



Exiting Commercial Sex Work: a Case of Adolescent Street Girls of the Harare Central Business District in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper interrogates narratives of adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, exiting commercial sex work. A qualitative research methodology punctuated by street ethnography was adopted to gather data for the paper. A feminist social work approach and empowerment theory were used to have a deeper understanding of the lives of these children. Research findings suggest that there were very few cases where adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District were successfully exiting transactional sex. There were varied and multiple reasons why they could not successfully exit commercial sex work. Some of them included addiction on commercial sex work, limited survival options outside commercial sex work, peer pressure, street subculture, and substance abuse. The paper concludes by advocating and lobbying key stakeholders such as the Government of Zimbabwe to improve the lives of children in street situations through provision of social protection mechanisms.

Keywords Adolescent · Commercial sex work · Empowerment · Feminist social work

Introduction and Background

The article problematises the reasons why exiting commercial sex work is difficult among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Exiting commercial sex work is a complex process (Baker et al., 2010). Children in street situations adopt various strategies for survival given their constraining environments (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014; Grugel & Ferreira, 2012). Commercial sex work is one of the survival strategies of street girls the world over (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014; Bhattacharya & Nair, 2014; Chikoko, 2014, 2017; Mhizha, 2010; Mtonga, 2011; Tyler, 2009; Tyler et al., 2011). Scholars such as Aptekar and Stoecklin (2014) observed that one in every three homeless girls in American cities was trading in sex for survival. The street girls of Durban South Africa engage in commercial sex work for survival (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). In Lukasa, Zambia, some street girls survive through selling sex to their fellow street boys and other people (Mtonga, 2011). Similarly in Harare, Zimbabwe, some of

the streets girls also raised money for buying basic needs such as food, clothes, and medical care through selling sex (Chikoko, 2014, 2017; Mhizha, 2010; Ruparanganda, 2008; Wakatama, 2007).

Women who exchange sex for money or goods also known as female sex workers are at an increased risk of experiencing violence and other negative health consequences (Carlson et al., 2012). Selling sex among the street girls is also a very risky behaviour (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014). Some of them succumb to HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted disease, unwanted pregnancies, among others (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014; Chikoko, 2014, 2017; Ruparanganda, 2008; Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003a; Wakatama, 2007).

There is limited academic literature interrogating the reasons why the adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, were failing to exit commercial sex work. For example, previous studies by Bourdillon (1991, 1994a, b, 2000, 2009), Mella (2012), Mhizha (2010, 2014, 2015), Chikoko (2014, 2017), Ruparanganda (2008), Wakatama (2007), Chirwa & Wakatama, (2000), Rurevo & Bourdillon, (2003a, b), Chirwa (2007), Dube (1997, 1999), Manjengwa et al. (2016), and Chikoko et al. (2020) were limited in articulating the reasons why the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe,

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were facing hurdles in exiting commercial sex work. Therefore, there is a need for an urgent updated study that provides insights on the reasons why the adolescent street girls were finding it difficult to exit commercial sex.

Conceptual Framework

The paper is conceptualised from two complementary theoretical bases which are the feminist social work approach and empowerment theory. The two theoretical bases are very relevant to understanding and analysing contemporary social work issues such as exiting commercial sex work among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe.

The Feminist Social Work Approach

The feminist approach is based on two assumptions (Muridzo, 2014). Muridzo (2014: 52) observed that the two assumptions are, “the role of power relations and the abuse of responsibility in initiating and maintain sexual abuse”. The feminist approach explains the men’s power within society and also encompassing the unequal power dynamics between men and women (Muridzo, 2014). Within the feminist approach, women and girls are socialised to be subservient to men at the same time men should dominate in all spheres of life (Muridzo, 2014). The feminist approach seeks to challenge the subordinate social and legal position of females in relation to males in society and to see how women’s position can be improved (Kyokunzire, 2006). Utilising the feminist approach, child sexual abuse such as commercial sex work is a form of violence and exploitation by men over vulnerable members of society such as women and girls (Gumbo, 1993). Feminist scholarships suggest that patriarchal systems result in the subordinate opportunity power and status of women (Nicholas, 2010). Prostitution is largely a phenomenon built on these structural and cultural conditions of gender inequality (Nicholas, 2010). As a result of fewer economic opportunities, more women and girls are often likely to be sexually objectified (Nicholas, 2010). Within the feminist approach, the perpetrator of abuse is responsible for the violation or exploitation (Muridzo, 2014). Another key characteristic of the feminist approach is that the perpetrator views the survivor or victim of abuse as objects (Muridzo, 2014).

