

**ORAL TESTIMONIES
OF
JAMAICAN
SEX WORKERS**

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ABOUT PANOS GLOBAL AIDS PROGRAMME (GAP)

The Panos Global AIDS Programme (GAP) is a network of eight autonomous Panos Institutes in Asia, the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Eastern, Southern and Western Africa, which work together within a shared strategic framework around the core theme of enhancing participation, accountability and ownership within the response to HIV and AIDS.

GAP's mission is to enable developing countries to shape a global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic by stimulating informed public and policy debate and amplifying marginalised voices - particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS - through media.

GAP has supported oral testimonies of all vulnerable groups to HIV and AIDS including sex workers in order to have participatory, inclusive and transparent decision making on HIV/AIDS at the national, regional and international level.

Oral Testimonies of Jamaican Sex Workers will enable this particular group, which is highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS to communicate their concerns and perspectives to the media. Their voices will encourage public dialogue and debate on HIV/AIDS.

ABOUT PANOS CARIBBEAN

Panos Caribbean is an international information organization established in 1986. Its mission is to promote sustainable development in the wider Caribbean region through empowering all sectors of society to articulate their own information and perspectives on development issues and broadcast them across language and political borders.

Panos believes that information which is independent, accurate and timely is a key resource for development. Information needs to be locally generated in order to enable countries and communities to shape and communicate their own development agendas through informed public debate.

Panos' particular aim is to disseminate, through the media, the voices of poor and marginalized people who are affected by certain development issues. This encourages their full participation in shaping the development of their societies.

Since 1989, Panos Caribbean has been working in the Caribbean through close alliances with the media to raise awareness about issues related to HIV/AIDS, Gender, Children & Youth, and the Environment. Panos has conducted extensive training of journalists, helped the media to cover complex development issues better (through handbooks, briefings, production fellowships, events) and supported journalistic networks. Panos also provides communication/media awareness training to NGOs, community persons and marginalised groups.

Panos is entirely independent of any political or religious groups and from its funding sources.

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PREFACE

The voices of the poor, marginalised and stigmatised are seldom heard in the debates around issues key to their survival. This is partially because these discussions often take place through written documents - letters to the editor, newspaper reports, articles, research papers and online blogs - or through the voices of those who have easy access to the print and electronic media.

Panos' Oral Testimonies are done out of the conviction that in order to change this, people should be given the opportunity to express themselves in a form that they know: orally. Through these oral testimonies, the wider society can be informed about what people say and think. Oral testimonies are a way of giving volume and power to the voices of people who are outside the main flows of communication.

The poor and the marginalised are often "spoken for", sometimes by well-meaning governmental or non-governmental organisations. However, many times they are misrepresented: problems and issues are often generalised and the concerns of community leaders and elite are sometimes over-represented.

Individual testimonies are important touchstones against the generalisations of the "collective" version. The people themselves are placed best to formulate their own problems and defend their interests. Personal testimonies connect the various spheres of life, such as family, work, health and income. Oral testimonies show that all aspects of life are intertwined and also that the perception of things is nearly as important as the facts themselves.

Sex workers or prostitutes are members of the society whose voices are hardly ever heard. Despite the lively debate about the legalisation of sex work and the importance of meeting the needs of sex workers as a part of the National Response to HIV and AIDS, the views of these sex workers, the persons at the heart of the controversy, are often completely missing.

Panos Caribbean has over three years (2006-2009) collected oral testimonies from sex workers in Jamaica as a part of its HIV/AIDS and Gender programmes, to provide stakeholders with factual, relevant information on HIV and AIDS and Gender issues and as part of its general mandate to disseminate the voices of the marginalised and vulnerable through the media. The objective of recording and documenting the views of local sex workers is to enhance public discussion and policy debate around the issue of sex work in Jamaica, particularly as it relates to the national response to HIV and AIDS.

Panos believes that the dissemination of such oral testimonies gives society access to the views and experiences of more marginalised people and provides an information exchange forum, which can assist in the resolution of conflicts and issues which too often polarise communities.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT

Recurring debates about the legalisation of sex work in Jamaica makes this publication a timely one, as Panos Caribbean seeks to amplify the voices of the persons who are the centre of this debate, and whose views are hardly ever heard in the heated discussions which invariably emerge around sex work.

These testimonies provide first hand information from 16 Jamaican sex workers about five major areas - reasons for entry into sex work, working conditions in the sex work industry, health and safer sex issues including prevention of STIs and HIV, legalisation of sex work and gender issues. They also provide insight into the background of these sex workers (family, education, religion, socio-economic status), as well as some information on sex work in massage parlours.

At the time of publication, the latest figures from Jamaica's Ministry of Health revealed that between January and June 2008, an average of two new cases of AIDS were diagnosed every day. While the country's HIV prevalence rate is reported to be 1.5%, the Ministry estimates that the infection rate among sex workers is 9% - almost six times higher than the national rate.

Jamaica's National HIV/AIDS Policy (May 2005) recognises not only the high risk status of sex workers in the epidemic, but also the underlying social, economic and cultural factors which make them vulnerable:

"Sex work, though illegal in Jamaica, is widely practiced. Unregulated commercial sex facilitates the spread of HIV in the general population. Sex Workers for their part are a migratory population making it difficult to sustain HIV/STI prevention peer education among them. Economic factors such as unemployment, migration, use of crack/cocaine, and other illegal recreational

drugs such as marijuana and ecstasy, prostitution and/or transactional sex increase vulnerability to HIV."

"Significantly higher" rates of HIV infection exist among sex workers and their clients, compared to other population groups in many countries, according to information from the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS).

UNAIDS has identified a number of factors which can increase sex workers' vulnerability to HIV infection, including:

- stigmatisation and marginalisation
- limited economic options, in particular for women
- limited access to health, social and legal services
- limited access to information and prevention means
- gender-related differences and inequalities
- sexual exploitation and trafficking
- harmful, or a lack of protective, legislation and policies
- exposure to risks associated with lifestyle (e.g. violence, substance use, mobility)

Photo: Panos Caribbean



The testimonies of the sixteen Jamaican sex workers bear out much of this and more. They also reveal aspects of the sex work industry that are specific to Jamaica: culture and gender inequalities which limit women's ability to negotiate safer sex or to protect themselves from violence; stark economic need among women which drives some to enter sex work; the situation of sex workers who are mobile and who, through alcohol or drug use on the job, are exposed to even greater risk.

There is also a section focused on the massage parlour industry which, newspaper advertisements indicate, is in constant need of "young", "attractive" and "open minded" women to work with clients. Despite the proliferation of these parlours however, very little information is available about this aspect of the sex work industry.

These factors, combined with the illegal and highly stigmatised status of sex work in Jamaica, create an environment which does not support sex workers' access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services, despite the National Policy's commitment to equity in providing these services to all persons.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Panos Caribbean staff member, Claudette Bailey-Nolan, conducted interviews with fifteen females and one male in Kingston, Ocho Rios and Montego Bay over a three year period (2006-2009).

The sex workers' ages ranged from 19 to 41 years, with an average age of 26 years. Most had not completed secondary level education and very few had been trained in a vocational area. The persons interviewed were involved in various categories of sex work - sex work on the streets, exotic dancing, massage parlour work and, in the case of the sole male sex worker, work in the local pornographic movie industry and live sex performances on stage. They have worked in various parishes including Kingston, St Andrew, St Catherine, St James, St Ann, Clarendon and Manchester. The sex workers agreed to be interviewed on condition that only their "professional" names would be published.

Sex workers were asked questions around five major areas - reasons for entry into sex work, working conditions in the sex work industry, health and safer sex (including prevention of STIs and HIV), legalisation of sex work and gender issues.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The testimonies have been specially edited for this publication. Some re-ordering has been done. Square brackets indicate 'inserted' text for clarification; round brackets are translations/interpretations; and dots indicate cuts in the text. Some Jamaican patois have also been anglicised for easier reading and understanding. The main aim has been to remain true to the spirit and content of the interview, while eliminating questions, repetition, and confusing or overlapping sections. Sections of the testimonies have been arranged thematically around key issues.

Panos hopes that the voices of the sex workers recorded here – **Ann, Apple, Bashy, Belinda, Blondie, Boy Blue, Chocolate, Flowers, Kelly, JLo, Lady Pixie, Peach, Pepper, Perfect, Simone and Strawberry** - will widen and inform the debate and discussions on HIV and AIDS and sex work and contribute to a better understanding of all the issues involved.

BEGINNINGS

– Home, Church, School

The testimonies of nine of the sixteen sex workers in this section reveal that they had fairly happy or stable childhoods, even in the face of economic hardship. These nine describe supportive parents and most were actively involved in church. The remaining seven describe childhoods marred by poverty, deprivation, weak families and in some case sexual abuse or early sexual activity.

Bashy is a 23 year old exotic dancer who describes her childhood and early home life as “practically normal.” She lived with her mother and her father died when she was 12 years old. She says life was hard for her family, but “okay... as long as we have food.”

While Bashy says she went to church “now and then,” she does not describe herself as active in the church.

She was expelled from high school for fighting and never completed her education:

“I tried to go into HEART (Human Employment and Resource Training Agency – the national skills training agency) but they tell me I was too young at the time so I didn’t bother....I don’t have anywhere to go because I don’t have any qualification or such like that. But well, [I] have to just continue living right?”

Perfect is a 19 year old single mother who has been working in the massage industry for three years. She got pregnant at 16 and feels she disappointed her mother with whom she had a good relationship. Even though her father left the home when she was 8 years old, she describes her family life growing up in glowing terms.

“I’d say I had a wonderful family - loving, caring and warm, well supportive in anything I tell myself that I wanted to do...Until my mother got broken heart. She just kind of drift away from us. When I got pregnant she feel that I let her down.....I could talk to her about anything, even when I was pregnant, even though she would cuss (curse) me. She

was there by my side through thick and thin. She come in like is she got pregnant. I only had the baby, but the baby belongs to her.”

Perfect says she was brought up in a Christian home and was also very active in the church.

Lady Pixie, a 28 year old exotic dancer, grew up with both her parents, who have been married for 33 years, in what was for her an ideal home.

“I always dreamt of becoming like my parents. ... I have always dreamt of becoming just like them, becoming a housewife like my mom. Being married, have my husband and my kids, settle down you know? That’s the type of dream you know?...My parents wasn’t rich but I can say I had a very good life. A very good one. Sometimes it was hard, yes cause sometime it go [there was] no money. But how my mom and my dad live...is like we never use to have to worry....It wasn’t that bad cause we go to school five days per week; Saturdays we go to church, Sundays we are back in church again. It was nice as a kid. It was nice because I had my brothers and my sisters. We grow up loving, we didn’t fight or anything like that.”

Boy Blue is a 27 year old male sex worker (performing live sex on stage, selling sex to female clients and acting in pornographic films on the internet) who prefers to describe himself as a “porn star”. While not providing much information on his childhood and home life he indicates that he is from Kingston and grew up in the city. He also grew up in the church:

"I'll say proudly, I was an altar boy, Church of God, that is. Presently my mummy is a bishop.owns her own church and she is a part of the Jamaica churches association..."

He says he completed and graduated from high school.

JLo, a 26 year old exotic dancer reveals that while her family experienced "money problems" when she was growing up, her family life with her mother and five siblings was good.

"Because whatever we achieve you know is just for the five of us and mother make six, so actually we would have to make it comfortable. 'Cause is like our mother is mother and father for us."

JLo was baptised in her church and was very active in it as a youngster. JLo says she used to attend a technical high school but was not very active at school:

"...because I didn't get the opportunity to go as how I (was) supposed to."

Peach is also an exotic dancer who is 24 years old. She says things were rough growing up, but that her relationship with her mother and siblings was great.

"We have it hard as a family yeah, but yet still we try to do the best in everything we can."

She attended high school and was very active at her school. She did not go to church very often.

Belinda is a 35 year old sex worker who works on the streets and who says things took a turn for the worse for her and her siblings when she was about nine years old and her parents separated:

"Well eventually my family get break up like.... Everything get mashed up so we have to split up. Our grandparents have to take us to look after us and things went bad. Nothing wasn't going on. So we just grow up struggling, fighting. So after being growing up so rough

and having it so hard, you leave country and come into the town now and see what's going on..... I used to go to school barefoot cause my parents didn't have it to give to me. And my grandmother she was a Christian type of person and if we have a pair of shoes is for church. We never use to have any water and we have to carry water on our head up a hill, steep hill, and you have to full (fill up) the drum [water storage container], you have to look wood to cook - that's how hard my life was when I was growing up a kid."

She says however that she was actively involved in the church, attending with her grandparents every Saturday and observing the rules of the church. She was also a good singer in the church. She did not complete high school.

Apple, another masseuse, says she finished high school and even attended college. She describes herself as a model student who participated in activities at school and was a member of the linguistic and drama clubs. She says she had dreams of becoming a doctor.

"I didn't get to go to high school, cause when I left All Age school and to go to High School, my mother and father couldn't afford to send me. So I had to be working - at the age of 14 yrs old"

Strawberry is a 21 year old masseuse who does some exotic dancing "in the country." She has been involved in the industry for three years. Strawberry describes the time she spent with her family in the country as a teenager as "alright" but feels she had no moral support growing up, despite being actively involved in church. Life as young girl for her was:

"Rough.... I had nobody uplifting to show me certain things as me coming up in the world. My mother wasn'tI talk to my granny but at one point I didn't feel comfortable doing it."

Strawberry was expelled from high school in grade 10. She says she later tried to do "a practical nursing course but I don't have the stomach for it."

Kelly, who is a 22 year old exotic dancer, says she is close to her parents and her siblings but paints a picture of a childhood cut short by poverty:

"It was very hard, we were poor....All six of us in one room with mommy and daddy and sometime me didn't eat. Me just have to drink some sugar and water and eat piece of bread and go to me bed.

"I didn't get to go to high school, 'cause when I left All Age school and to go to High School, my mother and father couldn't afford to send me. So I had to be working - at the age of 14 yrs old I start working...The first work I got was at Hope Zoo, to clean the animals them and cut up their feeding (food). At 14 - because it was a summer and I got a summer job. Then when the summer finish, I had to pick mango. I sell sweetie and from that me stop work. Me look work [and] me couldn't get work..."

Flowers classifies herself as a masseuse. She is 24 years old and dropped out of school in grade 10 because she says there was no money. She describes a lonely family life as a child:

"Growing up I'm the only biggest niece. Me don't have no-one to talk to. [My mother] wasn't there....I couldn't talk to her...[Father] I don't know him."

She attended church but was not active as many of the other interviewees were. She left school in grade ten.

Flowers says as a child she was sexually molested by an uncle. She never told anyone:

"Me did afraid to talk so me just keep it in... When me think 'bout it me feel down."

