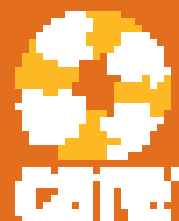


Living on the Edge

Sex workers' lives in Myanmar





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Acronyms/Glossary

CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
FSWs	Female Sex Workers
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
KTV	Karaoke bar/club
MMK	Myanmar Kyat (1 USD = 1280 Myanmar Kyats)
NSP II	National Strategic Plan (Myanmar) on HIV/AIDS (2011-2015)
NSPAW	National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (Myanmar)
PEER	Participatory Ethnographic and Evaluation Research
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	6
DEMOGRAPHICS	7
FINDINGS	8
PATHWAYS INTO SEX WORK	10
TRIGGERS AND ENABLERS	11
RECRUITERS	12
TRAFFICKING	13
EXPERIENCES OF SEX WORKERS	14
IN THE WORKPLACE	15
EARNINGS	16
CLIENTS	17
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE JUDICIARY	18
RELATIONSHIPS WITH VENUE OWNERS/MANAGERS	19
DIFFICULTIES SEX WORKERS FACE IN LIFE	20
THE FUTURE FOR SEX WORKERS	21
Aspirations	21
Barriers to Leaving Sex Work	21
DISCRIMINATION	22
IN THE COMMUNITY	23
DISCRIMINATION FROM COMMUNITY, FAMILY, INDIVIDUALS	24
INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATION.....	25
RECOMMENDATIONS	26
RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS	28
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FSWs	31

“Her father had bleeding in his stomach and they needed money. He went to the hospital to stay and her family requested she get some money or borrow from friends. She borrowed one lakh (USD \$90) from her friends to give to her father. She told another friend about her problems and her debt and said that her salary can’t cover her costs. Her friend told her about a job at a KTV as a cashier in Lashio in Shan State and if you work there you won’t have to pay for rent.”

KTV worker, Mandalay

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

KTV worker, Yangon

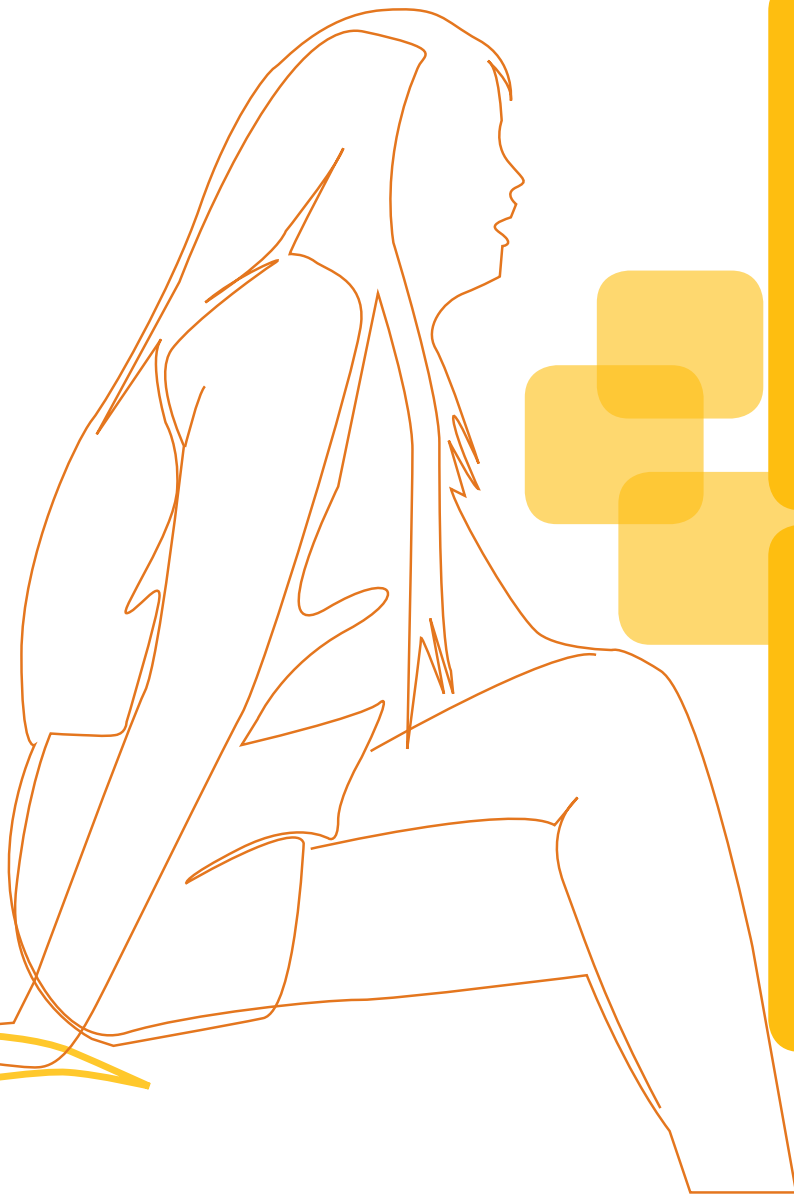
Introduction



The research in this report highlights the ways in which female sex workers (FSWs) are consistently exposed to multiple forms of exploitation, control and abuse, yet are able to assert agency over their lives, relationships and work. The women interviewed in this report face regular violence, isolation and exclusion from a range of actors both within and outside the sex work industry. They are denied basic human rights and opportunities for social support that are available to others, compounding their marginalisation and vulnerability.

Policy in Myanmar related to FSWs has focused on public health, rather than a right-based approach, however avenues are emerging for change. Recent projects recognise the need to improve social services for FSWs and there are local organisations advocating for sex workers' rights. The national constitution of Myanmar ensures gender equality and important provisions within the current National Strategic Plan (NSP) discuss issues specific to FSWs. Myanmar is also a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW) which includes recommendations to make sex work legal in certain countries.

