

The Study of Women Engaged in Transactional Sex Work, Bridgetown Barbados

Stavroula Kyriakakis, Ph.D.

Adelphi University School of Social Work

Sadie Goddard Durant, C.C.C., MSc  
Safe Spaces, Barbados

August 29, 2017

<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SAMPLE.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FOCUS GROUPS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>FIELD WORK .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>MOTHERHOOD AND PARENTING.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL RISK FACTORS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ENTRY INTO SEX WORK .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHILDHOOD POVERTY .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>FAMILY INSTABILITY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>LOW EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>EARLY ENTRY INTO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>FLOW OF EMERGENT ENTRY FACTORS INTO SEX WORK .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>ECONOMIC CONDITIONS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PARTICIPANTS ARE LIVING IN POVERTY.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>MOTIVATIONS FOR REMAINING ENGAGED IN SEX WORK .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>STRATEGIES FOR MAKING ENDS MEET .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHALLENGES FINDING ADEQUATE EMPLOYMENT.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>MEETING PROSPECTIVE INTIMATE PARTNERS.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>STRIVING TO REMAIN ENGAGED IN A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>WIDESPREAD INTIMATE ABUSE AND SUBJUGATION.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CHALLENGES IN NEGOTIATING CONDOM USE .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>RELATIONSHIP TEND TO BE TRANSACTIONAL .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>LOST HOPE FOR A GOOD RELATIONSHIP.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>EXPOSURE TO WORK RELATED TRAUMA.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN MAINTAINING SAFETY AT WORK.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHRONIC EXPOSURE TO RISK FOR VIOLENCE AND MORTAL DANGER .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>PRIMARY SOURCES OF DISTRESS AND EMERGENT STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH DISTRESS ...</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>EMERGENT SOURCES OF DISTRESS .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Poverty/Desperate Financial Need.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Interpersonal Trauma .....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Experiences Engaged in Sex Work.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Health Problems and Worries.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Interlocking Sources of Distress .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<b>STRATEGIES FOR ALLEVIATING DISTRESS.....</b>	<b>42</b>

<i>Seeking Economic Relief</i> .....	42
<i>Relationship with God</i> .....	43
<i>Isolation</i> .....	43
<i>Alcohol and Drug Use</i> .....	44
<i>Seeking Formal Assistance</i> .....	44
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	44
<b>ENGAGEMENT WITH FORMAL SERVICES</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE</b> .....	45
<b>FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE</b> .....	49
<i>Experiences with Welfare</i> .....	49
<i>Seeking Financial Relief through the Court System</i> .....	51
<b>UTILIZATION OF BANKING SERVICES</b> .....	51
<b>EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE</b> .....	51
<b>EXPERIENCES WITH HEALTH SERVICES</b> .....	54
<i>Reproductive Healthcare</i> .....	55
<b>ASSISTANCE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS</b> .....	56
<i>Substance Abuse Treatment</i> .....	57
<i>Counseling Services</i> .....	57
<b>SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE</b> .....	60
<b>PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT FORMAL SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY</b> .....	61
<i>Service Considerations</i> .....	61
<i>Service Component and Design Recommendations</i> .....	63
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	65

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to gain information about the experiences of women engaged in transactional sex work in Barbados. This study consisted of individual semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 women engaged in transactional sex, focus groups conducted with a sub-sample of participants, and field work.

Specifically, the study aimed to

1. Examine the factors and conditions affecting women's entry into sex work.
2. Learn more about women's work and personal life experiences while engaged in sex work, including practices surrounding the work, the management and negotiation of family life and interpersonal relationships, and exposure to abuse.
3. Learn about what types of assistance women engaged in sex work need and the best ways to provide this assistance.

This study utilized a phenomenological grounded theory approach. A phenomenological approach is necessary when attempting to gain information about a hidden phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998). A grounded theory approach is recommended when one attempts to gain information about the subjective and collective experience of underlying structures, such as the internal and contextual factors related to women's engagement in transactional sex and how these factors operate (Charmaz, 2005). These aims aspired to expound upon, or extend upon a pre-existing theoretical framework (feminist theoretical approach and social determinants of health framework) to understanding how women engaged in transactional sex work negotiate their personal and work environment conditions to maintain safety and wellness for themselves and their family.

### **Sample**

The sample was comprised of 30 women above age 18 who had engaged in transactional sex. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit the sample. Targeted outreach took place with the assistance of the director of an NGO local to Barbados. The director informed women she knew were eligible about the study. Participants who engaged in the study were also encouraged to let others who are eligible know about the study, and provide them with the study contact information.

Women interested in the study who contacted were screened for eligibility. Once safety was assessed, and participation in the study was described, interviews were scheduled with interested participants. Thirteen participants had recent engagement with services at local NGO and were informed by the NGO director about the study, four participants learned about the study during outreach on street sex work locations by the NGO director, ten participants learned about the study from other participants, and three participants did not disclose how they learned about the study.

### **Individual Interviews**

Individual interviews were conducted with all 30 participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 39 to 186 minutes with an average of 98 minutes. The authors of this

study, both of whom are clinically trained to work with survivors of trauma, conducted the interviews. The interview, which was audio-recorded, consisted of a brief demographic survey and a semi-structured interview that covered the following topics, 1) factors or conditions that lead participants to begin engaging in transactional sex, 2) her experiences while engaging in transactional sex including work conditions, relationship with family members and negotiation of work with other aspects of her life, and 3) any needs she has at this time that would make her life better and the types of services that would assist her. At the end of the interview, participants were informed of the opportunity to participate in a focus group. Interested participants were told the date, time and location of the focus group, which had its own consent procedures.

### **Focus Groups**

The authors co-facilitated two focus groups which were audio-recorded. The first focus group lasted 90 minutes and had three participants in attendance. The second focus group lasted 117 minutes and had 12 participants in attendance. The focus group covered the following topics: 1) the participants needs and concerns; 2) their experience with formal social services; and 3) what types of services would they benefit from and how they should be administered.

### **Field Work**

The field work was comprised of taking field notes and the collection of archival information and artifacts in print, and audio form. The purpose of field work was to provide information on the societal and community context in which the participants engage in transactional sex. Field work took the form of observations at locations and centers known to be associated with transactional sex work, in the evening hours when this work related activity was most likely to take place and interviews with formal stakeholders.

### **Analysis**

The individual interviews will be used to inform all three aims in the study, while the focus groups will be utilized primarily to answer the final aim. The ethnographic data will be triangulated with the other two sources of data. Triangulation is for the purpose of enhancing “completeness” of the data rather than for the “confirmation” of findings (Breitmayer, Ayres, & Knafel, 1993). The first phase of the data analysis will utilize a phenomenological approach described by Creswell (1998). This approach uses Denzin (1994) as a general template and incorporates approaches put forth by Moustakas (1994). This process included six phases.

The second phase of the analysis will utilize a grounded theory approach. The grounded theory analysis most closely resembles the process recommended by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of analyzing data proposed by Strauss and Corbin contain the following phases: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, 3) selective coding, and 4) theoretical proposition (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **Description of Participants**

Thirty participants conducted individual interviews, and 15 of them participated in one of two focus groups. Participants ranged in age from 18-62 years with an average of 32.9. Twenty-nine participants described their ethnicity as Afro-Caribbean, while one described herself as mixed race. Twenty-three participants were born in Barbados. The seven participants born outside of Barbados were born in Guyana, Haiti, Curacao, England and Jamaica. Three of the seven participants born outside of Barbados immigrated to Barbados as children, and two of the seven were trafficked to Barbados under false pretenses.

The participants shared the location of their home and living conditions at the time of the interview. These participants represented seven different parishes. All of the participants were poor, with the overwhelming majority living in abject poverty. More than half of the participants reported challenges providing food for themselves and their children day to day. A similar proportion of the participants owed rent or other household utilities. Some of the participants were homeless at the time of the interview. These participants were either living in charity shelter or living temporarily with friends or family.

The number of years the participants were engaged in sex work ranged from one to 48. The average number of years they were engaged in sex work was 12.6 with a median of six years. The participants throughout their experience engaged in sex work encountered customers in the following manner; in street locations known for sex work (“on the road”), bars that contained rooms where they could serve customers, bars where they were dancers, through relationships with taxi drivers who would bring customers seeking a sex worker. Some participants used these avenues to cultivate relationships with regular customers who would call these participants when seeking services. These participants reported serving a variety of customers who were from all levels of professional and socio-economic status. They served both local Barbadians and tourists.

## **Motherhood and Parenting**

Twenty-nine of the 30 participants were mothers or pregnant at the time of the interview, and 11 of these participants lived with or were raising all of their children. The remaining 18 mothers in the sample had at least one child being raised by someone else. The average age of first time motherhood for this sample of participants was 18, with a median and mode of 18 and 21 respectively. Five of the participants had one child, 17 of the participants had two to three children, and six participants had four or more children.

Figure 1

*Characteristics about Motherhood*

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>Number of Participants (Sample Total)</u>
0	1 (30)
Pregnant (no children)	1 (30)
1	5 (30)
2	7 (30)
3	10 (30)
4	2 (30)
5	3 (3)
6	1 (30)
<u>All Children Raised by Participant</u>	11(28)
	<u>Mean, Median, Mode</u>
<u>Age as First Time Mother</u>	18, 18, 21

**Health and Social Risk Factors**

The rate of health and social risk factors for this sample of participants was high. Seven of the participants reported a history of suicidality. While all but several participants used marijuana and or alcohol regularly, particularly while working, six of the participants reported that they had what they described as a substance abuse problem. Two of these six participants reported being addicted to alcohol, while four of the six participants described having a history of cocaine addiction. The participants had high rates of exposure to domestic violence, with five participants reported having witnessed intimate partner abuse in their family of origin and 18 of the participants reporting having a history of being in an intimate relationship that was abusive. Half of the sample of participants experienced sexual abuse or assault, with four of these 15 survivors experiencing a single exposure to sexual abuse/assault and 11 experiencing frequent exposure to sexual abuse/assault. While the participants were not specifically asked about HIV status, two of the participants reported they were HIV positive.

Figure 2

*Health and Social Risk Factors of the Participants*

<u>Health and Social Risk Factors</u>	<u>Number of Participants (Total in Sample)</u>
Suicidality	7 (30)
Substance Abuse	6 (30)
Alcohol	2 (6)
Cocaine	4 (6)
HIV Sero-Positive	2
Intimate Partner Violence	
Witness in Family of Origin	5 (30)
Direct Survivor	18 (30)
Sexual Abuse/Assault	15 (30)
Single Exposure	4 (15)
Frequent Exposure	11 (15)



## Factors Associated with Entry into Sex Work

An aim of the study was to examine the conditions and factors related to entry into sex work. The average age of participants when they entered sex work was 20.3 years old, with a range of 14-36 and a median of 18. Therefore, half of the sample of participants entered sex work by the age of 18. The precipitating factor prompting participants to enter sex work was overwhelmingly the need to provide for herself and her family, followed by because she was abandoned or ran away as a child; to pay for cocaine, because she was trafficked under false pretenses, or because she was undocumented and thus could not find employment outside of sex work. The following five themes emerged among the participants: childhood poverty, sexual abuse, family instability, limited education, and early entry into sexual relationships. Nearly all of the participants had at least three of these themes present in their set of experiences.

Figure 3

### *Factors Pertaining to Participant Entry into Sex Work*

<u>Age of Entry</u>	
Average	20.3
Median	18
Mode	14-36
<u>Precipitating Factor</u>	<u>Number of Participants (Total in Sample)</u>
Need to Provide for Self/Family	21(30)
Pay for Cocaine	2 (30)
Abandoned/Ran Away as a Child	3 (30)
Trafficked under False Pretenses	2 (30)
Undocumented	2 (30)

### **Childhood Poverty**

The most common factor that emerged among the participants was a childhood marked by poverty. Twenty-six of the participants reported being raised in severe poverty during childhood. Many participants described childhoods where they needed to stay for extended periods of time with other family or church affiliates because their primary caregivers could not afford to provide for their care. Some participants described conditions in childhood where they had to find a way to feed themselves or find a means to provide for other basic needs. Residential instability related to poverty, as well as the inability to pay for clothing, school supplies or basic hygiene supplies such as deodorant, resulted in sporadic school attendance for many of the participants. The need to provide for their own needs as children also resulted in early entry into dating relationships as an escape or as a strategy to meet their basic needs.

### **Childhood Sexual Abuse**

Childhood sexual abuse was very common among the participants. Thirteen participants experienced sexual abuse as children. Perpetrators tended to be male family members including mother's boyfriends or stepfathers (n=5), fathers (n=3), uncles (n=2), grandfathers (n=2) and cousins (n=2). Several participants were abused by several persons throughout their childhood. One participant, who was an only child and whose mother worked often to support her, was

sexually abused by numerous male and female caregivers throughout her childhood. Another participant was sexually abused by a superior at her work starting at age 13 years. She kept these numerous incidents of rape secret from her mother who also had a job at the same place of employment. This participant and her mother both desperately needed their jobs, and so she endured the abuse.

The way in which the participants' family responded to the abuse sheds some light on the conditions in the participants' lives contributing to entry into sex work. For six of the participants, their caregivers notified the authorities as soon as these participants disclosed they were being abused. Unfortunately, child welfare response was not always effective and often increased instability in the lives of these participants. Reports to authorities often resulted in referral to mental health services. Many of these participants did not feel comfortable talking about the abuse or other stressors in their lives, and so they did not find counseling effective or helpful. Some of these participants were also sent to the Crisis Center, which was not the best fit, even temporarily, for young adolescents. The participant below describes the sequence of events that followed disclosure of abuse. This experience was typical among participants for whom the authorities were notified of the abuse.

*Participant: I tell a cousin who was here from overseas and he tell my father and it went to the police and that's how it get out.*

*Interviewer: That's how you ended up then... so that stopped it and then what happened after it went to the police, you were?*

*Participants: That is how I end up in Crisis Centre, then I went to the children's home cause they say I couldn't be in the Crisis Centre too long as a child. From there it was the children' home then I come back home for a little while then in March I went up the road, remand, remand then I get four years.*

Sadly, the changes in behavior, that were directly related to the abuse, such as defiant behavior, mental health symptomatology, and running away were treated by the criminal justice system, resulting in placement in the Government Industrial School (Girl's Unit). The caregivers of the participant quoted below responded appropriately. They called the authorities as soon as it was discovered the participant was being sexually abused. However, the trauma and mental health symptoms were not fully resolved despite her having received mental health treatment.

*R: But nobody never understand why I use to run away from home, everybody use to feel that I just run way from home, but them never did understand. I went Summerville for something that I didn't even s'posed to be in Summerville. Understand. I went through Psychiatrist too. All of that I went through.*

*I: Yea. What do you think you were struggling with?*

*R: I was just like frighten, want to talk and can't talk about what happen. Every time I lay down I just use to see the man in front of me with a gun, use to don't want to sleep in my bedroom nothing. Just use to run way.*

Unfortunately, for most of the participants who were being abused, their parents offered little to no protection from the abuse. Three of the participants endured the abuse because their mother was financially dependent on the perpetrator, typically the mother's intimate partner.

One was able to avoid the home of the perpetrator, who was an older male extended family member, while another simply moved from her mother's to her father's home.

Those who suffered the most were the participants who had no choice but to leave home. One participant, who was being sexually abused by her father, left her home as a child on her own volition, two were kicked out of their home by the non-offending parent, and one participant, who was being sexually abused by her maternal grandfather, became pregnant in order to stop the prolonged sexual abuse. These participants entered relationships with older boyfriends who, at least initially, helped meet their emotional and physical needs for food and shelter.

Figure 4	
<i>The Participant, Family or Community Response to the Sexual Abuse of the Participants</i>	
<u>Response</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Authorities Were Notified	6
Mother Relied Upon the Perpetrator so Endured Abuse	3
Participant Told No One and Endured Abuse	1
Participant Avoided Home of Perpetrator	1
Participant Moved to Another Caregiver	1
Left Home on Her Own Volition	1
Caregiver Kicked Her Out of Home	2
Had a Child in order to Stop the Abuse	1

### **Family Instability**

The third factor that emerged was family instability. Just one participant was raised by both parents, and only 14 participants were raised primarily by their mother. Two of the participants were raised by fathers who were abusive and/or drank heavily. Three of the participants moved back and forth between parents. This was because both of these home were unsuitable due to the presence of an abusive step-parent, poverty or both. These participants simply moved back and forth to the parent who could provide the better home conditions at the time. Eight of the participants were raised by an extended family member, often a grandmother or aunt, and two were raised by a non-family member.