She also mentions being raped when:

"taking a taxi going home from school."

Pepper, a 27 year old who works in a massage parlour, says she wanted to be a lawyer but did not finish high school and was a teenage mother.

"Growing up, my life was kind of good and it was kind of bad family-wise. Basically I'm an only child for my mother, my mother was a successful woman....She became self-centered in herself where she neglect me in a way where she didn't even realise she was doing it...So basically, I kind of had an on and off relationship with my mother..My father

now, basically he was a part of my life...when I was younger he was there then after...he just vanish out of the picture."

She explains that her relationship with her mother got worse after she was raped by her step father when she was 17.

"I told my mom and she didn't believe me. Instead of she believe me, she rather take a iron chair and lick me inna me head."

Pepper says even though her step father didn't try to have sex with her again, she was uncomfortable living in the same house with him and eventually ran away.

"I had to live with him same way for a period of time till I decide - damn it! I have to run away! He used to pass and look at me some way and I just couldn't stay round the two of them no more, then I run away go to my grandmother."

Chocolate, a 27 year old exotic dancer who is trying to leave the industry, describes life as a young girl as "bad" and "rough."

"My mother used to try and help me but it did rough. She have to wash people clothes and all of that and sometime when she no have no food she cry. So, that kind of drive me out there. So me never have a good life."

Added to that was the sexual abuse she experienced from her own relatives, beginning when she was 13 years old.

"Growing up, being molested by me brother, and then by me uncle so me have to run way. Run away go out a road go get the rape..."

"Growing up, being molested by me brother, and then by me uncle so me have to run way. Run away go out a road go get the rape so it wasn't good... Me tell me mother - she never believe me. Tell me friend - them say [is] a lie. Only somebody believe me was me sister cause she see him."

Chocolate says she attended one all age school and three high schools, but it is not clear if she ever actually completed her secondary education. She attended church, was baptised and sang on the choir.

Simone, a 20 year old masseuse, says she began fending for herself at an early age. Her mother died when she was a young child and she was shifted from relative to relative, an experience she describes as "stressful." She began working in a wholesale in downtown Kingston when she was 17 but lost the job.

Ann is 19 years old and has been working in a massage parlour for nearly one year. She became pregnant at 18 for a boyfriend who was eight years older than she was and was forced to drop out of high school. She had dreams of raising a family and starting her own business but her boyfriend was controlling:

"Him used to give me a whole heap a problems. Him no want me to go to school. Him no want me to work. Him just want me to stay home."

She left that relationship and was faced with the task of providing for her young daughter by herself.

Blondie who is 41 years old, began working as a dancer relatively late, at the age of 32. She says she was sexually molested by a family member when she was about 14 or 15 years old, but says this did not influence her decision to become involved in sex work.

She grew up with both parents and a large family:

"Eleven of us – six boys and five girls..... Life was good...We didn't have much but it was good. It was a lot of us. We get a lot of loving. We had a lot of dreams."

She was however unable to continue her schooling beyond grade nine because of financial difficulties.

"It was many of us [so] it was hard for education. I had a lot of siblings so....you know you get a little set back...I would have been sent on to a technical school but I didn't get the chance, money-wise."

She also attended church and was baptised...:

"...and was going for a while, but after a while....sometimes as a new member going to church most people don't understand [that those] who [are] new inside the church are the people that you should stay near to because those are the people that are very weak. But sometimes you baptise and go in church...[and] them just leave you to battle certain demons on your own and sometimes you not strong enough....or don't have someone strong behind you, you're going to lose out...And I think something like that happened to me."

"A IT DRAG ME TO DO THIS" – Factors Prompting Entry into Sex Work

The lure of easy money, peer pressure, economic difficulties and lack of education and training seem to be the factors which prompted most of the interviewees to begin sex work. Boy Blue regards his entry into the industry as responding to a higher calling although he hints that none of his previous jobs was as lucrative as sex work. A few of the oral testimonies reveal that early sexual abuse combined with economic hardship helped drive some young women into sex work.

Kelly who started hustling to make a living as a 14 year old school dropout says she had few other options to earn an income. She stopped dancing once, but when she had a daughter with a disability, she again entered the sex trade.

"Me look work, me couldn't get work, so me end up go out on the road with me friend them. And so me get introduced to the dancing. Me start go Palais (an exotic dancing club) - kick it with them. If them making money, sometime me just go on like me is a dancer and dance for the man them and collect tip. Then one day me best friend say "... You can dance good. Why you don't buy a [pair of] slippers and



buy two costume and come try it?" And me try it one Christmas and me never like it 'cause the man them was so disrespectful. And me stop. Then me finally get pregnant with me daughter. At the age of eighteen me have me daughter. When she born, [I] find out say she deaf. Me a wonder how me a go manage now, cause when me have her, her father did live with him next baby mother and me couldn't find him. So a just me alone and God. So me just pick up back me slippers and pick up back me costume and start dance to help myself."

Kelly has a sister who is also a dancer. Using her sibling's experience she illustrates the economic circumstances which make it easy for a woman to enter and difficult for her to leave the sex work industry:

"You see like how me sister did stop for a little while - she have her son and she find a little man. Mommy say she to stop for good 'cause him can help her out. But [she has] one pickney (child) for him and the next three not for him so him help them, but she feel a way (bad) like she want to stand up to her own responsibility."

JLo, who says her childhood dream was to be an accountant, says lack of education is what made her become a dancer.

"Is not all of us get the school opportunity...so is not every one of us can work in bank in office and things like that. And you know there is nothing out there for people who don't have the education.

buy two costume and come try it?" And me try it one Christmas and me never like it 'cause the man them was so disrespectful. And me stop.

Then me finally get pregnant with me daughter. At the age of eighteen me

"Is not all of us get the school opportunity... so is not every one of us can work in bank in office and things like that. And you know there is nothing out there for people who don't have the education. ...because the one that bright have a better opportunity more than the one who don't have it. Because you know sometime we might watch other girls who do them bank work... and say it could be us, but it just can't happen that way..."

Belinda, who works on the streets, says that the financial difficulties she experienced as a child prompted her to begin selling sex.

"You learn that going to bed with man for money it's fast making money, because you don't have a proper education so, you know you go out and see that you can make money that way."

However she later admitted that when she first had sex for money as a 14-year-old high school student, she was influenced by what can only be described as peer pressure:

"I used to follow bad company go to dance, smoke weed and then I get carried away, not by anybody forcing me. I'm not gonna lie - I do this for my own. See, growing up in Ochi (Ocho Rios)...you have to have strong face not to become a prostitute and that's what I didn't have..."

I was living with my mother and my stepfather so when them gone a bed, I used to sneak out and gone to go-go club and see the girl them dance... The first time I've been, I saw a nice blue eye man come to me and talk up.... One girl come up and say 'Him like him want to do business with you....You go to bed and him have sex with you and you get money.' So she say 'You ever have sex yet?' and me say 'Yes me have boyfriend.' She say 'Well you can get pay for it and stop give it 'way free!'....Was a sailor....And actually him have sex with me and him did use him condom because he have it. That time we never hear about AIDS those days - anyway, I wasn't hearing about the AIDS- and him get up and give me one green money [in] the morning and me see the two zero and the one on it [US\$100].....

"That was the first time I was doing it. As I told you I was in nine grade. When I reach ten grade I didn't go back to school after



Photo: David Rose/Christian Aid

holiday. I been running up and down Montego Bay, going to go-go club, meeting girls and everything...Never going for money but run up and down make friends.[That was] the only time I do it for [money] - one time when I was that young. Never do it again...But [I] get bad now and run away from home.

Start go with other bad school girl.....we go to dance, burn weed (smoke marijuana) come in drunk, smoke Craven A (cigarette brand) and sleep whole day. Dress up the next night, gone to dance....and whatever...'til me reach 19 plus. I leave back from Montego Bay come back to Discovery Bay and I got a work there...reach the age of twenty.

[Age] 21 is when I lost my job....I rent a room. It was \$40 a month for rent in those times

and I couldn't pay my rent and the landlord decides he was gonna put me out. So one girl next door come and say to me 'You have you riches between you leg. Your property is there! Come to the ship and you will make money.' So I start to dress up in the night and go down there when the ship comes in. To a little bar down there in Discovery Bay. And that's where I start at the age of 21 to do prostitution...That's what I doing from then until now."

Flowers says the abuse she suffered at the hands of her uncle is one factor which has led her into sex work, claiming:

"A it drag me to do this."

She has, however, been having transactional sex since she was 16 or 17 when there was no money for her education:

"Growing up I had to have sex to go to school....For me, [it] was just about the money first time I had sex."

She says that before she became a masseuse she had done several job interviews but was unsuccessful...

"...so I decided to do this."

Apple says she began working as a masseuse because of the money:

"The money - due to how things are going now, the money is greater than a nine-to-five job. I heard about it, I saw it in the paper and I decided to try it out..."

When they told me that I would be paid for having sex, I kind of felt bad, because as a young girl growing up your parents always talk about these things. But being an open-minded person I thought 'okay, I am going to give it a try.' The first time I had to do it I was like, nervous. But knowing what I wanted and knowing it's just for the money I just went ahead and put the fear behind me."

For Bashy, becoming an exotic dancer was a quick solution to her money problems:

"Well it was easy for me. It was a easier way out for me because...I don't really have any qualifications to get any work and so, I

decide to dance and make some money and try to save so I can go back to school."

Perfect, was actually enrolled in a vocational training course when she decided to become a masseuse:

"One day I was sitting at home not having any money or anything. I was going to cosmetology school and I was reading the Star (tabloid newspaper) when I see this article in there where girls could make \$10,000 per week, that was in 2003, doing massage. So I call one day and made contact and did the interview. And I kind of was liking what I was doing, because it was easy money, so I just decide to just do it. I made more than the \$10,000 in 3 days time."

Pepper who ran away from home because of sexual abuse by her stepfather explains how she got started in sex work - doing exotic dancing and selling sex on the streets:

"When I was younger, I used to run away and go to the country side like in Manchester and I would go to the club and every time I would go it was something! Every time I go I would feel more release and then I would come home and be more stressed. I would look around and can't reach what I want to do and all of that just get to me. Then suddenly one night I decided, 'You know what? To hell with everything and everybody! Let me follow this feeling.' And when I touch that stage and I hold that pole that was it! There are dancers who are dancers from the heart. Now I'm a dancer from the heart!"

Strawberry became a masseuse after she found work in bars too distasteful:

"Sometime it never make no sense. The customers vile and most of the boss them too thief and them want to mix business with pleasure and me no like that."

She says she prefers dancing to working as a masseuse as dancing is more profitable.

"When I see this article in there where girls could make \$10,000 per week, that was in 2003, doing massage. So I call one day and made contact and did the interview"

She has however chosen to work mostly as a masseuse because she is averse to the go-go boots required for dancing:

"I don't like walking in the shoes. I don't like the shoes none at all."

Lady Pixie says her decision to become an exotic dancer was driven by straight economic need, particularly the needs of her three children:

"Me never have no help with me kids from them father and it wasn't fair for me to be burdening my parents with my responsibility and their responsibility. Because it was like practically my parents that stick by me and help me the most. You know, I used to work in bar and do domestic work but it never really can pay the bills or support me and me kids as how me want them to be supported. Because it no nice when you have you kids and sometimes them have to go to them bed hungry and cry and you no have nothing to give them. So you see the quickest means. Me use to have a friend...(who) used to dance and she say the money in it and me follow her. It rough! It pay the bills them quicker."

Blondie also cites the needs of her three children and her need to become financially independent as the factors which prompted her to begin working as a dancer:

"Well to be honest when I had my last son... I was living with the father...and we were going out for a while. Things wasn't working out cause the things that he wanted me to accept because I'm living with him and he's providing - I think I [am] worth more than that. So after a while I couldn't bear [it] and I leave and I do a lot of odd jobs but it just couldn't financially help me with the kids. And I have about two family members that doing this work and they say 'Why you don't come on and do it?' and that's how I really start - through family members."

Ann says she was desperate to find work as a single parent and so she responded to an advertisement for a masseuse in the newspaper, and left Montego Bay for Portmore with only her bus fare to the location.

"They direct me [to find the place] and when I get there the only money me have it was just for the fare and me never have no money

"Every time me try get a work, [the] work pay me \$3000 or \$2800 and that can't do nothing at all for me and me kids. So me try get a work where me can get some fast money, fix up me room and bank some so me can look after them."

to go back home. So when me find out what it really was it was just too late. Me couldn't go back home. Me just have to work with it for two weeks. They tell me that guys come for massage. You have to wear like just your underwear or swimsuit and so forth and you have to have sex with them."

Simone, after losing her job at the wholesale, felt pressured to find other work and did not want to depend on family, so she responded to an advertisement in the newspapers:

"I stayed at home for a couple of months and I say I can't sit here, cause my father calling me and say I am not working so I must come. But I can't stand him, so it don't make any

sense I go back into what I don't want to. So I look in the papers, saw the big money a (per) week and say 'okay! I am going to call it up.'"

Chocolate says the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her brother when she was 13 years old "have a whole heap (a lot) to do with" her becoming a sex worker. She says the abuse left her feeling:

"...dirty, useless. Me no response (care) if me want catch AIDS. Me no response (care) what did want to happen to me because me did just want dead!"

She explains however that there were other reasons she began dancing. She was a single mother with few other job options that could support her and her children:

"Every time me try get a work, [the] work pay me \$3000 or \$2800 and that can't do nothing at all for me and me kids. So me try get a work where me can get some fast money, fix up me room and bank some so me can look after them."

Peach does not elaborate much on her reasons for entering the sex trade, saying only:

"Well I did not really have it in mind to become a dancer but just because of certain situations why I'm here."

Boy Blue says he was introduced to the sex work industry by a woman he had sex with.

"It was like something like 'many were called, but chosen are few' something like that...Or 'one of the chosen few.'"

Okay - I was a security guardReally to tell you the truth, me go out one night, ... me come to one club. Me downstairs having some drinks and such. A young lady came up and... Anyway we end up in the private room and all of that. After sexual intercourse and all of that, she was like 'You blessed you know! Whole heap (a lot) of things you can do because you know you look good and you have a nice build...Them things can carry you far.' And I was like 'What you speaking [about]?' And she say 'You no know about like, blue movies and such?' And me was like, 'Yes me know, me watch Americans and

thing.'... Anyway after giving her my number and all of that, naturally, she convince me and here I am."

"YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG TO SURVIVE"

– Working Conditions in the Sex Work Industry

The sex workers have had mixed experiences regarding working conditions in the sex industry.

Some of the women lived on the same premises where they worked. Most have worked in bad conditions as well as in good places where they were satisfied with the treatment they received. Violence is mentioned as a constant threat to sex workers and some shared their experiences of this.

