**input for SR VAWG's report on violence against women and prostitution**

**ABOUT bar Hostess Empowerment & Support Programme (BHESP)**

Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP) is a sex worker-led organization that includes sex workers, women who have sex with women (WSW), women who use drugs and bar hostesses in Kenya. Founded in 1998, the organization serves as a common voice in efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination, while engaging various stakeholders in advocacy and policy dialogue. It is the first and oldest sex worker-led organization in Kenya.

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**Provide examples of the hidden forms of prostitution, and explain to what extent they are recognized and dealt with as such?**

Various forms of hidden prostitution exist, such as online sex work and operations of brothels, which are criminalized in Kenya. Challenges arise in distinguishing consensual sex work from trafficking. Online sex workers, often referred to as call girls face harassment, stalking, and financial exploitation from clients. The dark web provides an anonymous space for illegal activities, including sex trafficking, utilizing encrypted platforms and cryptocurrencies. Sex workers may experience online shaming, discrimination, and stigma, affecting their mental well-being. The associated stigma can lead to social isolation, impacting mental health. Online platforms may be used by traffickers to recruit individuals into sex work under exploitative conditions. Safety on digital platforms for online sex work varies based on platform policies, security features, and local legal contexts. Considerations include prioritizing user safety, secure handling of personal information, and access to support services for those facing safety concerns

, Sex work in Kenya including Online sex work, facilitated through digital platforms or escort websites is criminalized both under our national and county law. Under the penal code (section 156) operation of brothel apartments is outlawed. County laws have also been enacted to bar women from soliciting or importing for purposes of prostitution. engaging in online prostitution may expose individuals to legal risks, including arrest and prosecution

**what forms of violence are prostituted women and girls subjected to (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, or other**)?

Sex worker’s women and girls often face a spectrum of violence that encompasses physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, and other forms of harm. Physically, they may endure assaults, beatings, or threats. Psychologically, the trauma can include emotional abuse, manipulation, and coercion. Sexual violence is pervasive, ranging from non-consensual acts to exploitation. Economic exploitation involves financial coercion and deprivation. Administrative abuses may involve legal vulnerabilities and discrimination. Other forms of violence may include social stigma, isolation, and denial of basic rights. Collectively, these multifaceted forms of violence perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability and exploitation for prostituted women and girls.

**Who is responsible for the perpetration of violence against women and girls in prostitution?**

perpetrators of violence against women and girls in prostitution can encompass a range of actors. Some responsibility lies with individual clients who engage in exploitative behaviors. Additionally, pimps or traffickers, who profit from the sex trade, play a significant role in perpetrating violence. Law enforcement officials may be implicated in cases of misconduct, harassment, or abuse. Societal factors and discriminatory norms contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls in prostitution, placing responsibility on broader structures. Addressing this complex issue requires a comprehensive approach, targeting both individual perpetrators and the systemic factors that enable violence within the context of sex work

**Describe the linkages, if any, between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls.**

linkages between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls are intricate and multifaceted. Engagement in prostitution often exposes individuals to various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, infringing upon their right to live free from harm. Economic vulnerabilities within the sex trade can compromise the right to fair and just working conditions. Discrimination and stigma associated with prostitution infringe upon the right to dignity and nondiscrimination. Exploitative practices within the industry may also impede individuals' access to education, healthcare, and other essential services, further violating their fundamental human rights.

**what links are there between pornography and/or other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution**

The links between pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation, including prostitution, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Pornography often perpetuates harmful stereotypes and objectification of individuals, contributing to a culture that normalizes and glamorizes exploitative behaviors. The commodification of sexuality in pornography mirrors the transactional nature of prostitution, where individuals may be viewed as commodities for gratification. Consumption of explicit content may influence attitudes toward sex, relationships, and consent, potentially shaping perceptions that contribute to the demand for commercial sex services. Consequently, the interplay between pornography and sexual exploitation underscores the complex dynamics influencing societal views and practices surrounding sexuality and sex work

**What are some of the lessons learned about what works and what does not when it comes to stemming any negative human rights consequences from the prostitution of women and girls?**

Experience has shown that a nuanced and comprehensive approach is necessary when addressing the human rights consequences associated with the prostitution of women and girls. Successful strategies typically involve a combination of legal, social, and economic measures

lesson learned is that criminalizing sex workers often exacerbates human rights abuses. Instead, there is a growing recognition of the importance of decriminalizing sex work to protect the rights and dignity of those involved. This approach shifts the focus towards addressing exploitation and violence by targeting perpetrators, such as traffickers and abusive clien

social support systems, including counseling, housing, and healthcare services, are critical for individuals engaged in prostitution. Providing alternatives and economic opportunities can empower individuals to exit exploitative situations, addressing the root causes of vulnerability.

cation and awareness campaigns play a crucial role in challenging societal stigmas and discrimination against sex workers. By fostering understanding and empathy, communities can become more supportive environments for those seeking to leave prostitution

Trauma-informed approaches in support services are essential, recognizing the impact of violence and exploitation on the mental health of individuals involved in prostitution. Moreover, international collaboration is crucial to address cross-border trafficking and exploitation, ensuring a coordinated effort to combat human rights abuses associated with prostitution