who in their lives helped them to solve their problems. Other than ‘*nobody – I solve my own problems*’, the most common response was sponsors. In return for regular sex and companionship, sponsors can provide: reliable, regular financial support or housing; emergency financial support (in the case of family death, illness, or arrest); one-off payments of a large sum to leave sex work/start new business; and high-value items, such as mobile phone cards, which reduce risk to sex workers. Other sources of support, aside from friends (other sex workers), were mentioned infrequently.

“Mostly they talk about their sponsors. They don’t say much about their families. As long as they provide money to their family there is no problem. Sponsors support sex workers if they have a problem or need money. Some sponsors are close with them and know some of their family and provide as much money as they can.” **Message-based sex worker, Yangon**

“We did not have a permit granted for our land so my neighbours told the authorities and they announced it in the paper – this was a big problem for us. This was why I was working at the KTV and I met a guy who I had a relationship with for about one year – he was a customer who helped to solve this problem – he gave us money and because of this we were able to get the permit and build a new house.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

As the quote above shows, since women often provided the main or solitary source of income for their families, and often faced difficult financial situations, sponsors were seen as the only individuals with the means to solve FSWs’ life problems.

Other non-regular customers were mentioned, but whatever support they were able to provide was not seen as important that given by sponsors. In a few cases, women talked about the importance of the emotional support provided by ‘boyfriends’, but as explored in Section 4.4.2, women also recognised that these relationships were unreliable, and, to some extent, exploitative, since these men often relied on women’s income to support them.

“When she feels sad or disappointed her boyfriend calls her and takes her to the lake and lets her shout as much as she needs to and encourages her to talk about it.” **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

It was not surprising to find that, given their often-problematic relationships with family (including parents and husbands), women often cited their closest forms of social support as their friends (other sex workers), and, to a lesser extent, boyfriends. Friends (other sex workers) largely provided social support, such as sharing experiences, talking about problems, and having fun, to relieve the stresses of their lives with family or at work. Importantly, friends could also collectively provide financial support when a sex worker was arrested.

"When I go and visit to her she is happy and she talks about her feelings, ... she always talks about that she wants to work with me and she is not happy working there. ... My friend introduced me to her and we became friends when she came to apply in my shop first."

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

"She likes to go out with her friends because only her friends understand her. Even though she is at home she wants to meet with her friends and they are also sex workers. I also feel like that – I want to stay with my friends [sex workers] because we can open our feeling and understand each other." **Street-based/phone contact sex worker, Yangon**

"She phoned her friends to see if they could lend her the money and her friends collected money to give to the police and the police accepted and told her not to do that kind of work but didn't arrest her – but mostly she has to deal with it herself and can't borrow from friends." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Other more functional types of support/problem solving provided by friends/other sex workers were cited in these narratives, although it was recognised that this type of support could not be relied upon. Most often, this was through information, for finding work in different establishments or finding/passing on clients (although sex workers often charge each other for this service).

"I said you should have some friends who are working as sex workers and then you get more information about which places to work that are safe for you. She should try to make friends with other people in the place she stays – don't isolate yourself. We are working as sex workers – we need to be OK with our neighbours and we should be sensitive about our behaviour towards others." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

In some individual cases, women supported each other to cover debts and health expenses when health staff would not treat one of their peers. Women working on the street also reported the use of strategies developed with friends to reduce risk from arrest or abuse by a client.

"She is on the street so she needs help from her friends – sometimes one sex worker has been arrested by the police and other friends cannot solve the problem and if they get arrested from the police they can ask for help from the SWiM office – they can help them escape from the police station so she needs to ask her friends to help with this." **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

However, sex work often involves high levels of competition for clients' attention, or between sex work locations, and support between sex workers was not always reliable. Women were likely to have a small number of close friends but to be wary of other sex workers outside their close network, who might cause trouble for them.

In Mandalay, taxi or motorbike drivers were seen as a source of functional support: for instance, helping them to escape arrest or find clients, although this usually involved a financial transaction.

Family (especially mothers) and government services (and community leaders) were reported to provide support, resolving conflict with others in the community. In-laws and other family members frequently provided support with childcare, often on a full-time basis.

“Only her mother solved the problems, the one who sent her to the brothel. For example, if the neighbours talked badly about her, [her mother] is ready to fight them.” **KTV/street-based sex worker, Yangon**

“Some family members help to solve problems. Also some community leaders. But this is not always. Just in some cases. ... It is mostly mothers. ... An example is if the sex worker is fighting with others and the mother will say please stop fighting with that person, you are a sex worker so we will always lose, we need to forgive and stop fighting with them.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

For women living in venues with limited mobility, bosses were the main potential source of support (excluding other sex workers). Such support was largely legal or financial, although sometimes related to resolving problems with clients; in most cases, however, the boss was reported to take the customers’ side.

Friends who were not sex workers, other family members, or people in the community, including husbands and NGO workers, rarely featured in the narratives. This is not surprising given that the community is often reported as a source of discrimination.

“She knows that other people in her neighbourhood know she is a sex worker and she wouldn’t ask for any help from people in her neighbourhood because no one would help.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

4.5 The Future for Sex Workers and Their Aspirations

This section explores the feelings women have about being sex workers, their aspirations for the future, and reported barriers to leaving sex work.

4.5.1 Feelings about being sex workers

PRs asked their friends about perceptions of the lives of sex workers, which in some interviews included talking about their views on continuing or stopping sex work. This is a sensitive question, as sex workers are often severely stigmatised for their profession, and it is thus difficult for them to talk about the advantages (as well as the difficulties) that sex work may have for them.

In many of the narratives, especially those of street-based, brothel-based, and more experienced/older women, respondents appear highly distressed and depressed about their current lives, and nearly all women reported wanting to leave sex work were other feasible livelihood options available to them.

“Why did I become a sex worker – what kinds of bad things did I do in my previous life to deserve this?” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

“She cannot say how she feels about being a sex worker. Nobody likes sex workers. If she had a good husband or a good family to support her then she wouldn’t be a sex worker. She said only she can know her feelings.” **Street-based sex worker, Mandalay**

Women reported finding the social isolation and stigma that they experience very upsetting (see Section 4.3), especially from friends, who often are cited as one of the few reliable forms of social support that they have available.

“I have depression and I have no more friends. Sometimes my friends hide from the view of police man and other authority and she feels depressed and they all want to run away from this work.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

While some women were resigned to being treated badly because of their status as a sex worker, others were indignant at the injustice of the discrimination and stigma experienced when sex workers are suffering to support their families.

“People never treat sex workers well. We are not like other girls. We are not teachers or lawyers. We are sex workers and even though we can look after our families and our babies other people look down on us.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

“When women are working as a sex worker they feel that they are not the same as other girls working in other employment. For this reason she feels grief and sorry for themselves. When they compare themselves to other girls they feel that they do not get the same rights. [Interviewer: Did she tell any story about this?] Her friend said that sex workers are girls like any other girls and would like to get the same rights.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

However, one instance in which women did express job satisfaction was having the income to support themselves, their families, and their dependents. For others, the thought of their own daughters becoming a sex worker like them provokes feelings of worry and sadness. For many, although being a sex worker causes feelings of shame and disappointment, the desire to provide for children and/or family provides the motivation to continue. Others recognise the opportunity to pay back debt and to support their family and so feel more positive. As explored above, for many women, one of the main motivating factors for entering sex work was being able to support their families.

“She does not want to work as a sex worker but she is doing this work because of her family. She is not happy to work. She plans to stop this work when she gets enough money for the future study of her children. She has hope upon her children. It is the happiest time for her when she can buy food and clothes for her children and her parents.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

“She doesn’t want to work this job and she is finding money for her family and her mother and her medical fees – but she is pleased she can support her family but would rather not be doing it through this work.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

A small minority of younger women, working mainly in KTVs or less likely in massage parlours, expressed more positive narratives about their lives as sex workers. In some instances, women (in KTVs only) gained enjoyment from having disposable income, or being able to afford to look fashionable. Appearing to be well dressed and looked after would also confer social status that sex workers find hard to access through other means.

“Even though she is now working in KTV sometimes she works as a street-based sex worker – she enjoys it when she gets lots of money – that is what she enjoys about it. She works on street to get more money – so if she goes to a beauty parlour she can do more treatments and she likes to use good brands which is why they need more money – most girls from KTVs are like this – they like new clothes, good brands.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

“She would like to do this work because it is very free, at home parents tell her what to do but karaoke work is very free and she enjoys it. She said she has a boyfriend too and sometimes she has sex with her boyfriend too.” **KTV worker, Mandalay**

4.5.2 Aspirations for the future

The most common aspiration cited by women for their future was to continue to earn enough income to cover their expenses. While women expressed a desire to leave sex work, they also recognised that they were unlikely to earn sufficient income in non-sex work, and that this was an unattainable dream rather than an achievable goal. As a result, reported intentions to leave sex work were low. Every aspiration presented by women was accompanied by a plethora of barriers to its achievement; for many, their aspirations in life forced them to remain in sex work.

Many women’s aspirations were focused on their children, aspirations which both bound them to their positions and motivated them to leave sex work. Women reported aspiring to stop sex work so as to preserve their children’s dignity and reduce discrimination against them due to their mother being a sex worker, yet providing for and educating their children was their priority forcing them to remain in sex work.

“She plans to leave this work when she gets enough money for the future study of her children.”
Street-based sex worker, Yangon

Despite evidence to the contrary, the most commonly cited aspiration, and plausible route out of sex work, was seen to be securing a long-term sponsor(s) or a husband who could support them financially. Women were therefore often not motivated to leave sex work until they had secured a suitable sponsor or husband. Older women reported that once a woman had one sponsor she would aspire to gain more (and with them, more income, more security), meaning that she would continue to work as a sex worker.

“They hope that if they meet someone who can marry them – because they know a sponsor might not last for a long time – so they want a partner who understands them and can support them and would like it to be official but it happens very rarely – not an official wife – most are ‘keepings/mistresses’ but even in this case they might not need to work in KTV anymore.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

“She thinks that if she gets a sponsor who can support her lots of money she will leave this work.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

Key themes related to women’s aspirations to leave sex work and pursue another career emerged from the discussions. Women favoured self-employment, such as starting a small business (e.g. sewing, selling food, fabric or livestock) presumably because this would provide a daily wage. Others talked about working in a beauty store, as sales girls, or becoming brokers (e.g. of jade or land). Some women reported aspiring to receive money from a sponsor to set up a business or to buy land/jewellery as an investment for the future.

