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## Prostitutes: Vendors of Another Type \*

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### ABSTRACT

Urban prostitution in Zimbabwe dates back over a century to the rise of colonial towns. In Zimbabwe employment opportunities in the settler towns attracted male migrants. Due to low wages and the provision of bachelor accommodation in towns, men generally left their families in the rural village. Most lived like single men, often divorced or rejected by their kin (van Onselen, 1976). For those women who migrated independently to town, the only viable occupation was prostitution. Despite the fact that prostitution was never legal during the colonial period and despite attempts to control it by using Vagrants Act, it thrived and still thrives.

Prostitution remains largely as a 'hanging-on' strategy. This article explores prostitution in one of Zimbabwe's major towns – Masvingo – and demonstrates prostitutes' life situations, motivations and future plans. Their social and working lives, self-definition of their sex worker status, relationships with other prostitutes, the kinds of social networks they establish, their clients, incomes and expenditure patterns are some of the issues raised in this article. The impact of ESAP on prostitution, urban adjustments and coping mechanisms, are also discussed.

### Introduction

A small minority of Masvingo women are in the business of selling sex, as a means of supporting their households. In the context of this study, these prostitutes saw themselves as no different from the other women who were struggling to eke out an existence in the city. In Masvingo's bars and pubs, prostitutes generally referred to themselves as *vasikana vebasa* (working girls). Something that struck me particularly in the wealthier suburban pubs and hotels, which I regularly visited during fieldwork, was the recurring reference by the prostitutes to the similarity between their job as prostitutes and the work of food vendors. The prostitutes frequently retorted, "*What is the difference between us and those who sell tomatoes? We both sell something people want and can't do without.*" Just like food vending, prostitution for the Masvingo sample was a low-return job. Prostitution functioned largely as something that some women turned to as a last resort when everything else failed. Three terms used in Shona to describe prostitutes were

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\* The study on prostitutes is a part of a 14-month project from November 1994 to December 1995. Data was gathered using anthropological fieldwork techniques.

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*pfambi* (walker), *hure* (whore), and *pendeka* (whore with a high degree of independence).

The temporality and non-career nature of prostitution was something frequently noted by the prostitutes in their pub talk. Prostitution meant hard work and an investment both in terms of time and effort. Prostitutes considered prostitution as a short lived 'career.' The ages of most prostitutes who dominated the trade in bars, restaurants and hotels in Masvingo, appeared to fall in the early-20s to mid-30s age group. The above 40 years of age prostitute was a rare sight, for by this age most prostitutes are likely to have returned to their villages of origin.

In a situation characterised by declining disposable incomes as was the situation in Masvingo during my fieldwork in 1995, prostitutes were trapped in a low-return equilibrium situation. In Masvingo prostitution as a survival strategy, like most low-status and low-paying jobs, did not offer an opportunity to accumulate capital for investment purposes. Prostitutes in the study represented the underpaid, downtrodden, despised and discarded group by society, yet despite this negative view, prostitution was perceived as an occupation which brought them food, clothes and at least enabled them to pay their rent. However compared to other primary sources of income for the Masvingo sample, prostitution was the option with fewest chances for meaningful investment of proceeds. Prostitution was not lucrative in Masvingo, despite Bromley's (1982:177) statement that: *"...most young women without access to significant capital are aware that prostitution may be potentially the most remunerative form of work."*

## Sexuality and Power

Police harassment and arrests constituted one of the major problems the prostitutes had to deal with in the sex industry. However the application of laws and regulations against prostitutes appeared to be quite arbitrary, discriminatory, unfair and hypocritical. The State invoked prostitution laws selectively against suspected female prostitutes. The round-ups of suspected prostitutes that had been going on since 1982 targeted women only. It was actually a way of curtailing the rights of women generally.

In many ways prostitution in Masvingo mirrored the existing power relations in society, not just on those occasions when the state flexed its muscles in the form of round-ups. Besides the use of sexual labour in exchange for cash, Masvingo prostitutes used sex as a bribe especially in relation to those in positions of authority. According to pub prostitutes, sex as a form of bribe was directed mostly at those in a position to frustrate the operations of prostitutes, particularly law enforcement agents, but not exclusively so. A number of prostitutes retorted that: *"kana uchida kugara mutaundi zvakanaka unopota uchipawo machef"* (if you

want to stay in peace in town it is imperative that from time to time you give sexual favours to the chefs [ie, those in power]). In other words, sex was not only used as a bribe but it was quite often employed to extract favours from those in authority.