Feminist social work is greatly influenced by the various perspectives of feminism, socialism, Marxism and liberalism, among others (White, 2006). Feminist social work has a number of characteristics (Dominelli, 2002). Some of them include recognising the diversity of women, placing values women’s strengths, considering women as social actors,

capable of making decisions for themselves in all aspects of their lives, and providing platforms where women can voice their needs and proffer solutions to problems (Dominelli, 2002).

White (2006) also adds some of the key characteristics of feminist social work. Some of them include looking for collective solutions to individual problems, recognising that women’s individual problems have social causes and addressing both levels in each intervention, and recognition of the interdependence nature of human relations. In addition, some of the tenets of the feminist social work include redefining private woes as public issues and ensuring that women’s needs are addressed within the context of their being seen as a whole human being in which each area of life interacts with the others (White, 2006).

Commercial sex work as a form of child sexual abuse is as a result of patriarchal socialisations, where the survivor or victim bears the effects of gender oppression (Muridzo, 2014). The reasons why the adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, fail to exit commercial sex work are in sharp contrasts of the key tenets of feminist social work. For example, the institutions and structures that address the needs and solutions of the street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, are limited. It demonstrates that the Zimbabwean society does not provide platforms of listening to the voices of the street girls of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, who are clamouring to exit commercial sex work. In other words, the street girls of the Harare Central Business District who are failing to exit commercial sex work are not active social actors.

The Empowerment Theory

The word empowerment has been defined by Adams (2003: 08) as “the means by which individuals, groups, and communities become able to take control of their circumstances to achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives”. The empowerment theory has also been defined by Adams (2003: 08) as, “concerned with how people may gain collective control over their lives so as to achieve their interests as a group and a method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it”.

Scholars such as Turner & Maschi, (2015) observed that empowerment is very important as social workers have ethical responsibilities to respect and promote client’s right to self-determination and pursuit of life purpose and goals. Empowerment is rationalistic in the sense that it is linked with humanistic theory and existential theory and practice (Adams, 2003). It emphasises self-knowledge, accepting that people can control their own lives by rational and cognitive

means (Adams, 2003). In addition, social workers have an ethical responsibility to increase choices and opportunities for community and collective and political empowerment especially among vulnerable individuals and groups (Turner & Maschi, 2015).

The empowerment is also explained in the context that the environment can be changed directly in favour of the service user (Adams, 2003). Ironically, for example, the social environment in the name of structures and institutions on the streets of the Harare Central Business District has not been flexible enough to be changed in favour of the girls who are intending to exit commercial sex work. The empowerment theory includes a wide range of principles such as social justice, human rights, equality, inclusivity, and understanding of oppression (Turner & Maschi, 2015).

Utilising the empowerment theory, the reasons why the adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, are failing to exit commercial sex work demonstrate that they are not empowered to control their own lives by rational and cognitive means. It illustrates that the behaviours of the adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District practising commercial sex work are vulnerable members of society. The commercial sex work among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District is at variance with the key principles of the empowerment theory such as human rights, social justice, and equality.

Research Methodology

The purposive sampling was used to select or identify sixteen (16) participants for the study. The research participants were aged between 14 and 18 years. As a result of purposive sampling, the researcher identified and targeted participants who were known to be deviant in terms of sexual behaviours and also abusing substances. Through purposive sampling, it was easier to select the participants who were considered to be hard to reach ones. Scholars such as Babbie and Mouton (2012) and Neuman (2011) observed that purposive sampling is suitable when working with difficult or vulnerable populations such as street children and street-based sex workers. Through purposive sampling, it becomes easy to identify and recruit the participants in a study given that street children are mobile and difficult to reach (Bhattacharya & Nair, 2014). Similarly, Mhizha (2010, 2014) also used purposive sampling on his studies with the street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe.