They also speak of exploitation at the hands of both club bosses and clients, and of some employers who keep strict control over their actions. Some sex workers feel the police make no effort to protect them as citizens or to respond seriously to any complaints they make.

Boy Blue's oral testimony is in stark contrast to those of the female sex workers. He sees himself as the star of his own show. He says he negotiates what he does and where. He travels as he likes, chooses what acts he will perform and most importantly enjoys the sexual intercourse (unlike most female sex workers interviewed who said they were careful to separate business from pleasure).

Belinda who has been in the sex work business for a long time says that the treatment sex workers receive from clients and members of the public has improved over the years. She feels there is less discrimination, partly because many businesses now benefit from the activities of sex workers:

"You know some people treat you very bad... some treat you nice but, it getting [better]... That was in the past you know like earlier, in the eighties coming up. But now you have prostitute and so open now, because you have people even do it on the streets, in corners. So is like the girls they get so open to it now that as somebody come up and say "What's your occupation?", they say "I'm a hooker". Who want [to] say "prostitute". Who want say "whore"...

And you have the business people them

now, not all of them still, but they do let girls inside the hotels and the business place. But you have to go inside there and put yourself together, wear nice clothes, know how to address yourself, try to be decent, even play decent then, when you're in certain business places. Because prostitute now make most of these little, small motels make money, because you know sometime you go there and you rent it to use it. You have some girls leave from other places like Montego Bay, Negril, Port Antonio and they come here....."

Physical conditions in some clubs and massage parlours can be a challenge, according to sex workers.

Simone says that while some of the places she has worked in are okay, others could be improved:

"Well the Portmore one was okay, but I went

to this one in Constant Spring (in Kingston)..... the place is a nice home, nice place but it's full of cockroach and things like that. The kitchen, they need to just clean it up and things like that. It's not the best but it can go on. Just if them fix the roof and strong up them security problems so we don't get robbed."

Apple feels the same about her workplace:

"The physical environment needs a whole lot of improvement."

Lady Pixie has only worked in two clubs as a dancer. She says her first experience was terrible, but her present experience is much better.

She describes her living accommodations at the first club as crowded, roach-infested quarters where two or three dancers slept on a single bed.

"You have a big room like a open hallway... and then you have the bed them [arranged from] corner to corner, left right and centre. Everybody sleep in the one room. Everybody breathe the same air. It wasn't a nice experience because is not...something I was used to then....And then you couldn't put down anything. Sometime you have some dancer at the club as you turn your back, them walk in your things, them cut me suitcase, them cut me bootie (boots)...The first week, the first three months was hell man....You have to be strong to survive in the dancing world."

She says the pay was also bad and that women could not expect to be paid for just dancing as:

"...if you no sell yourself straight up you no have no money."

She explains that the women were paid \$500 a night, but the boss deducted so much money from that sum (for drinks, for each minute the women did not work) that the women were forced to have sex for money with clients if they were to have any money to take home.

"If you take a drink at the bar, \$200, \$300 gone out the \$500...No matter which night you come, no matter how much explanation you give...then still draw (take money from)

the little \$500. So you not working for nothing and you definitely have to sell you body at that club. If you even don't want to do it you have to do it to survive. Even if you don't want to, him make it that you have to sell your body....Him deal with girls them nice in a way yes, but him pimp them just the same in a next way...Him no nice. It no nice."

In her present job, Lady Pixie says the living accommodations are much better - air conditioned rooms, access to a washing machine and dryer, comfortable beds, five to six dancers in a room and hot and cold running water. For this and for better pay, she seems prepared to put up with some disrespect and rough treatment from the boss.

"The pay is very good. Is the first club I work that pays so well...He treats us good. Yes sometimes them be little rough with we and disrespectful yes. But we know sometimes too most of the ladies ...is we cause it on we self. It alright man, it alright."

"Boss don't like you to come off stage and go do the little business. Because he thinks that yes, he's paying you. But you [need] that second money. Your [the boss'] pay alone can't pay my salary."

Blondie, like Lady Pixie, also says that the wages paid to dancers cannot meet their needs. She explains that they have sex with customers in the clubs to supplement their earnings, even though some club bosses try to prevent them from leaving stage to have sex for money during work hours:

"Boss don't like you to come off stage and go do the little business. He rather the customer walk out the club with the money and you stay on stage because he thinks that yes, he's paying you. But you [need] that second money.

(As if speaking to her boss) "Your pay alone can't pay my salary. Your \$800 a day can't fulfil all of my needs."

Bashy who says she has been an exotic dancer for seven months, has only worked at two clubs and has not experienced any poor working conditions. She does however have some issues with her present club manager:

"They give us the facility to stay, the compound to stay on for free. We don't pay any bills or so, so we kind of live comfortably at that. But the boss, she kind of get irritable sometimes because she say we act like child and when you check it out she's the one acting like a child.... She will come into the club at night time 'cause she's the manager and she prefer certain dancers over some... And if a man see me and like me and if me there on stage, she will call one of her favourite dancer to go to the men and that's not right."

She is aware of the threat of violence. Although she says she has never been robbed or attacked on the job, she tries to reduce her risk of being abused or attacked:

"Well, when I'm looking for a client I pick and choose because is not every man is as good as some you understand...Some dancer - just any man them see and a man give them a price and them just go with the man and all of that. But not me, because some of them when them go with the man and done do business, the man all take way back them money and beat them. So I have to really pick and choose who I go with."

Belinda highlights the dangers that exist on the streets and says sex workers who practise their trade in this environment have to be very careful:

"You have to pick and choose you clients for your safety. You have to know where you go. Suppose you going with a man, him say him have a \$2000 to pay you and you don't want to rent a room because you need that money to do some extra business in the morning - like even pay you water rate or you light bill or make up for you rent. And he has a car you want to go in to do you thing. Make sure you in a public place as possible, especially if the car [windows] is tint up. Go in a public place... I don't mean in a place that people are walking up and down. Places like even across from the gas station, across from the police station where you can look across and see the station. Don't go on any lonely tracks, no bushes! Stay in public places as

possible if you have to do it outside, without going to a motel."

In fact, the oral testimonies illustrate the fact that most times, sex workers who are dancers are attacked when they are outside of the clubs they work in. Working independently means there is little or no protection for the women, while clubs are protected by both private security firms and the police.

Peach agrees:

"Me myself, I pick and choose who to go with and I'm not a person who leave the compound. I am always on the compound so I'm always protected."

Strawberry has faced violence when she almost got raped on a job outside of the club:

"Me and one of my girlfriends went to do an out call with a guy down in Tivoli and me never know so much man would be down there. But I escape."

Pepper relates that she has also been held up and robbed at gun point on the job:

"A guy draw a gun on me and me just give him the bag. But the bag what me give him, it only have a pack a Rizzla [cigarette paper] and some cigarette and one spliff."

Kelly says a client who attempted to rob her after she had sex with him is the reason she has stopped going to private homes to do business.

A much more serious attack occurred however, also outside the club, when she and her friend went to work at a bachelor party and had no bouncers or security system to protect them:

"Me no know what go wrong with one of me friend them and the man. Them hear she a bawl in there. Me see him friend them a whisper outside the door and when him kick off the door, four of them in there like them want rape her. And me and me friend broke two bottle! And when them see we are girls who no easy to manage, and me talk on the phone like me a talk to police, them let we go. We not even did dress! We come out on the road in costume, with we clothes in we hand and dress outside.

So we no do nothing out on road again. A just strictly hotel or club 'cause the hotel them have a button or a phone and once you say 'Lord God, the man a murder me!' you frighten to see police come fast."

There is security in clubs but not even these venues are totally safe for dancers.

Kelly has been attacked in the club by a client who demanded his money back and grabbed her by the throat when she refused. She managed to escape, locked him in the room and summoned the bouncers to deal with him.

"You never have a problem yet - to the police is just like rubbish. And I think people need to look at dancers as human beings and stop looking at them as a piece of cloth."

Flowers also recalls being saved by the club security. She says once a man tried to:

"...hold me down in the room...Me pull the door and run out and then the security come."

Similarly, **Chocolate** tells of a client who attempted to stab and strangle her at a hotel and how she had to:

"...press the buzzer in the hotel to make the Hawkeye security come."

Chocolate names one club located "round a back road" as the:

"...worst club in Jamaica.... You no have to tell a man round there nothing too bad. Him cut you up clean, clean. Them kill my friend and throw her body round Race Course (the local horseracing track). She name Shannon.... Me no advise nobody to work at [names the club]! No security not there so to guide no girls, to secure no girls! Security is only to secure the car and the people them (clients), not to secure the dancer them."

Blondie also names the same club as among

the worst places she has worked at and the club manager as the worst boss she has had.

Lady Pixie has also faced violence in a club. She recalls pushing away a man who grabbed her while she was dancing. She walked away but he followed her and grabbed her again. She retaliated by throwing a drink at him. He slapped her and she kicked him with her dancing boots. A serious fight ensued:

"All hell broke loose. Security have to come, police come. When the poor man come out, the whole of him head buss (burst) up. Him have to (go) into hospital. And police say "Come" and them carry me round at the station and them ask me 'What go on?' and me tell them. And what them say? Me first draw blood and me tell them say him first lick [hit] me, but them say me first draw the blood. So me jus pay him hospital bill. Me never did a go do it. Me did rather take the lockup, but you see when me think about it and my kids....Me say 'You know what? -make it go on cause him lick me.' Yeah me never like it, but me try defend myself in the best way me can and me no get no rights for it. "

The feeling that sex workers have no rights in some instances and are not defended by the agents of the state who are supposed to protect the citizenry is evident in a few other testimonies.

Chocolate says many things happen in clubs which should be investigated by the police including minors working as dancers, the secret taping of these girls having sex and sale of these tapes by club bosses. She says however that the police never listen to dancers' complaints:

"I think the police right now is a big part of the dancing organization! When you go to the police to report something as a dancer you are not recognized. Police, especially if they are men, they don't want to hear your side or they trying to get a business done (buy sex). That is the type of person them think you is. You never have a problem yet - to the police is just like rubbish. And I think people need to look at dancers as human beings and stop looking at them as a piece of cloth. We are human beings. We have responsibilities, we have children, we need our money to do things. That is why we are out there."

According to **Bashy**:

"I don't have much luck with police. I don't know [why] police always like to disrespect me and all of that. I don't know why."

Exploitation by club bosses and by clients is another common theme in the oral testimonies. While a number of the women praise their current bosses, they do complain of having been exploited and tricked in the past.

Perfect says her working conditions are good but says she has been cheated by a past boss:

"He was robbing me because at the time I wasn't really good at percentage, so because I didn't know instead of giving me 40% he was giving me 20 and I didn't know. And I found out and I just quit my job there. He was calling back for me, but I didn't go back."

Strawberry describes her present workplace as:

"...the worst based on the condition of the place, the unhealthy lifestyle, different type of attitude" and says most of her clients are "idlers, dutty (dirty) boy, no classy people come to this place."

She also feels she is being cheated out of the money she earns:

"To me it's very unfair 'cause it's like \$1000 for 20 minutes to have sex, \$2000 for blow job (oral sex) and \$2500 for both for 20 minutes. Everything you do you boss get half of it and out of my half they draw \$300 out of it for accommodation, and the place is not clean. It not worth it."

JLo explains it like this:

"[At] some other club you go and you work them say when you will get your pay. Or some of them charge you. [Suppose] you should get \$3500 for the week, some of them will charge \$500 for light bill, \$500 for water every week. [For] some of them you have to pay for the room you stay in and nuff (many) little things. So if you get \$3500 sometime for the week sometime is \$500 or none you get. Sometime you end up broke in the week. ... them sell food there and you have to credit a food or so. So you know

you end up get nothing for the week by the drawing, drawing, drawing [deductions]."

Ann describes unfair practices by employers, including the first one she worked for:

"When the two weeks finish them hold on 'pon mi pay, so me have to come back come work for them... next two weeks and collect me money. And them still hold on pon me money, so me just have to leave."

At the next massage parlour she worked her experience was not much better as her pay disappeared in numerous "fines" applied by her employers.

"I earned one hundred and something thousand [dollars] but they took half out of it for fines for nothing at all, so me ended up go home with about \$45,000.. Pretty much, if a client come and touch you they charge you like \$4000, \$3000 because they say 'no personal relationship!' Plus they don't like to pay money so they charge you. If they come in and see the bed barely like you were sitting on it or somebody sit on it they charge you for that too. If they call say that client is there and you take too long to come out, they charge you. If you are on your phone while you sitting down waiting for a client to come they charge you for it!"

Sex workers describe clients who demand refunds, who refuse to pay them, take back payments by threats of violence or who steal money, cell phones and even shoes from them.

Chocolate says:

"We wouldn't be out there if we never have things to do. And the men who are just staying in the club and watching us make the money and then rob us - that is not nice. You don't know what you have done when you do that. Is one of the worst experience a dancer could ever go through, because you make that money for a reason and then you just come there and take it. You don't only hurt the dancer, you hurt the dancer children too, cause that money was supposed to buy food or maybe send them to school or something,"

Belinda says:

"Let me put it this way: any way when you

just get into the business you get trick. You get bad money. You go to bed with a man they steal you money....There is no prostitute cannot tell me that when they just come out on the street they don't get disadvantage (taken advantage of). They do in the first, 'cause you have to pay to learn."

*While **Blondie** says working conditions at some clubs are clearly better than others, she describes the entire industry as:*

"Hell...the boss, customers and dancers.

"Customers...you do business with them, [they] take back the money, draw knife... Your life is more important than the money so you just give [it back]. That is hell...'cause I mean after you have sex, [performed] the most style, done the most outrageous thing, and when you finish...[customer] going to take back the money - that's hard!

And then you have boss that work you from Sunday to Sunday and when you to get pay Sunday you not getting no pay -that's not good.

You have dancers who [because] you look better than them, can dance better than them, them just fight against you. [They] do a lot of things: burn up you costume, cut up you costume, cut up you bootie (boots), cut up you slippers! So those things are hell!"

*As the sole male sex worker interviewed, **Boy Blue's** description of working conditions in the sex industry is in stark contrast to the descriptions given by his female counterparts. While the women say they have had mixed experiences - both good and bad - in the industry, Boy Blue says his work has been all pleasure and fun:*

"For me is more of an enjoyment than a profession."

Boy Blue does pornographic movies, pornographic tapes for the internet, sex shows on stage, including live sex, all over the island. And he does "house calls" where he has sex with women for money. He says his number and email address are available on the internet where his performances are shown and he gets calls and emails requesting his services.