Prostitutes adopted certain elements of *svejkism* (1) in their dealings with men in authority. Although prostitution brought pleasure at times, the women had an eye on its varied rewards both monetary and non-monetary. Prostitutes at times behaved in what appeared to be contradictory and deceitful ways, which they felt men loved. Prostitutes considered this as part of sex work. If there was anybody fooled by the behaviour of female sex workers it was only their male prospective and actual clients. Prostitutes aimed at getting things on the cheap, whether it involved drinks during the pub encounters or outside the pubs and drinking places. Getting things on the cheap did not exonerate the prostitutes from working, in fact it involved more work but of a different type. During conversations, it turned out that prostitutes never carried money to the pub, except for a drink or so. For them – and something borne out of experience – “*men do provide*.” These non-monetary benefits like drinks in the pubs and food purchases are benefits that streetwalkers miss in their sex trade.

All the prostitutes in the Masvingo sample (there were seven) felt that prostitution enabled them to establish a pattern of autonomy. They argued that through prostitution they were in a position to make decisions that affected their lives, independent of other people's thinking. In a way prostitution gave prostitutes in the sample a degree of control over their lives, something which they seemed to cherish and desire. Generally prostitution attracted young women. The seven sex workers' ages ranged from 18 to 32 years. Of the four full-time sex workers one was a divorcee and a mother of two, the other three were single and childless, but with one exception all had at least one dependent to take care of.

It was noticeable that prostitutes had very tenuous relationships with their own parents. Sometimes their own mothers' relationships with men had encouraged them into prostitution. A number of those in prostitution were children raised by abusive step-parents. In many ways prostitution for these girls marked a break from a cycle of home-based abuse and was looked at as a way to establish financial and residential independence. Those from abusive home backgrounds looked at prostitution not only as an escape from conditions of impoverishment and a search for freedom, but also as a way to remove themselves from the socio-physical environment of abuse which included parents or parent-surrogates.

Through prostitution they had established patterns of autonomy outside marriage. However, the way in which public behaviour was negotiated even in pubs

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(1) *svejkism* involves a process of disengagement from organisational activities by an individual; it involves a conflict of moralities. A *svejk* wants to extract as much as possible from an organisation but at the same time wants to maintain a private space beyond the reach of the organisation.

seemed to reflect deep-seated patriarchal relations. Sexual politics and power relations were manipulated in such a way as to give the impression of male control and dominance, when power in a limited way rested with the women sex workers. These prostitutes acted in some ways as radical feminists who work within patriarchal relations, in order to subvert that very social order not by resisting, but by appearing to be going along with the system. Prostitution enabled the women to pursue their drive to establish a market niche in which they could control men desirous to fulfil their sex drives. It was quite clear that, in the pubs in particular, the sex workers were calling the shots.

Despite the fact that 1995 was an election year, Masvingo prostitutes appeared unconcerned with organised politics. Political talk was very rare in public places. Prostitutes were not interested in politics at all. They did not attend rallies and saw nothing good coming out of politics. The prostitutes' plea was to be left alone in peace by the politicians. As one divorced sex worker noted,

*"It's a pity that gogo (2) (grandmother – her landlady) is forced to go to political party rallies. I have nothing to gain from politics. I will never attend these ZANU-PF rallies. I don't care about politics and will have nothing to do with politics. They should leave us alone, let them put each other into positions, we just want to be left in peace."*

Her sentiments were quite pervasive amongst my sample. For sex workers their concern was their work. Prostitution was a bread and butter issue. Anything like politics that would not bring in immediate perceived benefits was of little concern to them. Interestingly, however, one of the four full-time prostitutes attended church regularly. She devoted up to six hours a week on church activities.

## Prostitution in Masvingo

The Durkeimian notion of seeing prostitution as anomic is rejected. The prostitutes in this study were not characterised by a lack of norms and values. They were not a deviant group. They represented a minority of urban women who chose prostitution as a survival option to enable them to generate an income. However, prostitution, as shown in this study, is not a strategy for climbing out of poverty.

