

**THE COMMERCIAL SEX INDUSTRY IN DOUALA, CAMEROON:**  
**A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION**

By

Dilys Asuagbor

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Dr. Jody Miller

and approved by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Commercial Sex Industry in Douala, Cameroon: A Qualitative Investigation**

By Dilys Asuagbor

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Jody Miller

The literature on the commercial sex industry shows that extensive studies of the phenomenon have been undertaken in the United States of America, Europe and Asia. By comparison, relatively little research has investigated commercial sex in the African context, despite evidence that it is widespread in many nations throughout the continent, including the West Central African nation of Cameroon.

Using the qualitative method of inquiry, interviews were conducted with 50 sex workers in Douala, the nation's economic capital, covering different venues and types of sex work undertaken. The findings illuminate our understanding of: the pathways into prostitution in Douala, the nature and organization of sex work in Douala, and the risks and challenges faced by sex workers in Douala.

The extent of prostitution in Cameroon was not undertaken and remains an opportunity for future research. This research serves as a useful resource for public policy considerations in Cameroon and contributes to the growing body of research on the commercial sex industry in Africa generally and Cameroon specifically. It also provides a strong basis for comparative research with other studies that have been and are currently being undertaken elsewhere.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 OVERVIEW**

The literature on the commercial sex industry shows that extensive studies of the phenomenon have been undertaken in the United States of America, Europe and Asia. By comparison, relatively little research has investigated commercial sex in the African context, despite evidence that it is widespread in many nations throughout the continent, including the West Central African nation of Cameroon. The limited research available has documented aspects of commercial sex in several African countries, among which are Kenya (Kibicho, 2003; Kibicho, 2009; White, 1986; White, 1990), South Africa (Gould, 2011), Niger (Cooper, 1995), Nigeria (Orubuloye et al., 1994), Cameroon (Songué, 1986; Koh Bela, 2007; Ndjio, 2009), and Uganda (Zalwango et al., 2010).

Prostitution is a compelling social issue touching on human rights, public health and crime, and as such is of interest to all nations, developing or developed. When these issues have the possibility of arising in one country with its consequences felt in others, no country is indifferent. The effects of prostitution in Cameroon are felt in other African nations, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas. In addition, the human rights implications of trafficking in persons for sexual purposes, if left unchecked, signals a failure on the part of the United Nations, the African Union and governments whose countries are either source, transit or destination countries. As evidenced by the numerous scholarly articles and books written on the different facets of the commercial sex industry, the social, moral and public health implications of prostitution make the issue topical. World bodies like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations

Development Program (UNDP) and UNAIDS continue to dedicate enormous resources to understanding sex work from a comparative perspective. In order to facilitate continent or regional specific analyses, country specific studies need to be undertaken.

The only extensive study on the commercial sex industry in Cameroon dates back to the 1980s and focused solely on Yaoundé, the country's political capital. Geographically, Cameroon is strategically placed in West Central Africa and to some extent serves as an access route to some of its landlocked neighbors. The presence in Cameroon of a seaport alongside other waterways to neighboring countries provides importation and exportation possibilities for its neighbors. The constant movement of persons and goods makes Cameroon a country with a high migrant population, which is particularly reflected in its economic capital Douala, the country's largest city.

The high visibility of prostitutes in Douala indicates that sex workers have identified an earning potential in this city, which is comprised of workers not only in the formal sector, but also informal sectors. Thus, the choice of Douala in Cameroon as the study setting for the current research is pertinent, as it would add in a new way to the growing body of research on the commercial sex industry while providing a strong basis for comparative research with other studies that have been and are currently being undertaken elsewhere.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The economic concepts of demand and supply provide a direct yet simple explanation for the continued presence of prostitution in many countries worldwide. In some areas of study, notably criminal justice, the commercial sex industry - which invariably encompasses prostitution and sex trafficking - continues to form an important



subject for academic inquiry. From a criminal justice perspective, prostitution is regulated in some countries hence providing a framework within which prostitutes exercise the activity. In some instances it is regulated and in others it is criminalized. Criminalization places under strict governmental scrutiny persons who engage in prostitution and/or solicit prostitutes, exposing these persons to criminal sanctions. Additional research, particularly in understudied settings, is necessary for a better understanding of the lived experiences of those who engage in prostitution, and to understand the impact of criminal justice policies and practices on these activities. In its current Penal Code, Cameroon has criminalized prostitution, solicitation, pimping and living from the proceeds of prostitution. In spite of the existing sanctions associated to the crimes relating to prostitution, prostitutes and their clients are not deterred, as street prostitution is visible in almost every city in Cameroon.

In Cameroon, as elsewhere, law enforcement in its gendered application of controls continues to focus its arrest practices on prostitutes and not their clients. Interestingly, the arrests do not lead to prosecution and incarceration. Rather than charge prostitutes for prostitution or prostitution-related offenses, it is an accusation for the offense of vagabondage which is brought against arrested prostitutes. Vagabondage as an offense and by definition is difficult to sustain due to the fact that vagabondage entails being homeless, while most, if not all, prostitutes have a home or live with friends (Songué, 1986). In fact, upon casual enquiry from the guards in the New Bell prison, the only prison in Douala, on how many people were serving a prison sentence for prostitution in the month of November 2013, the answer was none. Yet prostitutes work the streets of Douala and solicit customers in other known venues. Law enforcement on

its part occasionally carries out raids aimed at cleaning the street, yet with no obvious result. Commercial sex is simultaneously criminalized and stigmatized, yet also widely practiced.

### **1.3 PURPOSE**

The poor application of the existing legislation and the presence of prostitution raise questions about the viability of current legal interventions in addressing commercial sex in Cameroon. The persisting questions are what policy considerations were taken into account in the criminalization of prostitution in Cameroon. Given that the Penal Code dates as far back as 1972, how pertinent are the laws in addressing the current situation? While the answers to these questions may be speculated upon, a properly structured study can provide a greater understanding of the commercial sex industry in Cameroon, providing law makers with policy recommendations reflective of data that has been collected from the field and analyzed using sound research methodology. The purpose of this study is thus to provide the first in-depth investigation of the lives of prostitutes in Douala, Cameroon, with a primary goal being to better understand their experiences of commercial sex in order to inform policy and practice.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Looking specifically at the city of Douala in Cameroon, this research examines three primary questions. First, what accounts for entrée into prostitution? Second, how is the sex industry organized in Douala? This study seeks to learn about the major players, the structural arrangement of the sex businesses across neighborhoods and venues in the city, paying particular attention to the areas where sex workers are most visible. Finally, what challenges and risks are faced by sex workers? This study also seeks to understand

the adaptation strategies sex workers utilize to deal with these challenges, paying particular attention to the role (if any) played by the criminalization of prostitution in shaping these risks.

### **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

To investigate these research questions, this study uses a qualitative method of inquiry. Given that there is no existing data on prostitution and the experiences of prostitutes in Douala, the data from which the commercial sex industry is studied and analyzed originates from in-depth interviews with 50 persons working in the commercial sex industry in Douala. These persons were identified using snowball sampling techniques, and interviews with them were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide eliciting information on the demographic and socio-economic situation of each person interviewed. There were also questions asked aimed at understanding reasons for entrée and continued presence in prostitution and their overall experience, including risks and challenges. The data collected was analyzed using grounded theory analysis strategies, as described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is important because in spite of the very visible commercial sex industry in Douala, no study has been undertaken detailing the experiences of sex workers in this city. Only three existing studies touch on prostitution in Cameroon, each with limitations the current study seeks to overcome. Ndjio (2009) focused solely on the role of Chinese prostitutes in the commercial sex industry in Douala, comparing them to Chinese goods that are now readily available and affordable in this West Central African City. Although Koh Bela (2007) made reference to the existence of street children and

young girls on the Douala streets who prostitute, her book focused on the experiences of Cameroonians in the commercial sex industry in France. Songué (1986) carried out the only detailed social science research on prostitution in Cameroon, with specific emphasis on Yaoundé. Songué (1986) examined prostitution and what she called “semi-prostitution,” which essentially is prostitution when carried out by persons who have other full- or part-time occupations. Songué (1986) examined female and male prostitution during an era when homosexuality was not well known in Cameroon. In surveying 62 people, she provided explanations to the causes of prostitution in Cameroon, or Yaoundé more specifically. She also examined the educational and family backgrounds, and the socio-cultural environment explaining entrée into prostitution. Finally she looked at the health consequences of prostitution and its relationship with the law (Songué, 1986).

Given that the research questions of the current study are very similar to those answered by Songué (1986) more than twenty years ago, her research provides a good comparative basis for understanding sex work in Cameroon across two periods in the country’s history. The current study is particularly significant in that it looks at sex work within the context of a city that is known for its economic potential, high migrant status and high incidence of employment in the informal sector, making available a high amount of disposal income, some of which is invariably spent on prostitution. This study also goes a step further than Songué’s research in its investigation of the nature and organization of sex work in Douala and the risks and challenges faced by sex workers - topics not investigated in Songué’s prior research. In sum, this study will (1) add to the sparse existing literature on the topic in Cameroon, (2) contribute data that will allow for

both a within-country temporal comparison (with Songué, 1986) and cross-national comparisons within and beyond Cameroon, and (3) to provide concrete evidence for policy considerations in addressing the issue of commercial sex in Douala.

This study provides the first information of its kind on the commercial sex industry in Douala. Given that the high migrant population of Douala is equally reflected in the migration status of prostitutes, some of whom had worked in other parts of the country, the information collected on the nature and organization of their work may be generalized to other parts of Cameroon with thriving commercial sex markets. This generalization may also extend to the motivations for sex work within the Cameroonian context more broadly.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS**

This study provides an important foundation to engage in comparative discussions on the domestic, regional and worldwide front in the area of sex work. Yet it must be noted that its generalizability and applicability is limited to the understanding of sex work in areas of Cameroon, and perhaps other cities in Africa which are similarly structured geographically and economically, providing in essence the same types of threats and opportunities within their macro economical context.

## **1.8 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

To ground the current research in the available literature on the issue of prostitution and sex trafficking, including recurrent themes in the discourse of commercial sex, Chapter 2 presents the literature review. Chapter 3 presents the study setting of the current research, describing Douala within the context of Cameroon. Chapter 4 discusses in detail the methodological framework of the research. Chapters 5

through 7 discuss the research findings. Chapter 5 examines the pathways to prostitution in Douala. Chapter 6 focuses on the nature and organization of sex work across different venues in Douala. Chapter 7 views the risks and challenges faced by sex workers in Douala and Chapter 8 is the conclusion, which points out recommendations for policy considerations and opportunities for further research on the topic.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2. 1THE POLITICS OF PROSTITUTION**

Prostitution has existed for as long as human recollection. In biblical times it was viewed from a moral standpoint and greatly stigmatized. Interestingly, in spite of the declarations of human rights to which modern day citizenship is associated, prostitution is still regarded with extreme scrutiny and for the most part still stigmatized. This scrutiny is obvious in the debates on the definition of prostitution, including whether it can be considered as work or if it is inherently violent and exploitative, whether women can be said to choose to prostitute or if they are forced to choose prostitution due to their socioeconomic situations, exacerbated by the unavailability of viable alternatives. The existing literature on these issues shows the complexity of understanding prostitution, the reasons for its continued existence, the different factors at play in the manifestation of the different types of prostitution (including street and indoor) and how policy can be better suited to its practical realities. Understanding these issues, as have been discussed elsewhere in Cameroon, in Africa and in the world, provides a good background that will facilitate our understanding of prostitution in Douala, Cameroon.

##### **2.1.1 DEFINITION OF PROSTITUTION**

In discussing prostitution, Miller points out that the “definitions and meanings of prostitution are widely contested” (2009:549) and refers to Scott et al (2005) in stating that “it is generally agreed that prostitution involves the exchange of sexual activities for economic remuneration with individuals with whom no special relationship otherwise exists” (2009:549). In determining what constitutes economic remuneration, this may

include “the provision of one or more of the necessities of living (i.e. food, clothing, and protection) and/or other items of monetary value” (Miller, 2009:549; Scott et al., 2005:322; see also Pettersson and Tiby 2003:161-63, Maher, 1997:147) and/or “food, lodging, clothing or luxuries” (Overall, 1992:717). Drugs are also a currency of exchange in commercial sex transactions, and sex for drugs has been studied extensively by researchers (Maher, 1997; Miller, 2009). Shannon (1999:119) defines prostitution as engaging or offering “the services of a person to perform sex acts for money or other recompense.” Weitzer (2000:259) uses the term ‘sex work’ and defines it as “sex services or performance in exchange for material compensation.”

In some instances where other relationships exist between the parties, the clear cut perception of prostitution is rendered blurry - for example, when young school girls “date” older and wealthy men for financial benefits while the men derive sex in return. These men are sometimes responsible for the girls’ rent, tuition, and medical expenses, playing fatherly roles in the girls’ lives. These men often are referred to as “Sugar Daddies,” and in cases where it is young boys looking to benefit from older women, the women are known as “Sugar Mummies” (Kempadoo, 2004:73). The blurred relationship, which by definition, is still prostitution or “semi-prostitution” (Songué, 1986), is sometimes further complicated when there is resulting procreation.

What is consistent in the literature is recognition that prostitution is the exchange of acts of a sexual nature for a compensation that is of a financial value. The value of the compensation is not in question, as from the experiences of numerous sex workers, value lies in the eyes of the beholder, which corroborates a trite statement in the Law of Contracts that whatever is given in consideration for a good or service need not be



adequate but sufficient. It is worth noting that the consideration given in return for the sexual act within the definition of prostitution is not expected to be of a sexual nature, as a mutual sexual exchange will not be considered prostitution (Kempadoo, 2004). It appears clear from the definition that the compensation received by the prostitute must have a financial value. Interestingly, this has not laid to rest the debate on whether or not prostitution qualifies as work.

### **2.1.2 IS PROSTITUTION WORK OR NOT?**

The debates on prostitution as work or abuse bring to light the divide that exists among feminists in discussing prostitution. The concept of “sex work” that has been used by prostitutes, researchers and policy makers depicts “prostitution and other related activities in a less judgmental and more self-determining fashion” (Kempadoo, 2004:59). Miller (2009) discusses the variations in feminists’ views on prostitution as follows: sex radicals view prostitution as consensual sexual activities and are opposed to government interference (Rubin, 1984), liberal feminists view prostitution as work or legitimate occupation (Jenness, 1993), radical feminists define prostitution as violence against women and a sign of patriarchy that can definitely not be viewed as work (Barry, 1995) while Marxist and Socialist feminists view prostitution as exploitation of women’s labor, especially under capitalism (see Maher 1997).

Whether or not prostitution should be recognized as sex work originates from “two philosophical positions: a liberal or libertarian model that views prostitution as a legitimate occupational choice within the service economy” without having regard to race, class, gender and other socioeconomic considerations, and “a critical structural-economic perspective that suggests ‘women become involved in prostitution because of

economic and structural barriers that prevent them from earning sufficient capital in both the licit and illicit economies” (Miller, 2009:551).

In viewing “prostitution as a legitimate occupational choice within the service economy” (Miller, 2009:551), comparisons have been made between prostitution and other types of work. Troung (1990) argues that sexual labor is comparable to other forms of labor (mental and manual) that people perform to sustain themselves, involving the use of different bodily parts. According to Edlund and Korn (2002) and referred to in Della Giusta et al. (2008), sex work is “a highly paid low skill female occupation, an alternative to marriage, explaining high wages in terms of a loss in position in the marriage market” (2008:15). The relatively high wages for sex work are further explained by Cameron (2002), quoted in Della Giusta et al. (2008:15), as “compensation for exclusion, risk (assault, disease, arrest, punishment), front loading in wage profile (informal pension scheme or insurance), boredom or physical effort, distaste (potential psychological and physical costs), loss of recreational sex pleasure, anti-social and inconvenient hours, possible excess demand and prices used to screen quality, taboos, and agent fees.”

The work of prostitutes has been described as requiring emotional labor, “which is the management of feelings to create a publicly observable display of facial expressions and appearance” (Sander, 2004:281 referring to Hochschild, 1983:7). Emotional labor has also been described by Lever and Dolnick as “when sex workers display or feign sexual arousal or sexual pleasure for their clients’ gratification” (2010, 187). Examples of emotional labor include faking orgasm, and making comments that provide ego boosts to the clients insinuating pleasure. Some examples taken from a call

girl's diary included "'I did the usual moaning thing' or 'I made typical 'into-it' sounds and 'that feels good' remarks'" (Lever and Dolnick, 2010:200).

Some prostitutes possess special skills and talent, guaranteeing the client their money's worth, which in some instances may be "the girlfriend experience" or "GFE," and is more commonly found in sex tourism where the sex workers have an approach to sex work that gives the impression to the client that they are sincere about wanting to be with them (Kempadoo, 2004; Kibicho, 2009). Brennan, referring to the Dominican example, says sex workers engaging in commercial sex with foreign tourists "perform love" (2010:313). Some have even described it as falling in love (Kempadoo, 2004). In discussing emotional labor and special skills, the expectation when the sex worker is male and the client female appears in some places to be less emotional and more sexual - in what Caskins and Coombs (1976) describe as having sex with a super-masculine male, what Kempadoo refers to as the "robust, powerful, and every-ready (sic) Jamaican man" (2004:134), or referred to by female sex tourists in Africa as the "Banana" (Kibicho, 2009:101).

The fruits of successful emotional labor on the part of male or female sex workers are evidenced when clients continue to provide for sex workers' financial needs long after the initial sexual experience. Some sex workers have been known to have the same client return numerous times for visits and in some instances, air tickets have been purchased for the sex worker to visit the client in their home country (Kempadoo, 2004; Kibicho, 2009).

The arguments in favor of treating sex work as work - for which effort is invested as to merit the title "work" and resulting compensation - are usually met with counter

arguments. Overall (1992), in evaluating sex work, made comparisons between sex work and other types of work like cooking, child care and nursing. She states “that while cooking, nursing and child care need not be necessarily commoditized, sex work is by definition the commoditization of sex. What is essential to prostitution is not sexual activity itself but the buying of sexual activity” (1992:717).

Radical feminists define prostitution with reference to violence: exploitation by men under capitalism does not give prostitution a chance to be viewed as or treated as work. For this reason both “sex workers and their clients thereby become criminals suffering additional abuse in the hands of the state. For these reasons, since the 1970s, sex workers’ rights activists have objected to the notion that all sex workers are victims and have challenged the idea that those who pay for their services, or who assist them in securing work or arranging for migration, should indiscriminately be defined as perpetrators, pimps or traffickers....They have insisted that antiprostitution legislation be focused on forced prostitution, not commercial sex per se” (Chapkis, 2003:928)

“Sex workers’ rights advocates object to the definition of all women in prostitution as “victims,” arguing that most adult women in the sex industry choose their occupation, and they should be free to do so. They have argued for the decriminalization of prostitution and for efforts to be targeted only at those who use coercion, deception, and exploitation” (Miller, 2006:150). Jenness researched the impact of COYOTE (an acronym for “Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics”), a prostitutes’ rights advocacy group founded by ex-prostitute Margo St. James in 1973, in shaping prostitution discourse. “COYOTE advocates the repeal of all existing prostitution laws, the reconstitution of prostitution as a legitimate service occupation, and the protection of prostitutes’ rights as

legitimate workers” (1990:403). Overall (1992:717) disagrees with COYOTE’s agenda by arguing that rather than representing legitimate work, prostitution is “the servicing of men’s sexual needs under capitalist and patriarchal conditions.”

Weitzer (2010) criticizes the positions of the abolitionists on the one hand and those advocating sex work as work on the other, as one-dimensional and essentialist (see also Kelly, 2008:123). Weitzer adds, “while exploitation and empowerment are certainly present in sex work, there is sufficient variation across time, place, and sector to demonstrate that sex work cannot be reduced to one or the other” (2010:6). Weitzer proffers “an alternative perspective, what [he] call[s] the *polymorphous paradigm*, [which] holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences. Unlike the other two perspectives, polymorphism is sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and workers’ control” (2010:6).

Finckenauer and Chin’s findings are somewhat consistent with Weitzer’s position when they state that there are more participants in the commercial sex industry than sex trafficking victims, and that “a variety of women from diverse backgrounds in fact go overseas to engage in prostitution...there is more diversity among the parties involved in prostitution than is commonly supposed, and to portray them all in the same way as victims is an oversimplification” (2010:7). Weitzer recommends, therefore, that “victimization, exploitation, choice, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and other dimensions should be treated as variables (not constants) that differ between types of sex work, geographical locations, and other structural and organizational conditions” (2010:6). The current study of commercial sex in Douala thus follows Weitzer’s recommendations,

investigating these dimensions of prostitution by looking specifically at the range of circumstances that shape sex workers' experiences in this setting.

## **2.2 ENTRÉE AND MOTIVATION FOR CONTINUED PROSTITUTION**

Most research suggests that “the onset of prostitution occurs most commonly in adulthood, except among juvenile runaways and homeless people” (Miller 2009:549). Pathways to sex work vary when we examine the nature of the sex work carried out by the individuals and the context in which this sex work is carried out. Weitzer, in comparing indoor workers to street prostitutes, found that indoor workers are less likely “to have a background of childhood abuse (neglect, violence, incest), to enter sex work at a young age, to engage in risky behavior (e.g., to use addictive drugs and to engage in unprotected sex), and to be victimized by others” (2010:9).

In their investigation of sex work and women's choices in urban Uganda, Zalwango et al. (2010: 77) note that difficult childhood experiences, parental conflict and poverty are factors that prompted some women to early marriages. These marriages sometimes put them on the path to prostitution after the death of a spouse, abandonment or divorce, or when they continued to experience poverty as they had to feed and clothe their children and themselves (Zalwango et al., 2010). In some cases, women suddenly experienced poverty following “marital instability or the death of a relative who had previously provided economic support, such as a father” (Zalwango et al., 2010:78) or a mother (Kelly, 2008). These women were faced with the prospect of taking care of themselves and in some instances, their young children (Kelly, 2008).

It is therefore not surprising that “economic need was usually given by the women as the main reason for turning to sex work for support” (Zalwango et al., 2010:80; see

also Anarfi, 1998; Kelly, 2008). “In markets characterized by intense gender, race, and class hierarchies prostitution provides a sometimes viable alternative among the limited options available” (Miller, 2009:562). Referring to Monroe (2005), Miller writes that “many scholars, activists, and sex workers agree that women’s primary motivation for involvement in the sex industry is economic” (2009: 562) or financial (Anarfi, 1998; Finckenauer and Chin, 2010; White, 1986; White, 1990). Some women use sex work as a means of supplementing incomes from what they consider to be the low paying jobs that they maintain (Kelly, 2008; Songué, 1986; Zalwango et al., 2010). Other women prostitute in order to accumulate capital for major investments in livestock or real estate (White, 1990). In other instances, the money earned from prostitution is saved or invested in businesses with moneymaking potential, as Anarfi (1998) finds with regard to Ghanaian women in Cote d’Ivoire.

What motivates women into prostitution is the economic difference between normal work and prostitution (Penttinen, 2010). According to Penttinen, women face the absence of alternatives to sex work that are “nearly as profitable” (2010:75) and describe it as a more lucrative way of earning an income than the other income earning alternatives available, such as working as a domestic servant or in a manufacturing plant (Kempadoo, 2004). In Africa, as elsewhere, women “attempt to maximize the resources they possess by manipulating the opportunities they perceive in their environment” (Anarfi, 1998:109). In some cases the only resources these women possess - also referred to as “economic capital” - are their “sex organs” (Anarfi, 1998:109, referring to Assimeng 1981).

The men and women who take part in this activity often describe doing so for economic reasons. For example, Kempadoo quotes a Guyanese sex worker who states unequivocally that she is in it for the money and not feelings: “I will say [it] is a job... I don’ go fuh feelings, I does go fuh me money” (2004:60). Interestingly, Songué (1986) finds that only 16 of the 62 prostitutes she interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon, gave financial need as a reason for entering into prostitution. Songué questioned her research subjects’ responses when the reasons given by the remaining 46 for entering into sex work were: they were living with a prostitute (15), dragged into it by a friend or parent (13), out of admiration for friends (5), and out of curiosity (13). These reasons, which Songué referred to as “contamination,” are not sufficient to explain why these persons actually went into prostitution (1986:76). As a result, Songué suggested that the prostitutes in her sample may have had individual or societal experiences which made them more prone to engage in prostitution than people who have not lived the same experiences(1986:76-77).

Finckenauer and Chin grouped into five the reasons given by their research subjects for participating in commercial sex : “(1) they wanted to live a good life but did not want to work that hard; (2) they tried to make money through conventional work but found that it was a bitter life and the money was not enough; (3) there was a financial crisis in the family and they needed to do something quickly to help their families; (4) they were divorced and were desperate to earn and save money while they were still young; or (5) they (the domestic trafficked victims) were deceived or coerced into prostitution by their boyfriends, or by pimps or chickenheads” (2010: 55).



Once the decision to go into sex work is made, assuming in this instance that it is freely made, the sex worker's actual entrée into the commercial sex industry may be facilitated by an acquaintance, a friend or relative with experience in sex work, a male or female pimp, or another type of recruiter. These patterns have been found in numerous studies around the globe, including among Cameroonians working in the sex industry domestically and abroad (Koh Bela, 2007; Kelly, 2008; Songué, 1986).

### **2.3 PROSTITUTION AND STIGMA**

Having reviewed the different approaches to prostitution, a pertinent question is whether decriminalization or regulation would render the perception of prostitution more acceptable as a form of work. If prostitution is considered to be work, does it then follow that the current stigma associated with prostitution will no longer exist? Though some scholars and activists suggest this will be the case, the question largely remains unanswered. What is clear, however, is that stigma is heavily attached to prostitution, particularly in settings where it is criminalized.

Research shows that prostitution often functions as a master status for those engaged in sex work, regardless of the longevity of their involvement. "In one person's lifetime, sex work is commonly just one of the multiple activities employed for generating income, and very few stay in prostitution for their entire adulthood" (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998: 4). According to Hubbard and Sanders (2003:76) some of the women in their research "use sex work to supplement another income; for others it is their only source of income. Most work on the street for a short period only, ultimately moving to other forms of sex work or leaving the profession entirely." With reference to Russian and Baltic women working as prostitutes in Finland, it was clear that the women

did not see themselves as prostitutes, thinking instead that “they are doing this ‘work’ or ‘business’ for the time being to gain money and to better their lives. Prostitution is something they do, for now. It is not a profession” (Penttinen, 2010:75).

In spite of the transient nature of this activity for some (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; Anarfi, 1998), the category prostitute has been linked to a status rather than to the activity exercised by a person (Pheterson, 1990). “Prostitution for women is considered not merely a temporal activity (as it is for men who are clients and often for men who are sex workers), but rather a heavily stigmatized social status which in most societies remains fixed regardless of change in behavior” (Pheterson 1990:399). Referring specifically to Senegal, but true for many countries, prostitutes are considered to be “the object of social disgrace” (Tandia, 1998:242). This stigma is accentuated by five key myths: “that prostitutes smell bad; that prostitutes are socially dead; that prostitutes are diseased; that prostitutes are a submissive sex object; and are a necessary outlet for ‘natural’ male excess” (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003:78, referring to Corbin 1990).

This stigmatization and labeling forces those women who view sex work as a temporary and part-time income-generating strategy to “remain prostitutes and to bear the prostitute status for all aspects of their lives” (Pheterson, 1990:399). The term “prostitute often becomes a master status for women involved in sex work, contributing to problems such as law enforcement discrimination, stigmatization, and violence” (Miller, 2009:562), making a woman engaged in the activity “vulnerable to legal controls and punishments and brand[ing] her the prototype ‘whore’” (Pheterson, 1990:399).

This “whore stigma,” which Pheterson describes as “a social and legal branding of women who are suspected of being or acting like prostitutes” (1990:397), serves as an

obstacle to international efforts made by prostitutes' rights movements in which prostitutes and ex-prostitutes are the main spokespersons (Pheterson:1990). "It's the stigma of sex work rather than sex work itself that causes so many problems for sex workers" (Jeffrey and MacDonald, 2006:137). Blissbomb confirms that as a sex worker, "the risk of being outed continues even though I retired from sex work seven years ago" (2010:300). Blissbomb perceives that risk as more challenging than "the hype about violence, drug use or degradation commonly reported in the literature" (2010:300). It is the stigma that prevents sex workers even in countries where prostitution is legalized and regulated from organizing themselves as "sex work activists" (Kelly, 2008:57).

Prostitutes sometimes minimize the effect of this stigma by migrating far away from their localities or countries to prostitute (Anarfi, 1998; Kelly, 2008). The migration of women to other areas to work as prostitutes exposed African women, particularly in the 1970s, to the assumption that if they were migrants they were prostitutes (Anarfi, 1998). Anthropologist Kenneth Little (1973) received sharp criticism for his statement, "scratch an African urban woman and you find a prostitute" (Anarfi, 1998:105). African women engaged in prostitution described themselves as "mothers, partners and daily wage laborers, juggling their family commitments and their identities" (Zalwango et al., 2010:72). It is this reconciliation of their different identities that Van den Borne calls "impression management" (2005:271).

Pheterson proposes that prostitute, as a category to which researchers have attached different meanings, be deconstructed to "counter prejudice and to conduct scientifically valid inquiry" (1990:397). Pheterson (1990) blames convenience samples in prostitution research for findings that have nothing to do with the variables in fact

measured and tested. By way of example, “prostitutes are often used by researchers to study stigmatized subjects such as ‘perverse’ sexual behavior, drug abuse, sexually-transmitted disease, and teenage delinquency. Rarely are stigmatized behavior patterns studied in dominant social groups or even in legitimized subordinate groups such as ‘wives’. Prostitutes epitomize social illegitimacy and are thereby designated fair game for scrutiny and attack. Specifically, they are virtually the sole target of research on the complex and taboo subject of sexual-economic behavior” (Pheterson, 1990:399). As a consequence, “in most societies, the only escape from prostitute status is migration or leading a double life” (Pheterson 1990:399).

Kempadoo and Doezema use the terms “sex worker” and “prostitute” interchangeably and emphasize that it is because they “view prostitution not as an identity - a social or a psychological characteristic of women, often indicated by “whore” - as an income-generating activity or form of labor for women and men” (1998:3). Interestingly, the profound impact of the stigma attached to the term prostitute, which is felt even in instances where prostitution is legal, is sometimes shared by researchers carrying out research on sex work when people refuse to interact with them for fear of being perceived as prostitutes (Kempadoo, 2004).

When we examine different societies’ expectations of who a good woman is, the fact that a woman is unmarried, a single mother, travelling without a man, dresses in a certain way or has multiple sexual partners lead to accusations of whore (Cabezas, 1998). It is in this regard that Cabezas concludes that “the stigma attached to sex workers can be hurled against any woman at any time. Therefore, the discourse on prostitutes fits within a binary system that seeks to divide women, control them, and ultimately benefit from

their labor” (1998:87). Stigma, then, and its potential impact on prostitutes’ experiences in Cameroon, is an important facet of the current investigation.

## **2.4 PROSTITUTES’ IDENTITY**

Pheterson asks the question, “who are prostitutes?” (1990:398). As seen in the definition of prostitution, prostitutes “are defined by behavior, most notably the act of soliciting money for sex. Any woman suspected of such behavior is likely to acquire the social status of ‘prostitute’” (Pheterson 1990:398). Beyond status, however, people who solicit money for sex (Pheterson, 1990) “exchange sexual activities for economic remuneration” (Miller 2009:549), perform sexual services in exchange for material compensation (Weitzer, 2010), “are variously referred to as prostitutes, sex workers, and prostituted women. They are simultaneously understood as criminal offenders, legitimate workers, gendered victims, vectors of disease, and the ultimate subversives. Which interpretation is accurate depends on who you ask” (Miller 2009:547).

Prostitutes include those who are male, female, transgendered, adults and children. The involvement of children in the commercial sex industry makes “the picture of gendered relations even more complex” (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998:7). Men as sex workers receive less scrutiny than their female counterparts. “In the United States, for example, until as recently as the 1970s numerous states’ prostitution laws specified that criminalized prostitutes were ‘female’ ....Even when definitions are gender-neutral, the archetypal prostitute remains a woman” (Miller 2009:549). The level of scrutiny received by male prostitutes varies with cultural perceptions. In the Caribbean, for example, absent procreation or economic need, a woman who has sex for financial gain is viewed and condemned as a prostitute, while a man who has sex for financial gain is seen to be

affirming Caribbean manhood (Kempadoo, 2004). This is made obvious by the terms used in the transactions: “romance tourism” refers to men providing sexual services to female tourists, “sex tourism” refers to females providing sexual services to male tourists (Kempadoo, 2004).

According to Balos (2004), the sex encounter between prostitutes and their clients is such that the prostitute does not have to be acknowledged as a full human being as the client discharges of all obligations through payments in cash or kind. Essentially what the client is paying for is “to have sex with a person who is physically alive but socially dead” (Balos, 2004:169). Kibicho (2009), referring to the interactions between local Kenyan commercial sex workers and tourists, cites Rao (2003:155) in noting that “sex ‘is purely a physical encounter where the former is just but an animate object.’” This is explained by the fact that there is very limited verbal communication, leaving no room for exchanges in culture and family history (Kibicho, 2009). To their credit, Kibicho says that commercial sex workers “use pidgin to establish their own identities as well as those of their clients” (Kibicho, 2009:13).

Cabezas (1998:198) interviews a sex worker in Mexico who stated: “it is not easy for feminists to understand that we are not sexual objects. Instead our work is like any other - only we do it with our genitals.” Kempadoo (2004:61) explains: “That intimacy is not necessarily connected to the vagina but to other parts of the body points most clearly to the difficulty of conflating sexual intercourse with intimacy (or love), as sometimes occurs in feminist studies of prostitution, and to the necessity of an ongoing exploration into how conceptualizations of sexuality, sexual desire, and love are deeply informed by specific cultural and social histories.”

Sex workers certainly do not perceive of themselves as objects and are categorical about sexual encounters that are either out of the ordinary or involve certain parts of their bodies. While some may charge a higher price for performing services they consider unusual, based mainly on cultural norms and habit, others refuse to perform services when they feel uncomfortable with them irrespective of the amount of money offered by the client. Street sex workers almost across the board perceive their lips and breasts as private and would generally not place a price on any services relating to touching their breasts or kissing their lips, reserving it for partners with whom they are in relationships or feel very comfortable (Kempadoo, 2004). This seems to distinguish street prostitutes (offering services on the street and not in motels) from call girls or escorts, as a study by Lever and Dolnick, confirmed their initial hypothesis that call girls provided “great[er] emotional services to clients than street prostitutes” (2010:199).

Probably due to the fact that call girls are more likely to engage in long term relationships, some lasting for years, “call girls are more likely to have their own genitals touched or to receive oral sex, akin to normal intimate relationships, although most clients are more focused on receiving than reciprocating sexual pleasure” (Lever and Dolnick, 2010:199). This dissertation includes an investigation of the extent to which prostitution is a status in Cameroon, and how prostitutes construct their identities and reflect their views on intimacy.

## **2.5 COERCION OR CHOICE**

Although some persons engaged in prostitution argue that their main motivation is financial and that this choice is arrived at after consideration of all other existing options, some other persons (radical feminists or others with an abolitionist agenda) insist that it is

structural inequality that forces people to prostitute, as prostitution cannot be freely chosen. According to Balos, “the exercise of power by the dominant group thus becomes the ‘choice’ of the subordinated group” (2004:170); she points to an observation by Catherine MacKinnon (1993) to the effect that “if prostitution is a free choice, why are the women with the fewest choices the ones most often found doing it?” (Balos, 2004:170).

In a contradictory response to that question, Blissbomb (2010) shows that in spite of the options to which she was exposed as a college graduate in Australia, and although she occupied a fulltime conventional job, prostitution was a choice she had made in supplementing her income. “Abolitionists need to hear that most sex workers, including male and transgender sex workers and men who work with female clients, do the job willingly and do very well out of it relative to other occupations” (Murray, 1998:62).

Kempadoo’s research demonstrates prostitution as an option amongst others when she writes, “indeed, it is difficult, from the situations described by women in prostitution in Curacao and in other countries, to simply state that the sex trade in the Caribbean involves extremely poor, illiterate, ignorant women, drawn from the rural underclass in the region. A woman may run into a specific financial problem, and the idea that she can accumulate a large sum of money in a relatively short period through sex work may undergird her move into the sex trade” (Kempadoo, 1998:128). Sometimes the money derived from prostitution is needed to be able to afford luxuries like fashionable clothes (Kempadoo, 2004). Selling sex “is considered viable for women of different backgrounds and is subject to as much ‘choice’ as any other income generating activity for women in gendered labor markets” (Kempadoo, 1998:128).



While the argument for self determination is one shared by prostitutes and prostitutes' rights activists, some feminists are unable to visualize the choice of something which they consider inherently violent, such as prostitution. As far as Balos (2004) is concerned, the only person who exercises choice is the customer and this choice is to exercise power. In holding the view that prostitution is a form of violence against women that undermines gender equality, Balos states that "the payment of money normalizes and legitimizes the transaction and acceptance of the payment is transformed into consent to sexual exploitation" (2004:170). She insists that "by attributing choice and consent to the prostituted women, her right to equality and justice is denied" (Balos, 2004:170). Balos concludes that the "argument that prohibiting the sale of sex for money is a limitation on women's autonomy is a gendered one" (2004, 173).

Penttinen (2010), in a virtual narrative, takes on the voice of a feminist in commenting on the position of Russian women working as prostitutes in Finland. She says "it is totally disgusting and depressing to see the beautiful women who do not really have choices to do things other than to serve the revolting smelly men" (Penttinen, 2010:63). These women, who face poverty in Russia, escape what she refers to as exploitation by the men in government or international politics only to be exploited by "real, physical (in this case Finnish) men, foreign businessmen and tourists" (Penttinen, 2010:64).

The distinction between voluntary and forced prostitution is pertinent. Radhika Coomaraswamy, while UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, distinguished between voluntary and forced prostitution by stating that "some women become prostitutes through 'rational choice,' others become prostitutes as a result of

coercion, deception or economic enslavement” (UN EICN 411995142; Doezema, 1998:41). This introduces sex trafficking and shows the nuances that exist in prostitution and sex trafficking discourse.

## **2.6 SEX TRAFFICKING<sup>1</sup>**

What may sometimes appear to the unsuspecting eye simply as prostitution may in fact be sex trafficking yet the nature and extent of sex trafficking remains to be known. In addressing the issue of the number of people who are victims of sex trafficking, the numbers differ based on the method and scope of research that was undertaken. Kara (2009:17) estimates that 500,000 to 600,000 out of an annual number of 1.5 to 1.8 million individuals are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. According to Farr, using data from the International Organization for Migration (2001), “of the approximately 4 million people who are trafficked around the world each year, an estimated 1 million are trafficked into the sex industry” (2005:3).

In every study where figures on trafficking or more precisely sex trafficking are reported, this one inclusive, the contradictions in the figures are very obvious and lead us to agree with Sanghera that “figures on the scale of trafficking are often derived from small scale surveys based on disparate methodologies, or sources such as police records, local information, or media reports which cannot be statistically representative or empirically sound. These calculations are based on many untested assumptions. Most data on the number of trafficked persons are based on speculations and projections. To date, there is no sound methodology to calculate the numbers of those who have been

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<sup>1</sup> This study did not uncover any instances of sex trafficking. As a result, this section on sex trafficking introduces some of the issues in the discourse

trafficked” (2005:12). This is echoed by Zhang when he says that “much of the current discourse on human trafficking has not been guided by empirical research. The increased urgency in U.S. government policy and funding priority to combat trafficking in women and children has been influenced more by a moral panic that continues to gain momentum rather than by solid and systematic assessment of the problem” (2007:122). All the numbers really seem to show is that trafficking exists and that it should not be ignored.

“Definitions of trafficking are as unstable as the number of victims” (Chapkis, 2003:926). The policies sometimes also follow the politics, resulting in definitions that may find favor with one group’s agenda over another. A practical case in point is the evolution of the definition of sex trafficking from the United Nations General Assembly Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others of 2 December 1949 (the 1949 Convention) to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (which came into force in September 2003) and its supplementing protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (the Protocol) which came into force in December 2003, altering the categories of persons within its scope and hence eligible for protection.

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the 2000 Protocol) in its Article 3, provides as follows:

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of

the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

The debates on the role of consent in the Protocol bear more meaning to feminists where there is a perceived victory for liberal feminists, who want women to be recognized as having more agency in their decision-making processes and their ability to choose sex work. Radical feminists are of the opinion that a woman cannot consent to violence, which is inherent in prostitution, so there is no point in the UN protocol listing instances where consent is negated. In doing so, they argue, the UN Protocol tacitly concedes that women can consent to sex work. Why would women consent to be prostitutes when prostitution is violence? Why would women consent to be transported elsewhere for the purposes of prostitution? To radical feminists, this is a failure in the advancement of a major policy position because prostitutes are prostituted women and should not be considered active participants in the decision making processes involving commercial sex. To radical feminists, all women engaged in prostitution are victims and all victims are innocent.

The drafters of the Protocol were mindful of the need to take into account agency and consent, and the fact that somewhere along the line, due to a change in circumstances

or other intervening factors, the nature of the consent given became materially different from the transaction entered into. Women may have consented to being transported to a different location for prostitution but were not aware and hence could not have consented to the gruesome exploitation or coercion which they were to endure following that transportation. Hence the Protocol aimed at admitting consent as an excuse to trafficking unless that consent was voided by aggravating factors. A consenting person, on whom no form of coercion, fraud, deception et cetera, as provided in (a) above was used, can be excluded from the purview of the Protocol.

The way trafficking is defined has been a “weakness in the global efforts to deal with the transnational movement of women for commercial sex, and one of the reasons for confusion and controversy is the fact that there is no consensus on just what trafficking is and is not” (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:137). Finckenauer and Chin (2010) opt for the use of a more restrictive definition of trafficking provided by The United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 with focus on “severe forms of trafficking in persons,” to which protection is accorded.

While researchers may not have reached a consensus on how many victims of sex trafficking exist annually worldwide or on an acceptable definition of sex trafficking, they are, however in agreement on the existence of the phenomenon and the need to eradicate it. Some scholars have viewed sex trafficking from the standpoint of a moral panic. Cohen defines moral panic as occurring when “a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (1973:9).

In spite of the definitions proffered for sex trafficking, sex trafficking can either be considered to have reached epic proportions or may simply be described as a phenomenon that exists but is not alarming enough to cause a moral panic. Finckenauer and Chin show that “if the definition of a sex trafficking victim is simply a person who is engaged in commercial sex (in our case overseas) then all our female subjects are victims, and there is a complete overlap between prostitution and sex trafficking” (2010:138). There is however no “inextricable link” between prostitution and sex trafficking (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010: 150). Weitzer also states, “there is no evidence that ‘most’ or even the majority of prostitutes have been trafficked” (2007:455), findings corroborated by Finckenauer and Chin (2010) in their research (see also Tandia, 1998; Gould, 2011). Weitzer and Ditmore consider the claim that “sex trafficking is prevalent and increasing, now at epidemic levels” a self-serving myth that is furthered by the use of “unverifiable and/or very elastic” figures (Weitzer and Ditmore, 2010:335).

In issues as sensitive as trafficking, the rhetoric is deliberate and words are chosen with a view to achieving an effect - apathy or empathy - depending on the desired outcome. Trafficking debates are crowded with persons who perceive themselves to be abolitionists and whose writings, sometimes sensational, aim at evoking enough revulsion, fear or dislike among policy makers for actions to be taken against trafficking. When those who feed on moral panics are successful, the focus of the state is on protective policies, sometimes going as far as restricting the movement of migrants; policies from which women are predominantly the victims as they fall prey to smugglers or worse still traffickers when they attempt to migrant contrary to their countries’ regulations. These paternalistic reactions sanctioned by the state in the wake of a moral

panic outcry are nothing short of kneejerk reactions which do not address the issues and sometimes place women in a worse position than they were previously.

In the current study, the degree of awareness of the research participants in discussing sex trafficking showed that although some of them had heard of sex trafficking they were not sex trafficking victims as defined by the UN Protocol.

## **2.7 PROSTITUTION: SPACES OF MANIFESTATION**

The general public has been somewhat divided on the presence of prostitutes on the streets, in their backyards, or elsewhere. In a survey in which men's opinions were sought about "spending an evening with a prostitute," 61 percent of Americans considered this morally wrong and two-thirds believed that prostitution can "never be justified," while 25 percent considered it "sometimes justified" and 4 percent "always justified" (Weitzer, 2010:2-3). The criminal justice system views prostitution as "a public order offense that contributes to social disorder in communities, including 'disorderly public conduct, potential harm to children, harassment of and violence against women,' drugs, crime and the proliferation of dangerous and unsightly paraphernalia (Brents and Hausbeck 2005:274)" (Miller, 2009:547). When men roam the streets with a view to purchase sex, other women in the neighborhood are likely to be "inappropriately approached" (Sanders 2004:1706). As a result, "community action groups have several legitimate issues to raise about the implications of commercial sex advertised, negotiated and often delivered in the same spaces as those in which they live" (Sanders 2004:1706). As a consequence, they sometimes organize themselves into protesters or picketers with or without official intervention from law enforcement, obtaining the relocation, shifting or displacement of prostitution activities from their neighborhoods.

Although information is limited on the actual percentage of street prostitutes when compared to the indoor types, some “estimates are that 10 to 30 percent of prostitutes, disproportionately minority, are street workers” (Miller, 2009:549); others estimate that “about one-fifth of prostitution in the United States is street prostitution and the remainder is spread among massage parlors, bar prostitution, outcall services, and brothels” (Porter and Bonilla, 2010:163). Whatever the exact ratio of street prostitution to indoor prostitution is, it is unlikely to experience great shifts over time as the tendency is that “the level at which the woman begins work in the prostitution world determines her general position in the occupation for much of her career as a prostitute. Changing levels requires contacts and a new set of work techniques and attitudes” (Heyl, 1979:198).

Street workers engage in the most visible type of prostitution and by doing so constitute a great source of nuisance with respect to spatial occupation and are “most often perceived as disruptive of public order” (Miller, 2009:558). This perception of public disorder exposes street prostitutes to violence from community protesters in addition to issues related to policing and violence from male clients (Sanders, 2004). These risks are linked: in trying to escape police scrutiny, street prostitutes are under enormous pressure to quickly accept a client without having much time to perform the due diligence that might protect them from risk.

Hubbard and Sanders (2003), who studied the making of and occupation of space for sex work in Birmingham, described the negotiation process between the street worker and a potential client. “The negotiation of a sexual service normally takes place on the street through a car window. During the negotiation phase, neither the sex worker nor the client wants to be apprehended by the police as it could be used as prime evidence of



both kerb-crawling and soliciting. For this reason, a sex worker normally has only seconds to decide whether to accept or reject a client” (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003:84). Miller notes that these “adaptation strategies increase [prostitutes’] risk for victimization” (1993:565), as they spend very little time in scrutinizing and attempting to judge the clients’ appearance, attitude and their likely exposure to the risk of violence when choosing a specific client. In deciding whether to accept a client or not, a sex worker describes the process: ““I look at their appearance, if someone looks shabby and horrible I won’t see them. I look at their body language and how they carry themselves. I look at how they are using the language, how they are talking to me, what they are asking me for”” (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003:84-85).

In spite of the risk to which sex work is associated, there is no other occupation available to unskilled women that can provide them a comparable income (Miller, 2009). Sex workers “manage occupation hazards by manipulating, separating, controlling and resisting urban spaces. Women actively use space to inform their collective and individual working practices to minimize harm and maximize profit” (Sanders, 2004:1703). The result of this is that in Birmingham, street prostitution (which is not illegal when compared with loitering and soliciting in a public place for the purpose of prostitution, which are illegal) “coexist[s], albeit uncomfortably, alongside those who claim the same physical space as their community, territory or ‘backyard’” (Sanders, 2004:1706).

Hubbard and Sanders “explore the making of space for sex work by adopting Lefebvre’s distinction between representations of space and spaces of representation” (2003:80) and go on to theorize that “the spatial practices played out in red-light districts

- the routines and rituals of sex work that constitute the everyday in these spaces - result from a conflict between representations of spaces (which seek to impose order on urban space) and spaces of representation (which emerge ‘organically’ from the bodily practices and behaviors of sex workers” (2003:87).

Examples of representations of space include the creation of hot lines by the police for protesters to inform them of their activities, joint action between police and local authority in funding and fitting a patrol van with holding cells, picketing, increase in arrests by police, addition of street lighting, and CCTV surveillance systems , all used to discourage sex workers and potential clients from interacting in targeted locations (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003; Sanders, 2004:1711). The sex workers, on the other hand, employed spaces of representation that involve sharing information on police activity, working hours when police or protester presence were reduced, moving to other street locations where there was less opposition to their activities, and moving to indoor or window locations (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003; Sanders 2004).

By employing the spaces of representation or resistance tactics, sex workers make use of what Hubbard and Sanders, referring to Certeau, describe as “stubborn procedures that elude discipline” to “shape spaces to their own ends” (2003:83). Sex workers, police, politicians and protesters all act to determine the eventual location of a red-light district in the cases of sex workers by turning potentially oppressive sites to sites of resistance (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003). Hubbard and Sanders conclude, therefore, that “red-light landscape are not simply produced by the actions of the authorities ‘from above’, but are produced ‘from below’” (2003:83). Yet the authors caution that sex workers should not

be given too much credit for this result in shaping the space of their activities because they may very well be in spaces in which authority intended for them to exist (2003).

In Cameroon, like in other parts of the world where sex work is visually present, there is a continued conflict over the spaces of manifestation of sex work. This study examines from the sex workers' perspectives the different considerations and resistance techniques employed in selecting locations for prostitution both indoor and outdoor in Douala. It also explores the extent to which the occupation of these spaces is regulated by law enforcement, even within the context of the criminalization of sex work.

## **2.8 POLICY APPROACHES TO PROSTITUTION**

Whether or not prostitution is work, whether or not prostitution is freely chosen, “surprisingly little compromise has emerged about the issue, with advocates of one approach or another continuing to argue for their preferred ‘solution,’ while policymakers continue to make important decisions about the trade” (Kibicho, 2009:5).

The different (feminists) views on prostitution have played relatively important roles in shaping policy regarding prostitution in different countries at precise points in time; these help explain the different approaches that exist in addressing the issue of prostitution. Mostly in line with the views of liberal feminists that prostitution is meaningful employment, some countries opt for a legalization or regulation paradigm in addressing the issue of prostitution. Such regimes exist in countries like Holland, Germany, and ten counties in the rural parts of Nevada in the United States, where 28 licensed brothels operate (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010). Since brothels were legalized in certain parts of Nevada in 1971, no other U.S. state has opted for the legalization paradigm (Weitzer, 2010). “Under this model there is state tolerance of prostitution

through government regulatory schemes” (Miller, 2005:552). Regulation involves licensing, registration and mandatory medical testing requirements.