Several factors caused family instability. Family violence was a common cause of family instability. Many of the participants lived in homes where at least one of the parents was abusive towards their partner or being abused by an intimate partner. Also, as discussed, sexual abuse of the participant also resulted in family instability. Severe poverty also created significant instability. Many of the participants' parents simply did not have the means to provide for the participants, resulting in them being cared for by extended family members and people outside the family. Dire economic conditions and family violence also resulted in the primary caregiver moving overseas and leaving the participant behind with others.

Figure 5

*Primary Persons who Raised the Participants During Childhood*

<u>Relationship to the Participant</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Mother	14
Both Parents	1
Father	2
Back and Forth	3
Extended Family Member	8
Non-Family Member	2

The consequences of family instability were most often lack of supervision and neglect. As such, many of these participants were put in a position where they had to figure out how they were going to find food or money for school supplies. The lack of supervision, exacerbated by neglect of basic needs, often resulted in school truancy and poor academic performance and relationships with boyfriends that quickly became sexual.

**Low Educational Attainment**

Low educational attainment was another factor that emerged among the participants. The mean and median age of exiting from school was 15 and 16 respectively. Thirteen of the participants did not even complete 5<sup>th</sup> form. It should be noted that six of the participants attended the Government Industrial School. There was a pattern, whereby, participants appeared to drop out of school when it became legal to do so. The only participant who attended some university did so after returning to school later in her adult life. She too, initially dropped out of school at an earlier age, subsequent to an early pregnancy that was a consequence of sexual abuse.

Figure 6

*Participants' Educational Attainment*

<u>Highest Educational Level Attained</u>	<u>Number of Participants (Total Sample)</u>
Primary	1
Less than 5 <sup>th</sup> Form	12
Completed 5 <sup>th</sup> Form	14
Some University	1
Unknown	2
<u>Attended Government Industrial School</u>	6 (30)
	<u>Average, Median, Mode</u>
Age When Exiting School	15, 16, 16

The causal factors associated with low educational attainment are many of the emergent themes associated with entry into sex work. Poverty was a common theme associated with low educational attainment. Many of the participants did not have the means to obtain school supplies, and some even lacked basic hygiene products. Several participants described being

teased by classmates because they smelled, which discouraged them from attending school. Three of the participants dropped out of school to work, and two participants dropped out of school when they became homeless. The lack of supervision and residential instability associated with family instability, and the trauma symptomatology and residential instability associated with sexual abuse lead to poor academic performance and sporadic school attendance. The most common factor that appeared to precede school dropout was entry into intimate relationships that became sexual. Many participants reported becoming truant from school choosing instead to spend the day with their boyfriends. Many participants dropped out of school when they became pregnant.

### **Early Entry into Sexual Relationships**

The final theme that emerged among the participants that appeared to be related to entry into sex work was early entry into sexual relationships. Many of the participants entered relationships during their early to middle adolescence with men who were much older. These relationships often introduced these participants to unconstructive behaviors including drug and alcohol use, as well as a criminal activity. The overwhelming majority of the participants had minimal awareness of reproductive health or pregnancy prevention, and thus became pregnant very soon after the relationship became sexual.

This participant sees the relationship with her first boyfriend as a turning point in her life. Prior to the start of this relationship, she was a well behaved girl who performed well academically.

*Interviewer: How did you get involve with your daughter father?*

*Participant: Friends, I met him through a friend, that was liming out by me and he just start liming out by we so we just started interacting and that sort of way and one thing led to another*

*Interviewer: You were about sixteen? So you think that that was the moment in your life where it change direction?*

*Participant: When I met and had sex and got my daughter and all that, my life went down.*

Many of the participants described becoming defiant of their parents once entering a relationship with a boyfriend, much like the participant below.

*I: So tell me a little bit about when you were a teenager you were saying that you kind of weren't you were...*

*R: I was hard ears*

*I: Looking after the boys.*

*R: Yea*

*I: Hard ears (Laughter)*

*R: Yes. Yea I was hard ears, my child father...not really boys my child father I did like one boy, uh hmm*

*I: There was one boy?*

*R: Uh hmm, yea it was one boy that I use to give 'nuff' trouble, give my mother 'nuff' trouble because, one boy my child father uh hmm.*

The participant below met her boyfriend when sexual abuse forced her to leave home. Typically, the men entered the lives of these adolescents at moments of intense vulnerability and need. This boyfriend introduced her to cocaine, which became an addiction. This addiction prompted her engagement in transactional sex.

*I: When did you meet him?*

*R: I didn't actually meet he, I did move in the apartment where he was.*

*Right, so he father own the apartment. So that is how I (incomprehensible)*

*I: Uhh that's how, that's how you met him?*

For many participants, birth control was not even part of their consciousness, let alone discussed and negotiated with their partners. The quote below was echoed by many of the participants when they were asked about fear of pregnancy in their early sexual relationships.

*I: For you the thought of pregnancy was like when you had...*

*R: I was not even thinking nearly nothing about pregnancy*

*I: How come?*

*R: I must be was just...I was just doing it. I was not thinking nothing about pregnancy. I found out when I was pregnant when I miss my period.*

Although nearly all of the participants entered relationships as children with boyfriends who were men, a particularly disturbing grooming phenomenon was apparent among some of the participants. During their pre-adolescence and very early adolescence, some of the participants caught the attention of men in the neighborhood, who kept an eye on the participant and gave her money for school supplies, money to spend socializing and for clothes. These participants' parents often gave tacit approval for these relationships which at the start were not sexual. Since the early stages of these relationships were not sexual, and were more parental in nature, these participants felt these men genuinely cared for their wellbeing. Invariably, when these participants turned 15, these relationships became sexual, followed very quickly by pregnancy. These relationships tended to end once they gave birth to their child.

The quote below illustrates the typical grooming pattern reported by these participants.

*So you know like how like first timers love at first sight and (incomprehensible) like thing and like he was talking to me when I come home from school and he would help me with my school work, and different stuff 'cause he was real bright help me with my school work and stuff and like thing. So when I get in to secondary school now I think I was in first form, in first form I take he money my mother beat me and he come and talk to my mother and different stuff and I tell my mother like I don't care you have to beat kill me 'cause I like he and aint nothing you could do about it. So then after he come and talk to my mother my mother like talk to he and different stuff and I holler for like if you really love me you would have to wait until I get older and I was talking to he I was like twelve at that time. I was like twelve yea and he wait until I get fifteen.*

When the participant below was released from the Government Industrial School and felt the heavy force of needing to provide for herself, she turned to the man who groomed her during her childhood for refuge. This relationship only became sexual after she left the Government Industrial School.

*R: I had them father for fourteen years from the time I was ten, we wasn't really in a sexual relationship not until when I went Summerville and come home. But we was close we use to kiss and thing and what's not*

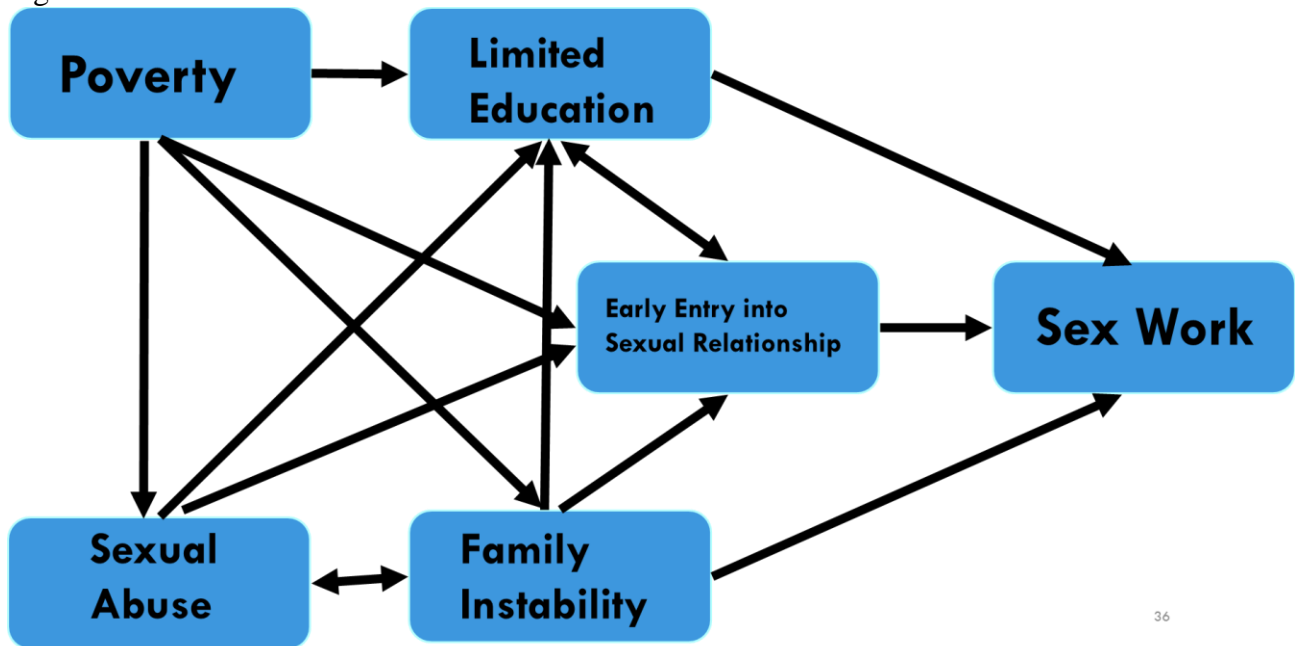
*I: So you knew him from the neighborhood?*

*R: No, he did live in [another neighborhood] but I met him through my cousin, and he always use to come down there and spend the whole evening with me when he come home from school. Sometimes he would come for me from school when my mother don't give me no money to carry school he use to bring two and three hundred dollars for me to go school with. He use to buy my school shoes everything for me, cause my mother wasn't checking, but at least I could tell you he was there, he was checking, he use to make sure that I right so I know he a long long time.*

**Flow of Emergent Entry Factors into Sex Work**

Poverty appears to be a core and launching entry factor into sex work. Poverty appears to set the conditions for family instability, sexual abuse and early entry into sexual relationships, which often end in early pregnancy. These factors, among the backdrop of poverty formidably impede even moderate educational attainment. In the face of these vulnerabilities, participants seek relationships that solidify their downward trajectory.

Figure 7



36

## Economic Conditions

The investigators examined the economic conditions of the participants, as it was expected that this would yield insight into underlying motivational factors pertaining to transactional sex work. Moreover, understanding the financial needs and money management practices of the participants would yield insight into service and intervention needs.

### Participants are Living in Poverty

Despite expectations regarding the earning potential associated with transactional sex work, it was found that nearly all of the participants were living in poverty. For many participants, the poverty was so severe that they faced the daily challenge to meet basic food, shelter and healthcare needs. The high cost of rent, particularly for those who did not benefit from residing in a family owned home, placed a great burden and stressor on the participants' finances. Many participants shared accounts of how they managed to fend off solicitations and even harassment from landlords who made regular attempts to collect back rent.

The participant below shared the approach she took to making her earnings stretch to sufficiently cover her basic needs.

*R: it is got to stretch because to tell you the truth I know that I owe the land lord you understand but this is how I does do it; one week I would pay the other week I wouldn't pay. If I give she like one fifty I wouldn't pay for the other two weeks you understand. If I get money I would give my mother some to hold on something and buy food. You understand that is how I does stretch my money. I does know how to do it you understand*

*I: So you pay a little something to make it stretch...*

*R: stretch and then*

*I: buy food*

*R: Right and then me that is how I does do it because I cant give she all you understand. Eventually she know she will get she money. You understand but put it to suit me, you understand, stretch it to suit me.*

For most of the participants, each day brought with it the worry of having to find food for themselves and/or their children. The decision not to work on a particular evening was commonly associated with the preoccupation about how they and their children were going to eat the next day. For the participant below, living in chronic poverty has significant consequences to her health.

*And I leave she to thing. Right now it does be real bad on myself, I suffering high blood pressure and I got diabetic. And when I ready sometimes, I don't be feeling good. Sometimes I spend days I don't eat cause I don't have. You understand but I does got to leave it out.*

Transactional sex work does not appear to bring the participants out of poverty. In general, the participants engaged in sex work do not make much money overall. Several financial factors associated with transactional sex work emerged that help explain this finding. First, money earned engaging in transactional sex work tends to be inconsistent. Also,



participants report that the economic downturn that has affected the country has negatively affected how much they earn. There are fewer customers and the existing customers attempt to pay less for services. At the same time, the participants report that more women, both Barbadian and from neighboring countries in the region, are working, and so there is greater competition for customers and fares.

Many participants describe evenings they go to work and make very little money. The experience described by the participant below was commonly heard among the participants.

*So sometime when I catch the van I would say man let me wait and see if I get something. Or sometimes even if I get like one, a sixty dollar bill, I can't even take he [that same van] back (Laughter). So I would wait and wait, now mornings come I does only get one free [ride] so I would go home.*

The participant below works in bars, where she rents rooms to meet with her customers. She describes what appears from the participants, as well as other stakeholders, the typical rent and fares for women in this setting. As she describes, earnings typically go to paying for basic and immediate needs.

*R: Ten for the room and the fifty would be for you*

*I: Fifty for you right*

*R: and when you get that fifty dollars you would still get up tomorrow and buy something to cook. A little bill got to pay in between you could still pay it you know? It can't do much but you would try to see how much you could do with it.*

Most often the participants' earnings remained just at subsistence level because the participants tended to work only enough to get by. Moreover, more time spent working often came at a cost that imposed a natural ceiling on how much they could earn, especially in the current climate where customers were in short supply. The more time spent working in terms of hours per night and number of years engaged in sex work, the less customers they attracted. The participant describes her calculation of the numbers of hours she should work per week before she reaches the point of diminishing returns.

*Yea but sometimes I prefer to do if I working Friday- Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I want three jobs Thursday three jobs Friday three jobs Saturday and three jobs Sunday. Because it does be easier- if you go wit so much people one time you be tired and break down and you service would become weak.*

A related factor which limits the participants' earnings is the desire among potential customers for a "fresh face". Nearly all of the participants described the customer's preference for a new or less familiar woman with whom to engage in transactional sex. They described preference for women who were foreign born as well as women who were new to sex work. To counteract this preference for women who were less familiar, some participants described moving to new locations to seek customers.

The participants were also mindful of the risk for exposure to work related violence and other potentially life threatening crimes when determining if and for how long they planned to

work each night. The participant in the excerpt below describes an ethos she tended to adhere to when working, whereby, she was mindful of not pushing her luck with regard to earning money.

*I limited myself out there with customers. I don't go, as I told you I don't go to every customer that come to me. If I find that I go with six customers and I have about- I just drawing a little average- and I have about umm eight hundred dollars that's enough; come off the road until the next day. Why you going go a whole night? Why are you going to do that torture yourself going a whole night or somebody to sit stand up and scope you and see the amount of money that you making, and next thing you know you going around the corner walking to go catch the bus and they jack you and take away your money from you; that means all your money gone. Be contented with what little bit you get. That is how I how I work.*

She and nearly all the participants vividly described an awareness that the decision to stay out on the road an extra hour or the decision to take a customer who was offering a fare that was well above the typical rate could result in fatal harm. Finally, many participants felt a reluctance to work. This reluctance was related often to the risks associated to transactional sex work. Participants who experienced work related assaults and/or robberies described the challenge they experienced returning to the road. Many experienced this reluctance as a spiritual indication that they working would portend a serious work related crime or assault. Also, many participants described a reluctance to work because they found it difficult emotionally and physically. This was particularly true for not only recent victims of work related violence, but for participants who experienced ambivalence about being engaged in sex work. Nearly all of the participants felt it was necessary and justified in order to provide for themselves and their children. Yet, they also felt it was wrong, as well as spiritually and relationally self-destructive.

### **Motivations for Remaining Engaged in Sex Work**

The single greatest motivator for remaining engaged in sex work for the participants was the need to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their children. A few of the participants described a period of time in their lives when, excited by the large amount of money they were earning, they spent money on non-necessities such as fancy clothes, hair and nails. This typically occurred when they first entered sex work and lasted for a brief period of time. Money typically went to paying for rent, utilities and food. While a majority of the participants did not reside with all of their children, almost all of the participants who were mothers provided for their children.

*So I was like, you know what, swallow my pride. At the end of the day at least my son would have a roof over his head, he would have things to eat, he would be able to have an education. So that was just my motivation to get up and go and do it, cause I don't want to got to be asking people for things that kind of way. So through the point of me having a child was really the reason why I really went and do it cause probably if I didn't had a child I wouldn't care where I live I could of just go by somebody and sleep or whatever.*

Some of the participants poignantly described the pain they felt at not being able to purchase a toy their child desired. Several also described the need to work on a particular night in order to pay for the birthday cake their child requested or the shoes they asked for.