A number of the qualitative data collection techniques such as life history interviews, in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and semi-participant observation methods were adopted to collect the data for this study. For example, the researcher visited the adolescent street girls in their

“bases¹” where the hideout where they were soliciting and having sex with *mhene*.² Through convenience sampling, five (5) key informants were selected for the study. Some of the key informants included social workers employed by the Department of Social Development under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. Some of the social workers were employed by the various drop-in centres providing support to street children of the Harare Central Business District. One of the key informants for the study was a street-based vendor selling substances to the street children. The adolescent street boys also formed part of the key informants for the study. The fifth key informant was a traditional healer, a spiritualist, who has vast experiences on African or Zimbabwean spirituality issues. The key informants had in-depth knowledge and understanding of the lives of the adolescent street girls who were engaged in commercial sex work.

Similarly, Bell (2011) used life history interviews, in-depth interviews when researching about sexual lives of young people in rural Uganda. The research findings of this paper were part of the author’s doctoral field work which involved street ethnography spanning more than twelve months.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The data analysis focused on themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. Some of the themes and subthemes that emerged included substance abuse, peer pressure, street subculture, spirituality-related factors, limited survival options, strained family relations, stigma and discrimination, and criminal records. Scholars such as Farmer et al. (2016), Mhizha (2010, 2014, 2015); Chikoko (2014, 2017), and Rugaranganda (2008) used thematic content analysis in their studies with street children.

Neuman (2011) defines ethical considerations as what is or not legitimate to do or what is “moral” when conducting research. The following ethical considerations were observed when conducting this research: informed consent, confidentiality, benevolence, among others. In the case of the street children of the Harare Central Business District, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent. In addition, the researcher received informed consent from the Department of Social Development. The Department of Social Development is the custodians of all children in Zimbabwe, particularly those in street situations in line with the Children’s Act (5.06). The researcher also ensured confidentiality by using alphabetical letters instead of writing the names of the street children on data gathering tools.

The study complied with the University of Zimbabwe’s ethical requirements. The study was also cleared by the

¹ Bases are places where the street girls relax and stay.

² Mhene refers to clients.

Department of Social Development under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

Research Findings

Limited Survival Options Outside Commercial Sex Work

The research findings suggest that some of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District who engage in commercial sex work were hesitant to leave the sexual behaviour because of limited survival options. During informal conversations, one of the girls had this to say:

How will I survive if I leave commercial sex work in this country? We live in a country where getting a job is extremely difficult. There is no any other job that I am good at. I am not educated. I do not possess any skill at all.

Another participant had this to say:

As for me I survive through selling sex on the streets. I have my own child, who I look after through commercial sex work. I once tried surviving through street vending but it was extremely hard. My selling stuff was confiscated by the law enforcement agents. I lost confidence in street-based vending and started selling sex on the streets.

During key informant interviews, one of the social workers based at a local drop-in centre also confirmed that some of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District were surviving through street-based commercial sex work. She added that the girls had limited survival options to the extent that it was difficult for them to exit street-based prostitution. The social worker confirmed that there was easy money through street-based prostitution to the extent that the adolescent could not venture in other livelihood opportunities such as street-based vending which were considered to be more difficult.

Substance Abuse

Evidence from fieldwork suggests that the addiction to substance abuse is one of the reasons why it is difficult for the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District to exit commercial sex work. During informal conversations, one of the adolescent girls had this to say:

I can no longer be able to survive without abusing substances. Substances assist me to provide confi-

dence to solicit for mhene.³ If I do not have money for substances such as chamba⁴ I do prostitution to raise money for chamba.⁵ Sometimes I some of the Jazmen⁶ in town provide me with substances in exchange for sex.

During in-depth interviews, one of the adolescent girls indicated that it was extremely difficult for them to exit commercial sex work. She added that some of the street girls who were involved in commercial sex work were also addicted to substances. Additionally, she revealed that as a result of addiction to substance abuse it was difficult for the street girl to exit commercial sex work.

One of the Jazmen selling substances on the streets of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, confirmed that it was very difficult for the adolescent girls to exit prostitution because of substance abuse. He added that he sometimes enters into deals or arrangements with adolescent girls where he gives them *chamba* for free in exchange for sex.

Strained Family Relations

Research findings suggest that the strained family relations are one of the reasons why adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District find it difficult to exit commercial sex work. During informal conversations, one of the adolescent street girls had this to say:

I doubt that my relatives are interested to see me. There is no one who is interested to see me. They know that I stay on the streets where I am selling sex. I brought a lot of shame to them. My parents are dead. I do not have any one to look up to for support. I look after myself through selling sex.