“If she can get enough money for her family she will stop. She wants her own business – she wants to call her siblings together and she wants to hire a house so they can stay together and she wants to open a fabric shop. She feels it isn’t safe for her two sisters to stay with the stepfather. She is supporting all these people but she can save money still from her earnings – she has been working for more than one year so she has saved 30,000 per month. She thinks she needs to save more money to open a fabric shop because fabric is expensive to buy so she needs lots of money. She wants to pay for her siblings’ school fees. ... She knows two girls who saved enough money and left but they didn’t have big families to support so they could save money quicker. One is opening a shop – sewing and she is selling sewing machines and one is opening a mobile shop.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

“She wants to stay with her family and do work with dignity like selling commodities. She doesn’t want to stay in the KTV anymore and wants to live with her family.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

There were some examples cited of women being entrepreneurial, with concrete steps taken towards achieving their aspirations – for example, lending money to others with interest to pay for training, saving money to start a business (such as opening a clothes shop to sell clothes on credit to KTV girls), and opening a KTV and a beauty parlour.

“She plans to try to work outside of sex work – she thinks she will move to another town and will open a small beauty salon. A customer bought her a plot of land a few years ago and the price of land has increased and she made a profit from it so has some savings.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

Young women in KTVs reported a lack of aspiration or thought for the future, displaying a short-termism based around the excitement of having disposable income (for clothes, perfume, or make-up). Many young girls entering the KTV from their villages had limited awareness of potential means of earning an income outside the KTV.

For those living away from their home town, returning to their home town or village was often an aspiration but many women felt that this wasn’t an option for them (see Section 4.5.3).

“One of my friends though that if she can save some money – like 30 laks from a sponsor – then she will go back to her native town and will sell clothes and fabric in a small market.” **Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay**

4.5.3 Barriers to leaving sex work

Financial barriers, including debt, supporting family members, the inability to save money to invest in a small business, the inability to earn as much in other line of work, and/or a dependence on a daily wage (rather than monthly salary), were the main barriers to leaving sex work cited by many respondents.

“She wanted us to know that she is not doing sex work for fun – she is not happy. Sometimes she is able to save some money but then there’s a problem like she has to pay the police and then she loses her savings again so she never saves enough for her business ideas and she said she isn’t just supporting her family, she is supporting the police.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

“She cannot escape from this life, because of her family. Everyone in her family depends on her income. There is debt and she needs to pay back money. She also has the responsibility for the studying of the brother and sister. She is the only one person who is supporting the family. That is why it is impossible to leave sex work.” **Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon**

A key barrier to leaving sex work is the awareness that their earning potential in other livelihoods is limited; the understanding that women have a limited window of opportunity in which to earn at this level also encouraged them to pursue sex work for as long as possible. Some younger women working in KTVs perceived the other livelihood options available to them as harder work than their current role. Other employment options (such as looking after other sex workers, manual labour, or working in retail) are low-paying and menial, and women said that they would only consider such work once sex work was no longer viable.

Other commonly cited barriers to leaving sex work included bureaucratic barriers, such as not having the required documentation. For some, this was a perceived barrier; others, however, had tried to push forward with the process of obtaining documentation but could not afford the charges for documents at the government office (which were cited as being higher for sex workers than for others in the same community).

“As a street-based sex worker the police already know her name and my name is also on the list already. And if she does another job she can’t earn as much money as if she is a sex worker. If she wants to apply for other work mostly the owner would ask her for two recommendations – one from the community office and another is from the police station – and they also have to show an NRC identity card and some don’t have this card. To get an identity card you need to show your family registration – you have to own a house or a family member must own his house and many sex workers don’t have this and can’t get this. Most employers will need proof of where someone lives and will ask for these documents so she doesn’t get another job and stays as a sex worker.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Legal barriers, such as risk of arrest due to being blacklisted or known as a sex worker, were also often cited as an important barrier.

“She feels that she is on the blacklist and even though she works in another place her name is still on the blacklist until she dies. ...The police are always watching them and even if they are doing good things they’ll still arrest them and because of money too – I’d need to earn enough money in another place to leave sex work. Even though they are doing different things the police won’t believe them so will still arrest them [once they leave sex work].” **KTV worker, Yangon**

Thwarted livelihood opportunities, through lack of education, skills, or training, were also seen to be a key barrier.

“She would like to stop this work but she has a lack of education and in the past her home had enough money and that is why she doesn’t have any experience of working in other fields.” **KTV worker, Yangon**

“She knows she won’t be able to find a job that pays as much because she didn’t finish school.” **Massage-based sex worker, Yangon**

Women that were known to be sex workers reported discrimination from people in their community and potential employers as a key barrier. Those recognised as sex workers in their ward found that people distrusted them, would not give them work (e.g. as a maid), and did not want to buy goods from them.

“It is not easy to leave this work. She opened a betel shop once but some women from the neighbourhood did not let their husbands buy at her shop. Another work she did asked to check her blood so she’s doing sex work again.” **Street-based sex worker, Yangon**

Some women reported a desire to move to another ward, where they were not known as a sex worker, or to go back to their home village, and perceived this as the only route to move away from sex work. However, they worried that it would become known that they were previously sex workers, that landlords would refuse to rent to them, and that others would refuse to give them work. Women cited a variety of barriers to their moving wards: lack of documentation required to make such a move (i.e. family registration and ID cards); presence on the blacklist; insufficient savings to start up a business; poor employment options in the village; lack of health services; and perceived discrimination and feelings of shame were their previous work to become known to the community.

4.6 Support to Change: Sex Workers’ Suggestions

Women were asked what would improve their lives or help women to move out of sex work. The key areas covered to improve the lives of sex workers include: legal reform/police behaviour change (a priority for street- and brothel-based women); improved working conditions in venues (a priority for KTV- and massage-based sex workers); harm reduction/risk prevention information, strategies, and services (a secondary issue raised by some women – largely those who were HIV-positive or part of SHGs).

For those wanting to move out of sex work, the following themes were covered: training/vocational support; financial support; and guidance, direction, and role models. These key themes cut across all categories of sex worker. Responses are summarised in Tables x–y and discussed further in Sections 5 and 5.1: Conclusions and Recommendations.

4.6.1 Improving the lives of sex workers

Legal reform/police behaviour change

Table 4: Proposed legal reform/police behaviour change

	Proposed change	Quotations
Harassment/abuse and exploitation by actors in legal system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actors in the legal system (police, judges, prison officers) should not take bribes/money - Police should pay for sex – not take it for free - Police should use condoms and set an example to others - Police should not be violent and abusive to women (no gang rape, beatings, threats) 	<p><i>They say if you give us this amount of money we won't arrest you and then they do. At the police station they say give us this money then we'll help you get released – it is unfair to release those that can pay and not those that can't and then the family members come to visit to girl and they take their money to talk to the girl.</i></p> <p>Street-/brothel-based sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>Police should pay like other customers – not expect sex for free – but they take advantage – they are police.</i></p> <p>Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay</p>
Arrest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No arrest without evidence – women should not be arrested based on history/suspicion (stop blacklist) - Evidence should not be fabricated or altered - Condoms should not be used as evidence for arrest - Police shouldn't have sex with sex workers after arrest 	<p><i>If she stops working as a sex worker she wants police to not arrest her based on her past.</i></p> <p>Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay</p> <p><i>If police arrest in the day they change it to night at the police station. ... Sometimes we're just sitting at a tea shop or waiting for a bus and they arrest us without evidence.</i></p> <p>Street-/brothel-based sex worker, Yangon</p>
Sentencing/changes to legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sex work should be legalised/made official/decriminalised/immunity card/licence - Sentences should be reduced or fines given instead of imprisonment - Sentences should be consistent and not based on bribes - Customers should be punished as well as sex workers (mixed views) 	<p><i>It would be great if there would be no arrests for sex workers, if police can understand they are like other people who work and don't take any action this would make their lives better.</i></p> <p>Street-based sex worker, Mandalay</p> <p><i>She recommended that there should be a licence for sex workers because then it would be safer, they can be respected like other working people and would have protection from the police.</i></p> <p>Independent/street-based sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>Sentences should be applied consistently and should be reduced because they destroy families when women are in jail for so long.</i></p> <p>Street-based sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>She wants no punishment for either sex worker or customer because if the customer is punished they won't come.</i></p> <p>Independent/phone contact sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>She would like to feel safe and would like equal treatment from police as customers. The customer initiates it – it isn't only one side so they</i></p>

		<i>should face punishment too</i> Street-based sex worker, Yangon
Treatment in prison	- Want same treatment as others in prison (no bribes)	<i>They are treated badly in prison. Some sex workers give money to prison officers so they don't get beaten by others and if they don't pay money they cut off their hair and beat them. This should stop.</i> Street-based sex worker, Yangon
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The law should protect sex workers exposed to violence - Women want more information about their legal rights and the law on sex work - Women want information on whom to contact for help with legal problems - Women want advocacy to police about protection and rights, to help police to see them as equals 	<i>She wants the right to report to police if she is beaten – the same as other girls.</i> Street-based sex worker, Yangon <i>Police should have a more positive view of sex workers because even though they are working as sex workers they are normal people with normal problems supporting their families and they shouldn't arrest them whenever they want to.</i> KTV, Yangon

Improved working conditions

Table 5: Proposed improvements to working conditions (venue-based sex workers)

