

Sex work in Namibia:

Illegal and dangerous

Government policies in Namibia have identified sex workers as being at high risk of exposure to HIV because they are sometimes raped by clients and even by some members of the police, writes **Kgalemang Makgone**.

Sex work is illegal under Namibian laws but tolerated. With unemployment at 40%, and thousands of school leavers hitting the streets every year and jobs hard to find, some women have resorted to sex work as their only means of survival. Although there are male sex workers especially men-who-have-sex-with-men most sex workers are women.

According to UNAIDS Namibia has a national HIV prevalence rate of about 13.3% among adults aged 15 to 49.

Sex work is dangerous writes Suzanne LaFont of the Gender Research and Advocacy Project in Windhoek after talking to sex workers.

'We are suffering!' says Dorina in an interview. She has been a sex worker since 16. Raised by her grandmother in Katutura who ironically died of AIDS, she found herself on the streets. Now 26 hers is a harsh life whose scars show on her face. Although worn out and tired she tells her story so 'people understand how hard it is for us'. The police are a constant concern to Dorina who has been arrested three times, raped, harassed, detained and also beaten. She served prison time

but on release she was back on the streets.

Although Dorina's clients come from all walks of life they seem to have one thing in common - contempt for the very sex worker they sleep with. She says it is common for men to drive her out to the veld for sex only to beat her afterwards, stab her with knives and broken bottles and refuse to pay. Reporting such incidents to the police was a waste of time as they threatened her with arrest!

SMALL MONEY

Even when the client pays - N\$80 or N\$30 (about R80 and R30) when the situation gets desperate - it is barely enough to buy food.

Forced into unsafe sex and worried that she might be HIV positive, Dorina hates sex work and warns girls to stay away from the streets. She feels trapped in a hopeless situation and believes that sex work would be much safer if legalised.

The colonial-era Combating of Immoral Practice Act (21 of 1980) which criminalises sex work by banning soliciting sex in public, pandering, and keeping a brothel remains unchanged. The Act discriminates on gender by

mentioning only women as sex workers. However, the law has not prevented sex work from taking place but has marginalised sex workers. The country's National Strategic Framework for HIV and AIDS identify sex workers as critical to plans to tackle HIV and AIDS. The framework sees sex workers as a key population at higher risk of HIV. Before 2011 little was known about their needs and challenges and there were no national guidelines for effective rights-based programming with sex workers.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENTS

A series of rapid assessments on sex work and HIV and AIDS were conducted by UNFPA and UNAIDS. The assessments concluded that sex workers were more affected by HIV, and vulnerable due to the attitudes and behaviour of health-care service providers, the sex workers clients, the authorities and the communities in which they lived.

Rejected by their communities, sex workers do not only face the danger of being robbed on the streets or assaulted by their clients, but stigma from health-care providers, abuse and rape by the police officers all add to

their concerns. The shocking reality which sex workers face in Namibia was revealed in community assessment conducted in five towns by UNFPA and UNAIDS through a survey in which more than 200 sex workers participated, writes Kathleen Gausies from Namibia Network of Aids Service Organisation.

The brutal challenges which sex workers face daily were highlighted. The findings showed that minors as young as 10 years were involved in sex work. The Sex Work and HIV-Reality on the Ground Rapid Assessment was conducted by sex workers to identify common issues. The 17 sex workers trained to conduct the assessment in Kalkrand, Katima Mulilo, Oshikango, Walvis Bay and Windhoek conducted 29 focus groups discussions with 212 sex workers.

KALKRAND

It is a small town on the road between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop. It is a common stopping point for trucks and it has bars, shebeens and a service station. Sex workers between the age of 18 and 40 participated in the assessment and for the majority of them sex work is their only source of income. They said their work environment was not safe and that their clients were truck drivers in transit from South Africa. Most paid sex in Kalkrand takes place in the veldt since there are no hotels.

Many reported that they have found it difficult to get the police to follow up on complains of abuse. The stigma from the community led to insults and exclusion of sex workers from society and in some cases even violence. 'Sometimes, if you want condoms there is nothing, so plastic or unprotected sex seems the only way. We need more condoms at hotspots or just leave some for safety at homes or in

the shebeen or club. We keep our illnesses to ourselves. We can't go to the clinic because (then) the whole Kalkrand will know you are sick or have a sexually transmitted infection (STI). We use Savlon or Dettol (antiseptics) to treat STIs, or traditional medicine.'

Participants noted that they often find it difficult to access condoms, especially free ones, which resulted in unprotected sex. There is only one clinic at Kalkrand and they related that they could not rely on confidentiality being maintained there. Thus they seek alternatives. Some travel to a nearby town, Mariental, to get health care, but given the distance involved, it is also common to ignore the symptoms or to self-medicate.

KATIMA MULILO

Sex work at Katima Mulilo in the north-east takes place on the streets, in bars and shebeens. As the Katima region borders different countries, there are sex workers of different nationalities in the town and 31 female sex workers aged 10 to 38 participated in the assessment. The issue of very young minors exploited in the sex industry appears to be a particular feature of Katima.

