

**A REPORT ON DOCUMENTATION OF GENDER BASED IOLENCE
CASES OF FEMALE SEXWORKERS IN THE HARD TO REACH
AREAS -ISLANDS/LANDING SITES IN THE DISTRICTS OF
MASAKA,KALANGALA,BUNDIBUGYO,NTOROKO,KASESE,
KAMWENGGE, BUIKWE AND MUKONO.**



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ABOUT WONETHA

Women's Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA) is a non-profit civil society organization that promotes rights, and livelihoods of adult female sex workers in Uganda. WONETHA strives to improve economic opportunities for sex workers and to empower them to organize and advocate for equitable access to health care, legal and social protection services. WONETHA was established in 2008 to address rampant discrimination in health care systems, social stigma and to advocate against punitive and restrictive legislation and policies that encourage violations of sex workers' rights.

Vision: *"A Ugandan Society that respects sex workers rights and supports their economic empowerment"*

Mission: *"To improve the health, social and economic wellbeing of Adult female sex workers in Uganda while advocating for human rights"*

OBJECTIVES

- Increasing access health care services and empowering sex workers to claim their rights
- Influencing change in policy, laws and practices that encourage violations of sex workers rights
- Strengthening the capacity of sex workers groups through collaborative networks and movement building in Uganda
- Promoting holistic wellbeing of sex workers and especially focusing on literacy, economic empowerment and stress management
- Strengthening the capacity of WONETHA and network members to deliver their mandate.

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
GBV	:	Gender Based Violence
SGBV	:	Sexual Gender Based Violence
ART	:	Anti-Retroviral Therapy
CSO	:	Civil Society Organizations
HIV	:	Human Immune Virus
HRAPF	:	Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum
FSW	:	Female sex workers
KPs	:	Key Populations
PLHIV	:	People Living with HIV
PWD	:	People with Disabilities
TB	:	Tuberculosis
O.C	:	Officer In Charge
WONETHA	:	Women's Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In a very special way, I would like to acknowledge UN Women for the financial support that enabled WONETHA to document and bring to light the first edition of the documentation of violation cases of sex workers. This support has enabled WONETHA move around all the 8 districts and having a one to one conversation on the experiences of GBV by sex workers as and have the stories documented as told by the sex workers.

Special thanks go to our members who bravely shared their nasty experiences of GBV and allowed us to share them in this version and also giving a human face behind the story by allowing us use their pictures in this documentation. Thank you so much. My sincere condolences to our departed sisters who have lost the battle to GBV, may their souls RIP.

Our staff especially the Outreach Assistants and the Peer Educators who continuously follow up cases of GBV in their areas of operation played an important role in identifying the source of these stories.

To our good partners especially the Police, the local leaders and the lodge owners for accepting to be part of this very sensitive discussion.

Our consultant, Sophie Carol Wanyenze, for moving around and collecting all these moving emotional stories and compiling them into a printable version. Your effort is greatly appreciated.

Our esteemed reader, enjoy reading the documentation while strategizing on how we can all end all forms of violence against women especially the sex workers so that we can all enjoy a work environment free of violations.

Diana Natukunda
Executive Director

Executive Summary

This report presents the documentation of cases of Gender based violence as experienced and told by sex workers in the hard to reach areas of Masaka, Kalangala, Budibugyo, Ntoroko, Kasese, Kamwenge, Mukono and Buikwe.

WONETHA with the support from the UNWomen, hired a consultant to support in documentation of the Female sex workers experiences of Gender Based Violence and come up with a report detailing findings and recommendations that will be adopted for help in addressing issues raised or support programmatic strategies to respond to GBV facing FSW

The main objectives of this activity is (i) to profile, document and come up with a report on the GBV cases of female sex workers in the hard to reach areas in the districts of Masaka, Kalangala, Bundibugyo, Ntoroko, Kasese, Kamwenge, Mukono and Buikwe in the last two years. These areas include the refugee camps, landing sites and Islands; (ii) To follow up and record the extreme SGBV and GBV cases faced by female sex workers in the eight island districts of Uganda, (iii) developing recommendations and strategies of dealing with GBV cases as well as mitigating occurrences of GBV in these identified hard to reach areas..

The documentation involved 76 Female sex workers to share their GBV/SGBV stories. Among these, there were all forms of GBV, like physical violence that led to death, physical violence, financial violence, sexual violence, access to justice concerns, psychological and emotional violence. The most outstanding challenges that arose from the documentation were mental health issues of addiction, anger, depression, anxiety, Intimate Partner Violence, emotional exposure where FSW are failing to notice it as a form of violence too, self-stigma and self-awareness plus low self-esteem coming from minority stress.