Another participant said the following:

After the death of my parents, things have not gone well for me. There were disputes emanating from the distribution of my late parent's estate. There were disputes among our extended family members. My parents had properties in Marlborough, Chitungwiza, Mbare among others.

Another participant said this:

I was doing ordinary level at one of the high schools in Mbare. I fell in love with some of the rank marshals⁷ in town. I eloped and my family members were so dis-

³ Mhene is a client.

⁴ Chamba is cannabis.

⁵ Chamba is cannabis.

⁶ Jazmen are the people selling substances on the streets.

⁷ Rank marshals are people involved in touting.

appointed with me to the extent that I ran away from home and started staying on the streets of the Harare Central Business District, where I am selling sex for survival.

One of the social workers based at the local drop-in centre also confirmed that some of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District were finding it difficult to quit commercial sex work because of strained family relations. She added that some adolescents had strained relations as they brought shame to their families through staying on the streets and also selling sex. The social worker indicated that some of the family relations were strained due as a result of disputes during the estate distribution of their late parents.

Criminal-Related Behaviours

Evidence from fieldwork suggests that some of the adolescent street girls found it difficult to exit prostitution because of criminal-related behaviours. Some of the criminal-related behaviours include stealing and misuse of school fees. During informal conversations, she had the following:

Before I left home for the streets of the Harare Central Business District, I stole some money from our school. I was learning at a local boarding school in Ruwa area. I connived with some of the school boys and stole some large sums of money from school safe. When the school authorities reported the matter to the Zimbabwe Republic Police I ran away and disappeared on the streets of Harare Central Business District.

Another participant had this to say:

I was learning at one of the schools in Highfields high density suburb. I was given money for school fees and registration fees for ordinary level in 2017. I squandered the money. I later on realised that this would create problems for me and I came and stay on the streets of Harare Central Business District. For me to survive on the streets, engaged in commercial sex work. If I quit commercial sex work and go back home, I will be in trouble for the crimes that I committed. I would rather stay here on the streets for the rest of my life.

One of the social workers at the drop-in centre also confirmed that some of the street girls found it difficult to exit or quit commercial sex work as a result of criminal records. He added that some of the adolescent girls were surviving on selling sex after committing various crimes in their family homes. Some of the crimes included misuse of school fees, stealing, and other delinquency-related behaviours. The social worker added that it is therefore extremely difficult for such girls to quit or exit commercial sex work and return to

their family homes. He revealed that such family members would be reluctant to accept them back home.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure was cited as one of the reasons which made adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District difficult to quit commercial sex work. During life history interviews, one of the adolescent street girls had this to say:

My friends do not allow me to quit prostitution. One of the days, when I tried quitting, they convinced me not to quit. They did a lot of strategies to make my life miserable outside prostitution. For example, refusing to play with me. Refusing to share food and other stuffs with me. As a result of that I almost died of hunger one of the days. I later on joined them in the street-based sex work.

Another participant had this to say:

How can I exit commercial sex work, when I am still part of the group of girls selling sex on the streets of Harare Central Business District? It is very tough for me to leave or exit prostitution. It is part of our lives.

One of the social workers employed at the drop-in centre also confirmed that peer pressure was one of the reasons why quitting or exiting commercial sex work was very difficult for some of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. She had that the majority of the street children on the streets of the Harare Central Business District relied so much on support for survival from their peers.

Street Subculture

Research findings suggest that conformity to the street subculture is one of the reasons why it is very difficult for the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District to exit commercial sex work. During informal conversations, one of the adolescent street girls had this to say:

The street life has its own culture. Prostitution and abuse of substances are part of street life. You cannot make on the streets of Harare Central Business District if you abandon commercial sex work, abuse of substances among others. We conform to the dictates of the street sub culture. If you do not conform you become an outcast and life will be tough for you.

Another participant had this to say:

We have our own culture which define, the street life. As part of it we initiate one another in selling sex, abusing substances, violence among other delinquent

behaviours. As a result of the street sub culture, it is very difficult to quit commercial sex work and substance abuse among others.

