
Promoting and upholding the rights of female sex workers (FSWs)
to safely report abuse and advocate for their rights

ENDLINE STUDY REPORT

*Prepared by Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC)
and Theatre for a Change (Ghana)*

DECEMBER 12, 2014

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction	5
Background	5
The Baseline Survey	6
Methodology.....	8
For FSWs.....	8
For the Police	9
For Chiefs	9
Analysis	10
Female Sex Workers.....	10
The Police	15
The Chiefs.....	16
Findings	16
Female Sex Workers.....	16
The police.....	17
The Chiefs.....	18
Recommendations for future programing.....	19
APPENDIX.....	20

Executive Summary

As part of a one year project, Theatre for a Change implemented various activities towards ensuring access to justice for FSWs in Old Fadama, Accra. This was in response to an alarming increase in arrests, abuse, stigma and discrimination meted out to FSWs in that community.

A base line study was conducted at the commencement of the project, and revealed three main issues: first, FSWs experienced physical and sexual abuse from both their paying and non-paying partners; second, FSWs were not aware of their legal rights and avenues for redress; and third, FSWs lacked the confidence to report abuse and discrimination through the appropriate justice systems.

Against this backdrop, the project had a dual aim: to increase the knowledge of FSWs on their legal rights and how they can protect them, and to build their confidence in reporting these abuses.

To achieve these aims, the project executed a series of activities tailored to the concerns of the FSWs in Old Fadama. These included behaviour change workshops for FSWs, peer education with Old Fadama and Railways community members and widespread advocacy via radio broadcasts and interactive theatre. The project approach also targeted Ghana Police Service, Chiefs, brother owners and operators and frontline civil society organisations (CSOs) through sensitisation workshops.

A subsequent end-line study for the project sought to gauge how information shared at the various sensitisation sessions, workshops and media engagements translated into improving the overall access to justice of FSWs in the focal community. That end-line study disclosed encouraging findings. The focused education and sensitisation have been credited for reducing FSWs fear and intimidation in respect of the police. Data also shows that FSWs gained knowledge of their legal rights and are now better able to practically apply it in their daily lives.

The police showed low interest in contributing to the process of ensuring access to justice for FSWs. Their general view of FSWs is that they are citizens like any other Ghanaian and would be afforded the usual protection provided by the police. They also

recommended more thorough and widespread education of police officers, particularly those more likely to deal with FSWs in the course of their duties.

The chiefs showed that they are already a source of access to justice for the FSWs. They showed high knowledge of the workings of the FSWs. They also recommended that they are sensitised on services available for FSWs.

It is recommended that the FSWs be educated about access to justice beyond the police. The police needs more education and involvement to enable them to realise the peculiarities of dealing with FSWs. Also, other legal service providers must be involved in future programming like the legal aid scheme. Women support groups like that of the Ark Foundation should be encouraged.

Introduction

Background

Theatre for a Change launched a project, with funding from Star-Ghana, entitled “Promoting and upholding the rights of female sex workers (FSWs) to safely report abuse and advocate for their rights”. The baseline study for the project was conducted in March, 2014 to assess FSWs’ knowledge of their legal rights and confidence in reporting abuses to assess to relevant authorities.

As part of the project, educational forums including behavioural change workshops, sensitisation workshops and peer education were coupled with advocacy activities including interactive theatre and radio broadcasts. The project’s target audience did not focus narrowly on FSWs in Old Fadama, but also extended to police officers from Accra-based police stations in the Ghana Police Service, chiefs and community leaders in Old Fadama.

The project is a response to the recent spate of abuse of FSWs by various community members, and a general inability of these victims to access justice.

Research conducted by the UNFPA in 2011 on the abuse of human rights of FSWs, reveals the violence, abuse and coercion FSWs face, which is compounded by the criminalisation of their activities. According to the report, attempts made by FSW to report breaches of the human rights and seeking redress are more often than not disregarded or otherwise fraught with difficulty. FSWs are regarded as criminals and are targets of harassment, extortion, exploitation and deportation from within their own networks of clients, pimps, regular partners and law enforcers. They are therefore forced to work invisibly and underground.¹ Their vulnerability is further heightened due to non-enforcement of legislation that offers protection for basic rights.

Recent media reports have shown various swoops conducted by the police to arrest FSWs in Accra. During the arrests, many of them sustained injuries, lost property, had their pictures displayed on various media including television, newspapers, media

¹ HIV/AIDS, Gender and Sex Work, UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS

websites and on various social media platforms. When arrested, they are immediately arraigned before a court within 48 hours, fines are imposed on them by the courts. Failure to pay these fines results in a custodial prison sentence.