The documentation also brings to light an analysis of the findings. The report indicates that the majority of violations are in Kamwenge district at Mahyolo Landing site while deaths were recorded in Kasese, Ntoroko, Masaka and Kalangala. Physical and financial violence were recorded to be the most occurring form of GBV which has later resulted into mental and emotional breakdown. Recommendations have been drawn and directed to different stakeholders including among others WONETHA itself, Un-women, The Police and government.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the documentation of cases of Gender based violence as experienced and told by sex workers in the hard to reach areas of the 8 districts of Masaka, Kalangala, Bundibugyo, Ntoroko, Kasese, Kamwenge, Mukono and Buikwe as supported by the UN women. The hard to reach areas include the refugee sites, landing sites and Islands.

1.1 Background

The rights of Female sex workers have been violated by their clients, the lodge owners, the police and the society members. Female sex workers have always feared to access justice because of the stigma and discrimination around the job they do coupled with their low income status, all these have contributed to the increasing vulnerability of the sex-work community to GBV in the country. Most of the violations go unnoticed and sometimes un-reported. The documentation of these cases and dissemination of the report will bring to the public the reality of the violations and the need to put in place the redress strategies to the violations against the sex workers.

Sex workers are among the vulnerable groups of people in Uganda, at high risk of experiencing GBV, HIV/AIDS, mental health challenges, stigma and discrimination and most of them failing to access SRHR services. The Ugandan population is largely Christian, cultural and conservative; many people have normalized violating and abusing sex workers rights within our society and therefore use the heteronorm created by religious leaders, cultural leaders and the gender ideologies as yard stick for moral judgement.⁴

This implies that as a result of the spread of resentment, and negative attitudes towards sex workers they suffer from stigma and discrimination.

1.2 Why document these GBV cases

The law in Uganda, criminalizes sex work and if caught, the victim serves a maximum sentence of 7 years and more, some so this has really made community members infringe on the FSWs' Human Rights, violate them and even kill some of the victims⁵. In the last two years due to the impact and effects of covid 19, as documented in the UNESO violations report on covid 19 impacts on sex workers, there has been a lot of GBV going on in the sex workers' community regarding harassment and perpetual violations and in many instances, perpetrators are getting away with abusing and violating sex workers rights. Often times, law enforcement officers seem not to be concerned about it with claim that we "don't have evidence or we are actually coming up with lies to jeopardize the police and its allies as mentioned by one paralegal sex worker in Kamwenge district.

WONETHA as an organization of sexworkers in Uganda, decided to take on the journey of developing an evidence-based report, by commissioning a study to listen and document the Violence stories and experiences of the sexworkers in the selected areas and report on the GBV stories as told by the female sex workers.

The islands and landing sites have recorded high rate of /SGBV cases, physical violence, financial violence, mental health concerns, sexual violence and even death for the last two years and that's why we needed to visit and pick up on those cases and document them to guide in our next steps of how to eliminate GBV among Female sex workers.

A lot of violations, access to justice issues have been researched and documented by HRAPF in the past years among sex worker communities and the LGBTQ communities and they clearly show you that

⁴<https://www.hrapf.org/index.php/resources/annual-reports/199-hrapf-annual-report-2020/file>

⁵<https://www.hrapf.org/index.php/resources/annual-reports/148-20-05-22-hrapf-annual-report-2019-copy/file>

GBV/SGBV, Access to justice have been happening and we need to bring out more evidence based reports so that we can aim at eliminating GBV /SGBV in our communities.

1.3 Objectives of the consultancy

1. Reach out to sex workers who have experienced violation and document their experiences, compile and document these experiences into a report to be disseminated.
2. Drawing strategies and Recommendations to inform GBV programming and advocacy both at Organization and National levels.

1.4 Outputs

A number of people were interviewed and talked to as indicated below:

The GBV violation stories really brought out, painful and sad scenarios of different age categories. The selection was a good one and bringing on people from different backgrounds, FSW, law enforcement officers, the community leaders who made the experience was Impactful.

Table 1: Showing Islands Visited

S/N	DISTRICT	SITE	NO. RESPONDENTS	FSW	POLICE
1.	Masaka	Ddimu landing site Kasensero (in Kyotera) landing site Namirembe landing site	10	10	
2.	Mukono	Katosi landing site Kiimi Island, Lugumba island	8	6	2
3.	Buikwe	Senyi and Kiyindi Landing site	10	8	2
4.	Ntoroko	Kanara landing sites	5	5	
5.	Bundibugyo	Nyahuka trading center	6	6	
6.	Kamwenge	Mahyoro landing site and Mahani Refugee camp	12	10	2
7.	Kasese	Katugungulu and Kasenyi landing sites	6	6	
8.	Kalangala District(Island)	Kasekulo, Kyagalanyi , Mweena landing sites Nkose Island	17	13	4
	Total number Interviewed		84	76	10

Table 2: Respondents by Sex

The Female respondents are female sex workers working in the outlined hotspots and the male respondents included police officers and local council leaders.

Female	76
Male	8

We had FSW between the ages of 20 to 68 years this gave an intergenerational experiential sharing

1.5 Methodology

An ethical quantitative method was used to collect information from the participants using a guided questionnaire. There was a specific articulated sample reaching a particular sex worker who has faced GBV as identified in the hot spots.