However despite this, the buying and selling of sex remains illegal in Myanmar. The Law on the Suppression of Prostitution Act (enacted in 1949) has been repeatedly identified as the source of stigma, discrimination and marginalisation of FSWs. As a result, violence and abuse, often at the hands of authorities, make it impossible for the women to rely on due process or justice. Those who do seek justice risk being arrested or imprisoned purely on the basis of their profession.



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

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

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

Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon

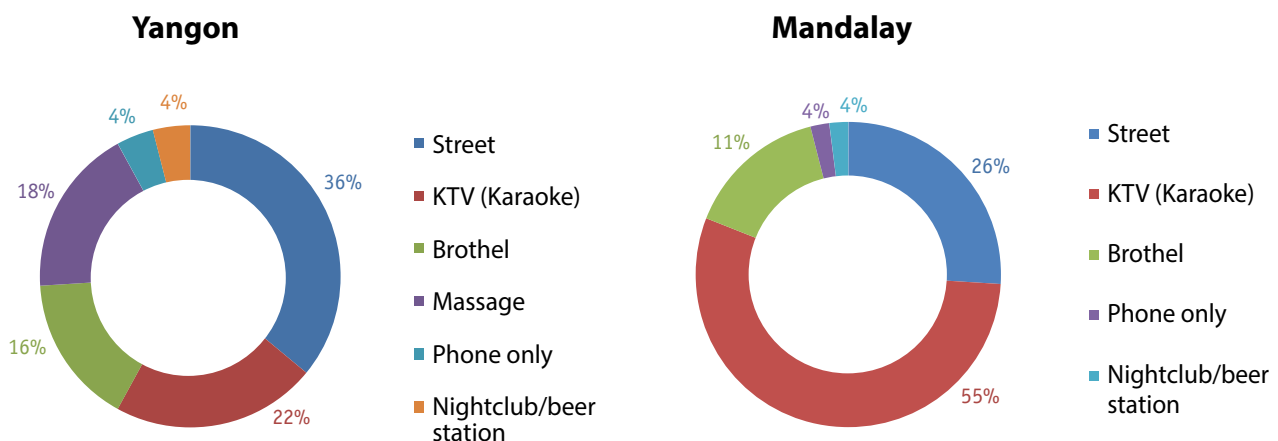
Methodology



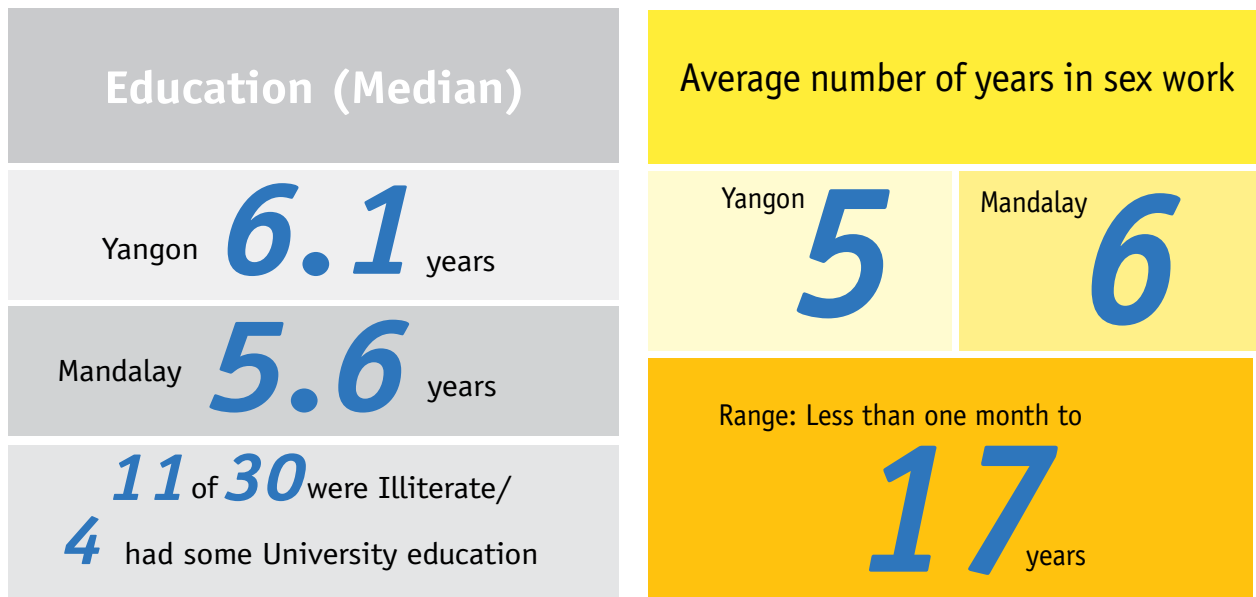
Living on the Edge: Sex Workers' Lives in Myanmar is a Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) study undertaken in November and December 2014 amongst FSWs in two cities (Yangon and Mandalay). The research generated robust evidence on women's experience in the sex work industry and will be useful for those interested in developing policy and practices to address issues facing sex workers.

The PEER method involves qualitative research that captures the voices of ordinary members of a community, those who have been marginalised or vulnerable populations who have been stigmatised as a result of their practices, beliefs or profession. It provides an insider's view of daily contexts and was chosen as the most appropriate research method for this report as it can be applied when researching sensitive issues.

A cohort of 31 sex workers were recruited and trained to interview their friends and colleagues about their experiences as women working in the sex industry. The interview data was analysed thematically and key findings triangulated with PEER Researchers, CARE Myanmar and the Sex Workers in Myanmar (SWiM) program staff. Recommendations for specific actors are detailed in the report with a particular focus on recommendations for advocacy strategies to empower FSWs.