	Proposed change	Quotations
Ensure protection from police	- Boss should pay police as required to avoid raids/arrest	<i>If an owner wants to have this kind of business then they need to take responsibility and have a close relationship with the police.</i> Street-/brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay
Provide protection from customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Woman should be allowed to choose/refuse customers - Boss should vet customers so women are protected from 'bad customers' - Boss should help resolve disputes with customers, either taking neutral position or supporting the sex worker - Boss should put in place rules to protect women (no sex on premises, no groping etc.) - Should have waiters/security to protect them from abuse from customers 	<i>She wants to be able to choose customers – she wants that right.</i> Massage-based sex worker, Mandalay <i>The boss should decide whether to allow the customer to go with the sex worker and should know which customers are good and which are not and should ask the sex worker if they are happy going with the customer so she has the choice and the boss should tell the customer to treat the girl properly and the boss should have rules like they should not have sex in KTV or touch the girls' bodies in KTV and if they are broken the customer should be thrown out.</i> KTV, Yangon <i>She wants her boss to decide fairly when there are problems between customers and girls.</i> Massage-based sex worker, Yangon <i>She wants the owner to stand and take responsibility from her side if she has a problem with a customer.</i> Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay <i>She thinks that the manager, waiter, and security can help them to be safe when they face problems – they can help them by running to her.</i> KTV, Yangon
Access to health services/risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boss should negotiate condom use along with customer when sex transaction is initiated - Should allow/support women to get tested 	<i>She thinks her boss should explain to the customer to use condoms instead of the girls having to do it when they're in the room together.</i> Massage-based sex worker, Mandalay <i>She wants other girls to know about health education. I always request that the customer uses a condom. People should not discriminate against people who have HIV. Should not send to prison for many</i>

reduction	regularly - Should allow women access to health services when needed	<i>years. People's perception is that these are working as a sex worker so they are bad people but she doesn't want people thinking like this.</i> Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon
Improve employees' rights	- Should be paid more, on time, and full amount owed - Bosses' cut should be reduced - Should receive sick leave - Should have fixed hours instead of being on call 24 hours a day, and have specified hours to rest - Equal opportunity, i.e. same number of customers per women - Should have right to make request to boss without being afraid - Should have better food provided	<i>She wants the boss to give her money on a fixed day not whenever he wants to.</i> Massage-based sex worker, Yangon <i>The boss does not give the correct amount. She would like the boss to be fair.</i> KTV, Mandalay <i>She would like to get sick leave like other employees.</i> Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon <i>She would like fixed working hours at the massage because it is open 24 hours so she needs to be able to have a break and sleep – not just work whenever a customer wants her to work.</i> Massage-based sex worker, Yangon <i>For other girls [who work in department stores and other jobs] if they want to say something to their manager they can say openly and don't have to be afraid.</i> Independent/phone contact sex worker, Yangon <i>She wants rice and curry – now she only gets rice.</i> Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon
Freedom of movement	- Should be able to leave the venue	<i>The boss shouldn't tell them that they cannot go out – like leave the premises.</i> KTV, Mandalay
No abuse/violence by boss	- Boss shouldn't beat women	<i>Some owners of the brothel beat the girls – she doesn't want this – girls should be treated nicely</i> Street-/brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay

Harm reduction/risk prevention information and services

Table 6: Proposed harm reduction/risk prevention support

	Proposed support	Quotations
Increase access to risk reduction information	- More PEER Educators needed in venues to share information about HIV/STIs - HIV/AIDS awareness raising on importance of condom use, testing, and treatment is required - Condom negotiation skills required - Access/share information with hidden populations of sex workers - Risk reduction information on alcohol abuse required	<i>Many girls don't have knowledge about condoms in the community and they don't know they need to take blood tests regularly. They are mainly street girls – young girls – the just sit in the tea shop and have no information about condoms. I try to give peer education to these girls but they won't listen – they won't give me time to listen. Girls who are HIV-positive and can't get other work and want to leave sex work.</i> Street-based sex worker, Yangon <i>I would like all girls to have awareness training on condoms – how to use condoms – how to protect against STIs and how to stop getting pregnant. Some won't even touch a condom. They should use them not be scared of them. ... She wants to know how to persuade customers to use a condom – how can she make a customer accept using a condom?</i> Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon <i>All sex workers are not at the same level – some are students but they work as a sex worker and some work as other employees but sometimes work as a sex worker. Some are models but they also work as a sex worker. These girls have more risks for their health because</i>

		<p><i>they sometimes don't use a condom – they don't know about HIV so much as others. They pretend that they don't know about condoms because if they request to use condoms they worry that the customer will look down on them. So they often don't use them. They pretend they're not sex workers.</i></p> <p>Massage-based sex worker, Yangon</p>
Increase access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness of services available to sex workers - Bosses should allow access to health services - Drop-in-centres should be open 24 hours - HIV-positive sex workers want to live with other HIV-positive women to provide support 	<p><i>All sex workers should be able to access organisations and should know how to contact them because most have a lack of knowledge and they move between the workplace and home only and don't spend time elsewhere. If a girl knows how to access organisations then she can get information at the health centre and get blood checks – some NGOs do tests for HPV but most girls don't know about this or that they can get these services for free.</i></p> <p>Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon</p>

4.6.2 Support to enable women to leave sex work

Table 7.1: Proposed training/vocational support

	Proposed support	Quotations
Training alone isn't enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training needs to be accompanied by opportunity to gain practical experience not just skills - Training should provide equipment or loan to take forward training 	<p><i>Organisations should provide work for sex workers with a daily wage – there are some organisations that provide training but just for skills but they don't provide money to invest – to start a new business so they also need money – training isn't enough. They need a job or money to start a business.</i></p> <p>Street-based sex worker, Yangon</p>
Training needs to be relevant and accessible to sex workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transport and accommodation costs need to be provided - Training needs to be at a time when sex workers can attend (difficult for venue-based sex workers with limited mobility) - Sex workers can't afford to lose income when attending training so reimbursement to attend training needs to be provided 	<p><i>They would like to get vocational training – like sewing and make-up artist training and even though this kind of training is supported they need transportation costs and also accommodation to stay in.</i></p> <p>KTV, Mandalay</p> <p><i>It is impossible for sex workers to attend regular training because they have problems at home and they can't give their time.</i></p> <p>Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon</p>

Table 7.2: Proposed financial support

	Proposed support	Quotations
Loans/microfinance schemes to start a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start-up loans required to set up small businesses - Loans for women without ID 	<p><i>She wants only money to do her business as a seller in a wet market. She wants only this. She needs capital to start this business.</i></p> <p>Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay</p> <p><i>There is one group in the place where she lives where women can borrow money but she can't access it because it is only for women who have</i></p>

business	card/family registration/fixed abode	<p><i>always lived in this place and she moves from place to place so can't access it.</i></p> <p>Phone/street-based sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>They would like to get a loan because they have heard that some organisations provide microfinance like World Vision but not for sex workers but for other people in the ward but they would like to get them too but they need to show the family registration form and ID card like that so we would also like to get this help. She doesn't have ID card or family registration. ... She never tried because she heard from others that there are many steps to get a card and make registration. Most don't have ID card – only a few sex workers.</i></p> <p>Independent/beer-seller, Mandalay</p>
Savings schemes	- Trusted mechanisms for saving are required	<p><i>Some organisations provide some self-help groups where women all pay into a group then one person can borrow the money and pay very low interest and then the next person can borrow. There are groups like this but not for sex workers because people don't trust sex workers. There should be these groups for sex workers too.</i></p> <p>Massage-based sex worker, Yangon</p> <p><i>Some don't dare to go to the bank – they don't trust it. ... If an organisation decided to save their money without interest they might trust ... even without interest they might trust the organisation – because they don't trust other people. Sometimes at the bank they need to wait for a lot of time to pay money in – if an organisation can provide an easier way to save than at the bank they might save more and trust more.</i></p> <p>KTV, Mandalay</p>
Support to get required documentation to enable employment	- Support to get IDs cards – financial and practical	

Table 7.3: Proposed guidance/direction/role models

	Proposed support	Quotations
Role models as motivators for change	- PEER Educators or other ex-sex workers who can act as motivators/positive role models to encourage women to leave sex work	<p><i>When they hear about girls who were working as sex workers and now they are working in a new life it motivates them – they feel impressed and they admire her and want to be like her.</i></p> <p>KTV, Mandalay</p> <p><i>This friend admires one person who was a sex worker previously and also had one son. This lady tried to save money every month and budgeted and then she was able to stop sex work. She tried to apply for work with an NGO as a peer educator. ... She tried to only spend that salary and now this lady has stopped sex work and she stays with her son and looks after him well. She also encouraged her [respondent] to escape from sex work: 'If you have a will you can escape – please look at me. I have done it.' Whenever she sees this lady she feels happy because she looks OK and in the mornings she takes her son to school and then she goes to work and then in the evening they come back together and sometimes the lady teaches her son and they look very stable and settled.</i></p> <p>Street-based sex worker, Mandalay</p>

5. CONCLUSIONS

Women working as sex workers across all categories of sex work in Myanmar are exposed to multiple forms of exploitation, abuse, violence, risk, isolation, and exclusion from a range of actors both within and without the sex work industry. As a result, women working as sex workers are denied basic human rights and are excluded from opportunities, services, and social support available to other members of their communities, which further compounds their marginalisation and vulnerability. This research has highlighted the complex ways in which FSWs are controlled, exploited, and in turn, assert their agency over their lives, relationships and work.

This research report found that:

- **There were complex drivers of entry into sex work:** a strong driver was the need to provide financial support for family members. Many women said that they were the primary or solitary income provider, supporting husbands, parents, and siblings to continue their education. A combination of underlying factors (poverty, supporting the family, limited education), combined with a trigger (debt, medical bills, relationship breakdown) and an enabler (a friend in sex work, recruited by a broker, family initiation) resulted in women starting sex work.
- **Specific social issues, such as debt, alcoholism, violence against women, and unaffordable health expenses, featured prominently in the narratives:** entry into sex work was often precipitated by complex social problems (such as alcohol and a violent husband), or by a crisis (such as high levels of debt or a health crisis).
- **Recruitment networks were pervasive and widespread:** women were often directly recruited from within their communities once their social problems were known. Women who had decided to enter sex work often found information on how to do so with relative ease.