Many of the participants described how they were working on the road, as a sacrifice, to provide a better life for their children. Therefore, there was a great emphasis on school related expenses, such as school supplies, food and snacks, and school uniforms. The quote from the participant below saw that her child was gifted and wanted this child to get a high quality education. Sadly, this same participant was also gifted as a child, and unfortunately, a combination of family instability and poverty hampered her ability to remain actively engaged in school.

*R: He was going school from the time he was two I pay for him to go to school at a private preschool and he was two and you use to had to pay a hundred and twenty five dollars every week for him to go school*

*I: A hundred and twenty five a week?*

*R: Yea that was including Spanish learn to teach him Spanish too at the school he was two years. After- and then he went to the primary school, the public primary school. But I don't know it just something about me I learn well and I does always help my son. When I was growing up it was not nobody really there to help me with my homework so I does make sure I help my children with their homework.*

Since nearly all of the participants were living day to day, and the current economic conditions made securing decent paying and consistent work incredibly challenging, many of the participants experienced high levels of stress when they were prevented from engaging in sex work. The following participant describes how she felt when she made the decision to come off the road and cease participation in sex work. Although this participant has not worked in two years, she continues to feel severe, suicidal depression as a consequence of the financial pressures to provide for herself and her child. The tremendous emotional stress she feels related to the pressure to provide is common among many of the participants who decide they won't or can't go on the road.

*So when I come off the road everything went sky high, and still going sky high. All the bills still going sky high so that is my problem now. Everything just going sky high so after it was so bad I still getting tempted to go back there because first thing you got to pay for citizenship. If you go to the hospital you aint straight you got to pay.*

### **Strategies for Making Ends Meet**

In light of the high cost of living and challenges faced by participants to pay for their household and family expenses, the data analysis examined how money was managed and strategies utilized to pay for household and family expenses. This examination revealed that relationships with current or former intimate partners or family of origin played a large role in the how participants paid for basic household expenses, and meeting the physical and educational needs of their children.

A critical relationship with regard to being able to make ends meet was with their intimate partners and/or children's father. Some participants were able to depend on their children's father for child support, which significantly supplemented household income. Unfortunately, this support was inconsistent or ended once the intimate relationship ended with the participant. Many participants shared how their child's father stopped providing support to his child once she was no longer engaging in sex with him or when she had moved on to a new relationship.

The participant below experienced this with the fathers of all of her children. She is now fully charged with providing for all of her children.

*A lot of times where you in a financial pinch umm, because of the fact that I have five children and all of them live with me so umm, I am...and none of their fathers...I have two children-fathers and none of them contribute in any way. The rent, the children, everything's at me at the end of the day.*

Some participants received parental support from a dependable father, who felt the duty to provide for their own children. However, only a few of these men also had the education or job skills to keep a decent paying job over the long term. Unfortunately, since the partners and children's fathers of the participants typically had job prospects comparable to the participants, this group of well-meaning fathers and partners were unable to provide in a consistent manner.

In fact, very often the participants provided for their boyfriend or intimate partner when he lost his job or became unemployed. Some participants left sex work once they entered a relationship with a man who is able to provide for him, and had to resume sex work once he became unemployed. A few participants even provided cash at urgent times to fathers of their children with whom the relationship had long ended. The economic conditions, where by the participants, and the men with which they tended to enter intimate relationships, left both parties with temporary, low paying and overall low stability job and career prospects. This left the participants unable to rely upon consistent support from their children's father. At the same time, participants made ends meet through sex work when their partner was unemployed. As a consequence, most of the participants, through their ability to earn money engaging in sex work, were the final resort for the household when it came to paying for food, utilities or the rent.

The participant below describes how she is the primary household earner now that her partner has just lost his job.

*I: So you're helping support him right now?*

*R: Yea for now 'cause he say he going start from next week he going back and look for a job, a different job. But he does get jobs fast, getting a job for him does be so easy.*

Participants and their family of origin (parents and siblings) assisted each other in meeting basic needs in a reciprocal, free form yet critical manner. Very often, the participants' family provided in kind assistance in the form of food, clothing, school supplies, etc. Since entire families of the participants lived in poverty, often for multiple generations, this assistance was minimal and did not allow for the kind of personal investment that could enable one to rise from poverty. The participant below is a young woman who was raised by her aunt, who she can turn to occasionally for food.

*I: Umm. Does your aunt ever give you umm like money or umm...?  
R: She don't give me money, she does give me like couple food stuff cause she going through a little struggle too so she does give me what she could help me with.*

Here a participant longs to be able to buy things she wants rather than depending on her mother to provide her food or receiving second hand clothes from her sibling.

*Worries me... well getting a job and having food, which in I could get a little bit of food from my mother. But you know sometimes you does feel like eating a hamburger, KFC right you know. I don't buy stuff, clothes my sister give me all my clothes she give me her stuff she wears, but but umm sometimes you feel like going in something nice that you don't have to go out there and let men take advantage you know?*

Very often this assistance goes to meet the basic needs of the participants' children. Although supplemental in nature and at times modest, the assistance provided by parents and siblings of the participants met critical needs for their children. At the same time, some of the participant's children live with a maternal or paternal grandparent, and the participant give cash earned on the road to this caregiver. It should be noted that typically these participants saw these children daily, often taking them to and picking them up from school.

This pattern of giving cash to members of their family periodically was common among the participants. Although many of the participants lived in chronic poverty and tended to spend their earnings modestly, it was not uncommon for participants to give cash assistance to family members including their mother, siblings and even cousins. There was a general ethos of giving to members of the family who did not have the means to care for themselves at that time. Unfortunately, because participants could always rely on sex work if money was absolutely necessary, they often were burdened with providing some of their earnings to family members' households in greater need.

For some participants this duty to assist adult members of their family particularly their parents drifted into what was considered by these participants to be economic abuse or exploitation. This was particularly true for those whose children were being raised by a maternal or paternal grandparent. The participant quoted below is no longer engaged in sex work. When she was working she often gave money to her mother, siblings and even cousins. She describes how she felt used by her family.

*R: Everybody did just want me for money. My mother, want me for money...  
I: Who's everyone?  
R: Cousins...  
I: So, people knew that...the people around you, your friends, your family knew that you had money so they would kind of, they would...  
R: Yea stick close just to get money  
I: Umm. What's you're relationship like with them now?  
R: Umm, aint so close right now.*

For many participants, the ability to depend upon a customer and the duty of reciprocal giving and receiving to and from members of their family to provide assistance when it was absolutely necessary, was beneficial and enabled their basic physical survival. This reciprocal pattern of giving also meant, however, that assistance received meant a payment was owed. For the participants, many of whom were engaged in relationships with intimate partners or family members that have a history of exploitation and abuse, payment was often coerced, shame induced, or required upon demand in the form of sex. Living in a state of chronic poverty and constant need required many of the participants to place themselves in a subjugated position when asking for help. Having to lower oneself relative to another continually became too dehumanizing for some participants. As a consequence, these participants opted to avoid asking for help ever, from anyone. This reluctance to ask for help was explained by one participant.

*Well, sometimes if I don't got nothing inside to eat it humbug me but I don't let nobody know cause if I let somebody know yes if I feed you today tomorrow them throw it back in your face; I now done feed you and this thing and the next thing so I don't tell nobody I hungry. If I got something inside I does make that do for me and my child. I don't go out there I aint going out there to make nobody miserable cause I aint letting nobody pity me.*

### **Challenges Finding Adequate Employment**

Participants shared formidable challenges in finding and maintaining even modestly paying employment. Limited skills and education, coupled with lack of suitable and affordable childcare closed off opportunities to employment. These challenges were heightened by a current economic climate, whereby those at every level of the labor market are being squeezed downward. These current economic conditions have squeezed this community of women outside the traditional labor market altogether. The comment shared by a participant below was repeated by most of the participants.

*To me that is not much because to get like to actually get a proper job. In this day and age you have to have more, despite I have a cousin who has thirteen certificates and some umm degrees and cant, they say she's over educated.*

The social stigma associated with transactional sex work was an unyielding barrier to employment. Many of the participants had some history of working, most often as a cook or server in a restaurant or as a supermarket cashier, often this was in their teens or early 20s before they had children. However, once participants entered transactional sex work, nearly all encountered significant challenges finding or keeping employment. Many participants described submitting applications for an assortment of employers, including gas stations, super markets or fast food restaurants, and receiving no reply. Some were given a job only to be fired after it came to the employers' attention that they were known to be a transactional sex worker. Sometimes this notification came in the form of people passing by and mocking the participant while she was working. Other times employers were notified directly by customers disturbed that a person known to be a transactional sex worker was employed at the establishment. The participant below describes her reluctance to work at a gas station located in an area she worked as a transactional sex worker for fear of being ridiculed.

*If I could find work yes, but then I was saying like at a gas station of something but then I figure at a gas station from doing that sort of work people would point you out even going town...I don't go town, I don't go town.*

Many of the participants struggle with multiple psycho-social challenges including significant interpersonal trauma in the form of childhood sexual abuse, neglect and physical abuse, intimate partner violence and work related violence and assault, fragmented family that face similar levels of chronic poverty, limited education and job skills and, for a few, alcohol and drug dependence. Nevertheless, nearly all the participants shared how they would be okay if only they had a modest, yet decent paying job. The account shared below was echoed by many of the participants who feel their life would be so much more manageable and peaceful if only they had a decent paying job.

*I would like a little place- I would like a job first, just a little something that I could do- that I could raise enough money to rent a little room or whatever. And I be good from there cause when I working I going be good, cause I going be able to pay my rent, buy my food and thing for my children. And I could work and come along up, save my money and get something else to rent. But really I...I want a spot, where I could save my- I start to save where I could save some money, and get some wood and build a little house for myself. So that even if I got to pay the light and water, I aint got to pay the light and water and rent... the light and water, and even if I got to pay for the little house spot.*

Unfortunately, the only work, outside of transactional sex work, available to the participants pays so little that one would not be able to pay the rent for a single room. And even this work is typically lost once it is learned she was engaged in transactional sex work.

## **Summary**

The economic conditions for nearly all of the participants is dismal and unrelenting. The nation's current economic crisis has squeezed the community of women engaged in sex work to an even lower rung on the labor market. In spite of the association many in society have regarding the earning potential for transactional sex work, and existing stereotypes whereby it is assumed these earnings support a frivolous and comfortable life style, almost all of the participants live in severe and chronic poverty. Contrary to expectations, transactional sex work does not provide steady income, and it is associated with significant and enduring risks and costs. Sex work introduces exposure to life threatening STIs, and the stigma associated with sex work enables predators to physically assault and rob sex workers with near impunity. As a consequence, participants work only enough to make ends meet and they tend to stop work for as long as they have a reserve of money. Typically, participants piece money from various sources to get by, including an odd temporary job, family or their children's father. Sadly, those people surrounding women engaged in sex work tend to be equally poor and under-employed, leaving them as the final resort in providing for the family.

## **Participants' Experiences with Intimate Relationships**

During the interview, participants were asked about their intimate relationships. Nearly all of the women described themselves as being attracted to men, and many of the women were in an intimate relationship at the time of the interview. Some women were recently in a relationship, but currently were not involved with anyone, and some of the participants had chosen not to engage in intimate relationships at all. They also were asked how they met their partner and how they got along. Most of the participants were actively engaged in a relationship with someone. Participants who were in a relationship tended to reside with their partner. Some of the participants were actively engaged in relationships that they described as being quite positive and supportive. Most of these relationships were in the early stages. Only several participants who had been with their intimate partner for several years or more had relationships that they described as positive and supportive.

With the exception of the few women who were actively engaged in a happy long term relationship, participants found it difficult to remain in healthy, positive relationships. This was due, in some part to the economic conditions of both the participants and their partners. The partners appeared, from the participants' description, to have similar economic and career prospects as the participants, in that they had limited education, few employable skills and hovered at the margins of the labor market. A few participants had partners that had some construction and carpentry skills, but were unable to procure stable, secure jobs in the industry. As a consequence, they tended to work for a brief period of time in construction and then remain unemployed, or fall back on more marginal work or business to get by. More often than not, the partners of these participants typically were living lives that involved being out all night in bars and on the street, drugs and alcohol, criminal activity and violence. However, engagement in sex work, itself, appeared to be the more significant factor affecting the participants' ability to find and maintain healthy and supportive intimate relationships. The participant's engagement in sex work had an impact on various aspects of the relationship including, how they met prospective partners, sexual intimacy, and power and the negotiation of conflict.

A pattern emerged with regard to the intimate relationships of the participants. They tended to follow a common trajectory, whereby, they met their partner, typically while working on the road. They typically came off the road soon after meeting their partner, or at least reduced their time on the road significantly. Their partner would invariably lose his job or become underemployed, which would require the participants to resume sex work. This would introduce tension into the relationship with would quickly become abusive and dehumanizing. Ultimately, the abuse would become so severe or dangerous, that the participants would leave the relationship and fully resume sex work to support themselves.

### **Meeting Prospective Intimate Partners**

Participants were asked how they met their partner. Many of the participants met their partner while they were working. Very often their partner was either a customer, worked in some sex work related industry or both. Sex work related industries included selling snacks or soft drinks, drug dealing, driving a cab, or serving as protection for sex workers. Many of the participants had current or past boyfriends that were involved in organized illegal business activities ("gangsters"). The partner (current or former) of some of the participants was in jail, very often for selling drugs, assault or robbery. These men tended to live at the margins, spending much of the night out liming in bars where sex workers were known to do business,



drank more heavily than was the norm, and had some involvement in drug use. For most of the participants their partner was a former customer, with whom they developed a relationship.

*R: Well I met him at first when I was young, say I was fourteen, fifteen. But by I was young and he was more older we didn't take it that...thing. So we start talking back about last year he saw me on the road and we start talking back together*

*I: He saw you while you were working?*

*R: Yes please.*

Most of the participants did not have much of a social life outside of sex work. Typically the participants describe working long hours at night, sleep a few hours in the morning and then tend to the needs of their children. This leaves little time to socialize, even for the younger participants. Some of the participants reported that for fun they would lime. This typically involved going to a bar with friends, usually female friends who were also sex workers and men who also tended to spend their evenings in areas where one could solicit a sex worker. This left the participants with little opportunity to find men who had stable and legal employment. Many participants described how meeting their partner on the road freed them from having to explain their lives. They felt understood by their partners who inhabited a similar world.

*R: The girls that- I get to understand- that he had before me was in the same kind of work and thing so. It would be easy to he 'cause he already know what we accustom to, dealing with girls that thing*

*I: So he like when you say he was out in the streets so he was a customer?*

*R: Uh umm*

*I: Like he would go out...?*

*R: He use be there and he use to sell; these Bajan boys does get these bottles that they would sell cigarette and thing and so on and so on.*

Typically, these customers who became boyfriends were older men. Several of the participants had a similar experience shared by the participant below involving van men. When these participants were teenagers, older van drivers flirted with them. Years later they encountered and recognized these van drivers during sex work as customers, who they often found attractive when they were teenagers.

*R: Well he was a job*

*I: So what happen, how did it how did you go from him being a job to...*

*R: Well when I was going school, when I was younger I use to always look at he, then a night I was out by the Garrison he stop and ask me how much, so I was like I tell he sixty and then when I get in, and we exchange numbers, and he call me the next day we went out and we just keep going out going out going out*

*I: So you knew him from high school?*

*R: Yea*

*I: You went to the same high school together?*

*R: Uh uhh, he use to work van I use to see he*

*I: He's older?*

- R: *Yea he's thirty*  
I: *Umm so, so he was someone you always kind of liked?*  
R: *Yea.*

Unfortunately, the sex work and illicit drug industry were intertwined. As such for some participants rather than meeting their partner through sex work, they were introduced to sex work by their boyfriend, who associated in both the illicit drug and sex work industry. For several participants, addiction to cocaine invariably introduced them to sex work.

- I: *How did you know this guy?*  
R: *Through a friend of mine. Well, we was in like a relationship like and then he introduce me to it [sex work], but the like... when I got into the work doing it now I just end all contact with the fellow.*

The method available for participants to meet intimate partners leads to partners that are not promising prospects for long term relationships which can provide stability. Meeting partners under these prospects, who themselves live similarly marginal lives, results in relationships that are strained and conflictual.