According to Weitzer (2010) legalization raises the question of whether it could lead to an increase in prostitution and whether prostitutes can actually comply with the regulations stipulated. In response to the first question, Weitzer (2010) cites Nevada and New Zealand as examples that the number of prostitutes has not increased post legalization. In Australia, however, the number of prostitutes did increase post brothel legalization.

With regulation/legalization as an intervention strategy, the sellers (prostitutes) can organize their activities like other legitimate businesses and make projections on revenues to be received. Sellers are provided with a regulatory framework within which they can insist on safe sex practices, and in which their brothels (if institutionalized) are invested. On the other hand, depending on what the regulations enacted by the State may be, the requirements for testing and mobility may be considered burdensome for the sex workers (Kelly, 2008; Hausbeck and Brent, 2010) and those who are “ineligible...would be forced to operate illicitly in the shadows of the regulated system” (Weitzer, 2010:25).

In a regime of legalized prostitution, the buyers also benefit as they are able to obtain regulated prices and safe sex practices. The fact, however, that regulation/legalization focuses on the testing of prostitutes only and not their buyers (also called “johns” or “tricks”) shows some of the disparity of treatment in the commercial sex industry. The greatest benefit derivable from the legalization of prostitution is that all parties involved (sellers, buyers and other third parties) are not faced with the threat of criminal sanctions. Regulation takes into account the existence of prostitution as a

practical reality and structures it in a way that the government has it under some form of control and derives revenue from licenses, taxes, zoning, and the like. Regulation is also useful in that it permits a State to more effectively execute its public health agenda.

Criminalization, also known as prohibition, sanctions prostitution and most often the actions of all parties to the transaction are criminalized. With the exception of the ten counties in rural Nevada where prostitution is legal, elsewhere in the whole of the United States prostitution is criminalized. This is the case in numerous other countries in the world as well, including South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, and Cameroon in Africa. This approach recognizes the existence of prostitution but for public health, zoning, security, national pride and other reasons, decides that everyone who engages in prostitution is eligible for prosecution. In principle, this approach, if uniformly and equitably applied, targets all persons involved in prostitution - including sellers, buyers and third parties who aid in the procurement process.

However, most research has found that laws criminalizing prostitution are rarely applied in a uniform and equitable manner (Miller, 2009). Criminalization has been criticized for ignoring the structural and socioeconomic disparities that exist, which are the root causes for why some women engage in prostitution (Miller, 2002). Another criticism levied on the practical application of the criminalization policy is that although prostitution is criminalized, it is the sellers and not both the sellers and buyers who are arrested and prosecuted, as will be discussed further below.

Turning to the African context, in Cote d'Ivoire, although prostitution is illegal, brothels exist without state interference (Anarfi, 1998). In South Africa, it is an offense to sell and buy sex, yet both parties to the transaction are hardly prosecuted for want of

evidence of the exchange of money for sex (Gould, 2011). In other instances, some countries that criminalize prostitution are seen to condone it, either by ignoring the presence of prostitutes on the streets or charging them with offenses that are minor when compared to prostitution, like vagabondage or loitering (Gould, 2011; Petzer and Isaacs, 1998; Songué, 1986). In Cameroon, arrest and the threat of being charged with vagabondage is one of the instances in which prostitutes interact with law enforcement (Songué, 1986).

Within a criminalized framework, parties who are likely to profit from the criminalization of prostitution are pimps (who are easily dispensed with in a regulated framework) and owners of brothels and other institutions (such as massage parlors) whose activities further the illegal operation of prostitution. “Sex for sale is a lucrative growth industry” (Weitzer, 2010:1). There is money to be made and someone is making the money. In Nevada, where prostitution is regulated in licensed brothels, “the brothel industry statewide earned about \$45 million in 2008 according to the Nevada Brothel Association” (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010:260). If the state is not taxing and collecting revenue from prostitution, as is the case under a regulated framework, given the potential amount of profits to be made, prostitution is nevertheless still likely to exist underground within a criminalized framework.

Another dominant approach in prostitution policy is abolition. An abolitionist model views prostitutes as victims of the commercial sex exchange. This model decriminalizes the participation of prostitutes, who are referred to as prostituted women, while criminalizing the participation of third parties to the transaction (Miller, 2005). Radical feminists such as “Andrea Dworkin (1981, 1997), Catherine MacKinnon (1987,

1989), Kathleen Barry (1979, 1995), and Shiela Jeffreys (1997)...reduce commercial sex to male violence against women and ‘sexual slavery’ whether or not it involves outright coercion or manipulation. These writers favor the term ‘prostituted women’ over ‘prostitutes’ because it underscores their lack of agency and directs attention to males who use them” (Weitzer, 2000:263). Miller (2009:551) notes that “like the prohibitionist model, the abolitionist approach does not recognize women’s rights to choose prostitution as a legitimate occupation.” It also absolves the “prostituted” women of any criminal sanction, which she would ordinarily face under the prohibitionist model.

“The ultimate goal under abolitionist models is the eradication of commercial sexual exchanges” (Miller, 2009: 551). Although complete eradication of prostitution has never been achieved (Miller, 2009), we can deduce that if successful, abolition will not benefit the sellers, buyers and third parties who profit from prostitution. Given that the only parties who are exposed to sanction under the abolition paradigm are the buyers and third parties within an abolitionist scheme, these persons may ensure that prostitutes are not easily able to implicate them by taking their operations further underground and using coercive methods to intimidate the prostitutes from testifying against them. Realistically however, abolition only opens the door for greater illegality. On the streets of Tuxtla Gutierrez in Chiapas, Mexico, after raids in which street prostitution was targeted, street prostitution was less visible “but like drug dealing in New York City in the 1990s, it became less visible simply because it moved elsewhere” (Kelly, 2008:75).

The fourth approach is decriminalization. “Decriminalization is a paradigm advocated by those who define prostitution as work” (Miller, 2009:551). It does not sanction any of the parties to the commercial sex transaction; buyers and sellers alike.

Proponents of this policy position argue that given this latitude, violence against prostitutes from customers and protesters may be reduced as the prostitutes would have more time to exercise better judgment on their choice of clients. Protesters would have no choice but to be more accepting of the existence of prostitution as a legitimate form of employment. Moreover, they suggest that buyers under the decriminalization paradigm would be given direct access to prostitutes, reducing the need for middlemen who, if present, are likely to gain less. Sex workers would presumably be freer to solicit clients either by themselves or through third parties with whom they freely contract for these services. These arguments remain speculative, however, since no research has identified or investigated commercial sex in the context of a fully decriminalized system.

## **2.9 DOMINANT THEMES IN THE PROSTITUTION AND SEX TRAFFICKING DISCOURSE**

### **2.9.1 INTRODUCTION**

What sex trafficking and prostitution have in common is the exchange of sexual services for financial compensation. In the case of prostitution there is a general understanding of voluntariness on the part of the person performing the service but in sex trafficking the conditions of work are presumed to contain certain elements of coercion and/ or deception which are sometimes referred to as slavery (Bales, 2004; Kara, 2009). Bindman explains how slavery finds its way into the sex industry by saying that sex is sold in a variety of forms and places everywhere in the world, ranging from massage parlors to the street, yet the persons who work in this industry do not have “formal contracts with the owners or managers but are subject to their control. Those who work in the sex industry are commonly excluded from mainstream society. They are thereby



denied whatever international, national or customary protection from abuse [that] is available to others as citizens, women or workers” (1998:66). Farr makes reference to a woman called Aye, who “was paid \$1 a day for servicing from 12 to 20 men on any given day. Each of the men paid a fee of \$6 for a half hour with her” (Farr, 2005:24).

This comes mainly from the fact that prostitution needs to be recognized as work, “as an occupation susceptible like the others to exploitative practices. Then sex workers can be included and protected under the existing instruments which aim to protect all workers from exploitation, and women from discrimination” (Bindman, 1998:67). It is in light of this that the themes below are discussed, given that they touch on persons who work freely in prostitution and those who transact sex within the framework of sex trafficking. Whether freely chosen or coerced, it is not always obvious to those interacting with the prostitutes or trafficked women, so in examining the themes common to both prostitutes and sex trafficking victims, the term prostitute or sex worker is used to include sex trafficking victims.

### **2.9.2 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

“Common opinion holds that once a prostitute, a woman loses her rights and is no longer entitled to protection against violence, exploitation, abuse, blackmail, and being held prisoner” (Wijers, 1998:77). Janice Raymond (a researcher and CATW activist) advances the argument “that sex trafficking and the sex trade [or as she thinks of it, the prostituting of women] are both harmful to women and violations of their human rights, and that the distinction between involuntary and voluntary traffic is an artificial one” (Farr, 2005:219). The human rights implications of trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exchanges or other forms of labor seem obvious. These persons are forced

against their will to engage in different kinds of labor. “Personal agency is also diminished by requiring the women to accept and obey all customers. In many brothels, women cannot turn down a customer for any reason and, in most cases, they must perform whatever acts he demands” (Farr, 2005:38).

If the sometimes anecdotal narratives by authors are to be subscribed to without questioning, human rights violations are blatant within the context of sex trafficking. In the use of forced contraception, “some girls are given three or four contraceptive pills a day; others are given Depo-Provera injections by the pimp or the bookkeeper. The same needle might be used for injecting all of them, passing HIV from girl to girl. Most girls who become pregnant will be sent for an abortion. Abortion is illegal in Thailand so this will be a backstreet operation, with all the obvious risks. A few women are kept working while they are pregnant, as some Thai men want to have sex with pregnant women. When a child is born it can be taken and sold by the brothel owner and the woman is put back to work” (Bales, 2004:60).

The degraded quality of life which trafficked women live is obvious in their dialogue. Farr (2005:38) reports, for example, that “Lola, the Russian woman working in a Berlin brothel, said: ‘I’m like a machine now. I don’t think anything anymore. I only work. There’s no happiness in life... I know what it is to live when you can’t smile, or laugh, when you can’t live freely.’”

The human rights issues with regards to prostitution are visible when prostitutes are denied protection within their chosen form of labor. Notwithstanding the legality of prostitution in a given legal system, very little attention seems to be paid when the victim of an offence, rape, theft or other type of aggression is a prostitute. According to Wijers

(1998:72), what the policies, criminalization/prohibition, regulation/legalization, abolition and decriminalization all have in common is “that prostitutes are denied basic human rights, held in contempt, isolated, marginalized and sometimes criminalized.” The current investigation therefore examines the extent to which this statement by Wijers (1998:72) is applicable in the treatment of prostitutes within the Cameroonian legal system by providing information on the views of prostitutes on the police and the court system.

### **2.9.3 PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

“Much of the material published... and resultant public policy has more to do with other social anxieties than with the human beings who engaged in commercial sex” (Sanders, 2005:344; Miller, 2009:548). A predominant theme in the discourse of prostitution and sex trafficking is disease. What seems to be a major concern from a public health perspective is disease, or more specifically, prostitutes as vectors of disease. The connection between prostitution and disease is historical (Walkowitz, 1982). Yet, in the US, “prostitutes have not been found to play a significant role in the spread of HIV. HIV has also not been shown to correlate with high numbers of paying sex partners but with IV drug use which is a habit of a small minority of prostitutes” (Pheterson, 1990:401). This is reaffirmed in a statement by Porter and Bonilla to the effect that “among prostitutes in the U.S. and elsewhere, HIV infection is related to long-term injection use or to large numbers of nonpaying sex partners more than to prostitution per se” (2010:165). Also, because street prostitutes mostly perform oral sex as opposed to vaginal sex with their clients, and because condoms are usually used during oral sex,

prostitution is not a major form by which HIV is transmitted in the United States (Porter and Bonilla, 2010).

The term prostitute has been used in research to evoke sensationalism involved in blaming the prostitute for the spread of disease. In the developing world, sex workers have been blamed in a recurrent manner for the transmission of HIV to the heterosexual population. Pheterson (1990) demonstrates how an article by Nahmias (1989), which blames prostitutes for the AIDS epidemic, only serves to reinforce the negative stereotype that they are a devastating health hazard to men, mothers and babies. In spite of the use of the term prostitute in this instance, Pheterson demonstrates that the category prostitute lacks scientific validity, yet research such as this leads to an “increase in forced medical testing, incarceration, harassment by police, and denial of human rights and murder” (1990:401).

To the extent that Nahmias’ choice is Africa, Pheterson grants him the fact that some studies suggest that prostitutes play a major role in transmission to heterosexual men in certain African cities, but she notes that Nahmias fails to take into account condom use as a significant inhibitor in his transmission formula, while demonstrating that prostitutes are more likely to insist on the use of condoms, noting as well that client resistance to the use of condoms undermines safe sex practices in Africa and elsewhere (Pheterson, 1990). Pheterson’s main challenge is whether Nahmia’s model is even about a prostitute at all (1990). “The African women referred to as prostitutes in the studies which he cites do not refer to themselves as prostitutes and may be at no greater, or lesser, risk of HIV infection than other women living in the same area who are not designated prostitutes” (Pheterson, 1990: 402). According to Pheterson, “using the

category ‘prostitute’ and qualifying it in an aside as ‘African’ seems to be based on nothing other than historical license to scapegoat prostitute women and Africans for societal ills” (1990:402). In the United States, politicization of these issues has led to “punitive and medicalized models of intervention that fail to address the social, economic, and spatial complexities of prostitution” (Miller, 2009:548).

What is a reality in developing as well as developed countries is that some sex workers describe regular condom use with clients, which are typically only dispensed with when the status of these clients change to “steady partner, boyfriend, husband, or man,” and in such relationships, the sex workers are looking to find some pleasure for themselves (Kempadoo, 2004:61). In spite of the existing precautions taken by sex workers by using condoms in oral and vaginal sexual encounters, some sex workers also admit to accepting a higher premium for unprotected sex, leading to inconsistent condom use (Della Guista et al., 2008), as well as sometimes experiencing rape (without protection) within the course of their work. Another factor which exists is the mobility of persons who sometimes request the services of sex workers. Travelers or tourists and more particularly sex tourists - given their mobility status and quest of sexual adventure - are more likely to be more participative in the spread of diseases, including HIV/AIDS (Kibicho, 2009). Kempadoo, referring to an unspecified research report, notes that “although tourism, war, [and] commercial travel have all played a substantial role in the dissemination of HIV, the migration of the young, rural poor, both on a seasonal and long term basis, has probably been of greater importance in developing countries” (2004:172).

Prostitution remains a serious problem from a public health perspective when looking at sexually transmitted diseases (Songué, 1986) and HIV/AIDS (Miller, 2009). In

each of the paradigms that frame governments' reactions to prostitution, only legalization or regulation attempts to address the public health issues related to prostitution.

In a legalization regime, the women who work as prostitutes are subjected to mandatory testing requirements which form the basis for their permits to work. In the brothels in the 10 counties of Nevada where prostitution is legal, a prostitute is expected to "have a state health card certifying her safety and health prior to applying for work in a brothel; this means testing negative for all STDs, including syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV" (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010:266). The prostitute working in a Nevada brothel is subsequently mandated to test weekly for STDs and monthly for HIV and syphilis and, if positive, the state card is withdrawn until she is cured (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010). Brothels are required to post notices in their premises informing customers of the mandatory use of condoms (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010). In Germany, where prostitution is legal, "prostitutes are required to register with the police and to have regular STD...tests, with penalties for women working without a license or 'health certificate'" (Wijers, 1998:73). In spite of the existence of these registration requirements, some sex workers do not register because they are illegal or they fear any stigma that may be associated with registration (Wijers, 1998).

In Senegal, where prostitution is legalized and regulated, prostitutes (defined to include an age limit of 21 or older) are required to register at the Office of Health and Social Services of the Institute of Social Hygiene and carry mandatorily a health pass following their testing for sexually transmitted diseases (Tandia, 1998). Prostitutes are required to test every 45 days, during which they are subjected to "a bacteriological test, for which blood and vaginal cells are taken" (Tandia, 1998:242). The consequences of

testing positive for an STD is that the health pass is withdrawn, and the woman is given a prescription, bears the cost of the medications and remains suspended until a subsequent medical test shows she is cured (Tandia, 1998). Prostitutes who do not show up to test in the 45 days prescribed period are penalized by having their health passes suspended (Tandia, 1998). Apart from testing requirements, registered prostitutes are required to attend lectures organized by the Institute of Social Hygiene focusing on STDs and AIDS, with absence sanctioned by “a three-day pass suspension” (Tandia, 1998:242).

The rules applied in Chiapas Mexico required that workers (who must be Mexican and at least 18 years old) possessed health certificates issued by the city (Kelly, 2008). Health certificates were not issued if the women were “pregnant, or if they suffer[ed] from contagious diseases” (Kelly, 2008:78). Each sex worker had to “‘demonstrate that she is able to discern the risks of the activity,’ be in ‘full use of mental faculties and not addicted to drugs’ and ‘carry out her activity in the tolerance zone called Zona Galáctica’” (Kelly, 2008:78).

Testing requirements have proven to be extremely burdensome to prostitutes, who rather than register and be recognized as prostitutes, prefer to work illegally. Their decision is further informed by the fact that even registered prostitutes are not spared from harassment by the police, who accuse them of public solicitations, which are illegal (Tandia, 1998). The requirement that sex workers are tested has been known to limit their mobility, while the lack of a testing requirement for their clients has given rise to a situation in which sex workers’ right advocates are opposed to legalization preferring outright decriminalization of prostitution (Miller, 2009).

With regard to women who are trafficked for commercial sex purposes, the preference of those who traffic them or to whom they owe a debt is that the debt is speedily paid off. These women, who may work in extreme conditions of illegal confinement and forced labor, are subject to abuses “including physical and sexual assault as well as exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Health care is minimal, and women who contract diseases are often simply discarded” (Miller, 2006:152; see also Bales, 2004).

There are diverse responses by countries to sex workers who are found to have sexually transmitted diseases. In “Sri Lanka women found to have sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are remanded to detention facilities” (Miller, 2006:152). Rumor has it that HIV-positive Burmese women returned to Burma have been executed (Murray, 1998, see also Shannon, 1999). The Japanese government has been reported not to provide health care to prostitutes and the Indian government will not provide medical assistance to prostitutes who show signs of being infected with HIV (Shannon, 1999). In the Netherlands and Germany, sex workers who are infected with STDs are compulsorily hospitalized, albeit at no cost (Kibicho, 2009). In his study of sex trafficking, Kara gathered from a reliable source in the Mumbai red light district that most victims of sex trafficking rarely survived beyond their mid thirties mainly due to the fact that “most were infected with HIV [and/or] suffered acute drug and alcohol addictions” (2009:15).

Sex tourism involving children has been seen as a direct response to Western tourists’ fear of AIDS among adult prostitutes (Miller, 2006; Williams, 1999). The belief that children are less likely to be infected is inaccurate, as children are more prone to sexually transmitted diseases, less aware of safe sex practices and less likely to impose



conditions of safe sex on their customers (Williams, 1999). Some cultural myths that men are rejuvenated when they have sex with virgins or young girls promote the demand for young girls in the global sex market (Williams, 1999). Organized crime groups or brothels trafficking in women and children are aggressive in procuring young girls or children to their clients' tastes. Sneaky suppliers when unable to immediately provide a girl or child to meet their clients' specifications have gone as far as tricking their clients into believing that they were having sex with young girls or even virgins hence obtaining a higher price. A case in point is Siri, a 15-year-old girl who was youthful enough to be presented to clients on a repeated basis as new (Bales, 2004).

The current study of commercial sex in Douala builds on existing public health concerns relating to prostitution and examines specifically the extent to which both prostitutes and clients (as reported by prostitutes) take into account the existence of diseases, particularly sexually transmitted diseases, in their interactions.

#### **2.9.4 PROSTITUTION AND DRUGS**

“There appears to be a strong connection between drug use and prostitution, although the causal nexus is unclear” (Miller, 2009:549). This is illustrated by the response of a drug addicted prostitute, Verity, in Maher's (1997) study of women drug users, who used sex work to generate income in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York. When asked if crack was the main drug Verity used while working, her response was, “yeah, because I can't go out sober on a date, because I don't like what I do and I do it for my (dope) habit. So I gotta be high on somethin' before I get into that next car” (Maher, 1997:133). It appears from the response that Verity needed the drug to be able to handle the stresses relating to the job, the same job which she also needed to sustain her

drug habit. “Regardless of the causal sequence or sequences, there is widespread agreement that prostitution and drug abuse are often tightly coupled and mutually reinforcing on the streets” (Miller, 2009:564).

Maher (1997) finds that contrary to the stereotype of the drug addicted prostitute who would do anything to get drugs, the women interviewed in Bushwick had norms aimed at maintaining their sense of dignity and self-respect with regard to prostituting. Like other prostitutes not necessarily addicted to drugs, they worried about violence and their exposure to risk. They were conscious about the value of the exchange in sex work and although they sometimes compromised their beliefs by performing sexual acts for drugs, their main preference would be to engage in a sexual act for monetary exchange. Among themselves, they tend to blame the reduction in prices on other prostitutes who accepted very little compensation (including drugs) in exchange for sexual acts, which undercut the going rates. Paradoxically, the “other” who is in this instance is a person who accepts the bare minimum (for example inhalation of crack) in exchange for the sexual act, is not necessary someone else but in some instances the same person criticizing the action. Although the women criticized such behavior by others, which caused them frustration and drove down their prices, they themselves also engaged in it from time to time (Maher, 1997).

In Maher’s study, there were two types of female sex workers: those who had engaged in sex work prior to drug use, referred to as “the professionals,” and those who started sex work after the use of crack, known as “the new girls on the block,” with the second category of women being more likely to engage in sex-for-crack exchanges (Maher, 1997:140). The sex workers in Bushwick who were also users of drugs or the

drug users in Bushwick who used sex work as an income generating activity attested to the same kinds of experiences as sex workers elsewhere. They had similar experience of violence, ranging from theft to rape (Maher, 1997). While the relationship between drugs and street prostitution is well established in developed countries, particularly the U.S., it appears to be less prevalent in at least some developing countries (Miller, 2002). The current investigation provides an opportunity to investigate the role drugs may play among sex workers in Cameroon.

### **2.9.5 VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

In discussing prostitution and sex trafficking, violence and abuse seem to come with the territory. In fact, violence is prevalent in prostitution related activities worldwide (Kibicho, 2009; Miller, 2006; Sanders, 2004; Koh Bela, 2007). While the violence used to ensure compliance in sex trafficking is almost institutionalized, in instances of voluntary prostitution, the incidence is comparatively reduced but still present. “Physical and sexual abuse of street prostitutes is epidemic” (Miller, 2009:549). Sex workers are victims of rape, including gang rape, and are robbed and assaulted in the context of prostitution (Miller, 2006; Porter and Bonilla, 2010; Weitzer, 2010).

Criminalization and stigmatizing of sex workers account for the high incidence of violence against women working on the street (Miller, 2009). Fourteen out of sixteen women interviewed by Miller and Schwartz (1995) had been physically attacked. Church et al. (2001), in a study across three cities in Britain, found 81 percent of street workers compared to 48 percent of those who worked indoors had experienced violence from clients (Sanders, 2004:1705). During a period spanning from 1989 to 2002, sex workers working mainly on the streets in Birmingham “reported over 400 separate incidents of

physical and sexual attacks by clients to a local health organization” (Sanders, 2004:1708-1709). Consequently, “for female street workers in Britain, selling sex means managing risks” (Sanders, 2004:1703).

Looking at only robbery, beating and rape as variables, we can look at a British study referred to by Weitzer (2009:10) that compared 115 street prostitutes and 125 who worked in saunas or as call girls (referred to in this chapter as indoor prostitutes), and found that 37 percent of the street prostitutes reported they were robbed compared to 10 percent of those who worked indoors, 27 percent of street prostitutes reported they had been beaten compared to 1 percent of indoor prostitutes, and 22 percent of street prostitutes had been raped compared to 2 percent indoor prostitutes.

Studies show that “a relatively small proportion of sex buyers account for most of the violence” (Lowman and Atchison, 2006:292, quoted in Miller, 2009:562). Apart from violence from customers, studies also show a high possibility of street workers experiencing violence from “other working women, predatory men involved in prostitution, the general public and severe physical harm from boyfriends/pimps” (Sanders, 2004:1705, referring to Benson, 1998 and May et al., 2000). Violence by way of harassment is also directed at sex workers working on the streets by community protesters (Sanders, 2004). As unfortunate as it seems, it is not uncommon for the police who are supposed to ensure law and order to be the perpetrators of violence against sex workers. Sex workers recount incidents of verbal, physical and sexual abuse from the police (Miller, 2006).

The nature of risks from pimps and dealers is different for street workers and for those who work indoors (Sanders, 2004). Some studies show high percentages of indoor

prostitutes who have never experienced violence while working (Weitzer, 2010). Sanders separates the hazards into public and private manifestation of risk. “In public, women fear violence from clients and other people on the street, arrest from the police with the increasing possibility of imprisonment and further harassment from community protesters. In private, the stigmatization and marginalization as a result of working in prostitution are equally stressful as women constantly fear that their friends, family or partner could discover their money-making activities” (2004:1705).

The presence of violence in prostitution and sex trafficking is undeniable and in some instances recurrent. Sex workers take measures to minimize their exposure to violence. “Violence, as an occupational hazard, has varying consequences for the women [in Sanders’ study]. Some decide that prostitution is too dangerous and leave all together, or leave the street for a safer working environment. Others learn quickly by their mistakes and change their working practices to reduce the risks of violence” (Sanders, 2004:1710). The moments when sex workers feel the most vulnerable with clients is during the negotiation phase and when performing the sexual act (Sanders, 2004). Sex workers have been known to choose fixed locations for their activities. Some carry some form of weapon which could be used to defend themselves if attacked. These weapons are usually knives, blades, sprays and lighters (Sanders, 2004). In some instances, they would either involve their friends or boyfriends in the selection of customers or use the streets only to solicit clients but perform the services at indoor locations (Sanders, 2004).

In spite of the pervasive nature of violence towards prostitutes, there seems to be a perception by the perpetrators that prostitutes deserve the violence that befalls them. The criminal justice systems in many countries have not been known to vigorously

prosecute those who attack prostitutes. In interviews conducted with 16 street prostitutes, Miller and Schwartz identified the following rape myths: “that people often see prostitutes as unrapeable; that no harm is done; that prostitutes deserve to be raped; and that all prostitutes are the same” (1995:1). It appears that for some men, the fact that these women were prostitutes meant they were available for all forms of abuse; they treated them not as individuals but as members of a category, subjecting one prostitute to retaliation for the actions of another (Miller and Schwartz, 1995). There appears to be consistent cross-national evidence that street-based sex work places prostitutes at the greatest risk for violence, and that such violence is tied to the stigma associated with prostitution as well as its criminalization. The current study investigates the extent and contexts associated with violence in the sex industry in Douala, adding new information about these problems in an understudied setting.

#### **2.9.6 CLIENTS OR JOHNS**

Also referred to as dates, tricks, clients, or patrons, men who patronize prostitutes are commonly referred to in the United States as johns. The gender of the prostitute has been assumed as female (although we note the variations) and the gender of their customer is presumed male. “Clients come from a diverse background in terms of age, social class, ethnicity and sexual identification” (Scott et al., 2005:321, referring to Minichiello et al., 1999).

As discussed above, law enforcement efforts have consistently weighed unfavorably on the side of the female prostitute, reinforcing already existing gender and class inequalities (Kelly, 2008). Within the context of Mexico, like in many countries in the world, “it is working women who are subject to arrest, not their male pimps or male

clients” (Kelly, 2008:62). Recently however, there has been a shift in law enforcement policy now targeting the customers, at least in some settings (Weitzer, 2010). “Traditionally, the act of patronizing a prostitute was not a crime in the United States, but it is now criminalized in all 50 states” (Weitzer, 2010:30). In spite of this criminalization, the percentages of men charged with prostitution-related arrests in 2002 (9 percent in Phoenix, 12 percent in Boston and 14 percent in Las Vegas) show that law enforcement’s focus is still mainly on the prostitute (Weitzer, 2010:30). Apart from arrests, shaming methods, which include newspaper captions, billboard posters and television programs, are also used to expose, embarrass and deter men who are seen to be soliciting prostitutes (Weitzer, 2010).

In the 1990s, John Schools were introduced, with the primary objective of providing deterrence through education. Men who were found to be soliciting or purchasing the services of a prostitute were given an alternative to incarceration whereupon payment of a monetary fine in the amount of US\$500 and attending educational classes, they could avoid having a criminal record (Della Giusta et al., 2008). These diversion programs target the buyers and have been shown to have a certain level of effectiveness since some johns were frightened at the prospect of arrests and embarrassment vis-à-vis their families if the latter found out.

The embarrassment which comes from being associated with prostitution or paying for the services of a prostitute is the stigmatization reserved for customers. “There is the perception that men who ‘have to pay for it’ have some personal deficiency or perversity, and such men risk censure if others discover their involvement in this seedy activity” (Weitzer, 2000: 268, referring to Campbell, 1998:156). Monto attempts to

“identify and correct some misconceptions about customers and explore their motives” (2010:234). The first myth addressed about prostitution is that patronizing prostitution is a natural aspect of male sexual behavior. Monto makes reference to a 1992 U.S. National Health and Social Life Survey and the General Social Survey reported in 2001, both of which showed that “fewer than one-fifth of men in nationally representative samples had ever had sexual experiences with prostitutes, and few than 1 percent had done so during the previous year” (2010:235).

Why then do men go to prostitutes? Monto, relying on research conducted in the U.S., compiles this set of reasons: “men are attracted to paid sex because they desire acts they cannot receive from their partners; they are able to have sex with a larger number of sexual partners; they are attracted to specific physical characteristics; they like limited emotional involvement; and they are excited at the illicit nature of the act... some men seek prostitutes in order to inflict violence on them... men’s primary motivations for having sexual relations with prostitutes are desire for sex or for companionship. Men are also motivated by the mystery and excitement associated with risky encounter, the belief that prostitutes are women of ‘exceptional sexual powers,’ and an interest in avoiding emotional involvement or the risk of rejection” (2010:244-245).

The reasons given by customers in descending order are: wanting to be with a woman who likes to get nasty, being excited by the idea of approaching a prostitute, being in control when having sex, being shy and awkward when trying to meet a woman, wanting to have a variety of partners, having no time for a conventional relationship, needing to have sex when aroused, not wanting the responsibility of a conventional relationship, believing that most women find them unattractive, reporting difficulty



meeting women who are not nude dancers or prostitutes, liking rough hard sex and preferring sex with a prostitute over that with a conventional woman, and prostitution as a “quick easy way to get sex” (Monto, 2010:246-248).

In the rural counties in Nevada where brothels are regulated, the clientele often come from a population of young men who are away from work to earn money in mines, “construction workers, the military, truckers and tourists” (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010:263). Depending on the market strategy adopted by the brothel owners, customers sometimes stop there out of curiosity, out of the need to satisfy some desire, sexual or emotional, or merely as an opportunity to add to their tourist experience (Hausbeck and Brents, 2010).

The motivations for purchasing sex are therefore varied and depend on the individual purchaser’s sex, class, education, background, and status (Della Giusta et. al, 2008). While these factors can be examined with a view to gauging exposure and propensity to purchase sex from prostitutes, these criteria would not determine with certainty whether or not someone would purchase sex from a prostitute. This is made obvious by high profile prostitution-related scandals, which are commonplace in the contemporary era, touching people from varying socioeconomic backgrounds and even high political status.

“Clients of sex come from all walks of life (and include women), they are not monsters, and sex workers as a rule do not hate them” (Murray, 1998:62). This study provides an opportunity to investigate from the sex workers’ perspectives who are the johns in Douala, paying attention to aspects of their socioeconomic backgrounds that come across from their interactions with sex workers.

## **2.10 CONCLUSION**

The available literature on prostitution and sex trafficking provides rich insight into the considerations undertaken by a range of parties who intervene in the commercial sex industry. The inability of the intervening parties to reach a consensus on numerous issues around prostitution and sex trafficking furthers a series of debates that maintain prostitution and sex trafficking as topical issues. This remains the case even as some of the experiences of prostitutes and sex trafficking victims may be similarly experienced or shared. Sharp differences have been noted across geographical areas in the manifestations of some of the themes which have been discussed in this chapter.

In discussing issues with serious policy ramifications such as prostitution and sex trafficking, a one size fits all approach is not workable and therefore not advisable. It is for this reason that the present dissertation draws on the literature reviewed in this chapter in informing the interview guide used in interviews with research subjects. The responses obtained from the interviews form the subject of subsequent analysis, which is aimed at uncovering the extent to which the experiences and motivations of prostitutes in Cameroon are similar or different from those of prostitutes elsewhere, as discussed in this chapter. These analyses will form the basis of policy recommendations for the commercial sex industry in Cameroon. Before proceeding to the presentation of my findings, I next provide a detailed description of the study setting (Chapter 3), and a fuller description of the methodology employed in this investigation (Chapter 4).

## CHAPTER 3

### STUDY SETTING: DOUALA, CAMEROON

#### 3.1. CAMEROON – OVERVIEW

The setting for this study is Douala, Cameroon. The Republic of Cameroon, more commonly referred to as Cameroon, is located in West Central Africa, sharing borders with the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the West, the Republic of Chad in the North, the Central African Republic in the East and the People's Republic of Congo, Republic of Gabon and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in the South. Cameroon occupies a geographical surface area of 475,440 sq km, described by the CIA World Fact Book as slightly larger than California and ranked the 54<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of countries by geographical surface area in a ranking where Russia, Canada, the United States of America and China are ranked in the first four positions.

**FIGURE 3.1 Map of Cameroon**



Map retrieved from [www.oxfordcartographers.com](http://www.oxfordcartographers.com)

Data retrieved from the CIA World Fact Book (03/19/2012) shows the population of Cameroon in July 2012 as approximately 20,129,878. This figure takes into account the HIV/AIDS rate of 5.3% in 2009 and AIDS mortality estimated at 37,000 deaths in 2009, low life expectancy (53 years for men and 55 years for women), high infant mortality (59.7/1000 births) and low population growth rates (2.082% in 2011).

The country is divided into ten Regions, an appellation adopted by presidential decree on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2008. These Regions, which were previously known as Provinces, are: the Littoral Region with Douala as its capital city, the South West Region (Buea capital city), the North West Region (Bamenda capital city), the Western Region (Bafoussam capital city), The Centre Region (Yaoundé capital city), the South Region (Ebolowa capital city), the East Region (Bertoua capital city), the North Region (Garoua capital city), the Far North Region (Maroua capital city) and the Adamawa Region (Ngaoundere capital city).

Buea in the South West Region is home to Mount Cameroon, known as *Mongoma Ndemi* in Bakweri, the local dialect of Buea, or Mountain of Greatness. Mount Cameroon is the largest active volcano in the whole of West and Central Africa, rising to 13, 255 feet above sea level and is an attraction to domestic and international hikers and mountain climbers, some of whom participate in an annual mountain ascension race.

Also in the South West Region is a location called Debundscha, whose remarkably wet climate has gained it a ranking among the top five rainiest places in the world with an annual rainfall of about 411.9 inches. The rainfall in Debundscha defies the well-known demarcation of seasons in Cameroon, namely rainy or wet and dry. Not far from Debundscha is Limbe, a coastal city with beautiful black volcanic sand beaches.

Other pristine beaches are found in Kribi (in the Centre Region) and Douala (Littoral Region) making these coastal cities highly attractive to tourists.

The Western and North Western Regions of Cameroon are hilly and very fertile. The vegetation along the major highways leading to these Regions is spectacular. Little wonder the indigenous people from these Regions are referred to as people from the grass fields or in Pidgin English “graffi people.” The main attraction of these Regions apart from their relatively cool climate, is cultural. The traditional form of Chieftaincy is still practiced where Chiefs live in palaces with their numerous wives, children and servants and are respected with reverence. Palaces are easily identifiable from their architecture and art. Popular places usually visited by foreigners are the Palace of the Sultan of the Bamoun people in the Western Region and the Palace of the Chief of Mankon and other Chiefs in the North West Region.

Cameroon also boasts of well conserved wildlife in the Far North Region. The Waza National Park, which is a national park covering 1,700 square km, is home to some species which are either endangered or extinct elsewhere in the world. A visitor to the Waza Park will be able to count lions, kordofan giraffes, kob antelopes, warthogs, roans, red-fronted gazelles, chimpanzees, gorillas and about 379 species of birds among its inhabitants.

A heritage which is shared by Cameroon alongside the Republic of Congo, Gabon and the Central African Republic for instance are the pygmies who are the Baka people found in the Eastern Region. The Encyclopedia Britannica (Pygmy.Britannica.com retrieved 10/11/2011) defines a pygmy as “a member of an ethnic group whose average height is unusually short” with adult males less than 4 feet

and 11 inches tall (en.wikipedia.org retrieved 09/21/2013). The pygmies have, to a large extent, resisted change and have maintained most of their traditional modes of dressing and livelihood as hunters and gatherer. They are also rumored to be great healers leading many people from other areas of the country to them in search of traditional cures for ailments or even for potions believed to bring luck or induce love.

### **3.2. CAMEROON'S COLONIAL PAST**

Like many African nations, Cameroon's recent history is shaped by its colonial past. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Portuguese explorers discovered the Wouri River which they named "Rio dos Cameroes" (River of Prawns). The name Cameroon originated from this discovery but not before going through another variation in 1884. In 1884, the German Chancellor Bismark sent Dr. Gustav Nachtigal to search for a colonial empire. Following the signing of treaties with the Kings of Douala, Bimbia and Batanga, Kamerun was declared a German colony (protectorate). The Germans invested in road and railway infrastructure, houses, schools, ports and plantations using forced labor. Some of the buildings and roads constructed by the Germans during that era are still being used today in Cameroon.

During World War I the Germans were defeated by British, French and Belgian forces. The country was partitioned between the United Kingdom and France under a League of Nations mandate (June 28, 1919) introducing French and English languages, two new languages, which were to remain as the official languages of Cameroon. These languages co-exist with the 230 local dialects spoken in Cameroon by the different ethnic groups (Neba, 1999).

Colonization by the French was by way of assimilation where the colonies were governed by French administrators with no participation from the locals who were regarded as immature and ignorant. Southern Cameroon, which was under British control, was governed by indirect rule making use of African traditional rulers. While colonization may have been beneficial in terms in structural development for African nations, including Cameroon, it has mainly been criticized as a form of marginalization of the locals by the colonialists. The criticisms against colonization include *inter alia*: restrictions on what and where locals could cultivate, destructions of their crops, seizure of land, imposition of Christian doctrine and disregard for tradition and culture, gendered recruitment of labor for commercial plantations destabilizing the nuclear and extended family structures (Kah, 2011; Nana-Fabu, 2006).

It was within this context that both French- and English-governed Cameroons clamored for and obtained their independence from the colonial masters. The part of Cameroon governed by the French gained independence on January 1, 1960 and became known as the “*République du Cameroun*” or Republic of Cameroon. On October 1, 1961 the Southern Cameroon governed by the British voted to join with the Republic of Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1972, by way of a new constitution, the Federal State was replaced by a unitary state called the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, the name of the country was changed to the Republic of Cameroon.

Nana-Fabu (2006) examines the economic status of women in Cameroon from pre-colonial (before 1884) to colonial times (1884-1960) and modern/post-colonial times (1960 to present). “Most women are subsistence farmers. Others are self-employed in the

informal sectors as dressmakers, petty traders, domestic servants and prostitutes. Their chances of acquiring wealth are slim, thanks to their lack of access to critical resources such as bank loans and modern technology” (Nana-Fabu:2006,146). The obstacles which women face in terms of access to loans and modern technology is a result of colonialism, which introduced industrialized modes of agriculture to which men, and not women, were exposed. This leads to Nana-Fabu’s conclusion that “overall today, more Cameroon women are economically dependent on men relative to pre-colonial times” (2006:146). This study explores the extent of this dependence and its manifestation in the commercial sex industry in Cameroon, particularly in the city of Douala.

### **3.3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Cameroon possesses numerous attractions to potential tourists and a diversity of people reflective of the Arab, Hausa, Fulani, Sudanese and Bantu origins. It is this uniqueness that prompted the Government of Cameroon, in a bid to encourage tourism, to describe Cameroon as “Africa in miniature” ([en.wikioedia.org/wiki/Tourism\\_in\\_Cameroon](http://en.wikioedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Cameroon) retrieved 09/21/2013). Some tourists visit Cameroon because they are interested in eco-tourism; others are interested in Cameroon’s commercial sex industry.

The CIA World Fact Book describes Cameroon as a destination country for sex tourists and a country of origin for the purposes of sex trafficking. Ntonye Njel, in an article titled “*Cameroun, Industrie du sexe: de hautes personnalités dans le collimateur d’Interpol*” published in a renowned Cameroonian daily newspaper, *Dikalo*, discusses the growing nature of sex tourism in Cameroon, bringing the country to the attention of Interpol and placing top government officials under its scrutiny (02/17/ 2010 *Dikalo*). The women, whose ages range from 19-35, two-thirds of whom are recruited from



Universities, make use of the internet and are at the disposal of expatriates, foreigners and sometimes locals on business trips (Ntonye Njel, 2010). Commercial sex activities are usually carried out in Douala, Yaoundé, Kribi and Limbe and the cost of services per night is earned mainly by third parties called “promoters” who earn millions and billions of CFA Francs per year in this sector (Ntonye Njel, 2010).

Yet the Penal Code of the Republic of Cameroon (Law No. 65-LF-24 of November 12, 1965 and Law No. 67-LF-1 of June 12, 1967) in Section 343 criminalizes prostitution and specifies a sanction for prostitution applicable to the prostitute and the client.

#### **Section 343 Prostitution**

(1) Any person of either sex who habitually engages in sexual relations with another person for remuneration shall be sentenced to, six months to five years imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 (\$40) to 500,000 francs (\$1,000)<sup>2</sup>.

(2) The same sanctions shall apply to anybody who, for purposes of prostitution or debauchery, publicly solicits persons of either sex through gestures, words expressed orally or in writing, or by any other means.

Given that Section 343 (1) makes reference to a person who “habitually engages”

in sexual relations with another person for remuneration, the question arises in a situation where a person engages in only one sexual act for remuneration. One sexual act does not appear sufficient to be categorized as “habitual.” Section 343 (2) extends the sanction of six months to five years of imprisonment and fine of 20,000 to 500,000 francs to persons who for the purposes of prostitution publicly solicit other persons. This sanction (which is exactly the same as that for the habitual offender) will apply to the occasional offender if by construction Section 343 (1) is not applicable. In essence both soliciting for the

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<sup>2</sup> Exchange rate: USD\$1 = CFAF 500 (CFA francs).

purposes of prostitution and prostitution itself carry the same sanction under the Cameroonian Penal Code.

Section 294 of the Penal Code criminalizes aiding and abetting prostitution and living off of prostitution earnings. The sanction is doubled when the offence is accompanied by coercion, fraud or where the offender is armed or is the owner, manager or someone in charge of a location where prostitution is habitually practiced, like a brothel, or when the victim is below 21 years of age or the offender is a parent or guardian of the victim. Section 294 which targets pimping does not specifically use the words sex trafficking but our knowledge of sex trafficking shows that the main ingredients are covered in this section: coercion and fraud.

#### **Section 294 Immoral earnings**

(1) Whoever procures, aids or facilitates another person prostitution, or shares in the proceeds of another's prostitution, whether habitual or otherwise, or who is subsidized by any person engaging in prostitution shall be punished with imprisonment for from six months to five years and with fine of from 20,000 (\$40) to 1,000 000 francs (\$2,000).

(2) Whoever lives with a person engaging in prostitution shall be presumed to be subsidized by her, unless he shows that his own resources are sufficient to enable him to support himself.

(3) The punishment shall be doubled where:

- (a) The offence is accompanied: by coercion or by fraud or where the offender is armed; or where he is the owner, manager or otherwise in charge of an establishment where prostitution is habitually practiced;
- (b) Where the offence has been committed to the detriment of any person under the age of twenty-one;
- (c) Where the offender is the father or mother, guardian or person with customary responsibility...

(7) The prostitute herself shall not be treated as accessory to any offence under this section.

In Section 294(7), given the intervening factors, ranging from pimping to outright sex trafficking, the fact that "the prostitute herself shall not be treated as accessory" is a position which is consistent with the policy of decriminalization discussed in Chapter 2.

### **3.4 DOUALA - OVERVIEW**

Douala is Cameroon's economic capital and the country's largest city, with a population of over two million people. It is characterized by widespread migration and cultural diversity, both of which have implications for the nature of its commercial sex industry. In 2007, Douala was ranked the 27<sup>th</sup> most expensive city in the world and the most expensive city in Africa (Mercer's 2010 Cost of Living Survey Highlights, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douala>, retrieved 10/02/2014). This is a rather curious classification for a city in an African country ranked 153<sup>rd</sup> out of 182 countries in its Human Development Index, measured along three quality of life dimensions: "life expectancy at birth, level of education, [and] standard of living" (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:37).

The high cost of living in Douala, which is comparable to cities like Paris and New York, has not deterred immigrants - both domestic and international - from relocating to the city with the expectation of making a better life for themselves. Neither rural-to-urban nor urban-to-urban migrations in favor of Douala are recent phenomena. These longstanding patterns of in-migration result from both infrastructural access and the opportunities these provide. In 1955 the Wouri Bridge, which connects Douala to the western, southwest and northwest regions, was commissioned. Three years later, the international airport was commissioned, adding to transportation and employment opportunities already provided by the existing deep sea port in Douala. Indeed, "90% of the country's imports and exports transit through the Douala ports, making Douala a strategic location for companies, including banks and warehouses" (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of social data,

Littoral Province, 2000:20). The migratory pull of the city “is partly due to the presence of industry (including fishing activities...[and] is further enhanced by its road, air and rail network” (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of social data, Littoral Province, 2000:20).

By the late 1950s, the city’s population was 130,000, but only 24,000 inhabitants were originally from Douala (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:17). These figures demonstrate not only the tremendous growth that has taken place in the metropolitan area since that time - from 130,000 to 2,053,000 in just over 50 years - but also reveal its lengthy history as a destination city for both Cameroonian and international migrants. Not surprisingly, Douala has both a high population density (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:30) and a growth rate that is above the national average (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of Social Data, Littoral Province, 2000:6).

Yet migration patterns are gendered, resulting in a sex ratio (101.29) that is slightly skewed in favor of men (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:33). Men tend to migrate more than women, resulting in a population that is disproportionately young and male (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of social data, Littoral Province, 2000). Such migratory patterns impact both the extent of commercial sex (with the disproportionate presence of young men generating market conditions for prostitution) and its organization (White, 1990).

The migration tendency towards Douala shows that for many persons in other towns or villages in Cameroon - men, women and children alike - Douala presents a place of opportunities. While “there are no specific data on the revenue of households resident

in Douala” (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:38), it is a setting that provides many opportunities for wage labor. In contrast, the main means of earning a livelihood in rural areas is by small scale farming or hunting. The minimum wage in Cameroon is CFAF 28,216 a month, or approximately \$59. The possibility of earning on average \$60-\$150 a month as a security guard, \$30-\$140 a month as a maid or nanny, \$100-\$200 a month as a driver, or \$20-\$100 as a waiter or waitress in Douala is far more enticing than remaining in rural areas where there is little demand for these services, and when present, they provide wages at a tenth of those available in the city.

Moreover, Douala is the home to many industries that have their registered offices in different parts of the metropolitan area. These companies, sometimes owned by multinational corporations, private parties or public private partnerships, employ thousands of people and account for “more than 66% of companies in Cameroon” (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of Social Data. Littoral Province, 2000: 7). In fact, the number of persons employed by Douala’s large number of industries only gives an indication of the number of persons whose livelihoods depend on these companies. There is a popular assertion that each worker has at least ten dependents to support, depending on the size of their family and extended family. While the average household size in Douala is smaller than in rural areas, and has declined in recent years from 4.8 in 1987 to 3.8 by 2005 (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:35), some persons who live and work in urban areas financially support their parents and other family members who live in rural areas.

Yet Douala is also a city of income and economic disparities. While executives in multinational corporations in Douala make CFAF 5,000,000 (\$10,000) a month and

upwards, the average annual household income is less than half of this (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011: 38-39). Moreover, despite the presence of these industries, Douala has high rates of both unemployment and underemployment, and this is especially the case for women. In 2000, the unemployment rate was estimated as 23.6% for Douala compared to a national rate of 8.4% (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of Social Data, Littoral Province, 2000: 6). More recently, unemployment was “estimated at 16.2% for people aged between 15-64 years,” but with large gender disparities: men’s unemployment rate was 10.1%, compared to 23.5% for women (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:38). Underemployment, likewise, is gendered: it is “estimated at 47.2% and mainly concerns women in the informal sector (total 62.2%)” (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011: 38).

While industries and the civil service provide formal employment for some, particularly those with educational qualifications, for the majority of persons in Douala, opportunities to earn a livelihood come from the informal sector. The informal sector bridges the gap between the growth in immigrants seeking work and the limited availability of job opportunities in the formal economy. The informal sector “is a conglomeration of small businesses that absorb roughly 51.5% of the active population employed in the city of Douala compared with a national average of 83.8%” (Socio-Economic Regional Survey in Cameroon: Poverty Eradication – Improvement of social data, Littoral Province, 2000:27). Professions found in the informal sector include all types of paid labor, including traders or receptionists in shops or supermarkets, hair dressers employed in hairdressing salons, mechanics in a car garages, workers in car

wash shops, as well as a vast array of street vendors, and of course, those who engage in prostitution.

Children also comprise a notable portion of those who work in the informal economy. This is despite impressive educational statistics across gender: school enrollments in 2007 were 96.8% for boys compared to 99% for girls (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011). What accounts for these high figures is the low tuition for primary education in government-owned academic institutions. Yet, the numbers dwindle as students go beyond initial registration and primary school education, as parents are required to buy school uniforms, books and feed the children during the school week. This creates economic strain in some households, as not only do parents lose one source of revenue (via their children's participation in the informal economy) but are also required to take care of children whose income earning capacity during the school year diminishes. Moreover, the reality is that although education greatly improves a person's chances of finding a job, it does not guarantee employment.

As a result, adults are not the only persons whose migration involves the search for economic opportunities. With specific reference to migrant children, they are usually seen on the street hawking food items like candy, boiled groundnuts and fruits for their parents. Female street child hawkers are sometimes victims of molestations and other sexual crimes, most of which go unreported because the victims are afraid to report and do not know their rights. In addition, some children are known to work as "houseboys" or "house girls," serving in households as hired domestic laborers. The ages of these children range anywhere from 9 to 18 and in most cases, they come from rural areas further away from Douala.

Concerns about child labor, school enrollment and attendance among such youth and “the socio-economic situation of very young women is a major issue facing the State and the authorities of Douala” (Communauté Urbaine de Douala, 2011:34). These concerns persist as world organizations continue to list Cameroon among the source, transit and destination countries for child trafficking for the provision of domestic labor. While exploited children, including from neighboring countries like Nigeria and Benin, may in fact be working under exploitative conditions in Cameroon and Douala in particular, it remains very difficult to prove. Those who employ child domestics tend to be private about the relationships they have with their domestic staff, some of whom are passed off as family members. These contexts likely play a role in young women’s pathways into prostitution.