Once in sex work:

- **Women were highly distressed by the levels of stigma and discrimination that they often faced within their communities:** women often tried to keep their profession secret; however, once their work was known, they were often excluded from social events, faced difficulties renting or finding places to live, and found stigma directed at their families and children.
- **Working conditions in all sex work venues were poor:** in sex workers' workplaces, conditions were harsh, with long working hours and strong restrictions on women's movements. Managers and owners of venues often confiscated sex workers' ID cards, documentation, and clothes so that they would be unable to leave venue premises. Conversely, venue owners/managers were often the only source of support for sex workers, for instance, in refusing to provide sexual services for a violent or drunk client, or enforcing condom use (in a minority of cases).
- **Women faced high levels of abuse and exploitation within sex work:** women had limited mobility or access to social support, and faced threats of abuse and violence from police,

clients and venue owners. Many women reported having experienced gang rape, and/or having to offer free sexual services to owners and the police. Women had little or no recourse for exploitation or abuse, except in a few cases in larger KTVs, where owners used connections to protect sex workers from arrest.

- **Women had poor access to legal services:** women often seemed to expect that in cases of conflict or abuse, they would have little support from local authorities, because of the stigma attached to their profession.
- **Individual debt featured strongly in the women's lives:** debt was often exploitative, with parents borrowing money against women's future work, thus putting them into debt bondage to owners/managers. Women reported living hand to mouth, and saving money for future plans to leave sex work was often said to be hard to do.
- **Women's sexual and family relationships were often exploitative:** in many cases, families, husbands, and boyfriends expected sex workers to provide for them financially. In many cases, male partners stopped working to rely on their partner's income.
- **Women were frequently arrested without evidence:** women's previous work as sex workers (being named on the police blacklist) meant that they were at constant threat of being re-arrested, with evidence falsified or carrying condoms used as evidence of sex work. Police routinely abused their state-bestowed powers to perpetrate financial exploitation (through demanding bribes), sexual violence and abuse, and psychological humiliation.
- **Criminalisation of sex work has resulted in the denial of basic human rights for sex workers:** women often reported that they had few means of restitution because of the law on sex work.
- **There were high reported rates of violence during periods of detention:** women reported having to pay bribes to reduce sentencing or avoid persecution in detention, as well as high levels of physical and sexual abuse at this time. Sex workers found periods of detention particularly difficult, especially when they had to make arrangements for childcare for long periods of time while in prison.

Trying to leave sex work:

- **Sex workers had many aspirations to leave sex work:** however, in many cases, the fastest route to leaving was widely perceived to be waiting for a generous sponsor who would support them financially (though this is often unrealistic).
- **There were many barriers to leaving sex work:** this included sex workers' lack of education and skills, the low pay of alternative forms of employment, and women's high levels of financial responsibility within their families.
- **The use of blacklists directly prevented women from leaving sex work:** frequent arrests, disclosure of their profession, and use of blacklists even after women have quitted sex work directly prevented them from leaving. In addition, women were at times required to produce specific documentation (such as references) so that they could find new employment, something they found impossible to do once their profession was divulged.

5.1 Recommendations

The findings from this study have been used to generate recommendations that will be used to inform CARE Myanmar's and SWiM's SMP programme to:

- empower sex workers
- advocate for change to the way sex workers are treated in their communities, and
- advocate for change to the punitive legal and policy frameworks which surround sex work and women's empowerment.

From the findings of this report, it should be clear that addressing the situation in sex workers' lives will require complex interventions with a wide range of different stakeholders, addressing the legal, policy, sociocultural, and structural processes which marginalise and exclude sex workers. These include:

- Addressing widespread stigma and discrimination towards sex workers, which were found to have a strong negative impact on their private and work lives
- Advocating for legal and policy reform, to a) decriminalise sex work, and b) mainstream addressing sex workers' economic and social empowerment within other gender-based policies
- Developing joint plans to work with local decision makers and duty bearers (including local authorities, police, penal, and legal staff) to address the processes which marginalise sex workers from legal services and restitution, including training, informational, and accountability approaches
- Focusing on specific areas of work with the police, including training and policy reform, to address a major source of exploitation and abuse towards sex workers
- Developing policies and practices which can improve workplaces for sex workers, using a firmer regulatory framework
- Supporting and empowering sex workers to have better access to services (health, legal, and other).

In the immediate future, and in the current absence of a legal framework that supports the empowerment of women in their daily lives as sex workers, the following actions are recommended:

- Use the results of the PEER research to humanise narratives around sex workers, shifting the perceptions of them as 'bad women' to an understanding of them as supporting their families in difficult circumstances
- Engage with government leaders and authorities – commune council leaders, lawyers, police, and others – to address high levels of discrimination and punitive practices which harm sex workers
- Raise awareness of sex workers' rights, as women subject to violence, citizens prevented from accessing services, and workers with rights in their workplaces
- Continue to advocate for legal reform so that sex workers are no longer subject to exploitation and discrimination.

Detailed recommendations for stakeholders are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Detailed recommendations for advocacy and accountability to empower sex workers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMMENDATION 1: Addressing widespread stigma and discrimination towards sex workers, which was found to have a strong negative impact on their private and work lives 	
All stakeholders	Continue to advocate for review and reform of laws that promote exploitation, stigmatisation, and isolation of, and violence and discrimination against, sex workers. Furthermore, in the immediate future (and in the absence of substantial legal reform), government leaders and authorities need to take decisive steps to address the stigmatisation of sex workers in their workplaces and daily lives
	Address stigma of sex workers in communities by humanising sex workers using in-depth empirical evidence from research studies that show the strong and important role that they play in supporting their families' livelihoods
	Raise awareness of the rights of, and challenges faced by, sex workers, and promote equal and respectful relations between men and women
Men/clients of sex workers	Promote alternative masculinities not associated with control and dominance over women, address ideologies of sexual entitlement, promote equal and respectful relations between men and women, and raise awareness of Gender-based Violence (GBV) against sex workers
	Raise awareness of SRH, including HIV/AIDS and STIs, and promote safe sexual practices among men
	Target trishaw, taxi, and motorcycle drivers for raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, STIs, and condom use, and support services for sex workers, encouraging them to distribute condoms and contact details/cards for services
IOs/NGOs/donors and national government leads	Promote and support existing sex worker community-based programmes for rights-based programming, crisis intervention, and community legal services
	Encourage donors/NGOs/Community Support Organisations (CSOs) to work with human rights groups to support and protect sex workers' rights through their programming
	Ensure regular and effective coordination/cluster meetings for NGOs/CSOs working with this group, with all key actors attending and sharing information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMMENDATION 2: Advocating for legal and policy reform, to a) decriminalise sex work, and b) mainstream addressing sex workers' economic and social empowerment within other gender-based policies 	
Law-makers, parliamentarians, and	Decriminalise sex work, in line with CEDAW statutory obligations and those outlined in NSP II

others	Inclusion of a commitment to improving sex workers' places of work, in line with other national policies seeking reform to improve women's economic empowerment (such as NSPAW)
	Address specific practices which result in sex worker's disempowerment and marginalisation, including use of public order offences to arrest women for sex work, lack of enforcement of guidelines which prohibit the possession/use of condoms as evidence of sex work, and support for women to seek restitution for abuses. Use advocacy and accountability approaches to develop the political will to address these key issues
	Integrating elimination of violence and discrimination against sex workers into NSPAW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECOMMENDATION 3: Developing joint plans to work with local decision makers and duty bearers (including local authorities, police, penal, and legal staff) to address the processes which marginalise sex workers from legal services and restitution, including training, informational, and accountability approaches 	
Penal system staff	Deliver training/advocacy to judges and lawyers to 'humanise' sex workers, and raise awareness of GBV against sex workers, and their lack of basic human rights (could be included as part of migrants training)
	Deliver training so that legal/penal/enforcement staff understand sex workers' rights to use legal services and gain restitution for abuses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECOMMENDATION 4: Focusing on specific areas of work with the police, including training and policy reform, to address a major source of exploitation and abuse towards sex workers 	
Police authorities (in collaboration with CSOs/sex worker organisations)	Work with police/prison service to identify areas of interest for training/advocacy and to develop a joint, agreed training plan to ensure buy-in at senior level, acting as a springboard for covering key issues identified below
	Provide group education targeted at female officers to humanise sex workers and break down attitudes that result in violence, abuse, and bullying
	Advocate to police to follow police rules/procedures and to improve practices around sex worker arrest (including not using public order offences or possession/use of condoms to make arrests)
	Remove police quotas for arrests made for sex work from crime statistics to reduce incentives to arrest sex workers
	Improving official police record-keeping so that all reports of violence against sex workers made to the police are followed up and action is taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECOMMENDATION 5: Developing policies and practices that can improve sex workers' workplaces, using a firmer regulatory framework 	
Leading agencies for workplace policies/ women's empowerment, venue owners, sex worker	Develop guidelines for venue owners for improving working conditions, including occupational health and safety, responding to violence against sex workers in the workplace, reducing risk of HIV/STIs, and raise their awareness of human rights in the workplace
	Lobby and raise awareness amongst venue owners, in order to: encourage

