



## MOTIVATION FOR ENGAGING IN SEX WORK AND POTENTIAL FOR QUITTING THE PROFESSION BY BROTHEL-BASED FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE: AN AGENDA FOR A CONTEXTUAL HIV ELIMINATION STRATEGY FOR NIGERIA

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Over the past decades, sex workers have been vilified, implicated and stigmatized in the epidemiology of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. While these negative perspectives about sex workers have changed in some climes, they still face discrimination, harassment and stigmatization in most developing countries. The fact remains however that the global push to eliminate HIV cannot be achieved without factoring in sex workers. **Method:** A cross-sectional design was employed, using a questionnaire to obtain responses from 200 brothel-based female sex workers on their motivation for engaging in sex work. Data was analysed with SPSS and results presented in frequencies. **Results:** Majority (52%) of the respondents attributed their engaging in sex work as a result of frustration from joblessness; 38% of the respondents went into sex work for pecuniary reasons, while 4.5% went into sex work for pleasure and fun. All the 200 BBFSWs expressed their willingness to quit sex work if they found alternative job opportunities. **Conclusion:** Most of the brothel-based female sex workers were aware of the HIV predisposing risk actors associated with sex work. They all expressed their willingness to quit the profession if they are gainfully employed. In this regard, the adoption of policy initiatives that engender access to right information, social support, confidence building and skills development for job creation and entrepreneurship would be veritable incentives for actively engaging female sex workers in the global fight to eliminate HIV/AIDS and ultimately motivate them to quit sex work. This will help to reduce the existing pool for transmitting new HIV infections and by extension the National HIV prevalence.

**Keywords:** Sex work, Motivation, Poverty, Economic survival.

### INTRODUCTION

Sex workers are adults who exchange sexual services for money or non-monetary goods, on regular or occasional basis (UNAIDS, 2012). They include a wide array of people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities and contexts who work in the sex business (Piper, 2018). Sex work is considered to be one of the oldest occupations known to men, having existed for millennia across all continents and cultures (Beyrer, 2015). It is a sensitive, sentimental and controversial subject, and based on religious or ethical persuasions, has been labelled as a taboo that should be eradicated (Piper, 2018). In most countries, sex work and the activities associated with it are considered criminal acts (IDS, 2020). Sex work which occurs in different forms is part of contemporary human existence, and cannot be wished away, considering the fact that it is a big industry that employs several thousands of people with various job titles. It is a profession of sorts and those involved in the profession, work in brothels, on the streets, from home or with agencies (Pauw, 2007). The categorizing or profiling of sex workers to a large extent depends on the societal or cultural contexts. In more economically advanced societies, with liberal sexual norms, where sex work has been legalized, brothel or agency-based sex workers who have the opportunity for socializing and mingling with socialites, will see sex work as a lucrative and exciting business (Lehmiller, 2018); whereas for less economically advanced countries where brothel-based sex workers face regular police harassment, sex work may be a routine means of survival (Saggurti *et al.*, 2011) In this regard incomes of sex workers vary tremendously depending upon their location.

The human mind is inquisitive and seeks to find out why certain phenomena, lifestyles, behaviors and practices exist in human societies. It is therefore not out of place for one to be interested in discovering the reasons why some people elect to sell sex for a living. The motivation for people who engage in sex work especially in developing countries is complex and to some extent multifarious. People engage in sex work for different reasons, that range from unemployment to the desire to live above poverty and become economically independent (Senthilingam, 2019). It could therefore be inferred that those involved are compelled by the vicissitudes of life to go into sex work to make a living or for survival because they feel there are no other options. It is equally possible to rationalize that those engaged in sex work actually like or enjoy what they are doing (Lehmiller, 2018). The cash-in hand nature of the profession that makes cash handy to meet financial obligations however puts sex workers who are hard pressed for money to succumb to risky sexual practices that can put them or their clients at serious risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (Pauw, 2007). There are however various risks associated with sex work, ranging from physical violence, drug or substance abuse /addiction, the risk of being infected with various sexually-transmitted infections and even death. Research evidences have shown that substance abuse helps sex workers to cope with the demands of the work by offering as escape, lowering inhibitions, reducing fear and strengthening denial (SWEAT, 2019). Substance abuse however creates more problems for sex workers, by making them more vulnerable to violence from clients, impairs their judgement and capability or will to negotiate safer sex (SWEAT, 2019). Globally, in low, middle, and high income countries, people of all genders (women, men, transgender) who sell sex have disproportionate burdens and risks of HIV, whether in the