Demographics



"She would like to stop this work, but she has a lack of education and in the past her home had enough money. That is why she doesn't have any experience working in other fields."

KTV worker, Yangon

"She cannot escape from this life because of her family. Everyone in her family depends on her income. There is debt and she needs to pay back money. She also has the responsibility for the education of her brother and sister. She is the only person supporting the family. That is why it is impossible to leave sex work."

Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon

Findings

Poverty is the driving force leading women in Myanmar to enter the sex industry

- The need to provide financial support for family members drove women to sex work. Many FSWs are the primary income providers in their families.

Social issues featured prominently in the narratives

- Debt, alcoholism and violence against women were persistent themes in interviews. The women often spoke about unmanageable health expenses and debt at the hands of money lenders as triggers for entering sex work.

Recruitment networks are pervasive and widespread

- Women are directly recruited from their communities. Those entering sex work find information about where to work with relative ease.

Individual debt features strongly in the women's lives

- Debt is exploitive. Parents borrow money against future work, putting FSWs further into debt. Women reported living hand-to-mouth.

Working conditions in all sex work venues are poor

- Conditions are harsh, days are long and movements are restricted. Managers and owners confiscate National Registration cards, other forms of documentation and clothes.
- Owners/managers are often the only source of support when dealing with violent or drunk clients or enforcing condom use.

FSWs face high levels of abuse and exploitation

- Threats of abuse and violence at the hands of police are common. Many women reported experiencing gang rape or having to offer free sexual services to owners and the police.

Criminalisation of sex work has resulted in the denial of basic human rights for sex workers

- Women have little or no recourse for exploitation or abuse.

Access to legal and health services is poor

- Clinics often discriminate against the women.
- Venue owners rarely advocate for condom use.
- Local authorities provide little support for the women and few have means of restitution.

The women face constant stigma and discrimination, causing them distress

- Most FSWs keep their professions secret.
- They are often excluded from social events and face difficulties renting or finding places to live. Their children and families also face discrimination.

FSWs are frequently arrested without evidence

- Once arrested and placed on a blacklist, the women are constantly at risk of being re-arrested.
- Police routinely abused their state-bestowed powers to perpetuate financial exploitation, sexual violence and abuse and psychological humiliation.

Most FSWs aspire to leave sex work

- The most commonly cited “way out” is to find a sponsor who can offer financial support, but this rarely occurs.
- A lack of education, limited skills, low pay offered by alternative forms of employment and high levels of financial responsibility are reasons the women give for staying in sex work.

Leaving sex work is difficult and blacklists are common

- Blacklists prevent the women from leaving sex work. References are required to find new employment and often housing.



Pathways Into Sex Work

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

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

Triggers and Enablers

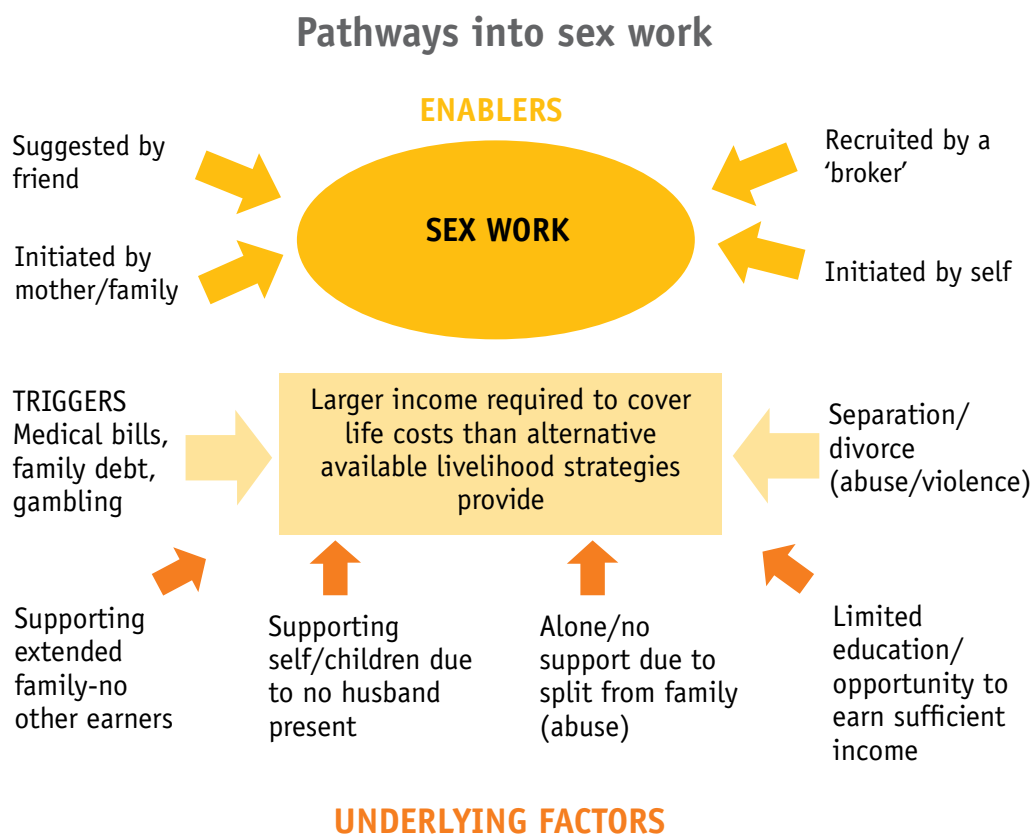
The PEER study found complex social issues and personal crisis are the drivers of entry into sex work. FSWs are often the primary or solitary income providers and support husbands, parents, and siblings to continue education or pay off debt. A combination of underlying factors featured prominently in the narratives: poverty (supporting the family, limited education); combined with a trigger (debt, medical bills, relationship breakdown) and an enabler (a friend in sex work, recruited by a broker, family initiation); drove women into sex work.