One of the adolescent street boys also confirmed that street subculture has a lot of influence on the behaviours of the girls of the Harare Central Business District. He added that there are rules and regulations that define street subculture. The adolescent street boy also revealed that as part of the street subculture, the street children of Harare central Business District engage in various delinquent behaviours such as selling sex and abusing substances such as cannabis and blon cleer.⁸ He added that because of street subculture it is extremely difficult for someone initiated into such behaviours to exit or quit.

Stigma and Shame

Stigma and shame were some of the reasons cited as why it was difficult for exiting commercial sex work among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. During in-depth interviews, one of the adolescent street girls had this to say:

Given that the whole world is aware that I stay on the streets of Harare Central Business District as a mugunduru,⁹ who sells sex, I am stigmatised and shameful to everyone. I would rather continue to stay on the streets, selling sex rather than to quit.

Another participant said the following:

I cannot quit selling sex on the streets. I am stigmatised as a sex worker. As sex workers were are called poto dzemaratsa.¹⁰ If I quit sex work, how can I survive? Who can marry poto dzemarasta¹¹ like me?

One of the adolescent street boys of the Harare Central Business District also confirmed that the adolescent street girls were finding it difficult to quit commercial sex work as a result of feeling of stigma and shame. He added that as a result of negative feelings some of the adolescent girls had psychosocial challenges such as lack of self-confidence.

Spirituality-Related Factors (Shavi Rechihure)

Evidence from fieldwork suggests that spirituality-related factors such as *shavi rechihure*¹² was cited as one of the reasons why it becomes difficult for the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District to quit or exit commercial sex work. During life history interviews, one of the adolescent street girls revealed the following:

I am possessed with a spirit that makes me to engage in commercial sex work. In our family we get possessed with that spirit. I cannot quit commercial sex work easily. I cannot make it in life outside commercial sex work.

One of the traditional healers also confirmed that some of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe, were possessed with spirits that are associated with commercial sex work. She added that as a result of the spiritual possession, it was very difficult for them to have normal lives, where they can quit or exit street-based commercial sex work. The traditional healer also explained that such spiritual possession could be as a result of a curse in a family among others. She added that such families should be cleansed from such spiritual possession through a ritual process.

Discussion

The research findings suggest that there are a number of reasons why it is very difficult for quitting or exiting commercial sex work among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. The reasons are multiple and varied. Some of the reasons included peer pressure, street subculture, limited survival options outside commercial sex work, stigma and shame, spirituality-related factors, strained family relations, and criminal records. Utilising the feminist social work approach, the reasons of failing to quit or exit commercial sex work among the adolescent girls of the Harare Central Business District illustrate the powerlessness and the vulnerabilities of such children. Commercial sex work as a form of child sexual abuse is as a result of patriarchal socialisations, where the survivor or victim bears the effects of gender oppression. The link between sex work and socio-economic deprivation is about the unequal power dynamics between the adolescent girls or youth on the streets and the men or males who bought sex (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). The commercial sex work

⁸ Blon cleer is cough syrup.

⁹ Mugunduru means a street child.

¹⁰ Poto dzemarasta means street-based sex workers.

¹¹ Poto dzemarasta means street-based sex workers.

¹² Shavi rechihure is a spiritual possession that makes or encourages one to engage in prostitution.

is closely linked with male's possession of females (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014).

In line with the empowerment theory, the reasons why they fail to exit commercial sex work demonstrate that the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District are vulnerable and powerless. The adolescent girls are powerless as men exercised control over them through economic resources. The social environment in the name of institutions and structures does not provide empowerment of these vulnerable girls. The behaviours of the girls are at variance with some of the key tenets of the empowerment theory such as social justice, equality, and human rights.

As highlighted above, limited survival options is one of the reasons why adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District continue to engage in commercial sex work. Many of the adolescent street girls who are selling sex have limited survival options. They do not possess skills that they can use to generate income for survival. Some of them are not educated enough to get a job for survival as they are school dropouts. Therefore, in their circumstances, selling sex is one of the only viable options for them. The situation of the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District trading in commercial sex work is severely affected by the deepening poverty levels in Zimbabwe because of the decaying socio-economic and political environment. The research findings are similar with experiences of street girls of Durban, South Africa, who found it difficult to exit commercial sex work because they lacked education, limited access to income, lacked national identity cards, and did not have access to formal jobs (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). In similar studies in Kampala, Uganda, street-based sex workers relied so much on commercial sex work (Kyokunzire, 2006). Selling sex was the only available option for women who were coping with unemployment, poverty, failed marriages, and with family obligations in circumstances where there were limited social protection programmes (Kyokunzire, 2006). Rather, sex work provided significant income or earning as compared with other forms of unskilled labour as most of the women were uneducated (Kyokunzire, 2006).