### **Striving to Remain Engaged in a Healthy Relationship**

There were inherent challenges to remaining engaged in an intimate relationship while remaining engaged in sex work. In spite of the challenges, some of the participants expressed optimism that their current relationship would work out well. One participant who was pregnant at the time of the interview, was closely involved with a boyfriend who she met on the road who was actively involved in the church. Once she became pregnant, he encouraged her to come off the road. Unfortunately, he has little ability to provide for her. Moreover, his family who is also very engaged in the church has not been supportive of their relationship. Nevertheless, she remains optimistic that she finally found someone who is good for her, even though, as is evident from the quote below, that he is not equipped to provide for himself, the participant and their child.

- R: *So even if I start going back to church on Saturday...on a Sunday I could probably get into the routine now where I would meet back a group a Seventh Day Adventist group that I would go back to church because my boyfriend is Seventh Day Adventist also, but he does...he does stay inside all day*  
I: *He what?*  
R: *He would stay inside.*

Some of the participants were able to take a hiatus from sex work and were supported economically by their intimate partner. Very often, however, this suspension from sex work was short lived due in large part to the precarious employment status of their partners. Invariably, they needed to return to sex work, at least to supplement household expenses. While several participants resumed sex work secretly, most participants informed their intimate partner. It was commonly reported by the participants, that their partners preferred to stay on the road and keep an eye on them. These were partners the participants had met on the road, so it was a known and familiar environment to these partners. Several of these participants felt safer knowing that their

partner was out on the road, however, these tended to be participants who were involved with gangsters and drug dealers with a prominent reputation for being very dangerous. Nevertheless, for the most part, the participants did not feel any safer with their partners out on the road, reporting that they allowed it more to provide their partner with a sense of security.

*R: It make him feel better but it didn't make me feel no way cause It didn't bother me if he come or not I still wasn't letting nobody do me nothing. But he did feel better so since it make you feel better come*

*I: Did he interfere at all with your work no he...?*

*R: He would go by the bar and drink go all in Nelson Street and find friends to lime with and thing until I ready. When I ready I would call he and tell he well I ready to go home and we would go and go home.*

For some participants, particularly those who had already endured the early phases of a budding relationship, remaining engaged in sex work introduced conflict into the relationship, which took two forms. The first was in the form of inner conflict related to engaging in sex for work and returning to their partner afterward. These participants shared feeling guilty, dirty and not normal.

*R: Yes but like, knowing the fact that...alright know the fact that you got a man, you got to be getting up from along side your man, that you calling your personal man, to go outside and let six or seven or eight different men get on top of you then to go home bathe and lay down next to the same man, that is not normal. That is not nothing a normal person would do*

*I: And that thought upset you?*

*R: Yea, cause you can't have a real relationship when you doing this. Things like this. It does always be noise, quarrels, fights everything and you can't tell them nothing because look at what you doing. That is what them does say look at what you doing you can't tell me nothing.*

Working on the road while actively trying to maintain a trusting monogamous intimate relationship also introduced conflict with their partner. Although the participants and their partners understood that engaging in sex with other men was work and nothing more, some of the partners felt jealous and insecure. Even those partners who were able to keep these feelings in check, feared how things like contraction of an STI or becoming pregnant as a result of intercourse with a customer could have devastating effects on the relationship.

*Uh uh so he write me a time and tell me [Participant name] all I want you to do is don't get pregnant, cause he don't know how he going handle that and different stuff after all this while he wait for me and thing. And if we didn't meant to be together the Lord wouldn't make we like meet back up at the jam and different stuff and thing.*

Another source of conflict experienced by nearly all the participants was their partners' infidelity. Almost always, participants described how their partners would excuse their infidelity

because the participants themselves were not being faithful because they were engaged in sex work.

*He knew but he say best I stop-and one reason too...the reason why I broke up with him is cause despite he was unfaithful was like, because the man helping you, you feel he's ok, then he tell-saying he the only person doing this, helping me out he always got to pay the bills, the rent and plus the umm the other stuff.*

Participants were often pressured to come off of the road by their partners. The consequences to working on the road were too deleterious for many participants, and so they ultimately decided to stop sex work.

*R: He aint tell me what he think about it, but the other day me and he was talking and he telling me that he would love me to get off the road to be off the road, to be off the road for good and to go look for work*

*I: He doesn't want you to do this work?*

*R: Cause every time I around he me and he does got a quarrel and he tell me most of the time when we quarreling it does be because he studying that I cross there*

*I: Studying what?*

*R: He studying that I on the road doing that.*

For some of these participants, this was a welcome respite. Some participants feared how relying upon their partner economically might make them vulnerable to abuse.

### **Widespread Intimate Abuse and Subjugation**

The stigma associated with sex work combined with the type of partners with which the participants entered relationships resulted in abusive, exploitative and subjugating intimate relationships. Eighteen of the participants reported having experienced intimate partner violence, and reported multiple relationships that ultimately became abusive. Some of the participants entered relationships with working men who attempted to care for them. Many entered relationships with customers who actively socialized and conducted often illicit business on the road. These relationships began with exploitation and eventually became subjugating, physically abusive and dangerous to the participants' health and wellbeing.

While none of the participants reported having a pimp, per se, to whom they gave part of their earnings, they did enter relationships and provide support to boyfriends who they met on the road. These men typically had business dealings on the road or spent nights out drinking in establishments associated with sex work. Many of the participants entered a relationship with such men, who in turn relied upon the participants for economic support. Sometimes, these relationships began with the men offering support to the participants, but soon afterward the participants were the primary source of economic support. Most of the participants readily recognized this pattern.

*R: Cause everybody does come in sweet, you know? He going to come in sweet...couple months now he show he true colors, confusing me what going to happen there now?*

*I: Confusing you in what way?*

*R: I mean like, when I say confusing I mean problem it could be about a woman it could be about... it could be a problem that he ain't going and look for work, cause some men does make you believe that them working, then two twos them ain't doing nothing; them on a block liming.*

Many participants became suspicious and wary of men who wanted to enter relationships with them.

*To be honest, his salary is small right? So he meet me in doing this job. To me he got so much feelings for me you understand? Maybe, I tell myself he just marry me because of the job that I use to do and I use to help with...you understand. But he don't have no feelings for me.*

Many participants talked about how they had trouble believing that the men approaching them really cared. Sadly, the reason they were suspicious is they could not believe that someone would be serious about a woman who was engaged in sex work.

*I: So being associated with this work makes it hard to have relationships*

*R: Right, so that's why me don't try to keep relationships. Because with this work and relationship, it no really work out. Some of them men want you work and you support them.*

Many of the participants discussed how being a sex worker limited their ability to set limits with their partner. It was not unusual for partners to insist on having sex with them, mistreat them, verbally degrade and physically assault the participants. These participants described how their partner did not deem them worthy of better treatment because they were sex workers.

*I: Umm, tell me about, tell me about your relationship with your boyfriend*

*R: Stressful because of the work you is be doing. Them have this thing if you out there selling your fronts as them say them could do as them like. So you can't tell them who to talk to where to go ask them where them going what time them coming back. You can't ask them kind of questions.*

It was not uncommon for participants to discuss how some of the arguments they had with their partner because he suspected she was cheating on him. Some participants had regular customers whom they also considered friends. Although the participants were clear in these instances that this was clearly a business arrangement, it may not be clear from the outside, that this was a purely transactional relationship.

*R: He mind he friends. He friends tell he that I get in a car, a man car, which was true I admit to he it was true but where was I going I was going by my daughter school to carry something for she. He believe them and he went along*

*I: Umm. Why did he believe them and not you?*

*R: Umm*

- I: *Why did he believe them and not you?*  
R: *I don't know, them is he friends so I don't know.*

Similarly, since it is not unusual for participants to be known as sex workers, they often get whispered about and propositioned, even if they have left sex work. This too, makes it difficult for them to prove to their partner that they are being faithful.

*So I was like alright if we walking together, at first when we use to be walking together people use to come and say ohh that girl use to smoke and this and that how you could be with she and what's not. And he use to feel bad and I tell him I.. I was like, all you got to do is tell me who it is; and it get out of hand. Until my aunt come and took me from by him a day. We get we went back quarreling, it is just always quarreling quarreling, quarreling and I realize the quarreling start after I went unprotected with him.*

Very often the arguing, fighting and abuse was most common when the participant suspected her partner was cheating on her. Sadly, they had little power to negotiate better, fairer treatment from their partner.

- R: *No I had to end up stabbing he up. I come home and catch he...he was living with me, I come home and I catch he with a woman in my apartment, so he didn't want stabbing up?*  
I: *Well, I could understand how you would feel*  
R: *And I was pregnant, young pregnant*  
I: *So you attacked him?*  
R: *Yea!*  
I: *What became of that, did he call the police or anything?*  
R: *No, he just went and get help with the hand and thing.*

The participants reported that their partner's infidelity was the most common cause for arguments and was what would ultimately lead to the termination of the relationship. For the participants, infidelity went beyond an emotional betrayal. First and foremost, infidelity posed a risk to their health. It was not atypical for the partner of the participants to enter one relationship as they were leaving another, sometimes, even keeping two or three girlfriends at a time. For many participants, particularly those who dated men who would lime or do business in these areas where participants worked, the dating scene was treacherous.

*Because you going to come around me, you got she, god know you been tellin' she and telling me and got another woman out there, and that is how people does get sick too. If you don't got your head on.*

### **Challenges in Negotiating Condom Use**

Throughout the interviews with every participant was some discussion of partner infidelity. Participants discussed quarreling due to partner infidelity, being angered when they learned their partner impregnated another woman, and leaving a partner because he was unfaithful. In light of the common and frequent experience of infidelity in their intimate

relationships, the participants were asked if and how often they used condoms in their intimate relationships. When engaged in sex work, all but several participants used condoms regularly and vigilantly. However, in their intimate relationships, only several participants used condoms consistently. Overwhelmingly, the participants tended to use condoms regularly in the beginning of the relationship, and then discontinued usage once they were in a relationship. Participants were aware and concerned about the risk unprotected sex with an intimate partner posed.

*Sometimes he would like go out there and be with friends and liming and so on and thing. But then you start hearing about girls that he dealing with...a matter of fact, a matter of fact he was out there then I heard that this girl getting baby for he too. So it's this other girl that he got a child with but he use to try to deny- i's not he and thing. But you know- resemblance you would see my children and you child resemble. And that is one of the reason make I- you know just done with he because if me and you should be together and we- sometimes we will do unprotected sex. That means that you doing unprotected sex with somebody else, you don't know who she's sleeping with too.*

When asked what stopped them from insisting upon the use of condoms, much like they did when with a customer, they reported that it was more challenging to insist on the return of the use of condoms. These participants reported that they worried this request would raise concern in their partner that she had cheated or contracted an STI while working. They already felt that engagement in sex work destabilized and imperiled their relationship, and did not feel they had the power in the relationship to ask. For many of these participants, they were reluctant to insist on a condom even when they experienced a broken condom while working. Their remedy for this situation was to get tested as soon as possible. They tended not to even encourage condom use temporarily until their received their test results. While there is tremendous concern that sex workers are a transmission hub for HIV, for these participants there appears to be a greater risk that they would be infected by an intimate partner rather than transmit an STI such as HIV. This was certainly the impression among the participants.

*Yea because it does don't making no sense going out on the street and going along and living with Tom, Dick, and Harry. Cause right now I frighten bad. Even a man that I had, I had, me and he get away the other day. He is a Guyanese. He got two women, he tell me I making three. But I don't mind he got two women I don't know the women the women don't know me. But when I sit down and study, how he could get two woman one live in Guyana one live here and see me and like me and I is one of them, that mean I don't like myself. Cause I don't know what them women be doing. And sometimes in a relationship, you protect you self. But when you getting deeper in the relationship, the man don't going to want no condoms. You not going to want no condoms. Because I does tell people people don't catch AIDS from prostitution. In prostitution you see you get AIDS its because that she fall in love with somebody. Cause condoms is not one hundred percent safe. If the condom burst too. But really truly, it is lovers.*

Among the participants in this study one HIV positive participant contracted the disease through intravenous drug use, while the other contracted it from her husband through

heterosexual sex. The participants expressed serious concern about contracting a disease from their partner. Sadly, for most of the participants, their solution to this risk was terminating the relationship. In fact, many participants reported that they ended their intimate relationship due to infidelity. However, rather than describing the pain or betrayal associated with the infidelity, they emphasized how they could not endure the risk posed to remaining in a relationship with someone who could give them HIV. Paradoxically, leaving their relationships often meant returning more actively into sex work. It appears from the participants' statements and actions, that sex work posed less of a threat to them contracting HIV than remaining in a relationship with their partner. In fact, some participants described how in order to leave their abusive relationship, where they had little control over their reproductive health, they resumed sex work.

### **Relationship Tend to be Transactional**

While participants appear to care for their intimate partners, and show commitment to the relationship by providing for the household when her partner becomes unemployed, many of the intimate relationships in the participants' lives, nevertheless, are transactional. Starting early in their adolescence, many of the participants described how, faced with conditions of severe poverty, they entered intimate relationships with older men who paid for their school supplies and other necessities, gave them extra money for clothes and entertainment, and even provided a provided basic shelter. To be clear, this is not to say that the participants did not have feelings for their partners, did not care deeply for him, and were not fully invested in the relationship. Overwhelmingly, the participants were sincerely engaged in these relationships. However, fully appreciating the desperate context whereby they faced conditions of chronic poverty, participants gravitated toward relationships that could provide them respite from hunger, overcrowded, conflict ridden and abusive family homes. The following participant, who had been engaged in sex work for decades, described her early adolescent years and what prompted her to go with older men.

*R: Either come at you or we go somewhere, cause you young and you flirting you know but it wasn't a good activity for nobody you know*

*I: Uh hmm, so you had some boys that you- were they boys or were they men...*

*R: Not boys men grown men. I never had a boyfriend that was seventeen eighteen I had men that was forty fifty grown men aint no little boys that you know as a girl you got you boyfriend it wasn't nothing like that*

*I: You were fourteen fifteen?*

*R: Had to go out and look, you had to aint had no choice. Hmm talking about that does pain my heart, it does hurt me inside cause the time I aint had no choice I had to do what I had to do.*

Even in adulthood, many participants described entering relationships as a means to exit, or at least take a respite, from sex work. Although most of these relationships resulted in exploitation, many of the participants described how they would like to meet someone who treated them well so that they would not have to work on the road.

*I: So the times then for the most part when you were in a relationship you weren't working you weren't*



R: No, no

I: Cause them were helping?

R: Them would make sure that not 'nough but whatever little bit I get I would be contented with you understand. As I told you I is not a wild person and if I going to got somebody to look out for me well that is ok. We could be good.

Unfortunately, participants predominantly experienced relationships that soon became exploitative and abusive. When relationships became abusive the participants tended to exit the relationship, often preferring sex work, over which they exercised greater control.

R: Well me did come with a little money and me spend it wild, until me meet a man and he use to help me out little but them use to say friends in weeks, personal then try to push you round and round so that's why like me and the girl was talking and me tell her and then she tell me it's best to leave him. Do me own thing so. Just move on.

I: So you say that the beginning you went with a man who would kind of push you around to different, that you didn't like that as much. Tell me about that

R: Like sometime them give you things when you need it then you don't see them and you don't hear them until when they feel like turn up again and just turn up. So it made it difficult in a difficult situation. Landlord money for them rent and so you just have to move on.

### **Lost Hope for a Good Relationship**

Some of the participants, particularly those that were older and had been engaged in sex work for many years, had lost hope of finding an intimate partner who would treat them well. As such, these participants elected not to seek out an intimate relationship and rebuffed advances from men who expressed interest.

Traumatic and repeated experiences of abuse, subjugation and exploitation in their intimate relationship was the primary reason cited by the participants for why they had no interest in seeking an intimate relationship. Many described how they were doubtful that a man who expressed interest in a woman who was engaged in sex work would have authentic feelings for her. These participants were aware that their ability to make money through sex work attracted some men.

*If you got somebody dealing with and they- you and them getting all the problems, that you say that you don't want to deal with them no more and you tired of being... them...so it like hard for you to fall in the same...in love now with somebody else cause you going be thinking now you going probably go through the same thing especially with men that going be out on the streets too, then after being out there and seeing other men with girls you already know what going on you know, so...*

Some participants expressed how the cost of being in a relationship, both in the form of monetary support and abuse endured, far outweighed the benefits.

I: are you with anybody right now are you in a relationship no?

R: Done with that I close that

I: You're done with that

R: It doesn't make sense because I aint want to go through the same issues that I went already, when I was before you know more focus; I aint going through that. If I got a dollar I make it do me, if I don't have I don't have. But I aint going with men; I cut out that. It doesn't make sense and a lot of sickness out there and at my age I aint going in front no doctor, you know what I mean. And the little thing they give the little petty change- fifty, sixty dollars come on, you know? And then them want to control you want to rule you, you know what I meaning? I does just let it go, but if I get a little job to go and do I going do it. Just to bring in food.