"If you have a computer ... you can browse

and...you can see 'Boy Blue'... And most clubs [are] like this: them call me phone on a regular [basis] needing shows to be done. So what I do is like, I make it be the biggest, or I patronize (name deleted), me long standing boss. Me come at his place you understand, instead of to option for all the little new club, where if me go maybe things don't work out right."

"This phone that I have now is a BlackBerry so it's internet capable. So any email that come in now, it would be forwarded on my phone...

...As me leave here some little, some big woman....husband gone a work all little more from now, my blood still hot in my vein, so them get a wonderful time."

"I am reigning number one island wide, really! This thing has carried me as far as overseas and to the next point of Jamaica."

"Triple X" is a next club, like this club where I am at now. "Shades" is to me, Ocho Rios' number one club. ...Strip tease, live blue movies onstage.....I master it from in Kingston.

First I did...one blue movie and it turn the whole of Kingston 11 and 20 (the areas of Kingston where he is from) upside down. Everybody was like "A [mother's name deleted] boy that!" because them know me. Me school friends who know me say, "Jeesam [Jesus] peace! Them never know say a so [name deleted] did have piece of....!" you know."

He also feels he enjoys the respect of many of his peers - young men who admire his sexual prowess. In fact his oral testimony seems to indicate that there is little stigma attached to his line of sex work:

"I'll be the person that everyone is going to say, me want to be like Boy Blue. Or for who know me in Ocho Rios or some part of Montego Bay as Wukka (Worker) Man (his other stage name), them a go say, 'You know say Wukka Man is a serious youth? Me see that youth take on about three girl in some position, that me have to go a me yard go try them!'

...And when me see them on de road in the morning, the thugs them be like "Yo, me



Photo: Panos Caribbean

dawg, me love how you handle you business still! But you know every man handle them business different but as long as you no mix with no man it's all good. A your business that!"

During his interview, he demonstrates that he does have some degree of power - by asking the coordinator of the show at the club to wait while he does his interview and by making fellow performers and the audience wait until he is ready to go out. He laughed in response to a query about upsetting the boss by keeping everybody waiting while he was being interviewed.

"To tell you the truth, ask the boss yourself, okay? Ask the boss - I cannot be suspended I cannot be fired. "

*"And when me see them
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"THEY ARE STILL COLLECTING NO MATTER HOW THEY COLLECT" – Dancing, Sex Work, Transactional Sex

Most of the female sex workers interviewed saw no difference between sex work and transactional sex. In fact, some were highly critical of women involved in transactional sex because they feel these women are dishonest about what they do.

Dancers and masseuses see their work as different from women who sell sex on the streets, largely because of the risks of the latter practice and the lack of security for sex workers who are outside of a club or massage parlour.

Boy Blue is adamant that he is not a sex worker but a porn star:

"For me my classification of being porn ... you take photo shoots, you do blue movie, you do live performances. Some, or majority, do live performance, but they haven't got the vigour or the wit to be on the internet, which I am.

When you are internet capable or on the internet like me you are of world standard. So for me I don't consider myself as a stripper or a sex worker. I consider myself a porn star.

Out of all the live performers here [at the club] is only myself [that] I can classify as a true porn star...cause I am the only one that is internet capable - on the internet up to now!"

Strawberry is opposed to sex work on the streets:

"Working on the street you have no security and I would consider it loose. You open to anybody and anything and all type of customers. I wouldn't encourage anybody to do that."

But she also is critical of women who practise transactional sex:

"From you enter my workplace you know definitely what it is about, while if you have a girl in the bank she is a teller in the day and a prostitute under cover. Me? I don't like undercover because she in the bank criticize me and pretend like she better than me when she doing the same thing."

For Belinda, who works on the streets, there is little or no difference between herself and the dancers and massage parlour workers:

"Go-go dancers? They are prostitutes too, only... they are not on the streets. They dance. They are sure of their pay when they dance but when you're a prostitute you don't sure of you pay because you don't have to get a business for the night...But because they want to be sure of their pay they stay inside the club and dance. But that's the only difference with them and us because they sell just like us.

I don't have anything to say bad about them because I have a lot of dancer friend and they are very nice people too."

Flowers sees no difference between sex work on the street, sex work in clubs and transactional sex. For her, the difference between herself and a woman who is having transactional sex with the boss is:

"I am doing it legally (openly) they are doing it undercover."

Kelly also sees the work of dancers and sex workers on the streets as essentially the same:

"Just one difference - we dance, they don't. But other from that we are just the same."

Pepper feels strongly that there is no difference between commercial sex work and transactional sex.

I've seen girls who have good jobs and still have to end up do worse than what I do too....

I want to address the issue of transactional sex. Those same girls who have good jobs but they want a nice apartment and them have to find a big (affluent) man to pay for the apartment - Do you think what they are doing to get their rent paid is any different from you who go on the stage? No. I don't think there is no difference to it. But basically to them because she (dancer) is bold enough to step on stage, you downclass her? No! Come on! Same how me doing Go-Go work it's no different from you.

If for instance you do a nine-to-five job and get maybe 4 grand a week (\$4,000), yeah? You stand up at the bus stop and a big man drive down and then him offer you lunch and carry you out. And him see you face look long and him ask what's wrong and you say to him 'You know me have so and so fi deal wid' and him fork it out and give you. Him is going to look some sex in reward, whether him might want it now, him going to want it later. And there is none of these woman who can look at me and tell me they don't know what I am talking about."

When asked if some dancers feel superior to others Pepper says:

"On the street, you is a whore then - nobody not respecting or looking up to you then because is yourself you selling so them can do you anything out there."

"Yes. Because you have some dancers who don't do business (sex work), them just dance and collect tip and that's it. And some [dancers who] do business."

JLo feels dancers are more independent than women who work the streets and do not have to sell sex unless they want to:

" 'Dancers' is different thing from 'prostitute.' Dancers...dance at the club. They can only depend on the pay. If them want, some will sell business....but dancers, most of us can do dancing without doing business."

She sees no difference between sex work and transactional sex but acknowledges that society views both differently.

JLo views economic need as the driving force behind both:

"I was working at a club and there was a girl there, she work as bartender, but she work at a insurance place. Like, she is a manager there and at the same time she's a bartender for the club I'm working....And she's a manager you understand. But she said nothing is not there (working in the insurance company) for she to get, cause she have to pay rent, light, bill, water rate. So anyway you take it she have to do it."

When asked if this woman was engaged in sex work, JLo says she never saw her doing this type of work but believes that the woman did have sex for money.

Bashy who says she would not call herself a sex worker, emphasises that working on the streets could never be an option for her:

"Well I don't have anything to say bad about them, but like I said [everybody] is trying to make a living. So if a girl decides to go on the streets and be a prostitute that's her life. Do you understand what I'm saying? But I wouldn't do it....I don't really like the idea, it's not for me."

She strongly condemns women who engage in transactional sex:

"Well me as a dancer now I would like to say that a girl [like that].....they are lower than dancer. Because dancers - we do things to get into the man pockets, you understand? ...they like when we tease them and so on

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and so forth. But some of them [women engaged in transactional sex] will just push on themselves to a man. I don't push on myself to men."

Lady Pixie expresses her views about working on the streets forcefully:

"The street prostitution is totally wrong.... Hear my take on it now - the street prostitution is different from the dancing. To me I feel say if a lady or if a girl feel she need some money and she have to do some commercial sex, then come in the club...It's much safer in the club, one hundred percent safer than being in the streets. Because being in the streets nobody knows you and if a man drive up and say "Come for this money" you gone and you no must come back. Him could all have ten of him friends lined up there.

"Cause you on the street - you is a whore then. Nobody not respecting or looking up to you then because is yourself you selling so them can do you anything out there. They can do it quicker than when you are in the club. At least when you are in the club, it's not right, but there are certain requirements a customer has to meet before a lady can leave...And then everybody know you or somebody know that person in the club, so at all times somebody always know where you at. The street prostitution is not safe!"

She sees no difference between commercial sex and transactional sex:

"...because they are still collecting no matter how they collect."

Blondie says that sex workers on the streets and dancers are essentially doing the same thing but explains that she sees "a big difference" between both groups:

"I'm not going to put them down you know, because we doing the same thing. But what I'm saying [is] being in the club - it takes off a lot of things, than when you [are] outside. Because a lot of harm can come to you more [on the streets] than when you in the club. It can happen to you in the club...but when you out on the road you're vulnerable... So me? I wouldn't go on the street even though I'm doing the same thing that they are doing. I rather come to the club and work."

She also sees no difference between commercial sex and transactional sex except in the way payments for sex are negotiated:

“Me as a dancer? Now if I’m going to do a business, right away I’m going to need my money. She (woman involved in transactional sex) know she going to get her money...so even if she have sex she not going to put her hand out for the money same time. But maybe she come tomorrow and say her rent due or something. She collect you know, but she collect [in a] different way than how I would collect.”

Chocolate *also feels that sex workers should not be on the streets:*

“I think they should be in the club because if a man try something with them when them in the club, it is easier for the boss to try and protect them than when them on the streets.”

For her however there is a big difference between commercial sex and transactional sex and she is not in favour of the latter:

“Them just a do it to get the rent pay and all of that...But me no like that at all... Sex upfront - pay me - that’s it. Me no want the transactional thing. When me get my pay up front me can save it. When transaction cut off - no more rent, no more car, no more nothing! So me no want that one!”

"I WAS AT HOME READING THROUGH THE NEWSPAPER TO FIND A JOB....."

- Massage Parlours

Of the sixteen sex workers interviewed, six have been or are workers in massage parlours. This sector of the sex work industry has mushroomed in the last decade as is evidenced by the growing number of newspaper (tabloid and daily broadsheet) advertisements for these establishments and for female and male workers in them.

In fact, four of the six interviewed women involved in massage parlours, found out about jobs through the newspapers. Of the remaining two, one had entered the industry after having been engaged in transactional sex as an adolescent and the other chose massage work over previous bar work and exotic dancing stints.

There are no official statistics on the number of massage parlours in Jamaica.

Ann, like most of the other young women employed in massage parlours who were interviewed, was searching for a job in the papers when she saw the vacancy for "masseuses":

"I was at home reading through the newspaper to see if I can find a job and I hear this massage thing come up. I think it was just like [ordinary] massage and I call and they say it was in Portmore."

She says she did not think that it was sex work but when she arrived at the location she had no choice but to accept the job since she had no fare to return home to Montego Bay. She worked initially for two weeks, as agreed.

"When the two weeks finish them hold on 'pon mi pay, so me have to come back come work for them next two weeks and collect me money and them still hold on 'pon me money, so me just have to leave."

Simone, like Ann, was also unemployed and responded to a newspaper ad that promised

high pay. She also says she had no idea the job advertised in the paper for the masseuse position involved sex.

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"I didn't know. I didn't know it was sex. If I knew, I wouldn't call it."

Apple also makes a similar claim, but says when the employers explained that she would be required to have sex for money, she decided to do so.

"Being an open-minded person I thought okay, I am going to give it a try."

Flowers says she used to do bar work and had been unsuccessful in a number of job interviews before turning to massage work.

Strawberry like **Flowers**, also worked in a bar but hated it. She prefers dancing over massage work as she thinks:

"...it is more profitable because when you sell you body it more beneficial to you. There is no money to split with you and nobody [else] but yourself, so dancing is much more better."

Perfect left cosmetology school, lured by the high wages in the massage parlours. She responded to an ad in the papers and has not looked back, but is focused on completing studies as a practical nurse and leaving the business.

Some masseuses live on the work premises where their movements and physical activities are sometimes strictly controlled by employers.

Ann says:

"You can't leave out of the building without their permission. You have to walk naked, you have to do everything that them tell you, everything them say you just have to do it, and if you don't, they charge you for it. If you want to buy hair or lotion and things like that downtown, you have to beg someone to go. Or if them let you out them only let you go out for half hour. And if you don't come back by the half hour or the hour them charge..."

You can't normally go out as usual. You have to stay in. You can't talk to anybody. If your child is sick you have to stay there, you can't go home. I work in Portmore, but I am from Mobay. My daughter was sick and admitted in the hospital and me couldn't leave to go to look for her. They said I have to finish two weeks before I can leave. And me ask them just to lend me some money so I can deal

with her and come back them say no."

Many of the women complain of being cheated by employers, including being charged or fined for breaking the business' rules.

Simone, describing her first job, says she was charged \$600.00 per day for accommodations and that her movements were severely restricted while she was on the job:

"You sign a contract to stay there for two weeks. If you want to go out they give you like half an hour no matter where you are going and we can't go out everyday either -only two times for the week. If we stay out longer than half an hour, they fine us two thousand dollars. And if you go home in the morning and you come back in the evening after working time you get a four thousand dollar charge. We always complain about it, but they always say if we don't like it we should leave."

Ann relates that at one establishment \$8,000.00 was also deducted from her pay for rent each month even though three girls shared a bed and they had to leave the room (even in the middle of the night) whenever one of them had to be with a client.

"If you get into fight they charge you for that. They put three girls in a room and it was uncomfortable.....It was a male boss and he want to sleep with everybody and if you don't want to sleep with him, him tell him girlfriend to charge you for this and that."

The way earnings are split with employers also seems unfair to many of the women.

Strawberry says:

"To me it's very, very unfair 'cause it's like \$1000 for 20 minutes to have sex; \$2000 for blow job and \$2500 for both for 20 minutes. Every thing you do you boss get half of it and out of my half they draw \$300 out of it for accommodation and the place is not clean. It not worth it"

Flowers says that she is:

"...not happy with the money what we charge [clients]. I think the money should be more."

For many of the masseuses, massage parlours

or centres offer privacy that sex work on the street or in night clubs do not.

"If I didn't work in a massage parlour, people who know me would tell ... other people in my community that I am doing that work and after that they would look down on you."

Perfect explains that she had to leave a job at a massage centre in Kingston for one in Westmoreland:

"I left because it was in town and I almost buck up on (met) someone I know so I left from there and I went to Negril."

Apple had a similar experience:

"Someone I knew...I won't say who or how I know him, came and saw me here and I had to basically play a psyches (con) game and pretend that I owned the place in order not to get in any trouble."

Simone explains that she can escape paying a fine for refusing to see a client by saying she knows the client:

"You have to have a reason why you don't want to go to the client. You have to actually say you know them."

Apple says:

"I chose to do this instead of becoming a go-go dancer because I can't dance. And being a masseuse, you don't have to dress like a prostitute. You are a prostitute but you don't have to dress x-rated. Being a dancer you have to dress x-rated."

Strawberry however has no problems in dressing up like a dancer for her job and feels this gives her an edge as a masseuse:

"Well I am one of the girls who always wear costume before everybody else start. Me always fix up myself and wear what the go-go them wear. Me bring that inna (into) the centre them cause them always wear panty and brassiere. But me always inna me full suit!"