In order to develop a clearer understanding of prostitution in Masvingo, it is important to discuss this in relation to marital unions. On one hand, we have the socially and legally sanctioned marriages, then the *mapoto* unions, which are situated in-between legal and unrecognised marital unions. Prostitutes' sexual labour was in many ways similar to that of wives and differed from that of *mapoto* women only in that it was paid in cash and did not involve other domestic obligations.

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(2) *gogo* is a term used to show respect to an elderly woman – not necessarily one's own grandmother.

Prostitutes were ambivalent towards marriage. Marriage had benefits as well as limitations. In Masvingo they generally spoke about the negative features of marriage. They recounted horror stories about the predicaments of many married women. Yet, interestingly, marriage remained the prostitutes' hope. They expected to find a marriageable partner in the years ahead, recognising that no matter how flawed, marriage meant material support from a man. They had no romantic illusions about marriage, but strongly desired its social and material benefits. For prostitutes, like most other Zimbabwean women, marriage was one of many survival strategy options.

### ***Types of sex work***

There are many different types of prostitution. Amongst some of the market niches identified in the literature are:

- streetwalkers;
- bar and pub prostitution;
- hotel prostitution;
- backstreet prostitution;
- advertised prostitution;
- organised prostitution (massage parlours/clubs, etc).

Three of these are selected for more detailed discussion as indicated below:

#### **(a) Hotels**

In Zimbabwe at the time of research prostitution was deemed illegal. I observed three types of sex work during fieldwork in Masvingo, located in pavements, pubs, and hotels. Masvingo had three graded hotels, two of which served not only a local clientele, but also the robust tourist trade. Prostitutes operated in all three hotels. Hotel prostitution represented the top end of sex work in Masvingo. Hotel prostitutes were more sophisticated than the others and appeared to be doing well. They spoke English in order to tap into the more lucrative tourist market. My snowball-generated sample did not include any prostitute from this group, which could have biased my view of sex work as generating low-income. On the other hand, hotel prostitutes constituted a low percentage of Masvingo's total prostitute population. Official perceptions of prostitution seem to ignore hotel sex workers, always referring to bar and pub prostitutes and to a limited extent streetwalkers, at the bottom of the prostitutes' own hierarchy.

#### **(b) Pubs**

There was a perceived operational hierarchy of the different types of prostitutes who operated from the different pubs. Variations existed between the different

pubs in terms of clientele as well as the perceived status of the sex workers operating from particular pubs. All the pubs that I observed were Council property. The Rujeko Council bar was the most decent 'high-density' beer outlet. It attracted many young female sex workers compared to the older Mucheke pubs. Within Mucheke, Farai beerhall close to the long-distance bus terminus ranked very low and it attracted the older prostitutes. Yet Farai was always overflowing with pub revellers, due to its strategic location close to the bus terminus. Variations existed in terms of hygienic conditions: Farai was filthy, Rujeko and Pangolin immaculate. The price of beer was fairly standard in these Council-owned properties, but opening hours differed, although most pubs closed down around 11 pm. Sarudzai and Manhede beer-gardens also operated as night clubs, closing only around 3 am, sometimes 4 am. Despite these variations and 'cover charges' (entry-fee) at certain times of the months, neither deterred would-be revellers. Prostitutes' prospective clients paid the 'cover charges.' Whilst some customers became established patrons at certain pubs, clients and prostitutes showed a very high level of nocturnal mobility, particularly at month-ends.

### (c) Pavements

Though not as widespread as pub prostitution, there existed a number of streetwalkers who operated particularly at night. Before Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980, prostitution was mostly associated with urban beer outlets and streetwalking was unknown. Streetwalkers generally represented the burnt-out and the desperate. They dressed in skimpy attire (eg, 'hot pants') and exposed themselves maximally especially to motorists. Sometimes, according to one Masvingo streetwalker, they wore only a coat with no garments underneath, and would lift or drop the coat altogether at the approach of a motorist. Sex took place in clients' cars, hotel rooms or in dark secluded spots. Occasionally a streetwalker would be hook a tourist, who would pay three to four times the usual rate. Pavement prostitution also existed just outside the pubs, especially at month-ends.