The FSW were informed about the documentation and asked if they are willing to share their stories, they were also told about why we were documenting the GBV STORIES

The documenting was both conventional and a mix of more proactive methods of probing and psycho social support. The methods included, individual interviews, group sharing onsite to get to know the most common and underlying GBV concerns

All these stories got, had written consent before starting the interviews from the participants and but not all agreed for us to use their stories and pictures as WONETHA and UN women to program, lobby and create change and better projects for Female sex workers in Uganda

2.0 FINDINGS

GBV STORIES AND EXPERIENCES.

We got so many GBV and SGV stories shared by the female sex workers that ranged from physical violence, SGBV, IPV, Financial violence, physical violence that led to death and emotional / psychological violence which produced a very evidence-based documenting.

We had so many stories shared by FSW but the following documented stories were the ones consented to by the FSW to be used in the advocacy and elimination of GBV/SGBV among FSW.

Below is a table summary of the number of stories recorded under the different forms of violence in this documentation.

Forms of GBV	Financial	Physical	Psychological	Physical/Death	Sexual
Stories Recorded	60	54	76	6	45

2.1 Kalagala District

In Kalangala districts, experiences were shared from Kasekulo, Kyagulanyi and Mweena landing sites and Nkose Island



Story 1(Kasekulo Island) KK-1 aged 25



Kk1

KK-1's pain and agony:

"The way she was eating me alive while the husband beat me up, keeps me up at night and worst of all they are still on the Island", I walk in fear everywhere I go on the Island; my face is no longer beautiful, and I don't work because customers are scared to come to me. I may starve, my children will starve. Some one should help me get back my beautiful face and smile.

During the interview, the HRAPF lawyer was consulted to know how far the case had gone. The consult was reliably told that the perpetrators were out on bail but they had agreed on settlement out of court on the matter with a compensation of Ushs. 800,000= and so far, they had paid Ushs. 400,000ug shillings to victim. And they are to go back to court on 28th of September 2021 with more money. HRAPF offers community members who have been brutally violated and Sylvia benefited from this fund too and received the Ushs. 380,000= through her Peer Educator. By the time of this report, the Perpetuators, ie James and his wife had left the Landing site without completing the payment they were supposed to pay.

Story 2:Kasekulo -KK2

KK-2 aged 30 faced *Physical, Financial and sexual violations as she narrates in he story:*

KK-2

"I HAVE NO ONE TO HELP ME WITH ALL MY TWO CHILDREN". I am Physically abused, raped by clients and sexually abused most of the Time Infront of my 2-year-old son not because I have no relatives but they cannot help me with my two children.

I fear My child will grow up traumatized by all the acts I have put him through to get them what to eat and grow up like any other children in our communities. NO

STORY 3 (Kyagalanyi)

KKY-1 aged 27 shared her experience of **Physical, Sexual and Financial**.

KKY-1 had this to say; I still fight with customers to put on condoms when they come to my room, even when I tell them am living with HIV, they think am lying and forcefully sleep with me. I have been raped so many times ,I can't count and I have to stay because it is the job and it's what I have to put food on my table for my children .This work of ours is stressful, the best WONETHA can do for us is continue supporting us with Lubricants, PREP and condoms. And if they can even talk to the health center providers and police to treat us like Ugandans and human beings. The buyers are not foreigners, and neither are they blind to know what they have come for. We only want to be respected and considered as Human being in the society.

Kasekulo had many other GBV stories to share but they were related, which we realized pay for the services and some are not keeping their word on the verbal agreements, some are using force to take back the money they have given the sex workers and some clients were robbing the sex workers and denying it. Another form of GBV we saw was physical, where clients are using a lot of force when interacting with the women, clients up beat sex workers when asked to put on condoms and insisting on condom uses usually leads to sexual violence, rape and even refusing to pay for the services already consumed.

2.2 Masaka District

In Masaka districts, experiences were shared from Ddimu and Kasensero landing sites.



Story 1 Kasensero

MK-1 aged 56 shared her experience of physical and financial violation

Annet recounted that EVEN the police who are supposed to protect them are the ones who arrest them and forcefully demand for sex in return for their release and when they refuse they are beaten up and their hot spots raided with both physical and sexual assault. Some of them have experienced extreme hate from the police and have cuts and soars from all the beatings.

My back, my thighs, all my body has wounds from the clients and also from the supposedly law enforcers who are supposed to protect US. NEEKOs are not safe anymore.

Story 2 :Ddimu Landing site

Anita aged 27 who lost her life as shared by the Peer Educator.

For Anita (deceased) story was given to us by the peer of Ddimu landing sites and some fact checking from the O.c MR. Baluka.

Anita was a sex worker at Ddimu landing site in Masaka.

GBV killed her and she is long forgotten. The culprits roam freely looking for another of us to

Anita (RIP):

We broke down the door after three days, where we found Anita lying on the bed, covered and dead. In shock the lodge owner called a local area defense leader and the O.C Mr. Baluka who transferred the body and the investigations to Kyesiga hospital and police station.