Ultimately, many of the participants did not believe that they could find a partner who treated them well and took the relationship seriously while engaged in transactional sex work. Sadly, in these participants' experience, being engaged in sex work attracted men who would exploit them and kept away decent men who were caring providers.

*Cause due that I by myself it aint make no sense saving my money for somebody else to get it or somebody that I may not know might want to fight over the money that I work so hard for that probably did not like me either, so I just live my life day by day.*

## **Summary**

The participants describe largely negative, oftentimes transactional, relationships that are commonly abusive and exploitative. It appears engagement in sex work and its associated stigma plays a large role in influencing their relationships. It appears that for many of the participants, unstable, violent and impoverished conditions lead them at a young age to seek safety, support and subsistence from intimate relationships. Many of these relationships start with the participant becoming economically dependent on their intimate partner. Relationship power inequities related to societal inequities in gender and social class create conditions for relationships that quickly become severely abusive, subjugating and dehumanizing.

## Exposure to Work Related Trauma

According to reports by the participants, sex work involves the chronic exposure to the risk for severe, life threatening violence. The number of years the participants were engaged in sex work ranged from one to 48. The average number of years they were engaged in sex work was 12.6 with a median of six years. An overwhelming majority of the participants grimly described an acute awareness that every night they went out on the road, every hour they remained out there, every additional customer they decided to service before returning safely home could result in the end of their life. Based on the incidences of violence reported by the participants, this fear is warranted. Eighteen of the 30 participants experienced at least one incidence of work related violence. Several of the participants experienced more than one incidence of work related violence. These assaults were typically sudden and brutal. The most commonly reported type of violence reported was robbery, followed by rape, physical assault and kidnap/attempted murder (please see figure XX). It should be noted that physical assaults typically occurred during the reported rapes, kidnappings/attempted murder and robberies. Similarly, participants typically feared for their life during all these types of work related violence.

Figure 8

### *Participants' Experience of Work Related Violence*

<u>Type of Incident</u>	<u>Frequency of Incidences</u>
Robbery	5
Robbery with a Knife	2
Robbery with a Gun	1
Rape (Attempted/Completed)	2/1
Rape with a Gun	1
Kidnap/Attempted Murder via Strangulation	2
Physical Assault	2
Physical Assault with a Knife	1
Witness of a Murder with a Gun	1

## The Role of Spirituality in Maintaining Safety at Work

All of the participants described strategies for maintaining safety on the road. Since fear of contracting HIV or other STIs was constant, nearly all of the participants reported using their condoms (as opposed to the one offered by the customer), and employed strategies for ensuring the condom remained in place and intact. Participants described rules for maintaining safety, types of sexual services they refused to provide, and the safer methods for meeting customers. Many of the strategies they utilized for remaining safe centered on sussing out or perceiving danger in a potential customer. Initially most participants described their discernment of risky customers as a sense that he was dangerous. However, upon deeper prodding, many participants tended to avoid men who appeared drunk, dour, rowdy, aggressive or shifting in his requests. Most noteworthy, however, was the role of spirituality for participants in maintaining safety while working on the road.

Nearly all of the participants described a close relationship with God, who they viewed as keeping them safe on the road. Many of the participants had conflicted feelings regarding the

morality of working on the road. Yet, nearly all of the participants believed God understood their circumstances, and why they needed to work on the road at least for now. Nearly all of the participants prayed before going out to work for the evening. They typically prayed for God to watch over them and protect them so that they could return home safely. These participants also described how God would communicate with them while they were working, alerting them to danger.

Often these communications came in the form of uneasy feelings about a situation, thoughts that would flash through their mind alerting them to walk away or go home. Sometimes God's protection took the form of an event or incident that caused them to avoid an attack that took place. Some participants described being protected by the spirit of a deceased loved one. Many of these participants also describe the countervailing force of the devil or an evil force pushing them into danger. This force often tempted participants to go against their better judgement or to violate their rules, such as going into a customer's car, accompanying a customer to another location, proceeding to go with a customer who showed signs of not being trustworthy, or taking on an additional fare even though she had made enough money that night. In these instances, they are tempted by the promise of an exceptionally high fare, or feel some kind of sympathy for or allure towards the customer.

Many participants describe getting a feeling that something bad was about to happen. These participants viewed this as a communication from God, and so always heeded this feeling.

*R: People is say well you protect with condoms, but what I know as long as I go with that person I just got the feelings the condom going burst*  
*I: You have this feeling?*  
*R: uh hmm*  
*I: And so you so...*  
*R: I don't go I don't go I aint going go because I got the feeling I does got the feelings is God does protect me all the time yea.*

*And I do think that God is still with me because I use to say I have a six sense but I think I have a spiritual being but I could only be use if I change my life but sometimes I does just know things before them happen, but thanks to God I can't give myself praise for it. But, and sometimes I does just have this fearful feeling like something wrong.*

Several participants described how beloved family members who passed would watch over them. Often these participants carried a symbol of this person with them while they were working for protection.

*My grandmother give me a bracelet and tell me to never take it off- my grandmother from the States- never take- she tell me it is a lucky charm I don't know like if it is true I tell myself it like it is true*  
*I: Your mom...this is your dad's mom?*  
*R: My dad's mom... I mean my great grandmother not my grandmother, my dad's grandmother. Right, so when like she come and she give me it she tell me like don't take it off umm is a lucky charm and different stuff. So, I does work...I does follow my mind I don't go against my mind, if my mind tell me don't go no*

*matter how much money he saying, I'm not going. So I find that that work out quite fine with me...*

Some of the participants described a heavy lethargic feeling that would discourage them from heading out to work at all. Often this would be experienced as procrastination. Nevertheless, these participants believed that this was God protecting them from an incident that would happen that night on the road.

*Before I go on the road and when I check myself I wake up two o'clock in the morning the whole night done gone, three o'clock and I be like, holler for man if two o'clock gone get up now and I say man [participant] take a little five more minute cause my body would be telling me rest, I would be tired, and like each time I like get up I would be like... back down, to lay down 'cause the Lord would like pushing me back down to lay down 'cause something could be happening on the road that He don't want me to be in, He protecting me. Then next time I get up after four in the morning outside start to get bright, I be like cha boy I wonder how [daughter] and [daughter] going go school in the morning.*

The participant below described how she was tempted by the devil to make a decision on the road that went against her better judgement. This experience was commonly reported by participants prior to an assault or incident.

*R: I would never leave out here and go nowhere. But that night the devil like it was they telling me get in the car. When he swing there I tell he no. But he still park and the fellows jump down with the collins and beat up the car and I get out you know*

*I: Yea and you got away?*

*R: Uh hmm*

### **The Consequences of Chronic Exposure to Risk for Violence and Mortal Danger**

The participants as a group experienced chronic exposure to multiple forms of severe trauma, including child physical abuse, childhood sexual abuse, witnessing domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and work place assault. Nineteen participants experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. Thirteen participants experienced multiple forms of exposure to violence and abuse in their lifetime. All 30 participants described experiencing broken condoms during sex work and the continual fear posed by this risk in the form of contracting HIV. As would be expected, many of the participants described having suffering the physical and psychological consequences of trauma. However, the continued exposure to risk associated with sex work appears to take a wrenching physical and psychological toll on the participants.

Many of the participants described some of the physical ailments and consequences of the psychological toll of prior work related assaults. The following participant describes how she felt and how her body reacted immediately following an incident in which a customer transported her to another location and raped her at gunpoint.

*Very, very, very, very, scary. I was frighten out my frigging.... I couldn't ever cry or nothing, I tell you everything emotional happen to me when I got by the corner,*

*right there by the bus pole, I cry. At one point in time I almost pee myself there standing up 'cause I couldn't believe it. I could not believe what just happen I tell myself look how this man would kill me and just gone along and leave me out here for somebody to find my body the next morning or something.*

The following participant was raped and assaulted while working. Her description of the physical and psychological toll this had long after the assault is vivid.

*And this thing give me a headache, I couldn't sleep, every time I go to sleep I could see it just flashing back in front of me all the time and I had this headache, most of my skin- cause when he lock off my neck and gag my mouth he drag me in the bush, so all my thing was scratch up from the grass; up under my eye was black and blue and thing. And every night I lay down my head hurt me and I could feel the room going around in circles.*

The following participant describes how dirty she felt after being raped while working. In response she bathed so vigorously that it had physical health consequences. As is evident from the quote, she could not find relief from the emotional consequences of this violation.

*I does sit down I does study it, I does try to like wash it off because when I go to the doctor I start bathing with Dettol you know Dettol soap? Right you know them say that is a clean soap, so since I like start to bathe with it just to wash off, but it started to give me a like a yeast infection that the doctor tell me like I know how you feel but you can't wash...she try to tell me I can't wash off the rape but I does feel that sort of way and I does start to feel dirty and I does start to remember the things he do to me and it does hurt a lot.*

Since most of the participants were required to return to work right after the work related assault, many described ways they tried to cope with the consequences of the past assault combined with the fear that it could re-occur.

*Like if I get rob a night, I would be frighten to work the other night or the next day I would be frighten cause you always seeing the fellow that rob you and every face you see then you going remember. That past- that behind and start fresh.*

Most of the participants who experienced work related assaults described how they simply had to repress their traumatic response and move past it.

*R: Yea be scared. Keep off the road a little while, but yes had to go back and look for what you got to look for*

*I: How did you get yourself back after that?*

*R: Umm*

*I: How did you, how did you work your way back after that?*

*R: Well, I don't really know but it frighten me and I was that sort of way but I get over it*

*I: You get over it*

R: *Uh hmm*  
I: *You have to?*  
R: *Yea.*

Sadly, some of the participants suffered severe mental health consequences from the chronic exposure to risk for work related violence, combined with the history of interpersonal trauma in the form of physical and sexual abuse and intimate partner violence. This very young participant described how depressed she felt after she was assaulted while working.

I: *Is...does that have to do with what one of the reasons not that but you mentioned that you feel you feel depressed?*  
R: *Uh hmm*  
I: *Can you tell me about that? How long have you felt that way?*  
R: *Long. [Jabez House Staff] could tell you in the past couple of month I had about eight nervous breakdowns. To the point, to I was actually to the point that I couldn't take it no more*  
I: *Tell me about your nervous breakdown, what does it look like, what does it feel like?*  
R: *It does feel bad I does feel like killing myself.*

### **Summary**

The participants endure chronic risk for exposure to severe and fatal violence when they engage in sex work. Since the overwhelming majority of the participants work only when necessary and after they have exhausted other options, they have little power to avoid this risk altogether. The participants appear to do their best to take precautions, and engage in spiritual coping that they report gives them a feeling of safety and psychological comfort. Nevertheless, the mortal dangers of sex work combined with pre-existing and co-occurring non-work related interpersonal traumas result in significant mental and physical health consequences.

## **Primary Sources of Distress and Emergent Strategies to Cope with Distress**

An analysis was conducted within the data to examine the sources of distress from the perspective of the participant, and then examine the strategies the participants utilized to cope with this distress. The researchers examined text in the interview data to which the following codes were attached, *anger, coping, depressed, effects of abuse violence, get accustomed, health problems, kill myself, mind relaxed, mental health, money stress, stress, under pressure, worries*. The related text was reviewed to examine the factors that appeared to be connected to or causing these sources of distress. The analysis then examined the strategies the participants utilized to cope with this distress.

### **Emergent Sources of Distress**

The following four themes emerged; poverty/desperate financial need, interpersonal trauma, experiences engaged in sex work, and health problems and worries.

#### *Poverty/Desperate Financial Need*

Desperate financial need and the suffering caused by chronic poverty emerged most prominently. Nearly all of the participants expressed some source of distress related to paying for bills, a persistent or abusive landlord, preoccupation with feeding their children, etc.

*[Financial pressure is] pushing me back down to lay down cause something could be happening on the road that he [God] don't want me to be in, he protecting me. Then, next time I get up after four in the morning outside start to get bright I be like cha boy I wonder how [my daughters] going go school in the morning, and how them going get to eat in the morning and different stuff. And tell the honest truth, I don't feel pleased saying this, but sometimes when I don't go out on a night I does be like... I does be crying in the morning telling myself my children going go school without things to eat, and they don't have no juices or any snacks.*

Many of the participants reported the anguish and sadness associated with being unable to feed their children, particularly before school, and it seemed to be the most acute source of financial distress.

#### *Interpersonal Trauma*

An overwhelming majority of the participants had some history of interpersonal trauma in their lifetime. Many of these participants continue to experience the emotional and psychological effects of this trauma. Moreover, the traumatic response to these events appeared to be exacerbated by financial distress, which prompted the need to work on the road. The two most common experiences of trauma included childhood sexual abuse and intimate partner violence. The psychological toll of childhood sexual abuse was exacerbated in moments when participants were engaged in sex work or felt financially incapable of providing for their children.

In addition to the deep and long endured psychological effects of childhood sexual abuse, many of the participants also suffered the degradation, fear and violence associated with more recent or current abusive intimate relationships. Sadly, this abuse for the participants often entangled degradation, pain and distress associated with poverty and sex work.



- I: *He use to hit you? What else would he do?*
- R: *Like when I go on the road take my money from me, all of those sort of things*
- I: *So he would steal your money?*
- R: *Not actually steal it but take it from me*
- I: *What do you mean? What's the difference? Like he would just take...like you had to give it to him?*
- R: *Right*
- I: *You had to hand over your money every morning*
- R: *He would be down there with me every night to make sure*
- I: *To make sure that you were working and giving it to him?*
- R: *Yes please.*

### *Experiences Engaged in Sex Work*

All but several participants discussed experienced distress associated with engagement in sex work. Two categories of stressors emerged regarding experiences engaged in sex work. The first was the emotional toll of sex work. This involved the pain associated with having multiple sex partners and the other related source pertained to the strain sex work was having on her intimate relationship. The second source of sex work related stress involved its associated dangers. Nearly all of the participants experienced significant distress both psychological and physical regarding the work related violence and dangers. Fear associated with the dangers of sex work pervaded the lives of the participants.

### *Health Problems and Worries*

Finally, many participants experience distress associated with health problems and worries. Nearly all of the participants experienced continual pre-occupation about contracting HIV. This pre-occupation turned to acute emotional and psychological distress when they experienced a broken condom or were raped while working. Some participants also worried they might contract HIV from their intimate partner.

Some of the participants had chronic health concerns such as diabetes, which required a good diet and medicine. The experience of chronic poverty affected these participants' ability to eat regularly and nutritionally or purchase necessary medicine. This appeared to cause both physical and emotional distress.

### *Interlocking Sources of Distress*

The sources of distress, poverty, interpersonal trauma, engaging in sex work and health problems, did not emerge in isolation of one another. In order to relieve the emotional and physical consequences of poverty, the participants worked on the road, which introduced them to work related stresses, health related fears and worries and exacerbated childhood abuse trauma. Most typically these factors were interlocking and interacting, particularly within the context of these participants' lives which was marked by ubiquitous conditions of acute powerlessness. Moreover, the consequences of these sources of distress flowed in multiple directions, thus making them inescapable.

## Strategies for Alleviating Distress

Five strategies emerged among the participants for alleviating this distress. Seeking economic relief, a relationship with God, social isolation, alcohol/drug use and engagement in formal services were the strategies most commonly employed.

### *Seeking Economic Relief*

The most common source of distress for participants was urgent economic need, and expectedly, participants coped with this distress through various methods of seeking relief. The two most common methods for seeking relief was sex work and via relationships with their intimate partners. Since work or even odd jobs outside of sex work were difficult to find, seeking non-sex work was not viable means for seeking expeditious economic relief. Also, while intimate partners were helpful in desperate times, they, too, often were unable to find employment. This left sex work as the only viable option for meeting immediate basic economic needs, such as paying an overdue utility bill, providing the landlord with enough back rent to stop harassment, or purchase food for her children so they could eat the next day.

Some participants coped with the ambivalence they felt about sex work by developing plans for leaving this industry. For these participants the knowledge that sex work was a temporary plan made it easier to cope with.

*R: Uh hmm yea, so I end up use to got to go there, got to work cause I still got my bills home. In the night so it use to tired me so I just it was one of my dreams*

*I: To become a cosmetologist and do hair?*

*R: Yea and then I didn't know everything I really didn't know I use to go try to get a English classes and so but, (sucks teeth) I aint know I never really sit down comfortable to get a focus on my dream you understand*

*I: You always struggling to get by?*

*R: Struggling, struggling, struggling, try all, but I still trying though I'm not giving up by it, I'm not giving up.*

Although, most of the participants did not want to remain engaged in sex work, and some even attempted to exit permanently, many described the powerful force of economic urgency which made a permanent departure from sex work seem impossible.