### *Observations of prostitution market niches*

Besides numerous 'conversations' with prostitutes, I also visited and observed prostitutes in pubs and hotels in Masvingo town and residential areas of Mucheke and Rujeko (3). Farai and Sarudzai beerhalls, Mandava Al Hotel and 'Stop Over' (some eight kilometres along the Masvingo-Great Zimbabwe road) are some of the places I frequented most. I did not observe streetwalkers during their working hours, as this would have interfered with their operations and I thought it unethical to probe that far. Direct observation of the prostitution market niches revealed that not all were occupied. Prostitution in Masvingo took the form of hotel and pub prostitution and streetwalking. It is within these niches that prostitution as a 'hanging-on' strategy is examined in this article.

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(3) Mucheke and Rujeko were the only high-density suburbs in Masvingo during the time of my research.

Observations of the prostitutes in their operational habitat of pubs were kept to a minimum, while nonetheless legitimating my status as a researcher. The prostitutes were very much at ease in their discussions with me in the pubs and even outside this environment, although they had every reason to be suspicious of strangers due to the phobic reaction of the state towards their work. The opposite happened. Some of the most friendly, understanding persons who enriched my insights as a researcher were prostitutes, possibly because less powerful members of the Zimbabwean society, still trust the University of Zimbabwe lecturers. The University was best known for its students who stood up to state oppressive forces, when most people were afraid of doing so.

As a researcher I was quite touched by what I saw during visits to the pubs. At places like Sarudzai beerhall, the head count of probable female prostitutes was at times as high as forty, although numbers varied greatly depending on the time of the month. Pubs attracted many young full-time as well as part-time prostitutes, from around mid-month when teachers received their pay. This peak lasted until month-end when presumably everybody had his/her salary. The pubs' business peaked on pay-days of teachers and soldiers. I also noticed a marked seasonal variation in terms of pub attendance by sex workers.

The agricultural cycle, the weather and end-of-year bonuses led to the emergence of two seasonal peaks of pub prostitution. In the period April to August, farmers received their pay cheques for their summer crops and the onset of winter is also associated with increased demand for sex to keep men warm. Year-end bonuses produced the second peak as since 1981 all civil servants had received a thirteenth cheque in November – however in 1995 the second peak did not reach its expected high due to the unanticipated sudden withdrawal by Government of the bonus to all civil servants reduced the workers' spending power.

### ***Perceived hierarchy of prostitutes***

The prostitution hierarchy was based on place of operation and the type of prostitution activity. Pub prostitutes looked down on streetwalkers and regarded them as filthy and debasing the profession. In turn, hotel prostitutes had an air of refinement and regarded themselves as more professional compared to pub 'girls.' Sex workers at different pubs practised an internal ranking order. Rujeko and Pangolin operators felt superior to the other pub 'girls.' However, the largest distinctions separated streetwalking from the other types of prostitution. Decorous behaviour and deference to customers tends to vary being the lowest amongst street-walkers and highest amongst hotel prostitutes. In hotels it appeared that manners, mode of communication and impression management all needed polishing as the possibilities of meeting 'gentlemen' customers were quite high.



### ***Use and manipulation of space***

The use and manipulation of space by sex workers in pubs and on pavements was quite striking. Nuances of pub seating arrangements first showed that sex workers had a tendency to expropriate certain portions of the pub for themselves. Certain spots in the pubs were always occupied by members of the same group.

Repeated visits to the pubs revealed that as a prostitute adjusted to the sex trade, through her network she developed a claim or recognised right to a certain space in the pub. 'Ownership' of pub space was not individualised. Space was recognised as a group entitlement. It was standard practice to notice that even when members of the network came to the pub late and found another group seated there, by the end of their drinking session they would have expropriated the space back to themselves. Space use did mark group identity in the pub. It also gave the members a sense of belonging and feelings of security.

Personalised pub seating arrangements depended on some unwritten code that recognised the entitlement of some groups to particular space sections of the pub. Within the pub some areas are assigned greater status compared to other sections of the pub. I felt that groups considered more 'senior' had access to that space ranked higher than the rest. It was also quite clear that seating arrangements also marked membership of a sex work group. Whilst amongst Masvingo's sex workers benefits seemed to accrue to individuals, the 'girls' operated in groups.

