

REPORT BACK: SEX WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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THANK YOU TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED

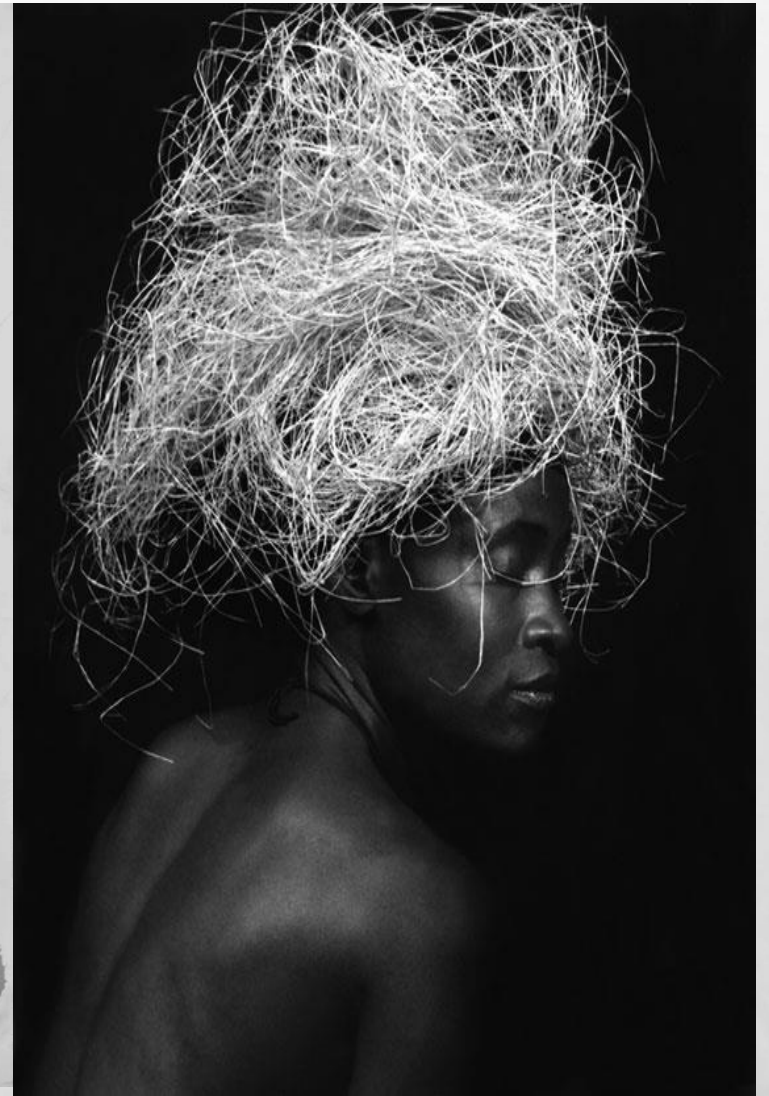
- FOR SHARING YOUR STORIES IN FOCUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS.
- WE HEARD INSPIRATIONAL STORIES OF BRAVERY, COURAGE, STRENGTH AND RESILIENCY TO ABUSE.
- THE WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED SAID THAT THE PROCESS HAD BEEN REWARDING, AND THAT IT HAD BEEN GOOD TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS WHO HAD GONE THROUGH SIMILAR THINGS.
 - IN THIS WAY, THEY FILLED AN ACTIVIST ROLE.

WHEN SEX WORKERS ARE IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS, WHAT ARE THESE RELATIONSHIPS LIKE?

- CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE PARTNERS: CONTROLLING, JEALOUS (OF THE MEN THEY MEET IN SEX WORK), POSSESSIVE, BELIEVE THEY HAVE A SEX RIGHT OVER THEIR PARTNERS' BODIES (AS THEY ARE SEX WORKERS), DOUBLE STANDARDS IN TERMS OF AMOUNT OF SEXUAL PARTNERS, PATRIARCHAL IDEAS OF GENDER ROLES, DRUG AND ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY/ ABUSE.
- CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSE: PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, VERBAL, EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, FINANCIAL, PHYSICAL CONTAINMENT AND ISOLATION FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS, FORCING THE WOMAN TO DO SEX WORK FOR MONEY, BECOMING VIOLENT WHEN THE WOMAN STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES.
- WOMEN SPOKE ABOUT TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS: MEN LINKED TO MONEY AND WOMEN FINDING POWER THROUGH SEXUALITY (BUT THIS IS THEIR ONLY POWER)

WHEN SEX WORKERS ARE IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS, WHAT ARE THESE RELATIONSHIPS LIKE?

- SEX WORK COMPLICATES RELATIONSHIPS: ABUSE IS LINKED TO THE FACT THAT MEN ARE UNHAPPY ABOUT THEIR SEX WORK/ SUSPECT THAT THEY DO SEX WORK (STIGMA AROUND SEX WORK INFLUENCES MEN'S VIEWS OF THEM), OR MEN ARE WITH THEM BECAUSE THEY EARN MONEY FROM SEX WORK
- WOMEN CAST MALE LACK OF SUPPORT AS ABUSIVE → RELYING ON HER TO SUPPORT HIM AND THEIR CHILDREN WAS SEEN AS A FORM OF ABUSE
- WOMEN OFTEN OCCUPIED A PASSIVE ROLE TO MINIMIZE ABUSE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TALKED ABOUT THEMSELVES IN AN EMPOWERING, AGENTIC WAY.