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context of a generalized or concentrated epidemic; and incidentally, because they are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors (e.g., sex without a condom, sex with multiple partners) and substance use. Those who exchange sex more regularly as a source of ongoing income are therefore at higher risk for HIV than those who do so infrequently (Beyrer, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly in Nigeria, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has largely been fueled through heterosexual relationships and female sex workers (FSWs) have played a pivotal role in the spread of the HIV virus (NACA, 2019). Female sex workers bear the greatest HIV burdens (Beyrer, 2015). An analysis of the HIV prevalence of 16 SSA countries in 2012 showed a pooled prevalence of more than 37% among sex workers (AVERT, 2018). Nigeria with a national HIV prevalence of 1.4%, has one of the highest rates of new infection in sub-Saharan Africa and is ranked second after South Africa among the countries with a large segment of the people living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2017). Nigeria has a mixed HIV epidemic, with a high HIV prevalence among the general population and a disproportionately greater HIV burden among certain groups such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM) and people who inject drugs. These high risk groups constitute only 3.4% of the population, yet account for around 32% of new HIV infections (NACA, 2019). In 2016, an estimated 14.4% of sex workers were living with HIV in Nigeria. Although this represents a significant drop from the 2013 estimate of 24.5% of sex workers who were living with HIV, and HIV prevalence among sex workers in Nigeria is still about eight times higher than that of the general population. Moreover, HIV prevalence is higher among female sex workers at 24.5% compared to male sex workers at 18.6%, and brothel-based female sex workers with a prevalence of 27.4%, face greater HIV risk in Nigeria (AVERT, 2018). The result of the Nigeria Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance Survey (IBBSS, 2014), showed that HIV prevalence among brothel-based female sex workers (BBFSWs) in Cross River State was 13.5%. Calabar metropolis, the capital city of Cross River State, is located in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. It is one of the major cities in the country and a tourists' destination making it an attractive haven for sex workers from different parts of the country and neighboring countries. Although sex work is considered illegal in Nigeria, sex workers can be found in hotels, bars, brothels and on the street. The role of sex workers therefore in the global war to eliminate HIV/AIDS cannot be downplayed. Sex workers are therefore very critical in the quest to achieve success in the global fight to eliminate HIV/AIDS. Moreover, due to stigma and discrimination, sex workers worldwide do not have equitable access to essential HIV prevention, treatment, and care services (Beyrer, 2015).

### Rationale of the study

Considering the important roles of CSWs both in the transmission as well the prevention of HIV transmission, this study was conducted to determine the motivation of BBFSWs in Calabar metropolis for engaging in sex work with a view to obtaining baseline data that can be used to advocate for female empowerment and also engage FSWs in the fight to eliminate HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

### Study Objective

To determine the factors that influence sex work among brothel-based female sex workers in Calabar Metropolis

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Site

The study was conducted in Calabar metropolis, the capital city of Cross River state, located in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. The metropolis comprises two jurisdictions, Calabar Municipal and Calabar South local Government Areas (LGAs).

### Study design

A cross-sectional design was adopted for this study, which was conducted among brothel-based female sex workers (FSWs) within Calabar metropolis. A multi-stage proportionate to size sampling method was applied in selecting the brothels and the FSWs from the two LGAs. In the first stage, 4 brothels were randomly selected from Calabar Municipal while 3 were selected from Calabar South LGA. In the second stage 122 FSWs from Calabar Municipal and 78 FSWs from Calabar South LGAs respectively were purposively selected, making a total of 200 FSWs.

### Method of data collection and analysis

Data was collected using a pretested and validated semi-structured questionnaire comprising the following four sections: (a) information on socio-demographic characteristic, beliefs, behaviour and attitude toward HIV/AIDS prevention and (c) reasons for engaging in sex work. The data collected were entered into a spread sheet and were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS Version 20) and the results were presented as frequencies, percentages and charts.