Sadly, the perpetrator was never found since it's a landing site, the police think on killing her he got on the boat and ran off.

Story 3: Ddimu

MD-2 aged 28 shared her experience of GBV



On 16th March 2021: The customer refused to pay me after sex and when I insisted, he started beating me seriously, he got on my neck and pushed me to the bed, I stopped breathing for a moment, he beat up my legs and scratched my thighs and legs .

I really thought I would die that day, I couldn't scream, shouted for help but the man had his hands wrapped around my mouth." MD-2

narrated with a traumatized stare:

In Masaka district the highest forms of GBV documented are Physical violations where sex workers in most cases end up fighting with clients because they are refusing to put on condoms and they are refusing to pay them, the extreme cases of physical violence that led to the death of Annita at Ddimu landing site. There were cases of sexual violence where some sex workers who are mentally disturbed are on a high alert in Kasesero and they are more vulnerable to violations like rape, assault and physical abuse. Some other three sex workers mentioned that they were raped and went through forceful sexual encounters many times with the customers. Emotional and psychological GBV cases in their stories especially those who were beaten raped and strangled by the clients and not forgetting aspects of financial violence ,where they are not paid ,or robbed by clients or even paid and then the same customer after having sex , he demands for his money back.

Namirembe landing site did not have cases of GBV shared by the sex workers. The Peer Educator noted that they are working well with the police and local leaders, who now appreciate sex workers as a great part of their community. She also went ahead and appreciated the WONETHA programs and trainings that have greatly contributed to this co-existence.

2.3 BUNDIBUGYO DISTRICT

In Bundibugyo districts, experiences were shared from Nyahuka.

➤ Story 1

BNY-1 aged 48 shared her experience GBV : Physical, asexual



BNY-1 aged 48



*BNY-1 a 48 sex worker from Bundibugyo had this to say. **We met during our work and decided to stay together. After 6 months the man started tormenting me, abusing me and accusing me of doing sex work and sleeping with other men and every time he found me with any man even during day time, he would abuse me in public and even shout and announce to the village that I am living HIV positive.***

My life has been a nightmare and the last time the man came to my house he beat me up and was about to remove my eye. He is now in prisons and BNY-1 is now looking better since the eye was fixed by WONETHA support and it's getting better.

➤ Story 2.

BNY – 2 aged 53 shared her experience of physical violence.

It was past curfew, our doors to the lodge were closed and me and my girls were organizing to sleep so we were cooking supper, When the police came and just pushed down our gate and entered with some army people. They started shouting at us and saying we are operating a bar and also selling ourselves past curfew time. The army men started beating us and destroying my property.

This was my business, I had acquired through my years of sex work, I thought I had retired and was supporting other young women, she lamented.

The police arrested all of us, BNY-2 continued. We only have one O.C who understands and if he is not there, sex workers suffer a lot.

And she went ahead and said that her and her three staff, the two slept in the cells and she paid for 100,000= each for bail for the four of them.

On assessment and the cases, we got in Bundibugyo, the most pressing concerns are on police raids and the army has no control, anyone as long as they are in uniform can raid a hotspot and abuse or violate the women.

I also realized that many of the sex workers are facing a lot of domestic violence but are afraid to speak up about or even report their partners to the police when the police violate them or even hurt their children.

We need to reach out to them and talk more on how report perpetrator, so that we can reduce on GBV cases in the area. Most of them are threatened and scared they will lose the fathers of their children.

2.4 NTOROKO DISTRICT

In Ntoroko the peer had left the landing site, so I went to the lodges and carried out a few interviews among three sex workers, the rest seemed hesitant and didn't want to share their violations. But through probing, I was able to get a few stories from the groups that had gathered at one of the lodges.



➤ STORY 1

Jackie's story was narrated by two of the female sex workers at Kanara landing site. Jackie aged 32 lost her life to GBV.

JACKIE (RIP):

Jackie was a sex worker on one of the lodges at Kanara, Ntoroko district, One day a Congolese customer picked her up at the lodge, they bargained and went to a nearby hotel.

They had sex and he paid her 30,000 shillings.

After two days he came back with other two men and they entered her room, in the night most of us thought they had come to check on her. They began shouting and the man claimed she stole his money and wanted it back and if she refuses they will kill her. The two men

stood guard so most of us feared to go there.

They beat her up seriously and killed her in the process. The neighbors just had the doors close and it all went quiet, we thought they have gone with her but that was not the case. The next morning, we found her dead in her room, raped and strangled lying on the bed.

Kanara landing site reflections:

For us at Kanara our biggest violations are customers who beat us and even your neighbors are scared to even come and help you, that's why even Jackie died, if we would have joined as one we could have scared those men or even beaten them and they would have run away. These customers can even use us for sex and refuse to pay you and after rob you of the little money you have done by force, and since most of us fear for our life, we give them the money. This has even made most of our girls to even run off from here.

Another issue here in Kanara is our children as sex workers, we don't have any support for our children and even no plans at all for them. Please help us and do some programs for our children please.