Participants raised the issue of negative attitudes by the community and some of them reported police officers demanding sex as a condition for reporting a crime

'As you see me now, I'm on drugs and I am a sex worker, nobody in my village cares about me. They do not regard me as a human being. I went out looking for a job and the people started shouting that they should not give me a job because I am a sex worker,' remarked one interviewee.

Sex workers narrated overwhelmingly negative experiences at public health

clinics. They complained of being turned away, denied treatment for STIs unless they brought their boyfriends and even getting insults from health-care workers. They preferred traditional healers who they believed provided better treatment than nurses who gave them wrong drugs.

OSHIKANGO, WALVIS BAY & WINDHOEK

Twenty-seven sex workers aged 18 to 30 were interviewed in the town which borders Angola. Most trade on the streets, truck shops, bars, salons and hotels. Abuse and assault from the police was common for those who worked on the streets. Some community members wanted sex workers to be 'killed' or 'chased out of the country'. Police officers also demanded sex and money and stigmatisation was rife at Engela State Hospital.

The client base for sex workers comes from sailors and truck drivers from all over the world who stopped at the port. In Walvis Bay, 47 participants aged 18 to 40 took part in the assessment. The same complaints against the police were made including demanding 'unprotected sex'.

The trade occurs throughout the city – settlements, highways and truck stops, bars, shebeens, clubs and hotels; 82 participants took part in the discussion groups while men and transgender women aged 18 to 29 and the female sex workers (18 to 45). Most of the sex workers in the assessment had no other means of income and complaints against the police followed a similar pattern.

Transgender sex workers and male sex workers are vulnerable to abuse and violence too. When arrested for trading, transgender women are placed with men and as a result they often face rape and violence in custody. Those who work on the streets often work under the influence of alcohol

Power of revolutionary songs:

and drugs thus putting them at higher risk. Fear of the police discourages them from carrying condoms as they can be used as evidence of prostitution.

Also common are fights for space and bullying of new arrivals especially sex workers from other countries. Despite the range of health facilities in Windhoek, participants reported that they feared breach of confidentiality and preferred traditional medicine.

WAY FORWARD

The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) amongst others has called for the decriminalisation of sex work. 'Decriminalising sex work does not have to mean the approval of sex work by Namibian society,' says Dianne Hubbard the coordinator of LAC's Gender Research and Advocacy Project.

Lucia Iipumbu, treasurer of the Namibia Planned Parenthood Association said at the Fifth Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights in Windhoek that the police should stop harassing and detaining sex workers and gay men for carrying condoms.

'We need to pay particular attention to the need to decriminalise and de-stigmatise the act of consensual sex between adolescents, removing moralistic perspectives in order to ensure they are all able to access information and services,' she said. ^{LB}

Kgalemang Makgone is the 2nd vice president of the Windhoek-based Public Service Union in Namibia and an Engage Programme alumnus student of the Global University Programme - University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and a former research assistant with of the Chris Hani Institute.

In SA's liberation movement

Some revolutionary songs had their background in church hymns whilst some were composed in prison. Others were influenced by international liberation struggles just as some drew inspiration from the local anti-apartheid struggle, writes

Busang Moiloa.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The encyclopedia of South Africa's music, especially the choral genre, will not be complete without the inclusion of the legendary Ntsikana (1780-1811) and the great Tiyo Soga (1829-1871). These two African luminaries have played an important role in the contributions of black South Africans towards modernity. Ntsikana of the Nqika clan in the Eastern Cape is the first African to convert to Christianity as missionaries arrived in the Cape at the turn of the 19th century. He was followed more formally by Tiyo Soga who became the first ever black South African to receive academic tuition in Scotland and was also the first to be ordained as a priest in the Presbyterian Church.

Historically, both Ntsikana and Soga are credited as proselytes who emerged from evangelisation of Christian missionaries and later became doyens of a new experience of cross-fertilisation between the western Civilisation and the culture of the indigenous African people, especially in the Cape. In as much

as the indigenous people were implored and urged to discover the new gospel, both Ntsikana and Soga were instrumental in its transfusion with local cultures. The Bible was thus translated into isiXhosa among other local languages and likewise many hymns followed suit. This process of inculturation spurred the likes of Ntsikana and Soga to compose hymns whose melodies would easily appeal to locals because of the language factor. Ntsikana's *Bell (Ulo Tboxo omkbulu ngosezulwini - He/she the great God in Heaven)* still resonates in churches, cathedrals, religious gatherings, choir festivals and schools as one of the great songs of our history and heritage. Ntsikana sang this song as a clarion call during religious convocations and it remains one of South Africa's classical soundtracks.

By mid-18th century, American minstrels were already performing and touring South Africa. In addition, links established with churches like the American Methodist Episcopal Church brought the influence of