Masvingo sex workers also expropriated the pavements to pursue their nocturnal operations. Streetwalkers as well as pub prostitutes used pavements for soliciting sex as they waited for clients to pick them up after a night's revelry. Bar girls sometimes simply walked or lingered on the street to pass time, so as to re-enter the bar when they were sure there were enough clients to sponsor them for a drink. It was quite clear that most prostitutes used space strategically (whether pub or the pavement) in the course of their operations.

### **Selling Sex**

Discussions relating to selling sex in Masvingo concentrate on three issues: firstly the costs and dangers of prostitution, secondly pub prostitution and thirdly alternative street-corner type prostitution.

#### ***Costs and Dangers of Prostitution***

The hazards of prostitution, as noted by Millett (1973), are many and varied, some of which were also observed in Masvingo. All prostitutes in the sample noted the many physical dangers characteristic of prostitution. One had been raped twice by would-be clients since starting prostitution. Her father, after divorcing her mother, renounced all paternity rights over her. She suffered physical and sexual abuse before becoming a prostitute. Another prostitute in the sample had engaged in life-threatening fights. Prostitutes revealed a deep sense of fear that they lived

constantly under the threat of physical aggression either by their clients or clients' mates. For the prostitutes even the most regular of clients could turn against them. Hence they had to be constantly on the watch.

The level of health awareness was very high amongst the Masvingo prostitutes. They recognised the health risks entailed in their work, both STD infections, and the ever-present possible death sentence due to AIDS. All the prostitutes reckoned, however, that this knowledge might have arrived a little too late. One described herself as a moving grave. However, all the prostitutes claimed that they always insisted on the use of a condom by their clients. They refused under any circumstances to engage in sex without a condom, despite the offer of higher rates for such unsafe sex.

In Masvingo, especially hotel prostitution had very high 'lure' costs such as dress and bodily perfumes. Financial returns did not match the high lure costs. The economic as well as physical dangers of prostitution produced negative psychological returns. Prostitution was a stress- and anxiety-producing job: a short-lived, low-return, high-risk and dead-end job. But none of the prostitutes in my sample used drugs to keep themselves going. However, they all knew many other prostitutes whose lives were in pieces due to excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol.

Prostitutes noted that the widespread existence of negative societal attitudes as well as kin disapproval of prostitution affected them negatively. This meant that in times of need such as illness, a prostitute could not expect even her own brothers to come to see her. The social costs of societal rejection were high. Prostitutes were likely to tell their relatives that they derived their income from sources such as vending, crocheting and knitting and not prostitution. Generally people did not ask how one earned a living. One thought that her relatives knew that she was a sex worker since the pubs she frequented were also drinking places for some of her relatives, yet she had never discussed her trade with any of her kinsmen.

### ***Pub Prostitution***

Masvingo sex workers preferred to operate at night. Most clients went to the pub in the evenings having spend the day doing something else. Fridays, Saturdays and paydays were the busiest. Because the pay-days of people working in different sectors had been staggered from mid-month to month-end, prostitutes were able to live on the incomes of the different men. However, the most notable pay-days were those of teachers, soldiers and civil servants, who moved from their rural postings into Masvingo for shopping and banking. Some of these men spent a few nights in Masvingo in the company of prostitutes. Late hours from around 11pm to 4am were the busiest.

I observed how the sex workers treated their clients. They generally strove to establish and maintain cordial relationships with them. I identified four types of

prostitute clients: the 'one-offs,' 'regular-urban,' 'regular-rural' and 'strangers.' Each case was different in terms of mode of behaviour. Prostitutes treated 'one-off' clients differently from the 'urban-regulars' who were likely to be given more personalised service, including food and laundry. Urban-regulars sometimes got a discount and received preferential treatment compared to strangers and 'one-offs.' Marital hopes appeared to influence prostitutes' relationships with regular clients. A *proto-mapoto* relationship seemed to emerge in any prostitute's dealings with her regular customers. It was not unusual to hear other prostitutes refer to regular customers of their friends as "*uyu murume wasisi. . .*" (this one is the 'husband' of *sisi* so-and-so). The prostitutes were more likely to agree to go to the residence of an 'urban-regular' customer, whose wife's movements were known to them. Clients sometimes joked about how free they were when their "*baas*" (boss) was away – apparently referring to their wives.