Younger FSWs are driven by a desire to live independently from and provide for their families. The earnings required to support themselves and contribute to their families' incomes is often not met by low-paid work available to them outside the sex industry. The financial pressures faced render most alternative forms of employment unrealistic and the lure of free accommodation and food often seems like a step in the right direction for those most vulnerable to recruiters.

“(The broker) told her that there is work selling at a shopping mall, but it will pay only MMK 25,000/month. She knew it was not enough to pay for a rent for a room, food, transport and so it was impossible for her to take the job. She asked her friend about whether she earned enough at the restaurant and her friend explained that they provide food and accommodation and that the salary is MMK 35,000/month, but she didn't tell her that she was also working as a sex worker.”

Street-based sex worker, Mandalay

Figure 1: Pathways into sex work



Recruiters

Widespread, informal networks exist in local communities and it is easy to find recruiters or intermediaries to find a job. “Professional” recruiters, friends, neighbours, sponsors and often mothers were cited as those who introduced the women to their first job. Brokers are well known in local areas. The harsh reality of sex work – violence from customers, abuse from enforcement agencies and marginalisation – is rarely communicated. Sex work is presented as an “easy” option and recruiters are often dishonest about the nature of the work. This type of professional recruitment was found to be consistent in entertainment venues (restaurants, massage parlours, and KTVs).

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

Street-based sex worker, Yangon



Trafficking

Stories of trafficking were common in the data and appeared to be more common in Mandalay than in Yangon. Some research referred to well-evidenced routes through Mandalay to China and women reported as being locked up in Chinese brothels where they were forced to provide sex. Others were imprisoned as sex slaves by an individual in China or impregnated to provide a son. In these cases, the women were tricked by a broker and transported to another location on the basis that legitimate employment would be provided.

Those most likely to sell the women into sex work were family members and those thought of as friends. In several instances, mothers contacted the venue owner (brothel or massage parlour) to "borrow" money (take advances on the girls' salaries), which distressed the women.

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

Brothel-based sex worker, Yangon



Experiences of Sex Workers

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

Brothel-based sex worker, Mandalay

In the Workplace

The experience of sex work differs considerably depending on where the women work (i.e., the street, brothels, massage parlours, KTVs, phone only). Their experiences are exacerbated by factors related to the disempowerment of women: age, appearance, indebtedness (family debt or money owed to a broker) and poverty (dependency on others and by income). These factors all contribute to the degree of agency of each sex worker and reduce the individual's choice and ability to negotiate. Widespread abuse from authorities was consistent through the data.

Findings revealed:

- Women in street or brothel-based sex work fared the worst.
- Women in KTVs and massage parlours were likely to have better protection from police due to protection from their venue owners/managers.
- Problems with clients include beatings, gang rape, and not being paid for services.
- The worst violence reported by FSWs was violence at the hands of the police.

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

KTV worker, Mandalay

Earnings

Sex workers are able to earn more than women working in other types of low-paid work otherwise available to them (e.g. maid, factory worker, low-grade clerical staff, sales person, waitress, food seller, agricultural worker etc.). Younger, attractive women working in KTVs were the highest earners, with older street-and brothel-based sex workers earning the least. The older and less attractive to customers women become, the less they are able to earn and the more various actors exploit them financially. Overall, slightly higher earnings were reported in Mandalay than in Yangon. Women in brothels or massage parlours were more likely than other FSWs to report being indebted to the venue from the outset. Their debts arose from having been sold by a broker or family member, or as a result of debts arranged with the venue-managers.

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

KTV worker, Yangon

	Salary range (small and large venues combined)	Room and board included?	Costs that reduce earnings
KTVs	MMK 100,000 to MMK 400,000	Yes	Cost of clothing/ cosmetics; Payments to managers/owners; Payments to lady controllers (intermediary)
Massage	MMK 150,000 to MMK 250,000	Yes	Payments to owners/managers; Payments to lady controllers
Brothels	MMK 50,000 to MMK 100,000	Sometimes	Theft from clients; Payments to pimps
Street-based	MMK 60,000 to MMK 100,000	No	Theft from clients; Payments to pimps; Payments to police