*I: So then you said it is like if...it is like bondage, where every time you try to get out of it something, starts a problem?*

*R: Or a problem arise if my kids suddenly get sick out the blue or ill*

*I: So some emergency or something that has to be dealt with immediately?*

*R: Like groceries, my kids always eating. And many times I does cry because I does say God is not helping me I could as well side with the devil and done. But I tell myself that ain't make sense. So umm it actually- I- ok...a normal person would understand it plays with your mind. But I realize they have some women who get to the point they just don't care and them is just continue and just do it until them die. But I'm not going to say so because power is in the choice.*

### *Relationship with God*

Many of the participants found comfort in their relationship with God. They prayed to God before leaving home in the evening to work on the road and at times they had no idea how they were going to feed their children the next day so they could go to school. They sought God's comfort when frantically awaiting HIV test results after a condom with a customer broke, and in moments when they felt so sad they considered ending their life.

*You can't stand home tonight, I was just fed up, I was like every night praying Lord...people feel you on the streets we don't know God, trust me, prostitutes talk to God all the time, but I don't feel He hear us or He hear us but He still saying well y'all got to go through this procedure in your life or something, but because before I leave home I say my prayers, like God carry me and bring me back safe home...*

### *Isolation*

Nearly all of the participants described how they practiced social isolation as a means of protecting themselves both physically and emotionally. Many participants avoided many members of their family, with whom they have experienced exploitation and abuse. They tended not to tell their family sensitive information about themselves, particularly involving sex work, for fear that it would be used to hurt them. This coping strategy was most commonly used on the road, where participants tended to avoid being robbed by jealous colleagues or social infighting, by keeping to themselves. Many participants were cordial with their colleagues on the road, and at times they helped keep each other safe. However, they rarely befriended other women who worked on the road. This participant describes how she relies upon herself for support, because she cannot turn to friends.

*R: Well I actually start talking to myself, not mad you know give myself encouragement because I can't find no one else because you can't trust, the close friend, you might think your friend, you can't trust them at all*  
*I: Even the girl who introduced you to it? Who first told you about it?*  
*R: Apparently she is...up to this day is years now she stop speaking to me cause she say- I was told she told someone I'm making more money than her, that was long ago but, but long ago isn't like now. It's quite dead but I mean what do I have for her to get jealous about? We're both doing the same thing aint it? So, but I don't have no grudge in my heart because that only increases a lot of violence and aggression and rage. It don't make sense. But she now- I don't know she- I don't know if she still does it but she turn to dope. And she think...I thought I was too good to do that.*

Some participants had female friends who were their roommates, and also engaged in sex work. These participants socialized with these friends from time to time, and they tended to get along well, according to participants' reports. However, the overwhelming majority of participants did not share any sensitive information about themselves with these friends. These participants reported that they could not confide in others because word spread easily and people would not keep secrets. The small and relatively insular social structure in Barbados heightened the fear that gossip they shared with close friends would inevitably spread throughout the island.

### *Alcohol and Drug Use*

Many of the participants relied upon drug and alcohol use to cope with the pain and fear of working on the road. The overwhelming majority of participants drank alcohol while working, and nearly all of the participants smoked marijuana. Most often participants smoked marijuana or drank to relax or put them in the mood for work. For some of these participants, a drink or two enabled them to release the discomfort they felt about working on the road or having sex with the customers. Some of the participants described how being in the mood allowed them to perform better, which enabled their partner to ejaculate faster and reduced the risk the condom would break.

*I: How about when you smoke, you say you, you smoke weed when you're working...*

*R: Uh huh*

*I: What does that do for you?*

*R: It just make me feel good, I does deal with the men good, so they would finish quick,*

*I: Umm, what do you mean finish quick? What does that mean tell me about it.*

*R: When I get high I does have sex better, So the men does come quick when I high.*

Some of the participants described how they also got into the habit of drinking or smoking marijuana when they came home, or during the day, to escape the anger and sadness they felt about the general conditions of their lives. Several of the participants reported that drinking or smoking during work has resulted in a problematic use of marijuana or drinking to cope with life outside of sex work.

### *Seeking Formal Assistance*

Nearly all of the participants sought gynecological care and HIV and STI testing to alleviate the stress and fear associated with contracting a disease while working. Seeking STI testing brought immediate psychological relief. Some of the participants with acute mental health distress sought psychiatric care. Many of the participants sought formal assistance at a community based NGO, which served women engaged in sex work. Participants primarily sought financial relief, employment training and supportive counseling from this NGO.

### **Summary**

With the exception of seeking formal services and spiritual coping, many of the strategies participants utilize to cope with distress (sex work, drug and alcohol use, social isolation) have adverse consequences. The psychological, physical, social, economic and spiritual consequences of these coping strategies are interactive and thus can create a destructive spiral. Moreover, these strategies for seeking relief magnify the participants' social stigmatization and marginalization. Interventions that facilitate engagement with the labor market, health and social services, religious communities, and other social groups can work to reverse the destructive spiral. These interventions also have the capacity to reduce the stigma and marginalization while empowering this acutely vulnerable group of women.

## Engagement with Formal Services

The participants were asked about their experiences with the system of formal social service systems. The purpose of this line of inquiry was to learn more about the types of service with which they engaged, how their needs were met and the ways in which they were treated. Participants sought the following types of services: employment assistance, financial assistance, police, healthcare, psychological and emotional care, and spiritual assistance.

### Employment Assistance

When asked what type of assistance would be helpful, the first response for nearly every participant was employment assistance. Participants tended to view lack of employment to be their primary problem.

*I: So are there things that you worry about?*

*R: Umm need a job. A job me need. Me get a job now me leave this tomorrow morning a job what can pay me. Me need a job.*

Generally, the participants felt that if they could obtain decent paying, steady employment, they would be okay.

*I: What about well not necessarily for you but for other women you know what are some of their needs that that would help them?*

*R: Like if them get work and thing. I feel that it would help nuff of them cause they would got them children and thing to support you know a lot you know a lot of things to do*

*I: So the biggest piece would be a job?*

*R: Uh hmm a job. At the end a job. Once you working you does feel so good. Cause you know when the week come that part you dollar coming from.*

The participants were asked about their professional aspirations. Most often participants aspired to start their own business, typically selling food from a small restaurant, a food stand, or catering, setting up a stand that sold produce, or selling their wares. This was viewed as a means by which they could use skills and talents they already possessed to support themselves and maintain economic independence.

*I: Umm, so what would, what do need, what do you think you need to make your life better? To make it like you want it to be*

*R: Well a house that I could call my own. A good job, like my own business so that I could be stable*

*I: Uh huh. So, to be economically ok, to be able to make a living and provide for your, for your family*

*R: Yea*

*I: Would you bring your son with you or would you leave him where he is?*

*R: I aint know, if I get my own. I would bring him with me.*

Some of these participants recognized the skills they acquired in sex work could transfer to other types of businesses. This is illustrated by the following participant who liked to clean and recognized her affinity with working well with all kinds of people.

*As he go into nursery I feel I going go about that again cause I really like cleaning ...I is a cleaning freak I like dealing with chemicals measurements anything like that I even get into the part where I was making like the towel animals and stuff like that. I want to do that back for truth though. That is something that I would enjoy doing. And in them work field now you does meet people. You does meet people, I like to counteract with different cultures, I like to socialize with the people, with the people that nice and that know things and you know. It is good sometimes to get away from your own kind and see...*

Some of the participants aspired to enter various professions. Hair dresser was the most common profession these participants wished to enter. This was followed by service work, such as working in a restaurant as a cook or as a cleaning or service staff in a hotel on the island. Several younger participants aspired to enter the health profession as nurse and one who wanted to be a doctor.

Many of the participants have participated in various job training programs. Most of these participants attended classes at Jabez house, while other's attended other programs. The participants reported that these classes gave them confidence and hope that they could leave sex work permanently. Most participants also appreciated the social contact and friendships that emerged from attending classes with other women. Several participants described avoiding or dropping out of classes due to conflict with other women in the class. It appears from their description that some of the tension and ill will among the women that developed while working on the road appeared to seep into the classes as well. This general tension and competition among women engaged in sex work was described by most of the participants.

When asked what they or other women who were engaged in sex work would need in order to be fully employed, many of the participants admitted that they could benefit from basic skills such as reading and writing skills, acquiring the CXC's and training on professional behavior and conduct. Participants also desired specific training that would allow them to enter a profession, such as hotel hospitality, hair dressing, computer and business skills training.

Most of the participants were able to describe training, skills and talents they already possessed. Yet, they were unable to convert these capacities into obtaining and maintaining economic self-sufficiency. Nearly all of the participants described two sources of assistance that they viewed to be the most critical in attaining economic self-sufficiency. Many of the participants described a need for funds. They described a need for funds to start a business or pay for classes and school supplies for those who wanted to attain CXC's and/or attend university. The young participant below is only 18 years old, yet worked on the road since she was 14. She dreamed of being a nurse and felt encouraged after receiving basic reading and writing tutoring from Jabez House.

*R: To help people (silence). But I was having doubts about it the other day and one of the tutors told me that is possible I still young don't have doubts just focus on it and say this is what I want, I want to achieve this goal by such and such a time and this is what I want*

I: *What were your doubts, like what were the doubts about?*  
 R: *Money wise, like paying for the books and thing, 'cause somebody told me that the books and thing quite expensive, and then it is a lot a lot a lot of studying*  
 I: *Yea. So the expense is one thing it could be expensive?*  
 R: *Uh hmm.*

The following quote comes from a participant who wanted to start a catering business out of her home, but needed a considerable amount of funds to set up her kitchen up to the proper codes.

I: *What things...so you've tried trying to set up your own business?*  
 R: *Yea I got the mean I done register and thing already so I try applying already and I didn't get through the woman tell me the finance, the finance is the problem for them. So I try something else now*  
 I: *The laundry mat?*  
 R: *Yea and the people from housing come and come and carry me by the building and thing already, so I just waiting to hear, cause I applying for the shop and the house at the same time so them come to my home where I live there now to see like to see the condition I live in so the woman was telling me like you know you can't go at nobody to live you got to got your own place for you and your children. The house really don't have no good condition either for eight hundred dollars*  
 I: *How so? What's wrong with it?*  
 R: *It leaking, about three rooms leaking. And then now they got some mice that in the bath in the wall digging out holes that does offset me.*

The other critical form of assistance reported by many of the participants who were seeking stable, decently paying employment was a program that provided them with linkages to employment. Many of the participants complained that it was not easy to find work, particularly in the current economic climate, if you did not know someone. They also shared how the stigma of sex work made it difficult to find or keep work, if these employers knew they were engaged in sex work. This participant expressed the need for such a program to notify the employer up front that they were engaged in sex work, so as to avoid the disappointment and emotional harm of being discovered to have been a sex worker. This need was echoed by several of the other participants.

R: *Uh hmm. Like if you go on a job right, for people that know about what you use to do to get into a job the first thing I think I should do um I think that should be known about me is that the person who is hiring me should know about my background before they hire me*  
 I: *You think so?*  
 R: *Because in then when they hire me and I working in this firm other people might see me and know what person I was back then, then they would go and tell the boss well, you know that she use to do this and then the boss like yea I know, right. So it's best to let the boss know these things before you work in a place*

*cause you don't want to jeopardize that work and you don't want nobody spreading your name. So...*

*I: So it's better to be upfront?*

*R: Upfront.*

Several barriers emerged that appeared to interfere with the participants' ability to obtain and maintain stable employment. The most commonly reported obstacle appeared to be a stigma associated with sex work. As previously discussed, many participants reported that they were not considered for employment or were fired once it was discovered they were known to be sex workers.

*R: Umm the main thing I think that is needed is some lateral thinkers that can create jobs opportunities. And amongst the community as well cause sometimes you cant always go out of the- of that particular community because of the stigma. So like I know a lot of persons who were trying to get out and went and got supermarket jobs but then everybody coming in knowing this person was a sex worker previously dropping remarks the person felt so bad that they left the job. or the manager because he knows you what you done he putting the hard word on you so you are in another uncomfortable situation you don't want to be in*

*I: What do you mean by the hard work?*

*R: Oh ok alright because he knows that you're a sex worker he's going to proposition you to see if he can get you to well do that for him so they put you in uncomfortable situation so you end up leaving the job, your legitimate job. So I'm going to say well if I got to do that there I should might as well go back, or if everybody is going to still see me that way I might as well just go back.*

Another commonly cited barrier to seeking employment outside of sex work was lack of available childcare. Paradoxically, for many of the participants, lack of available childcare is not an obstacle to engaging in sex work, because they can leave their children at home sleeping with other family members while they go out to work. Sadly, this decision to enter sex work in order to provide for their children, makes it even more difficult to find traditional forms of employment should they choose to exit sex work, due to the aforementioned stigma.

For some participants, mental health problems such as depression and PTSD symptomatology, and substance abuse problems limited their ability to work. For these participants these limitations interfered more with taking the necessary steps in their lives to leave sex work and find other forms of employment, rather than interfere with work they had already obtained. The quote below comes from a participant who is engaged in a training program that will link her with a job. Yet she still struggles with feelings of sadness and describes herself as an alcoholic. Here she shares her struggle and perhaps ambivalence about coming off the road and entering sustained professional employment.

*I: Would you, what would you need to be able to work independently?*

*R: I don't think nothing it is just be a mind thing. Just be your mind*

*I: So you think your only obstacle is getting your mind set ready to do it?*

*R: Yea, to just push off from doing what I doing.*



Finally, nearly all of the participants who were foreign born, and all who lacked documentation, described lack of work authorization as a central barrier to seeking employment outside of sex. Unfortunately, several of these participants had at some point remained in marriages that had become abusive in the hope that they could obtain citizenship in Barbados.

### **Financial Assistance**

All but a few participants had at some point sought financial assistance from a formal source. The reasons participants most commonly sought financial assistance was to provide for their children's general needs, to pay for the rent, or to pay for their children's school supplies and school uniform. The participants most often sought financial assistance from the Welfare department, and from NGOs. Several participants sought financial assistance from churches and from the court in the form of child support.

#### *Experiences with Welfare*

Many of the participants had at some time sought assistance from the Welfare offices across the island. While some of the participants were treated well and received the desired services, the experiences from the overwhelming majority of the participants was negative. For those who did not have positive experiences with Welfare, some felt the assistance provided was not sufficient to meet their needs or was for an amount less than they believed they qualified. Most of the participants dissatisfied with welfare services did not qualify at all for welfare services. Some of these participants who were told they did not qualify believed they indeed qualified for some assistance. Many of the participants shared that they were told Welfare had run out of money due to the impact of the economic crisis on government functioning. The following participant did not receive the amount to which she felt she was entitled. When she further enquired why she was not given more, the response was one interviewers heard often from participants, that the government had run out of money.

*I: So then it was only for the last two?*

*R: The last two them stop it, they only give me for one now*

*I: How come?*

*R: I don't know what is these people problem*

*I: Did they tell you that you no longer meet the criteria or something?*

*R: The umm... the officer say that things hard and the government ain't got no money so I could only get for one...straight so I just tell you, straight so*

*I: How long ago did they stop?*

*R: The cheque didn't come for about three of four months last year, and then she come and interview me and she tell me I going to put you back on the system but only for one but I know that I don't got nothing coming in so I got to take it. What ninety dollars could do for...when I go in Cherish with that ninety dollars I don't know what to pick up from Cherish cause I got to buy pads, I got to buy toiletry, that ain't even meet nothing there so yet.*

Most of the participants complained about the quality of the Welfare Department services. The most common complaint was that they were treated rudely by the welfare worker. The participant's experience with the welfare worker described below was similar to many of the participants.

*She just had an attitude she was just nasty with a nasty attitude like she wake up on a wrong side of the bed that morning she come in. Like I was filling out the form and I miss and write the wrong address like you know I told you I live in [Parish] so I write down the [Parish] address and I was going to write down the [Parish] , so I call it out and I write [Parish]. She aint know why I was calling out the paper and she start up so I give her back the paper, I give her back the pen and walk and went along because I didn't get on no way for her.*

Some participants complained that the welfare questions asked too many unrelated questions, or invaded their privacy by coming unannounced to their home. For many of these participants, who tended to maintain privacy and a veneer of toughness as a way of protecting themselves against violence, exploitation or the stigma of sex work, having to divulge private information and reveal vulnerability and need was particularly difficult. It became particularly galling to participants when they divulged all sorts of private information only to be denied services. Some of these participants suspected that these questions were more to satisfy these worker's desire for gossip, rather than for the purpose of conducting a thorough assessment. Several of the participants share how the worker came to their home to find goods such as a TV, furniture or other home goods that were purchased over the years, during periods when sex work may have been more plentiful or lucrative, and conclude that they were not in need.