Many of these FSWs do not have access to legal counsel nor are they aware of their rights as individuals under both national and international law. A great question is raised about the arrest procedure by the police when they carry out these swoops.

The Baseline Survey

The primary objectives of this study were to explore the experiences of female sex workers in relation to violence and abuse, and in terms of accessing justice services. It was also aimed to examine the attitudes of service providers, policy makers and other relevant community members.

Prior to commencing the baseline research, the study identified the following broad objectives:

- To provide a catalogue of abuses that FSWs living in Old Fadama experience;
- To provide a catalogue of experiences in accessing justice; and
- To provide a catalogue of attitudes of service providers, local policy makers and community members towards FSWs.

FSWs participated in focus group discussions and also one-on-one interviews. This enabled the collection of data both on individual and group levels on the various aspects of the lives of the participants.

Other stakeholders like the police and community leaders who are said to be ethnic chiefs within Old Fadama participated in one-on-one interviews. During the interviews, they were asked about their experiences interacting with sex workers (*SEE Appendix C*). The interviews were conducted in Twi and English, and audio-recorded for accuracy in translation and transcription. The findings set out below are based on interviews conducted with the Ewe and Wala Chiefs in Old Fadama and two police personnel.

The baseline report indicated that sex workers living in Old Fadama are experiencing a broad range of human rights violations, which encompass sexual and physical violence, police harassment, stigma and discrimination, and poverty. The report also indicated that the FSWs in Old Fadama face issues of insecure housing, intimate partner violence, police harassment and physical and sexual violence.

The report also identified that some FSWs were introduced into sex work by friends. According to them, they are involved for financial reasons. It was also identified that some of the sex workers faced multiple issues of sexual and physical abuse. They also indicated that it was difficult to access health care.

In the second half of the focus group discussion, facilitators sought to explore participants' experiences of accessing justice. Although participants had already touched on a number of these issues during the earlier discussions, this questioning was intended to examine in more detail the services currently available to women in Old Fadama and how they access them.

The cost of obtaining medical forms, paying hospital bills and medicine fees, and travelling to facilities were the main reasons cited by participants for not accessing healthcare. Negative or stigmatising attitudes on behalf of health service personnel were also identified as a barrier.

The participants identified some NGOs who supported them in various ways. They reported receiving social support from other sex workers in their network, key friends, and local NGOs, such as West African Project to Combat AIDS and STIs (WAPCAS), ProLink, and Theatre for a Change (TFAC), who provide services to sex workers.

Two community leaders or chiefs were interviewed; they expressed good knowledge of the operations of the FSWs in Old Fadama but were not in favour of sex work. They recognised the female sex workers as any member of their community and showed that they are willing to support FSWs if they needed help. They recommended that in seeking justice for female sex workers in Old Fadama, there is need for human rights organisations to work with them as community leaders.

Also two police officers from the Ghana Police Service who are stationed in Old Fadama participated in the research. Though the information they provided was useful, they were contradictory in various instances. The officers claimed to know the FSWs in the neighbourhood but when they were asked if they have come in contact with any FSW they mentioned that it will be difficult to identify one.

Methodology

This end-line study sought to measure the impact of some interventions carried out, to inform further programming in the area of access to justice for FSWs in Old Fadama and Railways communities and also to inform stakeholders of progress.

The majority of activities carried out during this project were educational, including behavioural change workshops, sensitisation workshops and peer education. This approach was complemented with advocacy activities including interactive theatre and radio discussion programs aimed at creating awareness among the general public on the rights of FSWs.

In line with these activities, this end-line study is aimed at measuring the impact of the information shared through the various media. This report used a qualitative approach to identify and describe findings from the data collected.

For FSWs

A Focus Group discussion (FGD) was organised for the FSWs who have participated in any of the activities organised under this project. Eighteen of them were divided into three groups of six. Each group was led by a research assistant (RA) who read to the participants a scenario (*SEE Appendix A*). The RAs asked the participants a number of prepared questions (*SEE Appendix B*) and recorded the opinions, reactions and knowledge of the participants. Similar questions which were used during the baseline study were repeated to enable us to measure the change. This enabled us glean the impact of the information that was shared at the various educational levels of the project. The FGD was therefore set to test:

1. The knowledge of FSW of the justice system and how to apply it;
2. The experiences with the justice system after the project; and
3. The awareness of alternative ways of accessing justice.