### Research Ethics

Verbal informed consent was obtained from the respondents after the aim, significance and benefit of the study was explained to them and they were assured of their confidentiality.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic data of respondents

Majority 75 (37.5%), of the respondents were aged 20 – 24 years, 43 of them were aged 15 – 19 years (21.5%); 33 (16.5%) were aged 25 – 29; while 19 (9.5%) FSWs were aged 30 – 34 years. The FSWs in the 35 – 39 and 40 – 44 years age brackets were 21 (10.5%), and 7 (3.5%) respectively. Most 123 (61.5%) of the FSWs were single; a few, 9 (4.5%) of the FSWs were married, 42 (21.0%) of them were cohabiting. A greater proportion, 86 (43%) of the respondents had completed secondary and tertiary education respectively, 11 (5.5%) were students in tertiary institutions, 12 (6.0%), have completed primary education, while 16 (8.0%) had no formal education (Table 1).

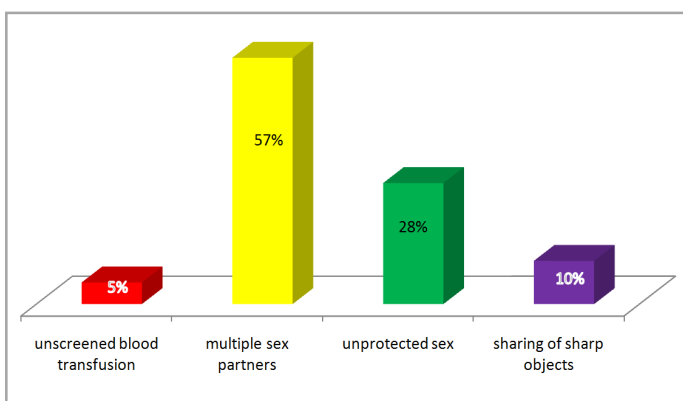
### Respondents perception about risk factors that can predispose to HIV infection

Figure 1 provides the result of the analysis regarding the respondents' perception about risk factors that could

predispose to HIV infection. The findings showed that majority 114 (57%) of the BBFSWS knew that having sex with multiple sex partners was a major risk factor for acquiring HIV. 56 (28%) of the respondents had the perception that having unprotected sex also predisposed them to HIV infection. 20 (10%) indicated that sharing of sharp objects was a risky practice that can result in HIV infection; while 10 (5%) observed that being transfused with an unscreened blood HIV infected blood could potentially lead to acquiring HIV infection.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=200)**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
15-19 years	43	21.5
20-24 years	75	37.5
25-29 years	33	16.5
30-34 years	19	9.5
35-39 years	21	10.5
40-44 years	7	3.5
45-49 years	2	1.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	123	61.5
Cohabiting	42	21.0
Divorced / Separated	15	7.5
Widowed	11	5.5
Married	9	4.5
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
No formal education	16	8.0
Primary	12	6.0
Secondary	86	43.0
Tertiary	86	43.0



**Fig. 1. Respondents perception of risk factors that can predispose to HIV infection**

**Respondents reasons for engaging in sex work**

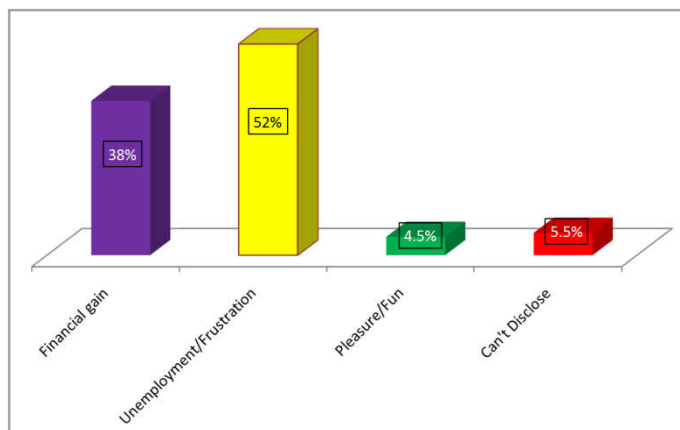
As shown in Figure 2, majority 104 (53%) of the respondents opted for sex work as a result of unemployment and the frustration associated with joblessness. 76 (38%) of the FSWs chose to do sex work because they saw it as a means of making financial gain while 9 (4.5%) of them took to sex work because they felt it was fun. 11 (5.5%) of the respondents however did not disclose why they opted for sex work.

**Duration of respondents' engagement in sex work**

Majority 70 (35%) of the BBFSWS had spent three years in the profession, followed by those who had spent two years 49 (24.5%) and four years 29 (14.5%) respectively. 27 (13.5%) of the respondents had spent five years and more while 25 (12.5%) of the FSWs have spent just a year in the profession. See Table 2.