*The woman [welfare officer] come at my house and looking at me and tell me umm, I didn't know you had to most thing, when the woman come at me woman see TV woman see this washing machine and then the woman tell me, Miss you does do prostitution, so you don't need the welfare. So if I do prostitution, that my personal business. They can't respect me after all the years I living here I got to live in a glass (incomprehensible). The house I live in I live in for twenty years.*

Another complaint that was heard by most of the participants was that the welfare workers refused to provide assistance because they were believed to be sex workers. Most of these participants were told they did not qualify because they worked on the road, while some suspected this was the reason. When asked how the welfare knew that she had engaged in sex work, most of the participants said they told her. Some, however, reported that the welfare officer assumed she was a sex worker based on the neighborhood in which the participant lived, or based on rumor. Sadly, due to Barbados' small size and the difficulty in maintaining privacy in such a small and insular community, many of the participants were known by others to be sex workers. Therefore, this stigma appeared to play out in the welfare office as well, even among participants who were attempting to leave sex work and needed financial assistance in the meanwhile. The exchange between the interviewer and participant below was echoed by other participants who tried to turn to welfare for assistance to reduce or entirely eliminate their engagement in sex work.

*I: How do they even know?*

*R: They pass out there or sometimes rumors just they would just go by rumors*

*I: So they don't give you assistance if you're working?*

R: *Like say if them giving me assistance now and someone have to go and tell I does work on the road, they would stop it*

I: *Because you're making money and so you don't qualify*

R: *Right*

I: *But if you stop how do they know that you...*

R: *They don't even believe you*

I: *So that can make a woman who work on the street ineligible forever. So that's no longer a service for you*

R: *Well I...them do that to a lot of girls.*

### *Seeking Financial Relief through the Court System*

Several participants were able to secure child support through the court. They decided to file a petition so that their child's father would be required to pay child support. For these participants, this proved successful in securing a reliable and sustained source of needed funds in the form of parental child support.

Unfortunately, this solution was not available to the overwhelming majority of participants. Since the romantic partners of the participants have similarly poor economic prospects, their children's fathers tend to be unemployed, under employed or employed in temporary, unstable employment. Similarly, many children's fathers work in illegal or non-traditional industries that make it more challenging for courts to measure and acquire their earnings. One of the participants lacked the necessary documentation needed by the court to process the child support petition.

### **Utilization of Banking Services**

Some of the participants utilized banking services. Several participants used banking services and found them to be a useful way to keep money safe. None of the participants who used banking services utilized this resource as a means to save money earned while engaged in sex work that could later be leveraged in building wealth. For example, none of the participants saved money in the bank that was then used to purchase a home, start a business or pay for schooling. One relatively young participant saved money by giving her earnings to her mother to hold for safekeeping.

The participants who did not find banks to be particularly useful cited several reasons. Many of the participants did not have enough money to open a bank account. Some of these participants shared how they had special hiding places where they kept money safe. Unfortunately, several participants reported that their roommate had stolen money they had stashed away. Several participants described how being able to withdraw money, particularly with the ease of a bank card, made it too easy to retrieve and spend money. These participants described a strong temptation to withdraw money, particularly when they needed the funds to pay for rent or food. Several participants could not open a bank account because they did not have the proper documentation. Sadly, one of these participants relied upon her husband to keep her money in his bank account, which she felt made her vulnerable to economic abuse.

### **Experiences with the Police**

When the participants were asked if they thought the police were helpful in providing them with safety while working on the road, the responses were mixed. Some of the participants felt safer with the police patrolling areas where solicitation of sex work took place, particularly

on the road. Their presence and vigilance with regard to what is occurring on the road provides a few participants with a feeling of safety.

*R: A way, it really matter cause they keep doing it and all the girls work in the late does really like the police when they coming around and doing these things because is real good for us too. They is really patrol too. In one night whole night them does patrol and say morning; different vehicles does pass through and does just keep checking. So from that and we does go in the room I is go in the room so you is done know well- so when the police pass you is doing rounds and people don't-the ones that would try to do things wouldn't come around when the police there. So that is how, another way we protect we self too*

*I: So they make a big difference?*

*R: Yea a big difference.*

Most of the participants felt that the presence of police on the road provided them some safety by deterring those who had planned to do harm to the women engaged in sex work.

*R: Yes it does help cause when certain people that think that they could come in a area to do certain things when women are out there working and once they see the police they aint going take that chance in doing it*

*I: What kind of things are they looking to do?*

*R: Looking to snatch a bag, you understand.*

Many of these same participants, in addition to some others felt that the presence of police on the road introduced its own risk to the participants. Some participants reported how they were solicited for sex by police patrolling the areas, or those who recognized the participant from patrolling the road. The power and authority of the police heightened the coercion involved in these propositions. Still, several participants described explicit demands from police for sex with the accompanying threats of reprisals should they refuse to comply.

*Like sometimes they would threaten the other girls and stuff and say them would charge them if they don't give them anything and stuff. Like to have sex with them too for free and tell the other girl. But nothing never really happen to me. I know one time when I was living in [Parish Name] when I was young I had a police man that threaten me to put me in jail if I don't give him sex.*

Most of the participants navigated the danger introduced by the police delicately, but with some variability. Some participants leveraged this opportunity to gain greater safety on the road. Some participants were sure to keep the tone with these officers friendly, while avoiding any sexual transaction, and others attempted to keep contact with the police cordial yet minimal. The sentiment below expresses the essence of how the overwhelming majority of participants characterized the police.

*R:If them work they would pass through check and see if you good, they would say girls ya'll good no problems nothing nothing...then now on the other hand*

*them would drive through and look in your face and like them want to attack you or whatever the case may be...so them like wolves*

*I: And they are the nearest ones to you?*

*R: Exactly. So when you got problems you can't run and go in there 'cause them didn't want to hear you and would tell you straight you shouldn't be out there like if you isn't human and them ain't human.*

The findings with regard to the participants' experience with regard to reporting crimes to the police was also mixed. For the most part, participants described reporting non-sex work related crimes and disputes quite readily to the police. Participants, on the whole, however were less likely to report crimes that occurred while they were working. The likelihood that they would contact the police tended to depend on the nature of the crime committed. Many participants who were robbed reported this crime to the police. They also tended to report severe and life threatening assaults, particularly if they required hospitalization or involved kidnapping. However, participants generally were not likely to report rapes that did not involve severe physical injury. These participants who experienced rape worried that the police would not view what occurred as a rape or that they would be blamed for the rape because they were engaging in sex work at the time. The quote below comes from an 18-year-old participant who was assaulted while working on the road.

*R: Them come, nothing aint really come out of it though cause them does don't care. When you doing sex work and the police got to come down there, police does don't really care*

*I: They don't care? So that's not who you turn too when umm, you don't even if its desperate you don't call them?*

*R: I does call them, but still they got some that would help out then they got some that would just be like...*

When the participants chose to report a crime, the treatment they received very often depended on the general individual character and decency of the officer. As the participants perceived it, officers who were generally kind and decent treated them well and with respect and concern. Police officers who they viewed to be less scrupulous treated them poorly and with lack of compassion and concern.

*Some of them are but all don't be the same, cause them got some police officers that does pass on a night and shout the girls and make sure them ok or if them seeing anybody lingering about the place or whatever the case is. Then them got some that does just get on like idiots you know. But that is life you does find good and you does find bad. But majority of the time in a situation and something happen to you it does don't make sense talking to the police cause the police does cant do nothing for you.*

Regardless of the respect and treatment they received from the officers, the participants generally did not find resolution in contacting the police. Many of the participants described how the perpetrator of the crime was never found, let alone apprehended. This was even true in

severe cases of kidnapping and assault, in which these participants perceived the police were making every attempt to find the perpetrator.

### **Experiences with Health Services**

Participants were asked about their experiences accessing health related services across the island. On the whole, the participants actively accessed health care services, and this was the formal sector with which the participants were most actively engaged. All of the participants attended regularly scheduled health care appointments, and sought medical care with relative ease. The level of health care engagement described below was fairly typical among the overwhelming majority of participants.

- R: I does go and get my Pap smears good, sugar good, everything*  
*I: Ok, so not just health, not just sexual health but your health in general*  
*R: Everything, I does go cause diabetes in my family bad, hypertension.*  
*Umm cancer, I never get my breast check though I afraid for that part cause I had two aunts that died with cancer*  
*I: But everything...*  
*R: So I got to build up the courage to get that one do*  
*I: Yea, but everything else you make sure you check?*  
*R: Yea.*

Generally, the participants described receiving treatment that was courteous, professional, and compassionate. It should be noted, however, that several participants expressed similarly sounding complaints of incidents of unprofessional behavior among nurses in general healthcare settings. These participants described witnessing nurses audibly disclosing private patient information to other health care workers. Several participants also described feeling uncomfortable settings because they felt they were looked down upon because it was known they were sex workers.

- R: I feel more comfortable going there than the clinic, cause at the clinic the nurses does look at you funny and that sort of way*  
*I: Do they know...when do they look at you funny like how come?*  
*R: If them know you is a sex worker*  
*I: Umm, how do they find out?*  
*R: Sometimes when them ask the girls the girls does say yes*  
*I: Umm. So so there it's the nurses that sometimes turn their noses up. Any one else there at the clinic, jus the nurses?*  
*R: Only the nurses you does tell you is a sex worker but the other people don't know.*

It should be noted, however, that this experience was not typical among the participants. Generally, the participants were treated fairly and with dignity and respect whether or not it became known that they were engaged in sex work. There did not appear to exist a need or circumstance that forced participants to disclose that they were engaged in sex work. In general, most of the participants kept their engagement in sex work private. Some chose to volunteer this information once they felt safe with their health care provider. It appeared, however, from the

participants' reports, that they tended not to be asked if they were engaged in sex work. The quote below referring to her experience describes the general sentiment of most of the participants.

- I: So do you tell them like do they know why you come for testing?*  
*R: Yea*  
*I: Yea, they don't judge they don't...?*  
*R: Uh umm*  
*I: You don't worry about them?*  
*R: No they don't really ask but I would just tell them I come to get tested and they would test me.*

It should be noted, however, that one healthcare setting conducted what appeared to be a brief survey of risk behaviors associated with HIV and STIs in the standard course of treating patients, which asked questions about sexual behavior and specifically asked about engagement in transactional sex. Some of the participants reported that they did not disclose their engagement in sex work in this survey. In fact, one participant went further, by instructing the researcher to alert those gathering this information that the information gathered from the survey on this subject is likely being underreported.

#### *Reproductive Healthcare*

The most readily accessed sector of the healthcare system was reproductive healthcare. All of the participants received reproductive healthcare screenings, free condoms and STI testing on a regular basis at the general health clinic, reproductive health clinic and HIV/AIDS specialized health care services. In particular, participants make full use of HIV and STI testing provided by these health care settings.

*I had a HIV test on Saturday, Saturday night which I do every time they come out with the van I does take the test so I had one they take blood and then I ask them for the one here incase I'm not cause I'm planning to go and look for some money somewhere else, so they give me the thing and I was clean so far, and that is all I thank God for does carry me through. Some day I will get through.*

Many of the participants appreciated the van services containing STI testing available in the evening where those engaged in transactional sex work would congregate. These participants appreciated the convenience of these services, and how they were sensitively tailored to the needs of women engaged in transactional sex work.

- R: Yea everything clean everything clean everything all the STD we take well we take well I take the STD at the polyclinic Sir Winston Scott, but I took test otherwise in the van*  
*I: Uh hmm you prefer the van or is it?*  
*R: What I like with the van is it faster sometime you go to the polyclinic you would sit long but what I like with the van ok, is very good because people would know well tomorrow I want to go and take a test but they wouldn't wake up and go but if you on the street and the van come you going take the test.*

Many of the participants report that the expediency with which they can be tested for STIs, particularly when they experience a condom break during work, provides them with significant psychological relief. Nearly all of the participants described the fear of contracting HIV, particularly after a condom broke. Therefore, they tended to prefer the twenty minute rapid results test to the test that took two weeks for the result. However, as this participant describes, even waiting twenty minutes can be excruciating when there is any possibility one may get news of a positive HIV diagnosis.

*R: But I prefer, I prefer that test not, the HIV test, I don't really like that one that you does got to wait two weeks that does got your head going mad*

*I That's long, two weeks*

*R: Two weeks. But I like the test now where therefore last one that I had, I had a rapid test, where you get it back fifteen minutes or twenty minutes. Twenty minutes. That they does hurt you head too*

*I: Long twenty minutes*

*R: Cause you does be thinking in that twenty minutes what going go on here now. Twenty minutes wow*

*I: So what goes through your mind in those twenty minutes?*

*R: If you, if you got this disease and what going happen now and all sorts of things I does be worried about yah.*

The psychological relief the availability of respectful, accessible, affordable HIV testing provides could not be understated. This was particularly true after a condom break occurred while working. Many of the participants described being mindful of the impression the healthcare provider might be under when they appeared for an HIV test after just having been tested just a few weeks prior. These participants appreciated the reproductive health care and specialized HIV services, which did not appear to judge these women.

The STI and HIV testing, reproductive health information, and distribution of free condoms appear to have an impact on condom use behavior for the participants. All but one participant described how they always used condoms with their customers. These participants described guidelines and precautions they utilize to ensure the condom does not break, including carrying and utilizing a sufficient amount of lubrication, keeping her hand on the condom, facing the participant and avoiding dark locations where she is unable to visually monitor the condom for breakage. Most importantly, participants on the whole use their own condoms rather than rely upon their customer to supply them. In fact, many of the participants described the fear that customers could maliciously poke holes in the condoms deliberately, thereby making them more likely to break. Therefore, many participants were particularly appreciative of the free condoms that were available at the health clinic, in the HIV testing vans, and that were distributed by outreach workers on the road.

### **Assistance for Psychological Distress**

Due to multiple sources of trauma (childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, work related assault), the experience of significant psychological distress was common among the participants. Five of the participants were hospitalized for suicidality as adults. Unfortunately several of these hospitalized participants received only medical treatment for these



attempts. One participant reported that she was linked to effective mental health services when she entered a domestic violence shelter.

Many of the participants feel significant distress about their children, including concerns that the stigma of sex work will fall onto them, that they may follow her path and ultimately become engaged in sex work, or that the trauma they have experienced associated with sex work interferes with their ability to connect emotionally with their children. Many of the participants expressed interest in professional parenting support and guidance.

#### *Substance Abuse Treatment*

Nearly all of the participants smoke and/or drank alcohol while on the road. The drinking and marijuana use for several participants has risen to the level of abuse. Several other participants reported having cocaine/crack addictions. The psychological consequences of multiple sources of interpersonal trauma, combined with the risks and emotional distress associated with sex work has placed some of the participants at increased risk for substance abuse and addiction.

Despite the heavy and problematic use of drugs and alcohol by a sizable portion of the participants, only one participant entered substance abuse treatment. This participant entered treatment because it was mandated by the court. She relapsed shortly after being discharged from a residential rehabilitation facility. Some of the participants thought that substance abuse treatment would be useful to themselves or other women engaged in sex work someday, and thus should be readily available. Yet, none of the participants expressed a need or desire to enter substance abuse treatment at the time of the interview.

#### *Counseling Services*

Some of the participants had attended counseling services at some point in their lifetime. Most of these participants attended counseling as adolescents subsequent to reporting sexual abuse or following acute psychological distress such as suicidal ideation or a psychotic episode. Participants who attended counseling during adolescence did not find it helpful. These participants found it difficult to talk to their counselor at all, let alone about the aspects of their lives that were causing them distress. The quote below is typical of how these participants experienced counseling as children.

*I: What was counseling like?*

*R: Kind of hard and pressuring*

*I: Yea, you didn't like it? How long did you go for?*

*R: I went for a month*

*I: A month?*

*R: Yea*

*I: Once a week. So they they, put a lot of pressure on you?*

*R: Yea, cause I didn't use to like that much talking. I didn't use to like so much talking. Them use to ask a lot of questions.*

The participants who attended counseling during an episode of extreme distress found it helpful. However, they discontinued counseling subsequent to the crisis, thereby limiting the full benefit of this type of service.