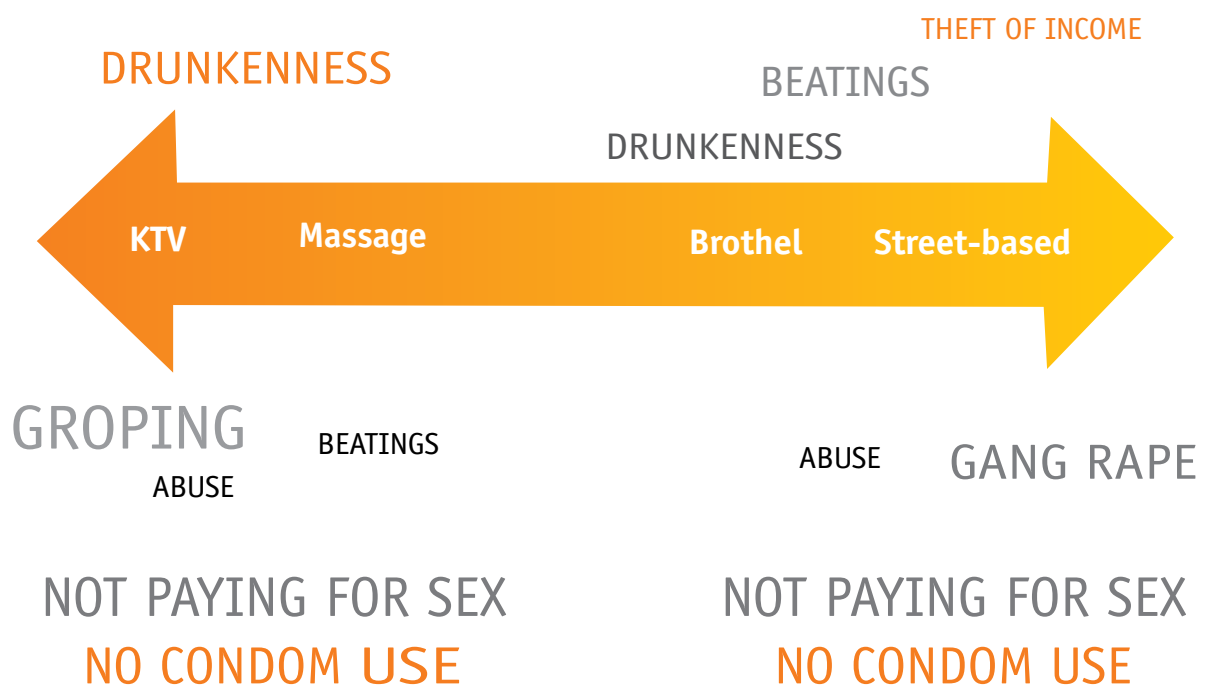
Clients

The most frequently cited client-related problems across the data were non-payment of sex, a lack of condom use, gang rape and beatings. Drug and alcohol use is common and nearly all the women have experienced violence – particularly, sexual violence. Most (with the exception of some of the younger women) also experienced gang rape and reported forced anal or oral sex. For women on the street or those providing sex over the phone and outside venues, violence was a regular occurrence and a source of constant anxiety.

“When the guy approaches her in the club, he says it is only him, but sometimes then there are three other friends. The problem of one girl and three guys is common. It happens often. The girl does not want to do it, but she has to because she needs the money. Having sex with three men makes her feel very upset. One offers her money for sex and she follows him to a hotel...but when she arrives there is not only one customer. The customer that only gave her MMK 20,000 is there, and the other boys. There are three boys and she has to have sex with all of them. She has to accept. They pay her only MMK 20,000 for three boys. The boys are drunk. If she talks back, they beat her.”

Nightclub-based sex worker, Yangon

Figure 2: Women’s experiences of clients



Law Enforcement and the Judiciary

All those interviewed reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse, violence and exploitation by the police. Often this took the form of non-payment for sex, refusal to wear condoms, beatings, bullying/harassment and gang rape. The violence experienced at the hands of police was amongst the most severe reported in the women’s narratives. Street-based sex workers experienced the most extreme and recurring abuse, as they were an easy target for authorities and did not have the protection offered by those working in venues.

Figure 3: Levels of abuse at the hands of law enforcement, by type of sex worker. Size of type denotes frequency of reports in the data



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

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

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

KTV worker, Yangon

Relationships with venue owners/managers

Relationships with managers/lady controllers/owners are critical to FSWs' quality of life and potential to earn. The relationships are complex, exploitative and abusive with managers/lady controllers/owners using various mechanisms to disempower women. The absence of other adult relationships beyond sex workers and clients means these individuals become the key authority figure or influencer in the women's lives.

Lady controllers are a layer of management unique to KTVs and are responsible for allocating women to customers. The majority are male, however some are female, usually older women who previously worked as KTV girls. These individuals often manipulate FSW financially by increasing their debt, withholding money or taking a cut of earnings. Sometimes the women are required to have sex with the lady controllers/managers, to gain favour or increase their earnings – often without protection (condoms). A small minority of women reported having positive relationships with the lady controllers.

“At the end of the night, the owner asks if there are any problems in your home? Do you need money in advance? And if they request he gives money in advance, which is really good for them. My friend has some debt to the owner – at least two lakh. She took MMK50,000 to send to her mother and then she needed some money for herself. She worries she can't leave until she has paid it off. There are many girls who owe money to the boss. They begin a tab because their parents came to the workplace and ask for money from their boss and this is how their tab starts.”

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon

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

KTV worker, Mandalay

Difficulties Sex Workers Face in Life

Most many of the women interviewed expressed a desire to leave sex work they also expressed an inability to support themselves and their families outside of the industry. Every aspiration presented by the women was accompanied by a plethora of barriers to its achievement. The women who had children were driven by a desire to creating a better future for their families - thereby forcing them to remain in sex work.

One set of factors led the women into sex work (debt and a desire to earn for the family) but another trapped them in a different cycle of poverty, shame and often health problems.



"Sometimes she is able to save money, but then there are problems. For example, she has to pay the police and then she loses her savings again. She never has enough saved for her business ideas and she said she isn't supporting her family, she is supporting the police."

KTV worker, Yangon

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

KTV worker, Mandalay

The Future for Sex Workers

Aspirations

Most respondents appeared highly distressed and depressed about their current lives and discussed a desire to leave sex work if other, feasible livelihood options were available to them. There was a sense of pride for some that the work provided the ability to support themselves and their families. Younger women in KTVs said the work afforded them a social status they would otherwise not have known.