The Masvingo prostitutes operated as independent entrepreneurs, responsible for decisions that affected their business of selling sex. Relationships with strangers were conducted in a business-like manner, with few jokes. Strangers were treated with suspicion and in nearly all cases the prostitute made sure she was paid before delivering sexual services. She also made it clear to any stranger that other members of her prostitute network knew she was taking him home. This strategy was to deter potentially aggressive behaviour and to minimise problems of payment. The price for sex with strangers was higher than with regulars and even 'one-off' encounters with familiar persons.

The prostitutes generally preferred known rural clients who had become regular customers. During pay-days prostitutes had a preference for rural clients, mostly because they were perceived to be more generous and less sophisticated, hence liable to manipulation. They were in town for fun as well as sex. Hence prostitutes were likely to spend more time visiting several pubs in the company of a rural than an urban client. At times some of the regular urban clients were introduced by the prostitutes as their relations to new rural clients and non-regular 'one-offs.' This happened at month-ends. In this way protection was forthcoming and the 'relation' for this occasion could drink at the expense of the rural client. However, there was no evidence that these men acted as pimps. From the women's point of view, they had to give way to higher fee-paying clients, but they could expect a reduction in the price especially during off-peak times.

Any woman who frequented pubs was presumed to be a whore. Prostitutes used various hooking strategies during their pub visits. They generally waited to be approached by men, but in many ways took a lead in soliciting for clients. Dress was used to entice clients. Not many prostitutes, however, used heavy make-up. There was no 'standard' dress among prostitutes, reflecting the different tastes of male clients. Dressing preferences varied from tights and see-throughs to long

garments. Most of the prostitutes preferred to operate late at night up to the time when most pubs close down or in the early hours of the morning, for those who frequented night clubs. The prostitutes recognised that when men were under the influence of liquor sexually suggestive behaviour such as bodily movements and suggestive talk did a lot to lure customers. Loud music was commonly played on juke boxes operated in the pubs, and I observed that most prostitutes responded to such music by sexually aggressive behaviour, especially toward closing time.

Despite the popular Zimbabwean image of prostitutes as drunks, the intake of alcoholic drinks was quite low amongst Masvingo prostitutes, although those who took to drinking seemed to overdo it. Of the four whose main source of income came from prostitution, only one drank alcohol, and likewise of the three who used prostitution as a secondary income source only one drank alcohol. It appeared that deliberately avoiding alcohol minimised operating costs and boosted one's chances in the market as most clients found non-drinkers more acceptable and less expensive to entertain in the pub. The deliberate avoidance of alcohol could also be seen as an attempt by prostitutes to remain in charge of their actions during working hours. Safety considerations may have influenced prostitutes' decisions to avoid drinking.

Hierarchical differentiation of prostitutes reflected in differences in prices between the different niches (hotels/pubs/streets). In discussions with the prostitutes in the sample it was clear that within a given market niche there was a standardised and regulated price for sex. Given the increasing competition this may not have been the actual practice. The general cost for a sexual act was common knowledge to clients. Overcharging as well as undercharging of customers, especially the 'one-offs' and strangers was discouraged. In Masvingo, a 'squeeze' as they call 'quickies' or short-time sexual encounters cost a client Z\$10 to Z\$30 depending on the market niche, being the lowest for streetwalkers. At month-ends especially paydays for teachers, army and public servants, sex workers hiked prices to about three times the usual price. They would commonly say "*zvinyu zvodhura varume*" (things are now expensive, men).

The charges for 'take-homes' (ie, going to the prostitute's place) were lower than prices for 'take-aways' when a prostitute went to a client's place. Being a 'take-away' was considered more dangerous in that the prostitute risked meeting the wrath of a client's irate wife or partner. The price for a 'take-home' varied from Z\$20 to Z\$30. Prices for sex were normally over and above any other expenditure like drinks a client would have spent in the pub. Such expenses were discounted as non-expenses and were merely a part of the costs of being a 'gentleman.' The charge for a take away varied between Z\$30 and Z\$50. Prostitutes charged higher rates during paydays and month-ends.