Evidence from fieldwork suggests that street subculture is another reason why it is difficult to exit prostitution among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. The street subculture has its own rules and regulations. Failure to conform to the rules and regulations of the street subculture normally invites punishments such as isolation. As part of the street subculture, the adolescent street girls are supposed to engage in commercial sex work to supplement their earnings. They sell sex to the fellow street boys in exchange for food or protection. The stronger or big boys tend to have several and most beautiful girls. The adolescent street girls also sell sex to outsiders. Similarly in Lima, Peru, street subculture also severely affects girls who intend to exit commercial sex work (Lieten & Strehl, 2015). In Lima, Peru,

as part of the street subculture, adolescent girls are expected to engage in commercial sex work so as to raise money for survival (Lieten & Strehl, 2015). The adolescent girls who fail to conform to rules and regulations of the street subculture are punished by their colleagues and the punishment comes in different forms such as isolation (Lieten & Strehl, 2015).

The study also established that addiction to substance abuse is another reason why it is difficult to exit commercial sex work among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. As a result of the addiction to substance abuse, the adolescent girls found it difficult to survive without selling sex on the streets. They raised money to buy psychoactive substances such as cannabis through selling sex on the streets of Harare Central Business District. There are also cases where the adolescent girls exchange substances such as cannabis for sex. In Lima, Peru, most of the adolescent street girls who were involved in commercial sex work were addicted to substance abuse (Lieten & Strehl, 2015). In order for the adolescent street girls of Lima, Peru, to raise money for buying substances such as cocaine and marijuana, they were selling sex among others (Lieten & Strehl, 2015).

Conclusion

As highlighted above, there are varied and multiple reasons why it is difficult to exit commercial sex work for the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District. Some of the reasons include strained family relations, limited survival options outside commercial sex work, street subculture, criminal records, stigma and discrimination, substance abuse, and peer pressure. Utilising the empowerment theory, the reasons demonstrate that the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District are vulnerable and powerless. The social environment in the name of institutions and structures does not provide empowerment of these vulnerable girls. The behaviours of the girls are at variance with some of the key tenets of the empowerment theory such as social justice, equality, and human rights. In addition, using the feminist social work approach, the reasons of failing to quit or exit commercial sex work among the adolescent girls of the Harare Central Business District illustrate the powerlessness and the vulnerabilities of such children. Commercial sex work as a form of child sexual abuse is as a result of patriarchal socialisations, where the survivor or victim bears the effects of gender oppression.

Recommendations

The article recommends have a number of recommendations for reducing risky sexual behaviours among the adolescent street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Some of them include the following:

- Law reform such as aligning the Children's Act (506) with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, (1999). For example, there are discrepancies on the definition of a child between the Children's Act (506) and the UNCRC, (1989) and the ACRWC, (1999),
- There is a need to improve access of social protection programmes targeting adolescent street girls who are involved in commercial sex work. Some of the social protection mechanisms could include the social cash transfer programme and the Medical Treatment Orders,
- There is a need to implement income-generating programmes targeting adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District. Some of the income-generating projects could include boasting about their vending activities or projects,
- The City of Harare and Zimbabwe Republic Police should legalise vending involving adolescent street girls of Harare Central Business District so as to ensure that they can increase economic empowerment opportunities for these children,
- There is a need to build capacity on vocational skills among the adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District. Some of the vocational skills could be motor mechanics, brick layering, carpentry, hair dress making, driving licences, among others,
- There is a need to implement rehabilitation centres for street children who have been addicted into commercial sex work and substance abuse. The rehabilitation centres can provide a number of intervention strategies to the target group. Such as psychosocial support (psychotherapies),
- There is a need to raise awareness of the dangers or risks associated with commercial sex work. The awareness raising should target the adolescent street girls as well as some of the street boys among others.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no conflict of interests.

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