**Table 2. Duration of respondents' engagement in sex work(n=200)**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The duration respondents have been engaged in the sex work		
1 Year	25	12.5
2 Years	49	24.5
3 Years	70	35.0
4 Years	29	14.5
5 Years and above	27	13.5



**Figure 2. Respondents reasons for engaging in sex work**

**Respondents willingness to quite sex work**

As shown in Table 3, all the 200 BBFSWS were unanimous in expressing their willingness to quit sex work, especially if they found an opportunity to do so.

**Table 3. Respondents willingness to quit sex work**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you intend to leave sex work after sometime?		
Yes	200	100
No	0	0.0
Would you quit sex work if you find an opportunity?		
Yes	200	100
No	0	0.0

**Duration the respondents would like to continue in sex work before quitting**

As shown in Table 4, majority, 60 (30%) of the BBFSWS indicated that they would like to quit the profession after three years. They were closely followed by 58 (29%) of the BBFSWS who looked forward to a four-year exit date. 55 (27.5%) BBFSWS proposed to exit sex work in two years, with only two respondents stating that they would quit within one year. 25 (12.5%) of the respondents were not certain about when they would likely quit sex work.

**Table 4. Duration respondents will like to stay in sex work before quitting**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Probable duration of sex work before quitting		
1 Year	2	1.0
2 Years	55	27.5
3 years	60	30.0
4 Years	58	29.0
Don't know when	25	12.5

### Job aspirations of the respondents after quitting sex work

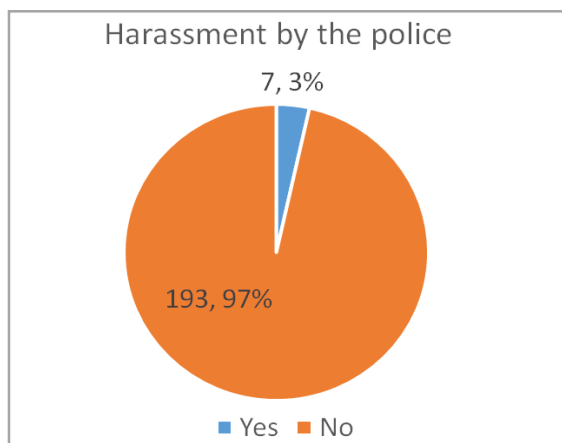
The finding of the study as shown in Table 5, indicated that majority 110 (55%) of the BBFSWs were positively disposed to seek for paid jobs / employment after quitting sex work. 50 (25%) of them however were inclined to being self-employed as hair dressers while 40 (20%) of them opted to engage in dress making or fashion design.

**Table 5. Job aspirations of the BBFSWs after quitting sex work**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
After quitting sex work what would you like to do?		
Find an employed /salaried job	110	55.0
Works as a hair dresser	50	25.0
Work as dress maker /fashion designer	40	20.0

### Harassment by law enforcement agents

Only 7 (3%) of the respondents admitted to have been harassed by law enforcement officials in the course of engaging in sex work. The remaining 193 (97%) of the sex workers have not had any encounters as yet with the police. See Figure 3



**Figure 3. Report of harassment by law enforcement agents**

## DISCUSSION

Sex work does not require special qualifications or skills to be enrolled, it is equally relatively easy to get engaged in the industry as the demand for sex workers is high; moreover, sex workers are mobile, have flexibility of time, and can determine when and how often they want to work (Pauw, 2007). To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has been conducted in Cross River State to determine why some persons opt for sex work as a means of livelihood. This study was therefore conducted among 200 brothel-based female sex workers (FSWs) in Calabar metropolis to determine their motivation for engaging in sex work.

### Motivation for engaging in sex work by the FSWs

**Poverty and the socio-economic context of sex work in developing countries:** Nigeria is a developing country and is ranked among countries that have high proportions of the population living in poverty. The World Poverty Clock (WPC) data for 2018 showed that about 86.9 million (22.54 %) of estimated 195.8 million Nigerians were classified as extremely poor, while about 187.1 million (77.5%) were living just above the poverty line.(WPC, 2018) As a result of the crushing

effects of poverty and social deprivation, some women, who in some cases are the bread winner of their families, are driven by hardship and economic necessity, to see sex work or prostitution as the most plausible way out of poverty and survival. In our study, majority 104 (52.0%) of the FSWs opted for sex work as a result of unemployment and frustration, while 75 (38.0%) were motivated by pecuniary gains. In contrast to a developing country scenario, a study involving about 200 female sex workers and reported by Rossler *et al.* (2010) in Switzerland, a developed country where sex work has been decriminalized, found that 37.3% of the respondents reported that they liked the job, while 28.5% indicated that there were no alternative jobs. Examining these two isolated contexts, it can be deduced that irrespective of the developmental contexts, globally, the driving factor for people engaging in sex work is money.