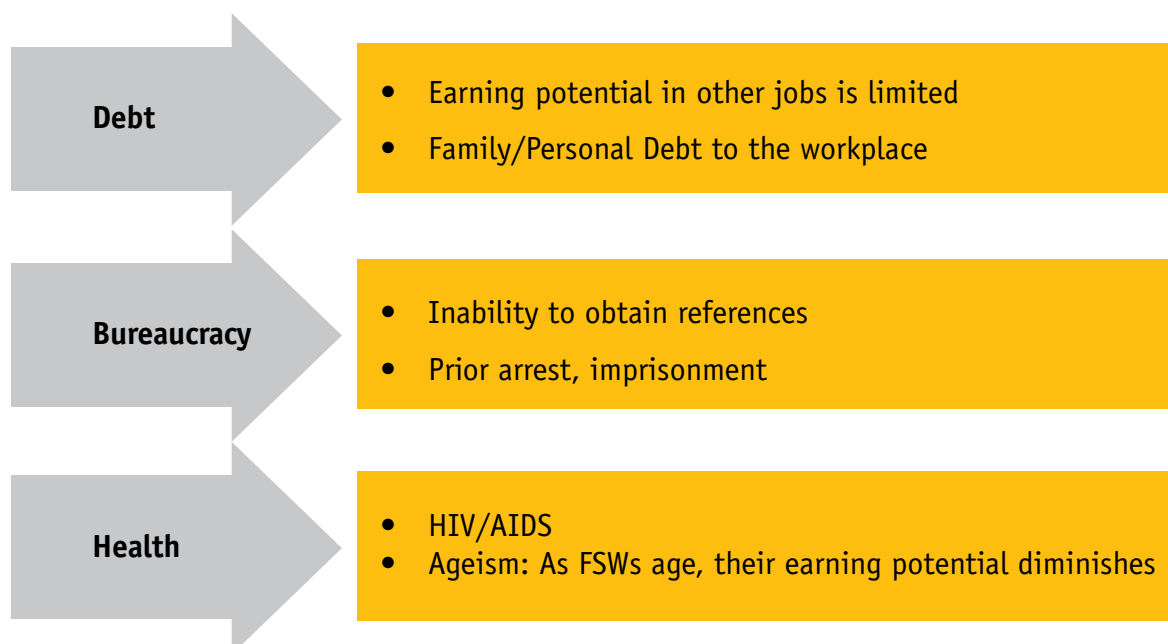
The most commonly cited aspiration was securing a long-term sponsor or husband who would offer financial support. Evidence has shown that this rarely happens, but the women were motivated by the “dream” of finding that perfect sponsor. Those who already had children expressed a desire to provide a better life for their children, which both bound them to their positions and motivated them to leave the work.

When discussing other livelihood options, the women favoured self-employment (starting a small business) and working in a spa or beauty salon. There were also cases of women being entrepreneurial and having taken concrete steps towards starting a business.

“She plans to leave this work when she gets enough money for the future study of her children.”

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

Barriers to Leaving Sex Work





Discrimination

"The previous ward she stayed nobody knew she was working as KTV and sex worker, but in her ward where she is now some people know she is a sex worker. In the ward, some people used to talk about her – let's see that girl who has learned her lesson, i.e. she used to have a husband, sponsor, money and now look at her."

KTV worker, Yangon

In the Community

The stigma experienced within communities is particularly damaging and upsetting for FSWs and often impacts their children and families. Two types of discrimination were identified: Emotional/Social and Functional/Economical. Discrimination was found to be pervasive within the community, the family and at the individual level. The women often kept their professional lives secret by living far from home. The abuse from community members was often overtly taunting and damaging.

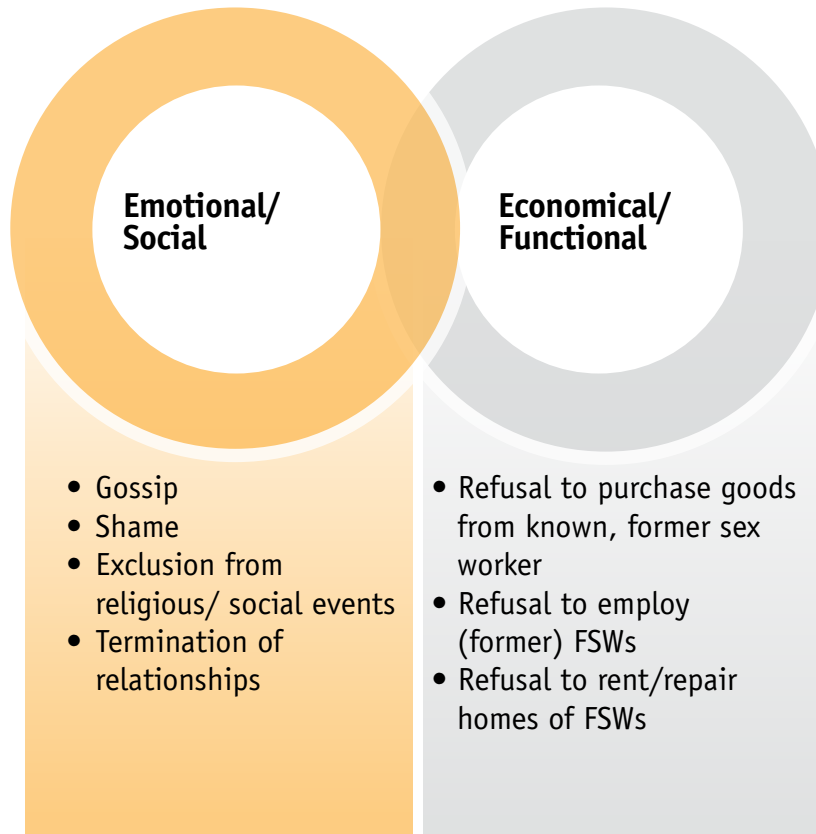
Institutional Discrimination

Women reported significant stigma at the institutional level in both law enforcement and when accessing vital health services. Discrimination in health settings increased vulnerability to HIV by making the women reluctant to ask for condoms, be tested or to seek treatment. NGO-run health clinics were the preferred choice. Similar experiences were reported when interacting with government agencies, particularly regarding property or domestic disputes. The women said they were told they were not entitled to any hearing or arbitration because of their profession.