*R: So as I felt better I just like stop going and just try to cope off of my own cause you know some people if them keep doing that them would tell themselves*

*them can't cope without getting counsel. So I tell myself I aint want to be going through this here for the rest of my life. I got to deal with it on my own*

*I: On your own yea*

*R: I got to learn to let go and accept he gone and he aint coming back. Right so I just stop going, get myself together cause I got my children to deal with and I just pick up, you know what I mean?*

An overwhelming majority of participants reported that they had no interest in attending counseling. Some of these participants did not feel they needed counseling, or that counseling would not help them.

*R: Right right I don't want I tell myself I don't want no counselor. I don't need nobody to help me control, I does look at it like as a I got that in a place and as long as I keep thing, that going to stay there. That aint going move that going stay*

*I: Do you think there will ever be a time where you're going to say you know I think I'm ready to kind of, to heal from that to kind of deal with it and put it away. No or one day or maybe not....*

*R: One day*

*I: Maybe?*

*R: Maybe yea maybe*

*I: Lets say its one year, five years, ten years from now and you stop and say I've been avoiding this and I'm feeling it affecting my life, you know I've been ok for now, I've been ok for now I've been coping, I need to put it to rest, what would you need to make you comfortable to see a counselor like what would be necessarily for that counselor or the whole set up for you to feel comfortable?*

*R: I don't even know because I never thought of it. So I aint sure cause I never thought of it*

*I: You umm, you had like you know how to keep things under control?*

*R: Uh hmm, I could say so.*

For many of these participants, the lack of interest was related to the associations participants had with counseling, and how foreign it felt to the Barbadian context. Some participants were used to handling the day to day stressors on their own. Sadly, despite the formidable challenges and sources of trauma and distress they experienced, these events were not atypical or exceptional in the day to day lives of the participants.

*I never went counseling cause we black people, got a thing counseling aint for black people. I wonder why, why we got this culture that counseling is not for black people and just like...for me like I say I would talk to you cause I want to know how to take like you say you could make a different road and tell your mind how to read a different track. I want to forget things.*

Another commonly expressed sentiment was participants' doubt that what they shared with their counselor would remain confidential.

*To be honest I don't really feel no way talking with you with you about it because I guess that I feel open up and I or I guess it probably that you know me that sort of way and I aint feel that way like this person would tell somebody you know. But people that I know- that they- and so on you don't want to tell them your business you know you just think I going go and sit down with that person when I done they done and tell somebody else.*

In spite of the consistent reports of a lack of interest in seeking counseling, there was evidence to suggest that participants may seek counseling if it is offered in a manner that is culturally congruent. Several of the participants reported that they would have liked to attend counseling during the distressing life event or time of crisis, but not now because they are back to normal now.

*R: Uh umm I never had any counseling*

*I: Umm do you think it would be helpful to you at all?*

*R: Yes it would be helpful at the moment in time when it did happen, but them never tell me about going nowhere and getting counseling or nothing*

*I: Umm and you you don't feel like you would need it now?*

*R: Not really yea you would still need it yea, cause it something that happen to me you know.*

It appears from what the many of the participants describe, that during a traumatic event, whether it be a work related assault, a broken condom, the experience of severe domestic violent, they experience severe psychological distress and an impairment to functioning. During these times of crisis, they on their own without formal or even informal help from family or friends, find a way to diminish these traumatic symptoms so that they can continue functioning. This functioning typically comprises working on the road and caring for their children. Once this symptomatology is diminished, however, these participants express a reluctance to re-examine the event that lead to this crisis out of fear that all the associated emotions and traumatic symptomatology returns. As a consequence, many participants have signs of chronic untreated trauma symptoms including constant and severe bouts of anger, depression, emotional numbness, and, as was mentioned, problematic alcohol and marijuana use.

Some participants also appear to be seeking what could only be described as counseling services from social service providers in non-mental health settings. For example, many of the participants described speaking to the worker at a local NGO that works with sex workers. These participants describe contacting the worker during times of distressing and sharing personal and sensitive information about prior childhood and adult traumas. The following quote is from a very young participant who experiences severe depression and has endured childhood abuse, neglect and work related assaults.

*R: On a night? Most of the time I does be depress and sad*

*I: About going to work or...? How do you cope with that?*

*R: I don't (silence). When I get depress and it get to a point, I does usually call [Jabez House staff] which is [Jabez House staff position] or I aint know if you know [Jabez House Staff] that use to give out condoms on the road. I does call her or my best-friend*

I: *That talking helps?*  
R: *Uh hmm.*

### **Spiritual Assistance**

The participants were asked about their experiences with attending church. Most of the participants attended church regularly as children, and had positive memories of this aspect of their childhood. Most of these same participants reported that their children attend church every week, typically accompanied by the children's grandmother or aunt. Despite the high level of spirituality and connection with God reported by nearly all of the participants, only a couple currently attended church even sporadically. The overwhelming majority of the participants reduced church attendance once they entered adolescence and adulthood. Hardly any of the participants attended church even a single time since they became engaged in sex work.

When asked why they chose not to attend church, two themes emerged. One reason that emerged was the fear that they would be scorned by other members of the congregation if they attended church. The second and most commonly cited reason that emerged for why participants did not attend church was they did not feel it was right to go to church while they were engaged in sex work.

R: *Them say that don't be good, you does be down the road on a Saturday night then going church Sunday. -It look funny*  
I: *Funny how?*  
R: *That you down there doing bad then you going in the house of the Lord.*  
I: *Right. You said they say that don't look good? Who says that don't look good?*  
R: *No, I saying it don't look good.*

The several participants who did attend had varying experiences. One of these participants was sexually propositioned by a fellow congregant who was aware that she had at one time been engaged in sex work.

I: *How come?.....What stops you from going to church?*  
R: *Umm, well they had one fellow in this church; umm he was like trying to get at me so I say to myself these people is the same thing, and I aint standing for that*  
I: *So you went to church and someone approached you?*  
R: *Yea*  
I: *Someone propositioned you?*  
R: *Yea*  
I: *Another church member?*  
R: *Yea*  
I: *Did they know what you did?*  
R: *Umm*  
I: *Did they know what...the work that you use to do?*  
R: *Umm I guess so. I would believe so cause if he approach me that way I would believe so.*

A few of these participants experienced actual scorn from church goers who did not feel it was right that they were coming to church while they were actively engaged in sex work. The following participant experienced this scorn, but did not seem to let it affect her decision to begin again attending church.

*Because I use to go church but I felt like a hypocrite knowing what I did the night before and here in the church. But the Lord say wear your heart and not your garments. But they have people in the church who is jus make you feel so uncomfortable, Them quick to judge and not understand speak and don't, right?*

A few of these participants were made to feel welcomed in the church. The participants who were made to feel welcomed experienced tremendous appreciation and hope in this response from the congregation and its leadership. The impact is captured poignantly in the experience communicated by this participant.

*R: Yea and when the reverend saw me in church yesterday, he so smart, he say I'm seeing some faces that I know, cause I went in the church once, that was when my son get christen in that church, and he was like, I'm seeing some faces this morning from the community that I know, some people I haven't saw in the church for a very long while, I need y'all to stand up. So we can give you a round of applause. It was like me and I just like look back and see like five other people standing. But I could see that them is church people but I know the statement was for me and then like after service he was like I glad to see you. Want you to...*

*I: So he was really welcoming and warm and*

*R: He make me feel you know that I belong there. So I tell myself every Sunday I going make it my business to go to church.*

### **Participants' Recommendations about Formal Service Design and Delivery**

Participants were asked about their recommendations for how services should be designed and delivered to meet their unique needs. The participants shared with the interviewers their recommendations for how they would like to be treated by service providers, and their recommendations for how services should be designed and structured to meet the needs of women engaged in transactional sex work.

#### *Service Considerations*

The participants were asked about how their experiences with social service providers and how they would like to be treated. Five themes emerged from the participants regarding their recommendations for how women engaged in sex work should be treated.

***You need to care about me.*** Many of the participants shared how they appreciate when their service provider demonstrates genuine care and concern for them. This feeling that the worker actually cares about their wellbeing increases their level of trust and makes them more open to discuss private and sensitive experiences and needs. The following participant shares how her worker showed she cared.

*I: How can you tell that she cares?*

*R: How I could tell that she care when a woman could come out all during the night late and bring out condoms stand up by corners, stand up by bars, you*

*understand and got conversation with women. Yea late when you should be in you bed she does be out*

*I: (Laughter)*

*R: (Laughter) she cares that is somebody that cares*

*I: Yea*

*R: I serious.*

***You need to understand the needs and lives of women on the road.*** The participants discussed this need to understand the lives of women on the road. This included a holistic and compassionate understanding of the complexity and difficulty of their financial conditions, the way in which they are typically treated by others, the dangers they face, and their experiences of abuse and mistreatment. By understanding the conditions of the lives of women engaged in sex work, service providers are more likely to create services that meet their need and bridge obstacles that typically exist in other service sectors.

*I think that they need I think they need dedicated people to them, people who need like [NGO Staff], [NGO] organization I think is a very good one and I think it's a great one because they understand this particular element, they understand this particular sub group because each subgroup have different needs emotional umm social they have they own needs.*

***Privacy is very important.*** Nearly all of the participants spoke about the need for privacy. There was a general assumption communicated by the overwhelming majority of participants that most service providers will not keep the information that is shared with them confidential. Perhaps this sentiment is exacerbated by the relatively small and insular nature of community and communication in Barbados, where people tend to know one another, and where many people know who is a sex worker. Many participants shared how they tended not to share the most private aspects of their lives with anyone because they feared this information would invariably be spread to others. There was a strongly expressed view that formal service providers should keep information about them confidential. Similarly, participants expressed the need to be able to access services in a manner that maintained their privacy and did not reveal they were engaged in sex work.

*Well some women that on the road don't like them business all out there, so I feel if its better you all come to us because it don't make no sense putting it in the paper for like for people that on the streets because some women don't really react to it cause they trying to hide them identity from people but then now if you go and put it in the paper so I think it better if you all is come to us, right.*

***I don't want to feel judged.*** Another theme that emerged among the participants was the concern that service providers would judge them. This concern caused these participants to refrain from revealing sensitive yet important information to service providers. This need to freely speak about topics without fear of being judged was viewed by these participants as important to being able to fully benefit from the services offered. This was particularly true with regard to counseling and health care services.

R: *So we would like think twice to talk to the person or like being like close up and not telling them what going on on the streets and what we does do from what we don't do*

I: *So you'll be more honest you'll let them know what's really going on...*

R: *Yea*

I: *so that way they could treat you better*

R: *Yea*

I: *they can give you better health care*

R: *Yea.*

***Don't ask me all these questions if you are not going to help me.*** Another issue that arose among the participants was the frustration they experienced when they would seek services and be required to ask many questions on a survey or as part of a general assessment. This frustration turned to insult when after revealing extensive and often sensitive information about themselves, they were not given the assistance or services they sought. This sentiment came up most often when describing their experience seeking financial assistance from the Welfare Department. This experience of denial of services appears related to two factors. The first is a general sensitivity to sharing private and sensitive personal information for fear that this information will be spread, as was described earlier in this section. Sharing private information, particularly when it is sensitive in nature places them in a subjugated and vulnerable position, as these participants describe. Second, the participants appear to view this process of seeking assistance as transactional, much like their relationships with their customers. Therefore, if they make themselves vulnerable and give up part of themselves in the form of divulging private and sensitive information, then they expect to get help in return. When they don't get the help they need, they end up feeling demoralized, subjugated and cheated. The participant below describes her anger at the welfare worker who after asking a thorough series of questions and making a home visit, she was denied financial assistance at the time she felt she desperately needed. The worker told her the reason for the denial was that the welfare office ran out of funds.

*I can't deal with it because time the girl step out in front my door and ask me if I does do prostitution I did done get vex. But it jus that I'm not a rude person, cause if I was a rude person I carry she real scruffy. But I just tell she mistress leave my place, have a nice night. Because she come in the evening time after six, you understand, so the welfare should be able to help people but the government aint got no money? So if you don't got no money you cant help nobody though?*

### *Service Component and Design Recommendations*

In this discussion of what types of services should be available to women engaged in sex work, and how should they be delivered, several recommendations emerged. They included the delivery of comprehensive services in a single location, the incorporation of women formerly engaged in sex work in the design and delivery of services, assistance with systems navigation and advocacy, and the need for preventive services targeting vulnerable adolescents.

***Comprehensive service at a "one stop shop"***. A recommendation that was repeated among many of the participants was the need for comprehensive services delivered at a single location that is specifically for women engaged in sex work.

R: *With all...one stop shop with all you need counselor...something like Verdun house where they deal with the alcoholics they have their counselors they also have social workers they have umm units support personnel who just assist, they have every thing you need to get clean in one place. So for sex workers that should be the case*

I: *So what would be the different stops of shop?*

R: *Elements...well the elements of the shop should be one the counseling aspect, then the educational aspect, then the skills program and the skills program is going to include the managerial skills or basic financial literacy as you say they also need someone and to me this is very important.*

The participants expressed the need for general and reproductive health services, mental health counseling and substance abuse, parenting classes and child counseling, job readiness classes and training and shelter/residential services to be provided in one location.

R: *More jobs. Some of the girls don't even have a place to stay, they can't...they don't know where they next meal coming from those sort of things. Like we need more help on the road like people to care for us help us...*

I: *Uh hmm with some of the girls will have a place to stay, and I say more jobs so that we girls can come off the street, because even like young fifteen year old and thing started coming out there, better edu- them sort of things we need*

I: *Education too?*

R: *Yes please*

I: *You're talking basics- you're talking about food and shelter...*

R: *Uh hmm*

I: *that's just basic stuff*

R: *Ok*

I: *Right is that what you're saying?*

R: *Yea.*

Participants thought that residential services would be helpful for those attempting to exit sex work and was a critical component of these comprehensive services.

R: *You mean like a half way house something like that*

I: *No you tell me*

R: *Right, I telling you*

I: *Ok yea, a half way house. So you could live there?*

R: *Uh hmm*

I: *What would be the advantages of being able to live there?*

R: *They would got maybe, they would got a lot of different thing and maybe it would be helpful.*

The participants expressed mixed view about whether they wanted their children in shelter with them. Several participants expressed the need and desire to bring their children into shelter with them, while more participants felt they did not want their children in a residential facility with women currently or formerly engaged in sex work.



***Incorporation of former sex workers into the design and delivery of services.*** Another recommendation that emerged frequently was the need for women who have been engaged in sex work to be involved in the design and delivery of services. This was related to the need for service providers to fully understand the needs and lives of women engaged in sex work.

*Like I telling you, you would do this program this program is need I had those women that does do sex work is be the head. So if you do the program you should be able to do something for those women. Help these women come out, cause some of them would like to come out of it.*

Assistance with systems navigation and advocacy. Many of the participants described the challenges they faced getting help, being offered jobs, or navigating the various government and services systems because they lack knowledge and did not know the right people in positions of power. These participants felt socially isolated from people in powerful positions. They also felt relatively disempowered and stigmatized due to their status as current or former sex workers. Thus, they expressed the need for help moving through and navigating the system and with key opportunities for employment or training.

*What you need because if you got an officer in the welfare know you and you tell them you want this chair you going get this chair from the welfare, because you know some body. In this system right now is who you know make things happen for you.*

***Need for preventive services targeting vulnerable adolescents.*** Some of the participants described the need for preventive services targeting vulnerable adolescent girls. These prevention efforts would consist of public awareness about sex work and intensive social, financial and counseling services to young girls who are experiencing extreme poverty, abuse and instability at home, who are performing poorly at school, or is becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

## **Summary**

This community of women are dramatically vulnerable to any and all weaknesses in the social, educational and health service system. Social Stigma and intersections of gender based, racial, economic inequalities inherent in the social structure influence existing human service systems and the labor market so that vulnerable females experience sustained and brute marginalization from the very start of their lives. Services to this community need to fully understand the lives, strengths and challenges of women engaged in transactional sex work. Every facet of these women's lives affects the other, therefore, a comprehensive set of interrelated services are necessary.

It appears from the service needs, service engagement experiences and recommendations of women engaged in sex work, there is a need for a holistic approach to the needs of women engaged to transactional sex work that are based on the social determinants of health model. There appears to be a need for relationship centered counseling, interventions that promote and enhance the critical role of social support and a constructive social network, and that take into account the critical role of spirituality in the lives of these women. It seems based on the multiplicity of the social service needs of this community of women, that services need to be

scaffolded so that specific services are available when the participant can most benefit. For example, reproductive health, counseling and financial services initially utilized by participants. As they progress and their lives become more stable, they may then feel the need for employment assistance, substance abuse services and more intensive psychiatric services.