For the Police

Eight police officers were interviewed on a scheduled, recorded phone call. They were asked similar questions as were posed in the baseline.

For Chiefs

A one-on-one interview was conducted to assess the knowledge and perception of chiefs on the impact of the interventions. Only one chief was available to participate during the period in which the interview was organised.

Analysis

The focus of this study was to identify the outcome of the various information sharing programs which were aimed at increasing the knowledge of FSWs on their legal rights and how they can protect them, and to build their confidence in reporting these abuses. These would ensure that FSWs have improved access to justice and are better informed about the procedure and avenues for information, complaints and redress.

In the same vein of improving access to justice for FSWs, the project sought to sensitise key stakeholders including the Ghana Police Service, the chiefs and community leaders.

Female Sex Workers

Through a selected case study, featuring *Fatima*, a FSW whose boyfriend physically abused her and extorted money from her, the participants were easily able to identify with the story and shared their opinions on the case study. The participants shared experiences of themselves or a colleague they know and shared ideas on what they would have done if they were Fatima. They expressed some worries they had about the justice system and how they used other means to resolve their issues if they find the police ineffective.

Participants were able to identify that Sammy, the boyfriend of Fatima, was wrong in beating Fatima for not making his food ready for him. According to them,

Sammy was not right in anyway in beating Fatima and extorting money from her. According to one of the participants:

“Sammy didn’t do well because he knew the girl was working and therefore should understand. He had no right to take her money because he was rather supposed to give Fatima money and not the other way round.”

Participants were of the view that Sammy was to be reported to the police. All of them but one was ready to report any incident of this nature to the police. Some responses were as follows:

“As for me because he has mentioned he wouldn’t live with me again, I will report him to the police so that he refunds the stolen money.”

“I will report him because he’s made a fool out of me and has also taken my money. So I will report him to the police so they collect my money for me.”

One of the participants suggested an alternative way to deal with such a situation:

“If I were Fatima, I wouldn’t do anything. He will definitely finish spending the money and come back to me that he want food. Really don’t have anything to do.”

When asked for alternative ways to deal with the situation, the participants said the chiefs in their locality served as another source to seek redress.

They also showed good knowledge of the processes in reporting cases to the police. When asked if they were Fatima how would they report the abuse, these were some of the responses:

“I will go to the police station and let them know that my husband beat me up so I want to make a case. After the police has taken my statement, I will ask him to

read it out to me to see if he put down what I really said and has not twisted the issue.”

“I will go to the police station and report by explaining what happened to them.”

The majority of participants were reluctant in identifying themselves to the police as FSWs. That notwithstanding, one participant noted that it was important to identify herself to the police so that the boyfriend may not have any opportunity of reporting her later after she has made a report of abuse against the boyfriend.

In the event the police failed to assist in addressing issues reported to them, the participants showed knowledge of how to report them to the Police Intelligence and Professional Standards Bureau (PIPS). They identified that, in such a case, they will record the name and the number of the police officer who refused to attend to them properly and send it to PIPS to make the report. Some of the responses are as follows:

“I will look at the badge and keep the spellings of the name in my head. So when I get to PIPS, I will spell the name for them and tell them that’s the person who refused to help me on my case.”

“I will also keep the name on the badge in my head so that when I get to PIPS, I will mention it to them.”

Participants were able to confidently mention some of their human rights. They were able to identify their rights also in relation to their work as FSWs:

“Right to go to the police station and report a case. Right to go to the hospital for check-up without any hindrance from anyone.”

“The police has no right to arrest you because me if am walking on the streets and I have condoms on me. My husband cannot also beat me because he asked for money and I refused to give him. I have the right to do what I want. It’s a man that’s gives a woman money and not the other way round.”

“We have the right to live wherever we want without any bother from anyone. I have the freedom to keep my own money and not to give to anyone to keep for me.”

“No one has to right to rebuke me for the kind of clothes I wear.”

“If you are going somewhere and you haven’t wronged the police in any way, he can’t arrest you.”

“My neighbour cannot prevent me from using the well because am a sex worker and no one can just insult me because am a sex worker. I have the right to do what I want but I just have to be in line with what the law says.”

Some participants also showed their understanding of the role of the police and how their attitudes have changed towards police officers. According to them, this has been as a result of the information they have received from the workshops and trainings they have had through the Promoting and upholding the rights of FSW Project:

“I used to be afraid to report cases at the police station. But now with all the knowledge I have gained through the various workshops, I now have the confidence to walk to the police station and report.”