### Sex work and policy implications for HIV/AIDS elimination in Nigeria

It is important to address the issue of HIV/AIDS elimination within the socio-political, economic and legal, contexts of every country. In view of the vital role played by sex workers in the HIV epidemic, the role of sex work cannot be ignored, downplayed or dismissed as marginal. Sex workers are central to African HIV epidemics. Their continued exclusion will undermine our goal of creating comprehensive and successful programmes to control HIV

### Age at enrolment into sex work

Sex work is an all-comer's affair, however age of enrollment into sex work is an issue for concern, although there is no clearly defined age bracket for sex work. Sex workers include post-menopausal women above 50 years and even girls as young as 12 years, who are often trafficked and forced into the trade (Guardian News, 2020; UNDP, 2009). Among our respondents' 21.5% were aged 15-19 years, which is quite substantial. Globally, there is limited data on young people who sell sex, available evidence however suggests that a great proportion of sex workers begin sex work as adolescents (UNDP, 2009; NSWP, 2016). Research evidence also has shown that adolescents under 18 involved in sex work are more vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (UNDP, 2009). They also have higher prevalence of HIV and STIs than their older counterparts. Moreover, available data indicates that about 7,000 new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15-24 each week; and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, three in four new HIV infections occur among girls aged 15-19 years, with young women aged 15-24 years being twice as likely to be living with HIV compared to their male counterparts (UNAIDS, 2018). Moreover, considering that fact that young girls who engage in sex work are immature, naïve, and unable to negotiate condom (McClure *et al.*, 2014); they are therefore more predisposed to getting pregnant and resorting to unsafe abortions, being raped and subjected to other forms of sexual violence and human rights abuses (Decker *et al.*, 2015) Additionally, they have limited access to HIV testing, prevention and treatment services. (NSWP, 2016)

### Sex work as a means of breaking the poverty cycle

The motivation for sex work is driven to a large extent by poverty and hunger and the crave to survive. Various studies

have been conducted in different climes to explore why people opt for sex work. In some European countries like the Netherlands and Switzerland where sex work has legalized, sex work as a profession is out in the open and is regulated. It is therefore likely that the motivations would be quite different in places where sex work remains underground and is more dangerous (Lehmiller, 2018). In our study, majority, 76 (38.0%) of our respondents admitted that they went into sex work for financial gain. More so, the studies carried out independently by the Commission on AIDS in Asia (COAA, 2008), The New Humanitarian Organization (TNH, 2010), and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2010) Report corroborate the finding that commercial sex workers are in the profession for financial benefits

### **Predisposition of sex workers to HIV risk**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS, 2018) Report, brought to the fore the fact that there are about 38 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world; and the largest number reside in Africa, with 25.7 million. It has also been established that worldwide, sex workers are disproportionately affected by HIV. Globally, on average the HIV prevalence among sex workers is 12 times higher than that of the general population. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, an estimated 50% of sex workers living with HIV, and 92% of all deaths from HIV/AIDS attributed to sex work occur among African women (UNAIDS, 2014). In Nigeria, it is estimated that the number of sex workers living with HIV is eight times higher than the general population (NACA, 2017). Considering this critical mass of sex workers, who may potentially be at risk of HIV infection, it therefore stands to good reason that the global effort to eliminate HIV/AIDS should engage and involve sex workers in the fight. Ignoring sex workers, and in particular female sex workers will certainly spell failure to this global effort.