CSOs, NGOs/IOs providing social services	regular blood tests and availability of condoms and lubricants; build positive norms around condom use by sex workers and clients, and; support sex workers to negotiate condom use
	Lobby venue owners to provide access to harm reduction information on HIV/AIDS, STIs, pregnancy and abortion, cervical cancer, and alcohol/drug use/gambling, including allowing access to peer educators, regular access to services and information within venues, and hosting awareness-raising events with NGOs within their establishment to promote condom use and reduce risky behaviours
	Lobby venue owners to support sex workers in condom negotiation with clients, through implementing and enforcing venue rules on condom use and/or negotiating on sex workers' behalf with the client
	Lobby venue owners to allow entry to peer motivators (ex-sex worker role models) to provide guidance and life coaching for sex workers (especially those in KTVs and massage parlours) on their future (e.g. reduction, alternative livelihood strategies for the future, managing relationships, services available to sex workers, such as vocational training, start-up loans, or savings schemes, and development of life-planning and budgeting skills)
Sex worker CSOs, NGOs/IOs working with sex workers	Build women's negotiation and relationship skills (including condom negotiation)
	Continue with and supplement health prevention messaging on HIV/AIDS and STIs (especially the importance of consistent condom use and regular testing) with awareness raising of other risky behaviours, such as alcohol and drug abuse, and gambling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECOMMENDATION 6: Supporting and empowering sex workers to have better access to services (health, legal, and other) 	
Sex workers	Raise awareness of sex workers' knowledge of, and ability to, exercise their basic human rights
	Build sex workers' understanding of due process and their legal rights, and build sex workers' capacity to report violence
	Facilitate women's access to social services and justice through improving awareness of services available, sign-posting from a wide range of agencies, and highlighting case studies through sex worker forums and peer motivators
	Encourage dialogue between the sex worker community and judiciary/legal system to use legal mechanisms to protect their rights as workers and seek justice for violence and discrimination
	Build partnerships and dialogue mechanisms between sex workers and police to promote greater respect and trust
	Promote awareness of services available to women, including GBV services
	Support mechanisms for sex workers to share their experiences and develop trust disclosing information, including violence, such as mutual support networks (including expanding SHGs for sex workers beyond those

	for HIV-positive women)
	Train peer motivators (ex-sex worker role models) to provide guidance and life coaching for sex workers on their future (e.g. risk reduction, alternative livelihood strategies for the future, managing relationships, services available to sex workers(e.g. vocational training), start-up loans or savings schemes, and development of life-planning and budgeting skills)
CSOs/IOs/NGOs/ donors and government leads	Provide a helpline for women exposed to violence to encourage reporting of incidents by sex workers and to link them with legal/other support services (e.g. SHGs)
Economic empowerment/skills- development agencies	Encourage partnership between training/vocational skills-building programmes and businesses/employers to provide work experience opportunities for those receiving training
Health staff, managers, and decision makers	Encourage the introduction of anti-discrimination policies to health facilities
	Support health workers to understand their attitudes towards sex work, sexual orientation, and gender identity to better understand sex workers and their rights, and to promote delivery of non-discriminatory services (including privacy)
	Support the development and implementation of guidelines for effective referral between services, such as sex worker organisations and health services, the police, NGOs, women's shelters, and women's human rights organisations
	Set up systems of redress for poor quality of care and discrimination, and restitution

APPENDICES

ANNEX I: PEER RESEARCHER QUESTIONS

Demographics:

Place of work

Age

Number of years in sex work

Relationship status

Number of children

Education – number of years in school

Yangon – three interviews

Theme 1: daily life

1. What do other women like us say about their lives?
 - a. Difficulties
 - b. Enjoy?
2. What do other women like us say about their families/husbands/boyfriends?
 - a. How do they support them?
 - b. Do they work? If not, why not?
3. How do women become sex workers?
4. How do other people in your neighbourhood marginalise/discriminate against women like us?
 - a. Peers
 - b. Leaders
 - c. Family
 - d. Government services, i.e. health
5. Who solves the problems of women like us?
 - a. How?
6. Please tell me a story about what we have talked about today

Theme 2: experiences in the work place

1. Which places do women prefer to work and why?
2. What are the difficulties that women face in the workplace?
3. How do bosses treat women?
 - a. Help/support
 - b. Difficulties/problems
4. What difficulties do women face with customers?
 - a. Payment
 - b. Gang rape
 - c. Satisfaction
 - d. How to prevent/stop these problems?
5. What difficulties do women face with the police?
 - a. Abuse
 - b. Arrest
 - c. Taking money

- d. Taking sex for free
- e. How to prevent/stop these problems?
- 6. Please tell a story about what we have talked about

Theme 3: change

- 1. What do women like us say about how safety in the workplace can be improved?
 - a. Who can help?
 - b. How can they help?
- 2. What do women like us say about the rights women want in the work place?
- 3. What do women say about how they would like the law on sex to change?
 - a. What would women like to know about the law?
- 4. What do women say about how they would like police to treat them differently?
 - a. Why?
- 5. What do women like us say about what stops women from leaving sex work?
 - a. Blacklist
 - b. Income
- 6. What do women like us say about what help women want to leave sex work?
 - a. What types of help?
 - b. From who?
- 7. Please tell a story about what we have discussed above

Mandalay: two interviews

Theme 1: daily life

- 7. What do women like us say about how women become sex workers?
- 8. What do women like us say about how women feel about being sex workers?
- 9. What do women like us say are the main difficulties faced in their daily life (life outside work)?
 - a. Family
 - b. Husbands/boyfriends
 - c. Debt
 - d. Alcohol/drugs
- 10. What do women like us say about where women go if they encounter:
 - a. Health problem – and what are their experiences?
 - b. Legal problem – and what are their experiences?
 - c. Violence – and what are their experiences?
- 11. What do women like us say about how other people in their neighbourhood marginalise/discriminate against women like them?
 - a. Peers/other sex workers/friends in neighbourhood
 - b. Leaders
 - c. Family
 - d. Government services, i.e. health
- 12. What do women like us say are the main difficulties faced in their working life (life at work work)?
 - a. Customers
 - b. Police
- 13. What do women like us say about which places women prefer to work and why?

Remember to ask for an example/story for each question

Theme 2: working conditions and change

7. What do women like us say about how bosses treat women?
 - a. Help/support
 - b. Difficulties/problems
 - c. Debt
8. What do women like us say would make their working life better?
 - a. Safer?
 - b. Fairer?
 - a. How?
9. What do women like us say they would like police to treat them differently?
 - a. Why?
10. What usually happens to sex workers when they are older?
 - a. In sex work
 - b. After sex work
11. What do women like us say motivates women to leave sex work?
12. What do women like us say stops women from leaving sex work?
 - a. Blacklist
 - b. ID card and family registration form – if mentioned, ask do you know women who have tried to apply? If so, what were the main difficulties faced with the application process?
 - c. Income
 - d. What plans do you have?
13. What do women like us say would help women to leave sex work?
 - a. What types of help?
 - b. From whom?
 - c. Examples of women who have left sex work – how did they do it?

Remember to ask for an example/story for each question

ANNEX II: ARCHETYPES

These archetypes include narrative data from different women by each type of sex work venue, illustrating the difficulties that they commonly find in their daily personal and work lives.

Archetype 5: Brothel-based sex worker (Yangon)

She lived with her step father and mother. Her stepfather cannot earn money. She is the only one who can support the family. Her mother and stepfather always fight. They fight about not having enough money. The stepfather is drinking all the time. This disappoints her. Her stepfather spends lots of money. He also uses other peoples' money. If he needs it, he borrows money from others. People cannot get the money back from him so they ask her to pay the money back.

She has a good relationship with her mother, but a bad relationship with her stepfather. The stepfather beats the mother if she cannot give him enough money to drink alcohol. Her mother is not in good health. At first her mother did not know that she is a sex worker. When her mother found out she asked her to stop, but because of the family problems her mother accepted that she does it.

She used to be married. Then her husband married another woman. This is why they had to divorce. Before the divorce the husband supported her and their child. He worked at a factory exporting fish. Now he does not support her at all.

There were other sex workers in her street that helped her become a sex worker. She started working in a brothel but also worked in the street in the past.

Since her mother is not in good health and the family has debts she needs money. She needs to pay to creditors about 150,000 kyats. Each morning she needs to pay 3,300 kyats to the creditors before 10 am. It must be paid over two months but an ID card (National Registration Card) is needed to borrow the money from this creditor. They must give their ID card to those creditors until they have paid all the debts but she does not have an ID card, so they have to hire another ID card from another person. She had to give them 10,000 kyats for a two month hiring charge, and she also needed to give the broker (some money) as he is the link between her and the creditor. So she gave him 10,000 kyats for 'pocket money'. She is afraid of him because he has treated her very badly. If she cannot give the cash in time to creditors, she says he will threaten her and will break everything in their house. So, if she borrows 1 lakh²¹ from the creditor, she ends up with only 80,000 kyats, because 20,000 kyats is needed to pay to this broker.

She feels like there are benefits to working in a brothel. Girls in the brothel help each other. If the owner does not give them money – the right amount of money - then they talk all together to the owner. Sometimes the girls share condoms with each other, sometimes if they get some information or health education they share with each other what they have heard.

On the whole the owner helps the girls in the brothel. If the police intervene, the owner will negotiate with the police and solve the problem. The owner of the brothel is a woman who used to

²¹ 1 lakh = 100,000 kyats, which is equivalent to approximately £64.

be a sex worker and sometimes still is for regular customers. Not all brothel owners are like her owner. At the brothel place she feels safer and on the streets you cannot know who is a good or bad customer. In the brothel if there are any problems between the customer and the girls the owner will tell the customer to go and take his money.

But not all owners of brothels are like this – first they say they will give money for 15 days, but they do not pay them and some owners take the whole money from the customer and do not give any to the girls and some owners are violent – they beat and kick the girls if the girls don't follow what the owners are saying. She met one girl who told her about how an owner had abused a girl and tried to stab her and also his brothers were cutting her and cut her all over her body but finally the police arrived and arrested the owner and her brothers and finally the girl died. This owner is really bad, she didn't provide food or anything for the girls, the police arrested the owner and she died in prison. The girl died due to the injuries, and after hearing about this she was really frightened. The girl who was stabbed did not want to work as a sex worker anymore and that was why they attacked her.

She used to be a street-based sex worker, so she can compare. Working in her current brothel is much better than other places she has worked. Working in the street was difficult. The police would often arrest you and she spent time in prison for around a year. As soon as she was released she went back to working as a sex worker because her family needed money. Also when she worked on the street, she had the experience of being forced or tricked into situations where she had to have sex with groups of men who did not want to use condoms and sometimes did not pay her. In the brothel she feels much safer and she has worked there for many years. The brothel owner stops difficult customers abusing her. Most brothel owners do not protect the girls from the police, but her brothel owner is ok, but she owes the brothel 3 lakhs and so it is difficult for her to leave the brothel because she will not be able to pay this back. She doesn't live in the brothel although some women do – so she can stay with her family and son outside of the brothel.

She feels it will be difficult for her to move out of sex work in a brothel. If she did this she would be noticed by police who know she was a sex worker and arrest her using code 3a, 3b or 3bb. The police will arrest her, and have arrested her, without evidence. The law they use to arrest you is based on how they feel at the time and is not based on a fair or just system of using the law. The police can do some demeaning things.