Thank you so much WONETHA for reaching out to us sex workers in Kanara, we feel like someone really cares for us.

Through the story sharing, most of the women the consultant interacted with never gave consent on their stories but the consultant noticed that Kanara needs more engagement meeting with the local leaders, police and the clients of the sex workers on Human Rights, Gender Based Violence and concerns of sex workers. The women live in fear and the community seems not to appreciate the contribution of the sex workers in the community.

2.5 Kamwenge District

In Kamwenge districts, experiences were shared from Mahyoro landing site

KMA-1 aged 26 shared her experience of GBV



Our lives is like a pyramid once in, Its Hard to get out. Life has squeezed us to a tight corner, and we cannot breathe because no one wants us to breathe. Help us deal with the injustices IMAHYORO .

Joan has left Mahyoro and never looked back ;;;;; for fear of her life and the injustices ,narrated the peer . “He got a big stick and hit her on the head so hard that KMA-1fainted. The man ran off and the police tried to look for him but they think he got on a boat and ran away

➤ STORY 2

KMA-2 aged 25 shared her experience of physical violence.

After offering him sex, I asked for my money, he became very angry and agitated. I got scared and tried to run for the door, he grabbed me and tied me to the bed, he tied my hands and legs back and started shouting, and quarrelling, he started



KMA-2 a 25 year old sex worker, narrated with a teary face” the perpetrator got away and he is actually still at the Island because the police fear to arrest him

beating me all over the whole night he just kept on beating me, raping me and doing what he wanted with me. I couldn't shout, since he was holding my mouth and threatening to kill me, I was so scared. The second day he tied ropes on my chest and legs and tied me on the bed and started beating me again, this went on for one more day.

I have failed to urinate well for three weeks after the attack, the many times I lost consciousness I can't remember. The doctor says my kidneys got spoilt and my eyes, I don't see well.

➤ Story 3- KMA -3



The customer and wife beat me and used the pole on my back and legs. he broke my back; I no longer bend or do anything anymore. The system here is very funny, justice doesn't work on these violators, and they are walking around the landing site hurting other women.
Murmured 33 year old KMA 3

➤ STORY 4

KMA-4 aged 40 years



On finishing business , from nowhere the man started beating me and hitting my face pulling my leg and beating me with a stick claiming I had robbed him. He continued beating me up seriously. I shouted and the lodge manager came and rescued me.

➤ STORY 5 (Refugee Camp)

KR-6 aged 29 shared her experience of GBV.



RAPED IS MY OTHER NAME:

I have been raped a number of times by my customers, even after saying no, so many times, I plead with them but they even refuse to use condoms, I am now living with HIV because of this work, she said with a teary face. I fear walking in the corridors because some men grab me and force me in their houses and forceful have sex with me. I have decided to get married but the men on the refugee camp don't seem to give me peace at all. Narrates KR-6

➤ STORY 6

KMA-5 aged 37 shares her ordeal on a sick bed of physical violence.

I fear I am going to run mad:



As I turned behind ,he got a stick that was in the corner of my room and hit me on the back ,so I turned in a lot of pain to defend myself ,that's when he brought the stick back and hit my head so hard .I saw blood coming and started shouting for help ,that's when I lost consciousness. I was so scared I thought I had died and left my children for just 5000= . I fear I will run mad in future, please help me.

2.6. Kasese District

In Kasese districts, experiences were shared from Katunguru and Kasenyi landing site

RIP: Nice a 27-year-old sex worker in Katugulu was killed by the client in her house. They found her naked and dead in her house after the neighbors noticed a foul smell coming from her house. On opening the door, she was dead with a bed sheet tied around her neck, she was dead for a day and her body was on the floor. The man had even robbed all of her property and left the house empty. Her ordeal is told by the Peer Educator

very well informed about violations and abuse, they are working with the police and local leaders and their partnership is very good. If a sex worker gets a challenge they report it to the police and they handle it. For the physical cases they have gotten, the perpetrators have been taken to court and paid the price. The girls are more organized and even having a saving groups to keep on their livelihoods better.

Kasese was very responsive and organized, the sex workers are informed and they are working well with the law enforcement officers and the community. The Team of Peer Educators and the Outreach Coordinator has really done a lot of community engagement and awareness for the Community.

2.7 BUIKWE DISTRICT

In Buikwe districts, experiences were shared from Kiyindi and Ssenyi landing site

➤ STORY 1

BK-1 aged 35 shares her experience of GBV.

I thought I was dead, In March 2021, As I was getting up to go bathe, I just had a sharp pain at the back of my head. He had beaten me with a stick and I started bleeding seriously. While he pushed me to give him back his money. I shouted as I used the last energy on me and pushed him outside that's when some friends at the lodge came and held him. The trauma is still there and this man is still at the landing site and even comes back here to buy other women . BK-1 narrated

➤ STORY 2:

BK-2 aged 35 has a story to tell when it gets to GBV.