As lucrative but illegal operations, some massage parlours have not escaped being targets of criminals.

Ann says:

"The last time I was at a [massage] centre, gunman come in and shoot up the whole place. We end up have to leave. I could lose my life just like that and I don't know why. I don't know what cause it or so. It's not safe. It's not even seventy percent safe."

Apple says her worst experience on the job was getting robbed even though no one was physically harmed during the ordeal:

"The place was hold up by gunmen and we got robbed of money, phones and other stuff."

Based on some of the women's testimonies, sex is not always a part of the services offered by some establishments:

Strawberry, in describing the best place she has ever worked, says:

"The place is so clean...And its a lot more expensive. We don't sell our body [and] make the boss know. If she find out [she] fire you! Straight massaging! Every massage you do you get 60% and she get 40. And we do a lot of bachelor parties all over Jamaica. Massage start from \$2000. If you want to sell your body, a (it is) your money that!"

Perfect explains that some clients ask for one thing and expect something else:

"A client will come. 'Alright, you say you want a massage fine.' You will go in the room [and] they don't want any massage. They want sex. So you say 'Ok'. [Then] they'll want to pay you for sex and expect to get blow jobs or anal. Stuff like those I don't do, so me and them are going to have problems...They'll come out of the room complaining..."

"IT MIX UP AND YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE" - Feelings about the Job

Most of the participants interviewed would not recommend sex work to persons looking for a job. Even where they said they took some pride in aspects of their job, they had mixed feelings about it.

Most did not consider their work a career and said they would not want to see their child or children involved in sex work.

Again, Boy Blue is an outstanding exception - he is very proud of his work, without reservations, and would not be opposed to his child getting involved in sex work.

Belinda:

"Well...you know actually right now a lot of people know me. I'm very popular and actually I don't go out [of] my towns, so everybody out there know me. Some of them will say 'Boy, you know say that whore name such and such' and people will say 'Boy she ever (always) look good, you know. She ever (always) nice!' And I try to get respect from people. I try to carry myself certain way, try to deal with people certain way. Even though I'm a prostitute I try to respect myself so people can respect me, even though I'm a prostitute."

She however feels trapped by the job and compares it to being a drug addict. Belinda says women are trapped by the lure of money and "nice things" such as hotels, travel and gifts:

"[you] start doing it by going to bed and have sex for money, so you get hooked on it. You see prostitution is like drugs. You have to know [that] when you're in it it's very hard for you to come out of it, even though you want to stop a lot of times...."

Belinda explains the addictive quality of sex work:

Not even only me alone, a lot of more girls on the streets...I will try to encourage them not to stay in it 'cause this thing is like a disease. [It] is like drugs when you come inside of it once you start make money!

...when December come, hear me 'You see next year? [It] is the last [time] this me a do it!' [But] next year me out there, same way.

These are things when you getting old and you sit down, you say 'Why?'... And you think...this is a job that you dying to come out of it. But them young youth them no think about it. Just like me when I was young - I just keep going and going."

Bashy says that as an exotic dancer she feels good about what she does:

"I love what I do and when I'm on the stage I feel like I'm a star 'cause you have an audience sitting here watching."

She says however, that for her dancing is:

"...not a career just...a job....The difference is a career is what you make out of the job. But I'm just ... in it for the money you understand. So as soon as I get what I want I will leave."

"I'm not proud but I'm not ashamed either. But there is nothing about this to be proud of. I should be ashamed but it's benefiting me one way or the other so there is nothing to be ashamed."

She says she would not recommend dancing as a career and would never want her daughter or son to choose it as a career:

"If I have a daughter if she grow up and she decides to do that, she is my child. Anyway, it's her heart, 'cause my mother couldn't stop me. So I wouldn't try to stop her, but I don't think it's appropriate."

***Perfect** says she would not encourage any young girl to work as a masseuse and emphasises that she is only doing it "to make a better life" for her son. She says she does not see it as a career and would not want her daughter to get involved in this type of work:*

"Sometimes you're at the centre and you don't get any work for the week. So you're going to jump at the first opportunity you get. And it's not, boy what should I say, it's not a good experience for you to lie down [with] a man who pay you for sex and you know him a go do whatever him want with you because him pay him money. So I wouldn't encourage any young girl to do this."

***Strawberry** who has been involved in sex work for three years feels it has all been a waste of her life. She is caught between not being proud of her job and not wanting to be ashamed of the work that has helped her make a living:*

"I'm not proud, but I'm not ashamed either. But there is nothing about this to be proud of. I should be ashamed, but it's benefiting me one way or the other so there is nothing to be ashamed. ...I feel very bad. I feel that me waste me life and waste me whole teenage life then, because I could have achieved a lot..."

But it's not my fault. It's my mother fault because I used to take care of my mother... but I stop now. Stop a good while and that's when I started saving."

***Lady Pixie** says she considers dancing [as] a job and not a career and would never want her daughter to experience what she has gone through.*

"Me have mixed feelings about me job. It alright in the sense it pays the bills but... There is fun in it too. There is fun in it apart from the money side. You meet some people that you wouldn't meet otherwise. Some customers or some clients you would never dream of meeting in you lifetime...Me meet entertainers, me meet movie stars, me meet people in high position, people in ministry position, who me never dream say me would meet! So the dancing is fun.

You meet some very nice girls too. Some very nice young ladies, where if you see where them coming from you would never know say those ladies would come and dance. So the dancing world it nice.

And it bad too, in that you have some bad clients to deal with 'cause sometimes them want [to] beat you up. And the dancer them sometimes them not nice too. Them not friendly. So the job - it mix up and you have to know how to live. You have to know how to live.

"And it would be nice in the dancing world, but now you have too much violence in the dancing and the dancing no nice again. To me you have less exotic dancers in the dancing. You just have commercial sellers in the market right now. Nobody not interested in the dancing again, so right now it not so nice. It nice but it not so nice."

***Apple** too has mixed feelings about what she does:*

"Well I feel ashamed that this is what I have to be doing, but on the other hand I feel proud that I am making money to continue life and to move on to something better. So I feel proud that I am making my own money and not depending on anybody else."

***Kelly** views her work...*

"...as something that put the food on the table. Me no enjoy it."

She would also never recommend it as a career and would never want her daughter involved in it.

JLo says she does not regard her work as a career but:

"I feel good about it, but is only when bad t'ings happen I feel bad about it. For livity (making a living) I would recommend it ... because there is no better choice for me, so me now have to choose something and do something."

She also admits to feeling ashamed of dancing when another woman is present:

"... here now in the day, there is nothing for me to [be] afraid [of]. But see like in the night now when me dancing [and].....a woman.... just come stand up and...look on me, me feel a little way shame. Like a little guilt....Me just imagine she a look on this little girl [thinking] 'Why she have to do this?' Me just think a lot so sometime. Me feel a way when me come off the stage too."

JLo is adamant that she would not want to see her own daughter on this path.

"...because what reach me, me don't want to reach she, you understand? Or me selling my body I don't want her to become one to sell her body."

*For **Flowers** sex work is not a career but something she is doing "just for the time being." She says she likes this job but would not want her son or daughter to do it:*

"No...[I] wouldn't like that. I would do the best to send them to school so that they don't have to."

She says that she is proud of her job but when asked how she feels about herself she says:

"Sometime me cuss (curse) meself."

Blondie also views sex work as:

"...a job, not a career...For me a career is something that you can be proud to stand up and say 'Listen, I am....' I'd be proud to stand up and say I'm a nurse. I don't mind saying, 'I'm a dancer' you know, but I wouldn't say I would be proud to say I'm a dancer..."

You see a lot of people don't really understand or really don't get the concept of dancer. They believe that dancers are people [who] don't have any feeling, don't have any blood running through us, [that] we are a worthless set of people - that's why we choose this. And it's quite not so! Nothing like that! So I would say Jamaican people are not ready yet to accept dancers. They are not ready, you understand. So it's not a career. It's a job."

She would never want her daughter to become involved in dancing:

"...because I know the hell and I've been through hell. So I can tell you that I wouldn't want my enemy to go through that."

Chocolate says:

"When I used to do it I used to have pride in what I do. Well sitting down now, not dancing again, and looking at it, it is the worst job ever! I wouldn't advise anybody to dance.... Nobody want to have a career [in which] you go work every night [and] you have to be having sex with ten, twenty different man to make some money. No! You know out of twenty man you have six in each night, one of them the condom might burst, and then you end up get sick."

She is adamant that she would never want her children to become involved in dancing and says they are the reason she was dancing "to give them everything."

Chocolate has a sister who is also an exotic dancer and confesses that the work has taken an emotional toll on them both:

"The type of work we are doing here it's a life and death [situation]..."

"It only affect for we to cry...Because we have we kids them to come home to. ...Man rob we, we have to walk from where them leave we, find somewhere else to go. Start all over again 'cause we money gone....It do something to we mentally. To me even now, me still go through that problem where me cry sometime. Me baby father no understand why, but him still try to work it out and hug me when me cry and reason with me, to see

what is the problem. So me kind of get it out.

Me going to church now so, the people in the church trying to help me to get past [it]."

Simone declares that she does not have sex for love, only for money:

"I don't love. The only person I love is my mother.....Sometimes when I think about it (sex work), I just want to die. But then situation like this in this world you just have to think of it as just another job. Nobody knows what I do, just myself. My sister know that I dance though, but I never tell her that I do this.

I go through a lot of pain. This has affected me, even though I haven't been doing it for a year yet. It good and bad - because I make my money to do what I want with it, but I make a lot of enemies every day. I don't know what life will bring. I guess I just have to see. I am not ashamed of what I do, I just don't want people to know... certain people."

Ann admits she is not proud of the fact that she sells sex to earn a living:

"I am ashamed, because it's not something appropriate."

Peach says she is not ashamed of her job or of herself, but when asked how she feels about being a sex worker says:

"Honestly sometime I feel a way (bad), knowing that I'm doing this while I can do other things. But just because of certain circumstances I just do what I have to do and do the best of my ability...The type of work we are doing here it's a life and death [situation]..."

Pepper sees exotic dancing and other sex work as:

"...just a job. We take it as a job so we just go in there and love up this thing and take it as you work. When I go to work I take myself out of it. It is just like working in the bank. In the bank you have fifty co-workers beside you doing the same work that you do, don't it? It's the same thing, no different. When you go in the supermarket you see ten line a cashier - all of them working. Just like you come in the club you see ten girls on the stage all of them working."

Boy Blue, the sole male sex worker interviewed, is proud of his job and goes into details about his techniques and methods on the job. He feels that he has a special talent for his work as a 'porn star':

"What I go up there and do on stage, it no take no chicken to go up there and do it. Because the first thing [is that a] man a go shame [about] whether them d...k being too big or too small. Now in my book God give me my own, so me a flaunt.

You see, me no know how to put it but me just love my job. And if one night me should come here and come work ...whole night, and the morning when me to go home and expect me pay, them tell me say them don't have no pay to give me, me wouldn't have it in me [to] argue. You know why? Right now I have made my night and my day and me no get no pay." (laughs).

He says he would not oppose his daughter or son pursuing a similar line of work:

"For me ... really as long as them grow to the age of consent, that would be their decision technically, not mine.

For me, love me and love me for me, not for what I have or own or what I look like. Love me for me. Naturally no matter what they are doing they would technically be my offspring, so a father's love and beyond [is what] they would be getting from me."

"SAFE SEX IS NOT HAVING NO SEX AT ALL"

– Lifestyle and Health Seeking Behaviours

Most sex workers interviewed stressed the fact that they tried to eat well and to take care of their health. Many said they had been tested for HIV and some do this regularly. Most said they used condoms at every sexual encounter but the danger of the condom bursting and some clients' insistence on not using a condom are threats to their health.

Two of the sex workers say in their line of work, safer sex is no sex at all.

The sex workers' level of knowledge about HIV is mixed, with Boy Blue displaying an alarming lack of information and a strong belief in myths and misconceptions about sexuality and sexual health.

A number of the women mention heavy use of alcohol or smoking marijuana and it seems Ecstasy is promoted by some club bosses to lower sex workers' inhibitions.

However, most sex workers are very aware of the threat that HIV and AIDS pose to them. One woman warns young girls:

"Don't try having sex with man for money on the side, 'cause AIDS come in like paper that blow by the breeze. It's very easy to catch and if you don't have it already you don't want to catch it again."

Another woman says the dancing industry is "not nice again...The man them no treat we like how them used to, the money no nice again and the AIDS get prevalent."

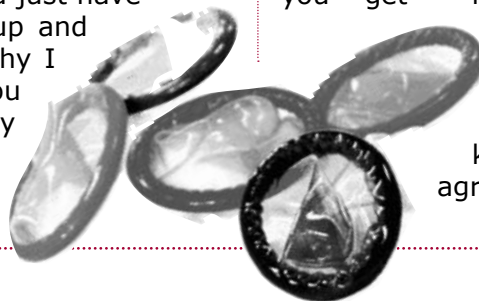
A dancer declares "Too much danger in the dancing world: the biggest killer - AIDS, then we have the second killer – man."

Belinda, a veteran sex worker, says she tests for HIV, "every other year, not every year. [I] not going to lie." She says that she uses condoms with all her clients.

"The only thing [is] if the condom burst I catch AIDS...and to be honest condom do burst on us. That's why you just have to go and get you check-up and just pray to God! That's why I say condom can prevent you from getting AIDS [but] they do burst..."

She also notes that some sex workers have other challenges with condoms:

"Number one - most of the times you see you get infection - is the condoms. When you using condoms is not every condom agree with everybody. That's what you supposed to know too. You try this condom and suppose you get itching from it, you don't use it again. You use other one. Because when you use it, suppose you find you have some smell from it. You know that this condom don't agree with you!"



Belinda notes that there are also challenges in getting men to use the condom:

"For me, always use a condom, and always use your own condom. Sometime if you're gonna use somebody else condom, make sure that if a gentleman come and say 'Boy, I don't like this condom' that they give you the money and you go buy it for yourself. Don't use the one they have in their pocket 'cause these man full of tricks and all kind of something.... Even though they hear AIDS a go 'round a lot of them still [saying] - 'A naked ride me want. Me want feel the real thing for me money.' "

Bashy has never done an HIV test, but says she would get tested. She is planning to do a medical soon because the club boss has made this a requirement for signing a contract. Asked what she considers to be safe sex practices, she says:

"Well most disease can contract by saliva, so I don't really kiss and I use condom. So that's kind of the safest way to me."

