

Exploring the dynamics of workplace typologies for sex workers in Eastern Ukraine

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Background



Ukraine has the 2nd largest HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.^{1,2}

The prevalence among female sex workers is ~5x the adult general population.¹

Given sex work exists in the informal economy (is criminalized) there is a gap in knowledge about the sex work industry in Ukraine.



Workplaces for sex work are **meeting places where sex workers connect with clients**, such as hotels, brothels, massage parlours, highways, truck-stops, or strip clubs.

Workplaces have distinct **physical, social, political and economic conditions which create different contexts**.^{3,4}



Different workplace conditions in turn give rise to differences in risks, such as STBBI transmission and acquisition, violence, police maltreatment, violations of social and labour rights, and experiences of stigma and discrimination.⁵⁻⁹

¹UNAIDS. (2018). Global AIDS Monitoring 2018: Ukraine Summary. Retrieved from: <https://www.unaids.org/>

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⁷Chen, Y. et al. (2015). Contextual influence on condom use in commercial sex venues: A multi-level analysis among female sex workers and gatekeepers in Guangxi, China. Social Science Research.

⁸Duff, P. et al. (2015). The relationship between social, policy and physical venue features and social cohesion on condom use for pregnancy prevention among sex workers: a safer indoor work environment scale. J Epidemiol Community Health, 69(7).

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Methods



We examine the typologies of workplaces for sex workers in **Dnipro, Ukraine**, an industrial city of 1-million people located ~200 km from the conflict zone in the Donbas region of Ukraine.

- Study population: **cis-female sex workers**, aged 14+ years, who had engaged in sex work for at least 3 months.
- Study design: **Cross-sectional**, which included mapping of workplaces, followed by a bio-behavioural survey.¹⁰
- Between September 2017-October 2018, **560 women** participated in the bio-behavioural survey.
- Workplace typologies were grouped by self-reported: *main workplace for meeting clients in the past 30 days*.
- We chose to explore typologies that represent the most common workplaces (**Office & Apartment**), as well as places ranked the most prestigious (**Art Club**) and least prestigious (**Public Place, Highway**).
- Prestige was self reported: *How would you rate the prestige of 'this place' [referring to their main workplace]*.

Definitions of workplace typologies for sex workers	
'Office' N=224 (40.0%)	owned and operated by one or more managers who employ sex workers, and possibly other employees such as office administrators or security guards, and where owners take a portion of the revenue generated by sex work to cover their operating costs and make a profit
Apartment N=153 (27.3%)	generally include one or more women working out of an apartment which they might own or rent and where they may or may not also reside
Massage Parlour/ Sauna N=7 (1.3%)	a massage parlour where massage service can be purchased or sauna, both of which are not exclusively for sex work
Entertainment Venue N=23 (4.1%)	an adult entertainment venue such as a casino or dance club
Café/ Bar N=43 (7.7%)	a café, bar or restaurant which is open to the public
Art Club/Strip Club N=27 (4.8%)	the venue may appear as more of a nightclub or strip club, with the understanding that additional sex services may be purchased there
Hotel/ Motel N=10 (1.8%)	a hotel or motel
Public Place N=37 (6.6%)	an open-air space such as a public park or street
Highway/ Truck-stop N=30 (5.4%)	along a highway or at a truck stop which is along the highway, although services could be provided elsewhere
Other N=6 (1.1%)	a dormitory or boarding school

Results

- Offices were most commonly identified by sex workers as their main workplace.
- Women working in higher prestige workplaces (**Offices, Apartments, Art Clubs**) earned a higher hourly wage, than lower prestige workplaces (**Public Places, Highways**) but client volume varied, resulting in comparable monthly earnings across almost all workplaces (except Public Places).
- Highway-based sex workers had the most client visits in a 30-day period.
- Sex workers in all workplaces (except Art Clubs) experienced various levels of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by law enforcement officers and sex partners.

Main workplace for sex work		Office N=224 (40.0%)	Apartment N=153 (27.3%)	Art Club N=27 (4.8%)	Public place N=37 (6.6%)	Highway N=30 (5.4%)
Client visits -30-day period	Median (IQR**)	35.5 (26-52) N= 222	35 (28-48) N= 153	23 (15-33) N= 27	28 (20-44) N= 37	39.5 (27-49) N=30
Hourly wage - past 30 days	USD*** Median (IQR)	\$25.80 (22.1-29.4) N= 219	\$25.80 (22.1-29.4) N= 147	\$58.90 (36.8-68.1) N= 17	\$11.00 (11.0-18.4) N= 25	\$14.70 (11.0-14.7) N= 17
Income from sex work in past 30 days (Dnipro city mean = 254.40 US\$)	USD*** Median (IQR)	\$419.50 (331.2-515.2) N= 219	\$368.00 (294.4-441.6) N= 153	\$424.20 (294.4-552.0) N= 26	\$226.30 (176.6-386.0) N=30	\$368.00 (265.0-437.9) N= 29
Physical assault by police while doing sex work ever - Yes	n (%)	16 (7.1)	30 (19.6)	0 (0.0)	7 (18.9)	5 (16.7)
Sexual assault by police while doing sex work ever - Yes	n (%)	10 (4.5)	12 (7.8)	0 (0.0)	5 (13.5)	-
Physical and/or sexual assault by partner -past 3 months - Yes	n (%)	5 (2.2)	5 (3.3)	0 (0.0)	8 (21.6)	9 (30.0)
Personal safety - 1 (unsafe) to 5 (safe)	Median (IQR)	4 (3-5)	3 (2-4)	4 (3-4)	3 (2-3)	2 (2-3)

**IQR: interquartile range

*** United States dollar conversion done with 2018 average rate 0.0368



Conclusions

- Remuneration, workload, and safety vary across typologies
- Sex workers earn a higher monthly wage than the Dnipro city mean, but report violence and a lack of safety at work
- Offices were most frequently named as a main workplace, a sex work venue which was ranked as one of the safest work environments
- Physical and sexual violence are important determinants of STBBI risk for women in sex work¹¹⁻¹⁴ and violence against sex workers is enabled by the criminalization of sex work¹⁵
- The **decriminalization of sex work in Ukraine** and globally has the potential to **minimize the risks and harms experienced by sex workers**, regardless of which space women practice sex work
- By understanding more about sex work workplaces, **programmes may be better tailored to meet the needs of sex workers and respond to changing work environments** due to ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine and COVID-19

¹¹Peitzmeier, S., et al. (2020). Associations between violence and HIV risk behaviors differ by perpetrator among Russian sex workers. *AIDS and behavior*, 24(3), 812-822.

¹²Decker, M. et al. (2010). Violence victimisation, sexual risk and sexually transmitted infection symptoms among female sex workers in Thailand. *Sexually transmitted infections*, 86(3), 236-240.

¹³Decker, et al. (2012). Injection drug use, sexual risk, violence and STI/HIV among Moscow female sex workers. *Sexually transmitted infections*, 88, 278-283. ¹⁴Pando et al., 2013;

¹⁴Swain et al., (2011). Experience of violence and adverse reproductive health outcomes, HIV risks among mobile female sex workers in India. *BMC public health*, 11(1), 357.

¹⁵Shannon & Csete, (2010). Violence, Condom Negotiation, and HIV/STI Risk Among Sex Workers. *JAMA*, 304(5):573-574.