“Initially, I wouldn’t even walk past police station because I was very afraid they will arrest me. But with all the knowledge gained, am able to go to the police station to report and also when I see the police I don’t run.”

The participants were asked if they observed any changes in the attitudes of the police towards them as a result of this project. They recounted that the police officers were now quite friendly and “treated them as human beings”. They also identified that the police cannot arrest them if they have not committed any offence. Some of the responses are as follows:

“Now they are very free with us and even in town, they chat with us and advise us to take good care of ourselves. They tell us they are there to arrest armed robbers and not us so we should just be ourselves.”

“Now I know they are just humans like us so when I see them I don’t run. If I run then it means am doing something wrong but if I see them I just walk and move to where am going.”

“Now we have the freedom to chat with the police and we are no longer afraid of the police.”

“Police cannot arrest you when you have done nothing wrong.”

The participants also identified that the police officer are more willing to listen to them when they report any case. They explained that they have seen a change in attitude towards them as FSWs. This can be realised in how the participants are able to identify specific police officer and how differently they behave towards them now.

“Now I realize the police listen to us and they have changed because, initially, when you take a case there, that madam X will ask you to cook banku and ask that you do shopping for her but just recently my friend had a case and when we went, she didn’t ask for anything but listened to our case.”

“I can see changes with the police because at first, that same madam X would shout at you and insult you but now she’s changed and doesn’t shout or insult us any longer.”

“Now they really listen to us not considering whether we are sex workers or not. They listen to whatever issue we report to them.”

“Right now you just have to be patient to explain yourself to the police and they will listen to you and help you.”

When questioned on their willingness to pay or provide a favour for them to be able to access the protection and service of the police officers they were quick to note that there is no need to pay or give any favour to a police man to perform his/her duty. It was also identified that participants were ready to report any police officer who tries to extort some money or favour in relation to them carrying out their duties attending to an FSW complaint.

Finally they were able to identify other relevant services or organisations which can assist them in access to justice and how to reach them. Participants were able to mention Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Human Rights Advocacy Centre (HRAC), Police Intelligence and Professional Standards Bureau (PIPS), a Chief or an elder in the church.

The Police

Six police officers were interviewed from five police stations in Accra; all of whom have participated in a sensitization training on policing and human rights in relation to FSWs. One was directly from the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit. They all acknowledged attending a workshop and three out of the six who were interviewed had shared the information with another police officer who did not participate in the workshops.

None but one of those who were interviewed has had contact with a FSW as at when the interview was conducted. Those majority of those who have never had any contact with a FSW stated that they were not in a department which would enable them to have direct interface with FSWs. One participant also believed that the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) was an appropriate point of collection of domestic violence cases and not for complaints of FSWs.

All the police officers interviewed agreed that it is their responsibility to protect the human rights of every Ghanaian. They also recommended further forums and workshops to raise the awareness among the police officers and the FSWs.

The Chiefs

One Chief was interviewed out of five who were targeted. The chief who was interviewed mentioned a number of social difficulties faced by the FSWs in Old Fadama and mentioned health care and access to funds as a major challenge for the FSWs.

According to him, the level of stigma and discrimination at Old Fadama is low and the FSWs are known and recognised. He also mentioned that the FSWs come to him and his colleague chiefs when they have some difficulties so they know them as well. He mentioned that FSWs in the Old Fadama vicinity come from various areas and form clans within the vicinity.

He identified that some of the FSWs sometimes change their names for fear of being identified in case there is a police raid or swoop. This is also to prevent them from being identified by their family members when they are caught and have to give their names out.

He recognised the role of some NGOs who create sensitisation in the community and for the chiefs in Old Fadama. But according to him they are not enlightened enough on some of the services available for the FSWs.

Findings

Female Sex Workers

Raised awareness of the role of the police

All participants in the survey showed a level of awareness of how they can access justice through the police. They were able to identify other institutions within the police including DOVVSU and PIPS. They were also able to identify alternative ways to address issues through their community leaders, CHRAJ and CSOs who provide legal aid. Notwithstanding this, their knowledge of stakeholders beyond the police was markedly more limited.

Improved relationship between the police and FSWs

The responses from the focus group discussions revealed a more positive interaction between the police and the participants. All participants shared experiences with the police in which either they were involved in or another person whom they know was involved in. In some instances, some of participants were able to identify police officers by name and know which station they worked and where they lived.

Reduction in level of fear of police officers

Participants are no more afraid of the police as they were at the beginning of the project. From some of the responses from the participants, before the education under this project, they would run away anytime they sighted a police officer nearby. Their attitude towards the police now has changed. Now they are aware of the PIPS and how they can report a police officer who misconducts him/herself.