Perfect says she does an HIV test "every three months," has regular medical checks and "always" uses condoms with her clients. But despite all her precautions, she like Belinda has had some scares:

"There was this one particular time when a condom burst and I cry for the whole live-long day, until I went to the doctor. And I went back three months after and did a blood test and he said that I was okay. Because it's like the guy had some type of infection or something, because the next morning I bend down and I insert my fingers inside of me and I see some white something come out like when you insert pill and it's coming back out. And so I started to fret and the doctor gave me some antibiotics. And three months later I went and did the blood test and I was okay."

For Perfect safer sex means:

"...to stick to one partner and use a condom every time."

Apple explains her concept of safer sex practices as:

"Using a condom. ...You see the work that we do? We have to flush the system once a month or so forth, (by using vaginal douches), to prevent not only sexual infections, but infections from the condoms, the lubricant and the rubber, the latex rubber."

Ann says she is aware of the dangers of sex work and tries to ensure that her clients wear condoms during sex:

"Condoms can burst and you can catch anything. I have a daughter to live for so I make sure I put on the condoms myself. Use a condom all the time. You double them (use two at one time), make sure you put it on and you take it off....Sometimes you feel nervous, scared, but sometimes you have to just say, 'What the heck?' So sometimes you have to think about doubling the condom."

Some clients say they can't use certain condoms so it's kind of scary."

Chocolate admits she did not use a condom all the time when she worked as a dancer in the sex work industry:

"I used to have clients who I think I would want them to be my boyfriend then and so... But the Ecstasy does that....It make you feel so sexy that sometime you don't really want to have sex with condom."

She also describes how some clients are willing to pay more money for unprotected sex:

"I have had men offer me thousands of dollars. I have men come to me ...offer me visa, green card....not to use a condom. And trust me it is tempting, but I just bite me lip and squeeze me toe and tell them no."

Knowledge about sexually transmitted infections is mixed. Most of the sex workers can talk about the protection offered by the condom and do understand that blood and sex fluids transmit most infections including HIV.

"I have had men offer me thousands of dollars. I have men come to me ...offer me visa, green card....not to use a condom."

There is some confusion about transmission via kissing and saliva, but the most devastating lack of knowledge is demonstrated by the confident Boy Blue. His testimony demonstrates major misconceptions about the transmission of HIV and STIs – that semen travels into the woman's body and takes infection back into the penis; that all body fluids can transmit STIs and that homosexuals are a main "cause" of the HIV epidemic.

Boy Blue is asked to explain how a person can become infected with HIV and in his response he says it is based on "my research on STDs":

"For me is mostly either the man not using no condom and him discharge in the lady, wherein you know that the man semen is what really do the travelling. It may go up inside the woman, contract the disease and come back down in his penis line to his balls and all of that.

Yeah.....Just as how it travel when the man ejaculate and it travel out the penis head, same way the little semen run go look for eggs, is same way them pick up whatever and them come back down in de line. `Cause naturally the d...k discharges what comes out of the penis head. Tthe line is still filled with whatever living semen that may travel about within near or far distance within the woman's vagina canal. Just as how it will go find the egg, it will go find the germs and come back inside the man same way...

And the man can have bruises too, like bruises to the balls back up to the groin area. And the woman discharge and the....condom protect the lower middle shaft but it don't protect up the seed bag (scrotum) or the groin area...So any form of bruise or scratch there, instantly that is a fuel (fluid) exchange – whether it be sweat, blood or discharge..."

Blue Boy continues to explain his ideas about HIV transmission:

"The other means what me know is them nasty man there, batty man (male homosexuals). Now them lifestyle is not natural. Unprotected sex and when them.... have sex with a man and then go back with a woman, they may be telling themselves say them no gay."

*You have to dead by something. Me rather p***y kill me than me bend up in a car [accident], or a man shoot me or me grow old and dead.*

Lady Pixie says she has learnt about safer sex through her work as a dancer:

"Me learn...a lot, cause [at] one time me never know what is safe sex. And then me work little [by] little with the AIDS Support (Jamaica AIDS Support for Life) ... Now and again me go out on the little talks and whatever..."

Most of the women define safer sex as using a condom at each sexual encounter. Some, like Ann, say they use two condoms with clients which they think gives extra protection, even though they have heard warnings about the dangers in doing this. One woman says she likes to use the female condom. The majority say they would stop working if they were diagnosed with an STI until it was cured, that they would seek medical attention and that they would not attempt to treat themselves with antibiotics borrowed from acquaintances. Most also say they would stop sex work if they were diagnosed as HIV positive.

Flowers however is not sure if she would stop selling sex if she was diagnosed as HIV positive:

"I don't know, I don't know how I would feel."

Kelly admits that her work and lifestyle have prevented her from taking medication for STIs in the proper way:

"Sometime me just stop. `Cause once you there at work you can't be on medication `cause you can't take alcohol, you can't take drugs. Sometimes them say you cannot have sex when you taking the tablets. So how you a go make you money? So what me do me just work extra hard for a week, try make that money stretch and take me tablets the next week. Make sure say everything alright and come back a work again."

Belinda says that as a "veteran" sex worker she can determine how serious an infection or



up if you can't afford to go to the doctor."

While most of the women interviewed are concerned about practising safer sex and say they try to protect themselves by using condoms, Boy Blue's oral testimony demonstrates a high degree of risk taking.

"Safe sex for me is not having no sex at all....Reason being, a disease carrier can never tell when he or she has it until them find out...No matter how you say in front of people you don't take risk, behind doors and in front of Jah (God) alone, with whoever you [do] run that risk....."

health problem is and decide if and when to self-medicate or to seek a doctor's advice:

"You know you have things you can go to the pharmacy and buy - peroxide or whatever you use to wash your vagina. But if it's up inside of you, you have to definitely go to the doctor to get pills or whatever for that."

Bashy's approach to healthcare is similar:

"If sometime me body feel down I will wonder what's wrong. But you see from me no drop down, me just go to the pharmacy and buy something to attack the feeling what me have. But if me see it get any worse, me know me just go to doctor with it."

Simone says frequent sexual activity does affect her physically, but she also often opts to self medicate:

"You bruise, but you have to know how you take care of your body. You have to buy up you things them to take care of your body. Like you use gel, lubricating gel, it's easy to go in. Or if you don't use that you make sure you have your Canesten cream (an anti-fungal cream) after you finish. Canesten is a cream you put on your vagina so if you get bruise or some infection it just help to clean it up."

Blondie demonstrates knowledge of the health care options available saying if a sex worker feels something is wrong:

"...you try check up on the doctor. You can go out by the clinic there. You get free check

Overall for me I am sure that I have to dead one day...People live and die on earth. You make the most of your time - It's that simple. The best of eating the best of food, partying, having sex. Having sex you know is one of the finer things about life that no stress you brain...You have to dead by something. Me rather p***y kill me than me bend up in a car (accident), or a man shoot me or me grow old and dead. Believe me is one of the things me fear most. Growing old and dead."

Alcohol and drug use are also features of the lives of the sex workers interviewed. Belinda says she has "a Guinness everyday" but does not drink at home or take drugs. For women who work in the clubs however, alcohol seems to be a part of their daily routine.

Bashy says she does not take drugs but she drinks:

"...every night....Sometime we drink Appleton and Pepsi....sometime we drink HQ, Alozade (popular alcoholic drinks), practically

"Taking Ecstasy is the wickedest thing you could ever experience!

You don't know what you do, what you have been through. You only wake up with the money."

everything on the shelf...Most times when I come up in the club, I'm kind of cranky and so I'm not in the mood enough cause we don't really know what the night will bring. So we just have a down spirit (depressed mood) when we come up in the club. So when we drink the liquor and smoke we get a vibes so we just work on it."

Kelly also drinks every night...:

"...but me only drunk Friday and Saturday. Them time me overdo it."

Apple says she doesn't smoke, but adds:

"I drink occasionally, only when I am working."

Lady Pixie admits she also drinks on the job "every single night" and says she also takes Ecstasy to boost her energy levels:

"Sometimes [I take] Ecstasy. Like for the month maybe one or two time like when me body feel down and lazy and me tired and me can't go. You know me take it with a Red Bull to get little energy."

Simone also uses Ecstasy although she is concerned about side effects:

"I just take Ecstasy...I have a friend from Trinidad; he imports them to Jamaica so I get them cheap. Some clubs sell them but not every boss want them girls to be taking Ecstasy because it really mashes you up after a while. Damages you inside and make you crazy.... It's illegal...When I take the ecstasy...you really don't know what you doing. Like you know it, but you really can't stop it. Because like it controls your body and your mind."

Kelly says she used to take Ecstasy but has stopped because of serious side effects:

"Me used to and me stop cause it make me behave bad and if me take it and me no make no money me go home and me curse and get ignorant. And it not good for me in front of me children them and them see me a go on like a mad woman. And one time it make me climb the fence down the gully and want to jump in the gully.....You never know say it make a girl jump through a window?"

Make me tell you about the Ecstasy. If you happy and you take it and you tell yourself say you a go make money...you don't know how you make the money, but you make money whole night! You see if you vex and you come a work with something on you mind and you take it? You vex for the whole night and just ignorant (angry)! Me take it one time when me happy in the Christmas and me make twenty odd thousand dollar! And when me go home and me pull me blouse me see thousand dollar [bills] and me wonder how! All now me don't know how me make them [the money]!"

Chocolate is also critical of Ecstasy, but notes that some club owners give it to women working in their establishments:

"Some boss sell you Ecstasy. Now a girl going into the job for the first time, taking Ecstasy is the 'wickedest' thing you could ever experience! You don't know what you do, what you have been through. You only wake up with the money the next morning. That's the way the pill do you!"

She admits that she took Ecstasy and drank heavily on the job, and says that both "give me a boost." She says both the drug and the alcohol affected her as sometimes she drank too much and could not wake up in the mornings and the drug gave her diarrhoea.

Flowers says she drinks and smokes. She smokes marijuana and explains:

"At first when I come to this job me couldn't do it but me get used to it now."

Ann, who is 19, says she does not drink, smoke or do drugs.

Blondie's testimony illustrates the difficulties sex workers face in maintaining good health when they face daily routines and working environments which do not support a healthy lifestyle:

"I mean you work night and day sometime. You know you buy you vitamin, you iron [but] sometime you don't get to eat properly... Sometime you work, you tired - you sleep all day. And I try to balance my diet [but] sometime I don't watch it."

LEGALISE IT!

- Legalisation, Registration, Taxation

Thesexworkersinterviewedhadmixedviewsonthelocalisationofprostitution - some said they would support it while others were strongly against the suggestion. Others saw both benefits and drawbacks to such a proposal. A number of them said they would be willing to pay taxes, particularly in order to get the benefits derived from paying taxes and statutory deductions and most supported registration and medical certification of sex workers.



Photo: David Rose/Christian Aid

Chocolate is one of those who sees both positives and negatives in regulating the sex trade. She feels licensing sex workers for medical reasons is the way to go:

"You know, me tell you the truth - Mi no like dancing again, but is a way of living. [It] is a job. If them could run the HIV test on the dancer...and the one them who don't have AIDS, give them a licence -you know, make them be a licensed dancer - it would be better than now.

Legalising - No me no think so 'cause if it legalise you a go have little girl want to drop out of school, want to go dance. Me have daughter. Me no want that. No just make it stay how it stay now."

She adds that legalising the industry would have a negative impact on dancers as:

"...everybody would want to do this. That would be like going to downtown and working in the wholesale. Well we no want it. Not legalising, you have less dancers."

Lady Pixie says she has:

"...two takes on that. I would say yes in the sense that if it is going to be legalised ...there definitely has to be a age limit and a permit for the dancing. And I would say no. The reason being is that if it legalise we not going to have no young people go school or even go church to do anything. We not going to have nobody in the country like females to take up to do nursing again or even teaching, 'cause what them look at is 'Yeah me friend them in the dancing and them collect a money every night or every week. And them not doing anything while me have to bust my ass for the whole month to collect a teachers cheque or nurse cheque'..... So if it going to legalise as I said age limit...It need certain requirements for it to be legalise. It no just legalise like that."

Kelly also feels that legalising sex work would make it too attractive to young people, but what she fears is the influx of new dancers:

"No, cause it a go make it worse for our situation. Right now I have about seven girls leaving high school, going to college and them dancing. Them dancing because they cannot pay for them subject (courses). So [in] a little [while] from this when you legalise it, everybody a go want to turn dancer. All who can't dance - just to make a quick money cause it happening already."

Belinda, who has been involved in sex work for the longest time, says she does not feel legalisation of the industry would affect her, but she advises young girls to stay away from sex work even if it were to be legalised:

"...because you have a lot of wicked things going on in prostitution....So all young girls, they need to try and find a little work to do and send yourself back to school, get a education, get yourself a nice job."

Blondie holds the same view:

"Maybe if they legalise it we would have a lot of young people coming, which is not a good idea. Because it is not a hobby or work that I would want anyone to come into. I am in it already for certain reason, but if they have an option they shouldn't [enter sex work]. So yes, it would be nice for we who are in it already, but they can go back to school. They have HEART (Human Employment and

Resource Training Agency). They have a lot of things for them so they don't have to come in here."

Perfect is against legalisation of sex work saying:

"I wouldn't encourage anyone to do what I'm doing. Why I'm doing this is to make a better life for my son. I wouldn't want to encourage any young girls to do it."

Simone says her appeal to the government is that:

"Prostitution is not a crime, but [try] helping a young lady to not to become one by making more female jobs available can help more females. Try to help the needy and not the rich because that's all I see you doing nowadays."

Strawberry supports legalising sex work and explains her position clearly:

"Well I'm not in this for long, but I think it should be [legal] because selling your body is not a safe job. And it being legalised will help anybody in this field to be more secure, more positive about what they're doing and not being ashamed anymore because you will have you license to do what you are doing. And it's honest earning, right? You not thieving (stealing), you earning. It's honest exchange."

JLo feels that legalising sex work could bring recognition of dancers' rights as equal citizens:

"Maybe we would be more recognised because we no have enough recognising (recognition) to people. Even the same people that come around us don't recognise us as somebody good....So maybe there would be a little changes, I don't know"

As far as **Bashy** is concerned, sex work is already legal:

"Well prostitute is legal you know cause it not only go on in the club. It's going in the streets you understand. So basically it legal."

But she also feels that legalising the industry could improve how dancers and sex workers are seen by society:

Tax sex workers

Gov't could rake in \$3 billion a year from prostitution

BY TANEISHA LEWIS
Observer staff reporter
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DECRIMINALISATION and taxing of prostitution could bring an estimated \$3 billion a year into the government's coffers, a senior health ministry official suggested yesterday.

Dr Kevin Harvey, senior medical officer in charge of the health ministry's National HIV/STI Programme said regulating sex workers would also mean that the country would no longer have to look to external funding finance that programme.

"We need to think about this for the long term," he said.