### **3.5 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF DOUALA**

Despite the above-noted challenges, for migrants in search of opportunity, all roads lead to Douala. As the economic capital of Cameroon and a city of migrants with a thriving informal economy, it is unsurprising that Douala has a large sex industry. The diverse organization of the city’s sex industry is perhaps best illustrated through a geographical description of the Douala metropolitan area.



**FIGURE 3.2** Map of Douala



Map retrieved from the internet (<http://www.ecrcom.net/nos-produits/23-plans-de-ville-et-pays/76-cameroun-douala-centre.html>)

The Douala metropolitan landscape is varied and colorful. The variety comes from a mix of office and residential buildings all painted to suit the taste of their owners. It is therefore possible to see within the same street a big yellow building, next to a red and white building, both across from a blue and white building, all showcasing their

respective corporate colors. These colorful streets of Douala are filled with workers gainfully employed both in the formal and informal sectors. Most of these workers live in the outskirts of the city and only return to their homes at the close of business. During the day and in the early hours of the night, however, workers rely on street-side vendors and hawkers for their shopping needs. Food, clothing, shoes, mobile-telephone cards and telephone credit can be bought on the street.

Sex can also be bought on the streets of Douala. Douala does not officially have red light districts reserved for commercial sex activities, yet some quarters within the Douala metropolitan area are reputed for prostitution. These quarters, also known by their French equivalent “*quartiers*,” are: Bonaberi, Deido, Bali, Akwa, Bonanjo, and Village. In discussing the different quarters of Douala, many are prefixed with the word “Bona” which in the Douala dialect means “descendant of.” Bonaberi for example would therefore mean “descendants of Beri” or “descendants of Njo” in the case of Bonanjo.

Bonaberi is geographically located at the entrance of Douala from the West. Bonaberi is a full-service quarter as people who happen to live and work in Bonaberi have no need to venture into the other parts of the rest of the city of Douala. Bonaberi boasts of branch offices for most of the major banks, supermarkets and gas stations. What is unique about Bonaberi is the presence of containers by the roadside serving as makeshift shops selling new or secondhand products from the United States of America imported to cater to the tastes of the mainly Anglophone immigrant population. Bonaberi, like any full-service town, has its supply of prostitutes, some of whom are local and some from other quarters in Douala in search of opportunities or anonymity or both. In discussing prostitutes in Bonaberi, of remarkable repute or disrepute is a bar known as

“Kwasa Kwasa” (named after a well known dance style originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970s and made popular in the rest of Francophone Africa in the 1980s). At Kwasa Kwasa, young and old women entertain men by providing suitable conversation while they drink and eat “soya” (grilled beef). These conversations sometimes lead to negotiations of commercial sex transactions, which if successful are finalized thereafter.

After entering Douala through Bonaberi, immediately after crossing the Wouri Bridge which connects Bonaberi to the rest of Douala, is a central point known as “*Rond Point*” Deido. Deido is a quarter inhabited mostly by its indigenous people also known in French as “*les autochtones*” who have resisted selling their land to immigrants over the years. In Deido the traditional Douala family household is reflected. Families live in housing complexes or compounds reflecting the extended family model where three generations all live in the same premises, and bring in spouses and sometimes in-laws to live with them.

These traditional infrastructures found in Deido exist alongside some degree of entrepreneurship evidenced in the building of hotels, motels, bars and night clubs. A street in Deido, which comes closest to a red light district if Douala was to have one, is the “Street of Joy” or “*Rue de la joie*.” Prostitutes, who are also referred to as “girls of joy” (Songué, 1986), are found on *Rue de la joie* by clients who go there to drink, eat or solicit commercial sex.

The *Rue de la joie* appellation originated from a previously existing street in Bali, another quarter in Douala. The *Rue de la joie* in Bali in the 1980s and 1990s possessed essentially the same characteristics as the *Rue de la joie* in Deido but witnessed a

transformation in the year 2000 and beyond. Its reputation as a location for prostitutes has shifted slightly. While prostitutes can be found on *Rue de la joie* in Bali, the numbers are greatly reduced when compared to the 1990s. The street is known more for its affordable road side charcoal grilled fish, a meal made popular by the indigenous coastal Douala people.

It is not very certain what transformed the *Rue de la joie* in Bali, but it is worth speculating that what happened to “*Quartier Bayangi*” - removing it completely from the prostitution landscape in Douala - may have happened to *Rue de la joie* in Bali. *Quartier Bayangi* is a quarter in any Cameroonian city which inhabits predominantly Bayangi people (indigenes of Mamfe in the South West Region). In *Quartier Bayangi*, there were Bayangi women who lived in modest rooms from which they worked as prostitutes.

Historically, Bayangi women as far back as the 1960s and 1970s migrated from Mamfe to work as prostitutes in other cities in Cameroon and in foreign countries such as Holland and Switzerland. These women were credited for having educated their children and other family members, and acquired real estate with proceeds derived from prostitution. Interestingly, although prostitution was stigmatized within the Bayangi tribe, women who worked as prostitutes were respected for what they were able to accomplish financially.

In Douala the Bayangi quarters was close to Bali. The prostitutes of Bayangi quarters in the late 1990s and early 2000 did not get a chance to work to retirement amassing fortunes like their predecessors. Instead, they died in alarming numbers from HIV/AIDS and although they were replaced by younger generations the replacements were not sustainable. The young girls who immigrated to replicate the work and lifestyles

of their aunts or sisters soon also became ill and died. The advent of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon was met with many myths and denial as to its existence with people preferring to refer to the disease as “slow poison.” This mindset was to change, but not before the huge number of HIV/AIDS related deaths. While this may also account for the greatly reduced number of prostitutes visible in Bali it does not explain the concentration of prostitutes in others areas in Douala.

Geographically close to Bali are Akwa and Bonanjo, home to the *crème de la crème* of Douala, at least so it seems, given the exorbitant prices of the house rents in these areas, with rent going for as high as CFAF2,000,000 or \$4000/ month in a some areas. Akwa, and Bonanjo are similar in that they have high expatriate populations comparable only to Bonapriso. Bonanjo is relatively safe: because as the administrative headquarters of the city of Douala, it has a high law enforcement presence with the police and military all having their main offices in close proximity to one another. Neighboring quarters, Bonapriso and Akwa, all benefit from quick response from law enforcement in the event of any incidents. Many inhabitants of these quarters also are able to afford private security firms whose presence is evidenced by neatly dressed security guards sitting in front of gated townhouses or apartment complexes. Akwa and Bonanjo accommodate many businesses like snack bars, nightclubs, shops and international hotel chains. As a result, night life in these quarters is busy and, in spite of the high security presence, not always safe, as street children hover around begging or stealing. If we were to list three areas in Douala where prostitution is most visible, it would be Deido, Akwa and Bonanjo.

The quarters in Douala increase as the population continues to grow. The highway that connects Douala to Yaoundé cuts across three quarters in the outskirts of Douala. These are Yassa, Village (pronounced in French) and Ndogpassi. Out of these three quarters, Village is worth discussing. Village has quickly gained a reputation as a place where prostitutes solicit and request the lowest payments known to the Douala prostitution market. Rumor has it that sex can be bought at CFAF500 (\$1) in Village. Village, whose population is mainly traders, also boasts of having Chinese prostitutes at very low prices (Ndjio, 2009).

The geographical and socio-economical profile of Douala discussed in this chapter provides a context for the understanding of some of the factors which sex workers may consider in the organization of their work across different neighborhoods and venues in Douala. The extent to which sex workers actually take into account these factors will be studied using the selected research methodology in Chapter 4, yielding data, which will be subsequently analyzed with a view to providing concrete findings for the research question which focuses on the nature and organization of sex work in Douala.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH**

As seen in Chapter 2, prostitution-related debates focus largely on whether prostitution is a form of violence against women or whether it is freely chosen and constitutes a form of labor. While these debates continue, a large body of research consistently shows that women involved in prostitution do it for financial gain. Some women consider prostitution an easier and quicker alternative to making money than other employment opportunities, while others do it because they do not believe they possess the skills necessary for other forms of employment or that there are simply no other viable forms of employment at their disposal.

The existing social science research has not focused on the experiences of prostitutes in Cameroon and more specifically Douala. As described in Chapter 3, this coastal city, as the country's economic capital, provides economic opportunities and experiences a relatively high incidence of immigration among persons seeking improved conditions of living. The research questions guiding the current study thus are framed with specific reference to Douala, Cameroon. Douala was chosen as a study setting because of the highly visible number of prostitutes in its metropolitan area and neighboring quarters. Douala is also unique as it is a city which provides both domestic and international immigrants with numerous opportunities for financial gain, among which is prostitution. Given the size of Douala, and the number of migrants in the city, it

provides its inhabitants with a certain level of anonymity which is not found particularly in rural areas or smaller towns within Cameroon.

The goal of this investigation is to better understand the motivations and experiences of prostitutes in Douala. To accomplish this, the study is guided by three specific research questions:

1. What accounts for entrée into prostitution?
2. How is the sex industry organized in Douala?
3. What challenges and risks are faced by sex workers?

#### **4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**

This research adopts a qualitative method of inquiry. Qualitative research has been defined by Strauss and Corbin to mean “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (1998:10-11). Little is known about prostitution in Douala. Official statistics and other data are not available on the incidence of prostitution in Cameroon or in Douala specifically. In addition, aside from one study of Chinese prostitutes in Douala (Ndjio, 2009), research on individuals’ pathways to prostitution in Douala, how sex workers in Douala organize their work, and the challenges faced by sex workers has not been studied or documented. In understanding the daily lives of prostitutes and their motivations for prostitutions, qualitative research methods provide a useful tool as they “can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:11). Qualitative research is also useful in developing criminal justice policies (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The findings in this qualitative study will



provide information which may be useful for future policy-making on prostitution in Douala specifically, and Cameroon generally.

#### **4.2.1 DATA COLLECTION**

##### **4.2.1.1 SAMPLING**

This research is based on in-depth interviews with 50 prostitutes in Douala conducted between June and July 2012. The qualifying criteria to be interviewed were that the person ought to have worked in the commercial sex industry within the previous six months and should be above the age of eighteen. Snowball sampling techniques were utilized to identify study participants. I first identified those locations - previously described in Chapter 3 - where prostitutes are concentrated in Douala, namely Akwa, Deido, Bonanjo, Village and Bonaberi. Some of the prostitutes working in these areas solicit customers in plain view on the streets, others in snack bars and some in nightclubs.

Prior to gaining access, finding 50 prostitutes to interview appeared to be an uphill task. Indeed, contrary to conventional wisdom that prostitutes standing on street corners are accessible and can be spoken to easily, the reality was very different. As a female researcher, I initially found myself perceived by female street prostitutes more as a rival than as a potential client. This resulted in unintended aggressiveness while the prostitutes I first approached tried to maintain their turf or territory.

A few trips on foot around the areas of Hotel Ibis, Sawa Novotel and the Meridien Hotel, all in Bonanjo, where prostitutes stand on adjacent streets, convinced me of the fact that access would not be granted by my greeting them in the hope of striking up a conversation. I next contemplated the idea of talking to male street vendors, who sold telephone credit and candy and appeared friendly towards the prostitutes. I hoped to get a

few referrals. Not making any considerable progress with this group either, I came to the conclusion that finding someone who personally knew at least one prostitute was the surest way of gaining access.

Finally, I was referred to a prostitute by a family member's co-worker. This prostitute (who for the purposes of this study is called Nadege) was this co-worker's cousin, whom everyone in the family knew worked as a prostitute but no one dared mention. I gained access to Nadege by first convincing her of the fact that the cousin who referred her had only mentioned she served drinks in a nightclub and may know some prostitutes. This initial conversation with Nadege was held in the early hours of the evening at 7pm in order not to interfere with her work, whatever it was. The location of the first meeting was a popular restaurant and snack bar in Akwa called La Source. La Source provided a good location for such a meeting at that time as there is an easy blend of persons who stop by for dinner after work and people who were there for the night life, which includes listening to live music while drinking.

Though she agreed to meet with me, Nadege was particularly skeptical and required comfort as to the fact that her referring cousin had not said she was a prostitute. She was even more reassured to hear that I did not personally know her cousin and had never met her. Nadege admitted to knowing a few girls and promised to refer them following the terms agreed upon with the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research involving human subject. The IRB ensures that research subjects are protected from exploitation and that their rights are safeguarded. Payment has been recognized as a means of avoiding exploitation, although payment in itself "should not be oversimplified as buying off research subjects" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:50). In the

current research “payment serves more as a ‘thank you’ for their time, knowledge and experience rather than an incentive, although undoubtedly it fulfils both objectives” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:152). Specifically, my IRB protocol, approved in April 2012, included payment of CFAF8,000/\$16 to research participants for full participation and CFAF2,000/\$4 for partial participation.

Nadege proved to be a very valuable contact in referring persons who solicited clients in nightclubs and snack bars in the Akwa and Bonanjo areas. At some point during the interviewing process, Nadege admitted to being a prostitute herself and agreed to be interviewed. A few days into the interviewing, it became obvious that the persons referred by Nadege and the resulting snowball sample concentrated around the same geographical areas (i.e. Akwa and Bonanjo) and practiced similar types of prostitution. Thus, in order to render the study more representative of the different types of prostitution practiced in Douala, I then actively sought persons who knew women or men who worked as prostitutes in the Deido, Village or Bonaberi areas.

Access was granted by a man who describes himself as a “promoter.” The promoter in question, who for the purposes of this research will be called Raphael, is a friend to a male friend of mine who is a gym instructor and who for the purposes of this research acted as my private security when I went out during the late hours of the night. Promoters, better known by the French equivalent title as “*promoteurs*,” are persons who manage certain types of businesses for investors. They are individuals to whom restaurants, snack bars, nightclubs and similar businesses are conferred with the expectation that they use their contact to bring customers to such locations, resulting in a financial gain to the investors. Promoters usually have a salary but the bulk of their

money is made on commissions tied to the number of clients and sales they are able to attract to the businesses they manage. It goes without saying, then, that the hallmark of a good promoter is his address book. Raphael had previously managed some restaurants, snack bars and a go-go bar.

Raphael knew many women and a few men who had worked in the commercial sex industry. He was of a naturally charming predisposition and with that in his favor, he was able to walk into the street on *Rue de la joie* in Deido and strike up a conversation with street workers he did not know, who would trust him enough to want to hear more about this researcher who was keen on interviewing prostitutes. After gaining access, respondents became easy to find using the snowball sampling technique; so much so that upon completing the agreed number of interviews, some persons continued to send referrals that I was unable to accept.

As noted, to qualify for participation, potential research participants had to be over the age of 18 and have worked in the commercial sex industry within the previous six months. Two women were disqualified: one admitted within a few minutes of the introduction that she had never worked in the commercial sex industry herself but had many friends who were prostitutes, and considered herself knowledgeable enough to talk about prostitution. In this instance, I gave the woman a payment equal to the IRB approved amount for a partial interview, given that the interview lasted for about 5 minutes. The second woman was disqualified because although she had previously worked as a prostitute, she had since met and married a previous client, and had been married for over six years. Although no longer happily married and suffering extensive abuse from her husband, which she wanted to talk about, she did not meet the qualifying

criteria for the sample selection. Because she desired to talk about her marital problems and was clearly distraught, I referred her to a psychologist, whom I was required by the IRB to retain for the purposes of referring research subjects when appropriate. In terms of payment, I gave this woman the full amount payable to a research subject who completes an interview, CFAF8,000/\$16. Although this was not required, I felt compelled to extend this payment to her in appreciation of the twenty minutes of her time that she spent talking to me.

#### **4.2.1.2 INFORMED CONSENT**

A requirement for conducting ethical research involving human subjects is informed consent. “Ethical research does not just leave participants unscathed but also avoids infringing on their rights” (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001: 339). It is the right of a prospective research participant to be informed of the subject of the research, the associated dangers, if any, how the dangers, where present, are mitigated, and the possible benefits. This permits the research participant to make a decision about whether or not they want to participate in the research. To obtain informed consent, I presented and reviewed the IRB-approved consent document to each research subject prior to commencement of the interview.

With specific reference to this research, given the bilingual (French and English) nature of Cameroon, with most persons knowledgeable only in one of the two official languages, Noaks and Wincup’s (2004) point that translation or an interpreter may be needed to ensure informed consent is instructive. Douala is geographically located in the French speaking part of the country, with most of its inhabitants French speaking or “francophones.” Thus, the informed consent document was provided to the research

participants in French and English versions. Because I am fluent in both languages, upon participants' indication of a preference for one of the two languages, I reviewed the document with the prospective interviewees in the language they preferred.

The informed consent document described to prospective subjects the possible risk(s) of participating in the research, which was mainly that prostitution is a criminal offence in Cameroon and admitting to the crime could expose the research participant to sanction if discovered. I mitigated that risk by structuring the research to be anonymous. The names of the research subjects were neither solicited nor required and the research subject was made aware of this fact. As with Sharpe's study of prostitutes, anonymity was "paramount" (2000: 267). Ethnographers can protect the identity of their research subjects by giving them pseudonyms (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001; Noaks and Wincup, 2004). In this research all participants are given pseudonyms.

Two separate consents were required of the respondents: first was the consent to being interviewed, after which the second consent requested was the consent to audiotape record the interview. Because the signing of a consent form by a participant could itself provide identifying information (Price, 1996), I used oral consent procedures; once it was given, all consent forms were completed by me on behalf of the respondents, in order to ensure their anonymity. All 50 respondents interviewed gave their consents to be interviewed. However, four of the 50 respondents were uncomfortable with the prospect of being recorded and their interviews were handwritten by the researcher.

Two of the four who refused to be recorded said they were afraid that their voices could be played on the radio and subsequently recognized by their families and peers. These two insisted that there were well-known incidents of street workers who had been

tricked by journalists to be recorded only to find out to their great embarrassment that their interviews were published in the mass media. The two did not derive any comfort from my assurance of their privacy and the fact that the digital recording would be safely kept, password protected and deleted after transcription. The third respondent who did not want to be recorded said her fear was that I may want to “capture” her voice to be used for mystical purposes. When asked for what kind of mystical purposes her voice could serve, she answered she had no idea and laughed heartily at my counter insinuation that while on the street soliciting customers, she may be running a risk of having her voice captured on a recurrent basis. The fourth respondent who declined recording simply did not want to be recorded. “All research participants should experience an approach that gives attention to protecting their rights, seeks to achieve informed consent and respects promises of confidentiality” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:43). The preferences of the four respondents not to be recorded were respected as a means of protecting their rights.

#### **4.2.1.3 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

One-on-one interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format using an open ended questionnaire to guide the interaction between the researcher and the research participant. “Semi-structured interviews offer more opportunity to probe, typically with the use of follow-up questions” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:79). The complete protocol used for the interview and found in Appendix 1.1 (and translated to French in Appendix 1.2) was developed with feedback from my dissertation chair, Dr. Jody Miller. Though it was heavily inspired by the interview guide she utilized in her previous research on prostitution in Sri Lanka, it was modified for the local context of Douala. The interview

questions were available in French and English versions, and the language used, as in the case of informed consent, depended on the language preference of the respondents.

The first part of the interview aimed at obtaining background information on the respondents, like age, family, educational qualification, tribe, and general demographical data. The second part of the interview asked questions aimed at situating the respondents' migrant status, which are more pertinent when asking questions relevant to coercion and sex trafficking. The next part of the interview focused on the respondents' perceptions and experiences of their work, crime and victimization, and their stresses (if any) and coping strategies. The interviews wound down with more neutral questions on the presence of non-governmental organizations and discussions on what other things the research participants wished for themselves, with a view to giving research participants who may have found the interviews "emotionally taxing...the opportunity to reach an equilibrium before the interview is brought to an end" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:84). Indeed, "no interview should end abruptly after an interviewer has asked the most searching questions or when the participant is distressed. The rhythm and pace of the interview should bring the participant back to a normal conversational level before ending" (Charmaz, 2006:30). The interview guide used was structured with this in mind.

#### **4.2.1.4 INTERVIEWING AND INTERVIEW PROCEDURES**

"One of the unique features of qualitative methods is that it seeks to start from where people are at and actively looks for means to enable them to share their experiences" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:75-76). In order to avoid any rigidity as a result of the use of questionnaires and to provide a good opportunity for dialogue with follow-up questions, interviewing was done by the use of a semi-structured format as discussed



above. Miller (2012: 50) points out that interviews are “reflective accounts of social life offered from the points of view of research participants. As such, they provide two intertwined kinds of data: descriptive evidence of the nature of the phenomena under investigation - including the contexts and situations in which it emerges - as well as insights into the cultural frames that people use to make sense of their experiences.” Moreover, face-to-face interviews provided the added advantage of “an opportunity to probe beyond the answers given and to seek elaboration and clarification” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:145).

Interviewing activities commenced in June 2012 and concluded in July 2012. Fifty persons, including forty-eight women and two men who self-identified as prostitutes, were interviewed during that period. In terms of sexual orientation, the sample included one lesbian, two bisexual women, a bisexual man, and a man who identified as gay. Interviews took place at three locations, all snack bars, located in Bonanjo, Akwa and Deido. Most interviews started in the early hours of the evening from about 5pm in order not to interfere with the work of some sex workers. Sometimes they occurred later at night in order to take advantage of the availability of sex workers who were in between client calls or who were having a hard time finding clients on a given day. One interview took place as late as 3am and the sex worker in question was as awake and alert as someone who had just woken up from sleep to start a bright new day.

The sex workers interviewed were generally of very kind disposition and did not appear to be or turn out to be threatening to the researcher. However, by the very nature of the research, at least twice during the interviewing process, like Noaks and Wincup, “I found myself talking to people that, if I am honest, I would normally avoid” (2004:149).

To mitigate the probable dangers of hanging around in certain areas of Douala during late hours of the night, I was accompanied to the late night interviews by a male friend whose muscular built gained as a gym instructor provided a semblance of security. It was this same friend who introduced Raphael to me. This friend was present for my safety and kept a good distance during the actual interviewing process. On the average, two persons were interviewed per night.

Appointments were taken at alternate locations (Akwa, Bonanjo and Deido) on alternate days so as not to create a pattern which could attract the attention of those around. The alternations were in part for my benefit as I did not want to be recognized as a usual presence in any one location. Another reason for alternating location was because very early in the interviewing process, when I showed up for a second successive time at the same location in Deido, the stories of at least one sex worker interviewed sounded rehearsed. That left me with the impression that she may have been told the questions she would be asked by a sex worker who had interviewed the previous day.

The sex workers were met at locations close to their usual places of work, which is where they felt safe from police or any other type of scrutiny. Although those who were to be interviewed in the earlier hours of the evening were advised to dress discreetly not to attract attention to themselves, some showed up for the interviews already dressed for their nightly activities. In some instances I was a little uncomfortable by their sometimes very revealing dressing, though the women themselves did not appear to care about the curious stares they received from other snack bar customers. One of them joked that she is always at work and if any of those staring was interested she would be happy to consider. These stares were mainly experienced in Bonanjo and Akwa, as the dress

code at all times in Deido was very relaxed. The interviews were conducted in a chosen corner in the various snack bars over drinks in order to cloak the encounter with an appearance of normalcy. The choice of a corner was also to minimize access to other snack bar clients who out of proximity may have otherwise found themselves eavesdropping on the conversations.

At the start of the interview, after a brief introduction of the researcher to the research participant, I thanked the research participant for accepting the invitation to meet and asked the research participant if he or she knew what the interview was about. "It is important in agreeing to participate that an individual fully understands what the research project is about and why they are being asked to be a part of it" (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:83). Given that most of the research participants were recruited using snowball sampling techniques, some were able to provide a brief summary to the effect that they had gathered the researcher was working on a book or something of that sort and was interested in the experiences of sex workers.

That initial conversation presented a great opportunity to discuss the purpose of the interviewing and research, and permitted me to eliminate early in the conversation the woman whose only experience with sex work was that she had sex workers as friends. The second person who was eliminated from the study was only eliminated about twenty minutes into the interview when it became obvious that her experiences as a sex worker occurred many years previously, hence disqualifying her from the sampling criteria. Moreover, she also would have been ineligible on the grounds of being temporarily disabled either as a result of drug or alcohol use, as her speech was greatly slurred and mannerisms a little disturbing.

After the research participants were presented with the purpose of the study, we went through the informed consent documentation. A copy was given to the research participants while informing them that they could discard it immediately if they did not want anyone seeing its content and making assumptions or drawing conclusions as to how they may have come into possession of a document targeting persons working in the commercial sex industry. When informed consent was requested, obtained and documented, the actual interview was recorded if consent for recording was equally accorded. A small digital tape recorder was placed next to the research participant permitting their accounts to be clearly recorded. In two instances, additional assurances had to be given upon the research participant's verification of the recording device to ensure that the audio recorder was in fact an audio recorder and not a video camera. In both instances, the research participants derived comfort from seeing a paper napkin placed on the audio recorder to cover it while interfering minimally with the quality of the recording.

All research subjects who agreed to their interviews being recorded were told they could change their minds at any point during the interviewing process and request that the recording be stopped or decide not to continue interviewing at all. No one exercised this right. In fact, some research subjects were pleased to note that this was the first time that someone cared enough about them to want to hear their stories. Others welcomed the opportunity to talk to a perfect stranger about daunting experiences which haunted them or about the secret lives which they live when they work as commercial sex workers.

I proceeded with the interviewing process by referring to the questionnaire and asking specific questions while soliciting elaborations on responses which appeared to

touch on areas not previously anticipated in the research. The interviews were scheduled to last for a maximum of two hours but in fact lasted for slightly over an hour in most cases. In a few instances, the respondents appeared to have hijacked the interviewing process as they happily discussed some aspects of their lives which were not relevant to the current research. I sometimes experienced difficulties maintaining the required focus and even greater difficulty in bringing the research subject back to the topics at hand without indulging the research subject further in their preferred subject of discussions. These were real life lessons on interviewing, which played more on the dynamics of the two personalities involved (the researcher and the research subject) than on the nature of the questions asked.

Some parts of the interviewing brought respondents to talk about difficult experiences. It was during such instances that I needed to maintain what Noaks and Wincup refer to as “emotional management” (2004:51). Some respondents talked about incidents of rape or childhood molestations or about difficult experiences with growing up in abject poverty. Sometimes they required a few minutes to calm themselves down before returning to the conversation. During such instances, I reassured the respondents of the fact that they were not obliged to share the particular experience and also informed them of the services of a psychologist who had been informed of the research, and whom the respondents could consult if the experiences shared or remembered were so traumatic as to require specialized help. That was a requirement of the IRB’s informed consent documentation that was read at the start of the interview and reiterated during such circumstances. At the end of each day of interviewing, the digitally recorded interviews

were transferred from the recorder to my password protected computer, which was kept in a safe place, for transcription after which they were deleted.

#### **4.2.1.5 SAMPLE**

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample. As noted, the sample included 48 women (stated below as F for Female) and 2 men (stated as M for Male): one lesbian, two bisexual women, a bisexual man, and a man who identified as gay. The average age of research participants was 26, with a range from 19 to 37. Research participants were from a number of ethnic groups in Cameroon, namely: Babouté (N=1), Bali Nyongha (N=1), Bamiléké (N=9), Bamoun (N=2), Bassa (N=13), Batanga (N=1), Bayangi (N=1), Béti (referring Bulu, Eton, Ewondo, Ntumu, Mangissa) (N=13), Douala (N=1), Mbamoise (including Yambassa) (N=6), Mounjo (N=1), and Yabassi (N=1). As such, they illustrate the diverse character of Douala, as described in Chapter 3. In terms of education levels, the education of the participants ranged from no education (N=2) to a Masters Degree level (N=1) with the majority of the participants having the local equivalent of a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education (N=12).

**TABLE 4.1 Demographic Profiles of Research Participants Interviewed**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ethnic Groups</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Sexual Identity</b>	<b>Education (US Equivalent)</b>	<b>Age of entrée</b>	<b>Venue street/indoor</b>	<b>Quarter</b>
Naomi	Babouké	30	F	Heterosexual	10th Grade	28	Indoors	Akwa
Manka	Bali Nyongha	21	F	Heterosexual	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	16	Streets	Deido Akwa
Charlotte	Bamiléké	20	F	Heterosexual	6th Grade	19	Indoors	Akwa Deido New Bell Bonanjo
Nadege	Bamiléké	24	F	Heterosexual	None	19	Indoors	Akwa
Pulcherie	Bamiléké	24	F	Bisexual	11th Grade	21	Both	Akwa
Mireille	Bamiléké	25	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	25	Streets	Deido
Amina	Bamiléké	25	F	Heterosexual	4th Grade	16	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Pierette	Bamiléké	25	F	Heterosexual	8th Grade	16	Both	Akwa Deido
Felicia	Bamiléké	25	F	Heterosexual	10th Grade	21	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Solantine	Bamiléké	30	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	29	Indoors	Akwa
Hillaire	Bamiléké	33	F	Lesbian	10th Grade	Not sure	Indoors	Akwa Deido
Larissa	Bamoun	25	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	23	Indoors	Akwa Deido
Raissa	Bamoun	26	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	16	Indoors	Deido
Stephanie	Bassa	21	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	19	Indoors	Akwa
Hortense	Bassa	23	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	21	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo Deido
Brenda	Bassa	24	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	18	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Hermine	Bassa	25	F	Heterosexual	10th Grade	24	Both	Akwa
Paulle	Bassa	26	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	21	Both	Akwa Deido
Sofina	Bassa	26	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	20	Indoors	Akwa
Angelle	Bassa	27	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	25	Both	Akwa
Sophia	Bassa	27	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	23	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Tatiana	Bassa	28	F	Heterosexual	8th Grade	28	Indoors	Akwa
Maguerite	Bassa	28	F	Heterosexual	10th Grade	20	Indoors	Akwa Deido
Laeticia	Bassa	30	F	Heterosexual	7th Grade	19	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo

Jacquie	Bassa	33	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	18	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Idris	Bassa	23	M	Bisexual	Master's student	21	Indoors	Bonanjo
Solange	Batanga	36	F	Heterosexual	7th Grade	26	Indoors	Akwa
Arrah	Bayangi	26	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	19	Both	Deido Akwa
Aicha	Béti	22	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	20	Both	Deido Akwa
Nina	Béti	26	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	24	Both	Akwa Deido
Rosa	Béti	22	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	18	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo Deido
Esther	Béti	24	F	Heterosexual	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	23	Streets	Deido
Caroline	Béti	28	F	Heterosexual	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	26	Indoors	Akwa
Marie-Louise	Béti	30	F	Heterosexual	None	19	Both	Akwa
Henrietta	Béti	30	F	Heterosexual	8th Grade	28	Both	Deido Akwa
Irene	Béti	22	F	Heterosexual	Nursery	15	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Nadine	Béti	25	F	Bisexual	9th Grade	20	Indoors	Deido Akwa
Deborah	Béti	19	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	19	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Edith	Béti	23	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	16	Both	Akwa Village
Agathe	Béti	28	F	Heterosexual	10th Grade	17	Indoors	Akwa
Christophe	Béti	24	M	Gay	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	22	Indoors	Bonanjo Akwa
Daniela	Douala	24	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	20	Indoors	Akwa
Teckla	Mbamoise	20	F	Heterosexual	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	19	Indoors	Akwa
Chantelle	Mbamoise	23	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	17	Both	Akwa Deido
Eyinga	Mbamoise	28	F	Heterosexual	6th Grade	22	Streets	Akwa
Pauline	Mbamoise	26	F	Heterosexual	5th Grade	20	Indoors	Akwa
Rosita	Mbamoise	32	F	Heterosexual	6th Grade	not sure	Indoors	Akwa
Ghislaine	Mbamoise	37	F	Heterosexual	11th Grade	27	Both	Akwa
Imani	Moungo	26	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	22	Indoors	Akwa Bonanjo
Virginie	Yabassi	25	F	Heterosexual	9th Grade	20	Both	Deido Akwa



As can also be seen in Table 4.1, eight research participants (16%), all female, entered the sex industry prior to the age of 18. Two additional women (4%) were unsure when they began and all the other research participants (N=40 or 80%) entered the sex industry after becoming eighteen years old. Four sex workers (all female; 8%) worked on the streets, while both men and 30 women (64% of the sample) worked in indoor venues. An additional 14 women (28%) worked in both street and indoor venues. Finally, the quarters where prostitutes worked included Akwa, Deido and Bonanjo, with 20 participants (40%) working in Akwa, including 1 who also worked in Village; 1 working in Bonanjo exclusively; 10 (20%) working on both Akwa and Bonanjo; 3 (6%) working exclusively in Deido; 13 (26%) working in both Akwa and Deido; and 3 (6%) working in all three sites, including one who also worked in New Bell.

## **4.2.2 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.2.2.1 GROUNDED THEORY**

A voluminous amount of data was derived from the transcription of the 50 interviews. The transcription in itself proved to be a tough task as it is so much easier to speak than to document word for word everything that was spoken. “A one hour taped interview can take anything between six and ten hours to transcribe” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:129). Notwithstanding the time consuming nature of transcribing, its major advantage is it permits researchers to familiarize themselves with the data, thereby facilitating subsequent analysis (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The rich data derived from the interviews is to constitute the basis of deriving theory from data by using grounded theory.

Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (1998:12). In essence, the resulting theory is grounded in data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Charmaz’s definition of grounded theory methods is consistent with Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) when she states “grounded theory methods consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (2006:2).

The current research uses grounded theory to give voice to the data collected by listening to the themes that “emerge from the data collected” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:122). Themes emerge from “reading the interview text word by word, line by line, and incident by incident” (Miller, 2012:51) or “a sentence or paragraph” at a time (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:57). The process whereby these emerging themes are noted is known as coding. In coding, grounded theorists “attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data” (Charmaz, 2006:3). Coding can be open, axial or selective (Strauss, 1987). “Open coding opens up the enquiry, asks questions of the data and searches for answers. This initial and unrestricted coding leads on to axial coding whereby each category is analysed intensely, and linkages between categories are explored in search of a core category. Finally, the selective coding can take place around the core category guided by the coding paradigm” (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:131; see also Strauss and Corbin, 1998 and Charmaz, 2006).

After reading each interview line by line and coding in pencil on the margins, I opted for a second phase of documentation of the coded information which would render

the data more accessible by title or subtitle. I designed an excel spreadsheet headed with information which was indispensable in responding to my research questions. These headings were directly taken from the interview guide and covered the full interview ranging from demographical information to perceptions of the police and criminal justice system as a whole. The headings were as follows: Name (for which I completed the pseudonym), sex (M/F), age, place of birth, age at first sexual experience, first sexual experience voluntary (Y/ N to represent Yes or No), etc. See Appendix 2 for excerpts of this excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet included a few additional columns in which I noted emerging themes by interview.

The themes, which were recurrent, were easy to note by virtue of the presentation in the document. These recurrent themes were examined for consistency with the findings in other studies on prostitution previously conducted elsewhere and to identify if and where new themes emerged. The intent was to note if new themes or categories emerge and if the emerging categories are consistent with previously derived categories. This was done by constantly comparing my data with existing literature on the subject (Charmaz, 2006; Miller, 2012). If deviations - or what Miller calls “deviant cases” or “cases in the data that are counter to the emergent hypotheses” (Miller, 2012) - were found, these deviations are applauded, and an explanation for their occurrence sought and found in the data, all of which adds to the growing body of knowledge on the subject area. “Making sense of such contradictions provides an important basis for building theoretical insight” (Miller, 2012:56).

During the data analysis phase, themes emerge and so do *in vivo* codes. “Grounded theorists generally refer to codes of participants’ special terms as *in vivo*

codes... *In vivo* codes help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz, 2006:55). *In vivo* codes provide the researcher with insights into thought processes and subsequent actions by research participants. "*In vivo* codes can also be phrases that condense and distill significant analytical concepts" (Miller, 2012:52). The *in vivo* codes which emerged during the course of this research were noted in an assigned column in the excel spreadsheet next to the names of each research subject. The existence of these codes in spite of their rather "catchy" appellation, do not exist in a vacuum but have to "integrate into the theory" (Charmaz, 2006:55).

A major risk in research involving human subjects covering areas such as prostitution or the commercial sex industry is the risk of bias or the inability to remain objective. The bias which I felt going into the research was in believing that the experiences of commercial sex workers worldwide are shared. The readings on the topic had exposed me to certain variations by continent but I was not expecting much of a difference when comparing the experiences of sex workers in Douala, Cameroon in 2012 to those I had read about in Yaoundé, Cameroon from the 1980s (Songué, 1986) and in other African countries like Kenya (Kibicho, 2003; Kibicho, 2009; White, 1986; White, 1990), South Africa (Gould, 2011), Niger (Cooper, 1995) and Nigeria (Orubuloye et al., 1994).

I therefore took seriously the recommendation that objectivity can be gained by triangulation, which is the process of gathering data through varied techniques ranging from interviews, to observation and written reports (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss methods of dealing with bias by recommending comparisons. "By comparing incident to incident in the data we are able to stay grounded in them"

(Strauss and Corbin, 1998:43). After interviewing and observing sex workers who solicited clients indoors in bars and nightclubs in Akwa and Bonanjo, I compared their experiences to those of sex workers who solicited clients on the streets in the same locations. When both groups were compared with sex workers who solicited clients in Deido, the differences in their experiences, including prices obtained for services, convinced me of the fact that my analyses were grounded in the data I had collected and not in any preconceptions.

Full objectivity or the lack of bias however does not seem to be an attainable goal even with the grounding of theory in data. Charmaz notes her disagreement with Glaser and Strauss when she states “neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (2006:10). Thankfully Charmaz provides some mitigation by recommending the use of “open-ended, non-judgmental questions” which “encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge” (2006:26). Miller also recommends a close reading of the data when she states “the more closely we read the data, the more readily we can move beyond taken for granted or preconceived ideas we bring to our research, and the more likely we are to discover emergent concepts and patterns in the data” (2012: 51).

Bearing in mind the potential for bias and the constant interaction between the researcher and the data collected, which in itself alters or modifies the data, I consciously mitigated the interference of bias by closely following the recommendations of Strauss and Corbin (1998), Charmaz (2006) and Miller (2012). Although the selected sample is

predominantly female, I was under no illusion as to the ease of conducting the interviews and collecting credible data. “Moreover, feminist scholars now recognize that women don’t simply share experiences *as women*. Instead, many facets of difference come into play when we attempt to understand women’s and men’s lives including race, ethnicity, cultural identity, nation, class, and age, as well as individual life trajectories and experiences” (Miller, 2012: 50).

### **4.3 CONCLUSION**

In using the grounded method of analysis, I provide new information on prostitution in Douala, Cameroon. This research is particularly important because in spite of the large number of sex workers in Douala, Cameroon, no other previous research of this magnitude has been undertaken to understand and document their experiences. Douala is a particularly compelling location by virtue of its high migrant population and large informal economy. The snowball sampling technique undertaken provided access to 50 sex workers working in several distinct quarters representative of the diverse venues and settings in which sex work takes place in the city. The conclusions of this research contribute immensely to the growth of criminological research in Africa generally and Cameroon specifically. This research gives public policy insights providing law makers with concrete evidence in making commercial sex industry related policy and also in the examination of the Penal Code relating to the criminalization of prostitution.

In Chapter 5, I investigate the pathways into prostitution in Douala, paying attention to age, life contexts and migration patterns. In Chapter 6, I examine the nature and organization of sex work in Douala across neighborhoods and venues focusing on areas where sex work is highly visible. In Chapter 7, I examine the risks and challenges

faced by sex workers in Douala, the incidence of violence and if this is attributable to the criminalized nature of sex work in Cameroon. In Chapter 8, I conclude on the research findings, making policy recommendations while pointing out opportunities for further research on the subject.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PATHWAYS INTO PROSTITUTION IN DOUALA**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Douala at night beams with lighting from advertisement billboards, vehicle headlamps, and human movement. The human presence is noticeable in restaurants, snack bars, and nightclubs, which close in the early hours of the morning, and in bakeries, which are open for 24 hours, catering to the taste for French baguettes and other pastries in preparation for breakfast the next morning. This is all reminiscent of a town that does not sleep.

In this same scene, and visible in some areas more than others, are prostitutes or sex workers at work. Some prostitutes position themselves overtly on street corners, while others covertly, only coming out to the lighting provided by cars' headlamps, which give them the special effects needed to showcase what they have for sale. These prostitutes are usually clothed in scanty outfits, leaving very little to the imagination of potential street customers. Other prostitutes, clothed not very differently from their street-based counterparts, are found in restaurants, hotel lobbies, snack bars and nightclubs, all with the same objective: finding clients.

Who are these women and men? Where are they from? Do they have families? How did they come about prostituting? Why did they choose to prostitute? Who assisted them in prostituting? These are the questions that Chapter 5 seeks to address, with a view to providing an understanding of the men and women who participated in this research. I begin by discussing where these sex workers come from, including how and why they migrated to Douala. Next, I turn to the locations where the sex workers have engaged in



sex work, other types of employment occupied by them, their educational qualifications, entrée and reasons given for entrée as well as the facilitators of entrée. I also discuss their marital status and the role (if any) which it may play.

## **5.2 REGIONS OF ORIGIN OF DOUALA BASED PROSTITUTES**

“Women who work as sex workers generally do so in a location far from family and friends, which provides them with a degree of anonymity that most workers feel is necessary in order to perform such highly stigmatized labor” (Kelly, 2008:126). This is true of the sex workers who participated in this research, as only 6 percent of those interviewed were from the Littoral Region of which Douala is the capital city. The majority of prostitutes originated from the neighboring Center (62 percent) and Western (22 percent) Regions.

**TABLE 5.1 Regions of Origin of Sex Workers**

<b>Regions of Origin of Sex Workers</b>	<b># of Sex Workers</b>	<b>%</b>
South West Region	1	2
North West Region	1	2
Littoral Region	3	6
South Region	3	6
Western Region	11	22
Center Region	31	62
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Cameroonians are known to migrate to other provinces in search of better opportunities or as required by their jobs, especially for those working in the civil service. The Cameroonian Government, via the civil service, set out to forge national unity through exposure and understanding of different tribes and cultures. Civil servants are transferred to so many regions and cities in the country during their careers that some of

them get married to people from other tribes and have their children in regions other than their region of origin. Although the nuclear family may have migrated to a certain region, it is the region of origin that is indicative of the area of the country in which a person has the most number of his or her extended family members.

It is therefore in the region of origin that a person is less likely to be anonymous, as there is a possibility of being seen and recognized by an aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent or other relative or any of their friends. In this research, there are more research participants who are born in Douala/Littoral Region (N=21 or 42 percent) than are from Littoral (N=3 or 6 percent), as seen above. Yet, although a person is born in Douala (Littoral), if this person is not from Douala, Douala still provides the much needed anonymity which such a person may require from a town in which he or she executes prostitution related activities (see also Liu, 2011).

Kelly found that “women who work as prostitutes generally do so in places they are new to, where they have no family, so they do not risk the humiliation of being seen by a brother, cousin or uncle” (2008: 195). Out of the three research participants from the Littoral Region, Daniela was the only research subject from Douala and who worked in Douala. The other two sex workers from the Littoral Region were from the towns of Nkongsamba (Imani) and Yabassi (Virginie).

Daniela was aware of the difficulty involved in deciding to do sex work at home. As a matter of fact, that was not her initial preference. According to Daniela:

I was born in Douala but I went to work as a prostitute in Kribi. I was there for more than one year. My sister called and asked me to come back and that no matter what I do, it is better for me to be home next to my family. My mother initially didn't want to hear that I could be prostituting

since I am from a religious family but she accepted since I needed to take care of my children.

### **5.3 REASONS FOR MIGRATING TO DOUALA**

Given that the majority of prostitutes (N=29) were born outside Douala (Littoral Region), they were asked about why they came to Douala and who provided them with assistance in coming to the city. These questions served the dual purposes of understanding the motivation for migration and investigating whether some sex workers had been forced to come to Douala against their will. Every sex worker who had migrated to Douala was voluntarily present in the city and the reasons which they gave for this move were as follows:

#### **5.3.1 IN SEARCH OF A BETTER LIFE**

In thirteen cases, the reason for coming to Douala was in search of a better life or more opportunities. By Mireille's recount:

I had previously come to Douala to live with my uncle and things had not worked out so I returned to the Western Region. When I decided to return to Douala, it was to find something to do to help myself, so I found my own place.

Ghislaine, who was 37 years old at the time of the interview, put it bluntly when she said she came to "discover life in Douala and to hustle." Teckla's goal for coming to Douala was to "search for better opportunities of earning money since my stepmother who had taken care of me since my father's death was aging." Teckla was 21 years old at the time of the interview and mother to an 18-months-old child who resided with her stepmother, a petty trader in Yaoundé. Teckla needed money for her child, her stepmother and her tuition, as she was a student in the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade (*Première*). In their individual searches for better lives, Mireille, Ghislaine and Teckla resorted to prostitution.

### **5.3.2 TO PROSTITUTE**

Some sex workers who participated in the research came to Douala knowing they were going to prostitute. Eight women (16 percent) stated expressly that they came to Douala to prostitute and improve on their situations in life. Marie-Louise for example said that “I had started working like a prostitute in Yaoundé mainly doing *auto-stop* [hitch-hikes] and someone told me about Douala so I came to see it for myself.”

Thirty-six-year-old Solange, mother to a twenty-year-old daughter, lived in Yaoundé and had benefitted from the largesse of her French boyfriend who resided in France until his recent death from cancer. Upon her boyfriend’s death, Solange moved to Douala, a city she had visited in the past, because she had a female friend who was doing well there. Solange said:

Yaoundé is tough for a woman who is struggling on her own without a boyfriend. In Douala you can go out for one night and have between CFAF20,000 – CFAF50,000 (\$40-\$100) permitting you to survive.

Esther, who was 20 at the time of the interview and lived in Yaoundé with her two young children, came to Douala for two weeks of each month to prostitute. In Yaoundé, she lived what she considered to be a respectable life, affording the services of a nanny to look after her children, whose father abandoned them when he returned to Gabon where he has been for over a year prior to our interview. Esther was encouraged by a female friend who also lived in Yaoundé and prostituted in Douala. While in Douala Esther rented a cheap motel room paying CFAF3,000 (\$6) a day, and sometimes taking clients to her motel room for services. Esther hoped to “do what I can for a short while and all will be fine. In the one year I have done this, I have bought a piece of land and I have saved CFAF500,000 (\$1000) in my bank account.”

### **5.3.3 RAN AWAY FROM HOME**

A couple of women (N=2) not only ran away from home but also ran away from the regions in which their parents resided, with Douala their destination. Chantelle, who was 23 years old at the time of the interview and mother to a three-year-old son, had come to Douala from Yaoundé to live with her Aunt. When she decided to stop going to school, her Aunt took her back to Yaoundé insisting there was no reason for her to remain in Douala. Upon arriving there, Chantelle ran away from home and returned to Douala with a female friend who had a boyfriend in Douala. Chantelle enjoyed her new found family and described her female friend as “older and [someone who] treated me like her child. I started having a relationship with her boyfriend’s junior brother which lasted six months.”

Manka, who was 21 years old at the time of the interview, had run away from her home town of Bali Nyongha in the North West Region of Cameroon and had been in Douala for five years. Manka described a very turbulent relationship with her father, who struggled with alcoholism. She “hated” her mother for abandoning her as a child and for preferring her sister to her. At sixteen, Manka used money she received from her boyfriend at the time to travel by road to Douala, over six hours away from her village. The boyfriend who gave her money did not know what she intended to do with it. Manka had simply become “tired of my father shouting at me and decided to leave and run away.”

### **5.3.4 TO BE WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS**

Some of the research participants came to Douala to be with family or friends. Their stay in Douala was either temporary like in the case of Christophe or permanent

like in other cases discussed below. Christophe, one of the two male prostitutes who participated in this research, lived and prostituted essentially in Yaoundé and occasionally in Douala when he came to visit his elder sister. His sister worked for the national social insurance fund and her husband was a magistrate, giving them access to upper middle class housing in Bonanjo. Although his sister knew he was gay and cautioned him to be careful given the criminalized status of homosexuality in Cameroon, she did not know that he prostituted. As a result, when Christophe was in Douala, given the nature of their encounters, his clients opted for chic, discrete and expensive hotels. The Meridien Hotel, for example, was only a stone throw away from Christophe's sister's house and counted among these discreet hotels. Christophe spent at least two weeks in Douala when he visited and, although his primary reason for visiting was to spend time with family, he prostituted while he was in Douala as well.

There were some sex workers who migrated to Douala to live with their family members. Pauline and Agathe migrated to Douala to live with their sisters. Rosita said her sister brought her to Douala to find a job and she decided to stay. Pulcherie's uncle who lived in Douala asked for Pulcherie to be sent to him from Bafoussam so that he could educate her. Instead her Uncle made her work for his family like a maid.

Two women migrated to Douala with their boyfriends or to live with them; when the relationships failed they decide to stay in the city. Henrietta, who was 30 years old during the interview, had been in Douala for about 13 years. She recounted a love story of how she met and started dating a young boy when she was 16 years old. This young boy's elder brother lived in Douala and wanted him to travel to Douala from Mbalmayo to explore opportunities. Very much in love, and out of sympathy for her struggling

lifestyle back in Mbalmayo, her young boyfriend decided to bring her with him. Life in Douala was to prove tough for her young boyfriend and herself. Her boyfriend was about 17 years old at the time and according to her:

My boyfriend discovered women, joined gangs and started doing terrible things to the point of being locked up in prison. When he was released, he decided to return to Mbalmayo. I could not go back with him because I knew my family's situation. I had found a man to take care of me. He was from Ebolowa and by then now I was pregnant with his child.

Twenty-five-year old Hermine came to Douala two years prior to live with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend had insisted that it was better for her to be in Douala, his place of work, to give birth to their baby. Unfortunately, the relationship broke up when the baby was six months old. Hermine stayed in Douala and resorted to prostitution soon after the breakup.

### **5.3.5 I LIKE DOUALA**

For Tatiana the reason she came to Douala was simply "I like Douala." Tatiana's immediate past had been tough. She was in Chad with her Cameroonian fiancé, who cheated on her with other women, including her best friend and another woman he had brandished all along to be his cousin. When they separated, Tatiana returned to Edea in Cameroon to live with her ailing grandmother who had raised her. Four months after the death of her grandmother she decided to move to Douala.

### **5.3.6 FOR A CHANGE IN SCENERY**

Laeticia, who worked as a sex worker in Yaoundé, came to Douala from time to time for a change. When in Douala Laeticia lived with a female cousin.

### **5.3.7 CONCLUSION**

In discussing the reasons why sex workers migrate to Douala, it is clear that trafficking played no role, at least among those who participated in this research. Instead, economic opportunities, along with family and other social ties, were the main draws of the city, and all sex workers described coming to Douala of their own volition. In addition, it is obvious that it is an alternate town of prostitution for some sex workers who also prostitute in Yaoundé, like Laetitia and Christophe for example. Douala also happens to be the city where some sex workers start to prostitute or a city in which some sex workers prostitute exclusively. There are some sex workers whose prostitution activities transcend the national borders of Cameroon, extending to different countries, notably within the African continent.