She experiences discrimination at many levels of her life. The police discriminate against her as soon as she is outside the brothel. Customers behave in a violent and disrespectful way on the streets. Women in her neighbourhood dislike and prefer to not be associated with her feeling that their reputations might be tarnished. Women that were her friends formerly have excluded her and ignore her. Other sex workers can be competitive and dismissive if they are better looking than she is. She has experienced discrimination in government services. For instance, health providers will put gloves on, sometimes two pairs, to inject her but will not do so with other patients.

Archetype: Brothel - Mandalay

When she arrived to Mandalay she met one lady who told her that there is a job at a beauty salon but you do not need to give money, she said you can learn about make-up and hairstyle and they

will give you on the job training. She is from a village so she had never been to a beauty salon and the lady actually took her to a brothel and the lady took two lakhs from the owner of the brothel and left her at this place²².

She did not realise yet that it was a brothel because the first lady said sleep tonight and the next day you will go to the salon. On this day the owners of the brothel asked her to sleep with a customer, so she realised what had happened to her. The next morning the owners of the brothel brought her to have breakfast outside and then they walked around the ward and two or three times and she did not understand why they did this and later she realised they were showing off a new girl. At night many customers came because they knew a new girl had arrived, because she is pretty and the owners of the brothel began to notice that because of her many customers came so they are reasonable to her. The next day the girls from the brothel said to her you will begin to know later that even when we go outside to eat at a noodle shop people will discriminate against you. Now the other people in the community do not know but they will find out and then they will treat you badly. She also had an experience where one day a customer came and told the owners of the brothel that he would like to have sex outside with her friend and he took her to a field in a small hut and the another friend also came and it was very far away from the brothel and it was dark and she was frightened and she did not want to refuse and they also asked her to have anal sex with them and then they left her in the field and did not bring her back to the brothel. She could not get back to the brothel and had to wait until morning and she tried to get back to the road.

Another friend stays at the same brothel and a customer came to take her to a guest house and after having sex with a customer the police came, and she felt frightened and said he is my boyfriend, and she said she is not a sex worker but one police asked the boy and the boy said she is a sex worker and that he had to pay 20,000 kyats to have sex and they released the customer but arrested the girl and she was sent to prison for 1.5 years and they charged her with 3a. Police usually check at night for temporary stay so they went to the guest house to check people who did not have temporary stay, and when they asked them separately if the answer is the same there is no problem but the police used to check temporary stay.

One day one customer brought her to a place on the way to where the festival for nat²³ is and he took her on a motorbike and another three men followed behind the motorbike and she thought they were travellers going the same way so she was not afraid at first, but later she realised they were part of the same group and she asked the man who was driving her, "please stop now, you said only one customer and I know you are the same group" and he kept driving at high speed so she jumped off the motorbike and her face hit the road and was bleeding, and when the guys saw she was bleeding on her face they ran away and left her. Later the other travellers found her and these people said that they would take her to hospital but they were worried at the hospital that they were involved so they explained that they just found her and that they were not involved and then they (the hospital staff) asked for her registration details and she did not say the true address because she worried that if she told them the true address they will begin to know that she is a sex worker. When she was hospitalised, she worried that her husband did not know where she was. She

²² 1 lakh = 100,000 kyats (equivalent to approximately GB£63). 2 lakhs is thus equivalent to £126.

²³ 'Nat' is a spirit. Spirit worship, often in conjunction with Buddhist beliefs, is commonly practiced throughout Myanmar.

could not tell him where she was because she lied about her address so she could not ask them to contact her husband and so she tried to run away from the hospital by hiding in a trishaw and there were still some tubes in her hand because they gave her antibiotics. The next day she went to private clinic and said she had fallen over but she still has some scars on her face.

The police ask for money from the brothel owners but sometimes the owners says they will pay them on another day and they have to serve the police free of charge. If the police have to have sex they always choose her because she is pretty and the police say to her you must treat me well because if you don't I will arrest you here or on the street wherever I see you. They threaten her. The police say to her please tell me if you have any problem. The police like only her but she said this is a problem for her because they always choose her she has to have to have sex with that police for free whenever they come. This police never ask the owners for money but other police come and ask the owners for money. This policeman just comes to have sex with her for free. This police man also told her that he has family and wife but he will keep her like a 'keeping/mistress' and provide her a place to stay but you must stop this work and I will come to see you and provide all your costs, food and everything, but you must stop.

Now when she did a blood test she found out that she is HIV positive. Her child is still in the village with her mother.

The owner of the brothel gives favours to the girls who have many customers, and then if that kind of girl wants to take money in advance they lend her money and if she wants to send money to her family she can, but they won't let her leave the brothel because she has to be there for customers so she saves money and has to send but cannot visit her family. At the brothel place the owners take their identity cards and sometimes the girls at the brothel do not have customers and they have to wait there.

Her family do not know she was a sex worker and she told her mother know that she is working in a restaurant and that she has her own room and is selling clothes and nobody from her village knows that she is a sex worker.

Some owners of the brothel are not ladies. Some are both husband and wife and if the man wants to have sex with a girl the girl has to have sex with him. The owner of the brothel keeps a record of how many customers and sessions they have per day and then they pay them after 15 days and sometimes on the 15th date they try to postpone and they don't want to give them the money and sometimes they delay until a month and then they do not pay them all the money they owe them. Sometimes brothel owners ask the police to arrest a girl if he owes her money. The girls cannot talk about it to the police and another thing is they cannot go out from this place because they need to get their money so they're always waiting for their money so they end up staying there for longer to try to get their money.

If the girl is arrested the owner does not take responsibility and most owners are like this, they do not come to the police station. If a girl is arrested and sent to prison for one year, the owner will know which day she will be released from the prison and on this day the owner will come to wait for her at the prison. The owner will say we have been trying to enquire about (your case), but we lost

contact, and we just heard about you a few days ago, so we came to wait for you so please come back with us. The girl does not have anywhere to go, and she does not want to go back to her village or town, so she works with them again as a sex worker.

Some come from the KTV because they have got older and at KTV they cannot get a customer anymore. When they get older they do not know what kind of work to do, so they come to the brothel. Not all girls are from KTV. Some are divorced women and they do not know what to do so they go to the brothel. Some come from the street. There are many different types. Most street-based workers are old ladies but at the brothel the young girls have more chance to get customers, even at the brothel, because the customers like the young girls compared to the old girls. Mostly nobody trusts sex workers, even though they would like to change to a different work like to wash clothes but other women worry that they will persuade their husband to have sex with them, so it is impossible to get other kinds of work and so mostly they are still working as a sex worker. It is impossible to work again in the ward in other good work because people already know about them and in their attitude they always think they are bad women.

Most do not have any motivation to leave. Some have children and babies and they want to stop this work, but for them it is not easy to work in other work and it is impossible to go back to their native town because they do not know what kind of job to do, and some already know that they are sex workers. So they do not really have any motivation to leave.

Outside it is not enough to earn a salary of 40,000 kyats because other work has a very low salary and it cannot cover their rent, room and other costs of living. Another reason is that this work is not like other general workers where the work is very hard. They are very tired, and they need to give all of their time and energy like in construction but sex work is not like this, it does not make them as tired compared to other work. Sometimes they admire other people but they think that they are already sex workers and nothing can change this and so they think this is their luck to be sex worker so they do not try to stop sex work anymore. And another reason is that even though they would like to marry a good man who can support them and even if they say they will try to live well nobody will believe them. They assume that no man would officially marry them and support them and be good to them forever. Also, for example, most men would keep them as a mistress/keeping so not as an official wife so they will not be treated well. So they feel they cannot escape and they really admire families who are working together and who have children and they would love to have this kind of life.

She hopes that someone would introduce her to other work without saying her true history and if so, she might get another kind of job because people would not know about her and would accept her, but she does not think this will happen because when they begin to know about her they would not trust her - she hopes that if she could get this type of help she would change. She can move but to move she would need enough money to rent a room, and if the landlord began to know about her past he would not want to rent a room to her. She has an ID card but does not have family registration and another thing the police can arrest anytime, because they already have a blacklist, and if this happens the police will harass the landlord and ask them did you know she is a sex worker.

My friend said I do not have any plans to work in any other kind of business. I will be a sex worker until the end of my life so you can ask me questions anytime because I will always be a sex worker.

Archetype 3: KTV

My friend said she does not want to work this job, but she does it to provide an income for her family. My friend is not educated and that is why she started this work. She has a big family with many members, some are working but some cannot so they asked her to bring money and they know her work can bring in more money than others. Most people in her family depend on her. She supports her family as much as she can, but she sometimes feels like she does not want to support them anymore. She has two younger brothers and one sister and her brothers are still studying and her sister is working in industry making clothes, but this is not enough to support the family. She could not finish school so she could not easily find a job and she was finding a job and she met with a lady and the lady persuaded her to become a sex worker. She said if you cannot find a job and you need lots of money for your family members you have to do this job because it will earn you lots of money. The lady heard that she was looking for work and came to find her.

In the beginning her family did not know she was a sex worker but sometimes she did not come back home some nights and they began to know. When they found out she was a sex worker she explained to her family that she is working to support them and that she is the elder sister, and this is why she is doing this. They did not say anything else about it after that, and they allow her to do it because her father passed away some time ago and there is no one to lead the family. They do not have enough money and her mother had borrowed money and she needs to pay it back.

My friend said that every girl has her own story. She has a friend who has older brothers who were not working much and were drinking and gambling so she started at the KTV. Since she started working in KTV, the other family members have stopped working, and she has to support her whole family. She feels really disappointed about this. She knows another girl who said she does not need to give money to other people like her family, so she can spend the money she has. Her boyfriend knows she is working as a sex worker, he told her not to work as a sex worker but she likes to spend lots of money so she carries on working as a sex worker. For another, during Cyclone Nargis time, the girl's whole family passed away. She was alone. She had no income. Then the brokers took her to a KTV place.