### **The socio-cultural and institutional factors associated with sex work in Nigeria**

Sex work has no geographic, cultural or racial boundaries and the practice varies between and within communities, countries and the regions of the world in terms of organization and regulation. In Nigeria, sex work is considered an illegal business, and sex workers are often stigmatized, marginalized and criminalized by their families, and the societies in which they live. 3.5% of our respondents reported being harassed by law enforcement agencies. This is in contrast to the 47.5% of BBFSWS arrested by law enforcement agents in Cross River State as was reported in the 2014 IBBISS report. In Nigeria, sex workers are frequently harassed by law enforcement officers. Police abuse involves physical manhandling, economic extortion, verbal intimidation and sexual assault. (Aborisade, 2019; Guardian Online, 2019) Some female sex workers are arrested, detained and sometimes arraigned for non-criminal offenses like loitering or homelessness. The labeling of sex work as a criminal activity has to a large extent given credence to the aggressive harassment and policing of sex workers particularly in Nigeria. This has created a sense of fear and intimidation in sex workers thereby reducing their ability to freely and confidently negotiate condom use with clients, as well as be able to advocate publicly for their right to organize themselves, to get fair hearing, treatment or obtain redress for acts of injustice, unfair treatment or even rape

committed against them by law enforcement officers. These legal and/or policy inhibitions created by the criminalization of sex work invariably increases their vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, extortion, including health-related risks, especially when the FSWs have no legal protection to enforce their human rights (Decker, 2015)

### **Decriminalization of sex work in Nigeria –the policy and legal dilemmas**

The decriminalization of sex work entails the elimination of all criminal and administrative prohibitions and penalties imposed on sex work in addition to the abolition of laws targeting brothel owners and the clients of sex workers. The removal of criminal prosecution of sex work implies that sex work is recognized as a legal occupation which therefore confers on sex workers the right to be protected from police harassment. It has been argued by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2012) that the eradication of sex work is not a feasible or appropriate public health goal, they have posited that in the context of sex work, effective approaches to HIV prevention would involve the society coming to grips with the fact that sex work is a reality of our human existence. UNAIDS position on sex and sex work is that, “sex in and of itself – whether paid for or not – does not cause HIV infection; rather, it is unprotected sex between HIV sero-discordant partners that can result in the transmission of HIV from an infected partner to the other”. This underscores the rationale for arguing that sex workers should be empowered to protect themselves and should insist on the use of a condom with every client they have sex with, whether they are casual or regular clients, (UNAIDS, 2009) since the correct use of condoms every time during sex by the sex worker is highly effective in preventing the contracting or transmitting of HIV infection if used the right way (CDC, 2016). Furthermore, in addition to the strict adherence to condom use, for HIV-negative FSWs, other prevention options like pre-exposure or post-exposure prophylaxis can be applied; while FSWs who are living with HIV, should have access to antiretroviral therapy (ART). It is expected that people living with HIV who take the ART daily as prescribed can reduce their viral load considerably and keep themselves healthy, thereby reducing their chance of transmitting HIV to others (CDC, 2020). Within the contemporary Nigerian society, the decriminalizing of sex work may not be easily achievable considering the religious and socio-cultural perspectives and perceptions about sex work generally. The way forward in Nigeria however would be for sex workers to have unfettered access to all HIV prevention services.

### **Dealing with social and structural factors related to sex work**

UNAIDS has recommended that punitive policies and criminal laws in relation to sex work, that have created barriers to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care, should be abrogated and replaced with supportive policies that would empower as well as protect sex workers and their clients, including safe sex during sex work (UNAIDS, 2012). In the last century, concerted efforts by the WHO and UNAIDS at the decriminalization and de-stigmatization of sex work has made in-roads in some countries in Europe, for instance sex work has been legalized in Switzerland and the Netherlands. A policy shift towards decriminalizing sex work in the United Kingdom, leaves the indictment of sex workers, but ensures



the prosecution of those involved in any exploitation, profiting and/or trafficking of sex workers (Piper 2018). Moreover, in Britain (but not Northern Ireland) sex work has been legalized, with some caveats; such as -sex workers not being allowed to offer their services on the street, restrictions on the ownership of a brothel, being a pimp, or paying for sex with someone under 18 or someone who has been forced into the work, regardless of whether the client knew about the coercion or not (Piper 2018)

### Addressing the motivation for engaging in sex work

There are various reasons that motivate adults to enter into sex work. They range from the acceptance of sex work as a viable and dependable source of livelihood (Qayyum, 2013) to that of being a temporary survival outlet, or a short-term means of earning income. However, the major driving force for women engaging in sex work is to a large extent for financial gain. The drive for human survival provides the impetus to engage in sex work notwithstanding the perceived or known risk associated with sex work. The provision of viable alternative means of livelihood can reduce the pressure on women and young girls to plunge into sex work.