### **5.4 LOCATIONS OF SEX WORK**

Some of the research participants mentioned accompanying clients occasionally out of town or out of the country. This section investigates the various locations to which the sex workers traveled on their own in order to prostitute.

In all, 29 out of 50 prostitutes, representing 58 percent of the sample, had only prostituted in Douala. Ten had prostituted in Douala and one more city in Cameroon. Among those ten, Marie-Louise, Paulle, Christophe, Amina, Pauline, Laetitia and Solange had worked as sex workers in Yaoundé and Douala. Brenda and Caroline had prostituted in Limbe, and Daniela in Kribi, while Raissa had prostituted in Bafoussam. Only two persons in the sample had prostituted in more than two towns in Cameroon. Edith had worked as a prostitute in Yaoundé, Baleng, Banganté and Bafoussam, the last



three of which are all in the Western Region. Felicia had prostituted in Limbe and Nkongsamba.

Nine prostitutes, some in addition to domestic travel for prostitution, had gone abroad in search of opportunities for sex work. The countries visited were Gabon, Chad, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia and Cote D'Ivoire. Three women (Laeticia, Nadine and Pierette) had gone to Chad, while Angelle, Agathe and Nina had gone to other countries including Gabon. Although Chad and Gabon had the most number of visits, the recurrent complaint by the women was that it was difficult to work abroad without having the right papers permitting you to live there.

**TABLE 5.2 Locations of Sex Work**

<b>LOCATIONS</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Cameroon and Abroad	9	18
Cameroon (more than 2 towns)	2	4
Douala + 1 City	10	20
Douala Only	29	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5.2 shows that twenty-one sex workers in the sample had practiced sex work in other cities than in Douala.

### **5.5 OTHER EMPLOYMENT OCCUPIED**

The men and women who participated in the research had not restricted their activities solely to sex work; instead some had occupied employment in other sectors.

Three categories of persons emerged with regard to the employment history of the research participants. The first is those whose sole work experience was in sex work (N=16) and they constituted 32 percent of the sample. The second category refers to those who currently worked as sex workers and continued to run other side businesses or activities. This category refers to people who used sex work to supplement their income, also referred to in the Cameroonian context as semi-prostitutes (Songué, 1986). The sample included nine semi-prostitutes representing 18 percent. Arrah was 26 years old at the time of the interview. At the age of 16 (while still in school) Arrah started assisting her mother, a petty trader, in roasting and selling corn and plums at the roadside. Arrah started prostituting at nineteen and dropped out of school when she became pregnant. She has continued to sell roasted corn and plums while working as a sex worker to financially support her mother (whose leg was amputated following an illness), her father (a driver who hardly finds work) and her three children. Among other semi-prostitutes, Paulle and Stephanie were trained as hairdressers. Paulle accepted clients who wanted to do their hair at her home. Stephanie did house calls to do clients' hair upon request. To quote Stephanie, "I do hair from time to time if someone calls me." Both also supplemented these activities with sex work.

The third category of persons is those who had previously worked in other sectors of employment as well as sex work. Individuals in this category decided to focus exclusively on sex work either because in their opinion it paid better than their other jobs or because it was a surer way of getting paid when compared to the other jobs they had occupied. Twenty-five sex workers, representing 50 percent of the sample, had been employed in other capacities and now focused exclusively on sex work.

Chantelle, who had previously sold smoked fish in the market and worked as a call-box owner (people who sell prepaid telephone credit on the street side and from whose cell phones people can make phone calls at reduced tariffs), viewed sex work as a quick and sure way of making money. Chantelle said:

It [prostitution] assures me an easy lifestyle. I tried other types of employment. If I could find an employment which guaranteed me CFAF50,000 (\$100) a month I could leave, although I will return to sex work to make quick money to satisfy my needs.

Chantelle had been a prostitute for seven years, and was skeptical as to whether she would ever be able to completely leave sex work given that she had an elaborate list of clients and if they call requesting for services it would be difficult to say no.

Twenty-seven year old Sophia, whose father was a lawyer, saw her life turn around when she went to live with her mother, a petty trader. She became pregnant and had a child at the age of fifteen. Sophia had worked in information technology and in esthetics. According to Sophia “after spending two years to get trained [in esthetics] the salary was still very small.” Ghislaine’s experience was similar to Sophia’s in that she found the salaries offered by alternative employment very small. During her ten-year sex work career, Ghislaine quit a few times, once attempting to own and operate a telephone call-box and at another time worked as a waitress in a restaurant. Ghislaine found that “the salary wasn’t enough to sustain me and drove me back to the streets.” In reference to the salary she earned from babysitting, Virginie was of the opinion that “when you are in the habit of earning a lot of money and you start earning only CFAF30,000 (\$60) a month, it becomes a problem.” It is interesting to note that as a sex worker, Virginie’s first client paid her CFAF30,000 for one night.

Some women may have been content with what they considered small salaries if these salaries were consistently paid and without strings. Hortense worked in a snack bar and her salary was fixed at CFAF40,000 (\$80) a month. Her boss only paid her CFAF20,000 (\$40) and he gave her the money in so many installments that it was of no use to her as she had “rent to pay and other responsibilities.” Nina was content selling air conditioners and working in a casino but the problem she had was that her bosses required sexual favors of her prior to paying her salary, so she left. Angelle worked in a snack bar and when her boss requested to have anal sex with her, refusal of which would result in a termination of her employment, she sought out other alternatives and found comfort in sex work. Abuse was not of a purely gendered nature, as some sex workers in their previous employment suffered verbal abuse from their female bosses. Aicha said her female boss, when she worked as a maid, would “treat me very badly. She will shout at me all the time and even before paying me.” It is within the contexts of such working conditions that the third category of persons preferred what Angelle referred to as the “independence” that comes with sex work.

Although some of the sex workers had been otherwise employed at the time of the interviews, those whose only current focus was on sex work constituted 82 percent of the sample (the 32 percent who had never worked in any other job apart from sex work and the 50 percent who had occupied other employment but decided to settle for prostitution), excluding only the semi-prostitutes. These findings highlight the economic bases on which these sex workers both entered and remained in prostitution.

## **5.6 LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

Referring to their Chinese research participants, Finckenauer and Chin note that “for the majority of these poorly educated women from rural areas, the only jobs available to them are low paying jobs in manufacturing, food, and retail industries that do not offer much of a career path” (2010: 51). This holds true for the sex workers who participated in this research. As seen in Chapter 3, the unemployment and underemployment rates in Cameroon are staggering. It is challenging for people who have received the relevant education or vocational training to find jobs and even more challenging for those with limited educational qualifications and unskilled workers to find work.

The educational qualifications of the 50 persons interviewed were crucial in the employment opportunities available to them. The sex workers themselves were not oblivious of this fact, with some regretting having dropped out of school and others hoping for a future where they could improve on their educational qualifications if given the opportunity. Two women said they had no formal education. Marie-Louise, who was thirty years old at the time of interview, said her parents divorced when she was young and:

I grew up with my father in very tough conditions. Every time I went to live with my mother, she would register me in school and my father would come and take me out of school.

Although Marie-Louise admitted to not being educated, she did not dwell on it and did not appear to be scarred as a result of this lack of education, like Nadege. Nadege, as discussed in Chapter 4, introduced me to the first set of prostitutes who set the snowball sampling rolling. She had come to feel comfortable around me after meeting on

alternate evenings. When we sat down for her interview, Nadege spoke freely. At the time, she was 24 years old, light-skinned and she told me she used lightening lotions to make her complexion glow. To her credit she did in fact glow. One very remarkable detail was that she wore glasses. Her frames were black and matched her dark hair, both of which contrasted deeply with her skin. Nadege's glasses could not be missed as they gave her a very intellectual look. I had barely dealt with my surprise over meeting a prostitute who wore glasses, and looked more like a college student than a "*femme fatale*," as prostitutes had been portrayed in the movies, when Nadege told me she was illiterate.

Nadege had suffered from poliomyelitis (polio) when she was young and spent more time in hospitals, going through a series of surgeries, than at home. School was not an option for her given her poor health, which had left her slightly handicapped. By her account "my two legs are of different sizes. I have a scar [which was] left by the surgery. It is not very noticeable from the way I walk but it is very visible when I am not wearing clothes."

Indeed Nadege's handicap was not easily observable and I would never have known about it if she had not mentioned it. Yet in her line of work - clients were demanding and other sex workers were sometimes petty towards each other - the handicap did not appear to bother Nadege as much as the fact that she could neither read nor write. Her most recent client was an American. Given that Nadege could not speak English and her American client could not speak French, they somehow got along during the two weeks he spent in Cameroon and upon his return he sent her e-mails. She had a friend who would read her e-mails to her and assist her with responding. She had

contemplated enrolling in an adult literacy program but she was not particularly interested in studying. Nadege believed she had lost opportunities for having long term relationships with some of her previous clients because she could not communicate effectively with them after their departure. Beyond that, her lack of education put a limitation on her ability to become a secretary, which is the alternate employment she would have liked to occupy, had she been educated.

The most educated person in the sample, by his account, was Idris. Idris was pursuing a master's degree in communications. He had at least three gold teeth, spotting waves on his dark colored hair, wore make up and looked more like someone in show business than a student. He admitted to paying great attention to his looks and dress. His educational level was able to obtain for him teaching as an alternate employment; as a result he worked part time as a tutor for students in secondary school and part time exchanging sexual favors for money. In spite of my reference to prostitution, prostitute was a word Idris could not use to describe himself, conceptualizing prostitutes instead as "those women who stand on the street whistling to passing cars."

**TABLE 5.3 Educational Qualifications**

<b>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
No Education	2	4
Kindergarten	1	2
Primary School Education (First - Fifth Grade)	8	16
Secondary School Education (Sixth - Ninth Grade)	20	40
High School Education (Tenth - Twelve Grade)	18	36
University Education	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 5.3, the majority of persons in the sample (N=38 or 76%) had secondary and high school education. While this education permitted a good level of interaction in everyday life, it certainly did not permit obtaining employment which offers career possibilities.

The reasons given by the research participants for dropping out of school are illustrated in Table 5.4. The table excludes two sex workers who were still in school (Idris in a master's program and Teckla in a high school program) and two others who did not go to school (Nadege and Marie-Louise).



**TABLE 5.4 Reasons for Leaving School (N=46)**

<b>REASONS FOR LEAVING SCHOOL</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Parent(s) refused to pay tuition	3	7
Didn't do well in school	6	13
Didn't want to go to school	7	15
Pregnant	10	22
Lack of financial means	20	43
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100</b>

Pregnancy (22 percent) and the lack of financial means (43 percent) stand out with the highest number of research participants falling in these categories (N=30). Not everyone who drops out of school for the reasons given in Table 5.4 will turn to prostitution. It is worth discussing the process whereby sex workers decide to engage in prostitution prior to making their actual entrée into sex work.

### **5.7 BOUNDED RATIONALITY**

The theory of bounded rationality derived from the rational choice theory demonstrates that people are able to make choices based on the information they have at their disposal. Given that individuals who make decisions sometimes “lack information and/or are unable to fully comprehend the information they do have, people are said to “*satisfice*” (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:48). That is, they make what may appear to them to be the best decision or choice given their circumstances at the time. Consequently, their decision making is bounded – constrained or restricted – by their

social, physical and situational contexts, and their perceptions of those contexts” (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:48).

According to Miller, while structural inequality, like gender inequality, may limit the availability of choices to be made, girls and women do in fact make choices and are not “simply passive victims of male oppression” (Miller, 2001:26; Finckenauer and Chin, 2010: 47-48). The limits of the information possessed, compounded by the structural inequities that make up their reality, do not make the choices of sex workers who engage in prostitution any less voluntary. “The individual assessments of costs, risks and benefits involved are subjective, which is why in this case different women in the same circumstances might make different choices; and why the same women may make different choices at different times” (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:48). It is therefore important to examine the considerations which they sex workers who participated in this research took into account in making a choice to be sex workers and their respective pathways to prostitution.

## **5.8 ENTRÉE**

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, eight research participants (16 percent), all female, entered the sex industry prior to the age of 18. Two additional women were unsure of the ages at which they began prostituting, all others (N=40) entered sex work upon reaching the age of maturity. A number of reasons were given by the research participants for their involvement in sex work, as listed in Table 5.5.

**TABLE 5.5 Reasons for Involvement in Sex Work**

Reasons for Involvement in Sex Work	# of prostitutes	%
Pleasure/Fun	2	4
Love related deception	2	4
Curiosity	3	6
Drift	11	22
To take care of my responsibilities	32	64
TOTAL	50	100

**5.8.1 PLEASURE/ FUN**

Whether or not sex workers enjoy sex with clients has been debated. Kelly (2008) refers to a book by Alexa Albert and the controversy around whether sex workers enjoy sex with clients: “Some workers asserted that they never enjoyed the sex, and that it would be wrong to do so, but others disagreed. As one worker told her, ““With as much sex as we have, how could a woman not enjoy it occasionally?”” But at the Mustang Ranch, a woman who enjoyed sex with a client did not speak about it for fear of being stigmatized by other workers” (Kelly, 2008:168-169). The same was true of the Galactic Zone in Tuxtla, Mexico, where Kelly found that if a woman said she had enjoyed sex with a client she would be perceived as engaging in sex work not out of necessity but out of pleasure (2008).

Few sex workers in the current study admitted to enjoying sex work, most likely because they would rather be perceived as engaging in sex work out of financial necessity than risk being perceived as doing so out of moral depravity. Male sex workers, however,

tend to challenge this thinking (Kempadoo, 2004). Sex work by male sex workers has been romanticized and sometimes characterized as emotional relationships rather than the commercial sex encounters. While moral depravity is attributed to women engaged in sex work, their male counterparts are attributed exotic appellations (Kempadoo, 2004). This lack of extreme gendered scrutiny or stigma, based on a sexual double standard about the appropriateness of enjoying sex in non-normative contexts, put male prostitutes in a better frame of mind to divulge the pleasure they find in sex work.

Idris identified his sexual orientation as bisexual. When asked whether he had a preference for either a male or female as a life partner said “if I am to marry in Cameroon it would be to a woman. If I am to marry abroad it would be to a man.” In response to why he prostituted, Idris said, “fun. I do this for fun. I already love men and having sex with men, so I do this for fun.” The only other male sex worker in the sample, Christophe, who was gay, said he regretted that he took money for sex because “I like sex. If I didn’t need the money so much I would have sex without taking money for it. But I need the money.”

### **5.8.2 LOVE-RELATED DECEPTION**

When I came across the first research subject who said she turned to sex work because she had suffered a love-related deception I was surprised by this reason. As I prompted her for a little more information Mireille, who came across as being very shy and who had only spent eight months on the street of Deido as a sex worker, had this to say: “I loved someone and he treated me very badly. He deceived me and I decided never to fall in love again. I preferred to start working on the street.” I asked her if that was the first time she had suffered a deception in love, and this mother of 10-year-old twins who

was 25 years old, told me, in a very calm way, with no intention of being made to question her choice, “yes.” Still the reason a broken heart would lead to a woman’s decision to engage in sex work only became clear to me after speaking with Nadine, who described herself as bisexual. Nadine said:

My child’s father let me down by having sex with my good friend. My mother never gave me motherly support. I decided to become a bisexual when another female friend snatched a man who had come from Spain to get married to me. I don’t trust men.

It was this distrust for men that put women like Nadine and probably Mireille in a situation in which they were able to see these men as clients and nothing else. They may have said to themselves, “I trusted a man and what did it get me?” and they were able to view the deception as giving them enough of a justification or freedom to now engage in sex work. Nadine’s reference to her mother’s lack of support, which may appear random in her response, also points to her perception that had the bond with her mother been stronger, she may have avoided the choice of sex work.

### **5.8.3 CURIOSITY**

Two research participants became sex workers out of curiosity. Maguerite was 28 years old at the time of her interview and mother to two children (five years and six months old); she had been a sex worker since she was twenty. Her five-year-old child was born with a previous client with whom she had co-habited until three years prior to the interview. The child’s father had disappeared with her 5-year-old and at the time of our conversation she did not know their whereabouts. She believed he had taken their child to his country, Switzerland, as he was in the habit of doing but had no intention of returning. When I perceived she was troubled by the absence of her young son and

appeared helpless, I encouraged her to contact Interpol. Speaking of how she became a sex worker Maguerite said:

I used to watch [TV] series like Beverly Hills, et cetera, so I loved White men and that is how out of curiosity I started doing this [sex work]. Now I have become used to money and I never seem to have enough. Even if I have a boyfriend who gives me, if it is not enough I go out there and get it.

With reference to race, the word White was used to refer to Caucasians but in some instances, White, also referred to anyone who was not of the Black race. Maguerite insisted that she did not enter prostitution out of economic need. She dropped out of school in the 10<sup>th</sup> Grade (*Seconde*) because she was “stubborn and hung out with bad company.” When asked what thought of sex work, Maguerite responded:

Sex work is not a profession or a job. I personally think it is not good. It is not normal that a woman should sell her body. Yet I do it because I have become used to money and a certain lifestyle.

While Maguerite may have been carried away by Western movies to the point of being curious about relationships with Westerners, Pierette said her curiosity came as a result of her raging teenage hormones. Pierette, who was 25 at the time of the interview, dropped out of school at the age of 15 and made her entrée into prostitution at the age of 16, said:

I cannot tell you that it is for economic reasons that I prostitute. I do not have any responsibilities. My mother is a business woman. I can only say that it is puberty and curiosity that led me to prostitute.

Pierette came from a family of three and had two younger siblings, both of whom were still in school. She was not close to her father and did not know what he did for a living, but her mother, in her words, was a “successful business woman.” When asked what she thought about prostitution generally, her views were strong and uncompromising:

They [referring to the Government] can ban sex work for all I care. I can live without money from prostitution. Those who think they need prostitution money only think like that because they have put it in their minds. For example today I ate a miserable meal of soaked *garri* [meal made from fermented cassava and considered cheap] and that is because I don't have any money. I could have come to the street and made CFAF 5,000 (\$10) or CFAF10,000 (\$20) or even found a man who would want to date me but I didn't. I am tired of prostituting. I don't want to do it anymore and keep praying to God for orientation so I can leave this or that I can find a man who can make me leave it.

#### **5.8.4 DRIFT**

Some of the research participants (N=11) found themselves working as sex workers without giving it serious contemplation. What these people have in common is the fact that they were exposed to prostitution in a way that their involvement in it may have been by way of what Songué (1986) calls “contamination,” or even exploitation, as was the case with Amina's entrée into prostitution. Amina said: “I lived with my sister who was a prostitute and I started prostituting before I knew it.”

Twenty-five-year-old Amina was from a family of nine children, three of whom were deceased at the time of the interview. Amina went to Douala from Bana (in the Western Region) to live with her elder sister who was a prostitute. Her sister would introduce men to Amina, who was naïve enough to believe that these men wanted to marry her. Amina would have sexual relationships with the men for which her sister was compensated. Amina was 16 years old at the time and when she realized her sister was taking money for her sexual encounters, she started asking for the money from the men herself. According to Amina, she “stayed in it [prostitution] because I did not do too much schooling [education] and I had no other way of taking care of myself.”

Sophia hung around some friends “I admired and who were older than myself. They always spoke about sex work in attractive ways and I was tempted to try.” Sophia, as mentioned earlier, had a lawyer for a father but did not turn to him for assistance. She admitted:

In my case it was clearly not based on need because I come from a good family. The thing is when you grow up everyone assumes you can take care of yourself and since I wasn't really able to take care of myself, I found myself doing sex work.

Pulcherie had not contemplated life as a prostitute until her living arrangements with her Uncle and his family broke down. She had gone out to party with some friends and did not return for the night. Although she sent her uncle a text message explaining her absence, which was a first occurrence, her Uncle refused to accept her explanation and kicked her out of his house. Her aunt, who also lived in Douala, agreed to keep her clothes but refused to take her into her house, saying her landlord would not agree to it. Pulcherie left her suitcase at her Aunt's house and became homeless. She would wander around and visit friends towards evening. According to her:

I would take very active part in all conversations and ensure that it was too late for anyone to ask me if I would return to my home. They did not know I was homeless. The next morning I could ask if they didn't want me to cook something and if yes, I would go to the market for them and cook. At some point I would go to my aunt's house and shower and change my clothes. Because I started spending the night at different locations soon I made friends with a girl who would let me stay at her place. I didn't realize she was a lesbian until she started touching me at night. That is how I became a bisexual. She took care of me. Everyone thought we were relatives. I had a boyfriend who was the reason my uncle had kicked me out of his house. I could not admit to my boyfriend I was no longer at my uncle's place because he had told me he liked girls who lived in family setting. Behind my back this friend of mine who had introduced me to lesbianism started dating my boyfriend. I left her house and found an old man who had always wanted to date me in the neighborhood and deceived him to pay my rent. I was hanging around the



wrong crowd and before I knew it I was a sex worker. Then while in it I had to sustain my lifestyle.

#### **5.8.5 TO TAKE CARE OF MY RESPONSIBILITIES**

Notwithstanding what may have led to the decision to enter into prostitution, whether it was conscious or just happened, the reason given by some of the sex workers for entering and most of the research participants for staying in sex work, was because sex work permitted them to take care of their responsibilities. Previous research discussed in Chapter 2 has found that the main motivation for entrée into sex worker is financial (Finkenauer and Chin, 2010) or economic (Miller, 2009; Zalwango et al., 2010). This study is consistent with those findings, as 64 percent of the sample entered into sex work for financial reasons. They needed money to take care of their responsibilities.

What do sex workers have as responsibilities? The question asked of all the sex workers who participated in this research was “what do you do with your money?” The primary objective of this question was to understand how sex workers in this context spend their money, while the secondary reason was to find out if there was any indication of exploitation of sex workers by third parties like pimps (“*proxénète*”) and others. The reasons given by the research participants included: to take care of myself, take care of my children, take care of my grandmother, take care of my parents and to take care of my siblings. While all mentioned taking care of themselves as their responsibility, others used their money to take care of their children, their immediate and extended family, depending on the family bond. No sex worker made reference to pimps although some occasionally gave money to street boys for protection or the police to obtain release when arrested, as is further discussed in Chapter 7.

### **5.8.5.1 RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS MYSELF**

In spite of any other reason given for entering sex work, all of the research participants, once in the commercial sex industry, used money earned to take care of themselves. While most of them voiced the wish that they could find a man who could take care of them, enabling them to quit sex work, they were quick to admit that it would be difficult to leave sex work if the amount of money at their disposal was less than what they usually received by performing sex work.

Finckenauer and Chin found that some women chose sex work because it was an easy way to make money. These women could “make a lot more in the commercial sex business than they can make in the legitimate labor market” (2010:55). This realization was shared by participants in this research, including Virginie and Chantelle. Virginie was of the opinion that sex work was an easy way of making money when compared to a previous babysitting job.

Nineteen-year-old Deborah made her entrée into sex work two months prior to the interview. Deborah said:

I do not have children so I use the money mainly for my clothes and to make myself pretty. I sometimes give some money to my mother to help out with her *tontines* [money saved by people in groups yielding interest when borrowed by others].

Manka, who was the mother of a three-year-old child who lived with his father in Buea, was not responsible for the care of her child. She did not know if her child went to school or not. She had sex with a man, got pregnant and when she wanted to get an abortion the man insisted that he wanted the child. Manka therefore had the child and gave it to him. When asked if the man was her boyfriend her response was rhetorical:

“Can someone in this type of work have one boyfriend?” Manka did sex work for herself.

She said:

*Akwara* [a derogatory term for prostitution] for some people it is to please their lives [for pleasure]. For me it is because there is money in it and there is something I want to do... build my own house when I am old or do business or open a shop. If you are smart you will keep [and] save some money.

Manka like Nadege compared sex work to stealing and concluded that sex work is preferable: “When a man does not have money he looks to earn money by stealing. A woman has an option to be a prostitute.”

For some of the research participants, although they are able to take care of themselves with the money obtained from prostitution, another equally important use for their money is their children.

#### **5.8.5.2 RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS MY CHILDREN**

Previous research has shown that some women are driven into prostitution following the failure of marriages (Kelly, 2008) which sometimes leave them with the responsibility of the care of their children. This study is consistent with previous research and, although most of the children born to the sex workers in this research were not born while they were married, the lack of support from the children’s fathers placed the full responsibility of taking care of the children with the sex workers.

A relatively high number of research participants (N=36) representing 72 percent were parents, as detailed in Table 5.5. Out of these 36, at the time of the interview, 18, or 50 percent, had one child; 13, or 36 percent, had two children; four, or 11 percent, had three children; and one or 3 percent, had five children.

**TABLE 5.6 Sex Workers with Children**

# of Children	# of Sex Workers	%
1	18	50
2	13	36
3	4	11
5	1	3
TOTAL	36	100

Tatiana turned to sex work seven months prior to the interview, when her fiancé disappointed her and left her with a baby to take care of. Tatiana's experience was common, though not all of the sex workers who were parents took care of their children. Looking the duration in sex work among each sex worker who was a mother and comparing to the ages of their children, six out of the 36 sex workers who had children started sex work within one year of becoming parents.

Although the data does not allow for comments on a direct link between becoming a parent and resorting to sex work, some research participants who had previously engaged in sex work mainly to take care of themselves viewed sex work as a necessity when they became mothers and had the additional responsibility of taking care of children. Raissa, who was 26 years old at the time of interview and had been involved in sex work for 10 years, had this to say when asked of her views on sex work:

At first I treated it [prostitution] like "*pass- temps*" [an activity or way of occupying one's self, "passing time"] but since I had my children [6 and 4 years old] and came back to it, it is a profession for me as I know what I need the money for.

Discussing the pressure of parenting, Jacquie, a 33-year-old mother of five, said:

I have finally become like my mother. My mother had five children with five different men. All of my brothers and sisters knew their fathers except me. I also have children with five different men.

Jacquie's children were ages thirteen, eight, seven, three, and one. Two out of her five children were racially mixed. Her first child lived with a cousin of Jacquie's in Yaoundé, and was in school during the academic year that ended prior to the interview. Out of the four children who lived with Jacquie, she was able to send one to school. One child did not go to school because Jacquie had some financial problems with her landlord and was obligated to go and live with a grand-aunt. Her last two children were not yet in school. When asked what she thought of sex work, Jacquie responded, "as far as I am concerned it is a profession. I do it to earn my living. I am obligated to do it to take care of my children. They are my responsibility."

Jacquie was also creative in obtaining money to feed her children. Her fourth child's father was the only man who seemed to care about his child. When he called inquiring about his child she would lie that the child was sick in order to obtain from him CFAP10,000 or CFAP20,000 (\$20 or \$40), permitting her to feed everyone.

While for most of the research participants their obligations towards their children were of utmost consideration in their decision to enter and/or stay in sex work, no other paints a more vivid picture and direct link between immediate need and sex work than Paulle's experience. Paulle said:

It was on Christmas Eve, December 24<sup>th</sup>, when my daughter was 4 years old. I had not bought her Christmas gift so I went to a snack bar and got picked up by a man who wanted oral and vaginal sex. He gave me CFAP30,000 for it. After that it was easy to prostitute.

### **5.8.5.3 RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS PARENTS, SIBLINGS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS**

Like the women in Kelly's *Zona Galáctica*, the participants of this research prostituted in order to take care of their "children and extended families" (2008:198). An analysis was done on the family situations of the research participants with a view to knowing how many parents were alive, the nature of their occupations and to gain knowledge of their abilities to take care of themselves and their other children.

In response to the question on whether their fathers were alive, 22 responded yes, while 23 responded no, and five did not know. Of the fathers who were alive (N=22) their occupations are categorized as follows: blue-collar, which included a driver and carpenter (N=2); white-collar, including a lawyer, doctor, accountant, colonel and customs officer (N=5); retirees (N=7); petty traders, in this context gas seller and farmer (N=2); and unemployed (N=2). Four sex workers did not know what their fathers did for a living.

**TABLE 5.7 Fathers' Occupations**

<b>Fathers' Occupations</b>	<b>#</b>
Blue-Collar (Driver, Carpenter)	2
White-Collar (Lawyer, Doctor, Accountant, Colonel, Customs Officer)	5
Retired	7
Petty Trader (Gas Seller, Farmer)	2
Unemployed	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>

In response to the same question on their mothers, 40 mothers were alive and 10 mothers were not alive. Out of the 40 mothers who were alive, 33 had their occupations accounted for: seamstress (N=1), business owners (N=3), petty traders who sell roasted corn, farmer, selling cocoa and store attendants (N=9), housewives (N=17), and retirees (N=3).

**TABLE 5.8 Mothers' Occupations**

<b>Mothers' Occupations</b>	<b>#</b>
Blue-Collar (Seamstress)	1
Business Owner	3
Petty Trader (sells roasted corn, farmer, sold cocoa, store attendant)	9
Housewife	17
Retired	3
TOTAL	33

In this sample, like Liu's research in Shenzhen, China, "not all of them fit the traditional stereotype, i.e., that prostitutes come from poor backgrounds and low class families" (2011:62). That notwithstanding, individuals whose parents could take care of themselves and their nuclear families identified extended family members to whom to provide assistance. Family within the African context includes parents, children, siblings, uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins and other varying degrees of relatives. Elsewhere in this chapter, I mentioned some research participants lived in Douala with their siblings, or uncles and aunts. Jackie's cousin, for example, was bringing up her first son.

Irene, who was 22 years old at the time of the interview, was a mother of two (four years and two months old). Irene recounted how she started prostituting:

I come from a family of 11 children and my grandmother with whom my mother and I lived, who had essentially worked like a prostitute herself, kept putting pressure on me to cover all of the bills: rent, electricity et cetera. My mother was sick and needed to be operated upon. A woman who lived across from our house and who went out with Caucasians told me one was interested in me. I went out with him for the two months he was in Cameroon. I was still a virgin when I started and occasionally when the man was not around this woman would introduce me to other men with whom I will have sex.

Irene was fifteen years old at the time of entrée and her first client with whom she spent two months gave her CFAF425,000 (\$850). Her mother underwent the surgery she needed. When asked what her family thought about her work, Irene responded:

They do not disrespect me as a result of it. My elder sister, grandmother and mother are all aware and because they know what the money permits me to do for the family, including raising my late sister's five children, they keep any reservations they have to themselves. My mother is always saying that I take care of her, so this gets me some respect as well.

Irene's responsibility extended to her nieces and nephews. Like Irene, Nadege's work as a prostitute had permitted her to put a roof over her mother's, stepfather's and brother's heads. She made her entrée into sex work at the age of 19 and her first client, a Caucasian man, was very generous. When asked how much he gave her for the two months they spent together she said:

I don't remember the exact amount but he kept giving me huge sums of money, particularly after seeing where my mother lived. The money he gave me was enough for me to buy a piece of land for my parents [referring to her mother and stepfather].

Nadege, who did not have any children at the time of the interview, had been raped when she was too young to remember and had been scarred by yet another experience when she had a stillborn baby at the age of 17 years. The second experience



affected her health making her incapable of working long hours. Nadege however felt a sense of obligation, particularly towards her mother and junior brother. She explained:

My mother had an accident which made her incapable of working. My stepfather is a driver and does not make much money. My junior brother needs to be taken care of and have his school fees paid. If he is not well taken care of, he can become a thief and that is bad for a boy. For a girl who fails, even if she becomes a prostitute one day she can turn her life around by marrying.

Ghislaine's sense of responsibility towards her family was determined by virtue of her position as first born in a family of eight children. She said of her decision to start sex work, "my mother died and my father was sick. Given my position in the family I had to take care of my siblings and my child [who was one year old at the time]." To Ghislaine, now a mother of two, with seven siblings relying on her (particularly the two who were still in school), sex work is "not a career; it is a way of surviving."

While the pressure on some sex workers may easily be understandable given the existing degrees of consanguinity with the family members they cared for, other relationships that motivated entrée into sex work were less obvious. These other relationships are discussed immediately below.

#### **5.8.5.4 RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OTHERS**

Thirty-three-year-old Hillaire, who self-identified as a lesbian, was not very sure how she came to be a sex worker, and engaged in semi-prostitution as she maintained her full-time job as a server in a snack bar. What she remembered was "I had a girlfriend to take care of, I didn't have a job and other wealthy women, married or unmarried would propose me favors and I would find myself prostituting." To improve upon her earnings at the end of the month, and permitting her to take care of her girlfriend and herself,

Hillaire prostituted when the opportunity presented itself. In doing this she faced a few challenges as she lived with her girlfriend and needed to meet clients at different locations:

My girlfriend gets very jealous when she sees other women talking to me. She doesn't know I am involved in sex work and once I went to the nightclub to meet a client. My girlfriend showed up and there was a big scene. I had to choose one person [to leave with] and I chose my girlfriend.

### **5.9 FACILITATORS OF ENTRÉE**

The findings of this research are consistent with previous research on the subject of those who play a predominant role in assisting sex workers in making their entrée into prostitution, and show that the majority (N=34 or 68 percent) of the study participants received assistance from their friends. Eleven (22 percent) sex workers said they entered sex work with assistance from no one. In three instances (6 percent), the sex workers were assisted by persons they could neither consider family nor friends. Two sex workers (4 percent) had their entrée into sex work facilitated by their family members.

**TABLE 5.9 Entrée Facilitators**

<b>ENTRÉE FACILITATORS</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Family	2	4
Other	3	6
Self	11	22
Friend(s)	34	68
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

### **5.9.1 ENTRÉE FACILITATED BY FAMILY**

The number of sex workers who were introduced to sex work by their family members is very low and this is understandable given the stigmatized nature of sex work and the fact that even those who work as sex workers tend to hide it from their families. Amina and Nadege were introduced to sex work by their family members. Amina's sister, as noted, "pimped" her out. Nadege said this of her experience:

My cousin took me to the club after telling me about what she did for a living, which was sex work, and abandoned me at the entrance. Then this man, my first client, comes along and asks me why I am there... offers me a drink and that is how it started.

### **5.9.2 ENTRÉE FACILITATED BY OTHERS**

In some instances (N=3) the person who introduced the sex worker to sex work was someone who was in proximity with the sex worker or someone in their immediate entourage. Marie-Louise was introduced to sex work by a woman best described by Koh-Bela (2007) as a "*Maman*" or by Kelly (2008) as a "*Madrote*." This woman owned a type of restaurant popularly known in Cameroon as "*Circuit*" or "chicken parlors" in Akwa.

*Circuits* are restaurants which sell grilled fish and chicken enjoyed as part of the night life in Douala or any other big city in Cameroon. What makes *Circuits* unique is the character of its ownership. Stereotypically, *Circuits* were owned by women who were either kept as mistresses by married men or women who worked as prostitutes or retired prostitutes. Even more interesting is the fact that *Circuits* are meant for eating but are usually located in premises which were intended for residential purposes. Upon transformation of the premises into a restaurant or *Circuit*, while patrons would dine in opened spaces - for example the living room, balconies and yard - other patrons would

seek and use the services of prostitutes in the rooms located on the same premises. Although these prostitutes may be independent of the ownership or management of the *Circuits*, in some instances they were girls mentored by its owner or the owner herself during her more youthful days. The *Circuit's* patrons who requested additional services from a sex worker would pay for these services and the use of the facility from which the *Circuit* owner would receive money depending on the duration of the use of the room. According to Marie-Louise, "I lived with her [the *Maman*] for two months. When I would return home, I will share the money I received with her. Even some money which I gave her to hold for me she never gave me back."

Hortense, who was 23 years old at the time of the interview, was introduced to prostitution by her friend's aunt when she was aged 21. Hortense spoke of this woman with great admiration when she said:

She was a high profile prostitute who was very successful. She owned a house and a car. I went to the club with her and she introduced me to a man she knew from Gabon. She encouraged me to go with him and because I needed money to take care of my children I went with him.

The only reason Hortense went with this man was because her friend's aunt introduced him and encouraged her. Hortense did not negotiate a price partly because she did not know how to but mostly because she did not need to. She trusted her friend's aunt and relied on her judgment. This reliance paid off for Hortense because her first client gave her CFAF200,000 (\$400) for the night and what he required of her was conversation. They spent the night talking.

The third person who was introduced by someone who was neither a friend nor family was Irene. Irene was introduced into prostitution by her neighbor who was a prostitute.

### **5.9.3 ENTRÉE FACILITATED BY SELF**

The number of women who ventured into sex work on their own is quite significant (N=11). Twenty-five year old Nadine did not utilize any assistance when she took her first client. She said, “I was dancing in a cabaret in Nigeria when a man asked me out. I went with him,” and that is how she made her entrée. Caroline was a dancer in a club in Douala when she was approached by a man who ended up being her first client. After that she figured “I could prostitute to supplement my income at the end of each month.”

Edith, who was 23 years old and the mother of three children (eight, seven, and three years old) at the time of the interview, made her entrée into sex work when she was 16. She recounted:

My first client picked me up from the entrance of my house. He just called out to me and told me he liked me and asked if we could go and have sex. I was tempted by the offer so I told him yes, provided he uses protection. He gave me CFAF30,000 (\$60) for a few hours. I was timid and naïve and didn't ask him for anything. It was he who decided on how much to give.

It does not appear that Edith contemplated her entrée prior to making it. Being only 16 at the time may have played a factor in what seemed like a very easy entrée into prostitution. Those who did not have any mentoring entered prostitution in ways which appeared very opportunistic. According to 22-year-old Rosa, who made her entrée into sex work when she was 18 years old, “I started going to snack bars [when I was] young.

One day a man approached me and asked ‘*ma chérie on fait comment*’ [my darling, what do we do now?], I gave him a price.”

Naomi was hanging around a go-go bar at which she had recently applied for a job. She was waiting for a response from the management which took a while coming. She said:

A very old White man [Caucasian male] asked me if he could buy me a meal. He took me to a restaurant and after I accompanied him to his hotel room. I wasn’t too sure what to do as no one had told me how it works. I didn’t ask for money. He gave me CFAF15,000 (\$30).

#### **5.9.4 ENTRÉE FACILITATED BY FRIENDS**

Chantelle had come to Douala with an older friend, and both of them had enjoyed free accommodation for a period of six months but left when the friend’s boyfriend’s mother persisted in making them uncomfortable. Chantelle’s entrée into sex work was facilitated by two friends. This is what she said:

My friend took me to a woman who owned a *Circuit* where girls lived and worked. She rejected me saying I was young and will put her in trouble. I went on to rent a motel room with another friend and started working on the street. She [my friend] told me what I was supposed to do. The first day when I took CFAF3000 (\$6) and took off all my clothes she told me I was only supposed to take off my underwear and lift up my skirt for that price.

Laeticia, who was 30 years old at the time of the interview and mother to a 14-year-old daughter, made her entrée into sex work when she was 19 years old. When asked how her first day doing sex work was, her response was:

My friend gave me the courage to do it. She is dead now. She was a Chadian. Since she was already doing this [prostituting] she taught me the tricks of the trade to be able to do it on my own.

These “tricks of the trade” - some of which were handed over during the mentoring which takes place before entrée and some of which were learned on the job - included the following: the price is negotiated in advance of going with the client; the client pays in advance and the amount of payment determines the amount of access to the body of the sex worker; the use of protection; and other factors, which will be further discussed in later chapters. For sex workers, there are rules but there is room for discretion. Chantelle, for example, was told by her friend who gave her tips to negotiate and take her money upfront. When asked if that is what she did with her first client her response was “no. When he approached me I trusted him because he was someone who was very well known and I had heard his name many times before.” Chantelle’s discretion was well utilized as this client paid CFAF20,000 (\$40) for the first sexual encounter. The client also became a regular client and continued to pay her the same amount as their first encounter every time they met to have sex. In her words the relationship “remained professional,” as opposed to emotional.

Henrietta, as noted, had come to Douala with her young boyfriend from Mbalmayo and stayed in Douala when he returned to Mbalmayo. She had a child whose father no longer took care of him. She could take care of her son as well as her other responsibilities, who were her six junior brothers, given that her father was dead and her mother was a housewife. Unfortunately, she was a member in a *tontine* in which people contributed CFAF50,000 (\$100) every month towards their savings. The money contributed was loaned out to any member who was willing to borrow and the interest payable on the loaned money was split among contributing members at the end of each cycle. Henrietta borrowed CFAF500,000 (\$1000) from this tontine and invested the

money into calling cards and telephone credit. Given the strategic location of her call box business in Bonapriso and the approaching December festive season she had made what seemed like a good investment with a good return guaranteed. Unfortunately her junior brother who was manning her business was duped by con artists. Henrietta recounted:

My problems started when my brother thought the con artists were some people who came from abroad and were having problems changing US Dollars. He went to go and show them where they could change money while leaving one of them with my business. I lost everything.

With CFAF500,000 to reimburse, when the *tontine* members started to call her on the payment due date, Henrietta escaped from the location of her business. Some members of the *tontine* got the police to arrest her and at the police station she signed a document acknowledging the debt and undertaking repayment. With her continued obligations towards her family and now a huge debt to pay, Henrietta was “desperate for money” to “overcome financial crises” (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:56).

The advice of her friends, who were prostitutes, was timely. Her friends told her as far as they were concerned, owing CFAF500,000 was not even a problem as they could easily take care of it with their line of work. A now interested Henrietta asked them how and they explained to her how they work. This story has an interesting twist as although they advised her on how to go about prostituting, they told her she needed to “cleanse” herself of any bad luck prior to starting. They took her to a woman who possessed powers enabling her to “cleanse.” At the time of the interview Henrietta had been a sex worker for two years and had repaid the CFAF500,000 debt within four months of starting sex work.



### **5.10 SEX WORKERS' MARITAL STATUS**

Out of the 50 prostitutes interviewed, in response to a question on their marital status, two (4 percent) responded that they were married, while 48 (96 percent) responded that they were single. The two women who were married were both separated from their husbands: one (Henrietta) was abandoned by her husband for another woman a few days after their marriage and the other (Amina) was abandoned within three years of her marriage by her husband who had always lived in France. While Henrietta blamed abandonment by her husband as partially influencing her decision to engage in sex work, Amina's husband met her while she was a sex worker and, when he stopped sending her assistance, she went back to working as a sex worker. Amina said she contemplated filing for a divorce from her husband.

**TABLE 5.10 Sex workers' Marital Status**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Married	2	4
Single	48	96
TOTAL	50	100
<b>Relationship Status Among Singles</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Single in Relationship	26	54
Single no relationship	22	46
TOTAL	48	100
<b>Partner's Knowledge of Involvement in Sex Work</b>	<b># of Prostitutes</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	11	42
No	15	58
TOTAL	26	100

Table 5.10 shows that 48 sex workers were single. Out of the single sex workers, 26 (54 percent) were in relationships while 22 (46%) were not in relationships. When asked if the partners of those in relationships knew of their involvement in sex work, 15 out of 26 (or 58 percent) responded no (Angelle, Deborah, Rosa, Christophe, Pauline, Hillaire, Caroline, Daniela, Larissa, Sophia, Idris, Virginie, Pierette, Hermine and Naomi). Eleven out of 26 (or 42 percent) responded that their partners knew of their involvement in sex work (Paulle, Imani, Charlotte, Brenda, Nadine, Edith, Rosita, Agathe, Nina, Pulcherie and Maguerite).

Those whose partners knew of their involvement in sex work were in three categories:

1. They had met their partners while working as sex workers and their partners wanted them to stop (for example Charlotte and Paulle);
2. They had met their partners while working as sex workers and the partners were being supportive while assisting the sex worker to quit sex work (like Pulcherie and Maguerite); or
3. They had met their partners while not working as sex workers, and although the partner later found out of the sex worker's involvement in sex work and hoped they would stop, it did not impact their relationship in anyway (like Agathe).

Agathe, who was 28 at the time of the interview and who started sex work when she was 17, had been in an off-and-on relationship with her boyfriend for over 12 years. They had a 12-year-old child, and sometimes during the off moments of her relationship she would work as a sex worker, even co-habiting for as long as six months with some

foreign clients. Her boyfriend, who was a student and could not afford her upkeep, accepted the situation while hoping she would stop working as a prostitute one day.

### **5.11 CONCLUSION**

Going by the findings in this Chapter, most of the sex workers who work in Douala migrated here from other towns in search of opportunities. These opportunities presented themselves in the form of prostitution. Sex workers who decide to enter into prostitution in the majority of cases receive assistance from friends who show them the ropes. Reasons given by sex workers on why they chose to prostitute include: taking care of their responsibilities, drift and curiosity.

The word “responsibility” was recurrently used during the interviews. Some sex workers choose sex work because of the very limited options at their disposal and the real need to take care of themselves, their children and some members of their family. Some sex workers however either have a bigger sense of responsibility than what is expected even under the African context or felt the need to stretch far into their relationships to neutralize (Sykes and Matza, 1957) any moral dilemmas that they may face by their involvement in sex work. A few contradictions became obvious when some sex workers insisted on engaging in sex work in order to take care of their siblings and pay their tuitions. When subsequently asked on whom they spent their money, the same persons said on themselves, mentioning clothes, shoes and other luxury items, completely forgetting to mention the same family members who were presumably dependent fully on them.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE NATURE AND ORGANIZATION OF SEX WORK IN DOUALA**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Irrespective of whether the motivation for entrée and continued duration in sex work was ordinary, noble or even invented, what was obvious was that the research participants were sex workers and, in the course of their activity, organized their work taking into account the environment, risks, and what they hoped to accomplish from sex work.

Sex workers are found in every quarter in Douala, although they are particularly visible in quarters like Akwa, Deido, Bonanjo, Bonapriso, and some areas of Village and Bonaberi. What attracts sex workers to certain locations within the city (depending on the type of prostitution practiced) is either the presence of nightclubs, snack bars, restaurants, hotels, or busy streets punctuated by traffic lights, permitting them to pick up clients.

The ways in which the sex workers organize their work, the number of days in a week they spend on sex work, the number of clients they are willing to accept in one night, the services they are willing to render, as well as the prices for the services, all depend on the type of prostitution practiced, going rates at the location(s) at which the sex work takes place, the amount other sex workers are willing to accept as a price, and any other factors the individual sex worker may have to consider in deciding on whether or not to accept a client. These factors include their personal circumstances in life as well as their family support structure.

## 6.2 TYPES OF SEX WORK: INDOORS, STREETS AND BOTH

As introduced in Chapter 4, a majority of the research participants engaged only in indoor-based sex work (N=32 or 64 percent), soliciting clients in venues such as nightclubs, snack bars, restaurants and hotel reception areas. Four sex workers (8 percent) engaged solely in street-based sex work while fourteen sex workers (28 percent) engaged in both street-based and indoor-based solicitations, as shown in Table 6.1 below.

**TABLE 6.1 Types of Sex Work**

Types of Sex Work	# of Prostitutes	%
Street-Based	4	8
Indoor-Based	32	64
Both Street and Indoor-Based	14	28
TOTAL	50	100

The uniqueness of indoor-based solicitations within the Douala context is the fact that this was not sex work that took place in enclosed or confined premises like a brothel or massage parlor, and thus absent the benefits that came with such establishments. The use of the word “solicitation” emphasizes the fact that the act of finding the client is what takes place indoors, after which both the indoor-based and street-based sex workers resort to different venues for the actual sexual act. While it remains possible that brothels and massage parlors may in fact exist in Douala, the closest venues that I encountered in this research came from examples of sex workers who solicited clients in *Circuits* or restaurants and subsequently used and paid for the lodging facilities (if any) provided by

the *Circuits*. The typical indoor-based type of sex work found in much existing research was not substantiated by the experiences of any of the sex workers interviewed.

Beyond street-based and indoor-based solicitations, the sex workers also found clients through referrals, outcalls and the internet. All of the research participants were open to referrals, which either came for free from regular clients referring their friends or for a fee when the referring party was a nightclub security guard, a hotel receptionist, a taxi driver, an attendant in a snack bar or a specific category of persons found in Akwa known as “*attaquants*.” The fee for referrals, where payable, were mostly between five and ten percent of the transaction amount, depending on the generosity of the sex worker and on the sex worker’s need to build a lasting business relationship with the referring party in order to receive future referrals. The referral fee, which ranged anywhere between CFAF1,000 (\$2) and CFAF5,000 (\$10), was based on the price of one session or one night at best, and did not increase if the sex worker spent a long duration with the client, which earned them more money.

The situation of the *attaquant* is different. The word *attaquant* can be translated in English to mean “striker” (soccer striker) or persons who do not miss opportunities to “strike” deals in context. The *attaquants* are middlemen, usually taxi drivers, but not always, who are in contact with sailors when their ships arrive. Since the sailors generally do not know the countries or cities in which they harbor, and are sometimes given limited migration access into those countries, they count on middlemen to bring them prostitutes, if requested, during the duration of their stay. The *attaquants* therefore have a repertoire of telephone numbers of prostitutes and would call them, arranging for a pick-up and informing them of the price the client is willing to pay. If the price is acceptable to the

prostitute (as it tends to be, given the *attaquant* knows the going rates for the services), the pickup is made by the *attaquant* and the sex worker is taken to the client. The client does not pay the sex worker directly. The money is given to the *attaquant*, who pays the sex worker the agreed upon fee while expecting the sex worker to “tip” him for the referral. All of the sex workers interviewed, who have found clients using this means, are convinced that the *attaquant* gets paid twice. It is he who gives the money from the client to the sex worker and will deduct any amounts in excess of the agreed price for himself. In all instances, no one except the *attaquant* and the client know what the client really paid and whether the *attaquant* makes yet another commission or referral fee from the client. What is sure is that the sex worker earns what she expects and all parties involved are taken care of. When asked if she received any assistance in looking for clients, Nadege replied “I get referrals sometimes from *attaquants* who hook up sailors or other people working on ships when they come to town.” Amina said:

There are some people they call “*attaquants*” who hook up people, particularly with White people. I am naturally timid and would generally count on a client seeing me and liking me.

All of the sex workers in the study admitted to engaging in outcalls, defined as “arranging meetings with clients by phone” (Miller and Abeyaratne, 2014:22). The use of mobile telephones in Cameroon is very prevalent and has facilitated business transactions in every sector, including in sex work. Idris, who engaged in indoor-based solicitations in hotel reception areas, said he got the majority of his clients by referrals from previous clients and mainly through telephone calls. Some of his clients were resident out of Cameroon, particularly in France, and they gave his telephone number to their friends who called him when they were in Douala.

Two sex workers (Felicia and Imani) described finding clients by using the internet in addition to indoor-based sex work. Sex workers have clearly taken advantage of what technology has to offer businesses. Meeting clients online has been an adventurous experience for Felicia, who was 25 years old at the time of the interview. Felicia, who did not have any children, made her entrée into sex work when she was 21 years old. Felicia said she met men on a website known as “Badoo” and recounted that she once met a client on the internet who invited her to a home in a residential area in Douala. Upon entering the house Felicia found out that there was a sex orgy ongoing. Felicia, who was surprised but not afraid, gave her views:

I don't like it [threesomes with two men] as the two men are trying to treat you like an animal. There was one woman who was having sex with three men. I had sex with the man who invited me and left.

Twenty-six year old Imani, who did not have any children and whose entrée into prostitution occurred when she was 22 years old, said she found men:

Indoors in snack bars, hotels, restaurants and sometimes on the internet. I look for people who are based in Douala only. I met a nice guy online. He is married and doesn't know the life I lead. I never look for customers on the street. My family is very big and that will expose me a lot.