In April 2021 I wanted to put on him a condom but he insisted on putting on himself. After having sex for a while, he was not stopping, then suddenly, he burst the condom, on telling him that we get a new condom, he held me down by my neck and raped me until he reached Orgasm. When I noticed he was weak, I pushed him off quickly. Then the man jumped on me, started beating me up seriously, abusing me and even throwing slurs at me.

Ongoing to report to Police, they chased me away they said it is part of our work as sex workers and we should stop bothering them with our complaints.

"This business will kill me some day," murmured BK-2 with a sad face.

Group session at Ssenyi Island



FIVE THOUSAND SHILLINGS ALMOST ENDED MY LIFE Laughed Resty. When you are with them, they enjoy and at they end they rob and beat you. The police sides with them calling us thieves. Who is the thief here? The one who eats food which he did not buy. MEN are cruel.

In a group session of 5 Sex workers shared concerns they face at Ssenyi Landing site:

QUOTES FROM SSENYI ISLAND

- 1.."Clients beat us up and while pressing us down on bed to have forceful sex(RAPE) with us.
2. Customers after having organism very fast, they get angry and get the condoms and pour the sperms on our faces(sex workers faces).
3. Police and lodge owners are very mean and rude to us, they raid our hotspots.
4. WONETHA please consider Ssenyi and Kiyindi and most Islands in Buikwe for an awareness and sensitization session with the police and lodge owners, the lodge owners don't care if something happened to you, all they want is their money and police let these bad men who rape and hurt us go free and they come up and threaten us again."
5. Some clients don't want to wear condoms, and if you refuse, they spread word around and men will not come to buy from you.

The consultant observed that Buikwe sites, need to build more working interlinks with the police in the areas of work, so that the perpetrators of GBV on these landing sites can be brought to books, if not we will end up losing more sex workers, we will see a continued pattern of SGBV and GBV in the area because of the habitual perpetrators who re-offend and not detained by law enforcement officers.

The Officer C.I.D Kiyindi Police station (preferred not to share his name)for security purposes pointed out that as long as the Networks of sex workers reach out ,they can always work with them. He went ahead and said that he knows about WONETHA and most of the cases that have been forwarded to him, he has always made sure he handles well. He admitted though that some sex workers may not know where to report and that some officers are very naïve and ignorant about sex work. **“Just get us a sensitization session with some lived realities of sex workers who are willing to share their stories of police brutality and Human Rights abuse and we will organize ourselves to listen and learn so that we can co-exist”** he continued

More sensitization training with police and lodge owners are priority in the landing sites on Buikwe.

Group Session at Kiyindi Landing site (Buikwe District)

A focus group discussion of 6 Female sex workers on GBV was held at Kiyindi hotspot. They had this to say:-

QUOTES FROM KIYINDI LANDING SITE

- Many programs are not reaching us and we feel we could benefit from the programs of children of sex workers, parenting programs and the district programs.
- We have so many clients, who are always drunk, and sometimes they pretend to be drunk and rape us or even rob us and since they have a lot of energy as men, it is hard to fight them off.
- Men refuse to use condoms, and when the sex worker insists they beat them up and use force.
- The law enforcement officers are not very friendly to us and keep on letting abusers get away with the violating sex workers.
- The hospital that gives us PREP is very far ,so most of the FSW no longer go for PREP ,no one really follows up anymore or picks for us refills. And transport is now higher to go anywhere.

2.8 Mukono District

In Mukono districts, experiences were shared from Katosi landing site

➤ STORY 1:

MK-1 aged 34 shared her experience of GBV.

She narrates her ordeal: On 13th /08/2021 at 5:00pm. I remember it clearly, The man had sex and was not stopping, so I told him to get off me since his time had already passed and his failing to stop.



I pushed him off me and he got off with a very angry look on his face, he put on his clothes and before I knew it the man had hit me with a bottle on my head. I was bleeding so much and even testing the blood in my mouth. He was trying to run away, I grabbed him and held myself on him with the little energy I had as I called for help but through this whole process, he kept on scratching me and pushing me off, that's

why you see all these bruises in my neck.

MEETING WITH THE STAKEHOLDERS (POLICE AND LOCAL COUNCIL LEADERS)

MEETING WITH THE O.C MAHYORO

After noticing all the violations in Mahyoro landing sites, and not much response felt. The consultant went to the police station, where she met the O.C CID of the station.

The consultant brought out the many cases of violation, the way he treats the sex workers and why the perpetrators get away without paying for their crimes of violations against women.

He seemed reluctant to reply and later said, “you will not understand the politics of police.” We had a brief argument but later he agreed asking for fuel to arrest people was wrong and that he will update his staff about GBV and the vulnerability of women at the landing site. This was shown when Roselyn was attacked by a client and hit on the head, they arrested the perpetrator and now he is in prison in Fort Portal.

He promised to talk to the O.C station to work on the concerns of sex workers and wants WONETHA to organize an awareness session on human rights and GBV in Mahyoro.