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

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

Discrimination from community, family and individuals



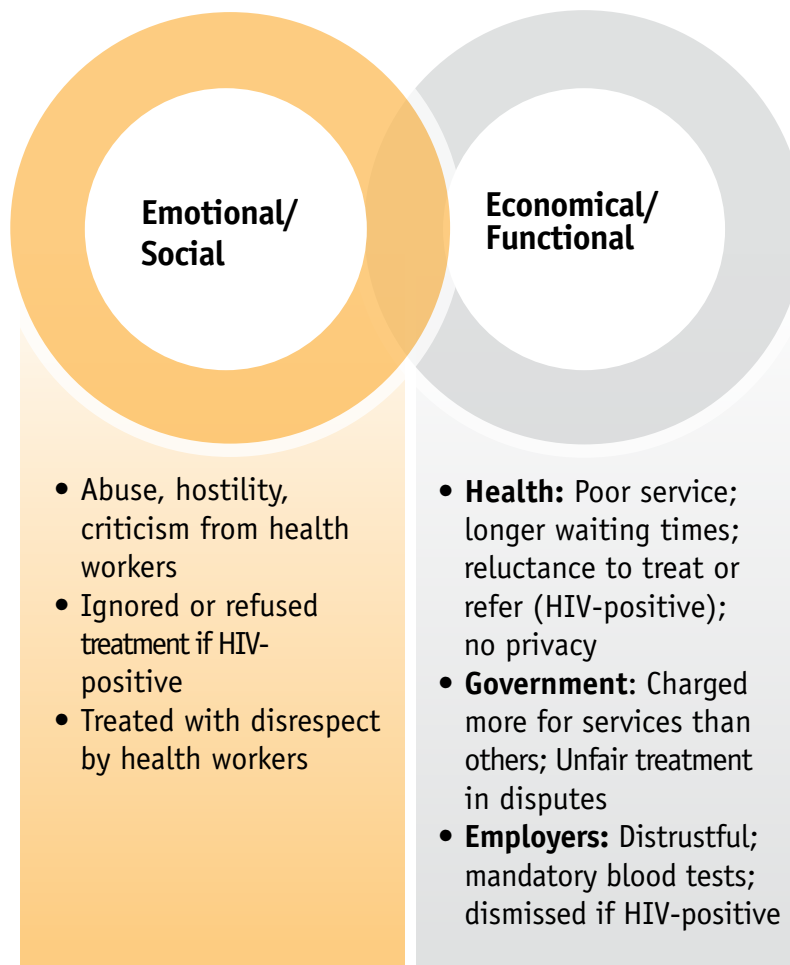
“People from her neighborhood know she is a sex worker. They do not talk to her. Some of them do not let their children play with her children...Sometimes someone in the neighborhood has a donation event at their house. It can be religious, or a birthday, but they make her eat alone. Nobody will eat with her.”

**Street-based
sex worker, Yangon**

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

KTV worker, Mandalay

Institutional Discrimination



“I went to the clinic in the street and the people from that clinic know that I am a sex worker and they discriminated against me. They said, ‘Why are you being impatient – you are a sex worker – what did you expect?’”

**Street-based
sex worker, Yangon**

“If there is a problem between me and my husband I can’t say to the community leader that there is a problem. The community leader will say, ‘I don’t want to judge between you and your husband – that is your business. You are a second wife and you are working as a sex worker. You sort it out. If another couple has a problem, the government office would try to resolve that problem – they would help them. But for the KTV couple, they won’t help and sometimes they also inform the police.’”

Massage-based sex worker, Mandalay



Recommendations

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

Massage-based sex worker, Yangon



This paper presents robust evidence about the realities of women's experience of sex work in order to inform the development of policy and advocacy strategies to support sex workers' rights. The primary reason for entering sex work is family obligations and a lack of other livelihood options that provide adequate income. Once in the sex industry, women experienced multiple forms of abuse, violence and exploitation.

These circumstances cause suffering to the women and make it extremely difficult for women to exit sex work. Addressing the situation in sex worker's lives will require complex interventions with a wide range of different stakeholders, addressing the legal, policy, socio-cultural structural processes which marginalise and exclude sex workers.

The following recommendations are based on sex worker's own vision of how their lives can be improved, as well as the research team's analysis of the implications of the research findings. These recommendations specify which target audience should be involved in a comprehensive approach to tackling the structures and processes which marginalise women as sex workers.

“Organisations should provide work for sex workers with a daily wage – there are some organisations that provide training, but just for skills. They don't provide money to invest, to start a new business. So, they also need money. Training isn't enough. They need a job or money to start a new business.”

Street-based sex worker, Yangon

Researcher Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Address stigma and discrimination

Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for reform of laws that promote discrimination against sex workers • Address stigma of sex workers in communities. FSWs play an important role in supporting their families' livelihoods • Raise awareness of the rights of sex workers
Men/Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address ideologies of sexual entitlement and promote equal and respectful relations between men and women • Raise awareness of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against sex workers • Target trishaw, taxi and motorcycle drivers. Raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, STIs and condom use. Encourage distribution of condoms and contact details/cards for services • Raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and STIs and promote safe sexual practices
IOs/NGOs/donors and government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and support existing sex worker community-based programs for rights-based programming, crisis intervention, and community legal services • Work with human rights groups to support and protect sex workers' rights through programming • Ensure effective coordination/cluster meetings and information sharing for NGOs/CSOs working with FSWs

RECOMMENDATION 2: Legal and policy reform: (a) decriminalize sex work and (b) address economic and social empowerment within other gender-based policies

Lawmakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decriminalise sex work in line with CEDAW statutory obligations and those outlined in NSPII • Commit to improving places of work in line with other national policies seeking reform to improve women's economic empowerment (such as NSPAW) • Integrate elimination of violence and discrimination against sex workers into NSPAW • Address use of public orders to arrest women for sex work, lack of enforcement of guidelines that prohibit the possession/use of condoms as evidence of sex work and support restitution for abuses
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RECOMMENDATION 3: Work with local decision makers and duty bearers to address processes marginalising sex workers from legal services and restitution