Given that Imani is from the Mounjo Division, which is within the Littoral Region, her fears about being seen by a family member in Douala are valid. The internet therefore affords Imani with a certain level of anonymity regarding what she actually does for a living. Outcalls and the internet were used as modes of supplementing the sex workers' access to clients and not as independent types of solicitation used by the research participants.



Although some sex workers lived and worked in exploitative situations, as when they gave their money to their family members or friends who had facilitated their entrée, none of the sex workers admitted to having a pimp or a person who found and obligated them to have sex with customers. Some even found the description of who a pimp is very unusual, insisting that they work for themselves and it would be tough to prostitute for someone else. Some had seen pimps, but only in the movies. Given that the sample included 50 prostitutes, it is possible that a larger sample size might uncover more serious incidents of exploitation and even pimps. This is remote, however. If pimps were part of the commercial sex landscape, they would be visible as they watch over the women to control them. Instead, none of 50 sex workers were familiar with their presence within sex work in Douala.

### **6.3 REASONS FOR SELECTION OF SEX WORK TYPE**

The choice of prostitution type (indoor or street-based or both) is motivated in part by the sex worker's views of sex work, their experiences, and what they believe to give them a greater money-making advantage or discretion, depending on which is more important to them.

#### **6.3.1 STREET-BASED SOLICITATIONS**

Previous research has shown that one's level of education sometimes determines the type of sex work a sex worker will engage in, with the more educated persons opting for indoor-based sex work or escort services, while the street prostitution concentrated among those who are less educated. As noted, four sex workers in the sample engaged exclusively in street-based prostitution. Of the four, two (Mireille and Manka) dropped out of school in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Eyinga in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and Esther in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The

research participants who engaged in both street-based and indoor-based solicitations (N=14) had equally diverse educational backgrounds.

It is therefore important to listen to the sex workers themselves on what motivated their decisions to engage in street-based solicitations. Virginie, who engaged in street and indoor-based solicitations, recently focused her efforts on the streets in Deido because “I put on some weight after childbirth, previously I was in the clubs in Akwa.” Virginie’s child was three years old at the time of the interview and in her view the clientele in Akwa prefers slimmer women.

Esther, who saw prostitution as “a job,” added that “it pays very well and there is no point criticizing those who do it,” chose street-based prostitution because it gave her a chance to have a high turnover. This allowed her to see a maximum number of customers, which she described as “10,000” meaning she did not keep track. Esther did not see the sense in investing an amount of money to buy drinks, as is typically done in indoor locations like nightclubs, snack bars and restaurants, with no guarantee of meeting clients. She said of such investments, “you could lose money and not make any money.” On the street, Esther had access to passersby who solicited her services and when times were rough, she would accept CFAF3,000 (\$6) for services that would otherwise cost at least CFAF10,000 (\$20). The reason she gave for being able to do this is because her rented motel room was not far from the street in Deido on which she solicited clients and she took her clients easily back to her room, allowing them to pay her what they could have paid in motel fees.

Esther, as noted, came to Douala from Yaoundé only to prostitute, and hoped to return at the end of each two-week stay with at least CFAF100,000 (\$200). She insisted

that no one knew what she did and that the people she met on the streets did not know anything about her. Esther was able to work on the streets in Deido and remain anonymous.

Eyinga, who was 28 years old at the time of the interview, made her entrée into sex work when she was 22 years old. She counted among her responsibilities her ten-year-old child. Eyinga's location for street-based solicitation was one which was easily visible to newcomers in Douala and known by all who live in Douala as a hotspot for prostitutes because of its proximity to a well known hotel. Eyinga chose this location, which is widely contested among sex workers, because it provided her with access to the predominantly expatriate population going in and out of the Akwa Palace Hotel. Akwa Palace is prominently located on the *Boulevard de la Liberté* in Akwa, a main street in central Akwa leading to many other quarters, with a steady flow of traffic in front of the hotel, permitting persons who may be interested in picking up prostitutes to do so with minimal scrutiny. When asked why she chose to work on the street, Eyinga responded:

It is easy to work on the street and be natural. When you work in the nightclubs it is as if you need some supernatural powers to increase your chances of finding clients. I have been in the clubs for two months without having even one client.

In spite of her mode of solicitation, Eyinga maintained that she was very discreet and no one in her family knew that she was a sex worker. If ever a member of her family was to meet her around Akwa Palace, she will act like she was there for an errand. That reaction was not very different from what indoor-based prostitutes gave as a planned reaction if a family member saw them in the club. What appears to be the key in any

chosen type of prostitution when a sex worker does not want to be discovered is having a story ready to tell at a moment's notice.

### **6.3.2 INDOOR-BASED SOLICITATIONS**

As noted, the typical venues for indoor-based solicitations are nightclubs, snack bars, restaurants and hotel reception areas. Soliciting clients indoors involves investing in drinks or even bottled water. Christophe said, "I invest a little on a drink or water, which I sip while waiting for a client. You cannot go somewhere 2 or 3 times and not find a client." In discussing the investments that could go into looking for customers, Agathe said:

I find customers in clubs only. I don't do the street. Those who whistle after cars like the girls in Bonanjo and Village are of a different standing. From high to low standing I see myself in the middle. I go to certain clubs in Akwa, invest CFAF30,000 (\$60) to buy a bottle of whisky each night, with that I know that whoever comes to talk to me should expect to give me between CFAF60,000 and CFAF100,000 (\$120 - \$200). When I returned from Tunisia once, I spent CFAF195,000 (\$390) on a room in the Meridien Hotel in order to meet a specific type of people. There were some very important people and we went to the nightclub together and I kept their contact details.

Agathe is not the only indoor-based sex worker who talked about street prostitutes with disdain. Tatiana talked about prostitution and street prostitutes in such derogatory terms that it was difficult to reconcile the fact that the discourse is held by a sex worker. She called street-based sex workers dirty whores ("*sales putes*"). When prompted on her views of sex work, Tatiana, who solicited clients only indoors, had this to say:

The life of a whore ("*pute*") is not a life. This cannot be considered a job because most of us who do this have suffered deception. There are some girls that if you give them millions of CFAF they will still go out looking for men. I for one, I am housewife material. I know how to take care of a man. I am not supposed to be on the street.

Teckla engaged only in indoor-based solicitations in nightclubs. On street-based prostitution, Teckla said “not only does it [street prostitution] pay badly but it provides unnecessary exposure. It is a little extreme. Even if someone must prostitute, they should do it with some dignity.” Teckla obviously did not need the exposure, as by her recount, “I have not told any family members what I do. Added to that is that as far as I am concerned this is a temporary phase in my life.”

Some sex workers live in fear of the fact that someone in their family could find out about their involvement in sex work and that is a major consideration for them in their preference for indoor-based sex work. Twenty-six year old Sofina, who had no children at the time of the interview and had been a sex worker since she was 20 years old, voiced this fear and maintained that she only solicited in nightclubs and snack bars: “I would never do the street. I just imagine one of my uncles seeing me whistle at a passing car.”

Rosa was also concerned about her family finding out and was of the opinion that street-based sex work did not pay:

I only do snack bars and nightclubs. I do not do the streets. I now have too many family members in this town and it would expose me if I did the streets. Moreover the street prostitutes do not make a lot of money.

In discussing the choice of indoor locations, there was a need to vary between locations, as explained by 26-year-old Nina, who made her entrée into prostitution at 24 years of age, and used to solicit in nightclubs and snack bars. Nina said, “people have become poor now so it is a little difficult to find clients in night clubs, so I do a lot more of snack bars.”

Following the conceptual clarification given of street-based and indoor-based solicitations within the Douala context and the sex workers accounts, the profiles of the persons soliciting indoors do not differ from those soliciting on the street on the basis of their education or other factors. The differences hinge on the amount of visibility and expense associated with each type of solicitation, permitting some women to solicit easily using both types.

#### **6.4 VENUES FOR SEX WORK IN DOUALA**

Street-based sex work is carried out on major streets like *Rue de la Joie* in Bali and Deido, or streets around well known hotels like Hotel Ibis, Sawa Novotel, Akwa Palace Hotel, and Lewat Hotel, mainly in Bonanjo and Akwa. The venues for indoor-based sex work are found in snack bars in the different quarters in Douala; in nightclubs, notably in Akwa, Deido, Bonanjo and Bonapriso; and in major hotels in Akwa and Bonanjo.

As noted in Chapter 4, the quarters where prostitutes worked included Akwa, Deido and Bonanjo, with twenty participants (40%) working in Akwa, including one who also worked in Village; one (2%) working in Bonanjo exclusively; ten (20%) working on both Akwa and Bonanjo; three (6%) working exclusively in Deido; thirteen (26%) working in both Akwa and Deido; and three (6%) working in all three sites, including one who also worked in New Bell.

Three (Henrietta, Nina and Pulcherie) out of the fifty research participants stated that beyond their usual locations of work, they found customers everywhere. Essentially, as far as these three were concerned, you never know where you could meet your next client. Henrietta said in response to the question on where she found clients:

Everywhere. Even on the way to the market... in a taxi, on a motorbike. Even when walking, a car could stop next to you and that is your next customer. Apart from that it is mainly in bars, nightclubs and on the street.

## **6.5 CLIENT SELECTION CRITERIA**

When the venue for sex work is decided upon by the sex worker, what becomes critical to the sex worker is the types of clients they are willing to accept. In order to understand the factors which sex workers in Douala consider in their choice of clients, research participants were asked, “how do you decide which customer to accept and which customer to refuse?”

### **6.5.1 CLEANLINESS**

Top on the list of what sex workers asked of a client was cleanliness (N=14). This referred to the hygiene of the client and the fact that he or she should not have a bad smell. According to Nina, “it does not suffice to have money to be able to have a woman. I pick men who have money and who look clean.” Sophia reiterates this when she said, “it is important to me that a customer is clean. I accept customers of all races and ages but they need to be clean before I take a look at the money they want to pay.”

### **6.5.2 PRICE**

Next on the list of what sex workers expected prior to picking up a client was that the client accepted the price requested (N=12). While it may be a foregone conclusion in most negotiations that if the price is not acceptable then there is no deal, these twelve sex workers felt the need to emphasize this because price related issues tend to be a major and persistent source of conflict between sex workers and their clients. Angelle said, “when a client approaches me, I take a careful look at his allure and if he accepts the

price that I propose.” In determining whether a client is able to pay the price requested, prior to the negotiations, Laetitia speaks of a preliminary due diligence which is conducted:

Prostitutes know how to identify who is well off just by their appearance and how much they spend during the night. Not so much by the way they are dressed. If it is someone who is new to the club we ask those serving in the club about him.

### **6.5.3 RESPECTFUL, MATURE/YOUNG AND SOBER**

It was also important to sex workers that their clients treated them with respect (N=7). To some respect was linked to the maturity of the client, hence their preference for more mature clients (N=6), which they defined as clients who are over 28 years old. Younger clients were considered “troublesome” (Irene, Hortense and Aicha). While the combination of youth and immaturity may not be desired in a potential client, “young” was requested by two sex workers who participated in the research. Twenty-one-year-old Manka, who liked young and energetic clients, said:

I am not very old so I try not to go with people who are like 46 [years old] or so. It is too much for me. However it depends on how I feel and if a man is older but looks like he still has some energy, then I can consider him.

Chantelle added sobriety (N=1) to respectful and mature as requirements for client selection. Chantelle said:

They should appear sober, as drunks are very troublesome. I refuse young guys who don’t know what to do and are looking for sexual experiences. Young guys are also not respectful when compared to older men as they believe they buy you and can treat you badly. The men give me their money, I give them my body so they should show me some respect.



#### **6.5.4 WHITE OR/AND BLACK**

To Deborah young meant less than thirty years old. Added to this preference was the requirement that her potential clients be Caucasians. Deborah said “I only go with White people less than 30 [years old].” For a country where most of the population is Black-African, race surprisingly played a big and recurrent role in the commercial sex industry and in the selection of clients. Maguerite said:

I already have a preference for White people because I have had a few bad experiences with Black people [Black African] who didn't want to pay. Among the White clients what I am interested in is the money. If he can pay then fine.

The bad experiences with “Black people” which Maguerite referred to above was shared by a few other sex workers, and three of them (Tatiana, Deborah and Maguerite) insisted that their clients were “White.” Sophia described the “White/Black” problem when responding to a question on how she was treated by her clients. She said:

There are some kind ones, some violent ones and some perverts who think because they have given you their money you have to do as they want. This is a recurrent problem with Black people because they think if they have given you CFAF30,000 (\$60) you should work all night. White guys are not usually like that.

Still with regard to race, Paulle voiced a different opinion when she said, “I prefer Blacks because Whites are very demanding. They want piercing, that you stop eating to be thin and they exaggerate.” In the Cameroonian context, “skinny” is not a criterion for attractiveness or a requirement to be considered beautiful. The beauty of a woman is often spoken of with references to a full and curvy figure. It is therefore understandable that some research participants would take issue with clients whose preference for skinny women was contrary to the standards of beauty to which they were accustomed and which required little or no effort to maintain.

What therefore posed a problem to Paulle and some other sex workers when White clients preferred thin women, did not present a problem to Esther. Esther said her client base was Black and White. She added, “the Whites do not give too much trouble. They tend to like skinny girls and they will pay without a problem. A White client can even give you CFAF100,000 (\$200) for one night.”

The selection of a client based on race may not go as deep as someone's preference for one race over the other. This preference may be based on a previous experience or the ease with which they have found one race to satisfy or pay over the other. Ghislaine, while emphasizing her preference for mature men, said in response to her client selection criteria:

Mature men. Black or White. But I have a preference for Blacks given a bad experience I had with a White client who took me for a three weeks stay. We had an argument and he tried to strangle me. When I set myself free I ran off and never came back even though I heard he was looking for me. I never went back even to take my money.

Twenty-year old Charlotte reconciled the race related dialogue, when she said, “Black, White and racially mixed. In terms of preference, I prefer those who pay well.” This thought is echoed by Naomi, Larissa, Manka, Chantelle, Marie-Louse, Eyinga, Aicha, Felicia, Nina, Edith, Sofina, Hortense, Pierette, Esther, Teckla, Amina, Agathe, Daniela, Sophia, Imani, Laeticia, Angelle and Pauline, who have no racial preference.

#### **6.5.5 ATTRACTIVENESS, ELEGANCE AND PHYSIQUE**

Other qualities which sex workers considered in the selection of their clients were: attractiveness (N=6), elegance (N=5) and client's physique (N=2). Daniela put these qualities in context when she said:

I need to be sure that I find the customer attractive before I can accept him. If I am not attracted to him, doing anything with him will be very frustrating. If I don't find a man attractive even if he gives me 100,000 FCFA (\$200) I won't accept because I will have difficulties spending time with him and satisfying him and that may lead to problems.

The frustrations which Daniela sought to avoid may be the frustrations Stephanie felt when she accepted a client to whom she was not attracted. Stephanie said:

I need to find the client attractive. I am very sensitive and if I find someone unattractive I cannot go with him. There was a time I found a customer so unattractive that I threw up on him. I sat on him, took one look again at him and could not control the urge to throw up.

Fortunately for Stephanie the client was a perfect gentleman as he accepted her explanation that she was not feeling well. To me however, Stephanie insisted that the client was "too ugly."

#### **6.5.6 INTUITION, PRAYERS, HONESTY, KINDNESS AND INTEREST**

Like the sex workers in Cape Town, South Africa (Gould, 2008), intuition or gut feeling played a role (N=6) in whether or not some sex workers who participated in this research accepted a client. Charlotte and Pauline were direct about it when they both said they go with their gut feelings. Solantine said, "I consider the price he is willing to pay and also go with my gut feeling." Apart from going with her gut feeling, Henrietta is the only research subject who specifically mentioned the role played by prayers in her selection of a client. According to Henrietta, "I follow my intuition and I pray about it. To me what really counts is the person's level of honesty to know that he has made use of a service and will pay."

Honesty is mentioned by three sex workers (Aicha, Ghislaine and Henrietta), kindness by three (Felicia, Hortense and Amina), and the client appearing to be interested

in her by one (Nadine). According to Nadine, with reference to a potential client, “he has to act like he is particularly interested in me. I tend to wait for the client to come to me rather than go to him because he had indicated an interest.”

#### **6.5.7 HEALTHY AND NOT SUPERSTITIOUS**

To Raissa it was important that the client looked healthy. She said:

You look at a customer and you can tell from his looks what he wants from you. Some look brutal. Also if a customer has a skin rash like he has a problem I don't care if we are in the room and he is naked when I discover this, I won't accept to have sex with him.

The first part of Raissa's statement is subtle but refers to the superstitions that some sex workers voice within the context of their work. Christophe said in choosing his clients he avoids superstitious people: “I avoid people who look like they just want to take advantage of me. Some want to practice their superstitions....Some people are into occult practices.” Christophe relates an incident where a client put a piece of wood into his rectum. He did not notice when it happened and only found out the next day. He took the piece of wood to a priest who burnt it. It is not very clear what burning of the wood signifies but Christophe appeared to have found peace in this outcome.

#### **6.5.8 NORMAL**

Sex workers have a number of considerations to take into account when choosing a client. Larissa just wanted for her client to be normal. She said:

I don't always accept a customer because I want money. I look for men who are clean and normal. I say normal because there are so many bisexuals out there that you meet a man and all he wants is anal sex. Others come with their wives requesting threesomes. I don't do that.

### **6.5.9 ANYONE**

In spite of the fact that a lot of scrutiny goes into client selection, for at least one sex worker, Pulcherie, anyone or everyone was a potential client. Pulcherie quit sex work with the help of her boyfriend five months prior to the interview, and was the only sex worker who admitted to using drugs like cocaine. She characterized herself as the type of prostitute called “*prosti-pute*.” Pulcherie said:

I was not just a prostitute. I was a *prosti-pute*. A *prosti-pute* is someone who has no limits. Someone who has sex with every client who approaches them: male, female, mental patient, anyone. No age limit. There were some clients who stink and in that case you would close your nose. All a *prosti-pute* wants is her money.

## **6.6 CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Who are the men who request the services of prostitutes? The research focused exclusively on sex workers and no clients were interviewed. The information discussed in this section relies on the sex workers’ perceptions of their clients based on their interactions with these clients. While some of the information may result from direct conversations with the clients, some may originate from speculation or perception. Clients were not always forthcoming about themselves and they came in all “packages” as Rosita said: “Some are nice but some don’t want to pay. Some talk and some do not want to talk at all. It depends.”

### **6.6.1 AGE**

The ages of the men and women who solicited the services of the sex workers in the study are even more varied in range than the ages of the sex workers themselves. Every sex worker interviewed had a different preference in terms of lower and upper age limits of their clients. For Arrah, her clients ranged from 21 to 70 years old; Christophe

said 30 to 40 years old; Rosa said 25 to 70 years old; Stephanie 22 to 70 years old; Teckla 20 to 80 years old; while others said their clients had no upper age limit, which sometimes left them concerned that they may die. Speaking of her clients, Pauline said:

They are between 30 and 60 years old. As long as they look young, that is fine. I had a White *papi* [old Caucasian] and I kept wondering what would happen if he died on me. He penetrated and in less than three minutes he was done. He gave me CFAF13,000 (\$26).

Speaking of her clients, Raissa said:

Some are so old there is nothing you can do for them to get an erection. They will make you give them oral sex until your jaws get tired. Some can't get it up once you wear them the condom. Some are young as well.

Irene did not seem to care very much about the ages of her clients as she prefers “mature men, they could even be 80 years old no problem, the younger clients give too much trouble.” It seemed to be a consensus among the sex workers that the older clients were less demanding hence “less troublesome.” Jacquie said:

I don't like too young and I don't like too old. 45 to 65 [years old] sounds right, although the 70-year-olds do not give much trouble if you massage and caress them.

Laeticia echoed the same position when she said of her clients:

As long as you can walk. Some are very old they do not have the energy to do anything in spite of the Viagra they may have taken. Some just want the company or want to be massaged.

Some of the clients were as young as 14 years old either seeking their first sexual experiences, or just had a preference for prostitutes. Chantelle said:

Some of the guys are young like 14 but I don't accept those and they tend to prefer older women. May be for the same reason that older men prefer younger women. I have a son, so I do not accept those young guys.

Charlotte admitted to accepting two 19-year-old male clients in a threesome. Young therefore was relative as Charlotte, at twenty, was not much older than her 19-year-old clients. Of her twin clients, she described the following:

They wanted to have their first sexual experience. One had come and said to me “please excuse me, I want to do it [have sex].” When I told him we should go, that is when he said to me they were two [of them]. I told him in this case it is CFAF15,000 (\$30) per person as it is a threesome we are having. They told me they do not have that amount of money but will give CFAF10,000 (\$20) per person and they will pay for the hotel for one hour. I asked where the hotel was located and they told me Hotel Manu, something like that. I told them let’s go. The first person went without incident, while I was touching the second. When it was the second person’s turn he ejaculated fast, he did not last as he was already very tense. He asked if he could go for a second round and I asked him for an extra CFAF5,000 (\$10) instead of CFAF10,000 (\$20). He gave me the CFAF5,000 and we went for a second round. During this time his brother went and took a shower. I left from there with my CFAF25,000 (\$50).

I expressed surprise at the fact that Charlotte was paid without an incident, as I had heard numerous times of young people who did not pay or did not want to pay. I remembered vividly Irene who had sex with twin brothers who said they lived in Europe and had agreed to pay her CFAF25,000 each, only to pay her by her account:

Zero. I started making noise, I removed my shoes. It was this noise that attracted the attention of the security guards of the hotel and when the guards came, they threw me out.

In response to my surprise, Charlotte confirmed that some young clients were troublesome. In her words:

There are young persons and there are young persons. Among young clients, there are children of big shots (“*enfants des ‘boss’*”), there are young street boys (*nanga-bokos*, “*enfants de la rue*”), and there are children of poor people (“*enfants des pauvres*”), those whose parents do not have anything, but they too go out with CFAF5,000 (\$10) and want to have a nice time.

Virginie maintained that her clients range between 20 and 60 years of age. She said “I don’t accept younger or older because it is just bizarre.” It is probably safe to say that the age range which a sex worker is able to accept has to do with how comfortable she feels with the encounter or whether she perceives of sex work like a *prosti-pute* as defined by Pulcherie, in which case comfort does not count.

### **6.6.2 EDUCATION AND PROFESSION**

The sex workers in the study were unable to speak of the educational qualifications of their clients. In fairness to them, questions such as educational qualifications and professions should best be addressed to the clients themselves. That notwithstanding, here is what the research participants had to say of the education or employment situations of their clients:

*Marie-Louise:* They [Clients] are well employed working in the private sector.

*Maguerite:* They [Clients] are employed; I am not sure of their educational qualification.

*Sofina:* They [Clients] are very well educated and have good jobs.

*Edith:* They [Clients] are educated and working class.

*Felicia:* Some [Clients] are educated, some are not.

*Nadege:* Some [referring to her expatriate clients] work and other are on standby for their next assignments.

*Agathe:* They [clients] are educated. Some are very important personalities.

*Hortense:* They [clients] are working class and sometimes very important personalities.

While some may be educated, some may not. Some may have jobs and some may not, particularly when we look at the younger clients and those spending CFAF1,000 (\$2) on prostitutes who may be relying on pocket money from their parents or friends. Nadege asked me a pertinent question when she said, “do you think it is easy for someone to spend CFAF30,000 (\$60) on a woman for one night if they do not have a job?” In order



to afford certain types of services or prostitutes, it is most likely important that the client has some disposable income.

### **6.6.3 CLIENTS' MARITAL STATUS**

“Mostly married” was a recurrent response (N=13) to the question on the marital status of the clients when research participants were asked. In some instances the response was that the clients were “usually single” (N=1), “some married and some single” (N=7), or “married, single or divorced” (N=1). Speaking of his clients who are only male (Christophe has never had sex with a woman), Christophe said, “they are usually married, bisexuals, some who are married only as a cover but are gay in actual fact.” Speaking of her clients who are only female, as Hillaire is a lesbian (it has been seven years since Hillaire had sex with a man), Hillaire said her clients are “sometimes married and sometimes single.”

Although I definitely heard the response “married” many more times than “single,” Nadege’s view must be taken into account when she said, “they [clients] do not wear their wedding rings so I won’t know if they are married or not.” In addition to that, Hortense said, “some are married, some are not. Some are talkative and would talk of their home situation and some do not talk at all.” This brings us again to the conclusion that while we may speculate based on the perception of many sex workers that most of their clients are married, we cannot conclude on this with any accuracy without interviewing the clients themselves.

### **6.6.4 NATIONALITY**

Although all of the sex workers in the sample were Cameroonians, their clientele, by their accounts, represent the various nationalities of the world. All African countries

(Chantelle), Chinese, Lebanese, Americans (Laeticia), French (Pauline), German and Italian (Agathe), just to name a few.

The country of origin of the client and the ability to communicate does not seem impede the business relationship between the sex worker and her client. Nadege's experience with her American client is proof of that. In spite of the language barriers, or maybe because of the language barriers, Americans were perceived by some of the sex workers as kinder (Nadege, Laeticia and Caroline) when compared to the French. The French, probably as a result of the colonial history or because of a greater French presence in Cameroon, were less gullible to some of the stories told by the sex workers to obtain additional amounts of money. This leads to a discussion on what indeed is an acceptable amount based on the services requested and delivered.

## **6.7 SERVICES, PRICE, NEGOTIATIONS AND PAYMENT**

While the services rendered by the prostitutes tended to be the same (with slight variations based on gender preferences and tolerance), what differed was the price, whether or not the sex workers negotiated, and the terms of payment acceptable to the individual sex worker. It worth noting that the prices discussed are indicative and cited in ranges and cannot be quoted with absolute certainty. Interestingly, although the sex workers have an idea of what they will or will not accept for certain services, the amount is always an ideal amount and when it comes to the reality, the constant response given by sex workers when asked how much they charged for a service, irrespective of which, tended to be "it depends," followed by elaborations: It depends on whether there is an urgent need for money to satisfy a particular obligation, it depends on whether the sex worker is lucky enough to find a client as soon as he or she goes out to work; it depends

on how many days of the week the sex worker is working that week; it depends on whether the client looks like he can afford a higher price given the type of car he drives; or it depends on whether the client has been spending all evening buying drinks for people in the nightclub.

### **6.7.1 SERVICES AND PRICES**

**TABLE 6.2 Services and Price Ranges**

<b>SERVICES</b>	<b>PRICE RANGES IN CFAF (USD)</b>
Oral Sex	5,000 - 20,000 (\$10 - \$40)
Sex/Session	1,000 - 15,000 (\$2 - \$30)
Love Making/Hour	5,000 - 15,000 (\$10 - \$30)
Love Making/Night	10,000 - 30,000 (\$20 - \$60)
Threesomes	15,000 - 40,000 (\$30 - \$80)

In examining the prices paid for the respective services by venue, I divided the sample into those who solicited customers indoors, on the streets, or both. I further took note of the actual locations or quarters in which the sex workers solicited their clients and the differences in prices (if any) based on locations or on venues of solicitation.

Table 6.2 details the range of prices that the research participants were willing to accept for the different services which they offered. The lowest acceptable price for sex was reported by a sex worker who worked exclusively on the street. Manka, who worked on the streets in Deido and Akwa, said she would accept CFAF1,000 (\$2) for sex. She focused on the duration and insisted that sex, in such an instance, would last no longer than 15 minutes per session. Esther, who worked exclusively on the street in Deido, was

willing to accept CFAF2,000 (\$4) for sex when times were tough. Charlotte, who worked only indoors in Akwa, Deido and New Bell, accepted CFAF2,000 (\$4) when in New Bell. Eyinga, who worked on the street in Akwa was willing to accept CFAF3,000 (\$6) for sex but so did Chantelle, who worked on the street and indoors in Akwa and Deido. Mireille, who worked only on the street in Deido, took CFAF5,000 (\$10) as her minimum price for sex, which was an amount acceptable to other sex workers (Aicha, Edith, Hermine, Virginie) who work both indoors and on the streets in Akwa and Deido.

No price difference was noted among sex workers who worked in multiple venues, which led to a conclusion that it is the sex worker who determined the prices he or she was willing to accept in the venues represented. Charlotte who, as noted, accepted CFAF2,000 (\$4) in New Bell insisted on CFAF5,000 (\$10) for sex when in Akwa and Deido. Deborah, who worked in Akwa and Bonapriso, requested a price for sex that started at CFAF10,000 (\$20), same as Laeticia's, who worked in Akwa and Bonanjo, and Rosa who worked in Akwa, Bonanjo and Deido. Given that the only sex worker who worked exclusively in Bonanjo is a bisexual male whose clientele were mainly on referral, the prices Idris was willing to accept for the different services are discussed below alongside the prices requested by Christophe and Hillaire.

What appeared to explain the willingness for some sex workers to accept less money, while others would require more, was their personal circumstances. Esther came to Douala for two weeks each month to work and while in Douala was concerned about making the best of her situation. The fact that she rented a room in a motel meant she could take money from clients inclusive of the amount usually payable to a motel. When in Deido, Manka was more concerned about turnover and mentioned being able to take as

many as fifteen clients on a good night. Fifteen clients a night, for sessions that last fifteen minutes on the average, assures Manka an amount of CFAF15,000 (\$30), which is an amount that most of the women in Akwa would ask to have in one night.

The maximum number of clients the sex workers were willing to accept in one night also depended greatly on the amount of money they requested from each client, how early it was in the night when they found their first client, and in some cases their ability to sustain or as they put it “support” the said number of clients. With reference to the amount of money paid by the client and the role it had in determining whether or not to take another client, Hortense said, “when you have a client who gives you CFAF30,000 (\$60) or more it is one client for the night. At CFAF10,000 (\$20) you can come back for one more [client].”

Focusing on time as a factor that was taken into account when deciding how many clients to accept on a given night, Raissa said she would normally accept one, “but I can accept two or three if I find them early enough.” Tatiana and Esther spoke of the difficulty or ease with which they could accept or not accept more than one client night. Tatiana, for example, said, “my vagina is tight and I feel uncomfortable with more than one client. In fact sometimes even with one client I am hurt.” In contrast, Esther was purposeful when she said, “Even if it is 10,000 [clients] I don’t care. I remain calm and relax. I have conditioned my mind that this is what I do and I just open my feet and let the customer do what he has to do. I don’t think about it.”

As Table 6.3 below shows, 31 out of 46 sex workers questioned said they could accept between one and three clients in one night.

**TABLE 6.3 Number of Clients per Night**

# of Clients per night	# of prostitutes	%
1	14	30
2	5	11
3	12	26
4	3	7
5	1	2
6	2	4
7	1	2
10	1	2
15	2	4
No limit/does not count	3	7
# based on opportunity	2	4
TOTAL	46	100

In discussing services offered by research participants for the prices detailed in Table 6.2, all of them identify with the same types of services, which include sex (which by definition here will mean vaginal intercourse for a brief period of time ranging anywhere between fifteen minutes to one hour per session). When a client pays for sex, the understanding is that the sex worker is not expected to take off all of her clothes and it will suffice to take off her underwear only.

A distinction I quickly learnt from these sex workers was between sex and love making. While sex would take place with the sex worker's clothes on, lovemaking is more elaborate. Paying for lovemaking is essentially paying for the "girlfriend

experience.” It gives the client full access to all of the sex worker’s body. Absent violence, sex workers are generally able to ensure that the terms of the financial bargain are reflected in practical terms. Pulcherie details how to go about it with some humor:

A good *waka* [derogatory term for prostitute] is one who talks back to the customer in a tone enough to frighten him. If a customer wants to touch your breast [without paying for full service] you tell him, “did you come here to touch my breast? Don’t you know touching them will make them fall?” A *waka* needs to have a loud mouth, be imposing and have a mastery of the client.

The girlfriend experience paid for in lovemaking did not include kissing. Like sex workers elsewhere in the world (Kempadoo, 2004), sex workers in Douala will generally not kiss a client. Marie-Louise will not kiss a client because she is “afraid of disease, particularly hepatitis.” Like Marie-Louise, Aicha said, “I don’t kiss because I don’t want to carry a disease from a client.” Virginie said, “the client can touch everywhere but is not allowed to kiss.” Others who thought it was worth mentioning that they would not kiss a client were Sophia, Laeticia, Amina and Rosita. Edith, on the other hand, will kiss a client if the price is right. She said, “I would do everything except anal sex. There are some clients who want to kiss you and do everything. If they pay for the experience I will do it.”

Anal sex received more attention than any other type of service. The clients’ requests for anal sex and the refusal by sex workers appeared to be a great source of conflict, hence the sex workers needed to be explicit about whether or not they would engage in anal sex. Tatiana said, “there was an incident when one of my clients wanted to have anal sex and I didn’t. He wasn’t very happy with it and asked me to leave, which I did.”

The only sex worker who admitted to offering anal sex among her services, and with restrictions, was Laetitia. According to Laetitia:

If a White man [Caucasian] wants me to do anal sex I will because they know it is different and they pay the price for it. For a Black man [African], I will say no because they want to pay the same price.

Irene did not engage in anal in sex because she took into account her mother's feelings. Given that her mother was not happy that she prostituted, and prayed constantly for her in that regard, "it would be worse to consider adding anal sex to the mix."

Nadine took a more superstitious approach to the decision not to engage in anal sex. In response to the question, "what would you do if a customer wants you to render a different service from that agreed upon?" Nadine said:

I say no. For example I won't do anal sex with a customer. With my boyfriend yes, but with a customer since he is placed behind you, it is difficult to say whether he is not saying some incantations while he is there. If someone offers you CFAF200,000 (\$400) for anal sex you should worry as you have no idea what he hopes to do with you.

Other services requested by clients include oral sex and threesomes. The research participants are divided as to whether or not they will provide threesomes. Of the 50 sex workers interviewed, thirteen (26 percent) had done threesomes with two men, as well as being one of the two women with one man (the client). Twenty-three (46 percent) said they had only done threesomes when they were one of two participating women. Nine (18 percent) said they had never done threesomes and would not consider it. Three had never been asked by clients before and two said they had done foursomes (i.e. with three other participants, in one case three men and in another a man, his wife and two female prostitutes).



Discussions on threesomes were very lively sometimes showing bravado. Rosa, for example, admitted, “I can have sex with two men. I have had sex with two men at the same time. It was painful but the money was worth it.” As far as Raissa is concerned, threesomes came with the territory: “I have accepted more than one man at least three times and I will also do threesomes as one of two women with one man. I am not scared as I have already accepted that this [sex work] is my job.”

Christophe, who said he does not have sex with men every day because “anal sex is delicate”, denies categorically being interested in threesomes saying that “it is difficult enough to have sex with one man.” Tatiana agreed with Christophe when she said, “I cannot accept more than one customer. I already have sores from having one customer.” Ghislaine said for her it would take courage: “I have not had the courage of doing that [threesomes].” Some, like Aicha, did not look at the difficulty involved or the courage required. She was completely uninterested because of her perception of sex work. Aicha said:

I don't like sex work, it is hard enough doing this so I cannot even think of having more than one customer or two women involved in the same sexual act. Someone has proposed it to me before but it did not interest me at all.

Some sex workers describe very graphic experiences when they talk about threesomes. In this case involving a gay couple and Nadine, she said:

I have had threesomes with two men. When one was having vaginal sex with me and another was sodomizing that one. It was the first time I saw anything like that but I had to act like it was normal.

Angelle said:

When this happens, all three of us undress at the same time and while I am giving one oral sex the other penetrates me. And the second follows when it is his turn. I insist that all three of us are busy at the same time, because

if one is idle he may be videotaping with his phone. In some instances, it is two girls and one man and it takes place with one girl after the other. That is already a little common everywhere and some men even request now to have two lesbians.

Discussing threesomes raised issues relating to safety in some instances and in others the sex workers' perception of their own sexuality. While safety will be discussed in Chapter 7 alongside other risks and challenges faced by sex workers within the context of their work, it is important to show a few examples which point to the sexuality considerations in threesomes.

Stephanie said, "I can have sex with a customer and one other woman if it is a woman I know. I don't touch her as I am not a lesbian." Jacquie, on the other hand, will accept and actively participate in a threesome even if one of the clients is of the same gender as herself. She did not see herself as a lesbian or bisexual and said:

I have done threesomes with two men [customers] when I am the only woman, and with two women [as one of the women] and one man. It is something I do without hesitation. I will have sex with a man or a woman at the right price. I am not a bisexual. I just do it for the money.

Caroline initially bargained for a threesome which became a foursome. She recounted:

In this case it was a White man and his Black wife who initially wanted a threesome. When the woman, who had lesbian tendencies, realized I didn't want to be touched by her, she went out and got another female prostitute.

When discussing oral sex as a service, the points of views of the sex workers were less controversial but the discussions remained highly spirited. Some prostitutes shared some tricks of the trade with regard to that particular service. Mireille said, "clients who request a blow job (*la pipe*) pay a high price as after you need to rinse your mouth with bleach." When I asked Solange if she used bleach as well, her response was, "those are

stories. Where are you going to find time and a place to do that while working at night?”

When asked if she had heard of women using bleach to rinse their mouths after performing oral sex, Marie-Louise laughed and responded:

Those are stories. Bleach will burn your mouth. I buy mouth wash lozenges because I have seen girls die, hepatitis et cetera. At first, I used to kiss men but now that I am conscious of the risks, I no longer kiss men. For blow jobs I use condoms or, to avoid it, I tell a man I have bacteria in my teeth in order to discourage him.

Esther said she retained saliva in her mouth while performing oral sex on her clients and spat it out occasionally. Rosa, in detailing her pricelist, said, “I ask for CFAF20,000 (\$40) for blow jobs because you do not know who is who and you are exposed. I need to clean up my mouth properly after that.” The word “exposure” in Rosa’s response points to the exposure to diseases that Marie-Louise points out. It is important to note that the research participants describe performing oral sex as intimate and referred constantly to the cleanliness of the client requesting oral sex. In some instances, the sex workers required that the clients took showers if the oral sex was to be performed in a hotel or motel setting. In actual fact both parties to the commercial sex transaction requested showers to improve on personal hygiene. In other instances married clients insisted upon showers or preferred oral sex only as it would minimize the fragrance of another woman’s perfume on them, as noted by Daniela.

In comparing sex workers’ accounts of performing oral sex in Douala to elsewhere in the world, particularly in the United States, while those in the United States reported condom use while performing oral sex (Porter and Bonilla, 2010), those in Douala generally did not. This may justify the relatively high prices that Douala sex workers request of their clients for oral sex.

While some sex workers fight off requests for services like anal sex or threesomes, which they were not willing to provide, Eyinga did not even deal with such requests and said:

I think customers ask for different services depending on the behavior of the girls. Customers generally don't ask me for services like anal sex et cetera. Some girls carry themselves like superwomen and the men believe then that they can do everything.

Angelle had a list of things she will not do and was uncompromising when communicating to potential clients. Angelle said:

When I pick up a man I have my conditions. I do not like anal sex. He can caress my breasts but must not suck them particularly smokers because I fear cancer. Sometimes you pick up a man and all he wants is to give you a blow job. I have had that request at least six times. Those are things I do not do and I let you know before we get to the room and if we are unable to agree, even if we have already gotten to the room, we can suspend the services. I also avoid people who do drugs.

As unusual as the request by a client to pay to perform oral sex on a sex worker seemed, during the course of interviewing, I was told by Naomi of a regular client who paid her to perform oral sex on her. Naomi said this client was an “older French man who would call me and some other girls while in Cameroon.” He had been her client since her entrée into prostitution three years prior to the interview and he paid her a fixed price for this service. Neither the price nor service changed over time. He would pay her CFAF22,000 (\$44): CFAF20,000 (\$40) was for the service and CFAF2,000 (\$4) for taxi.

While most of the female research participants shared similar experiences as far as services and prices are concerned, the gay, lesbian and bisexual sex workers had different price ranges applicable to the services they had to offer. Christophe was willing to accept CFAF40,000 FCFA for oral sex and between CFAF50,000 and CFAF100,000

(\$100 and \$200) for anal sex, while insisting that he did not accept clients every day. Idris, whose clients were predominantly male, said he was willing to accept CFAF50,000 (\$100) for sex with a man. Of this service, he described: “I penetrate the client and in some cases depending on whether I am well paid the client could penetrate me. The client gives me a blow job if he feels like it.” Idris did not perform oral sex on clients. If Idris’ client was female, and he has had two female clients in his sex work career, he would request CFAF20,000(\$40) for vaginal sex.

Hillaire said she accepted between CFAF25,000 (\$50) and CFAF100,000 (\$200) for sex, which according to her she did “naturally and without any kind of protection.” Also given that Hillaire had a girlfriend with whom she co-habited, she insisted that all of her clients had to be “clean.” Clean in this context meant neat looking as she was not in a position to check their health records.

The starting prices requested by the gay sex workers for same sex transactions were higher than the prices requested by heterosexuals from their clients. This price differential probably compensated male sex workers for being discreet given the criminal nature of both transactions (same sex sexual practices and prostitution). This discreetness premium was not necessary reflected in lesbian transactions: although Hillaire could request as much as CFAF100,000 (\$200) her asking price was no more than what other heterosexual prostitutes requested from their clients.

Pulcherie, when talking of price said:

It depends on the service rendered. Price starts from CFAF5,000 (\$10) for oral sex with a man or between CFAF20,000 (\$40) and CFAF50,000 (\$100) for sex including oral sex with a man or woman. There are times a man would give you CFAF30,000 (\$60) in a threesome with his wife. That would mean having sex with his wife and himself.

The services varied enormously and so did the prices. As noted, the prices depended on many factors. According to Edith:

It depends on the service requested by the client and the duration. There are times I will agree to CFAF5,000 (\$10) for a few hours or even CFAF5,000 to 10,000 (\$10-20) for the night. It depends also on the number of women out there and right now as schools are on holidays there are these young girls out there who are trying to save money for their school fees taking even CFAF1,000 (\$2), making things very difficult for us.

The price depended also on the gender of the client vis-à-vis the gender of the sex worker and particularly the sex worker's sexual orientation. If the sex workers believed they are going outside their usual boundaries, they sometimes requested more money by way of an incentive, as noted by Jacquie. To some sex workers, price also depended on the race of the client. Jacquie said "I can take CFAF10,000 to 15,000 (\$20-30) if he is Black and CFAF20,000 to 30,000 (\$40-60) if he is White." Price even depended on the type of car driven by the potential client. Charlotte said:

You cannot park a Hummer and tell me you have CFAF5,000 (\$10). I will not go with you. If you park a small four wheel drive car and tell me you have CFAF5,000 (\$10), I may go with you and you will pay for the Hotel. But the Hummer, you will pay me a minimum of CFAF10,000 (\$20).

Interestingly, Charlotte said she only solicited clients indoors. She was not among the three sex workers who say they are always on the job soliciting clients everywhere. Her reference to the type of car driven by the client would either mean she is able to obtain this information by some other means when talking to the client at an indoor location, or that consciously or unconsciously she is always at work looking out for clients and judging their financial potential from the nature of cars driven.

Some sex workers said they would only accept a price that was previously agreed upon with the client. If a price is not agreed upon, the sex worker still has an expectation of a certain payment based on the going rate for the particular service. This situation where a fixed price is not agreed upon, as well as situations where the price is agreed upon and the client avoids or reduces payment may lead to conflicts. Conflict is reduced, although not completely avoided, when the parties reach some form of an understanding through a negotiation process.

#### **6.7.2 NEGOTIATIONS AND PAYMENT**

Negotiations are a major part of commercial sex transactions, with both the sex worker and client playing active roles in the offer and acceptance process, in an order which is not usually pre-defined. Sometimes the sex worker leaves it to the client to propose a price with the hope that the client will propose a price higher than the sex worker's usual price. Sometimes the client lets the sex worker request an amount with the expectation that the amount requested is less than the amount budgeted for the transaction. For repeat customers, the price is established by the prior transactions between the parties, and regular clients who start to deviate from it may find their subsequent phone calls ignored by the sex workers. Negotiations and price are very important, as they are a potential source of conflict between the sex worker and the client in instances where the agreed upon price is not paid by the client or where the client is of the opinion that the service rendered is not commensurate with the price paid.

When asked how they arrive at the price for a specified service, the research participants had varying responses. Some possessed negotiation strategies which reflected their personalities, ability or inability to request a price, or their determination in fixing

the right price and avoiding any subsequent conflict. Paulle said the price she was willing to accept “depends on negotiations.” Imani agreed with Paulle on the role of negotiations in fixing the price and added that:

When I started I was so shy I could not ask for a specific amount. Prices range from CFAF15,000 (\$30) to CFAF30,000 (\$60) for sex and a little more or sometimes the same amount for you to spend the night.

Sex workers tended to have a minimum price below which they would not accept. The minimum price for sex for Solange was CFAF5,000 (\$10). She was open to negotiations and said “I won’t take less than CFAF5,000 (\$10). I would take between CFAF5,000 (\$5) and CFAF30,000 (\$60).” While some sex workers were able to negotiate their acceptable price, some had a more difficult time negotiating. Tatiana for example, said:

There is no fixed price and it varies depending on the person. Since for me it is not sex that counts, I do not negotiate the price in advance. They give me what they have at the end. What I care about are the relationships.

Rosita admitted to not knowing how to negotiate. The prices for the services she offered depended essentially on the generosity of her clients. Rosita said:

I generally don’t know how to negotiate. A man who goes to have sex with me knows he has to give me something. It can be CFAF10,000 (\$20), CFAF15,000 (\$30) or even CFAF20,000 (\$40) or even CFAF200,000 FCFA (\$400). I have never known how to ask a man for money and sometimes when you don’t ask, they are more generous with you.

Nadege, in contemplating the negotiations and price process, was concerned about what the client would think of her if she requested a specific price. Nadege said:

It depends on if you are spending a long duration with the client or if it is for one night. I generally don’t fix prices with the hope that the client will be generous. I think when you fix the price it spoils the image that the customer has of you. I think when you do not fix prices the client feels free to come back to you. I think however that a client who gave me



CFAF15,000 (\$30) per day for sex after spending 2 weeks with him wasn't generous. That is what pushes women to steal from clients and I told him that.

Whether or not the price is agreed upon as a result of negotiations between the parties, all of the sex workers agree that the price is payable in cash as opposed to in kind. Rosa compared the commercial transaction to what occurs in a market. She said, "it is like in the market. You pay your cash and collect." Two of the research participants (Virginie and Maguerite) said they would sometimes negotiate a price with cash and kind components (for example cell phones). Brenda and Laetitia noted exceptions to the "cash and collect" policy when they both admitted that if the customer is a regular customer they would consider him even if he did not have money to pay immediately. Laetitia said, "if a usual customer does not have money, I could render the service knowing that when I am broke he will also help me out." Brenda said:

You can be in a situation in which a regular customer tells you he doesn't have money on a given day and promises to give you later. Sometimes he would [pay the full amount] and sometimes he would reduce the amount, at which point you start to avoid his phone calls.

In addition to cash, some sex workers also reported receiving gifts, consistent with the literature on successful emotional labor (Kempadoo, 2004; Kibicho, 2009). Felicia received a cell phone; Hortense received perfume and jewelry; Rosa, Brazilian hair weaves; Christophe, telephones and jewelry; Amina, dresses and perfume; Raissa, T-shirts from clients who came from abroad; and Nadine received rent paid for by a client based in France.

Given the importance of financial or economic exchange in commercial sex transactions, sex workers were asked at what point they collected the money payable by

the clients. The responses were as follows: before (N=23), after (N=7), and on a case by case basis (N=20). Those who collected their money before had good reasons for doing so. Most of them had previously trusted customers who deceived them. Charlotte said:

I have had two experiences where the customers promised to pay me and they didn't. One even told me to call him the next day and when I called he told me he was at work and that he will call me the next day. He never did.

Felicia, in insisting on getting paid before, did so out of distrust for customers. Felicia said, "some clients steal, they do not want to pay or use tricks not to pay." After receiving their money, some sex workers take additional steps to ensure that the money is securely kept because they have had experiences in which clients stole back the money they had paid. Raissa said:

I take the money most of the time before, particularly when the customer looks like a delinquent. I ensure that it is paid before and I give him the impression that I have left the money with a friend to hold.

Those who accepted their money after also had good reasons to do so. Some are sex workers who did not negotiate prices and wait at the end to find out what they would be given (Nadege and Naomi). Others, like Eyinga, knew the amount to expect following negotiations but did not ask for the money before. Eyinga said:

I agree on the price before but do not ask them for the money before because I don't want to put pressure on them. I think it is more relaxed that way and sometimes the customer even treats you better and gives you more.

Deborah, referring to her clients, had this to say: "Since they are mainly White men, I don't have any issues with people who don't want to pay." There seemed to be a general consensus among the sex workers that foreign clients could be counted on to pay the agreed amount after the sexual encounter. Sofina said, "if the customer is Black he

pays before and if White he can pay before or after. Black men are difficult and complicated.” Teckla echoes the same when she said:

With foreigners I don’t worry a lot about price negotiations and payments as they know they have to pay. If they are foreigners they can pay after. With Cameroonians it is cash first. I trust foreigners more.

The gay and lesbian sex workers generally had fewer problems collecting their money at any point. According to Idris, “it doesn’t matter when, as long as we agree on the price before. Since the activity is not legal, no one wants any attention around it, so men tend to pay as agreed.” Hillaire, whose clients are female, said, “it really doesn’t matter, we reach an understanding and they can pay before or after. They tend to pay after.” Idris and Hillaire may have had more honest clients than Christophe’s. Christophe agrees that his clients generally pay without problems but he has resorted twice to creative means to get compensated for his services. Christophe said:

In two instances the customers paid less than the amount of money agreed to. In one case I blackmailed him by taking his wedding ring. He paid to have it back. In the second case I took many things belonging to the man including his watch, suit, shoes to compensate for the CFAF50,000 (\$100) which he didn’t pay me.

Twenty sex workers responded that they decide when to take their money (before or after) on a case by case basis. Edith for example believed she was able to determine who was dishonest and unworthy of trust. Edith said:

I take the money before if [the] customer looks dishonest. I take the money after if the customer looks normal. Those of us on the street are able to tell the dishonest customers sometimes just by looking at them.

## **6.8 VENUES OF SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS**

Upon successful solicitation of clients and negotiation (if any), sex workers have different venues to which they take their clients or to which their clients take them. In response to where the sexual encounters occurred, all 50 sex workers responded in hotels or motels, 31 sex workers included their clients' homes as alternate venues, and 14 said they had sex in their clients' cars. Three sex workers (Solange, Chantelle and Esther) admitted to taking clients to their home and rented motel rooms respectively.

There are different considerations that go into venue selection and these include privacy and affordability. Some clients may not want to be seen using the services of a prostitute hence preferring to take the sex worker to their homes if they are not married or when their families are not around. The cost of the hotel or motel is the responsibility of the client. As a result, the selected venue may differ depending on whether the client is able to afford a hotel, a motel or neither, in which case he may want to have sex in his car if his home is not an option. In most instances where a hotel is the retained venue, the client pays the hotel directly. In some cases, particularly when cheap motels are used, the clients may give the money to the sex worker who makes the payment ensuring that no trace of the client's information is kept in the motel's records.