PROBLEM AREAS IDENTIFIED:

- LINKED TO POVERTY:
 - MEN DON'T SUPPORT THEM (EG: PAY CHILD SUPPORT).
 - WOMEN ENTER SEX WORK DUE TO FINANCIAL NEED (MANY DO SEX WORK FOR THEIR CHILDREN).
- SOCIAL STIGMA AROUND SEX WORK AFFECTS THEIR RELATIONSHIPS:
 - SOME WOMEN INTERNALISED THIS STIGMA AND VIEWED THEMSELVES AS DESERVING OF PUNISHMENT AND ABUSE.
 - ABUSE WAS INTENSIFIED BECAUSE OF THEIR STATUS AS A SEX WORKER:
 - DEROGATORY VERBAL ABUSE.
 - SEXUAL ABUSE.
 - ABUSE WAS SITUATED IN A BROADER CONTEXT OF STIGMA – ABUSED BY PARTNERS BUT ALSO BY SOCIETY AS A WHOLE (EG: MALE PARTNERS' FAMILIES, NEIGHBOURS, SUPERMARKETS).

LEGALIZATION:

- ISSUES OF LEGALIZATION LINKED TO ISSUES OF STIGMA:
 - LEGALIZATION COULD DECREASE STIGMA FROM PARTNERS AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.
- OUR PROJECT DIDN'T REVEAL REASONS FOR OR AGAINST LEGALIZATION:
 - IN SOME SENSES, SEX WORK WAS AN EMPOWERING WAY FOR WOMEN TO LEAVE IPV BY EARNING THEIR OWN MONEY WITHOUT RELYING ON A MAN.
 - HOWEVER, MANY WOMEN MENTIONED THAT THEY WOULD PREFER OTHER OPTIONS, AND THAT SEX WORK IS DEGRADING AND DIFFICULT (CLIENT ABUSE, HIV).
 - THERE WAS CONFLICT IN THE TALK ABOUT WHETHER IT WAS EMPOWERING OR VICTIMISING.

SUGGESTIONS

- NEED TO HAVE THE AWARENESS THAT HAVING A RELATIONSHIP AS A SEX WORKER MIGHT BE DIFFICULT – DUE TO PROBLEMS OF STIGMA AND TRUST.
- WHEN GETTING INTO NEW RELATIONSHIPS, SHOULD BE CAREFUL:
 - TO BE HONEST ABOUT THEIR SEX WORK.
 - THAT THE MAN RESPECTS THEIR STATUS AS A SEX WORKER.
 - THAT THE MAN WILL NOT MANIPULATE THEIR SEX WORK FOR HIS OWN FINANCIAL BENEFIT.
 - TO SEE IF THE MAN HAS CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSE AND VIOLENCE
 - TO HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE FINANCES WILL WORK IN THE RELATIONSHIP.

SUGGESTIONS

- WHEN WOMEN FIND THEMSELVES IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS:
 - BE AWARE THAT THEY HAVE RESOURCES AND TO DRAW UP A SAFETY PLAN
 - TO KNOW THAT IN MOST CASES, PARTNERS WILL NOT CHANGE UNLESS THEY HAVE COUNSELLING OR DEMONSTRATE A REAL WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE. IT IS BETTER TO GET OUT OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP THAN TO HOPE FOR CHANGE.
 - NB NOT TO FEEL CONCERNED ABOUT TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT THE ABUSE. MANY WOMEN EXPERIENCE IT AND IT IS BRAVE TO BREAK THE SILENCE.
- IMPORTANT TO GET ECONOMIC SUPPORT WHEN LEAVING ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS (EG: LEGAL AID FOR CHILD MAINTENANCE)

SEX WORKERS' IDENTITY:

- SOMETIMES SAW THEMSELVES AS OUTCASTS AND LOSERS (PART OF STIGMA AROUND SEX WORK AND REJECTION FROM OTHERS)
- NEW IDENTITY AND REDEFINITION: A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION:
 - ALTHOUGH THEY HAD HAD LOW SELF-ESTEEM INITIALLY, MANY WOMEN NOW SAW THEMSELVES AS SOCIAL ACTIVISTS.
 - STRONG, EMPOWERED WOMEN WHO HAVE LEARNT FROM DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES AND WANT TO USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO HELP OTHER WOMEN.
 - STRONG IDENTITY OF 'WE AS WOMEN'.
- IDENTITY AS MOTHER (VS. PARTNER)
- PLEASING AND SUBMISSIVE WIFE

SWEAT'S HELPFUL ROLE

- MANY WOMEN VIEWED THEMSELVES AS HAVING BEEN PASSIVE VICTIMS OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS, BUT TALKED ABOUT THE MANY CHANGES THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THEMSELVES THROUGH AFFILIATION WITH SWEAT.
- EMPLOYEES AT SWEAT ENABLED WOMEN TO LEAVE THEIR ABUSIVE PARTNERS.
 - STRONG SURVIVOR IDENTITY. DID NOT BLAME THEMSELVES FOR THE ABUSE – 'I AM NOT WRONG, I AM STRONG'. MADE PEACE WITH THEIR VIOLENT PAST.

SWEAT'S HELPFUL ROLE

- WOMEN VALUED AND RESPECTED THEIR OWN IDENTITIES, AND WANTED OTHER PEOPLE TO DO THE SAME.
- HAD UNDERGONE A PROCESS OF GROWTH AND SELF ACCEPTANCE – TODAY THEY ARE ABLE TO RECLAIM THEIR STORIES OF ABUSE BY REPOSITIONING THEMSELVES AS SURVIVORS INSTEAD OF VICTIMS.
- WOMEN ALSO HAD AN EMPOWERED UNDERSTANDING OF GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS.