Another friend at her KTV had a husband but he seriously abused her so they broke up. At the time they divorced she was pregnant but she did not know it. She had no family, no mother, brothers or sisters. She is alone. After 5 months she resigned from that KTV. Then she did not work anymore, just looked after her daughter. She saved money when she worked, and then she used this to support herself when she resigned. But now she works again in KTV and has done so for 3 years. My friend said that KTV is more suitable for me because I get tips. It is possible to earn more than other work places. In massage, you only earn money from each session, which must be tiring if you need to earn lots. KTV girls are earn more than massage girls and it is easier because it is only entertainment for customers such as only to sing, only to treat the customers nicely. When they like her, she can get more tips from them.

My friend said that she thinks that some KTVs are better than others. For some girls you can refuse or choose clients but in others you cannot if the boss tells you to go you go. At some places the boss just sees the money but not the girl. They do not care about her choice and sometimes she is tired and does not want to have sex but the boss just wants the money and forces her to have sex with the customer. Also, the bosses do not treat the girls equally. If the girl has many customers then (the boss) likes her, but if she has less then will not treat them equally. Also it depends on the customer. Some look bad, so the boss will not make them have sex with the customer. It also depends on the mood of the owner and sometimes you cannot refuse because the boss assigns her to a customer. Her friend is not ok with the boss because she wants to be able to refuse but the boss does not like this and dislikes her. Sometimes she does not do what the boss assigns but then he has said to her that if she refuses too many times she will not be able to work anymore at his karaoke so she sometimes has sex with men she is assigned.

Her owner does not put pressure on them to go with customers without a condom. Some KTVs are not like this, the owner says we are giving you money so you must follow what I tell you. If the customer does not accept to use a condom she will tell the boss and next time she will refuse to go with that guy. The boss accepts this and will ask another girl to go with the customer. It depends on the girls' choice. He will find another girl.

Mostly girls are not allowed sex with customer during working hours. It has to be after, but if they do allow it then the owner takes the money back from the girl or takes some of it back. The customer needs to get permission from the boss. After sex the customer gives the money to the girl and then the boss counts the time, how long they were off site and then the boss takes a note of the time and when the girl comes back the girl gives the money to the boss and the boss gives her some back like if it was 15,000 kyats then he gives her back 5,000 kyats. The girl cannot lie because the boss has fixed the price per hour for all the girls. If he fixes the price then everybody is the same price. So the girl knows how much she has to give back to the boss. After hours she says it is up to us what we charge the customer and we can keep what we earn but the boss will not help if we have a problem with a customer outside of working hours.

My friend said that if the girls are in trouble they can ask the boss for money in advance, and then they would take it from their salary or keep a tab. Most girls owe the boss some money like 1 lakh. Sometimes police come into the KTV and ask for money not to arrest the girls. The girls do not need to face the police directly, the police just talk to the boss and he sorts it out and pays them. In one township there is one police and he knows who the sex workers are and he asks each girl to pay him. The price is not the same, it depends on where the girl works and if they work in certain places the police will ask for more. Like the police knows if she works in a KTV and what the price is and knows what kind of customers she is having so knows how much to ask for. He knows from the informers. The police ask the informer to watch the girl so he knows when the girl goes out and what she is wearing and where she is going.

My friend said that when she is outside, at night, some police ask her if she is with a customer. The police ask her where she works and she says "I work in a KTV" and then the police do not take her money. He goes to the KTV and her boss gives him money. This isn't the case for other (girls). For other girls from other KTVs they are arrested even if the owner gave money to the police probably

because the KTV does not have a license. One of her friends told her that one day, a police called her “Hey! You are a sex worker!” and arrested her. When she saw him she remembered that he met with her for sex. She also told her that the police have quotas and sometimes they arrest us and lock us up according to this quota. She said it is up to the owner to pay the police to release them and sometimes owners do pay but other times not.

Sometimes police come to the KTV and she has to serve them. This means she cannot leave the room. She cannot even go to the bathroom. She must serve them the whole time. Sometimes it takes about 4 or 5 hours. During this time she cannot see any other customers so for this day she does not get any money. If you do not want to serve the police you have to, you cannot refuse. Sometimes girls ask policemen for tips but then the police say, “would you like to be arrested, or would you like to go freely?” The boss treats all police free of charge because if they are not satisfied and they have power to control his KTV. Most of KTV shops have no license.

It is safe in the KTV. They provide a room for her to stay there if she wants to but they cannot have sex in KTV, they have to go to another place. The KTV is just for entertainment so they can only drink, etc so they just meet the men there and go somewhere else, like a guest house, for sex. Some customers at the KTV give a tip for service, like 5,000 kyats, but the owner does not give a tip to the girls. But if the owner does not know the customer is giving a tip then she can keep it and get more money. The owner provides food and drink but the salary is low, only 10,000 kyats for one month. Some bosses do not give us time off and always ask when we want to take time off. The owner is close to her, but he is not good to all girls. If the girl is good and behaves well then they have a good relationship.

One friend she knows at first she worked at a KTV and then the regular KTV is only a little bit of money so it cannot cover her family and then she met one customer and had sex outside and then later on that customer became a regular customer and then he found other friends of his who became customers to have sex with. So later on she just worked through phone contacts. Now she is not working at KTV, she has the contacts of her customers from the KTV. She worked at the KTV for about one year but her income did not cover her family’s needs. She has about four or five regular customers and then she has rich/high profile guys and there are about 4 or 5 of them. Her current situation is that she becomes closer with the customers so she asks them to get her more customers and sometimes a customer will give 50,000 kyats for one time. My friend is very pretty which is why she can ask for more than others.

My friend experiences discrimination from the neighbours. They look down on her. The neighbours know that she goes to work at night. They know that she leaves the house at night. They talk about her. But my friend says she does not care. For her it is more important for things to be okay with her family. She does not care when people discriminate against her.

My friend says that by working as a sex worker, it is easier to get money compared to other kinds of work. For example if she will work as another employee, she can only get her salary at the end of the month. But as the sex worker, she can get money daily. Moreover she does not know herself that what kind of other work she can do except to be a sex worker. She thinks that if she gets the sponsor

who can support to her lots of money, she will leave this job. She wants to open small shop in front of her house.

Archetype 4: massage

Her mother sent her to the massage. Her mother is always spending money all the time and does not save any money. Her mother had a friend and she knew the massage place and so from that lady her mother sent her to the massage and she went to earn money for her mother. At first, she was not paid, so she was afraid that she would not be paid but her Mum had already taken the money from the boss. She wanted to go back with her Mum so she said “please have me back” to her mum but her mum left her there. She said, “I was thinking of so many ways to run away from this massage but I did not have any money so I couldn’t run away. I was thinking of jumping from a tall building. I dare not to die this way so I slept three days in one room (in massage) and I did not know what to do, crying, sleeping and thinking for three days. Where I was sleeping one lady at the massage died because of an abortion and I was sleeping in the room and the other girls saw the ghost of the girl who died sleeping with me and that ghost gave a dream to me about her, and I think she had been raped by one customer and she told the boss about it but the boss didn’t believe and so she had an abortion and died.”

She told me that after three days at the massage a ‘waiter’ came there to make her face beautiful, and he introduced a customer to her and this customer was a really big customer – a giant – the boss told her to serve this customer and in the massage there are lots of rooms, they have underground rooms also and this guy called her to the underground room and tried to rape her and she struggled. He was really big so she couldn’t get away so she shouted for help. Someone was there and they pulled the guy away by his legs but I couldn’t see who it was and they pulled him to the stairs and the person let him fall down the stairs. So she was really afraid now and really crying. The boss asked what happened and I explained to the boss that he tried to rape me and that someone pulled him away about I did not see who. That guy had to go to the hospital, he had a bang to the head and his eye was coming out. The whole night the boss was scolding me but other sex workers told the boss that I am a small girl and that guy is big so think about it! That guy asked the boss for money for his hospital costs for his injuries and the boss got angry and scolded me again and he told the police and the police came to investigate and the guy told the truth, that he tried to rape me and at the time the boss realised that there is a ghost in the massage place.

For other girls at the massage, at first they worked in industry, then they looked for another job. My friend worked in industry for two years and at first she thought her income would cover the whole family but she really did not know it was not enough. She got about 80,000 kyats per month. Industry work is not okay because the salary is not enough to cover the whole family’s expenses. Then a friend told her about a massage parlour needing people. Her friend told her that it is just pure massage. In the beginning you don’t know that the work will include sex. Later you begin to know. Then you continue to work there. For some girls, they are not safe living at home so working in massage means they have somewhere to stay and they get food.

In some massage the boss lets you have sex with customers but in others the rule is that you are not allowed to have sex with customers, but girls do. The boss turns a blind eye to it, he pretends he does not know.

In my massage, the shop name is just 'the beauty store'. It has 5 rooms and room 1 – 5 is closed type with only one door and from 6 to 20 rooms are only with a partition. Some want to take a rest so they go to another room and some want to have sex so they take rooms 1 – 5. For one normal session the shop takes only 3,000 and I get 500 kyats but for sex the girls can ask the money as they like from the customer.

Some customers do not want to use condoms. I don't understand why they don't want to use them. I try to request that they use condoms but if I cannot persuade them I will have sex without a condom. Sometimes the customer says if you will not use a condom I will not have sex with you and gets another girl but with the next girl he uses condoms and she thinks it is because he doesn't want to agree to her request. The owner does not speak directly to the customer about condoms but the owner provides condoms and tells the girls to be aware of condoms.

When a customer refuses to use condoms the boss takes us to MSI to check our blood every three months. When we see our results we know we do not have (HIV) and it is such a relief and we feel like we are safe. But then we have to accept another customer who does not want to use (condoms). The boss provides enough condoms and he takes the girls to the health centre every two months. I think my boss should explain to the customer to use condoms instead of the girls having to say it when they are in the room together. Some customers are really young and it is difficult to explain to use condoms. Sometimes I already know the customers because they call in advance and when we know that customer is coming we can use a female condom but sometimes they cannot prepare ahead.

Some customers abuse me like pulling my hair, being rough. At first one customer said he would like to get pure massage service but in reality he tried to have sex with me. Then after, in front of the owner, the customer said I didn't give massage well and blamed me. The owner thought I was lying and on that day I cried a lot. The owner said you girls lack education so no more complaints, you all must do what I say because with your education you cannot get you better work or employment. But I talked back to the owner and said I got 9th Standard and the owner said "if you don't treat the customers well you can't come back, you should resign". My friend assumes that there might be a problem between customers and their wives. She doesn't know what kind of problem but when the customer comes to the massage room they always treat them bad, so there may be problems at their home.