Parliament recommended a debate on homosexuality and prostitution, as one of 31 suggestions to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.

But Dr Harvey went further yesterday to call for a tax on commercial sex workers, the ministry's preferred name for prostitutes, and he calculated that the treasury could pull in close to \$3 billion a year from the tax.

Said Harvey: "I estimate that we could generate an additional \$3 billion in revenue annually from taxing sex workers, Dr Harvey said, would mean that the country would no longer have to look to external funding finance that programme."

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BY HORACE HINES
Observer staff reporter
hinesh@jamaicaobserver.com

FALMOUTH, Trelawny — A senior health official's recommendation to decriminalise prostitution and to regulate sex workers has earned the ire of Opposition Leader Portia Simpson Miller, who said the country should focus instead on employment and education.

"I challenge the Government, don't even think about it. Because we need more teachers, not prostitutes; more policemen and women, not more prostitutes," she said.

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Portia blasts proposal to tax prostitutes

Portia Simpson Miller blasted a proposal to tax prostitutes, saying it would be a "disgrace" to the country.

"I am not going to support a bill that would tax prostitutes," she said.

"It is a disgrace to the country to have a bill that would tax prostitutes," she said.

Sex workers happy with tax proposal

THE Sex Workers Association (SWA) on Thursday welcomed a proposal to decriminalise and tax commercial sex work.

"The truth of it is that the members of the association are outside the formal working environment in Jamaica and have felt the brunt of not being able to access social services like protection from the police, health care and housing benefits," Marsha Grant, president of the association, told the Observer. "We are looking at the upside of that where the association members are saying 'if I pay my taxes and you can say to me I will get these benefits I will pay my money'."

On Wednesday, Dr Kevin Harvey, senior medical officer in the Ministry of Health with responsibility for the National HIV/STI programme, said the government could earn up to \$3 billion a year if it taxed prostitution. This money, he suggested, could be used to fund the National HIV/STI programme and strengthen intervention programmes for the sex workers — one of the groups most at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.

While there is no available data on the number of sex workers in Jamaica, the Ministry of Health says there is now nine per cent more workers in the industry than in previous years.

On Thursday Grant said most sex workers had no intention of staying in the profession forever and would like to have some stability once they retire.

"Having some financial records would help them with institutions to get loans to start other businesses," she said. "For a lot of them, this is just a means to an end for now."

Formed in 2007, Grant said the SWA more than 100 members. And she expects more workers to join the association soon.

"It has been growing. More persons have been finding out about us and they actually like the work that we are doing," Grant said, adding that the sex workers have recently begun organising the industry so that it can be safe and legitimate.

"What we do is provide support for each other, we also have practical services like skills training, literacy programmes, we are able to fund support and we also have interventions that go into clubs and disseminate condoms and talk to the ladies," she added.

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Flowers also supports legalisation of sex work, noting that:

"It would be a honest earning."

All the persons interviewed who were asked if they would be willing to do a medical in order to register if the industry was legalised, say they are prepared to do this. Many would also welcome an organisation to which they would be able to lodge complaints about problems on the job.

A total of nine of the persons interviewed say they are willing to pay taxes and some highlight the benefits they think they would be able to access as taxpayers.

Chocolate says:

"Yes, if [they] legalising it, then we going to pay tax. 'Cause if you pay tax then Housing Trust (National Housing Trust) can get money. Nuff (a lot of) little things, opportunity [can come] out of it, of course."

Blondie feels that:

"...if we are legalise then we would be able to pay NIS (the National Insurance Scheme which makes contributors eligible for a state pension), NHT (the National Housing Trust)

"If we are legalise then we would be able to pay NIS ... and those stuff so further down the line we can get some benefit."

and those stuff so further down the line we can get some benefit.”

Strawberry sees the opportunity to get:

“Tax returns when you get older.”

JLo feels paying taxes would offer recognition and some legal protection:

“Well for me to pay tax... Me wouldn't say no, because...like now, if anything happen to we, we don't legal to the government or to certain things. So we would like to have it so that if anything happen to we, we can say 'yeah, dancers pay [is supposed] to raise' or whatever.”

Kelly is not opposed to paying taxes as she says her club boss is already deducting money from her wages and dishonestly claiming that it is for taxes:

“We a pay tax already....Yeah when **** pay you, him draw [deducts] hundred dollar a night.And we always go to him and say 'No government not getting this'. Me can show you four of my envelope now. If you work five night, \$500 come out of you name....Him write tax, bar bill and pay on you envelope.”

LIFE AT PRESENT AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

A number of the women interviewed have children and some have boyfriends. Some live with their families while others spend most of their time at the compounds where they work. Their relationships with family members and partners vary, but very often they say their work does put a strain on these relationships.

Nearly all of the sex workers, with the exception of Boy Blue, say they have no intention of staying in the industry. Even Belinda who has spent nearly twenty years as a sex worker expresses a desire to leave the industry. Very few however have concrete exit strategies or plans.

B*elinda says all her family knows she is involved in sex work. Her mother is not happy with her profession. Her father cried when he found out what she does for a living, so she simply avoids him. When her favourite brother found out it changed their relationship:*

"Oh my god! He was just like [in] judgement! He never talk to me anymore. Never want to see me or anything and that was it until now."

She does not have a boyfriend but has one son who has a disability. He lives away from her in a children's home. She explains:

"My son is not healthy. He has a brain problem so I have a kid and I don't have a kid."

"His father is in the States and ...he make a pledge with me that if I left him then he wouldn't take care of my kid and that's exactly what he did, because of me going out on the street and everything like that. I used to take care of him [son] very good because I love him..... and God bless me by when going out even by doing this I was always lucky to put food on the table for him, because you know they need special treatment. So I always make money to bring him to doctor....that expensive. I have to bring him to Kingston by Mona rehab. I have to charter vehicle because you know

me no really want squeeze him up [in public transport] and I have to charter vehicle...to bring him to therapy."

After a while however she was unable to cope with this and she put him in a children's home and visits him sometimes:

"I used to bring him home sometime like holidays. But because he get used to the kids there, when I bring him home, he get lonely and cried, don't want to stay....Even now he still can't even call me properly and he's thirteen. You know he just trying to walk with some irons...I was saying if I had the money I could bring him away to the States to get him look after."

Belinda says she would like to study childcare and do baby sitting for a living but admits she has not started making any plans in that direction, although she constantly says she will soon retire from sex work.

She has "a little saving...not a whole heap, but a little saving" and her dream is:

"...to have a nice house and to have a business place. I'd like to open....a nice place for kids. Even people who are trying to fight life to make two ends meet, young people who get pregnant before time, and they have a job. But you know [at] the day care centre you have to have money to leave your kids there.

I would...have a house and a place for [persons who] if you have money you bring your kids and if you don't have money you bring your kids same way (anyway)."

Apple also has big dreams and wants to help others in a similar situation:

"I have so much plans for the future. I want a car, a big house. I want to be able to have my own office. I want to be a private counsellor so I can counsel young girls. I want to open a charitable organization so that girls in my situation don't have to subject themselves to something like this. There are other means of accomplishing what they want."

Bashy has one son who is six years old and who lives with her mother. She says her mother knows that she dances for a living and:

"...she no feel too good about it, but she say me a big woman and she can't tell me what to do as long as me know what me a do."

Other family members know and although they do not agree with it, she says they simply tell her to protect herself.

Bashy's son also knows about her work:

"...the first time him hear...him come to me and him say 'Me no want you a dance no go-go. Me no like it...' And he's just 6 years old, but I can't argue with him 'cause that's how he feels. But me just tell him and make him understand that nothing not going on for me so me have to find some ways and means to survive to make him eat."

Her boyfriend knows what she does:

"That's the reason why I love him so much. 'Cause when I first came to dance he didn't like it. Up to now he didn't like it... I was wondering why he still with me, but I guess him realize that him just can't stop it. You understand, it no make no sense him tell me what to do 'cause that is what I want to do and him respect me for that."

Bashy says she feels badly about her work

"People portray dancers as the worst...So they don't take the chance to know you. They just say whatever. So that cut down you (your) chances of getting maybe a decent man."

because of her son and worries that it will be a big problem as he grows older:

"But that is why I'm not going to stay in it too long....So me just a catch what me can catch from now and then me save and then little later me go look a regular job....My plan is

to save what I can save from now and go to classes....But now that I'm saving, I have two bank accounts so when I save in the two of them, I will put his name in one of them so when he get big he can have that for himself."

Flowers has no children and no boyfriend. Her mother knows she is a sex worker. She says her mother does not care about her profession:

"All she think about [is that she] want money. Everyday - money, money, money. If me no give her money, she cuss (curse) and she no understand what me have to go through to get it."

She says because of family pressure she has not been able to do much for herself since she started working in the sex industry:

"Me no accomplish nothing 'cause this week me work [and] me get the money, me mother come - me have to give her the money; me have three sister who me have to help."

Flowers says she will quit when she saves enough money as she is:

"saving towards going to foreign (abroad)."

Blondie has three children and no boyfriend:

"...because I broke up with my boyfriend before I start dancing and since then I haven't had that type of relationship with anybody else."

She says her mother knows that she is a dancer and that while she is not happy with this she understands her choice. She says her 21 year old daughter is also not happy with her job as a dancer:

"I know she don't want me to do it, but she know is to put food on the table and help send her to school and take care of them, so she sort of have an understanding. And the two young ones I think they are too young to really understand to any degree."

Blondie says her job as a dancer has limited her chance of finding a serious partner:

"You get a nice little man. Suppose is a man who don't go club, 'cause you have some nice man out there don't really go club. And the minute they find out you're a dancer, I think it levels your chances with him back down to zero. I mean he's going to have this thing about dancers, 'cause people portray dancers as the worst...So they don't take the chance to know you. They just say whatever. So that cut down you (your) chances of getting maybe a decent man."

She says she is saving to leave sex work. She still has her childhood dream of being a nurse:

"I'm 41 now. I was considering even doing it but I don't know. Maybe by time I'm through [with] this I'll still be able to do it. But if not, maybe I can open a little business or get a bar work or in some shop or something."

"Him not alright...Me and him have difficulty, bad difficulty, over it (her dancing). More (most) time him want me to stop. Me and him go through big argument over it!... Him try to help me but at this point him can't do it fully yet."

Chocolate has four children and lives with the father of one of the children. She was a dancer for three years and says she feels badly about that time now. She has a sister who is also a dancer. She says her parents and boyfriend know what she did for a living and were strongly opposed to it:

"My mother hate it! She no like it. She right now 100 percent behind my baby father - No dancing whatsoever... Me father worse, but me father is not a father...He is the one who help me go out there (start dancing) because...me mother alone can't mind

(support) nine of we...If me did have a father to help me along with me mother, me feel like me wouldn't dance."

Her children also know what she did for a living, but three are too young to really understand. The eldest daughter is 10 years old and does not like it.

She says her boyfriend accepted her dancing then, but he does not like it. She reveals that her previous partners actually encouraged her to continue dancing as they wanted some of her earnings:

"Him accept it then, but him don't like it now. Me and him start...and after 2 months, is like no more dancing no way. And him try him best to go out there and work and look after me. Is the best man I ever get 'cause everybody else them want me to work, and then them take some of the money. Him don't want the money, none at all."

Chocolate says she is happy to be out of exotic dancing:

"I can look up to nuff (a lot of) girls and say I not dancing anymore. I just feel good. I feel light."

She is now looking for a new job and wants to study food and beverage preparation at a skills training institute. She admits however that job hunting is not easy and that her past as a dancer works against her in the job market:

"No job is out there... Right now if I could get a work to wipe out a building, clean out a little table, it no matter - so long as me get some work to help me - I'd go and do it. But still, everywhere I go to look a job and somebody know me as a dancer, them turn me down. Tell me that me used to dance [and] them don't have no work for me; [that] me to go back on the stage 'cause that is what me good at. So that no nice. Even though me stop, sometime it make me feel like me would just go back."

Strawberry is pregnant but is no longer with her child's father who was one of her clients:

"We been together for one year - live together for one year - and we broke up and me come back to work the same night... Now

we still talk to each other but we never gone back together... Because me come back a work, him figure more or less that me is a masseuse and me sell me body and me a go do it unprotected."

She says she would like to go back to school and says her plans for the future include:

"Being a nurse, having my child, ...a nice little house. Even though me no sure. Me want to move, 'cause where I'm living now, it [the house] is in my name but I don't think I would want my child to grow up in the ghetto. So me would like to throw (contribute to) NHT (National Housing Trust) so me can get a little house and go to school and get a nursing job."

Pepper remains conflicted about her job as an exotic dancer and sex worker:

"Some people were made to make shoes, some was made to do hair, some was made to do nails.....dancing is just me. And it helps with my financial life a lot...I sit in my community and I watch a lot of girls have their baby father and all of that going on and them still have it hard.....

"I go to work and then I come home. I make a little thing [money] there and you know that is me. Sometimes the way how my dancing make me feel I don't even really need a man. The only thing I want is to try make it up to Father God knowing that he ain't pleased...To me right now, this is my life as a dancer from the heart, where I don't even want to make it up with man, I want to make it up with God. Tell him say: 'Father, you know I love dance but on the other half I doing the next piece of it, selling the thing and everybody have a problem with it, [but] we have to do it."

Simone is not sure what her next steps are but she eventually wants to complete her education and become independent:

" 'Cause right now I should be in college but because I left home I have to make my own money to send myself to college now because I want to go.....I want to be independent, because from my mother died she say, 'don't make nobody take no step...' From that day I try not to take anything from people. I try to do it on my own.

My guardian now helping my sister and I just

want to make her take a break cause she helping us from we round nine [years old]. My mother died when I was around nine and she was helping my mother before I was born. So I want to help her now."

Lady Pixie has three children and they live with her parents. She also lives with her parents. While she says she has a good relationship with her parents, they do not know about her work:

"I could never let them know." Friends do not know either - "just co-workers."

While she is still working at the club, for the past four months she has stopped dancing and is a supervisor for the dancers.

She has a boyfriend whom she met on the job:

"Him not alright...Me and him have difficulty, bad difficulty, over it (her dancing). More (most) time him want me to stop. Me and him go through big argument over it! ... Him try to help me but at this point him can't do it fully yet. Him have to understand that him have things what him have to deal with before him can do that. So right now him have him kids that need supporting [and] I have my kids that need supporting....Him can't support my kids with his kids at the same time. So we always at disagreement."

The nature of her job also means that she cannot maintain a normal household:

"When me have to work nights he is at home with the kids. When me come home in the morning I am tired. Me have to sleep...The clothes to wash, this to do, so you know it going to cause a problem.....When him come back from work - me can't lie - same like how him left the place, is so him come back come see it 'cause me tired. So me and him always at problem with it."