Penal system

- Provide training to judges and lawyers to “humanise” sex workers, raise awareness of GBV against sex workers
- Deliver training to legal/penal/enforcement staff workers’ enabling FSWs to access legal services and gain restitution for abuse

RECOMMENDATION 4: Work with the police on training and policy reform to address abuse

Police (in collaboration with CSOs)

- Provide targeted education for female officers to breakdown attitudes
- Remove police quotas for arrests made for sex workers
- Improve record keeping so reports of violence are followed up and action is taken
- Identify areas of interest for training/advocacy and develop agreed training plans to ensure buy-in at senior level
- Advocate for police to follow rules/procedures and improve practices around sex worker arrests (including not using public orders or possession/use of condoms to make arrests)

RECOMMENDATION 5: Developing policies and practices to improve workplaces using a firmer regulatory framework

Leading agencies advocating for women

- Lobby venue owners to encourage regular blood tests and availability of condoms and lubricants; build positive norms around condom use by sex workers and clients and; support sex workers to negotiate condom use
- Lobby venue owners to allow entry to peer motivators (ex-sex worker role models) to provide guidance and life coaching for sex workers (especially those in KTVs and massage parlours)
- Lobby venue owners to provide harm reduction information on HIV/AIDS, STIs; condom use; pregnancy and abortion; cervical cancer and; alcohol/drug use/gambling

Develop guidelines to improve working conditions, including occupational health and safety standards that respond to violence against sex workers in the workplace

Sex worker CSOs, NGOs/IOs working with sex workers

- Continue with and supplement health prevention messaging on HIV/AIDS and STIs (especially the importance of consistent condom use and regular testing) and other risky behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse and gambling

RECOMMENDATION 6: Support sex workers to have better access to services (Health, Legal and other)

Sex Workers

- Raise awareness of basic human rights
- Facilitate access to social services and justice through awareness training from a range of agencies, highlighting case studies
- Encourage dialogue so FSWs can use legal mechanisms to protect their rights as workers and seek justice for violence and discrimination
- Promote awareness of services available to women, including GBV services
- Train peer motivators (ex-sex worker role models) to provide guidance and life coaching for sex workers on their future
- Build understanding of due process, legal rights and capacity to report violence
- Build partnerships and dialogue between sex workers and police to promote greater respect and trust
- Support mechanisms to share experiences and develop trust such as mutual support networks (including expanding SHGs for sex workers beyond those for HIV-positive women)

CSOs/IOs/NGOs/ donors and government leads

- Provide a help line for women exposed to violence to encourage reporting of incidents by sex workers and to link them with legal/ other support services (e.g. SHGs)

Economic empowerment/ skills development agencies

- Encourage training/vocational skills-building programs and businesses/employers to provide work opportunities

Health staff, managers and decision makers

- Encourage the introduction of anti-discrimination policies to health facilities
- Support development of guidelines for safe referral between services
- Setup systems of redress for quality of care, discrimination and restitution
- Support understanding of FSW attitudes towards sex work, sexual orientation and gender identity to better understand sex workers and their rights and promote delivery of non-discriminatory services (privacy)

Recommendations from FSWs

RECOMMENDATION 1: Legal reform, Police behaviour change

Police and Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of abuse by those in the legal system and abuse by police when conducting arrest • Reduce harsh sentences • Improve treatment of FSWs in prison
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RECOMMENDATION 2: Improve working conditions

Venue owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure protection from violence at the hands of police, venue owners and customers • Provide access to health services (STIs/HIV/AIDS) to reduce risk • Improve employee rights • End restrictions on women’s movement
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RECOMMENDATION 3: Access to harm reduction/risk prevention

Venue owners, NGOs, INGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to information services
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RECOMMENDATION 4: Training/Vocational support

NGOs and INGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access programming that provides skills building relevant to FSWs
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RECOMMENDATION 5: Financial support

NGOs and INGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many women have the goal to open their own business and leave sex work. They asked for programming that would help assist this long-term goal
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RECOMMENDATION 6: Guidance and mentoring

NGOs and INGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The women want positive role models, including role models as motivators of change
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SWiM (Sex Workers in Myanmar Network)

The vision of SWiM is non-discrimination, equal rights and the pursuit of a better life for HIV affected sex workers. The organization aims to enhance capacity and technical knowledge; encourage discussion dissemination of information about sex workers and their rights; strengthen communication and networks; amend the articles and laws promoting discrimination on sex workers; promote equal opportunities for sex workers in the social, economic and religious sectors; and fund raise for the network.



CARE Myanmar

CARE has worked in Myanmar since 1995 with the aim to improve the lives of people through the empowerment of women and their communities. This is achieved through CARE's two programs: Socially Marginalised Populations (SMP) and Vulnerable Rural Women (VRW). CARE works with partners at different levels to address underlying causes of poverty and to achieve lasting results. CARE's activities in Myanmar focus on Gender based violence; Food and livelihood security; Disaster Risk Reduction; Maternal and sexual reproductive health; Peacebuilding; Policy and law reform in related areas.



Options

Options builds partnerships to transform the health of women and children. We bring together partners with the knowledge, expertise and influence – governments, health workers, NGOs, businesses – to make change happen and ensure that everyone can access the health care they need. With over 20 years' experience of identifying and shaping complex programmes in the health and social sector, we coordinate consortia, develop and manage frameworks to monitor and evaluate progress, and capture and share evidence of successful approaches. Our approach is flexible, responsive and tailored to the local context. Our focus is always on building local skills and systems that last. We use data to drive improvements in the quality of services being delivered, and enable communities to use this information to demand the services they are entitled to.