I want my boss to decide fairly when there are problems between customers and girls. The boss should be in the middle, neutral rather than taking the customers' side. I want a chance to choose the customer, and discuss with my friends which customers we want. There are lots of girls in the massage so the boss can't take care of every girl. The boss says that I have lots of girls I can't look after all of you so if you have some problems in massage I can solve it but I can't help with your other problems.

The boss will not let us outside and I want to go outside more regularly. I think the boss should give us more time to go out. We have to work for three months and then we can go home and take a holiday for about 10 days. We are allowed to go out if we want to go to a festival or pagoda but we have to go at 5am so other people can't see us, they send us all in big car together. There are two

helpers and we can ask them if we want something from outside. The two helpers have to be paid by us 1,000 kyats each month, from each girl. There are about 30 girls.

We are really busy and every night at about 11pm every girl has a customer. There are two girls who keep saying why are we shut up here we should speak to the owner and tell him why are we locked up here and then they discussed with each other and some would like to take leave after one month to go back home but they have not said yet to the boss. Mostly I stay in the work place because when I am home the people in the neighbourhood always talk and look at me and say bad things. For me I never make myself look beautiful when I stay at home.

I didn't know when I started the job, I didn't know that I wasn't allowed to go outside so I went outside for some food and the police brought me back to the massage because the relationship between the police and the owners is close and they thought I was trying to run away. The owner said 'why did you go outside?' and I explained that I didn't know I wasn't allowed to go outside. On that day the owner gave money to the police and the owner was angry to me and told me to pack my clothes and leave and I thought I had to leave and I packed my things and thought they were going to send me back home, but my mother had taken money from the owner in advance. Before I was going to leave the owner said "don't be stupid you are not really leaving your mother has a debt so try to work hard and save some money for yourself" and now the relationship between me and the owner is good. The owner also asked me if I have any plans to leave this job one day and I said yes if I can get some money I would like to leave.

At the end of the night the owner asks is there any problems at your home? Do you need money in advance? And if we request she gives money in advance which is really good. My friend has some debt to the owner – at least 2 lakh - she took 50,000 kyats to send to her mother and then she needed some money for herself. She is worried and will try to give back the money, all of the tab, and then after giving all money she will discuss with her friend what should she do next. She cannot leave until she has paid it off. There are some other girls who owe money to the boss. They begin to have a tab because their parents come to the workplace and ask for money from their boss and this is how their tab starts.

Although I can get a regular income I would like a workplace where I can earn more money. Also, the food is not good at my place. The curries are not good and I hope to have better curry and to have at least three times a month but no curry in a month is really bad.

Sometimes the police come to the massage to inform them that they plan to make some arrests and at the time they close the massage. The police inform the owner. Nobody thinks that massage is just massage and so they target massage places. The owner gives money to police regularly but even though they do this sometimes the police do not inform the owner and they come to arrest the girls suddenly.

Sometimes the police ask for money from the boss and at the time they don't pay a session fee and they have sex with the girls too and they don't treat them politely. They say rude things to the girls. Some police do not give any money and want to have sex without a condom. The police should know better! Sometimes when the police come and ask for money from the boss the girls are sitting near

the boss and the police look down on them. I want the boss to set some rules for the police. I would like the police to pay session fees like other customers.

I know that I won't be able to find a job that would pay enough because I didn't finish school. I get the money from sessions and tip money so sometimes my income is 1 – 2 lak per month. I want a shop, like selling things in front of house. I would sell rice or wine or onion, I would like a grocery store. I am saving money now and little by little, I am saving as much as I can but I have not yet saved enough.

Street-based: archetype 1

She has a mother a father and also a brother and sister – she is the eldest daughter. Her father is suffering from TB and is always lying down in bed. Her brothers and sisters are still young, about 5 or 10 years old, and they cannot go to school because they have no money. When she was 14 years old, her family had very low income and could not survive anymore, so her mum found a man to pay to have sex with her. Her first sexual experience was so frightening, she was very afraid. And later, whenever her Mum needs money she asks her to be a sex worker. Her mother doesn't allow her to come back home without money. If she does not have money she does not allow her to stay there so will have to sleep on the street and other places like that. She had a husband briefly but he beat her and is a drunk and stays somewhere else now. He has never supported her but she met him on the street and married him very young thinking she could escape this life.

She worries about her little sister and worries that one day her little sister will become like her. This is why she is trying to earn enough money to cover her whole family because she does not want anyone else in her family to live like her. She would like to get money, so that is why she has sex with so many men, but sometimes she feels so tired and feels so much pain. She thinks to herself that she became a sex worker because she has a lack of education because she attended only 2nd standard²⁴. She would like her younger brother to be educated, but they cannot afford to send him to school because they are just able to cover her eating and living costs.

At one point, she got pregnant and at that time it was really difficult because she did not have anything for her baby, for herself, anything and at the same time her dad passed away. After the birth of her baby she could not take any rest. She had to start work again after a few days, she couldn't take any rest. At that time, there was no money to buy anything for the baby, and sometimes she couldn't breast feed her baby, she could only give the baby water to drink. She would like to send her son to school and she will try to get her son to be educated and not be poor like her. Sometimes to get money for her family she needs to have sex with customers 6 or 7 times per day although most days it is 3 - 4. The customers ask her to do oral sex and she does not want to do it, and at first the customer says he will give 5,000 kyats and then he won't pay afterwards or will demand money from her²⁵. She said there is nobody on our side, she cannot refuse to give the money, she just has to give her money to him. Sometimes she is paid to have sex with one customer but there is more than one customer and some customers do not give money. They have sex then they run away without paying or beat her.

²⁴ Second standard is for approximately 7-8 years old. A full primary education is from Kindergarten to Standard 4.

²⁵ 5000 kyats = approximately £3.18.

Sometimes she charges 10,000 kyats but sometimes they ask to give as little as 2000, and she has to agree if she needs the money. For her, the majority of her earnings are given to the police, sometimes she pays other sex workers if they refer a customer to her and then customers ask for money, so some days she's left with very little for her family.

Once she met with the police and the police brought her to a bush beside the road to have sex and then he also hit her in her head and so she thinks sometimes she cannot remember. She thinks that her memory is damaged since then. Most police are violent, she says, because police know they are sex workers and they know they can do whatever they like to them.

She has been arrested but taken only to the police station. At the time her baby was too young and she was still breast feeding, so she explained this and the police beat her but let her go. She said "I don't have any money", but they beat her because she did not have money. She said to the police that she does not have family otherwise they would ask her family for money. In the police station, the police asked her if you want to be released you have to work here as a model girl so the police asked her to take off all her clothes at the police station and asked her to walk like a model.

Police do not take arrests of all sex workers – it depends on the power – like if they know a KTV owner or massage owner is rich or has good relationship with government or police officer, even though they know it is a place for sex, they do not take action but they just target poor people even though they know others are doing it too. She does not want any abuse or hatred or police asking for money from her. Sometimes sex workers get beaten and injured but the police do not see sex workers as humans and do not understand the lives of sex workers. She wants to be treated like other people. She does not feel free. She worries about other people, and the police all the time. Her family do not have their own house, they rent from an owner who came to know that she is working as a sex worker and the owner wants them out and doesn't want them to let them live there anymore, so he doesn't make any repairs and the house doesn't even look like a house. It has just cloth but not walls like a house. If they move to a new house they have to give 6 months' rent in advance, but they do not have enough money, and in this place she only has to give money monthly so they can stay there.

When she was young she had childhood friends but now they do not want her to be their friends anymore and she does not have many friends like when she was young. Her neighbours know that she is working as a sex worker and they look down on her. They do not want to be friends with her and they stop their relationship with her and sometimes the other people talk about her and tell others not to be friends with her. They say she's not a good girl. Some sex workers are able to hide from their family and neighbourhood that they are sex workers, at least to start with but later they usually come to know.

Sometimes her husband decides to visit her when he wants sex but when she comes back from work late at night he hits her. Her husband thinks he knows that she is working as a sex worker, but he has not got proof. But other people in the neighbourhood talk to him about it and all her neighbours know about her. This causes her anxiety. It is easier when her husband is away, as he only comes for sex or to take money and is always drunk.

She said currently she met one guy who works as a driver, a bus driver, and she has begun to go with this guy and he has said that he will support her about 15,000 kyats per week because he feels sorry for her, because she looks very poor and so she cannot buy slippers and she can wear only very cheap slippers. The guy wants to have sex with her one time per week and he will pay her 15,000 kyats, so he will be a regular customer.

She said I do not think about tomorrow, if I can earn today I can eat today. She thinks day-to-day, she is struggling with daily life. Everyone in her family depends on her, and that is a big pressure for her. If they could work and earn money she would not have such problems.

She said she is really unhappy working as a sex worker and she expects only if she can get 5,000 kyats a day from another job then she would stop this work. She cannot read and write so she does not expect too much. She has tried to search for any kind of work, but she cannot get any recommendations from the police so it is very difficult for her to get a job. She also mentioned that if you are a known sex worker there is a black mark against you that can never be erased. It is always there. As a street-based sex worker, the police already know her name and her name is on the list already. And if she does another job she cannot earn as much money as if she is a sex worker. If she wants to apply for other work mostly the owner would ask her for two recommendations: one from the community office and another is from the police station this is common and you also need to show the NRC identity card and she does not have this card. Most employers will want proof of where people live and will ask for these documents. This is why she cannot get another job that would pay enough money. So she stays working as a sex worker.

Most people she knows who are working as sex workers do not enjoy this work and want to leave. Even if she became rich one day people would still say 'once she was a girl like that', people would still look down on her, it is really bad. A big worry for her is that she is now only 18 years old and her son is only 2 years old and she worries that she will not be around or able to support her son through school. She knows a friend who was arrested and her drunk husband did not take care of her baby and when she came out of prison after 1 year her baby was gone. She never found him. She worries that this might happen to her.