### **6.8.1 HOTELS**

Sex workers who work in Akwa, Bonapriso and Bonanjo benefit from spending time in what they call "big hotels" like the Meridien, Akwa Palace, and others, with room prices starting at over CFAF100,000 (\$200) per night. Spending time in a big hotel usually provided comfort to the sex worker and also attested to the ability of their client to pay the agreed price. In such instances, the money was typically not collected in

advance of the service. This was true of most clients who could afford to live in “big hotels,” although Imani had a slightly different experience with a client who was lodged at the Akwa Palace Hotel. Imani related:

It [the client] was a young French guy. He must have been about 28 years old. He gave me CFAF30,000 (\$60) for sex, and later told me he would give me CFAF20,000 (\$40) more if I agreed to stay the night. At night he stole the CFAF30,000 (\$60) which he had already given me and paid me CFAF20,000 (\$40) in the morning. I saw him take it from my bag when he thought I was sleeping. After he paid me, he noticed I was looking in my bag for my money and he started to act like he was in a rush to go out so I needed to leave. When I insisted I had lost CFAF30,000 (\$60) which he had paid me the night before, he claimed he had seen CFAF30,000 (\$60) on the floor and picked it up. He gave me back my money.

### **6.8.2 MOTELS**

Motels, mostly found in the Deido area, are cheaper and some designed specifically to cater to commercial sex activity. Manka and Arrah describe the good relationships they sustain with some motel receptionists or “*aubergistes*,” which they insist on calling in French in spite of their English speaking orientations. The motels charged their clients CFAF500 (\$1) every 15 minutes and would keep time by knocking at the door of the room occupied five minutes prior to the end of the time. After the knock at the door, the sex worker and the sex worker’s client, if satisfied with the service rendered, would vacate the room on time. If the sex worker’s client needed more time, he would negotiate the additional services payable to the sex worker and pay an extra amount for the additional time to the motel. It is when the motel receptionist knocks at the door that the sex worker would indicate if they intend to buy some extra time, which would be paid for after the service.

Motels function on a cash-only basis. The pre-existing relationship between the sex worker and the motel receptionists serves as a guarantee that the extra time granted by the motel receptionist will be paid for at the end. In discussing the existing relationships with the motel receptionists, it is worth noting that the sex workers sometimes provide orientation to their clients on which motels to use, thus generating business for the motel. The motel receptionist in some instances also serves as a custodian of the sex workers' money while they are in the room with clients. This money-keeping activity is structured to the point where the motel receptionist would keep a book in which he writes the amount of money held per sex worker per night. Some sex workers would withdraw their money in the morning and others at any point during the day when it was safe to do so.

Sex workers also describe instances of complicity with motel receptionists. The sex worker would indicate instances to motel receptionists when he could knock at the door before the end of the client's time. This was meant to pressure the client to "finish" fast or to request additional services and time, believing the initial timeframe to be insufficient. These good relationships with motel receptionists were maintained with little gifts in cash.

Although all sex workers admitted to going to hotels and motels as usual places of executing their businesses, for a certain category of sex workers it was slightly complicated. Homosexuality is criminalized by the Cameroonian Penal Code in Section 347, which states that:

Whoever has sexual relations with a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for from six months to five years and fine of from CFAF20,000 to CFAF200,000 (\$40- \$400).

Christophe said his clients were usually required to pay for two hotel rooms; one for the client and one for him. It is when everyone is asleep that one party would sneak themselves into the room of the other party. Idris said, “my clients would normally introduce me as their brother. When you try to go into another man’s hotel room alone, it is complicated,” meaning people would wonder why. Both Christophe and Idris did not have sex in their clients’ homes and particularly not in their cars as Christophe recounted anecdotally:

Cars are very dangerous. There is a gay guy I know in prison in Yaoundé because he was having sex with a man in his car. The man was able to pay in order not to get arrested but the gay prostitute is still in prison.

### **6.8.3 CARS**

Fourteen sex workers said they had performed sex acts with clients in clients’ cars. Although Felicia was one of these fourteen sex workers, she admitted that “cars are dangerous because of the police.” It was for this same reason that Stephanie would not perform any kind of sex act in a car. Charlotte did not like using cars as a venue for sex work because “a girl I know had a bad experience when the police saw her in a car with a client and asked to know what was going on. She was going to get arrested for it and the client was made to pay some money.” Raissa has had sex in a car once. She would easily agree to performing oral sex in a car but generally not for other sexual acts. Sofina was not a fan of sex in the car and said, “I really don’t like having sex in a car and have only done it once because the client said he gets a thrill from it.” Esther described her experience performing sex acts in customers’ cars:

I have had about four bad experiences going with customers in their cars that I do not do it anymore. Once after going to the back seat to give the client oral sex, we both came out of the car to move to the front seat. As

soon as the client got into the driver's seat, he blocked the doors and drove off. He had previously spent money on grilled chicken and three cans of Heineken beer for me, and yet he didn't want to pay me.

#### **6.8.4 HOMES**

Some clients, married ones included, take sex workers to their homes. Sex workers describe going to houses and seeing pictures of families on display. Laeticia said of her clients:

Most of them are married and it is when you get to their homes that you see pictures [showing they are married]. If a man tells you he wants to take you to his home you dare not ask if he is married or he will tell you to mind your business.

Going to a client's home was not an option for some sex workers (N=19). They would not do it. For those who went to the clients' homes (N=31) there were instances in which the wives would be present, essentially scaring the sex worker who needed time to understand that the wife was aware of the commercial sex activity and sometimes a participant. Maguerite explained:

The man [referring to her client] picked me up from the nightclub and took me to his house. I freaked out when I noticed he was married and his wife was home. He was White and she was Black. She told me to calm down and that she was used to having threesomes with people her husband brought home.

Some sex workers reported violence in clients' homes which informed their decisions not to go to there. Stephanie recounted an incident:

I had CFAF30,000 (\$60) on me when the customer took me to his house and he stole the money from me. When I asked him he started beating me and threw me out of his house. I screamed and no one came to help me so I left.

Felicia discussed hotels, cars and clients' homes as venues for commercial sex encounters but added that:



Client homes are also not good because I have had a few bad experiences. A client once accused me that I had stolen his wallet when he had left it in his car and he didn't have any money in it. Also, sometimes the clients act like they are asleep when you want to go so that they do not pay you.

Angelle discussed what was necessary to seduce a client all the way to the venue of the sex exchange only to meet with drama when that venue was his home. Angelle said:

When I go out I dress in a way that my breasts are revealed. If a man sees me and likes me then we agree on a price. I will follow a man to his hotel room if he has one already or we will go to a hotel or motel together. I no longer go to men's houses because I had a bad experience once when the man said his wife had traveled and she returned early. He ended up paying me and warned his wife who wanted to beat me not to touch me.

As discussed, some clients would use the hotel, some their cars, some their homes and some the sex workers' homes. There is another category of clients who do not choose their location guided by privacy, or affordability or even thrill considerations. Superstitious beliefs may play a factor when some clients choose certain locations to have sex. That was Pulcherie's view when she said:

I will have sex in a client's home, a hotel, a motel or a car. I will only refuse where the request seems so strange that it appears like they were satisfying a requirement of a sect. A man would tell you for example that he has to have sex in a particular public place. That I won't do.

## **6.9 A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SEX WORKER**

The research participants' view of sex work, either as their main activity or profession or transient phase in their lives, determined the amount of time spent on the streets or in the nightclubs (depending on the type of prostitution engaged in). Interestingly, even those who would fit the definition of semi-prostitutes (Songué, 1986) made much more money from prostitution than any other activity they did. Prostitution, therefore, was not a way of supplementing their income but a primary income-generating

activity while the other more conventional activity in their lives became the supplementary or secondary source of income. Edith sold food as well as prostituted and although she hoped she would one day retire from prostitution to sell food fulltime, for now, according to Edith:

Prostitution is a means of earning money and it ensures that I feed my children and pay their school fees. I sell food on the side but when the kids have to go back to school I need to make an extra effort as I am a single mother with no help from my children's fathers.

Edith therefore went out to prostitute every single day at 11pm and although on "some days I do not pick up clients, I am out there in the restaurants and nightclubs looking." Edith sold food every day except on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Irrespective of the numbers of days of the week during which a sex worker works, the work day tends to start between 9pm and 11pm and ends at about 6am or as late as after breakfast if the client is buying. When sex workers have clients who request services in sessions, they are able to return to their homes when they are either tired or have made enough money for the night. Some sex workers return home at any point during the night when they give up on having clients. Research participants, whose children lived with them, like Jacquie and Rosita, insisted on returning to their homes before 6am so that their children would not notice their absences from home. This early return also permitted them to get their children ready for school in the morning.

During their regular working hours, during weekends and even during the day when the research participants were presumably resting, they all reported their availability to take outcalls at a moment's notice, sometimes modifying other pre-existing commitments. When asked what they do when they are not working, particularly during

the day, the research participants responded: sleep (N=16), insisting that they are usually exhausted after a night out; go to the market and cook (N=10); clean the house (N=7); surf the internet (N=5); take care of family (N=4); do other businesses (N=3); study (N=2); party and have fun (N=2); and read novels (N=1).

#### **6.10 SEX WORKERS' EARNINGS**

Considerations for entrée into sex work included relative ease to earn money for some sex workers and the availability of earnings when compared to other jobs for those who had worked in other sectors. Even sex workers who had different reasons for entrée, stayed in sex work because it enabled them to take care of their responsibilities or at least take care of themselves. In their dialogues, the research participants mentioned daily or weekly amounts received from clients which exceeded the monthly minimum wage in Cameroon, which, as noted earlier, is CFAF28,216 (approximately \$59). However, when asked how much money they make in a week or a month, all of them were unable to say with certainty.

That is due to the uncertain nature of their business and the fact that there is no guarantee that they will have approximately the same number of client in a given month or week as the previous one. It is also due to the fact that because all of their money comes in as cash, and on a daily basis (if they worked daily), the sex workers do not necessarily keep an account of it, preferring to live day-by-day. In giving figures on their daily, weekly or monthly earnings, they all admitted that they were giving estimates. Twenty-five sex workers gave their earnings per night and their earnings are detailed in Table 6.4 below.

**TABLE 6.4 Range of sex workers' earnings per night**

<b>Range of Sex Workers Earnings Per Night CFAF (\$)</b>	<b># of Sex Workers</b>
≥5000 (10) - <30000(60)	8
≥30000 (60) - <50000(100)	8
≥50000(100) and up	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>

As seen in Table 6.4 sex workers:

1. who make CFAF5,000 (\$10) or more, but less than CFAF30,000 (\$60) a night (N=8);
2. Those who make CFAF30,000 (\$60) or more, but less than CFAF50,000 (\$100) a night (N=8); and
3. Those who make CFAF50,000 (\$100) or more a night (N=9).

The rest of the sex workers (N=25), some of whom may fall under any of the categories above, spoke of their earning on a weekly or monthly basis with varying ranges. For example, Edith said she made CFAF15,000 (\$30) a week, sometimes receiving CFAF5,000 (\$10) from each of the three clients she may have accepted, or Nina and Agathe who said they sometimes make as much as CFAF1,000,000 (\$2,000) in a month.

The amounts given per night did not guarantee those earnings on every single night. The research participants were conscious of the variable nature of their earnings. The variable nature of sex workers' earnings is described by Rosita when she said she could make CFAF100,000 (\$200) on a good week and on a bad week even CFAF15,000 (\$30). Teckla said, "you can go for two weeks without any customer at all then one customer gives you CFAF100,000 (\$200)." Sofina, who said she made between CFAF100,000 (\$200) and CFAF150,000 (\$300) a week, noted that "when you just start,

you can make as much as CFAF300,000 (\$600) in a week and the longer you stay the more difficult it becomes to make such money.” The reason for this may be what Stephanie referred to as being “vulgar or common.” Stephanie said she makes CFAF80,000 (\$160) to CFAF100,000 (\$200) a week or maybe CFAF200,000 (\$400) a month by working “three nights a week on the average. I do not want to be vulgar or common.” Being vulgar or common came up as an *in vivo code* which sex workers used to describe being all over the place and extremely familiar with clients, making the sex worker unattractive to clients who tend to reward novelty.

It was generally agreed among sex workers that there were good days and bad days, explaining why CFAF80,000 a week did not translate to CFAF320,000 a month for Stephanie. Solange clearly said, “while I make CFAF30,000 (\$60) on some nights it is difficult to say what I make monthly as some days I do not find clients at all.” Manka agrees in saying, “you could make CFAF30,000 (\$60) on a very good night or sometimes you could return home with nothing.”

For some sex workers, sex work is a very lucrative business if judged solely on the basis of the revenue they are able to generate, comparable only to salaries paid by the private sector and multinational corporations in Cameroon. Caroline made about CFAF500,000 (\$1,000) a month when she combined the money she made from sex work with the CFAF80,000 FCFA (\$160) she made as a dancer. Imani said she made between CFAF400,000 and 500,000 (\$800 and \$1,000) a month and said “a while ago I made CFAF800,000 (\$1,600) in a month and cannot account for how I spent the money.” How money is spent seemed to be a puzzle to many if not all of the prostitutes. As noted,

Agathe and Nina sometimes earned as much as CFAF1,000,000 (\$2,000) a month. Nina spoke of her earnings:

I sometimes make CFAF1,000,000 (\$2,000) a month although there are months when you make a lot less like CFAF500,000 (\$1,000) or even less, so to say that it pays well is an exaggeration. It creates a lot of fake problems for you. You want people to see how well you are doing and you squander the money without really knowing what you do with it, hair weaves, and clothes.

In trying to resolve the puzzle of how money from sex work was spent, Nina provided a response based on superstition:

There is a lot of transfer of energy involved in sexual encounters. Recently, after a prayer session with a pastor, my eyes have opened to the fact that the huge amounts of money given by some clients is because they want to take your positive energy and luck. Sex, particularly without protection, is very powerful for people who are in sects as they see it as a way of taking your good fortune. The only women who have been able to save or use money from prostitution successfully are those who have counted on “*marabouts*” or witchdoctors for guidance. In such instances the women do not think for themselves on how to spend their money. They do as the *marabout* says.

In spite of the variable nature of their earnings and their inability to account for how their revenue is spent, sex workers sometimes recount coming upon a windfall. What will constitute a windfall differs based on the usual earning of a sex worker. Naomi made CFAF15,000 (\$30) on the average a night and she was “extremely lucky once when a client gave me CFAF60,000 (\$120) and that was just for sex not for the whole night.” The inability to predict their future earnings compounded by the occasional good fortune when clients shower them with much money or windfalls as described here, probably accounts for why sex workers for the most part are unable to save and depend on sex work for longer periods than they initially fixed for themselves when they started. There is also the fact that the sex workers become accustomed to the lifestyles (Maguerite,

Chantelle, Larissa and Agathe) or sex work becomes “like a drug” to which they are addicted. Jacquie said:

Sex work is like a drug it is very difficult to leave and when you are in the habit of earning big sums of money that come with it, it would take a combination of a good job and a man to stop you from coming back all the time. A good job alone may not be enough. Being married may also be a deterrent but not enough if your husband is not giving you much money.

With this potential for addiction that Jacquie describes, for which the remedy she prescribes is very complex, it is therefore not surprising that the duration of the study participants’ sex work ranged from two months to fifteen years, with an average of five years. When asked if they had ever quit sex work, fifteen sex workers (30 percent) responded that they had quit (some for a few months and others for a few years) and returned. The reasons which led initially to quitting sex work were as follows:

1. In stable relationships (Paulle, Ghislaine, Henrietta, Brenda, Eyinga, Amina and Pierette);
2. Pregnant or when their children were young (Raissa, Virginia and Pauline);
3. To try different career opportunities (Imani and Solange);
4. Got tired of sex work (Charlotte and Rosita); or
5. For religious reasons (Daniela).

They all returned to sex work because, according to Daniela because, “bills had to be paid.” Pulcherie was the only research participant who was no longer prostituting at the time of the interview, having quit five months previously. She said:

I left prostitution about five months ago. I have tried to leave before and did not succeed. This time I am done with it. I currently work as a waitress in a snack bar and I haven’t engaged in sex work since I left. I live with my boyfriend, who helped me leave both sex work and my drug addiction.

### **6.11 AGENCY AND CONTROL OF SEX WORKERS' WORK CONDITIONS**

In discussing the nature and organization of sex work in Douala, what was striking was the degree of agency and control that the research participants consistently exhibited in their decision-making processes. The prostitutes, whose primary motivation for sex work was financial, prior to accepting clients considered a myriad of factors, including the “attractiveness, elegance and physique” of their clients. In this active exercise of agency, the research participants were determined to make their work conditions tolerable, or even pleasurable.

Agency was demonstrated by the research participants, who all worked for themselves, in their price negotiation strategies, whether or not they chose to negotiate prices, and in the manner in which they dealt with payments, including whether or not these payments were made prior to the sexual encounters. The research participants were also categorical on where they would go with clients for sexual encounters, some drawing from their own experiences and others from the guidance they received from their friends. The sex workers who participated in this research, in considering the nature of their work, made decisions that started with the location of their soliciting activities, which not only demonstrated their agency and control of their working conditions but showed their awareness of the risks they encountered within the course of their work as further discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 takes a detailed look at these risks and how sex workers try to mitigate their existence.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **RISKS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SEX WORKERS IN DOUALA**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

As noted, there are numerous risks and challenges faced by sex workers, which Sanders separates into “public and private manifestations of risk” (2004:1705). This chapter discusses these risks within the context of sex work in Douala, along with the measures taken, if any, by sex workers to mitigate these risks. The chapter also discusses the impact of criminalization of sex work on the risks and challenges faced by the research participants.

#### **7.2 PERCEPTIONS OF RISK BY SEX WORKERS**

The research participants were very conscious of the risks associated with their activity. In fact, some were of the opinion that sex work is so dangerous that it does not merit being called a job or profession. Deborah said, referring to sex work:

I don't like it. You cannot consider it a profession. There are many risks involved. You can fall into the hands of a truant who refuses to pay you or someone could use you in witchcraft.

The fear of witchcraft or superstition among sex workers is recurrent and reflects the context in which they live. When certain things cannot be explained within the African context, the tendency is to call it “witchcraft.” Beyond the fear of witchcraft, which cannot be proven, sex work, according to Hermine, is “dangerous.” Hermine added: “it is very risky. It is not a job. A man who does not know you can assault you. Some men are dishonest.”

The risks inherent in sex work are sometimes not perceived by the sex workers prior to entrée. While some sex workers were properly mentored by their friends (like

Manka, who was warned of the risk of disease, hence insisting on condom use), for others, their lessons were learnt the hard way. Stephanie, who had been drugged, sexually assaulted and beaten by clients, had this to say:

I had a friend who used to tell me how much money there is to be made in sex work; I would see their [prostitutes'] fanciful lifestyle and want to be like them. What I didn't realize is that there are many risks involved. It would be nice if when told of the good parts one is told of the risks, for example getting killed by a customer.

Stephanie, whose entrée into sex worker was a year and a half prior to the interview, said "I just want to make the money I can from it and get out." Like many other sex workers who subsequently knew of the dangers in sex work but chose to continue the activity, Stephanie can be said to "*satisfice*" (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:48). These risks, which are not equally experienced by the research participants, are sometimes publicly manifested and sometimes privately manifested.

### **7.3 PUBLICLY MANIFESTED RISKS**

Publicly manifested risks (Sanders, 2004) within the scope of this study are listed as follows: violence (which are assaults on sex workers excluding fights with clients and other sex workers), robbery (excluding client related thefts) and/or rape. Fights with clients or other sex workers, in which sex workers actively participated, although a publicly manifested risk are excluded from the conceptualization of assaults and discussed separately. Theft by clients, although a form of violence, warrants a separate discussion for two reasons: it sometimes occurs when sex workers are not aware, hence less aggravating than robbery; and sex workers also admit to stealing from their clients, with both scenarios exposing the sex workers to risks of assaults.

Thirty-three out of fifty research participants (representing 66 percent) reported experiencing violence, as defined herein, within the context of sex work. Twenty research participants reported being victims of assault (40 percent), eighteen (36 percent) had been raped and fourteen (28 percent) had been victims of robbery. Two sex workers (Jacquie and Irene) had experienced all three types of violence listed, while seventeen (34 percent) reported having experienced two forms of violence and fifteen (30 percent) reported experiencing one form of violence.

Existing research (Church et al., 2001; Sanders 2004) on sex work shows that street-based sex workers experience a disproportionately high incidence of violence when compared to indoor-based sex workers. Looking at sex workers in the current sample, as noted, 32 sex workers solicited for clients indoors only, 4 solicited for clients on the streets only, and 14 sex workers engaged in both forms of solicitations. In examining the likelihood to experience violence based on the type of solicitation carried out by the sex workers in the research sample, 50% of the sex workers who engaged in street form of solicitations experienced violence, while 53% of those who engaged in indoor form of solicitations experienced violence. All fourteen (100%) sex workers who engaged in both types of solicitations experienced violence, as shown in Table 7.1 below.

**TABLE 7.1 Types of Sex Work and Experiences with Violence.**

LOCATION OF SOLICITATION	NUMBER OF SEX WORKERS	SEX WORKERS WHO EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE	%
Indoors Only	32	17	53
Streets Only	4	2	50
Both (Indoors and Streets)	14	14	100

The results may be explained by the fact that number of sex workers who carried out only street-based solicitations did not constitute a sample size large enough to prompt any conclusions on the violence inherent with street based sex work. What seems to be the case here is that the venue of solicitation in this instance does not play a very important role in properly selecting the client hence avoiding subsequent violence. It also seems to be the case that, when sex workers do not have control over their means of transportation to the venue of the sex encounter, or control over the venue of the sex encounter, they increase their exposure to violence, notwithstanding the fact that they may have chosen the client at an indoor location.

It is also important to note that we do not deviate from the position that street prostitutes in contexts where prostitution is criminalized, like Cameroon, do not have adequate time to scrutinize their clients prior to selection. But in this instance, even research participants who solicited only indoors did not particularly have opportunities for scrutinizing their clients beyond physical observation and preliminary interactions. What seems to afford greater protection therefore to indoor-based sex workers are the other mechanisms in venues like brothels, massage parlors or other institutions used to scrutinize clients and control their activities when they are in contact with sex workers. Recall from Chapter 6 that indoor sex work in Douala involved the selection of clients in sites like nightclubs and snack bars, with the actual sexual exchange taking place elsewhere, but not in a brothel, massage parlor, or similar venue.

The data clearly show that sex workers who engage in both forms of solicitations are more exposed to violence. Added to the risks inherent in the venues usually selected by the clients for the sexual encounter, which may be isolated, sex workers who engage

in both indoor and street-based solicitations probably have not taken the time necessary to understand the risks associated with each type of solicitation hence increasing their likelihood to be victims.

It is important to define some recurrent terms describing certain people introduced in this chapter. These people play a very important role in the victimization of sex workers and other persons in Douala and other big cities. The term “street boys” refers to boys or young adult males who have run away from their homes in rural or other urban areas in search of opportunities. While living on the street, they sometimes engage in prostitution, sale of drugs, harassment and mostly criminality to survive. Also known as “*nanga-bokos*” within their criminal subculture, some street boys find success by rising to lead bands of street boys earning them fear and respect.

Another term which is recurrently used in Cameroon and particularly in Douala is “*moto taxi*.” *Moto taxis* refer to motorbikes which, like taxicabs, are used to transport passengers. The riders tend to work on commissions, agreeing on certain amounts of money to be given at the end of each day or week to the owner of the motorbike while keeping the surpluses. All *moto taxi* riders are male and although no reason is given for this trend, it is worth noting that *moto taxis* riders work under tough climatic conditions and have been known to engage in criminal acts given that they can easily evade pursuit. This ability to “disappear” is facilitated by the fact that the *moto taxis* do not have number plates and are not easily distinguishable one from the other. Locally, *moto taxis* are called “*bendskins*” a Pidgin English term referring to the way people slouch when sitting on them and the riders of *bendskins* are called “*bendskinneurs*.”

### **7.3.1 ASSAULT**

Twenty of the sex workers who participated in this research reported being assaulted by clients (N=15), thieves (N=3), a *moto taxi* rider (N=1), street boys (N=2), police officer (N=1), and potential client turned vigilante (N=1). These numbers reflect the number of sex workers reporting each category of assault, not the number of assaults. Two sex workers reported being assaulted more than once (Irene once by a client and once by a street boy, and Eyinga twice by clients and numerous times by police officers).

#### **7.3.1.1 ASSAULT BY CLIENTS**

Assaults are clearly a major risk faced by sex workers within the execution of their activity given that 20 out of 33 sex workers who had experienced violence had been assaulted. In essence, 40 percent of the research sample had been assaulted. Their clients were responsible for the assault in 15 cases. The main reasons given for assaults by clients are as follows: client's refusal to pay and disputes relating to sex worker's refusal to perform certain services.

Some clients request the services of prostitutes but do not want to pay for these services. Nadege said those clients will sometimes attribute their refusal to pay to the fact that the services were not up to the expected standard. In order to avoid conflict, Nadege said she was willing to accept money for her taxi fare or nothing at all. Eyinga did not try to avoid conflict and paid for it with a violent assault:

A customer took me his house. The next morning when I wanted to go, I asked for my money and when he made no efforts to pay, I tried to take his phone as my payment. That is when he called me a thief and started beating me. He beat me for about 3 hours. He [the customer] even called a friend of his who came to watch him beat me. His friend did not try to stop him. The customer broke my tooth. I took him to the police and he was made to pay for a replacement tooth.

In another instance, probably with experience from the first assault, Eyinga perceived the escalation of the violence and knew what she needed to do to mitigate it. Eyinga said:

Another time a customer took me to a very dark place. I was convinced he was going to rape me. When he asked me to kiss him I refused as I don't kiss customers. He hit me really hard. I realized if I didn't kiss the man he would hurt me so I complied and it worked. He gave me CFAF500 (\$1) and let me go.

When asked what they do when clients ask them to perform services different from what was negotiated and agreed upon, all of the sex workers said they refused. In some instances, this refusal was not accepted by the client, who resorted to violence either as punishment for refusing or as a means of ensuring compliance. Raissa said, "I was once beaten by a man who wanted to sodomize me and when I refused he started to punch me. I screamed so loud that the security guards got me out of the situation." Raissa's rescue was possible because she was in a hotel with security guards who worked for the hotel and not for her client. Nadege recounted a similar experience in which she was rescued by security guards. Nadege said:

A customer got angry with me for saying I wanted to leave. In wanting to prevent me from going he pushed me to the ground and put his knee on my neck. I was desperate. I reached out for a shoe which was on the floor and used it to hit the wall of the room. The neighbors called the receptionist who came with the guards of the hotel. The man, whose nationality I couldn't really be sure of because he had many passports of African countries, gave me a few US Dollars which I gave to the security guards. I kept insisting I had to go to the hospital and he had to pay, he gave me what seemed like CFAF300,000 (\$600). I thought he was setting me up to say I had stolen his money if I tried to leave so I called those around and gave them some of the money telling them that is what I had been given.

Raissa and Nadege's experiences show why hotels are less risky venues for sexual encounters compared to clients' homes. If ever there was a reason not to go to clients'

homes due to risk considerations, Nina's experience (or at least what she remembers of it) is that reason. Nina recounted:

I once had a client who took me to his house in Bonamoussadi. He wanted to have sex with me without using protection. When I refused, all I remember is my head getting drowned by him in water. I fainted and woke up the next day in a hospital. I was told the hospital bills had been paid for by the person who brought me in. I guess I should be thankful that the client took me to the hospital and did not leave me to die. In fact, how do I even know that it was the same man who drowned me who brought me to the hospital? May be he threw me out of his house and another kind person picked me up. I don't know. I don't even know if the client had sex with me or not.

Given the uncertainty about what happened on that day, this incident is narrated as an assault although it is possible that Nina was not only assaulted but also raped by a client who may not have used protection since that was the client's initial preference which led to the conflict.

As gruesome as assaults by clients appear, sex workers are exposed to assaults sometimes by persons who are not even clients. This is because sex workers work during hours of the night which are not usually safe.

#### **7.3.1.2 ASSAULT BY OTHERS**

Sex workers are sometimes assaulted by other persons picked up as clients who do not pay the sex worker and who never had an intention of paying. Hermine picked up someone she believed to be a bona fide client. She said, "this man took me to PK10 [a location in the suburbs of Douala] and beat me up. He almost killed me. I don't know what he wanted from me." While it remains a puzzle for Hermine, who continues to ask what the would-be customer turned vigilante wanted from her, we could apply the rape myths as possible explanations. To whoever caused her harm, Hermine, as a prostitute



like other prostitutes, deserves the violence, no harm is done and one prostitute can be made to pay for the actions of another (Miller and Schwartz, 1995). Another possible insight into Hermine's predicament may be found in a quotation by one of the prostitutes in Gould's study when she expressed fears for her work environment:

One thing I am very scared of on the road [is] that a lot of these men regret what they are doing, they hate themselves and they hate prostitutes. A lot of people are not aware of it because these men that come from respectable families, religious families, they are such sweet, innocent, saintly men. Now those men, when they have that drive for sex, then you are the best person, but once they are finished with you, they can actually kill you in their mind because, in their mind, they have done the worst thing that anybody can do on this earth (2008:70).

Charlotte was assaulted by thieves who wanted to steal a valuable yet inconveniently placed item. This item was artificial hair braided into her hair. Charlotte said:

I got into a taxi with some people in it. I didn't realize they were thieves. They shaved my weave from my head, took everything including my shoes. My Brazilian hair weave was worth CFAF75,000 (\$150), I had jewelry worth CFAF45,000 (\$90) I had just bought, and I had CFAF20,000 (\$40) in my handbag. It looks like they had been following me. I had the dress I wear to go to work in my handbag. They removed what I had on as clothes and made me wear the work clothes which I had in my bag. I was lucky because in some cases, the woman is left completely naked.

Thieves are known to steal expensive hair weaves from people's hair using razors to shave this directly from women's scalps alongside their hair. This exposes the victims to cuts from the razor, added to the trauma of being stolen from.

Being assaulted by passengers in a taxi is likely, but even more likely is being assaulted by a *moto taxi* rider or *bendskinneur*. This likelihood is established by

*bendskinneurs'* notoriety for criminality after transporting their lone client to a destination other than the destination requested. Imani said:

When I just started [sex work] I used to go out to clients' homes when they would call without necessarily knowing where they lived or knowing the taxi driver. One day I took a *moto taxi*. The man took me to a deserted place and I got robbed by some guys who took my bag and telephone. Thankfully I had hidden my jewelry on me and they didn't see it. But they hit me on the head with a bottle, cutting me. I had to go to the hospital.

Street boys, who are known for stealing and raping prostitutes, nighttime street vendors, and other persons who work at night in some instances, have been seen to assault people. Manka once met some street boys or *nanga-bokos* when she was returning home from work. Manka said when they asked her for money since she did not have any to give them, they gave her a beating.

Getting assaulted by clients or other street users is consistent with the literature on the risks faced by prostitutes. Unfortunately, also consistent with the literature (Miller, 2006) and found in Douala, is violence from the police. According to Eyinga "every time we get raided by the police they beat me up. They slap me with their hands. Maybe because I am always talking back when they speak." Eyinga was able to introspect on why she was the target of beatings by the police. Talking back to the police may be something for her to control to avoid being beaten by the police in the future. She was the only sex worker who reported such violence.

### **7.3.2 ROBBERY**

Robbery is "the felonious taking of the property of another from his or her person or in his or her immediate presence, against his or her will, by violence or intimidation" (retrieved from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) on 02/25/2014). Fourteen research participants (38

percent) reported incidences of robbery within the context of sex work, with one subject (Felicia) having been robbed more than once by thieves. The perpetrators of robberies were: thieves (N=7), street boys or *nanga-bokos* (N=3), *moto taxi* riders or *bendskinneurs* (N=2), would-be clients (N=2) and a taxi driver (N=1).

### **7.3.2.1 ROBBERY BY THIEVES AND STREET BOYS**

Robberies of sex workers by thieves are very prevalent because both categories of people tend to work during similar hours. Their interactions leave the sex workers, who possess money and other valuable goods, victims of these thieves, who are usually armed with knives or guns. Jacquie was attacked at knife point by thieves who wanted to steal her handbag. Of this incident, she said:

The aggression was so unnecessary and lasted for a while because I fought back. I was hurt by the knife when there was really nothing in my handbag. I like to fight. I would have just given the bag.

Jacquie realized that fighting and getting hurt did not prevent the thieves from taking her bag and she could have avoided getting hurt by not fighting.

Irene had been robbed at knife and gun points by thieves and *nanga-bokos* numerous times. She said “I am lucky because I always have something they can steal, like a phone or money so they have never hurt me.” Henrietta also preempted the experience of a violent attack by leaving home with some money which she could give to the street boys upon request. Henrietta said:

The violence on the street is from street boys who require that you to pay “*droit de terre*” [directly translated as right of way, i.e., protection money]. If you are not able to pay they insist that you have sex with them and they are usually armed. To avoid this, I always leave my home with a little bit of money, CFAF1,000 to CFAF2,000 (\$2- \$4) so that if they ask me for money I have some money to give them.

Rosa's experience was that the street boys "would sometimes follow you and insist on taking some part or all of your money from you." These street boys knew the prostitutes had spent the night working and most likely had their money on them. Unlike armed thieves, the prostitutes were likely to know the *nanga-bokos* who stole from them because they occupied the same spaces, and when the *nanga-bokos* were not harassing or stealing from the prostitutes, they acted as their security vis-à-vis third parties. Angelle said:

I think the *nanga-bokos* protect us more than the police. The police are sometimes indifferent to assaults while the *nanga-bokos* will never ignore it. The only problem is that the *nanga-bokos* eventually assault the clients.

Some people are less visible than thieves and *nanga-bokos* on the robbery scene at night but nevertheless present.

#### **7.3.2.2 ROBBERY BY OTHERS**

Sex workers report instances of robbery by people they pick up believing to be clients. It is what ensues that defines the status of these persons as robbers and not clients.

Sofina refers to her would-be client as who really was, "a bandit." Sofina said:

Once, a bandit took me to a very deserted place, threatened me with a knife and took my bag from me. He wanted to rape me. I was able to talk my way out of it and made the thief think we were friends. I lied to him that I had a baby who was three months old and whose father had abandoned us. I told him he could be a father to my baby. There were times he acted like he didn't believe me and sometimes he acted like he was on drugs, screaming at me to undress myself. I spoke to him very calmly making him believe I wanted to be his girlfriend. When he relaxed a little and stopped watching I escaped.

Sofina was able to pull herself out of that situation and said that the error she made was accepting "that type of client." Sofina said the only reason she accepted the client turned bandit was because:

It was at 2am in the morning and I had not had any clients. He [the bandit] offered CFAF10,000 (\$20) for sex which I would normally not have accepted but since the day was almost ending, I was encouraged by my girlfriend to accept.

Henrietta and Nadine lost their handbags to some *bendskinneurs* who pointed knives at them. Nadine was surprised when the thief in her case took out the sim card from her cell phone (which was in her handbag) threw it at her before riding off. Nadine said “he didn’t want me to lose my telephone number.”

Beyond robberies and physical assaults, sex workers were also exposed to sexual assault, which came with the possibility of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

### **7.3.3 RAPE**

In determining the number of research participants who had been raped within the context of sex worker, I asked if they had previously been victims of rape. Twenty-seven out of fifty sex workers (54 percent) responded in the affirmative. When asked when the rape occurred, out of the initial 27, nine were rape victims prior to their entrée into prostitution and had not been victims of rape during the course of prostitution. In fact, five out of those nine had been raped prior to their eighteenth birthday.

Eighteen sex workers (representing 36 percent of the research sample) were victims of rape during the course of prostitution, two of whom had been raped prior to their entrée into prostitution. The persons responsible for the incidents of rape as listed by sex workers were as follows: clients (N=11), police (N=5), street boys (N=4), thieves (N=4), and *moto taxi* riders (N=4). In response to how many times they had been raped, most (N=14) of the eighteen sex workers reported one or two times, while four

(Chantelle, Arrah, Marie-Louise and Ghislaine) said they had been raped numerous times. Ghislaine described her experience with sexual violence as:

That is what happens when someone forces you to have sex without using protection. Given that I am weaker than him it is preferable not to try to fight and do my best to leave the situation.

Arrah, took into account numerous rape incidents by street boys during her return home from work. Rape was used by *nanga-bokos* as punishment when a sex worker did not give them money upon request. Some sex workers had come to expect it and this interfered with their perceptions or conceptualization of these encounters as rape. This perception may be the research participants' way of minimizing rape and consequently the gravity of the risk in being raped. In fact Manka said she experienced "something like rape" and it is only when I asked what that meant that she provided further clarification by saying, "I was raped by 4 boys when I was returning home one day. The good thing may be [the fact] that they all used condoms."

The persons for whom sex workers are out for every night seem to be the same people who cause them the most amount of violence: their clients.

### **7.3.3.1 RAPE BY CLIENTS**

In discussing rape by clients, it is important to mention that, like in the case of robbery, in some instances sex workers pick up a client who turns out to be a robber. The same is true for sex workers who pick up clients who turn out to be rapists. There is also a second category of clients who insists on performing sexual acts for which the sex worker's consent is expressly denied. An example is manifested where the sex worker consents to protected sex, but is forced to engage in unprotected sex. While the client in the second instance is likely to pay for the "service," albeit forcefully obtained, the

client/rapist in the first instance is not likely to have paid and has no intention of paying. In both instances, the violent rapist may request a refund or forcefully recover his money from the sex worker.

Angelle described her experience with a client turn rapist, which happened on her first day as a sex worker. Angelle recounted:

My first day was very bizarre. I did not know these *nanga-bokos* then as I do now. I accepted the proposal of one who took me to the Mbappe Lepe Stadium [located in Akwa] where three of them raped me without paying. I returned to the house, took a break for a week, did a [medical] test which showed all was fine, then went back to work. When I went out the next time, I was fortunate to meet a man to whom I told my story and he gave me CFAF300,000 (\$600). I didn't have sex with him at the time but he became a regular client. Now I see him like once in six months.

Irene was raped by a client who took her to his house. Irene related what happened:

He [the client] felt provoked when I responded to one of his questions by saying that I am not his maid, he hit me and brought out a knife. When he finished raping me, he threw me out and threw my bag and shoes out after me.

This was a client who had paid Irene prior to taking her to his house, and she picked him up from a nightclub and reported the incident to a nightclub bouncer she occasionally had sex with at a preferred rate of CFAF5,000 (\$10). Irene said, "the bouncer and his friends were going to physically attack him the next time he came to the club. He didn't have any money on him and I told them it wasn't worth it."

While most of the victims of rape were women, consistent with the disproportionately high number of female research participants, one of the two male sex workers interviewed, Christophe, was a victim of rape during the course of prostituting. Christophe described what happened:

I went into the hotel room and the man who took me [his client] had his friend hiding in the bathroom. Usually I go into the bathroom to freshen up prior to having sex but I don't know what happened that I didn't on that day. When the second man came out [of the bathroom] the first man said he had wanted a threesome. When I refused, they told me they will kill me. I had sex with one then had sex with the other while his friend videotaped using his phone. My client who had brought me into this situation later felt bad and gave me CFAF1.5 million (\$3,000) and CFAF150,000 (\$300) to make myself a passport. He told me that I could do a trade if I wanted.

The amounts of money given to Christophe as post-rape compensation were unusual as well as very substantial. I asked Christophe if that money was given to him immediately after the incident and he said he stayed in touch with the "client" who had put him in that situation. When I asked if he was not suspicious of the large amount of money he was given, Christophe's response reflects the uniqueness of the Cameroonian context and what I had become accustomed to hearing as a possible explanation of tough to fathom situations: superstition, sects, and witchcraft. Christophe explained:

You need to understand many people engaged in same sex encounters because they belong to certain sects that require it of them. They ask them to do things that are sometimes strange in order to gain certain advantages. I had a boyfriend once, he is now dead, but he was in his fifties and was very kind to me giving me everything I wanted. I lived with him like his wife but the only strange thing was that he acted like he was required to spend much money on some days. He would go out in the evening with CFAF500,000 (\$1,000) and return with nothing. So I am not surprised that this client gave me CFAF1.5 million (\$3,000).

A situation similar to Christophe's happened to Chantelle. It is not uncommon that when a sex worker consents to, and is paid to have sex with one client, that client brings along another person with whom the sex worker is expected to have sex, usually under duress, hence rape. In order to avoid getting hurt, the sex worker would comply



with the request, having sex with as many other people as required. Chantelle said “a guy paid me and took me to his hotel room. I found that his friend was there and to avoid conflict, I had sex with both of them.” Chantelle was paid by the initial client who took her and she was not given an amount worthy of explanation, like Christophe’s.

### **7.3.3.2 RAPE BY POLICE OFFICERS**

Existing research on violence towards sex workers lists the police as a category of persons responsible for raping sex workers (Gould, 2008; Liu, 2011), and this research confirms this finding within the context of Douala. Sex workers have numerous interactions with the police, which usually start when they are raided in police sweeps, as will be discussed below. However, some police officers take advantage of the raids to rape prostitutes. In fact Caroline (who was not a victim of rape) was of the opinion that “the police carry out raids in order to disturb the girls and have sex with them.” Nadine, who was almost raped by a police officer in a police station, agreed with Caroline and said:

The police officers are not trustworthy. Sometimes they arrest girls only because they want to rape them. After hitting a police officer who wanted to rape me...I screamed so loud his boss came in.

Nadine was saved by the boss of the police officer who wanted to rape her. Hortense was rescued by the presence of a female officer in the police station. Hortense said:

I was arrested for vagabondage since I left home without proper identification. I was taken to the Bonanjo police station. At about 11 pm an officer came and asked me to have sex with him. His female co-worker heard the argument that followed and came and took me from there. She sent me back home in a taxi.

Edith turned the misfortune of being raped by a police officer to her advantage. She said “I became ‘friends’ with the police officer who had forced me to have sex with him and

although it did not become a relationship, the other police officers who carried on raids would no longer bother me as a result of that friendship.”

The sex workers who were victims of rape by the police (Edith, Chantelle, Marie-Louise, Irene and Jacquie) reported the venue of the rape incidents to be the police station and in police vans driven to locations far away from where the prostitutes were picked up, usually after releasing the prostitutes in whom the police officers were not interested.

Although the police are usual players perpetuating violence in the commercial sex industry across different countries and continents, their continued participation in inflicting violence on sex workers, although not unexpected, is regrettable. To be expected, however, at least in the commercial sex scene in Douala, is the notorious participation of street boys in sexually assaulting prostitutes.

#### **7.3.3.3 RAPE BY STREET BOYS**

As noted, that only four sex workers admitted to being raped by street boys seems to point to a problem in the conceptualization of rape with regard to street boys, given that the research participants talked about constant interactions with street boys and the options at their disposal when faced with street boys at night. These options included: giving them money or having sex with them. These options were not mutually exclusive and it was not for the sex worker to determine which of the two options they would prefer when faced with the problem.

The problem of sex workers’ definition of rape when it relates to street boys is seen in Virginie’s experience, which she related as follows:

There are these boys who ask for CFAF15,000 (\$30) or want you to have sex with them. To protect yourself you need to date a “boy” or a “thief” so

that the others can leave you alone. It offers you protection but he is there because he also wants to exploit you.

In describing the relationship as “dating,” Virginie blurred the conceptualization of her experiences as rape. She was, however, able to admit that this type of “relationship” was of an exploitative nature. Brenda’s entrée into prostitution was in an era when street boys did not give options of cash or sex in lieu of cash, while she noted that neither actually guaranteed protection. Brenda said:

When I started out in prostitution the *droit de terre* to be paid to *nanga-bokos* was sex. You were expected to have sex with their leader, after which he would instruct everyone to leave you alone. In fact they never left you alone as the same leader would continue to bother you for money every time he sees you.

#### **7.3.3.4 RAPE BY OTHERS**

This section discusses sexual assault by thieves and *bendskinneurs*. The main distinction between street boys and thieves is that the latter have homes while the former live on the street. Sex workers are sometimes exposed to people who meet their qualifying criteria for clients, which as noted, include cleanliness and appearance of being able to afford the service. These thieves, posing as clients, lure the sex workers to their hideouts and rape them. Chantelle had one such “client” and recounted:

He [the would-be client] told me he was taking me to his house. He took me to an abandoned building. There were three other guys there. When I asked them to pay, they wanted to be violent so I had sex with them. Some used protection and some did not.

One of the risks in prostitution associated with working late and returning home late at night or very early in the morning is the exposure to thieves or rapists lurking in the dark. When the sexual assault occurs close to home, it is more troubling to the victims. Aicha said:

One night, I was raped in my neighborhood by a guy when I returned home. I didn't recognize him but I suspect after living in that quarter for close to a year he had observed my pattern and knew that I return late in the night. I went to the hospital the day after as the rapist did not use protection. I worried about the incident for a long while as I had lived in that quarter for a year and nothing like that had happened, but I told myself when you are a prostitute and work at night something like this could happen.

Nadine was raped by a motor taxi rider. She was his passenger and instead of taking her safely to her destination, he took her to a deserted place and raped her. In discussing sexual assaults, some sex workers, when asked how many times they had been victims, their response was many times, meaning they were no longer counting. Naomi, who spoke very softly and slowly when asked how many times she had been sexually assaulted, calmly provided this response:

I have been raped four times. Once, before becoming a prostitute, by a soldier who threatened to kill me if I said no. He put a knife and a gun next to me and told me he would shoot me with the gun and chop me up in tiny pieces. He looked like he would have done it and no one would ever find out since he had taken me to an isolated part of the military barracks. Sometimes I think he may be the person who infected me with the HIV virus, as he did not use protection. I went home and never told anyone about it. I kept thinking it was my fault for being out late at night with a miniskirt. He arrested me for indecent dressing. Now I realize I should have reported him. Another time a client who took me at the close of the nightclub, raped me and threw me out in Bali [quarter]. He used protection. Another one was a *bendskinneur* who told me he knew some people who were looking for sex workers for the night. I accepted for him to take me to them and instead he took me into the quarter somewhere and raped me without protection. The fourth case was someone who saw me at about 3am when I was dropped off by a taxi not far from where I live. He raped me without using protection.

Naomi, who takes the precaution of requiring the use of protection by all of her clients, said "although I am HIV positive I have to be careful because if I don't use protection I will expose myself to the risk of infections and other types of

contaminations,” yet she was put at risk of complicating her health further by these numerous instances of rape. When asked how she dealt with the rape incidents, Naomi responded in the same calm manner: “I don’t think about things a lot. My illness does not allow me to think too much about many things.”

### **7.3.4 OTHER PUBLICLY MANIFESTED RISKS**

Violence towards sex workers is not limited to physical assaults, robberies and sexual assaults. During the course of sex work, sex workers are exposed to other risks, like fights and thefts, which if allowed to escalate, could expose them to further violence.

#### **7.3.4.1 THEFTS FROM AND BY CLIENTS**

Violence as discussed above in its different manifested forms poses a great risk to sex workers. Among the other risks faced by sex workers is the risk posed when a sex worker steals from a client or when a client steals from a sex worker and the potential for conflict these acts of theft provide. When asked how many sex workers had stolen from their clients and how many had been stolen from by their clients, 24 sex workers (48 percent of the research sample) responded that they had stolen from their clients. Nineteen sex workers (38 percent) said their clients had stolen from them.

##### **7.3.4.1.1 THEFTS BY SEX WORKERS**

Chantelle was of the opinion that all prostitutes stole from their clients and said:

Girls who tell you they have never stolen are lying. I steal from customers who either have a lot of money or those I have seen spend a lot of money while we are together. When he [the client] is asleep or in the bathroom I take his money.

Arrah’s rationale for stealing was to compensate herself for the intensity of the services rendered to the client. Arrah said:

If I think the sex was too much compared to the price, I ask the customer to add money and if he doesn't I steal from him. Once I had an old Papa as a customer, we had drunk and had sex. When I thought he was sleeping around midnight I went to remove a few bills from his wallet. I usually don't take all. He caught me with my hand in his wallet and asked, "my baby, do they steal at this time? Couldn't you wait until around 2am to be sure people are fast asleep?"

In this instance the customer who caught Arrah did not become violent and took a humorous approach to address the situation. In providing a justification for theft, what Hortense referred to as "stealing by intuition" was a rationalization which reduced the perception of risk involved in stealing. Hortense said:

I can say I stole by intuition. The client had agreed to give me CFAF30,000 (\$60). I looked into his pocket and took CFAF30,000 and when the time came to pay me he gave me CFAF4,000 (\$8) insisting we had agreed on CFAF4,000 (\$8). I left without complaining as I had already taken what was mine.

Going by Hortense's description, Brenda also stole by intuition. Brenda said:

I have stolen twice and in both instances the clients were White. In one instance, the man had a lot of money and hid it carefully but I saw where he kept it. I took only 300 Euros from it and guess what? He paid me 20 Euros at the end of the sexual act. He did not even realize I had stolen. He was just a very stingy person.

The instances of theft discussed by sex workers were many and those who had stolen were very animated when recounting their experiences, which showed their wit and ability to improvise in order to get out of otherwise difficult situations. There were many instances in which the research participants successfully tricked their clients who appeared to have caught them stealing red-handed. Edith recounted her experience:

I have stolen numerous times from customers. I stole CFAF85,000 (\$170) once from a customer when he was drunk and asleep. He opened his eyes and saw my hands in his pocket jacket and asked me what I was doing and I told him it [the jacket] had fallen to the ground. When we woke up he

assumed he had spent all of his money the night before, went to the ATM, got money and paid me.

If Edith's customer was drunk and gullible, Daniela's was not, yet she got away with stealing from him. Daniela recounted:

I steal from clients but not too much. Once a client almost caught me as I stole the money before he looked for it to pay me. When he asked me if I had stolen his money, I told him he must have forgotten where he kept it. He found money from elsewhere and paid me.

Rosita, who had stolen twice from clients - CFAF60,000 (\$120) and CFAF150,000 (\$300) respectively - said in both instances, "I leave early when the clients are still sleeping." This measure demonstrates that the sex workers who steal are very conscious of the risk of arrest or violence that theft from a client exposes them to, hence the cautionary measures taken to avoid being caught. In spite of their consciousness of the risk associated with theft, sex workers stole varying amounts from their clients and in some instances unusually high sums of money.

Laeticia who admitted "having stolen many times from customers," said "I haven't been lucky to meet people who had a lot but I have stolen CFAF200,000 (\$400) before." Maguerite said, "I stole slightly over CFAF200,000 (\$400) from a customer who was drunk and asleep." Jacquie admitted stealing "over CFAF400,000 (\$800) from a client, [along with] his telephone and camera. I left CFAF5,000 (\$10) for him as his transportation money." Agathe stole over CFAF2,000,000 (\$4,000) from a customer's hotel room safe by taking out CFAF200,000 (\$400) daily. She said "it was on the day he [the customer] was leaving that he noticed his money was missing but I insisted not knowing anything about it. He didn't know how I could have known the number to his safe but I saw him enter it before."