### The willingness of sex workers to quit sex work

The median number of years the sex workers in our study have engaged in sex work was 3 years with a range of 1 to 5 years (Table 2). Majority, 70 (35.0%) of them have been involved with sex work for 3 years. All of our respondents (100 %) had indicated that they were willing to quit sex work if they were provided other options of being gainfully employed (Table 3). In the study reported by Rossler *et al.* (2010) majority (55.4%) of their respondents expressed their wish to quit the sex work. Schwartz (2008), also reported that female sex workers surveyed expressed their willingness to quit the business once they have earned their desired earmarked financial targets.

### Economic empowerment of sex workers

The finding of our study showed that majority xxx of the BBFSWs expressed their willingness to quit sex work if available job opportunities are provided. It has been asserted that the HIV epidemics were able to spread more rapidly in settings of social and economic deprivation and vulnerability (Kerrigan *et al.*, 2008; Swendeman *et al.*, 2009) as opposed to affluent and more developed countries.

Moreover, stigma, ridicule and discrimination further aggravate the economic disempowerment of sex workers, restricting their access to financial services and opportunities, further compromising their ability to earn equitable livelihoods. Women who are faced with poverty and a dire sense of lack, are vulnerable and can easily be pushed into sex work as a last resort. These women are also more likely to throw caution about safer sex to the wind in their quest to make enough money to take care of themselves and their families. Efforts to create opportunities for economic empowerment and the creation of social capital for women are therefore laudable options for dignifying womanhood and providing livelihoods for women who under normal circumstances will not opt for sex work. Providing women with requisite survival skills through training and skills acquisition for living cannot be over-emphasized. Empowering sex workers economically through entrepreneurship and

gainful self-employment are viable options for female sex workers who want to quit sex work. In this regard, the different levels of government at Federal, State and Local (County) level can crate skill acquisition training centers where women can learn gainful skills for self-employment. The BBFSWs can also be provided grants for the initial start-up of their business plans /ideas and also be educated in financial management on how to grow their business. The increase of economic options available to the female sex workers, can enable them achieve greater financial security, thereby enhancing their capacity to take charge of their lives and make key decisions that affect their livelihoods and that of their families (Bekker, 2015).

### CONCLUSION

Although sex work has been stigmatized and morally denigrated in several societies and cultures, the fact cannot be obviated that no matter how closed or impervious to issues about sexuality a society may be, sex work cannot be easily wished away, neither can such societies live under a pretentious delusion that activities associated with sex work do not exist. Particularly for countries with prohibitive laws against sex work, the activities may not happen openly but they may take place secretly under cover of darkness. It has been argued that widespread poverty and a sexist restriction on the types of job opportunities open to women could be responsible majorly for driving females into sex work Lehmiller (2018). The implication of this fact therefore is that gender equity is an imperative that is needed to expand the job space and create job opportunities for women, thereby reducing their vulnerability and tendency to engage in sex work out of joblessness and frustration. As noted by Overs *et al.* (2013), in the global fight against HIV, the tide cannot be turned without the involvement of sex workers; therefore, regardless of the reasons female sex workers have for engaging in sex work and the nature of their work in the industry, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect as human beings. The creation of the enabling environment for female sex workers to develop the requisite skills for wealth creation would go a long way in reducing the number of women who due to pressure or frustration in meeting their basic needs of life opt for sex work.

### Limitations of the study

The link between the exchange of sex and the use of drugs and alcohol has been shown in previous studies by some researchers which is predicated on the fact that under the influence of alcohol or drugs, sex workers with impaired judgment are more likely to engage in riskier forms of sex such as anal or oral sex, and may also have difficulty in negotiating safer sex. Additionally, they are more likely to share needles. The aspect of drug use by the BBFSWs was however not explored in this study.

### What is already known about the topic

Existing prevention strategies including behavioral and structural approaches, sexual and reproductive health services, condom social marketing or free condom supply, HIV counselling, testing, and supportive linkage to care for HIV positive FSWs, as well as other intervention strategies such as community-based programmes to build capacity and skills of FSWs for condom negotiation with clients have been discussed in different contexts by other researches.

## What this study adds

This study adds the dimension of exploring why some women opt for sex work and how these drivers can be identified and addressed as a means of ascertaining the willingness of female sex workers to quit the profession and under what conditions this could happen. Ultimately by addressing these concern, HIV can be eliminated overtime as these women are financially empowered are able to willingly opt out of sex work and embrace the alternative sources of livelihood.

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