Kamwenge especially Mahyoro landing site had a lot of GBV cases, some of the cases happened when the consultant was around and the consultant made sure the police arrested the perpetrators and went ahead and called a HRAPF lawyer to follow up and intervene because the police seemed very reluctant to actually bring the perpetrators to pay for their crimes. Instead they are still at the island hurting more women.

Meeting with the OC Lugabwa and Kiimi Islands

Mr. Rajab (O.C Lugabwa) and madam Beatrice (O.C Kiimi Island) had this to say about violations against sex workers.

They shared with me the challenges they face working with sex workers, the strides they have taken so far and how they co-exist with sex workers in their areas of work.

They mentioned to the consultant that it's true they have recorded GBV cases and they have made sure they follow through to courts so that justice is served to all Ugandans.

The O.Cs seemed happy that they have really co-existed well with FSW in their regions. “We even go to their meetings and we learn from each other, that's how we have peace they know what to do not to disorganize me and I also don't go disturbing them, most of them are very peaceful women, just doing their work”, mentioned Mr. Rajab with a confident look on his face.

O.C Beatrice added and said “We know WONETHA, they are always here talking to us about sex workers' concerns and we are working well with them”

Interactions with the O.Cs made them feel included and it pushed our agenda further.

4.0: KEY POINTS

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

- Stronger collaboration and networking with health facilities will help in supporting sex workers to access treatment on time. Access to health care is a fundamental right no matter one's status in community. This can only be achieved while identifying health facilities as our strong allies. In all sites, it has been noted that government health facilities are there and continue to offer health services. However, there is a time when clients/victims of abuse may need specialized treatment.

which may not be available at most facilities. Sometimes there is need for medical forms to follow up with cases to police and court. This will call in the support of WONETHA and other partners to think about it in the sense of resources and other support

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

- Sex trade world over has been stigmatized and it's a cancer that should be handled in all directions. This can only be achieved when we work with other partners and communities through sensitization. And work towards decriminalization of sex work by the Uganda government.
- We need to reach out to the Health care workers, the Law enforcement officers, the brothel owners and managers, the local council leaders and the community as a whole. If we can work on co-existence and humanity, it may lead to ending of the ignorance's, stigma and discrimination of sex workers.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Looking at most of the stories shared by the female sex workers, mental health concerns are very pronounced. The sex workers narrate their ordeals and inhuman stories of what the community and people do to them, but through it all you are hearing hints of **"I couldn't sleep for weeks"; Every time I see that man my heart jumps out of my heart"; Am scared of walking on the Island/landing site; "I am no longer beautiful"; "I hate myself because of this job"; "I live in fear because I don't know what will happen ,if he will come back and beat me again";** and so many more. These clearly show signs of mental health like Trauma, Depression, insomnia, frustrations, self-hate and self-stigma, minority stress, even mental illness.
- There were clear signs of disorders like Bipolar disorders, some female sex workers show episodes of mood swings ranging from depressive lows to manic highs; Anxiety disorder, where on some sites the sex workers ad feelings of worry, anxiety or fear which where interfering with their daily lives.
- WONETHA needs to come up with mental health strategies like training the peers on basic counseling and guidance, on mental health and wellness; as well as engaging and supporting sex workers going through mental illness by referring them for psychiatric services.
- To set up mental health healing spaces in the different regions so that by the time we are dealing with GBV, physical abuse, we also handling the mental health part of it hence healing justice for the sex workers as well as combating mental health due to GBV.

4.1: ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

1. The consultant noticed so many sex workers facing physical and financial violence, this was observed through the sharing sessions ,where most FSW mentioned the failure to be paid by clients after sex, the mentions of clients who have sex with FSW and later rob them or forcefully get money from them or ask for it back. This kind of violations puts the sex workers at a disadvantage to access money that would support their livelihoods and it's mainly the reason why most of them are engaged in sex trade. It is even worse with the volatile areas of landing sites and Islands because customers -mainly men run away using water transport and relocate to other places.
2. Physical and emotional violence was also witnessed in most of the stories shared by the FSW. On realizing most FSW don't recognize emotional and psychological violence as a form of violence ; the gender norms and ideologies have normalized emotional violence that even through probing most of them never recognized that they were going through violence. There were mentions on minority stress, trauma ,fear and other feelings by the FSW.

3. Access to Justice, while documenting these GBV /SGBV stories, there has been notable observation that in all sites visits, Local council leaders have been a partner in supporting sex workers to access justice and also work as a referral pathway for sex workers to reach police or courts. Looking at some of the police stations they are not safe places for FSW to report cases or violations.

There were scenarios where the police asks for fuel from the victim or money to arrest the perpetrators, which affects access to justice' Most perpetrators have run away, still on the water because they have bribed police or they are relatives to police. For those who committed murder got away with it by getting on boats because the police rapid response never played their part of arresting them. There are unsolved cases of murder among 6 sex workers in the eight Island/landing site districts and the murderers are on the loose.