The sex workers who stole seemed to have justifications or excuses for stealing, some of which had nothing to do with “intuition” or anticipation of not getting paid the agreed amount (Hortense), or a stingy client (Brenda), or that the service rendered was in excess of the agreed amount (Arrah). Sometimes the sex workers needed the money and the theft was opportunistic. For example, Raissa needed to furnish her room with a mattress, and a sleeping client with CFAF30,000 (\$60) in his wallet was what she needed. Yet, some sex workers showed that the decision to steal was sometimes fraught with a few bouts of conscience. Esther said:

I stole a customer’s cell phone but returned it when he kept calling me to ask if he hadn’t dropped it somewhere. He is now among my favorite clients and is very generous with me. He pays at least CFAF15,000 (\$30) for sex and would give me CFAF30,000 (\$60) for two rounds [sessions] easily. He usually takes me to classy hotels.

Manka related a similar experience when she said:

I stole once from a customer. The money was much. It was about CFAF60,000 (\$120). My conscience started to bother me as the customer looked like someone who worked hard for his money. I called him and we met somewhere. When I returned the money to him he gave it all back to me.

There was a strong possibility that the return of stolen money or property could expose the sex worker to criminal sanction or violence, depending on the temperament of the client. The experiences of Esther and Manka showed that some customers appreciated and rewarded honesty. That was not to say that some clients were not dishonest. Nineteen sex workers (38 percent) said they had been victims of thefts by clients.



#### **7.3.4.1.2 THEFTS BY CLIENTS**

Virginie, who said she did not steal from customers, was unfortunately stolen from by a customer. She said:

Once a customer stole from me. It was CFAF15,000 (\$30) which included the money he had paid me and some money which I had before. I kept looking for the money and could not find it. He had hidden it in his butt crack. He wasn't a young person at all. When I couldn't find the money I pushed him and when he tried to walk the money fell.

It was not uncommon for clients to steal sex workers' money to pay them with it or to steal the money that they had just paid the sex worker. Hortense's experience was that "a client once stole CFAF15,000 (\$30) from me to which he added CFAF5,000 (\$10) and paid me. When I confronted him, he refused to admit to it. I let it go because I was in his house." Jacquie said, "my customer was Lebanese; he stole CFAF5,000 (\$10) from me and added it to the money which he had to pay me. I let it go." Letting go of situations such as these was a way of ensuring the situation did not escalate and was thus a violence minimizing strategy.

Clients sometimes stole from sex workers when they were asleep. Raissa's customer stole from her when she was asleep. To ensure she did not try to follow him if she woke up when he was making his exit, he soaked her clothes in water. Some sex workers who have been stolen from said they did not sleep when they were with new clients and would sleep only if the client was a regular. That, however, did not stop Edith from losing money. Edith said, "I was sleeping when the customer stole from me. The interesting thing is he was a regular customer and he stole CFAF2,000 (\$4)." Clients also stole from sex workers when the latter went into the bathroom to freshen up. Solantine

said “The client had paid me and I went to the bathroom. He took the money from my handbag. Sometimes they even lock you up in the hotel room.”

It appeared that even the clients who stole did not want to get caught. Curiously, when a sex worker discovered a theft and reproached the client, the sex worker was at risk of violence following the reproach. Paulle said, “one day the client stole my cell phone in his car. When I complained he threatened me with a fork and pushed me out of his car.” Stephanie got beaten for accusing the client of theft. This probably explains the silence exercised by Hortense and Jacquie when they realized their clients had stolen from them.

The experiences of the research participants showed that if theft by a client exposed them to violence, theft by the sex workers themselves equally exposed them to violence and a broad array of consequences. Mireille said, “I was successful the first time I stole from a customer. The second time, the customer caught me and he refused to pay me so I went away.” Mireille was saddened by this consequence particularly because she stole less than she had bargained to be paid by the customer. Sofina was caught stealing by her client and got severely insulted for it. She said:

I was in the process of stealing from my customer’s wallet when he came out of the toilet. The wallet fell from my hands and when he realized what I was doing he insulted me, calling me “dirty whore” and threw me out of his hotel room. I didn’t hang around to ask for my payment as I was already caught stealing.

Imani learnt that her generous client would have given her more money if she had asked.

Imani said:

My client was an art buyer with whom I spent three weeks. He went to many towns in the country buying art and he would take me along with him. He would carry around large sums of money in a bag. He took this

bag everywhere except to the toilet. I would steal every time I had an opportunity until one day he caught me with my hand in his bag. He was very disappointed and kept saying if I needed more money than what he usually gave me I could have asked. He sent me back home and told me he would call me. When I didn't hear from him and called, he said he did not want to see me again.

The biggest possible risk that sex workers faced when they were caught stealing was the risk of a complaint being filed against them or an arrest by the police. This risk nearly became a reality for Irene. According to Irene:

I stole CFAF2,000,000 (\$4,000) from a French guy. I put the money in my handbag and threw it outside the hotel window into some trees. He called the police. The police officers couldn't find the money on me. I confided in one of them telling him I had stolen, but CFAF200,000 (\$400) not CFAF2,000,000 (\$4,000) as accused. In order not to be locked up, I gave them CFAF15,000 (\$30).

Irene was able to negotiate her way out of the situation by benefiting from the fact the police officers who were called to arrest her did not find the money and tried to make money from the situation. That did not change the nature of the risk she ran, which was the risk of being arrested. The sex workers who said they had never stolen from clients cited repeatedly the fear of getting caught. Ghislaine said, "I am too scared of getting caught and even if I see the money lying around I cannot touch it." Hermine took it a step further when she said, "I am too scared of getting caught and getting beaten." Apart from getting caught, Teckla was concerned about the impact of stealing on her reputation when she said, "I also do not steal from a customer because I never know where our paths will cross again."

Solange's reason for not stealing from a customer went beyond the fear of getting caught. She said with absolute conviction, "I will never steal from a customer. That goes against everything my mother taught me and although I am a prostitute, that [stealing] is

something I cannot do.” While Solange may have successfully used what Sykes and Matza (1957) call “techniques of neutralization” to accept the fact that she is a prostitute, she was not going to neutralize the deviant behavior involved in stealing, even from a client.

I found out with theft, like I found out with many other things related to sex work in Cameroon, that there is a superstitious reason. Henrietta, although a victim of theft by a customer, will not steal from customers because “I have seen some girls who had the habit of stealing and now they are mad. They steal without knowing the people they steal from.”

Issues as serious as theft, which pose security risks to the victim and the villain (in some instances), are very prevalent in sex workers’ interactions with their clients. This prevalence does not reduce the fact that theft, as well as prostitution, is criminalized, exposing a thief to criminal sanctions. Yet for some sex workers it is a game. At least it seems that way when Irene said:

One of my usual clients stole CFAF10,000 (\$20) and a cell phone from me. It annoyed me a lot because I lost my identification card in the process. I agreed to see him again when he called me. I stole his driver’s license and made him pay me CFAF100,000 (\$200) for it.

While some sex workers can make light of what they perceive to be adventures when they steal from clients and vice versa, this is an occupational risk for sex workers. Other risks include fighting with clients and other sex workers.

#### **7.3.4.2 FIGHTS WITH CLIENTS**

In all, 13 (26 percent) out of 50 research participants said they had gotten into fights with their customers. The main reasons given for the fights, from sex workers’

perspective, can be listed as follows: the customer did not want to pay the full agreed amount; the customer did not want to pay at all; the customer renegotiated the initially agreed upon scope of services and did not want to pay the additional amount; the customer wanted to unilaterally change the nature of the service agreed upon; or the customer solicited the services of sex workers without having the money to pay. It was after rendering the services that the sex workers realized that there was a payment-related problem. An example of a change in the scope of services was portrayed by Nina when she said:

A client took me to his home and when we got there I found out he wanted my services for his mentally retarded brother who was drooling all over the place. When I refused, he [the client] starting beating me and I decided to fight back. Fortunately for me, his neighbor upstairs who was a medical doctor and his wife came to my rescue. Apparently the man was in the habit of treating prostitutes like that. The doctor and his wife gave me CFAF12,000 (\$24) since I told them I needed money to go for my uncle's funeral.

In deciding whether or not to fight the client, the sex worker sometimes considered the venue of the encounter (a hotel or in a client's home) and which venue offers the sex worker the possibility of "winning the fight." A fight was won in this instance if the sex worker could get the hotel security or neighbors to intervene. When considering where to fight and where not to fight, Solange said, "it depends on the context. When this [refusal by the customer to pay] happens when you are in his house, you are better off keeping quiet for your safety."

Among the research participants, the strategies of how to obtain payment differed. Chantelle for example said:

I take their clothes, shoes and sometimes identification cards to compel them to pay. I also fight with them. I fight when the customer stays too long having sex and does not want to pay for the additional time.

Felicia also would fight to obtain payment. She said, “if I can fight him I fight, I have insulted, slapped and fought with clients.” It is worth noting that while fighting may result in the client paying, sometimes fighting did not achieve the intended result. Irene said, “I got into a fight with a client who refused to pay me. I even broke the windshield of his car with my shoes and got scared I would get into trouble for it. He still did not pay so I left.”

For some sex workers fighting was not an option. They tried to obtain payments from clients by screaming and causing what they considered to be substantial embarrassment to the clients. Imani said, “I make them pay by screaming and getting other people involved if need be.” Caroline opted for an approach where she used verbal threats. Caroline said, “I make them pay. I scream and threaten them. I tell them I will make them suffer.” Raissa opted for mix of insult and guilt and said, “at first when clients would refuse to pay me I would fight. But now I would insult them and try to guilt them over taking my money.”

Interestingly, when it came to retrieving payments from customers, the police were sometimes an ally. Arrah said, “I take them [customers who refuse to pay] to the police and they give me my money,” and so did Nadege. The sex workers who had experienced successes with using the police as collection agents gave the assisting police officers some money in gratitude.

Not all sex workers called upon the assistance of the police and the reason given for that was the criminalized nature of prostitution, and their personal awareness.

Laeticia said if a client did not want to pay her she will do:

Nothing. Prostitution is not legal so of what good is it to be arrested by the police for creating a scene like making noise or fighting? In that case I just tell myself I have lost the night. The dishonest clients know that if the police officers come they will be at an advantage. In some cases they do not even register in the hotel. They just pay for the night so there is no trace of them.

Laeticia's, discussion on the advantage dishonest clients gained from the police, showed the gendered nature of law enforcement which scrutinized the actions of the women involved in sex work although both the sex worker and the client should ordinary face sanction if the law was to be applied. For sex workers who were conscious of the legal framework, and for other reasons, some preferred to "do nothing" to ensure they were paid by a client who did not want to pay them.

Aicha's consideration for doing nothing was religious. Aicha said, "if a client refuses to pay me I will leave it to God. There is no point fighting or making noise about it." Naomi said, "I let them go. I do not have the energy to fight." Amina referred to her personality in her decision to do nothing. She said of a customer who did not want to pay, "I let him go. I am quiet naturally and don't like trouble." Pauline agreed with Amina and so did Esther who added, "he [the client] will have his reward."

Pierette's response - "sometimes I fight, sometimes I do nothing, depending on how I see the risk of fighting" - acknowledged the risk involved in fighting and the considerations that sex workers sometimes had to take into account in that split second

when they decide to fight or do nothing. Virginie had been fortunate not to have a client who refused to pay. Virginie said:

I have not had the experience of customers refusing to pay. I have instead had the experience of customers who wanted to ensure that the money they pay is utilized 100 percent.

Virginie described an incident where a client got violent because she complained he was exhausting. She said:

A guy gave me CFA\$10,000 and I dropped off the money before going. It was about 11 pm. The customer started treating me like a dog. He didn't want me to rest for one second and when I complained he broke my phone.

Satisfying demanding customers may be problematic and challenging to sex workers. As seen in the case of Virginie, complaining about the customer could expose the sex worker to violence. Virginie did not react when her phone was broken by the client mitigating further violence. A reaction from Virginie may have escalated into a beating or a fight. Virginie was consoled by the fact that she had collected and secured her money prior to the sexual encounter.

#### **7.3.4.3 FIGHTS WITH OTHER SEX WORKERS**

When asked how many research participants had fought with other sex workers during the course of sex work, 17 out of 50 (representing 34 percent of the sample) responded yes. The reasons given by the sex workers for fighting were as diverse as the outcomes of the fights. The research participants cited the following reasons for fighting with other sex workers: over clients (N=7), jealousy (N=5), gossip (N=2), turf (N=1), did not get along (N=1), disrespect (N=1), boyfriend issues (N=1) and no reason at all (N=1).



#### **7.3.4.3.1 OVER CLIENTS**

Although fighting over clients featured on the top of the list, some sex workers insisted that they did not fight over clients. Tatiana said, “I have never fought but I have quarreled over clients. Some girls think because a client has looked at you he belongs to you.” The seven out of seventeen sex workers who fought with others over clients had justifications for their behavior. Raissa said, “I fight with other girls if they try to snatch my customers.” Pierette agreed and did the same. Jacquie, however, “used to fight with girls all the time over customers but I am starting to take it easy as I get older.” Although discussed casually, when the fights occurred they were very dramatic and could potentially cause a lot of embarrassment if not danger to the parties involved.

Nadege was able to walk away after a successful fight, which gained her the respect of onlookers and the sex worker who attacked her. Nadege related the incident:

I was coming out of a corridor after discussing with a client who had called me over. Another sex worker slapped me. Since my sight is not very good I really didn't see it coming and I was surprised by it. As soon as I realized what was happening I jumped on her and beat her so much those who watched clapped for me at the end. The next day when I came back to that club some people offered me a bottle of champagne. The girl attacked me because she saw her customer talking to me.

Virginie was injured when she fought with another prostitute “over a White guy who changed his mind and wanted to take me instead of her. She bit me with her teeth. At the end the police intervened and neither of us had the client.” Edith attested to the fact that even if injuries were not incurred during a fight, fighting over a client could leave both sex workers losers when neither of them was taken by the client. Edith said:

I fought with another woman because of a customer. She acted like she owned him because he had taken her the night before. We were both banned from the [particular] nightclub location for some weeks.

#### **7.3.4.3.2 JEALOUSY**

Jealousy was cited by Felicia, Tatiana, Esther, Arrah and Eyinga, as a reason why sex workers fought among themselves. Eyinga was of the opinion that jealousy was more responsible for conflicts among sex workers than clients. She said, “the reason we fight is mainly jealousy. Not because of customers. On the street we know that the customer does not belong to anyone so we do not fight over men.”

#### **7.3.4.3.3 GOSSIP**

Jealousy, where it existed was most likely transmitted by gossip. Chantelle said gossip “among women” was responsible for some of the fights. Daniela added that “we fight almost every day as a result of jealousy and gossip.”

#### **7.3.4.3.4 TURF**

I was surprised to find out that turf was not a major reason why sex workers fought among themselves, as the sex workers I met on the streets in my initial attempts to gain access to conduct the research appeared to be territorial. Although fighting over turf was mentioned only once during the interviews, the consequences were severe enough to show the risks of serious injury sex workers face by the nature of their work when they enter into fights with other sex workers. Marie-Louise recounted how a fight with another sex worker left that sex worker injured and played a role in the victimization of Marie-Louise’s sister.

The location of the fight was in front of the Akwa Palace Hotel. The fight occurred when Marie-Louise made her entrée into prostitution eleven years prior to the interview date. Marie-Louise recounted:

When I started prostituting, I paid protection money to stand in front of Akwa Palace and that is where I met clients. I no longer pay protection money since I have been a prostitute for more than ten years. There was a *nanga-boko* who called himself Chinois (the French word for Chinese), who would tell me on certain days, “today you will give me all the money you make” and on other days he would tell me, “today you will not work at all.” There was another girl who did the same thing as I, so one day we went into a fight because we needed to determine who was entitled to that spot. She no longer prostitutes because I pierced her eye. Now she sells tomatoes in the market. To revenge, she sent *nanga-bokos* to rape my junior sister.

I could not help worrying about the misfortune which befell Marie-Louise’s sister who was not a party to the initial dispute. In response to a question aimed at understanding what sex workers did with their money and why they stayed in sex work in spite of the seemingly large sums of money they made, Marie-Louise explained that the amounts of money earned from sex work trickled in and there were always many things to do. Marie-Louise explained:

I have to pay bills, my son has to eat. I have a lot of responsibilities. My junior sister is in Europe but she does not do anything because she is a drunk. Fortunately, my brothers take care of themselves. Now I am left with my mother to take care of.

The sister who is a drunk in Europe is the same one who was gang raped by the *nanga-bokos* in retaliation of the injury Marie-Louise had caused the sex worker with whom she fought. Could that have played a role in her sister’s life? Did she become a drunk fortuitously? While I would never know the answers to these questions what is obvious is that sex work puts the women who undertake it (and sometimes their families) at risk for violence, and in this instance, violence is experienced by a former sex worker who lost her eye and a family member who was sexually assaulted.

#### **7.3.4.3.5 DID NOT GET ALONG**

Stephanie said some fights were as a result of the fact that sex workers sometimes did not get along with each other. She cited herself as an example of someone who did not fight over customers but fought with other sex workers. Stephanie had gotten into fights three times, “mostly because women do not get along with me.”

#### **7.3.4.3.6 DISRESPECT**

Disrespect, which may be manifested by insults, was another reason to get into a fight. Angelle got into a fight with a sex worker who made a mockery of her, which she had found disrespectful.

#### **7.3.4.3.7 BOYFRIEND ISSUES**

Arrah said some sex workers fought over boyfriend issues and provided clarification by saying that sometimes sex workers dated their former clients. She added that her current boyfriend who was the father of her two-year-old child was a former client. Sometimes these relationships did not work out because the men met them on the street and they know them to be sex workers and although the sex workers now called them their boyfriends, they know these men like prostitutes. Situations like these sometimes may lead to fights among sex workers.

#### **7.3.4.3.8 OVER NOTHING**

Most of the reasons given above were legitimate reasons why anyone could get into an argument. In the case of sex workers it is worth noting that the nature of their jobs, the risks that they face on a daily basis, as analyzed above, and the fear of stigma they manage may all make them more prone to reacting over situations such as those described above with a fight. This is likely what Caroline implied when she said, “sex

workers sometimes fight for no reason at all.” After admitting she has been in fights with other sex workers, when asked why she fought, Caroline’s response was, “do I even know why? Sometimes you would think girls show up to work high on drugs. We sometimes fight over nothing.”

#### **7.3.4.4 ARRESTS BY POLICE**

As noted, the criminalization of sex work in Cameroon puts both sex workers and their clients at risk of incarceration and fines if arrested. In order to find out if the research participants were aware of the risk of incarceration in sex work, they were asked if prostitution is legal in Cameroon. Their responses were: prostitution is not legal (N=38, or 76 percent), prostitution is legal (N=7, or 14 percent) and I do not know whether or not prostitution is legal (N=5, or 10 percent).

Sex workers’ awareness of the illegality of prostitution would be heightened if the provisions of the penal code on prostitution were enforced, starting with the arrest of sex workers for performing sex work. The study participants did, in fact, face the risk of arrest. When asked how many had been arrested during police raids since their entrée into prostitution, 37 out of 50 (representing 74 percent) said they had been arrested. Table 7.2 below shows the number of times of arrests reported by the sex workers who had been arrested by the police.

**Table 7.2 Arrests by Police**

<b>Number of Times Arrested</b>	<b>Sex Worker Count</b>
1	8 (16%)
2	3 (6%)
Many Times	24 (48%)
No Details	2 (4%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37 (74%)</b>

In all, 24 out of 37 prostitutes with histories of arrests had been arrested many times, which within this context means, they could not remember how many times they had in fact been arrested. Laeticia, for example, reckoned she was arrested on a daily basis in police raids and Angelle said twice a week. Whatever the actual frequency of the arrests may be, this study showed that no sex worker was arrested for prostitution. When asked for what offences they were arrested, the responses were as follows: not in possession of an identification card at the time of the arrest (N=17), *vagabondage* (N=19), and fighting (N=1).

Police officers who arrested prostitutes did not cite prostitution as the reason for the arrest. If prostitution was in fact the reason for the arrest, the sanctions that should logically follow are those prescribed by the penal code. Yet within the course of this study, the sex workers provided the consequences of arrests as follows:

1. Payment of money to the police officer. The amount of money payable was reported to be within the range of CFAF500 (\$1) and CFAF6,000 (\$12).

2. Sex with a police officer, as discussed in Section 7.3.3.2, when discussing police officers as perpetrators of sexual assaults;
3. Detention for the night at the police station; and/or
4. Cleaning of the police station in the morning.

Marie-Louise drew a comparison between police sweeps in Yaoundé when compared to Douala and she said:

There was a time in Yaoundé I was arrested in a raid. When we were taken to the police station there was a female Police Commissioner who was in charge. She refused to take CFAF5,000 (\$10) from us insisting on keeping us. We were referred to the prosecutor who released us. A few days later, we were again arrested and brought to the same Police Commissioner and when we offered to pay CFAF15,000 (\$30) each she took the money and released us. The police in Douala generally do not disturb. In Yaoundé, if a customer gives you CFAF15,000 (\$30) the police officer takes CFAF10,000 (\$20). Sometimes they take your money and still want to have sex with you.

Marie-Louise's statement showed that the application of these sanctions could be combined at the discretion of the police officers. In every instance where a sex worker was detained, their expectation was to be released in the morning. Marie-Louise's experience, which led as far as encountering the prosecutor, only to be released, occurred in Yaoundé, and started off as what seemed to be an enforcement of the penal code and its sanction on prostitution. The end, however, was there was a Police Commissioner who wanted more money than what the sex workers were accustomed to paying for their release.

None of the prostitutes arrested during raids in Douala was arrested for prostitution, and none was formally charged. That is probably why some research participants believed prostitution to be legal in Cameroon. Naomi answered with

conviction that prostitution is legal. Rosa explained why she believed in the legal status of prostitution to be legal: “It is my body and I can do with it as I want.” Virginie said prostitution “is not a crime because we are not killing anybody. Everyone gets to choose what they do with their bodies.” Daniela, in her conviction that prostitution is legal in Cameroon, said, “if the authorities really wanted to stop prostitution they would have arrested all of the prostitutes on the streets.” Edith’s response, which was based on the reality of her experiences when asked about the legal status of prostitution in Cameroon, was:

I think it is legal. Many women are suffering and need to prostitute to survive. What would I do to raise my kids if I couldn’t prostitute? I probably would turn them into beggars.

Some of the sex workers who responded that prostitution is illegal gave clarifications that showed that they did not clearly understand the risk of arrest and incarceration in prostituting if the law is to be enforced. Maguerite used good sense when she said, “it [prostitution] has to be illegal because it just doesn’t sound right. When they say that someone is a prostitute it sounds wrong in peoples’ ears.” Irene took a religious position when she said, “my mother is a Christian and tells me God does not like this [sex work], so it cannot be good for me or someone else.” Amina reflected another religious position when she said:

Not only is prostitution a crime but as a Muslim it is also a sin. I do not judge anyone, but certain persons do this because they need to eat and dress themselves. Here we have an obligation towards our parents. When you see your mother suffering you feel obligated to sell your body.

The outcome of arrests probably influenced some sex workers’ inability to perceive of the criminal justice related risks in soliciting clients for sex. When asked if



prostitution is legal in Cameroon, Teckla's reply was yes and no. She elaborated, "on the books it is illegal, but in practice it is [not], as those who are supposed to be arresting are making money out of it, so it is a win-win."

The role of the police in the continued existence of prostitution was explained by Chantelle when she said:

No, prostitution is not legal but it is those who are supposed to stop it that enable [it]. If when the police came around for a raid and they closed the motel we won't be here. They instead ask for money and in some instances they ask for services too.

The different views of the research participants showed that some of them were particularly knowledgeable and exhibited this knowledge in the illegality or legality of prostitution discourse. Esther said:

Prostitution is illegal but every time I am arrested, I remind the officers that they too are part of the crime to the extent that they are my customers. My father is someone in uniform [a law enforcement official] so I do not have any fear of police officers and this helps. I have now become their friend. They no longer come around the motel where I live to create problems.

The bisexual, lesbian and gay prostitutes showed their knowledge not only in discussing the illegal nature of prostitution but also in discussing the other risks they faced, which was imprisonment for homosexual acts. Idris said, "what I do with men [same-sex sexual practices] is not legal, so we try to minimize conflict." Hillaire said, "prostitution is not legal and lesbianism is not legal either."

To the extent that these savvy sex workers knew what the illegality of prostitution entailed, they knew the advantages they could enjoy if prostitution were legal. Larissa said, "if prostitution was legal there would be no police raids arresting prostitutes." Laetitia said, "you could ask a client who refused to pay you for your money without

being scared of getting into more trouble.” Nadege said, summing up the benefits of legality, “women will be tougher on their clients by insisting on their rights.”

Until such day as prostitution is decriminalized or regulated in Cameroon, sex workers and police officers continue to coexist, with the police providing sex workers with constant reminders of the fact that they are on the commercial sex landscape because the police allow it. This reminder is by way of raids that cause sex workers varying levels of inconvenience, including loss of revenue during the period they are locked up. These constant interactions with the police have left sex workers highly opinionated about the police. When asked, “what do you think about the police in Cameroon?” the responses showed admiration, indifference and contempt.

Those who held the police in high esteem included Hermine, who said, “I think the police does its job.” Arrah and Mireille agreed, saying “they are doing their jobs well.” Ghislaine added:

There was a time some thieves were about to rob a friend and myself when the police came around in their van. They picked us up during the raid and that saved us from being robbed. So I feel secure.

Chantelle did not think highly of the police in Cameroon and questioned, “is there a police in Cameroon? If you have money, it does not matter what you do, they will let you go.” Chantelle’s reaction was shared by other sex workers, like Amina and Larissa, who said, “the police is very corrupt.” Jacquie added, “there is law in Cameroon but the law is not enforced because there is too much corruption.” Teckla said, “I don’t feel safe with the police. You can be getting robbed and the police will never protect you.” Esther found the police officers who raid to be hypocritical and she said:

I am not scared of them [police officers]. They are my customers and I tell them that if I am guilty of a crime they are also guilty. I opened my shop and they come and buy from me, we are both guilty.

Idris thought it better to leave the police officers alone and avoid every opportunity of interacting with them. He said, “police officers are people that you should not give trouble to, if you are looking for problems, the police will give you problems.” Nina provided a fairly representative summary, given that the sex workers’ views on the police are only as good as their individual experiences with certain police officers. Nina said “I think there are some police officers who work hard and some who abuse their position of power.”

The publicly manifested risks and challenges faced by sex workers are many. While they were able in some instances to mitigate these risks, in some instances they did not possess enough information or empowerment to mitigate the risks they faced. That in itself makes sex work dangerous. Yet when Blissbomb (2010) said the violence faced in sex work did not compare to the risk of stigmatization that sex workers faced, it becomes important to examine the role played by the fear of being found and the resulting stigma, which some sex workers in Douala make a continuous attempt to manage. This is what Sanders (2004) referred to as private manifestations of risk.

### **7.3 PRIVATELY MANIFESTED RISKS**

In earlier discussions on the number of research participants who were in relationships, we noted that out of the 26 sex workers in relationships, 15 said their partners did not know that they worked as prostitutes. The concealment of this information by sex workers from their partners, families and friends was deliberate.

When asked if their family and friends knew about their involvement in sex work, the research participants responded no (N=23, or 46 percent), yes (N=15, or 30 percent) and yes and no (N=12, or 24 percent). Yes and no reflected a situation in which some family members and/or friends knew and some did not know. Aicha said:

Some members of my family know, like my mother, my elder sister and my elder brother's wife. My mother is disappointed as she doesn't like it and it is not what she would have prayed for my future. A mother's love still remains. My father does not know that I prostitute myself. Some of my friends know. Two of my childhood and school friends do not and it bothers me to tell them because I see how well they are doing in their professional lives that I don't want them to think badly of me.

Fear of disappointing the family was one of the reasons given by sex workers who had not informed their families. The fears or concerns that the research participants took into account prior to disclosing or not disclosing to their families are listed under four themes: fear of disappointing loved ones, fear of isolation or alienation, fear of marginalization or mockery, and fear of disrespect.

The fear of disappointing loved ones was a reason why some sex workers kept their activities private. Esther, who had worked as a sex worker for one year prior to the interview, said:

It is only my friend who introduced me to sex work who knows that I prostitute. I have not told anyone in my family as I plan on leaving in a couple for months. If it is found out, my mother will be very disappointed and it will hurt her pride a lot. My father will also be let down because I could go to him for assistance but I haven't as I want to make it on my own. I want to know what suffering is and to know I made it, so that one day I may be able to recount to my children that their mother was a prostitute and that they should never do it.

The fear of being isolated or rejected by family and loved ones was taken into account and manifested when Chantelle, for example, said, "if my family finds out they

will not want to have anything to do with me.” Rosa said the fact that she is a sex worker “will be very badly perceived. I will be rejected by them [her friends and family].”

The fear of marginalization or mockery was the reason why Brenda did not tell her family and friends of her involvement in sex work. Brenda said, “they will disapprove and will be mocked by the community if people find out.” Sofina, who had not told her family, believed some of them were able to speculate on what she did for a living. The reason for that was they made some hurtful comments to her from time to time. She found consolation in that “they do not have any proof” and concluded that “in any case I don’t care.” That notwithstanding, she still had not told them formally. If she did, she may have found herself in a situation similar to Tatiana’s, whose family knew. Tatiana said:

They [her family] know but since they are only interested in the money which I give them, they do not treat me badly. There is a lot of mockery going on but that is to be expected.

Edith’s experience was similar to Tatiana’s and she said her family “knows and because I feed them, they treat me with respect most of the time. Sometimes they insult me. Some of my friends know and some have no idea.” Expecting and accepting the mockery and teasing that came with involving family members in what some sex workers considered a well-kept secret may be difficult to live with on a daily basis, hence some sex workers decided to keep their activities to themselves.

The fear of disrespect was taken into consideration by sex workers who kept their activities secret from their family and friends. Ghislaine said, “I have not told my family because I want to maintain my dignity and as the first child, I do not want my siblings to copy me.” Her concern was legitimate particularly in the African context where leading is

mostly by example and older siblings tend to set the tone for their junior siblings' goals and aspirations. Henrietta did not think she had lost the respect of her family by telling them that she was a prostitute. Henrietta said:

My brothers [she is the eldest child and has 6 junior brothers] and mother know what I do and they respect me and do not judge me. I take care of my family. It is important that when I leave the house my junior brothers know what I do, so that if something happens to me they can say our sister told us...my son does not know. He may think that I work in a restaurant.

Henrietta appeared to have told her brothers about her work as a measure of security rather than a simple disclosure aimed at gaining acceptance. What made this plausible was that Henrietta's twelve-year-old son was not told what she did for a living, in spite of the fact that Henrietta lived with her brothers and her son.

Agathe took care of what she perceived to be her responsibilities but she was conscious of what information about her work that she shared with different members of her family. She said, "my mother knows, but if my brothers were to know that the money used to pay their school fees comes from prostitution it would traumatize them." Like the women who worked in what Kelly described as Mexico's "Most Modern Brothel," these sex workers in Douala "work as prostitutes in order to support children and extended families, but do so at the risk of losing the emotional support and respect of those very people they financially support" (2008:198). Knowing the type of family from which one originated and the nature of one's friendships, including their possible reactions, are crucial in determining the amount of information to be shared with them.

In finding the right balance and sharing the appropriate amount of information, which in some cases meant not sharing any information at all, 48 out of 50 sex workers interviewed said they had a good relationship with their families. Only two sex workers

(Hortense and Manka) said they did not have good relationships with their families, but the state of their relationships with their families was independent of their involvement in sex work. Hortense said, “we [referring to her family] don’t get along too well. The relationship with my family is strange but it has nothing to do with what I do as they don’t know what I do.” Manka said she did not have a good relationship with her family: “I have not told anyone what I do. I wonder if my family knows that I am alive.”

In disclosing or not disclosing their activities, sex workers were not only concerned about family members. They were also concerned about their neighbors. When asked how many sex workers thought their neighbors knew about their involvement in sex work, 48 sex workers who were asked provided the following responses: my neighbors do not know (N=26), my neighbors know (N=20) and my neighbors may or may not know (N=2).

Chantelle lived in a motel and said, “when you live in a motel and bring in different types of men, they [neighbors] know what you do.” Esther, who also lived in a motel, said, “all who live in motels prostitute.” Edith did not live in a motel but lived in an area where many other prostitutes lived and said, “all of us who live in that area are into sex work, so no one criticizes.” According to Mireille, going by the hours she kept her neighbors must know what she did for a living. Imani, like Mireille, suspected her hours of work betrayed to her neighbors what she did for a living, yet she could not say for a fact that her neighbors knew. For Tatiana, the giveaway was most likely her dressing. Tatiana said, “they [neighbors] must know from the way I dress.”

For all of the sex workers who said their neighbors knew they prostitute, they responded that the neighbors do not treat them badly. Solantine and Brenda found their

neighbors to be “very supportive” as opposed to being judgmental. The relationship with their neighbors, which most sex workers in this category described as good, was what Irene described in her case as “normal. And if they [neighbors] have any reservations they keep it to themselves.”

Some sex workers took active steps to ensure their neighbors did not know what they did for a living. Rosa said, “I do this [prostitution] far from where I live. My neighbors know that I work in town and that I spend the night at my boyfriend’s [home].” According to Pierette her neighbors believed “I am taken care of by a man. They don’t realize that the man they see coming to my house is my boyfriend but he is not the one who pays the rent.” Stephanie’s routine permitted her to escape her neighbor’s scrutiny. Stephanie said, “I leave home early at about 9pm and either return when they are asleep or during hours when no one can suspect, like 9am.” Even neighbors whom sex workers called their friends did not necessary know of their commercial sex activities. Manka said, “one of my neighbors is my friend and I told her that I work in a bar.”

The fact that sex workers lived with family members or friends or significant others did not guarantee that information on their activities as sex workers would be shared with them. Emotional and physical proximity were not the reasons why sex workers divulged information of their activities. The contrary was seen when sex workers tried to protect their loved ones from this information, which Agathe called traumatic and Charlotte described as potentially life threatening. Charlotte said, “my mother is the only parent I have left. When I see people from the village I escape, as someone can go and tell her something and she dies from nervous problems.” Brenda said:



I stopped prostitution on the streets when I realized the risk of being found by a family member. I used to dress decently so that if anyone saw me I would tell them I was going down the street to take a taxi to visit someone.

Prior to changing her type of prostitution, which to Brenda was a means of mitigating the risk of getting caught prostituting, she had a version of a story ready to tell. Sex workers therefore found themselves lying to their friends and loved ones, in order not to disappoint them or to protect them from the truth.

Sometimes the families from which these sex workers belonged and the expectations of their loved ones put pressure on the sex workers not to disclose the truth. Nina said, “I come from a very religious family and everyone will be very hurt if they find out what I do. My mother would much prefer that I carry *beignets* [fritters] on my head and sell than do this.” Sex workers went to great lengths to shield their families from their activities. Virginie said:

Only my friend who introduced me to sex work knows. Although I live in a room in the family compound, no one knows what I do. My parents are Christians and will never approve. I tell them I work in a motel. I dress differently when I leave home and only expose myself prior to standing on the street.

As a way of mitigating the risk of being caught doing sex work, Idris and Esther kept separate sets of friends for what they considered to be their separate lives. Esther was a responsible mother in Yaoundé and those who met her in Douala knew her to be a sex worker working on the streets of Deido. Idris said:

I have two sets of friends, those in the university who don't know my life as a sex worker and those with whom I do my sex work who don't know I am a university student. The two worlds don't meet.

In order to protect her “secret” from her live-in boyfriend, Pulcherie succumbed to blackmail and she recounted:

I lied about it [involvement in sex work] for long. I told people I was a dancer, then there was a guy in the quarter who was threatening to tell my boyfriend and I paid him CFAF2,000 (\$4) a day to keep him quiet. One day I was fed up with the blackmail and told my boyfriend and everyone who wanted to listen. So my friends now know. I don't know if my family knows.

This research found that the risk of being outed held a very predominant place in the commercial sex industry in Douala, based on the reaction of prostitutes and the way they managed information relating to their work. It did not matter if the sex workers lived alone (N=25), with family (N=17), with friends (N=4) or with their significant others (N=4), information on their involvement in sex work was kept carefully and only shared after numerous considerations. In all, 17 sex workers shared with one category of persons: family, friends or neighbors; 15 shared with all categories of people (family, friends and neighbors) and by a slightly higher majority, for 18 out of 50 sex workers, no one they could count among their family, friends or neighbors knew of their involvement in sex work. This led to the conclusion that when they were able, sex workers would avoid the stigma and marginalization that comes from others knowing of their activities. The avoidance of stigma may be for their own benefit but may also be for the benefit of their families and loved ones.

## **7.5 OTHER CHALLENGES**

### **7.5.1 DISEASES AND CONDOM USE**

If the earnings of the participants of this research are a good indication, sex work is potentially profitable for those involved. Yet alongside the other risks of violence

discussed above, particularly the risks of sexual assault, came the risks of diseases and unwanted pregnancies. These risks existed even when the sexual act was consensual.

In discussing the use of condoms during a sexual assault, condom use during rape was perceived by some sex workers to change the nature of the incident or at least reduce its gravity. There were instances in which the sex worker, when faced with the imminent danger of being raped, focused their negotiations on obtaining the use of condoms by the rapist(s). Jacquie said:

There was a thief who wanted to steal from me and when he found nothing valuable he raped me. I asked if he could use a condom and he agreed. Also, a police officer forced me to have sex with him, I would not have agreed to it as I was menstruating at the time but he insisted and since I didn't have my identification card I had no choice.

When asked how she was able to deal with both incidents, Jacquie's answer was, "since during both rapes the rapists used protection it was okay." Reference to it being "okay" was not to be construed to mean that the sex workers were fine with being exposed to rape as long as they were not exposed to disease. It however showed the consciousness of the sex workers who participated in the research towards sexually transmitted diseases. Though Cameroon's HIV prevalence rates are not as high as those of many other African nations (CIA World Fact Book, 2011), study participants were generally knowledgeable and concerned about the risks of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Condom use and references to frequent medical examinations were very recurrent in the interviews with the sex workers. Discussing condom use, two questions were asked to the research participants: the first solicited information on whether or not the sex worker used protection and the second requested justification for the use or non-use of

protection. In all, 94 percent of the sex workers (N=47) responded that they used condoms during sexual encounters with their clients. Four percent of the sex workers (N=2) responded yes and no, meaning sometimes they used condoms and sometimes they did not. Just one study participant said she did not use condoms at all. Sexual encounters within this context were understood to mean during vaginal and/or anal sex. Condom use during the performance of oral sex was not asked, and only Marie-Louise mentioned using condoms for oral sex, discrediting the other methods cited by the other sex workers, such as washing their mouths with bleach, to keep their mouths free from possible diseases linked to the performance of oral sex.

Sex workers who used condoms gave two main reasons for their use: to avoid pregnancies and to prevent the transmission of diseases. Hillaire, who responded no to condom use, provided clarifications saying, “I do not use sex toys. I make love naturally.” Hillaire insisted therefore that her lesbian sexual partners had to be “clean.” Christophe and Felicia, who responded yes and no, provide clarifications as well. Christophe said, “I don’t like using condoms. They wound me. I prefer using gels and lubricants. Some clients insist on condom use.” Felicia explained what seems to be a situation faced by many more sex workers. Referring to condom use, Felicia said:

Sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. It [prostitution] is between life and death. I sometimes take the risk of trusting the client. There are times when the condom gets burst or the client pierces it or removes it when you are not paying attention. When you find out that he had done this, you quarrel with him, wash up and take antibiotics or other medications not to get pregnant.

Felicia detailed accurately varying scenarios that many sex workers identified with and which I categorize here as risky behavior. The risky behavior was “trusting clients.”

Some sex workers who admitted to this said they did it in the hope that a longstanding relationship would result from their sexual encounters. Sofina said:

We use protection to avoid diseases although I must tell you that I have gotten pregnant twice from two clients. It was crazy the way I fell in love with them, a German and an Italian. I was going to keep the baby the first time it happened when my girlfriend asked me if I had come to the street to deliver racially-mixed bastards. The only way to have a racially-mixed kid is to have one who is recognized by its father.

Not every sex worker got the advice given by Sofina's friend on childbearing while working as a prostitute. Some sex workers were mothers to children who were fathered by previous clients. These previous clients sometimes knew of the pregnancies and acknowledged the children and some of the pregnancies were unplanned and not accepted. Aicha's trust of a client left her with a child to take care of and she recounted:

The father of my second child was a client of mine. On the fourth occasion when we were having sex he convinced me to agree to unprotected sex saying he did not see me like someone who has an illness. Also he used to give me more money than negotiated to take care of my family obligations so I felt he was someone who could marry me one day, particularly because he was not married. I got pregnant and soon after he wanted me to have an abortion. When I refused, he started insulting me and stopped taking my calls. I called him when I had the baby and he warned me never to call him again. I have since deleted his phone number.

Many sex workers admitted that when some clients became familiar there was a chance that they may disregard their initial cautious behavior. Solange said:

I always use protection. But to be honest there are times when I take the risk not to. I am a romantic and even within prostitution there are times you meet someone and after three encounters you start feeling like you have a connection or something may come out of it. It is at that point that you become a little reckless and have sex without protection.

Sex workers generally insisted that no amount of money could make them discard with condom use. Paulle said, “There is no price that a client can possibly offer me not to use protection.” Manka said, “it is true that when you insist on condom use some customers insist on paying you less but it is better.” Marie-Louise agreed, saying:

No matter what a customer proposes I always use protection. I think of my family and the opportunity I may have to redo my life, I need to be in good health to live long to be able to tell my grandchildren that life isn't easy.

It therefore appeared that it was the hope of a romance and not a higher price that encouraged sex workers to engage in risky behaviors, which exposed them to the risks of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. These risky behaviors on the part of sex workers may be explained by the fact most of the study participants who spoke of leaving prostitution wanted to meet their “Prince Charming.” Prince Charming was to give the sex worker who wanted him to “rescue her” enough money not to desire sex work. Yet, the sex workers themselves were the biggest critics of this exit strategy, asking if money can ever be enough and wondering if they could resist the temptation of going back occasionally to sex work for quick money. Yet to meet their Prince some were indeed going to take the chance of kissing many frogs, some of which may be diseased.

Beyond romantic notions, for which the research participants could take complete responsibility for risk taking, there were some clients on the other hand who lured or tricked sex workers into unprotected sex. These clients had reasons for doing so and these reasons from the sex workers' perspective were that some men lacked satisfaction from

protected sex or received increased satisfaction from unprotected sex and that some men experienced erectile dysfunction when they used protection. Imani said:

There are some clients who complain of having erectile problems when they use protection. A client once gave me CFAF20,000 (\$40) although we had agreed on CFAF30,000 (\$60). He was not satisfied since he was not able to have sex all night as his body did not respond to the condom.

In addition to the clients who did not want to use condoms because it impeded their sexual performance, there were also instances where the condom broke exposing female sex workers to pregnancy and both parties to the sexual encounter, to the risk of diseases. Daniela discussed her reaction to damaged condoms when she said:

I always use protection with clients. I have been told by some clients that it prevents them from ejaculating and that is why they try to negotiate for sex without the condom. There are a few instances where the condom bursts and when that happens I insist that the client replaces it immediately.

Some sex workers mentioned burst condoms as something which they found stressful in sex work. There were financial and emotional consequences which followed, including ensuring they were not pregnant and getting tested for sexually transmitted diseases. Nina said:

Sometimes the condom burst and that is a source of stress. When that happens you wonder if you had a cut before and if the customer had a cut. Whether there was exchange of blood, et cetera. After, I need to go to the hospital to get tested and pay CFAF30,000 (\$60) of my own money.

Larissa said she always used a condom but:

Sometimes accidents occur but it is extremely rare that the condoms get burst. When that happens both parties [client and sex worker] panic. The reason for the panic is that we don't know each other. That's why I subject myself to medical check every six months.

The frequency with which research participants said they got tested to ensure they were in good health made me question if indeed they got tested, given that they acted like they were in a regulated regime where the testing was mandatorily prescribed within fixed timeframes. Something else which I found curious was that the sex workers did not hesitate to mention that they were well following their tests. It reminded me of the *Zona Galáctica* in Mexico, where the women were not as well as their test results sometimes showed (Kelly, 2008). In the current study, 13 sex workers (26 percent) said they got tested every time the condom burst, some once every two months and others once every six months or once in a year.

When Christophe, who had told me he hated using condoms preferring lubricants, said he subjected himself to an annual medical examination to ensure he was well, I could not miss the opportunity of pushing to see what that really meant. I told Christophe that female sex workers (like Nina, Larissa, Pulcherie, Virginie, Arrah, Irene, Chantelle, Rosa, Laeticia, Sophia, Angelle, Esther and Mireille) appeared more meticulous in testing more frequently, some getting tested every time the condom broke or routinely ranging from once every two months to once a year. Christophe's reaction was brilliant. He sighed in disgust and said, "don't believe what those female prostitutes say." He added, "they are all telling lies. If anyone here tells you they get tested every two months or every six months, it is a lie. I do not even think those women get tested at all."

I found some humor in Christophe's retort and was happy he could not read my mind with regard to his own assertion that he tested himself annually. Yet in that moment, I realized we were discussing a serious topic, once considered taboo, which many more people now felt free to talk about, whether truthfully or not. I commended



Naomi's braveness for sharing information about her HIV status and continued to wonder how conscious the research participants really were of the risk of diseases associated with sex work. I also wondered if even their self reports of medical testing were said with a view to presenting themselves in the best responsible light.

### **7.5.2 COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY**

A final risk that sex workers, who tend to be paid cash, are exposed to, is the risk that some discover when they attempt to spend money previously given to them by their clients: being paid in counterfeit currency. This is likely to put them in a situation of conflict as the sex workers could themselves be accused for attempting to inject fake currency into the economy. I did not anticipate finding this risk going into the research but it was mentioned by two sex workers (Rosa and Teckla) as instances of deception by clients, and the fact that the dishonesty of clients could play in the victimization of sex workers in this regard was worth mentioning.

### **7.6 CONCLUSION**

Sex workers are exposed to a myriad of risks within the course of their work. In spite of their occasional fights with each other sex workers in some instances worked together to mitigate risks of violence from clients. When the services requested by the client were threesomes, some research subjects insisted that they could only participate when the other female was someone they knew. With that requirement, the clients generally allowed them to bring into the sexual encounter someone of their choice. There were also instances in which sex workers like Nadege communicated (or pretended to communicate) the number of a client's car to a friend prior to leaving with the client. Nadege said referring to the venue of the sexual encounter with her clients as, "hotels and

their [client's] homes. It's a little dangerous when you go to their homes but I usually call or will pretend to call another sex worker to tell them where I am".

Virginie was saved from possible danger by another sex worker who warned her of the client who had just picked her up. Virginie recounted:

I was in the client's car on my way to his house when I received a text message from another sex worker saying "if you get into that house you will regret." The client was going to force me to have anal sex.

Beyond relying on each other to minimize instances of violence, sex workers sometimes relied on other persons they could trust to communicate information on their location. Henrietta communicated with her brothers. Nadine said "for my security I sometimes communicate the client's number to the receptionist or have a *bendskinneur* I can trust take me to the location so that one person knows where I am."

In conclusion, the subjects of the research manipulated their environment in ways that they could to minimize some of the risks and challenges which they face during the course of sex work. By staying in sex work in spite of their experiences, not only had they *satisficed* but "they made a choice that seemed good enough for them under the circumstances" (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010:149).

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research set out to contribute to the knowledge base on the commercial sex industry with specific reference to Cameroon, remedying in part a dearth of literature in this regard. As noted, previous studies on the commercial sex industry in this setting were oriented to the role of Chinese prostitutes in Douala (Ndjio, 2009) and the prostitution of Cameroonians in France (Koh-Bela, 2007). Upon its conclusion, this study acknowledges and compliments greatly the study titled *Prostitution en Afrique: L'exemple de Yaoundé* by Songué (1986). Although published almost three decades prior to the current study, Songué's research, which focused on prostitution in Yaoundé, remains pertinent in the understanding of the commercial sex industry in Cameroon today and provides a solid background as well as a strong basis for comparative research.

#### **8.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The three main questions this study addressed with specific focus on Douala were the following: sex workers' pathways into prostitution, the nature and organization of sex work, and the risks and challenges faced by sex workers. This section summarizes these findings and compares them to the existing literature on the subject in Cameroon and other geographical contexts.

##### **8.2.1 FINDINGS: PATHWAYS TO PROSTITUTION**

Although a few research participants reported having successful entrepreneurs and professionals as parents, like Finckenauer and Chin's study participants, "most of our

subjects come from poor families” (2010:45). With regard to their educational qualifications, one sex worker was pursuing a master’s degree and another in *Première* or the equivalent of the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade. All others had dropped out of school at the secondary or high school level for various reasons, including the lack of financial means, pregnancy, and not doing well in school, consistent with Songué’s findings in her research (1986). Also consistent with existing research, the educational qualifications of the subjects acted as a limitation of the employment options at their disposals (Gould, 2008; Liu, 2011; Finckenauer and Chin, 2010).

These sex workers, faced with limited opportunities in their hometowns, migrated to other regions or cities with the hope of finding employment or quite simply, to prostitute (Anarfi, 1998; Kelly, 2008; Liu 2011). While the decision to migrate in order to prostitute was made by some study participants from the start, for example, eight women in this study, most research participants migrated for different reasons, including adventure (Songué, 1986).

An eligibility requirement to participate in this research was that the research participants ought to have worked as sex workers as recently as within the last six months prior to the date of the interview. It was therefore obvious that some of these women and men, who migrated to Douala for a change in scenery or in search of a better life, found a reason to stay in Douala. That reason was prostitution. This study found that while some research participants appeared to have consciously made their entrée into prostitution, some appeared to have drifted into it without much consideration. Yet, not everyone who came to Douala in search of opportunities ended up in sex work. Why do some people turn to sex work while others do not? This is an important question for future research.

Research suggests that “when all is said and done no single factor stands out as causal in a woman becoming a prostitute” (Bullough and Bullough, 1996:171). Liu therefore concludes that “prostitution is a result of a variety of interconnected factors appearing in women’s lives at different periods of time. Established factors (such as poverty, sexual abuse, drug use, etc.) do not furnish an exhaustive explanation at the individual level” (2011:55). It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate or speculate upon the reasons why the research participants were more prone than similarly situated others to engaging in sex work. The sex workers’ voices on the motivations for their entrée and continued stay in sex work were heard and treated as meaningful. These reasons included the relative ease with which to earn money as a prostitute (see also Finkenauer and Chin, 2011), or to take care of what they refer to as their responsibilities (see also Kelly, 2008). Although the reasons for engaging in sex work were varied, in the current study as in others (Songué, 1986; Kelly 2008, Liu, 2011), they all led to the motivation for sex work, which, as previously noted, was financial or economic (Anarfi, 1998; White, 1990; Kelly, 2008; Miller, 2009; Zalwango et al., 2010; Finckenauer and Chin, 2010).