Masvingo prostitutes were in the habit of collecting money from the client

before delivery of services. Due to past experiences when a prostitute got a 'catch' she usually collected and entrusted the money to one of her network members for safe-keeping. This was done to discourage clients from demanding back their money after sex as well as to ensure that payments were made with the minimum level of dispute. Only regular trusted customers were exempted from the 'pay before you eat' provision.

It appeared that the sex acts were standard; none of the different sexual acts discussed in the prostitution literature were common in Masvingo. Differences in pricing were noted in terms of time and place. The cost of a sexual act could give a picture of a lucrative sex industry in Masvingo. However, on closer examination as well as discussions with the prostitutes, it was apparent that returns were not high. The prostitutes reckoned that the tastes of clients had gone up and they expected a lot from prostitutes in the form of decorum. This had meant an increase in 'lure costs.' Whether a prostitute operated in a pub she had to dress like those who frequent hotels as very often some of the clients would request her to accompany them to a hotel or some other night club. Hence these 'lure' costs in the form of dress/lingerie, perfumes and other related bodily adornments considerably reduced the net earnings from prostitution. Profits from prostitution did not exceed Z\$600 per month for practically all the prostitutes in the sample whether they operated full-time or part-time. When one took clients home cleanliness was a major consideration: prostitutes had to possess several sheets to change and they noted that after each encounter one had to wash the sheets, thereby raising household operating costs and in the process depressing the profitability of the trade.

### ***Street-Corner Type (Streetwalking) Prostitution***

Streetwalking existed in Masvingo and was ranked the lowest after hotel and pub prostitution. Pavement prostitution was a wholly nocturnal activity. It was prevalent in town as well as on pavements in proximity to pubs and beerhalls. Pavement prostitutes operated on the street most nights of the month. They normally spent up to six hours on the streets from around 9 pm to 3 am. Street prostitutes apparently increased during festive holidays and month-ends, due to increased demand. Motorists were the main clientele for the town's street walkers. Streetwalkers serviced amongst their clients, not just the lowly-paid, but some of the successful/respectable men who did not want to be seen picking up prostitutes at such places as beer outlets and hotels.

Streetwalking was the most unpredictable and risky type of prostitution. The streetwalkers charged variable prices, depending on the clientele. For the local clients the price varied between Z\$5 and Z\$20 at a time. Tourist clients paid up to Z\$50 per sexual encounter. Whilst prices appeared good it was not everyday that one had a 'catch.' Getting a 'catch' for at least 10 days per month was considered

to be good. Streetwalkers also operated in small groups of three to four persons. Once they left the pavements, they were not in a position to give each other support.

## **Prostitute Social Networks**

Whether one was initiated into prostitution by a friend or kin, right from the beginning a new entrant into prostitution has to make a choice within a short time after joining whether to stay on with the group or seek to join another network. The seven prostitutes in the sample within a very short time had effectively shut themselves off from the influence of kin and other non-prostitute acquaintances. The Masvingo prostitutes operated in small groups. Once a network gets above six it was likely it would split. Even though one was introduced into a network it all depended on its size whether the network would accommodate you or would actively assist you in finding another group. The pub 'girls' were quick in making their assessment of a new entrant, in relation to physical attributes, personality and perceived attitude. Whilst there were persons who resented a competitor, others cherish one if that would transform the marketability of members of the network. At the end of the day it was not the new entrant only that made the choice as to which group to permanently join. The choice rested with the more experienced members of the group and to a limited extent the prospective new entrant. It appeared that strong bonds formed between members of the prostitute network. Life for the four (full-time) prostitutes in the sample largely revolved around the pub and friends who happen to be at the same time members of the network.

Sex workers had very limited interaction with both urban and rural kin. They were all effectively cut off from kin networks, rural interaction was rare and restricted mostly to remittances and occasional visits to the village, perhaps twice a year. Relatives were of little consequence to the female sex workers. They neither relied on nor expected anything from relatives: one prostitute noted, "*I expect nothing, maybe sympathy from a relative.*" They all turned to the prostitute friendship network for morale, material and financial support. In times of illness only friends assisted.

The sex workers reported very limited interaction with neighbours. According to the prostitutes their relationships with neighbours were influenced by people's negative perceptions of prostitution. There was a general unspoken resentment of prostitutes. Married women as a general rule kept their distance from prostitutes, to avoid damaging gossip regarding their private lives and also to conform to their husbands' disapproval of prostitutes. Contact with previous village-based friends was quickly lost once a woman embarked on pub prostitution.