4. Further, more the consultant saw extreme cases of gender-based violence that have been fatal where some sex workers have lost their lives, through physical violence that lead to death, this must be addressed legally and must have safeguards since it's a human rights issue. And WONETHA fears these men are hurting and killing other women, where they are running off to.
5. Solidarity is also lacking in some of the areas where FSW operate, through the consultant's analysis FSW hotspots /areas that had solidarity there was less and no extreme cases of GBV like Mukono, Kasese and some parts of Masaka verses islands and landing sites that were not well coordinated or lacked solidarity. There were recorded extreme cases of violence like death ,severe physical violence cases like in Mahyoro ,Ntoroko and Diimi Island in Masaka .
6. Most of the sex workers need to be sensitized on the legal procedure and given toll free help-lines to support them achieve Justice and end GBV by making sure the perpetrators are punished, if not they continue to hurt other women wherever they go and get away with it hence continued GBV.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

WONETHA

1. The consultant recommends that strong and coordinated structures in all landing sites be instituted and if they are there, be made stronger so that they can empower members on basic human rights, reporting pathways and other necessary information on safety and security of FSW.
2. Having a unifying item or agenda in form of savings groups or schemes can create more cohesion among sex workers. They will access some money to access basics through their savings schemes but can as well share information during these meetings and have common voice.
3. WONETHA should encourage group formation built around security for one another(for sex workers) at each site as a strategy to mitigating the violations born by clients.
4. Deliberate and continuous sensitization of police officers on the protection of FSW Rights inorder to enhance referral pathways by training police, local councils and other peers on relevant basic human rights but also how they can avert crimes of this nature and support sex workers in their pursuit of justice if their rights have been violated.
5. WONETHA should strengthen their partnerships with legal entities like UGANET, UWONET, HRAPF and LASEPNET inorder to work on the legal issues and track down the perpetrators who are committing such extreme violations and not paying for their ordeals.

6. Continue having reflection meetings with peers and ensure linkages to other service providers in the respective areas. And work on paying the peers, and community outreach coordinators better to motivate them as they do their work.
7. To bring back the memory book project, so they can register, get the bio information the right addresses and reach out to all sex workers communities to know their details and backgrounds, so that in the extreme cases of violence leading to death of a sex worker on site, the team knows where to bury them as well as finding their(the deceased) relatives. This will help end the cycle of where sex workers who die end up being buried in limbos or wrong families.

UN WOMEN

1. UN women needs to support WONETHA to come up with a GBV rapid response fund that will help FSW who face extreme physical and sexual violations through medical first aid, court and other rapid concerns that he FSW may be going through as it arises.
2. Having around table meeting to compliment and appreciate each other as UN women partners and beneficiaries. This can help to complement each other partners' efforts e.g the Human rights Organisation with lawyers can take up and follow up cases of non-legal partners.

GOVERNMENT

1. For the government to include issues of Human Rights of minority and marginalized women in the police and prisons curriculum ,so that they can appreciate and listen to the ,lived stories and sharing of sex workers concerns from sex workers so that they can appreciate and understand what FSW go through.
2. Decriminalization of sex work in Uganda and reviewing the punitive and discriminatory laws.

SEX WORKER NETWORKS

1. To support regional and grassroots sex workers in Uganda to open up Community Based Organizations(CBO) that they can easily reach the FSW in case of such GBV violations in their communities.
2. Sensitization for district leaders by the FSW networks on the human Rights issues of FSW, lived realities of FSW, share some reports like this that document GBV concerns of FSW to clearly view the reality and inhumanity that is happening to FSW community where they operate.

5.1 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that sex work is a risky venture, however, in all the areas visited, it has been noted that women have been resilient and continue to pursue their livelihoods amidst risk and as an organization that thrives to create enabling working environment for sex workers, WONETHA should use findings to reflect on strategic direction that will give suggestion to address GBV issues raised in a sustainable manner. In areas where local leaders and police have been supportive, we have less cases of GBV and this can work as a building block in building stronger partnerships

Annex 1: Coding

Kalangala District

KK-1 – Kalangala Kasekulo- Asiime sylvia

KK-2 – Kalangala Kasekulo – Namatovu L

KKY-1- Kalalngala Kyagalanyi- Rosette Nalumansi

Masaka

MK-1 – Masaka Kasensero – Ssanyu

MD-2 –Masaka Ddimwe – Nakato Aisha

Buikwe

BK-1 – Buikwe Kiyindi –Rest

BK-2 – Buikwe Kiyindi –Beatrice

MK-1 – Mukono Katosi-Anita

Bundibugyo

BNY-1 –Bundibugyo-Nyahuka-Shakima H

BNY-2 – Bundibugyo Nyahuka Syson

Kamwenge

KMA-1- Kamwenge Mahyolo-Joan

KMA-2- Kamwenge Mahyolo-Agnes

KMA-3 –Kamwenge Mahyolo-Mercy

KMA-4- Kamwenge Mahyolo-Maria

KMA-5-Kamwenge Mahyolo Rosylyn

KR-6-Kamwenge Refugee site-6-Phiona

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