Lady Pixie says she eventually wants to leave the club scene altogether:

"I have something in mind other than the club, but you know me need little funds more."

She admits however that she has not really sorted out her plans for the future.

I don't see why I should be here bursting my brains and spiting myself when I can make more money than this in a minute. That's what keeps me going back to massage."

"Me no really done sort out that part yet. Me just a wait on the little funds....then me can tell you me plans a next time."

Kelly plans to leave dancing in the next couple of years:

"Me have two more year and me no know if me get lucky. 'Cause you have some girl, white man come buy them house, buy them car. Me no know if my luck a go come so, but if me lucky that way...me plan to quit in two years time."

Her plans include getting "a normal work" and saving with her baby father to buy a house. Kelly, who was unable to attend school after grade nine, recognises that she needs to complete her high school education:

"Me want to go school, but me want to do some class first – Maths and English. Refresh back me brain 'cause is a long time me no do none. Then now, when me reach certain level, me want do two subject (examinations)....."

Her obligations at home and to her family, which she juggles with her job, have meant however that she cannot find the time to pursue any studies:

"Me can't manage that [going back to school] right now, cause me have to go class to learn to sign (sign language) for me daughter. You know me is the woman of the house – me have to clean and cook. By the time you quint (blink) is down in the evening, and me have to prepare to go back a work! So me no have the time."

Ann says her mother thinks she wears a white uniform and is a professional masseuse, not a sex worker. She says her choice of occupation affected her last relationship:

"You can't even tell you boyfriend what you are doing because it cost a relationship.... We have to hide from people and it is so embarrassing. My ex-boyfriend, he found out

and he was really mad. After that we break up."

For now she is continuing with sex work to support herself and her child but feels she is affected by discrimination:

"I don't think it is fair for people to discriminate against us because sometimes you can't get a job. You have a child to feed. You have a child to go to school. Some people have children and you just trying to make a living. You are trying to make a child go further in school, because it is not nice to know that your child is hungry, [and] that child can't go to school."

JLo has one daughter who lives with her father. Her parents, daughter and boyfriend do not know what she does for a living. She has only told a few friends because she wants to keep it private.

She would like to stop dancing, but has just started building a small house for herself so she cannot stop anytime soon:

"Me start a room now. It just have a kitchen, verandah and one room.... Me would hope it can get more bigger."

Her plans are vague and she says she simply hopes for the best:

"Well me plan for the future? I don't know, but as I can say anything is the best. Me don't know what's the best, but me wish for de best."

Perfect has one son. She is the only person interviewed who outlines a clear plan of action for leaving her job as a masseuse. She says she wants to leave sex work eventually:

"I'm supposed to be going back to school September. So when I finish my course I hope that I come out with my diploma. I have my cosmetology certificate. I will be going away to a small island or so to do hair

and to finish up my studies in the US.....I will quit eventually. As soon as I get my diploma I'm finished with massage business."

She has dreams of eventually going to university and becoming a medical doctor. Although she dislikes being a masseuse she says she has few regrets about choosing this line of work:

"When I look back, for instance I used to work as a receptionist for \$3500 a week...and when I go home I look - my partner (system for saving money), has to throw out of that my son has school fee. And I say, 'No! I can make more money.' I can make this in one minute. So I don't see why I should be here bursting my brains and spiting myself when I can make more money than this in a minute. That's what keeps me going back to massage."

Boy Blue says his mother, who is a minister of religion, knows what he does for a living:

"I sit her down, explain out and define my level as a young man in today Jamaica and the options that I have....not that I am not qualified academically...explaining all of those [options] including security work, she see where I am coming from."

The only relationship he mentions is one with a co-worker who also does live sex acts at the club. They were together for eight months and although "we still have feelings for each other", he explains that the work affected the relationship:

"Me watching other man having sex with her onstage and she watching me giving other girls her sugar stick...It was painful."

He however philosophises that this experience taught him that love should not be selfish as:

"For me, love is to be enjoyed. Not to be explored beyond its levels."

He does not seem to have any plans beyond sex work, and feels his body and his virility are his security for the future:

"Ok. Future...I don't consider myself rich but I know I am a young man of great wealth. Otherwise from the riches of my spirit and

my body in which I cherish greatly naturally, I have got earthly wealth...."

Peach has a two year old son who lives with her. She has ended a relationship with her boyfriend. She says her mother knows about her work in the sex industry:

"Well at first my mom was a little bit break down knowing that I'm not the type of person who talk about doing this type of job....and I have to just talk her into it and let her understand. Finally she do."

A few of her friends who do know about her work encourage her to be careful and protect herself. Her boyfriend knew and it was a problem for him:

"Well I know right now he still feel a way (badly) knowing that I'm doing this, but at this time he's not around me anymore."

She says she does not want to stop dancing "until I reach what I want" and says she is saving to make sure she has a lot of money in her accounts. She says:

"My plans for the future is to uplift myself, help myself, help my family and make things better and greater for them."

FINAL WORDS

C*hocolate*, who has managed to leave dancing, describes the harsh economic circumstances (low wages, few jobs, high cost of living) that drive many young women into sex work or back to sex work – an industry that always seems to have jobs and money available:

“Look at the expense of food and school..... You can’t be going to work and [at the] end of the week you getting \$3000. That is just school and lunch money. That cannot do nothing. That cannot help the children. That can’t even buy food to put in the house, cause everything so expensive! They need to put jobs out there that girls would be more interested in going to get a job than dancing. ‘Cause right now I walking everywhere now to look a job and everywhere full up. No jobs not out there. So this is what make girls go out there turning themselves into prostitute and dancing. No job is out there for them to do.”

Belinda, the sex worker who has worked longest in the industry, describes how women get trapped in a vicious cycle in the sex trade even when they plan to make money and leave, and provides words of advice to young women:

“When you [are] prostitute - easy come, easy goes. Because when you make...a million dollar tonight, you brush off you backside tomorrow morning, you get up going out there to make two million. And that’s what happen to more of us. You get hooked by saying you going out there to make more and more. And you don’t look and say, ‘It’s not gonna be the

same thing every day and every year things get harder and things change.’.

... If you don’t start it, whosoever hear this when it write or publish, try not to come into prostitute (prostitution)....Money - you can make money out of it. You can make house out of it, but you have to know what you doing and is not everybody lucky enough to do it and those days are gone. ... Because men come now want to pay you \$500 and girls are going for it.....So all the young girls them they need to try and find a little work to do and send back yourself to school get a good education, get yourself a nice job.”

Lady Pixie who has left dancing advises:

“The ladies them who a come in the dancing, my advice to them is wait on the time. See if them can do something else. The ones in school - just get a education, put your head to the book. Don’t put you mind on man, ‘Cause right now man a failure and if them going to sit down and depend on man, a so comes (this is how) most of them go end up in the dancing. And to me, most of the ladies them now them can’t read, them can’t write, them can’t even sign them own name. ‘Cause sometime is cheque we get pay in and sometime when me see some of the ladies them can’t even sign [for] them own pay, me eye full up of eye water (tears). Some of them are just 18, 19, 17. Them should go learn to sew, anything like that, before them even consider [dancing]. ‘Cause too much danger in the dancing world.... Too much danger in the dancing world: the biggest killer - AIDS, then we have the second killer – man.”

*“Too much danger in the dancing world:
the biggest killer - AIDS, then we have
the second killer – man.”*

RECOMMENDATION

The illegality of prostitution contributes to bad working conditions, violence, insecurity, exploitation and lack of access to government benefits. In view of all this the sex workers in these testimonies are demanding respect for their human rights and certain reforms.

Panos Caribbean is an information broker and does not campaign itself. However, Panos helps people affected by development issues to raise their perspectives and opinions in debate. We transmit below some recommendations to various audiences (government, businesses, CSOs) as articulated by the sex workers.

1) INJUSTICE, VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION

Recommendation:

Campaigns to sensitise law enforcement personnel to respect the human rights of all the people employed in clubs and massage parlours and to investigate complaints and incidences involving such workers in a professional and unbiased manner.

Chocolate says many things happen in clubs which should be investigated by the police including minors working as dancers, the secret taping of these girls having sex and sale of these tapes by club bosses. She says however that the police never listen to dancers' complaints:

"I think the police right now is a big part of the dancing organization! When you go to the police to report something as a dancer you are not recognized. Police, especially if they are men, they don't want to hear your side or they trying to get a business done (buy sex). That is the type of person them think you is. You never have a problem yet - to the police is just like rubbish. ... And I think people need to look at dancers as human beings and stop looking at them as a piece of cloth. We are human beings. We have responsibilities,

we have children, we need our money to do things. That is why we are out there."

Lady Pixie has faced violence in a club. She recalls pushing away a man who grabbed her while she was dancing. She walked away but he followed her and grabbed her again. She retaliated by throwing a drink at him. He slapped her and she kicked him with her dancing boots. A serious fight ensued:

"All hell broke loose. Security have to come, police come. When the poor man come out, the whole of him head buss (burst) up. Him have to (go) into hospital. And police say 'Come' and them carry me round at the station and them ask me 'What go on?' And me tell them. And what them say? Me first draw blood. And me tell them say him first lick (hit) me, but them say me first draw the blood. So me just pay him hospital bill. Me never did a go do it. Me did rather take the lockup, but you see when me think about it and my kids....Me say 'You know what? - make it go on, 'cause him lick me.'... Yeah. Me never like it, but me try defend myself in the best way me can and me no get no rights for it. "

2) WORKING CONDITIONS

Unsanitary conditions, hazardous working environments and restrictions on personal movements are all violations under Jamaica's labour laws. While prostitution is illegal in Jamaica, "massage" establishments and clubs, which employ many young females, are not. There is no official estimate on the number of these establishments in Jamaica. But the proliferation of newspaper advertisements for erotic masseuses and dancers suggests that increasing numbers of Jamaicans are involved as operators and employees.

Recommendations:

- A. The Ministry of Labour should pay close attention to this trend and investigate

the complaints of all workers employed in these establishments.

- B. Clubs and places that publicly advertise personal services such as “massages” should be regularly assessed to see if they are complying with Jamaica’s public health policies and laws.

Lady Pixie:

“You have a big room like a open hallway... and then you have the bed them [arranged from] corner to corner, left right and centre. Everybody sleep in the one room. Everybody breathe the same air. It wasn’t a nice experience because is not...something I was used to then...”

Simone:

“I went to this one in Constant Spring (in Kingston).....the place is a nice home, ... but it’s full of cockroach and things like that. The kitchen, they need to just clean it up and ...fix the roof and strong up them security problems so we don’t get robbed.”

Ann:

“You can’t leave out of the building without their permission. You have to walk naked, you have to do everything that them tell you. Everything them say you just have to do it, and if you don’t, they charge you for it. ...You can’t normally go out as usual. You have to stay in. You can’t talk to anybody. If your child is sick you have to stay there. You can’t go home.”

3) DRUG USAGE IN CLUBS

Recommendation:

A targeted health campaign for workers in massage parlours and clubs about dangers of drug usage.

Kelly:

“Me used to [take drugs] and me stop, ‘cause it make me behave bad and if me take it and me no make no money me go home and me curse and get ignorant. And it not good for me in front of me children them and them see me a go on like a mad woman. And one time it make me climb the fence down the gully and want to jump in the gully.....You never know say it make a girl jump through a window?”

4) ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

Recommendation:

Campaign to get persons employed as masseuses and dancers registered for NIS and NHT, perhaps as self-employed persons.

Chocolate:

“Yes, if [they] legalising it, then we going to pay tax. ‘Cause if you pay tax then Housing Trust (the National Housing Trust) can get money. Nuff (a lot of) little things, opportunity [can come] out of it of course.”

Blondie:

“...if we are legalise then we would be able to pay NIS (the National Insurance Scheme), NHT (the National Housing Trust) and those stuff, so further down the line we can get some benefit.”

Footnotes:

1. National HIV/STI Unit of the Ministry of Health indicated that “the need to improve access to health care both for education and treatment indicate the need for ongoing interventions beyond a campaign.”
2. In 2008 the Sex Workers Association of Jamaica (SWAJ) was formed to be “the voice and advocate for sex workers in Jamaica including men who have sex with men (MSMs), trans-gendered and disabled sex workers.” SWAJ could be used to communicate with Jamaican sex workers and initiate reforms to benefit people involved in sex work. SWAJ may be contacted through the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) offices in Kingston, St. Ann and Montego Bay.

GLOSSARY

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
All Age School	Secondary school which ends at grade nine in the Jamaican public school system
Baby father	Popular name for the father of a woman's child who may or may not be her present partner
Bootie	Boots which are often a part of the costume worn by exotic dancers during their performances
Ecstasy	Street name for MDMA (3, 4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine), a synthetic, psychoactive drug. MDMA is an illegal drug that acts as both a stimulant and psychedelic, producing an energizing effect, as well as distortions in time and perception and enhanced enjoyment from tactile experiences. (Information taken from the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse Fact Sheet on MDMA)
HEART	Human Employment and Resource Training agency – the national training agency in Jamaica, which is funded by contributions from employers and offers training in a variety of skill and vocational areas
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
JAS	Jamaica AIDS Support for Life. An HIV/AIDS service NGO.
NIS	National Insurance Scheme - is a compulsory contributory funded social security scheme in Jamaica, which offers financial protection to the worker and his family against loss of income arising from injury on job, incapacity, retirement, and death of the insured
NHT	National Housing Trust - a statutory agency which provides low interest loans for housing and which is funded by compulsory contributions from employees, employers and self-employed persons
Partner	A popular form of savings system in Jamaica is the "Partner", which is called by many different names elsewhere in the Caribbean and is also found in many other parts of the world. A Partner is basically a partnership among people to save collectively. The partners contribute a regular sum on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Each member of the partner, on a consecutive basis receives the total amount contributed by the partners over that period.
Sex Work	The preferred term to refer to the sale of sexual services or the exchange of sexual services for money. The terms commercial sex or sex work are preferable to the value-laden term "prostitution."
Transactional Sex	Sexual services in exchange for material gain or favour. Persons engaged in transactional sex do not necessarily identify themselves as sex workers and may be having sex in exchange for a variety of things or services including food, rent, clothing, luxury items, school fees or even personal security.
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS which brings together the efforts and resources of ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response to help the world prevent new HIV infections, care for people living with HIV, and mitigate the impact of the epidemic

Panos Global AIDS Programme's (GAP) Mission:

Enable developing countries to shape a global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic by stimulating informed public and policy debate and amplifying marginalised voices - particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS - through media and communication initiatives.

Panos Caribbean's Mission:

Amplify the voices of the poor and the marginalised through the media and ensure their inclusion in public and policy debate, in order to enable Caribbean people to communicate their own development agendas.

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