In Masvingo the pub provided new entrants into prostitution with a conducive place for starting friendship networks. The pub-based social networks were personal and closed. Pub prostitute networks reflected the characteristics of Bott's

(1971) close-knit networks, with high degrees of connectedness. At the pub one met people in similar circumstances with whom one could establish continuous interaction patterns. All the prostitutes noted that although prostitution was seen as highly individualistic and competitive, success as a sex worker depended on establishing a supportive social network.

Recruitment into a network depended on a number of factors. All the Masvingo prostitutes had been 'sponsored' (4) by members of their network. Sponsorship was seen as the most vital factor at the point of entry. The selection of one's friends in the pub was almost foreclosed right from the beginning. New entrants into sex work established friendship patterns with those they were introduced to. These were likely to be people already sympathetic to the plight of the new entrant. The relationships started as acquaintances and within a short space of time developed into effective friendship ties. Hence getting into a pub network was quite easy as long as one had sponsorship.

Once introduced to a new entrant, all the members of the network took individual as well as collective responsibility to induct the new entrant into the business of sex work. The new entrant was initiated into the beat by the older, more experienced members, and told what to do when approached by clients, which clients to avoid, how to avoid trouble, how to price the sex product for different types of customers, and to keep members of the network informed. It was important if one took alcohol to avoid accepting invitations to spend a night with a client in the early hours of the pub. Some clients are a nuisance when drunk. The network members also inform the new entrant about formal and informal sources of lure products like perfumes.

Successful adjustment to urban prostitution required the development of strategies by the prostitutes as members of a network to handle police actions. The Masvingo prostitutes felt that the police did not accord them any rights as citizens. Pub fights, abuse by clients and assaults of known prostitutes were seriously investigated by the police. Such mishaps were almost assumed to be part of a prostitute's work environment. Prostitutes risked police arrests and fines due to the criminalisation of sex work. At times in Masvingo, as noted above, prostitutes were granted police immunity from harassment in exchange for sex, referred to by Delacoste and Alexander (1987:318) as "*rape by the state as the cost of liberty.*"

A new entrant soon realises that while in the larger society workmates and friends usually form part of an individual's social network this was not the case with prostitutes. Most of the other prostitutes outside the network are competitors, and remain so even after many years operating in the same pub. So one gradually learns how to relate to other prostitutes as competitors in the sex industry.

Prostitute associations that act as mutual aid organisations were notable by their absence in Masvingo. In Masvingo it was the small-scale prostitute networks that assisted arrested members with bail-out money. This was in addition to all the other support they offered to members.

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(4) "sponsored" meant being introduced and vouched for by a member of the network.

## Conclusion

Prostitution acted as a survival strategy for Masvingo sex workers. Prostitutes had to overcome numerous dangers and obstacles in order to stay in business. Clients, members of the larger society, irate wives, etc, all posed a threat to them. For instance during the month of November 1995 a scuffle between husband and wife took place at one respondent's residence. The wife had stealthily followed her husband and caught them red-handed. At the conclusion of my fieldwork this man continued to date her. The prostitute respondent noted that *"...this woman should be grateful that I am a prostitute – in fact her husband has been begging me to marry him but prostitutes don't snatch away people's husbands."* Masvingo prostitutes told me many stories of beatings and fights involving town prostitutes. In order to cope with these physical hardships prostitutes turned on network support.

Urban adjustment hinged on the prostitute's ability to generate an income sufficient enough to enable her to 'hang on' in the city in the face of hardships. As noted prostitution incomes were insufficient when it came to investment needs. Income-generation depended on useful advice about prostitution market niches. Client vetting with the assistance of network members meant that one serviced only those clients who were likely to pay for the service. Most prostitutes tried to diversify and supplement their income from sources other than prostitution. When sex workers' ability to face the challenges of a declining income diminished, they had the alternative of going back to the village or rural home.

Options for prostitutes are not that many. Prostitutes were seen not just as "vendors of another type." There is public stigmatisation and unlike others in the informal sector, prostitutes had their diversification options foreclosed. It is therefore important to see prostitution not in isolation but as a survival strategy adopted by a minority of women within the context of a declining market.

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