Facilitation of entrée into the financial or economic venture was seen in this study to be made by the sex workers, their friends, family members or other persons known to them. In 1986, Songué did not find any persons to be procuring, aiding, or facilitating the prostitution of another within the definition of Section 294 of the Cameroonian Penal Code, which criminalizes pimping. This study uncovered some measure of exploitation of otherwise naïve debutants, as well as required tributes to *nanga-bokos*, but did not find

any evidence of pimping or the presence of pimps. Hence no role was played by pimps in facilitating entrée.

### **8.2.2 FINDINGS: THE NATURE AND ORGANIZATION OF SEX WORK**

In discussing the nature and organization of sex work in Douala, worth noting was the conceptualization of the terms street-based and indoor-based sex work, whereas here I preferred to refer to them as street-based and indoor-based solicitations. Contrary to the existing literature, where indoor sex work most often involves the use of brothels (Gould, 2008; Kelly, 2008), hair salons, massage parlors or sauna parlors (Liu, 2011; Finckenauer and Chin, 2010), indoor sex work within the scope of this research was limited to solicitations. Songué “searched in vain for brothels as described within the Western context” (1986:54). Like Songué’s, this study did not find evidence of the existence of brothels in Douala.

The actual venues of the sexual encounters for indoor as well as street-based solicitations were hotels, motels, clients’ homes or cars, or sex workers’ residences. Only three sex workers took clients to their residence, which is a shift from the 1980s, where most of Songué’s subjects ranked in first position the venue of the sexual encounter as their homes. The fact that there is no difference in the venues of the actual sex act following the initial solicitation (outdoor, indoor, or outcalls and referrals) may have accounted for the lack of differential in risk exposure when discussing risks with regards to venue and type of sex work.

Beyond the venue of solicitation and performance of their sex work, the study participants did not always remember how much money they were able to earn from sex work (see also Liu, 2011). This was either deliberate or due to the variable and

inconsistent nature of their earnings. I am likely to opt for the latter as a real possibility. Songué (1986) found her subjects to be active even though modest economic contributors or investors, sometimes owning hair dressing salons, clothing stores, bars, nightclubs, restaurants and cafés. Those participants in the current study who met the definition of semi-prostitutes appeared to be using their alternate employments as front offices for their prostitution activities and were not necessarily active economic contributors with regard to their alternate employment. This was similar to the cases of some sex workers in Finkenauer and Chin's research, who may have "enter[ed] certain industries that serve as pathways to their ultimate entrance into commercial sex" (Finkenauer and Chin, 2011:51). In Douala, sex work appeared to provide these modern day semi-prostitutes with primary income rather than supplementary income.

Sex workers' earnings were largely determined by the nature of the services they were willing to perform, the minimum amounts of money they were willing to accept per service and the number of clients they were able to take in a day or week or month. The study found that although sex workers placed a premium on a potential client's ability to pay, they generally did not compromise other ideals, which sometimes included the race of the client, the client's age or maturity, and personal hygiene.

Pimps, as noted, were absent from the prostitution scene in Douala and therefore did not play a role in the nature and organization of sex work. Sex workers prided themselves on their independence and possessed the ability to work longer hours or sleep when tired. The need to work certain hours or accept clients who did not meet the sex workers' preferred criteria was usually as a result of a "crisis" (see also Finkenauer and Chin, 2010) or other situation which needed to be resolved financially. Long hours were

sometimes motivated by the need to afford certain luxuries or maintain a certain quality of life. Kelly noted that “when poor women suddenly find themselves able not only to survive but also to purchase consumer goods, they experience shifts in desire: new ‘wants’ are created and transformed into ‘needs’” (2008:189).

Sex workers’ approach to sex work was therefore determined by their perceptions of sex work and the purpose which it served in their lives; *passe-temps* or profession. The degree to which sex workers successfully neutralized every aspect of sex work afforded the sex workers fewer restrictions as to what services could be rendered or what clientele they could accept, all of which dictated their overall experiences as prostitutes.

### **8.2.3 FINDINGS: RISKS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SEX WORKERS**

“The illegal status of sex work creates conditions in which exploitation and abuse can thrive” (Gould, 2008:55). Exploitation and abuse, in fact, thrive in the commercial sex industry in Douala as was evidenced by in the numerous instances of violence faced by the participants in this research. The major risks examined in this study include assaults, robberies, rapes, fights with clients, fights with other sex workers, thefts from clients, thefts by clients, arrests by police, stigma associated with being found out, disease, unwanted pregnancy, and counterfeit currency.

Previous research showed that clients of sex workers and police officers played a predominant role in the victimization of sex workers (Gould, 2008; Liu, 2011). This research was consistent with those findings. Gould noted that the “likelihood of violence from clients increases when clients are drunk, or when sex workers refuse them the services they expect” (2008:67). This was corroborated by the participants in this research who said clients who were drunk were more difficult to satisfy. Refusal to



perform expected, but usually not negotiated or paid for, services was the leading source of violence with clients in this study. Clients and sex workers tended to get into conflicts when the sex worker refused “to comply with the client’s demand, particularly for anal sex or for unprotected sex” (Gould, 2008:69).

With regard to the demand for unprotected sex, Gould noted:

This seems strange, given that sex workers are universally regarded as dirty and diseased, that the prevailing view is that prostitution increases the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Yet our findings suggest strongly that it is the clients of sex workers, rather than the sex workers themselves, that present the strongest threat in this regard (2008:73).

This study found, consistent with Gould’s findings, that clients were a strong threat in the spread of disease. While some clients exerted violence to obtain unprotected sex, others sometimes resorted to more malicious means like bursting or removing the condom during the sexual encounter.

Unprotected sex exposed the sex workers and their clients to disease, making “disease” a big risk undertaken by sex workers in the performance of their activities. Songué (1986), in discussing prostitution and health, asked her subjects if they were usually sick, the illness (if any) from which they suffered, and if they visited venereal disease dispensaries, and with what frequency. In response to the first question, the prostitutes cited illnesses such as headaches, malaria and toothache. In her study, 50 out of 62 prostitutes admitted going to venereal disease dispensaries for routine testing.

Songué remarked that, given research subjects do not always tell the truth, she resorted to data used by a doctorate student (Baua Djingoer) for his thesis. In a sample of 107 prostitutes, he found 18 infected with gonococci (17 percent) and the same percentage infected with syphilis (1986:129). Songué’s study was conducted in an era

when gonococci and syphilis were the sexually transmitted diseases which received utmost scrutiny and were especially associated stigma. HIV/AIDS has since been added to that list.

The present study did not ask as many detailed questions as Songué's aimed at eliciting information on the disease status of sex workers. The questions asked on the frequency of condom use and reasons for condom use were able to produce useful information on the sex workers' consciousness of the risk of disease as an occupational risk. Many research participants appeared to give scripted responses during this part of the interview. Like Songué, I did not find some of them to be particularly truthful when discussing disease related risks. That notwithstanding, I am able to conclude based on their responses that the research participants were conscious of the risk of disease and the role played by condoms in their mitigation. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that their actual behaviors did not always reflect that consciousness.

Another risk to which sex workers are exposed which was studied in this research is what Blissbomb referred to as the "risk of being outed" (2010:300). Among research participants in this study, many (N=23) kept their activities away from their family and friends, for fear of being stigmatized. Twelve shared the information with either some friends or some family members, while only fifteen out of fifty were completely open about their sex work activities. The fact that the research participants were not forthcoming to their loved ones about their involvement in sex work is consistent with existing research (Songué, 1986; Kelly, 2008; Liu 2011). The sex workers interviewed here employed lies, disguises and even separate identities to sustain the image of

themselves they want to portray vis-à-vis their families, friends and even neighbors. This created a paradox, which Kelly detailed as follows:

Sex work offers the women a decent living but is accompanied by great emotional and physical risk. They lie about their work to the people they love, whereas fake intimacy with strangers. They redefine sex as an economic interaction and work, while retaining some conceptualization of it as part of romantic love (2008:192).

According to Gould, “the stigma of sex work and, even more important, the fact that sex workers are regarded as criminals by the law, means that few sex workers believe they can claim their human rights” (2008:52). In this study some sex workers, not conscious of the illegal status of sex work in Cameroon, were able to successfully obtain the intervention of the police in disputes with clients. It is worth reiterating that the intervening police officers were, in some instances, provided incentives for the intervention. Most sex workers, however, when faced with violations of their human rights or other instances of victimization, resorted to self-help retaliation or adaptation strategies.

Some research participants were seen to respond to the existing risks by revisiting their client selection criteria, preferring mature men (Gould, 2008), or people of a certain race, gender or perceived social class. Others watched more closely the venues of the sexual encounter, avoiding venues like client homes, where they are more vulnerable with little resort to help or rescue. Some sex workers entered into arrangements with trusted cab drivers or *bendskinneurs* in order to avoid the risk of taking cabs or *bendskins*, exposing them to unscrupulous people. Among themselves and in spite of their occasional conflicts, sometimes resulting in fights, some sex workers acted like their brother’s or sister’s keepers, jotting down number plates, warning others of problematic

clients, or taking note of clients who pick up other sex workers who are their friends. Some subjects, if not all, given their continued engagement in prostitution, accepted that a certain measure of violence was to be expected in this line of work and used adaptation strategies aimed at self-preservation.

### **8.3 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **8.3.1 STRENGTHS**

This study attempts to bridge the knowledge void which exists in the understanding of the commercial sex industry in Cameroon. Given its empirical design and execution, the study results in rich and nuanced findings that shed light on an industry in a country which has not received much research attention.

As an added strength, the study details the lives and challenges of sex workers as they earn their living. The study also discusses sex workers' experiences with same sex sexual encounters, threesomes and other requests which were not common during Songué's era and whose absences she mentioned when comparing Yaoundé to the Western world.

Liu (2011), referring to Maxwell (1996:89), pointed a potential weakness to her study which was the "threat to valid description." This potential threat to validity was linked to the fact that she was not able to record interviews or observations. I was fortunate, with the permission of 46 out of 50 research subjects, to record their interviews. The data collected from these recordings remained available for clarification of any issues that arose during the course of writing, ensuring this research validly describes sex workers' opinions and experiences.

### **8.3.2 LIMITATIONS**

The fact that the generalizability and applicability of the findings of this study are limited to the understanding of sex work in areas of Cameroon, and perhaps other cities in Africa which are similarly structured geographically and economically, is a limitation.

Researchers have raised concerns about the truthfulness of research participants in providing responses to certain questions like their health status (Songué, 1986), age, marital status, place of origin and amounts of money they earn (Finckenauer and Chin, 2010) or their duration in prostitution and the frequency of their prostitution activities (Liu, 2011). It is worth noting that in this study some sex workers' stories were not consistent with reference to their duration in sex work sometimes discussing experiences which may have lasted a lifetime in cases where the subjects claimed to have barely made their entrée into sex work.

Yet, "people usually lie when they have something to gain by doing so, or they have something to fear from telling the truth," say Finckenauer and Chin, adding, "neither of those conditions existed in our interviews. We interviewed the women in their own natural settings and without the presence of a third party. We promised them nothing except anonymity. We were good listeners who gave them every opportunity to tell us their stories" (2010:154). These statements by Finckenauer and Chin (2010) describe my experience as well. I did not find any deliberate effort on the part of my research participants to tell lies, notwithstanding the occasional discrepancies in very few of the interviews. Many of the study participants were thrilled to be given an audience and insisted that it was the first time someone had shown interest in their stories. One sex

worker prefaced her interview by saying she had contemplated writing a book about her experiences as a sex worker. After speaking to Naomi, I agreed.

Another factor that can be perceived as a potential weakness of this research, which focuses on the commercial sex industry in Cameroon, is the complete absence of sex trafficking. Some people may criticize the absence of this finding on sex trafficking to mean cases of trafficking were not effectively sought out for analysis. The snowball sampling technique gave me access to 50 people. Although this selection process may be described as opportunistic and convenient (Liu, 2011, referring to Sharpe 1998), consciously accepting referrals from different parts of Douala where sex work is visible makes the sample more representative of the commercial sex landscape in Douala. All of the 50 sex workers who participated in this research were under no deceit, coercion or force to engage in sex work and, although some of them had heard of sex trafficking (when described), none of them knew of anyone working under such conditions, believing the phenomenon to be one which only took place abroad as represented in movies. It is possible that a larger sample size, or research in other areas of Cameroon, may uncover instances of sex trafficking that were not found in this research.

Finally, the sample size was comprised of 50 sex workers out of which only two were male. One of the men identified himself as bisexual and the other gay. Although these two participants, alongside a lesbian and a female bisexual sex worker, were specifically sought out, this study can nevertheless be criticized as predominantly focusing on the experiences of female sex workers.

## **8.4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

In her conclusion, Songué questioned the future of prostitution and prostitutes in Cameroon, as she wondered if societal norms will continue to give way to a free field for commercial sex transactions or if they would assist in the “progressive disappearance” of prostitution while providing alternatives to prostitutes (1986:141). In response to these questions, based on this most recent study, the future of prostitution, as contemplated by Songué in Cameroon, remains deeply in place.

Sex workers face a myriad of risks and challenges within the course of their work. Their rights as humans are exposed to violation and are infringed when they are physically and sexually assaulted and robbed by an extensive number of preys including law enforcement officials. Taking into account the knowledge gained from the victimization of the research participants, this study makes some recommendations focusing on the sex workers, their clients, civil society, the legal framework and law enforcement.

### **8.4.1 EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF SEX WORKERS**

Some of the study participants were knowledgeable about their rights but were constrained by the illegal nature of prostitution from seeking redress. Sex workers need to be educated on the fact that the illegal nature of sex work does not entitle a client to rape them or inflict any form of violence towards them. With this education comes empowerment to seek redress. Miller and Abeyaratne refer to a UNDP (2012) report in which “legal empowerment can be understood as the process of systemic change through which vulnerable communities are protected and enabled to use the law to advance their human rights and their interests as citizens and economic actors” (2014:95).

There are laws relating to rape, assault, robbery and these laws are independent of the laws criminalizing prostitution. These laws can be used by sex workers who are vulnerable persons to advance their human rights. This can only be done by a process of education backed by positive results and not retaliation.

#### **8.4.2 EDUCATION OF SEX WORKERS' CLIENTS**

Clients were seen as major perpetrators of violence towards sex workers. This research did not interview any clients and that remains a possibility for future research. However, based on the recounted incidents of rape, beatings by clients, clients who resorted to tricks and seduction, there is good reason to believe that within the commercial sex industry in Cameroon, some clients have established themselves as vectors of disease and perpetrators of violence towards sex workers.

In order to address these risky and dangerous behaviors on the part of clients, there is need for sensitization programs drawing clients' attention to public health implications of unsafe sex practices. Clients also need to be made aware of the penal sanctions to which they expose themselves when they commit acts of violence against sex workers or anyone else for that matter. Law enforcement needs to ensure that when acts of violence are reported, they are in fact investigated and not ignored because of the status of the victim as a prostitute.

#### **8.4.3 INCREASED INVOLVEMENT BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

During the course of interviewing, I did not meet any non-governmental organizations (NGO) or other civil society organization focusing on sex workers. When asked if they knew any NGOs in Douala offering them any type of assistance, 21 study participants said yes and 29 responded no. Sex workers who had interacted with NGOs



on the field said they were offered free condom (male and female condoms) and educated on their use. Three sex workers reported that NGOs spoke to them about sexually transmitted diseases and gave them access to free medical screening if they were interested. Among the 29 research participants who had never interacted with NGOs, some said they had heard of their existence while others said they had never heard about them at all.

The presence of some NGOs on the commercial sex landscape in Douala is laudable, but if sex workers are to be better educated on the risks involved in their activities, there is a need for an increased involvement by civil society organizations. NGOs can also play an active role in the education and sensitization of sex workers' clients as discussed above.

#### **8.4.4 REVISITING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Policy on prostitution and its application has not changed over time. The current Penal Code is the same Penal Code under which Songué's research was carried out. The laws are not applied today any more than they were applied in 1986, yet their very existence exposes prostitutes to arbitrary arrests cloaked under other possible offenses, none of which are eventually prosecuted.

The laws which criminalize prostitution need to be revisited to understand what purposes they were intended to serve and if there is need for modifications, given that their actual application (if at all) only provides room for police officers to have access to prostitutes and further their victimization.

#### **8.4.5 THE ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS**

Law enforcement officials are citizens and must also obey the law. Yet the general approach towards law enforcement officials by the study participants was one of fear or avoidance or both. Esther stood out as not being afraid of the police. The reason she felt comfortable with police officers to assert what she perceived to be her rights was because her father was in law enforcement and had encouraged her not to fear officers in uniform.

Some sex workers approached police officers when in conflict with their clients. Those who received assistance provided financial compensation. Vis-à-vis sex workers, law enforcement appeared to have abandoned its role and sought to exploit them like the other exploitative relationships which they described with *nanga-bokos*.

This exploitation by some police officers went as far as sexual exploitation as discussed in Chapter 7. There is need for law enforcement officials to be educated on their duties towards sex workers who are just like any other facet of the population. Miller and Abeyaratne (2014) recommended accountability among the police officers in Sri Lanka for their actions towards sex workers. There is need for consequences when law enforcement officers abuse the dominant positions which they hold. Police officers in Douala and the rest of Cameroon who prey on sex workers should be sanctioned. Punishment will serve the dual purpose of retribution for their actions as well as a deterrent for other law enforcement officials.

#### **8.4.6 CONCLUSION**

As shown in the above discussions, the sex industry in Douala is a complex and yet vibrant one, manifesting multiple layers of social, cultural and legal complexities.

This research has shown that just because the law exists on paper does not change the practice. The current state of affairs seems to point to the direction that prostitution is allowed to manifest itself in certain spaces. It is not clear what the position of the government is at the moment although speculation holds that maintaining the status quo permits a certain category of persons (prostitutes) to survive and feed their families while permitting the clients to satisfy their sexual needs. If that is the intention of the government, the next question would be if it is not preferable to bring prostitution under a regulated or decriminalized framework, while acknowledging the issues and challenges which either present.

Beyond speculations however, like Finckenauer and Chin, I do “firmly believe that it is not good practice to build policy on a foundation of unsubstantiated claims, false beliefs and myths” (2010:151). Sound academic research by Songué and now this study provide insights into the commercial sex industry in Douala specifically, which can be generalized to Yaoundé and other parts of Cameroon. The ability to generalize the findings of this research is enabled by the mobility of the subjects, some of whom practiced sex work across city, regional and national borders. “Yet any grand plan to ensure sex workers’ health and human rights must include sex workers’ voices. They are experts in their field, and they have a right to participate in policy making decisions that will affect their work and well-being” (Kelly, 2008:211).

### **8.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of this research are very instrumental in the understanding of the pathways to prostitution, nature and organization of sex work, and risks and challenges faced by sex workers in Cameroon. While this research and the existing literature on the

subject matter are valuable for informing future policy considerations, there remains the need to know and understand the extent of prostitution in Cameroon. Future research should focus on the extent of prostitution in Cameroon with a view to having quantitative indicators as to the number of prostitutes engaging in sex work in the big cities in Cameroon.

In addition, more research on diverse samples of sex workers in Cameroon would be useful. Songué's research only investigated women sex workers with male clientele, while my research included a small number of lesbian, gay and bisexual sex workers. The criminalization of same sex practices in Cameroon appears to create additional risks for such sex workers, warranting further investigation.

The sex workers who participated in this research worked predominantly in Deido, Akwa, Bonanjo and Bonapriso. Although experiences were shared by two sex workers who had also worked in New Bell and Village respectively, further research into prostitution in Village particularly is recommended. I was not able to gain access to Village as some security concerns were raised. Anecdotally, Village is said to have many prostitutes, some of whom charge as little as CFA500 (\$1) for sex and clients most of whom work for the informal sector doing menial jobs and sometimes as young as 14 years old. The nature and organization of sex work in Village may show some variations which will provide a useful basis for comparison with Songué's research, this study and future research on the subject.

Future research may also interview the clients of prostitutes with a view to understanding who johns in Douala are demographically, as well as their reasons for patronizing prostitutes. There is also need to understand what thought processes (if any)

are taken into account by clients who exhibit violence towards sex workers. Another question worth asking is if these clients who exercise violence are only violent towards sex workers or other persons in their entourage. It will be useful to understand if violent johns are aware of the criminal nature of their actions and the extent to which they expose themselves to sanctions when they perpetuate acts of violence towards sex workers.

The aged old question why some people faced with the same socio-economic situations as the current research participants do not enter into sex work, choosing different paths remains a question for future research within the Cameroonian context. Beyond the reasons given by sex workers themselves for choosing sex work, what makes them more likely than other people to have made such choices?

As the general remarks about the future of the sex industry in Cameroon or their work choices, my research participants offered the following remarks.

Laeticia talked of the inherent difficulty of sex work when she said:

Nothing can make this [prostitution] better. Every day it is different men. Ok, maybe the only recommendation is to make it legal so that men are forced to pay for the services.

Chantelle addressed the price as she said “I would say the price. Some novices lower the price so much so that it causes problems to some of us.” Imani elaborated on the price and said:

If they [the government] legalize prostitution, it would be ideal to have fixed prices for services so that men would no longer give women trouble or at least they will get sanctioned if they give trouble.

Arrah addressed the risks in sex work when she said “I will ask that they [the government] look for a means of making it secure or legal [in order] to limit the risks we face here at night.”

Daniela spoke of opportunities when she said:

I would prefer that if the government's action is to ban prostitution it [the government] makes sure there are opportunities for people who have gone to schools. Now when you have gone to school there is no guarantee that you will find a job.

Rosa recommended an approach that nonjudgmental when she said:

There is no need to judge people involved in sex work. They [sex workers] need to do it to support their families, et cetera, and the government can be more supportive of sex work.

Pierette, contrary to her self-interest, pointed out:

No one needs sex work to survive. They [prostitutes] just put it in their heads that they do. You can live a poor life without sex work but sex work gives women a chance to afford the nice things in life.

Angelle reflected on a possible exit when she said:

I will recommend that an opportunity should be given to people doing sex work to leave because some people stay in it for a very long time. This is not something that someone should be doing for long.

In conclusion, discussing sex work with 50 persons engaged in the commercial sex industry in Cameroon was a very enlightening experience. I was particularly impressed with the parallels between my findings and those of previous research undertaken in different countries and even continents. These study participants, who never had a chance to review the literature on the subject matter as extensively as I did, told similar stories about their experiences relating to intimacy, emotional labor, and the risks and challenges they faced, and in this way they were comparable to sex workers around the world.

Researchers have repeatedly said the voices of sex workers must be heard in any policy making decisions concerning them (see Kelly, 2008). I now join the bandwagon of

researchers clamoring for that position. When asked of the changes (if any) the study participants would recommend in Cameroon with regard to prostitution, if given the opportunity, they voiced many opinions, which are detailed above. The sex workers have spoken and hopefully in due course their voices will be heard.

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## **Appendix 1.1**

### **Questionnaire: English Version**

#### **Questionnaire for subjects in the Commercial Sex Industry**

##### **I. Background Information**

READ: First I will like to ask you some questions about yourself and your family.

1. Where were you born?  
City  
  
Region
2. What is your ethnic group or tribe?  
In what town or country did you live in before coming to Douala?
3. How old are you?
4. What was the community like where you grew up?
5. How far did you go in school?  
IF NOT COMPLETED: what made you stop going to school?
6. Were you ever employed as a child?  
IF YES: What kinds of things did you do to earn money?  
  
What happened to the money that you earned?
7. What are your parents' occupations? (If retired, please tell me what were their occupations before retirement)  
Father:  
  
Mother:
8. Do you have any brothers and/ or sisters?  
IF YES: How many? What are their occupations?
9. Are you married, divorced, widowed or single?
10. Do you have children?  
IF YES: How many? Ages? Education?
11. How old were you when you had your first sexual experience?  
-How did it happen/ what was it like (e.g., coercive or not, who was it, how old were they?)

##### **II. Life in Douala/ Cameroon**

**Read: I would like to ask you a few questions about your life in Douala/ Cameroon and the reasons for coming here.**

12. Have you been in any towns in Cameroon other than Douala?
13. What did you do for a living in these other towns? (Space provided to list the jobs, businesses, the nature, location and income).
14. Have you been to other countries besides this country?  
IF YES

i. Which countries and what were you doing there?

ii. When did you arrive in this country?

15. Why did you come to Douala/ Cameroon? (Aim at obtaining information regarding job opportunities, school, relationship, or by chance)

### **III. Coming to Douala/ Cameroon**

**Read: I would like to ask you some questions about how you came to Douala/ Cameroon.**

16. Did you come to this city/ country on your own?  
IF YES. How did you come here?

IF NO

i. What help did you get, from whom and how did you get into contact with this person?

ii. During the first few meetings between you and these persons what did you discuss?

iii. Did you discuss how much it will cost for your trip, what you will be doing in Douala / Cameroon?

iv. Did you and the persons who helped you leave your previous city/ country discuss your working for them or other persons that they know when you get to Douala?

v. How long did it take to make your departure arrangements?

vi. How did you travel? What occurred during your trip?

vii. How much did the journey cost you and how did you pay for it?

### **IV. Work**

17. Are you currently involved in sex work/ prostitution?

IF YES: Can I ask a few questions about your current involvement?

IF NO: When did you quit working?

What led you to quit?

Can I ask you about what it was like when you were working?

**Read: For women no longer in the sex industry, ask the remainder of the questions in the past tense. I would like to ask a few questions about the nature of your work.**

18. How did you become involve in the sex trade?

Checklist: -circumstances leading to prostitution

-age of entrée

- age of your first sexual experience

19. How did you find out about the work?

Checklist: -Broker, friend, family, boyfriend etc?

-Was broker male or female?

-How and where did they approach you?

-What did they tell you?

-How was your first client arranged?

-How much were you paid?

-Did you share your money with someone and how much?

20. What would you categorize the nature of your work and why? (Job, career, hobby etc, what do you like/ hate about it?)

21. How long have you been in this line of work?

22. Can you leave/ quit if you wanted to? What are your reasons for continuing?

23. How did you enter into this line of work? (Training, mentorship, boyfriends, friends, family involvement etc).

24. In what cities/ countries have you worked in this line of work?

25. How is your work organized?

26. Where do you find your customers (street, restaurants, snack bars, night clubs etc)?

27. How do you decide which customer to accept and which customer to refuse?

28. Do you use protection?

IF YES why?

IF NO why?

29. Would you accept more than one customer at a time?

IF YES why?

IF NO why?

Do you have some people who supervise your work or do you supervise any other person's work?

30. Do you have some persons working with you in the same organization?

IF YES (who are these people?)

31. Do you have persons who find customers for you?

IF YES (who and how do they find you clients and how are you informed of the clients they have found?)

32. What is the nature of payment received from clients?

33. In financial terms about how much money does a customer pay to see you and for what type of service?

34. Where do you go with your clients for the exchange?(Hotel, motel, car? Not location exactly but description of location) Reason for the choice of location?

35. On a normal day, how many customers will you take and for what types of service?

36. How do you negotiate your fee?

- Do you get the money upfront?
- How much do you get?

37. Do you share the money you make with anyone?

IF YES (with whom and how much? Are you happy with this arrangement?)

38. About how much money do you make in a month?

39. What do you do on a daily basis from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep (how many days a week do you work)?

40. What do you do when you are not working (recreational/ hobbies)?

41. What type of services do you generally perform?

42. How would you describe your customers (age, profession, education, marital status, nationality etc)? If foreigners how do you meet them?

43. Do you have frequent customers? Do they pay the usual rate?

IF YES (how did it happen and do you know any other persons in your customer's lives for example co-workers, friends, family?)

44. Have you ever been in a relationship with your customers other than in a business relationship?

IF YES please describe.

45. How do your customers treat you?

## **VI. Crime and Victimization**

**Read: I would like to ask some questions regarding your security when you perform your job.**

46. In your view is prostitution legal?  
     IF YES (what is your understanding of this?)  
     If NO (what is your understanding of this?)
47. Do you believe it is right for someone to be deceived or forced to have sex with another person?  
     IF YES please explain  
     IF NO please explain
48. Would your answer be any different if the person who is deceived or forced to have sex is paid some money or other benefit for having sex?  
     IF YES please explain  
     IF NO please explain
49. Has anyone ever forced you have provide services of a sexual nature to another person?  
     IF YES what happened? Describe the nature of the services? What did you do?
50. Have you ever been deceived as to the nature of the services to be provided only to realize later that sexual services were required of you?  
     IF YES what happened and what did you do?
51. Have you ever been hit or beaten by a customer?  
     IF YES what happened and how did it make you feel?
52. Have you ever been shouted at by a customer?  
     IF YES what happened and how did it make you feel?
53. Have you ever shouted at a customer?  
     IF YES what happened? How did the customer react? How did it make you feel?
54. Have you ever hit/ beaten a customer?  
     IF YES what happened? how did the customer react and how did it make you feel?
55. How do you handle customers who do not want to pay you or who want to engage in sexual acts which you would ordinarily not perform?



56. Have you ever taken something from a customer without his knowledge and permission?  
IF YES why and how did it make you feel?
57. Have you ever been in a fight with any one while you were at work?  
IF YES who, why and what happened after the fight?
58. Has any other person ever hurt you while you were at work?  
Yes (who, why and what happened?)
59. Have you ever been arrested?  
IF YES why, how many times and how did you get released?  
  
IF NO how do you avoid arrest?
60. What do you think about the police and the courts in Cameroon?
61. Have you had any encounter with the police and/ or courts in Cameroon?  
IF YES what happened?
62. Would you say you can freely move around from city to city/ country to country?  
IF NO what would you say restricts your movement?
63. What are your fears/ worries in this line of work?
64. How do you deal with this worry? Drugs, alcohol, protection?
65. Before working in the commercial sex industry, had you ever been a victim of a crime such as theft, assault or rape etc?  
IF YES when did it occur, where, what happened and how did you deal with the situation?
66. While working in this industry, have you ever been a victim of a crime such as theft, assault, or rape?  
IF YES how many times, when, where, what happened and how did you deal with the situation?
67. Have you ever heard about any one in this country who forced or deceived to work in the sex industry against their will?  
IF Yes where, who, by whom, for how long and how did you hear about it

## **VII. Miscellaneous**

**READ: I would like to round up this interview by asking you a few general questions**

68. Do you know of any Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) which provide any type of assistances to persons in this line of work?

IF YES what is the nature of the assistance?

69. Do your friends and/ or family members know about the nature of your work?

IF NO what do they think you do for a living?

IF YES what are their reactions (approve, encourage etc)

70. What is the nature of your relationship with your family now? How much contact?

71. Who do you currently live with?

72. Do the people in the community where you live know about your work?

IF YES: How do they react? Accept it, mistreat you for it?

IF NO: Do you purposely keep it away from them? Why? How would they react?

73. If you had a chance to redo your professional life again is there anything you would do differently and why?

74. What kinds of recommendations for change would you like to see come out this research? What could improve the conditions of people in your kind of work?

**READ: We have come to the end of the interview. I would like to thank you for your time and for your assistance.**

## **Appendix 1.2**

### **Questionnaire : French Version**

#### **Questionnaire à l'intention des personnes travaillant dans l'industrie de commercialisation du sexe**

### **I. Informations générales**

LIRE : D'abord, j'aimerais que vous répondiez à certaines questions sur vous et votre famille.

1. Votre lieu de naissance ?  
Ville  
  
Région
2. Quel est votre groupe ethnique ou tribu ?  
Dans quelle ville ou quel pays avez-vous vécu avant de venir à Douala ?
3. Quel âge avez-vous?
4. Qu'est-ce qui caractérisait la communauté dans laquelle vous avez grandi ?
5. Quel est votre niveau de scolarité ?  
Si vos études ont été interrompues, pourquoi avez-vous pris une telle décision ?
6. Avez-vous eu à travailler en tant qu'enfant ?  
SI OUI : Quelles activités avez-vous exercé pour gagner de l'argent ?  
  
Qu'en est-il de l'argent que vous avez gagné à l'issue de cet emploi ?
7. Quelles sont les professions de vos parents ? (S'ils sont à la retraite, veuillez m'indiquer quelles étaient leurs professions avant qu'ils n'aillent à la retraite)  
Père :  
  
Mère :
8. Avez-vous des frères et/ou des sœurs ?  
SI OUI : Combien ? Quelles sont leurs professions ?
9. Etes-vous mariée, divorcée, veuve ou célibataire ?
10. Avez-vous des enfants ?  
SI OUI : Combien ? Ages ? Education ?
11. Quel âge aviez-vous lorsque vous avez eu votre première expérience sexuelle ?

-Comment cela s'est-il passé/qu'avez-vous ressenti (p.ex., contraignant ou non, qui était le partenaire, quel âge avait-il ?)

## **II. Votre vie à Douala/Cameroun**

**Lire : J'aimerais vous poser quelques questions sur votre vie à Douala/Cameroun et sur les motifs qui vous ont poussé à venir vous installer ici.**

12. Avez-vous vécu des d'autres villes au Cameroun autres que Douala ?
13. Quels étaient vos moyens de subsistance dans ces autres villes ? (espace prévu pour répertorier les emplois, les activités, la nature, l'emplacement et les revenus).
14. Avez-vous vécu dans d'autres pays à part le Cameroun ?

SI OUI

i. Lesquels et que faisiez-vous là-bas ?

ii. Quand êtes-vous arrivé dans ce pays ?

15. Pourquoi avez-vous choisi Douala/le Cameroun comme destination ? (Pour obtenir des informations sur les possibilités d'emploi, la scolarité, les relations ou par aventure)

## **III. Votre arrivée à Douala/Cameroun**

**Lire : J'aimerais vous poser quelques questions sur la façon dont vous êtes arrivé à Douala/Cameroun.**

16. Etes-vous arrivée dans cette ville/ce pays de votre propre initiative ?

SI OUI. Comment êtes-vous arrivée ici ?

SI NON.

i. Quelle aide avez-vous obtenue, de qui, et comment êtes-vous entrée en contact avec cette personne ?

ii. Au cours des toutes premières rencontres que vous avez eues avec ces personnes, de quoi avez-vous parlé ?

iii. Avez-vous parlé du montant de vos frais de déplacement, de ce que vous ferez à Douala/Cameroun ?

iv. Avez-vous discuté avec les personnes qui vous ont aidé à quitter votre chère ville/cher pays de travailler pour eux ou pour certaines de leurs connaissances lorsque vous arriverez à Douala ?

v. Combien de temps vous a-t-il fallu pour faire vos préparatifs de voyage ?

vi. Comment avez-vous voyagé ? Que s'est-il passé lors de votre voyage ?

vii. Combien avez-vous déboursé pour vos frais de voyage et comment les avez-vous

réglés ?

#### **IV. Votre profession**

17. Travaillez-vous actuellement dans le domaine du sexe/de la prostitution ?

SI OUI : Est-ce que je peux vous poser quelques questions sur votre implication actuelle dans ce métier ?

SI NON : Quand avez-vous quitté ce métier ?

Quelles raisons vous ont-elles poussé à le quitter ?

Est-ce que je peux vous poser des questions sur vos expériences lorsque vous y travailliez encore ?

**Lire : Pour les femmes qui ne travaillent plus dans l'industrie du sexe, poser le reste des questions en employant le passé simple. J'aimerais vous poser quelques questions sur la nature de votre travail.**

18. Comment êtes-vous entrée dans le commerce du sexe ?

Liste de contrôle : -circonstances ayant mené à la prostitution

-âge d'entrée

- âge de votre première expérience sexuelle

19. Comment avez-vous entendu parler de ce métier ?

Liste de contrôle : -Passeur, ami, famille, petit-ami, etc. ?

-Le passeur était-il un homme ou une femme ?

-Quand et comment êtes-vous entrée en contact avec lui/elle ?

-Que vous a-t-il/elle dit ?

-Comment avez-vous eu votre premier client ?

-Combien avez-vous payé ?

-Avez-vous partagé vos revenus avec quelqu'un d'autre ; si oui, combien ?

20. Dans quelle catégorie placerez-vous la nature de votre travail, et pourquoi ?  
(Emploi, carrière, passe-temps, qu'est-ce que vous aimez ou détestez à propos de ce travail ?)
21. Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous dans ce secteur d'activité ?
22. Pourriez-vous abandonner/quitter ce métier si vous le vouliez ? Quelles raisons vous poussent à continuer ?
23. Comment êtes-vous entrée dans ce secteur d'activité ? (formation, tutorat, petit-amis, amis, implication de la famille, etc.).
24. Dans quelles villes/quels pays avez-vous travaillé dans ce secteur d'activité ?
25. Comment est organisé votre travail ?
26. Où trouvez-vous vos clients (rue, restaurants, snack bars, boîtes de nuit, etc.) ?
27. Sur quels critères vous-basez vous pour accepter tel client et refuser tel autre ?
28. Utilisez-vous une protection ?  
SI OUI, pourquoi ?  
  
SI NON, pourquoi ?
29. Pourriez-vous accepter plusieurs clients à la fois ?  
SI OUI, pourquoi ?  
  
SI NON, pourquoi ?  
  
Travaillez-vous sous la supervision de certaines personnes, ou est-ce que vous supervisez vous-même le travail de quelqu'un d'autre ?
30. Travaillez-vous avec d'autres personnes dans la même organisation ?  
SI OUI (qui sont-elles ?)
31. Avez-vous des gens qui vous cherchent des clients ?  
SI OUI (qui et comment vous trouvent-ils des clients, et comment êtes-vous informé des clients qu'ils ont trouvés ?)
32. Quelle est la nature des paiements reçus de la part des clients ?
33. En termes financiers, combien vous paie un client pour vous rencontrer et pour quel type de service ?
34. Où emmenez-vous vos clients pour avoir vos rapports ? (hôtel, motel, véhicule ? pas précisément l'emplacement, mais la description de l'emplacement) Raison du choix de l'emplacement ?
35. En temps normal, combien de clients acceptez-vous et pour quels types de service ?
36. Comment négociez-vous vos tarifs ?  
- Obtenez-vous le paiement à l'avance ?  
- Combien gagnez-vous ?
37. Partagez-vous l'argent que vous gagnez avec quelqu'un d'autre ?  
SI OUI (avec qui et combien ? cet arrangement vous satisfait-il ?)

38. Environ combien d'argent gagnez-vous au cours d'un mois ?
39. Comment vous occupez-vous quotidiennement, du moment où vous vous levez au moment où vous allez au lit (combien de jours travaillez-vous par semaine) ?
40. Que faites-vous lorsque vous ne travaillez pas (divertissement/passe-temps) ?
41. Quels autres types de services offrez-vous généralement ?
42. Comment décririez-vous vos clients (âge, profession, éducation, situation matrimoniale, nationalité, etc.) ? Lorsqu'il s'agit d'étrangers, comment les rencontrez-vous ?
43. Avez-vous fréquemment des clients ? Paient-ils le tarif habituel ?  
SI OUI (comment cela s'est-il passé, et connaissez-vous d'autres personnes qui partagent la vie de votre client, par exemple, des collègues, des amis, de la famille ?)
44. Avez-vous jamais entretenu une relation autre que commerciale avec vos clients ?  
SI OUI, veuillez la décrire.
45. Comment vos clients vous traitent-ils ?

## **VI. Crime et victimisation**

**Lire : J'aimerais vous poser quelques questions au sujet de votre sécurité dans le cadre de votre travail.**

46. A votre avis, la prostitution est-elle une activité légale ?  
SI OUI (comment la définissez-vous ?)  
  
SI NON (comment la définissez-vous ?)
47. Pensez-vous qu'il est juste qu'une personne soit dupée ou contrainte à avoir des relations sexuelles avec une autre personne ?  
SI OUI, veuillez expliquer.  
  
SI NON, veuillez expliquer.
48. Votre réponse serait-elle différente si la personne qui a été dupée ou forcée à avoir des relations sexuelles reçoit une certaine compensation ou autre avantage pour avoir eu cet acte ?  
SI OUI, veuillez expliquer.  
  
SI NON, veuillez expliquer.
49. Vous-a-t-on jamais forcé à fournir des services de nature sexuelle à une autre personne ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé ? Décrivez la nature de ces services ? Qu'avez-vous fait ?

50. Avez-vous jamais été trompée quant à la nature des services que vous devez fournir pour ne réaliser qu'après qu'il s'agissait de services à caractère sexuel ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé et qu'avez-vous fait ?
51. Avez-vous jamais été frappée ou battue par un client ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé et comment vous-êtes vous sentie après cela ?
52. Avez-vous jamais été grondée par un client ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé et comment vous-êtes vous sentie après cela ?
53. Avez-vous jamais grondé un client ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé ? Comment le client a t-il réagi ? Comment vous-êtes vous sentie après cela ?
54. Avez-vous jamais frappé/battu un client ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé ? Comment le client a t-il réagi et comment vous-êtes vous sentie après cela ?
55. Comment gérez-vous les clients qui refusent de vous payer ou qui veulent pratiquer des activités sexuelles que vous n'avez pas l'habitude d'accomplir ?
56. Avez-vous jamais pris un objet appartenant à un client à son insu ou sans son autorisation ?  
SI OUI, pourquoi et comment vous-êtes vous sentie après cela ?
57. Avez-vous jamais été impliquée dans une bagarre avec toute personne pendant votre travail ?  
SI OUI, pourquoi et que s'est-il passé après cette bagarre ?
58. Avez-vous jamais été blessée par une personne pendant que vous travailliez ?  
Oui (qui, pourquoi et que s'est-il passé ?)
59. Avez-vous jamais fait l'objet d'une arrestation ?  
SI OUI, pourquoi, combien de fois et comment avez-vous été libérée ?  
  
SI NON, comment évitez-vous les arrestations ?
60. Que pensez-vous de la police et des tribunaux au Cameroun ?
61. Avez-vous déjà eu affaire avec la police et/ou les tribunaux du Cameroun ?  
SI OUI, que s'est-il passé ?
62. Pensez-vous pouvoir vous déplacer librement d'une ville à l'autre/d'un pays à l'autre ?  
SI NON, qu'est-ce qui, à votre avis, limite vos mouvements ?
63. Quelles sont vos craintes/préoccupations dans ce secteur d'activité ?
64. Comment gérez-vous cette préoccupation ? Stupéfiants, alcool, protection?



65. Avant de vous engager dans l'industrie de commercialisation du sexe, avez-vous jamais été victime d'un crime comme le vol, l'agression, le viol, etc. ?  
SI OUI, quand cela s'est-il produit, où, que s'est-il passé et comment avez-vous géré cette situation ?
66. Pendant que vous y travailliez, aviez-vous jamais été victime d'un crime comme le vol, l'agression ou le viol ?  
SI OUI, combien de fois, quand, où, que s'est-il passé et comment avez-vous géré cette situation ?
67. Avez-vous jamais entendu parler d'une personne dans ce pays qui a contraint ou trompé des gens à travailler dans l'industrie du sexe contre leur volonté ?  
SI OUI, où, qui, de qui, pour combien de temps et comment avez-vous appris cette information ?

## VII. Divers

### **LIRE : J'aimerais terminer cette entrevue en vous posant quelques questions d'ordre générale**

68. Connaissez-vous des Organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) qui fournissent de l'assistance à des personnes travaillant dans ce secteur d'activité ?  
SI OUI, quelle est la nature de l'assistance ?
69. Vos amis et/ou membres de la famille connaissent-ils la nature de votre travail ?  
SI NON, quelle activité exercez-vous selon eux ?  
  
SI OUI, quelles sont leurs réactions (approbation, encouragement, etc.)
70. Quelle est la nature de vos rapports avec votre famille à l'heure actuelle ? Degré de contact ?
71. Avec qui vivez-vous actuellement ?
72. Les gens de la communauté dans laquelle vous vivez connaissent-ils votre occupation ?  
SI OUI : Comment réagissent-ils ? L'acceptent-ils, ou vous maltraitent-ils pour cela ?  
  
SI NON : Leur dissimulez-vous cette information de manière intentionnelle ? Pourquoi ? Comment réagiraient-ils ?
73. Si vous aviez la possibilité de refaire votre vie professionnelle, aimeriez-vous faire autre chose et pourquoi ?

74. Quels types de recommandations en vue du changement aimeriez-vous voir intervenir à l'issue de cette recherche ? Qu'est-ce qui peut améliorer les conditions des personnes pratiquant votre genre d'activité ?

**LIRE : Nous voici arrivé au terme de notre entretien. Je vous remercie pour votre temps et pour votre assistance.**

## APPENDIX 2

### EXCERPTS OF EXCEL DATA SHEET

Interview Data File [Last saved by user] - Microsoft Excel

Home

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Page Layout

Formulas

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Review

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Workers

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
1	#	Name	Tribe	Age	Place of Birth	Gender (M/ F)	Sexual Identity (Heterosexual, Lesbian, Homosexual/ Bi-sexual)	Father Alive (Y/N)	Mother Alive (Y/N)	Father Occupation	Mother Occupation	Number of Siblings (including self)	Position in family (among children)	Sibling Occupations	Marital Status	# of Children	Ages of children	Education of Children	Self Educational Level	Reason for leaving school
3	2	Arrah	Bayangi	26	Douala	F	Heterosexual	Y	Y	Driver	Corn Business	10	N/A	Students/Workers	Single	3	7, 4, 2	1st Only	BEPC/ O'Level	Got pregnant
4	3	Mireille	Bamilike	25	Bamendjind	F	Heterosexual	Y	Y	Work/ not stated	Housekeeper	7	N/A	Workers	Single	2	10 yr old twins	Yes/ Class	CEPE	A little slow in school and had hearing
5	4	Marie-Louise	Beti	30	Ayos	F	Heterosexual	Y	Y	Sick	No job	4	N/A	Workers	Single	1	13	In school	No education	Divorced parents and grew up with
6	5	Angelle	Bassa	27	Douala	F	Heterosexual	N	N	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	Workers	In a relationship	1	7	In school	3eme	Failed BEPC
7	6	Tatiana	Bassa	28	Edea	F	Heterosexual	N/A	Y	N/A	Petty Trader	5	3rd	All struggling sister works in a Housewife/ lives in Elder	Single	1	2	none	4eme	Lack of means. The I paid to
8	7	Sophia	Bassa	27	Douala	F	Heterosexual	Y	Y	Lawyer	Petty Trader	4	Father/2	Engaged	1	12	In school	3eme	Pregnant	
9	8	Laeticia	Bassa	30	(Bassa)	F	Heterosexual	Unknown	Y	N/A	Housewife	3	last	Single	1	14	3eme	5eme	Pregnant	
																		courses	Primary	Traumatized

Demographic Table

From Transcripts

Unique Quotes

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Sheet2

Sheet3

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Interview Data File - Microsoft Excel

Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View

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BC3 Cleanliness, his approach and if he accepts my price

	AV	AW	AX	AY	AZ	BA	BB	BC	BD	BE	BF	BG	BH	BI
1 #	If yes for how long were you away from Sex Work	Locations where you have engaged in Sex Work (Countries / Regions)	How do you organize your work	Why did you choose sex work i.e. motivations, entrée (economic, drift etc)	Sex work as pleasure (Y/N/ no mention)	Where do you find customers (streets, bars, internet)	What do you do to attract customers	How do you choose to accept or refuse	Do you use protection (Y/N)	why do you use or not use protection	Would you accept more than one customer at a time (Y/N)	Comments regarding threesomes	General customer profile or demographics	Does anyone supervise you on the job (Y/N)
2	I have never tried but I believe I can	Douala	night starting at 8pm as she takes care of her mother during the day. Will respond if still going to	started prostituting when we were still going to	someone performs very well I could do it	snack bars, hotels and night clubs and	No info	Cleanliness, his approach and if he accepts my price	Y	ask not to use protection. When you refuse they destroy the condom when having	Y	Each one will wait for his turn while touching. I am	years old. Those who are above 60 just want you to touch them, and	N
3	Have never tried to quit but believe I can	Douala	I stand by the road side. If a client comes he likes you, he calls you and if you are	I suffered a deception in love and I decided not to fall in love	N/ Every one pays unless you are my	On the street	No info	I generally go with gut feeling. Sometimes there are looks that you	Y	There are some clients who like you and who suggests to you to both get tested.	Not asked	n/a	Age is not a factor. What counts is money	N
4	A client could keep you for 2 weeks and when he's leaving	Yaounde and Douala	I stand by the street in front of Akwa Palace or go to clubs.	I have a child I needed to feed and send to	N. I don't like SW but it pays the	Streets and nightclubs. Sometimes	No info	Good perfume, good jewellery, good dressing (i.e. Y	Y	No matter what a customer proposes I always use protection. I	Y	If the price is good for example 50000	All nationalities, married, well employed	Y
5	I don't think it is a metier that girls should make	Gabon, Limbe, Yaounde, Douala	in a way that my breasts are revealed. If a man sees me and is suggestive, wear heels, go to	responsibilities and it makes me independent and	N	Club and on the street	Dress provocatively	approaches me, I take a careful look at his allure	Y	although sometimes some client perform the sex act in a way that the	Y	happens, all three of us undress at the	(although I avoid those who do drugs). Mostly	N
6	I just need to do this from now (June) to December and I	Yaounde, Douala	go to the club and if a man sees me and is interested in me and	deception from my fiancée, I have a baby to take	N	bars, clubs but talks very	dressing and dancing	With regards to my choice, it is everything that	Y	I always use protection and I cannot be convinced to do	No	more than one customer. I	50+ the older ones are mostly	N
7	I have been doing this for 4 years. I think I can leave if I want to	Douala	a man sees me and is interested in me and	clearly not based on need because	No mention	Nightclubs only	No info	It is important to me that a customer is clean.	Y	As for protection I am concerned I do not take chances. It is with	N	I will accept to work with another female	but not picky about age or race. The	N
8	n/a	Yaounde, Douala		Since I did not go far in school it		in nightclubs	No info	Prostitutes know how to identify	Y	As protection against diseases. There are	Y	yes but one client after the	All races; Chinese, N	N
9	for 1.5 years. I met	Yaounde	I wake at 10 am, do	I needed to but		Streets,		I look at the		no reason. States that it		I don't think I	Between 22 and	

Demographic Table From Transcripts Unique Quotes From Transcripts (2) Sheet2 Sheet3

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

**NAME: DILYS ASUAGBOR**

**BORN: 22 AUGUST 1973, Yaoundé, CAMEROON**

### **EDUCATION**

**1990 Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Bamenda, Cameroon**

GCE Ordinary Level

**1992 Baptist High School, Buea, Cameroon**

GCE Advanced Level

**1998 University of Lagos, Lagos Nigeria**

LL.B (Hons)

**2000 Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA, USA**

LL.M.

**2006 Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, Newark, NJ**

MA

**2014 Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, Newark, NJ**

Ph.D.

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**2014 African Development Bank, Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire**

Senior Legal Counsel

**2013 Guinness Cameroun, Douala Cameroon**

Commercial Legal Counsel

**2006 AES SONEL, Douala, Cameroon**

Senior In-house Counsel

**2004 Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, Newark, NJ**

Doctorate Student/ Teaching Assistant

**2000 Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP, New York, USA**

Contract Attorney