FSWs aware of their basic human rights

The FSWs who were interviewed could identify their basic human rights especially as it is related to their daily lives. They also showed knowledge on how to seek redress if they believe their rights are being infringed upon. Though one of the participants said she will do nothing and hope the boyfriend will see the need to come back when she is abused like Fatima in the scenario which was used, all the others were quiet emphatic on reporting such an abuse to the police.

The police

Low level of interest in issues of FSW

The participants who were interviewed showed low interest in the issues of FSWs. According to some participants, FSWs are also like any other citizen and they protect the rights of all Ghanaians. Some deflected the issue by stating that their department or section they work with does not deal with such issues but if they receive any case of such a sort they will deal with it as it is reported. Just one out of six had come in contact with dealing with FSWs.

The workshop was not targeted

Though the police actively participated in the workshops to be educated on human rights and FSWs, just a few seem to have some link with FSWs. The participants did not show any way in which they will be working to ensure that they support the protection of the human rights of FSWs. They rather suggested a greater sensitisation among the FSWs and DOVVSU.

The Chiefs

Showed involvement as an avenue for FSWs to seek justice

The chief who was interviewed showed that he understood the need for protection for female sex workers for abused and also identified that the FSWs find them as an avenue to access justice. He also showed that the FSWs also contact them even beyond seeking justice. The FSWs also identified the chiefs in their interview as a means by which they would seek justice apart from the police or any other formal justice system.

Recommendations for future programing

1. Increase education of FSWs on access to justice beyond the police
2. Specific police personnel who maybe working directly with FSWs should be identified and worked with
3. Other sectors of the justice system should be involved in the programing like the legal aid scheme.
4. Women support groups like that of the Ark Foundation should be encouraged.

APPENDIX

A- FATIMA SCENARIO

B- FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

C- INTERVIEW SCHEDULE; EXPERT INTERVIEW FOR CHIEFS AND POLICE

D- FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONSENT FORMS

APPENDIX A:FATIMA'S STORY

Fatima is 23 and lives in Old Fadama. She has a boyfriend, Sammy. They have been in a relationship for a few months. Sometimes Fatima cooks for Sammy and they listen to music together. Yesterday, Sammy came to see Fatima. Sammy was hungry and asked for food. It was late and Fatima had just closed from work. She was feeling tired and hadn't prepared anything. Sammy got angry and started calling Fatima names. He was shouting at the top of his voice. Fatima felt scared and upset. When she tried to explain, Sammy beat her. Then he took some money from her purse and left. He swore he would not waste any more of his time on Fatima.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION – GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 mins)

2. Objectives of the Session (5 mins)

To discuss:

- Participants' knowledge and understanding of accessing justice
- Participants' attitudes towards the Police and Chiefs as mechanisms of justice
- Participants' experiences of accessing justice over the past year

3. Consent and Participation (5 mins)

4. Topic 1 (30 mins) – Knowledge and understanding of accessing justice

Groups listen to 'Fatima's story'. Participants to discuss:

- What happened to Fatima?
- What can Fatima do now?

- Who can Fatima talk to about what happened?

FACILITATOR PROBES: How could Fatima report the abuse? Who to? Are there any options other than the Police and/or Chiefs? What are Fatima's rights under the law?

5. Topic 2 (20 mins) – Views and experiences of accessing justice

In groups, participants to discuss:

- If you experienced violence or abuse like Fatima, what would you do?
- Who would you talk to about what happened?
- What are your rights?

FACILITATOR PROBES: Would you consider reporting the abuse to the police? Are there any reasons why you wouldn't report it to the police? Would you consider reporting the abuse to a Chief? Are there any reasons why you wouldn't report the abuse to a Chief? Are there any other options for reporting abuse?

BREAK (10 mins)

6. Topic 3 (25 mins) – Follow-up on participants' experiences

In groups, participants to discuss:

Has anyone had any contact with the police over the past 24 weeks?

FACILITATOR PROBES: What happened? How would they describe their experiences?

How do they feel about the police? Has this changed since the beginning of the project?

7. Plenary (5 mins)

Any other comments?

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR KEY INFORMANTS: OLD FADAMA PROJECT

Name:

Occupation:

Organisation:

Age:

Gender:

Time and date of interview:

1. Can you tell us a little bit about your job/responsibilities as...?
2. Can you describe how your work brings you into contact with sex workers?

Probes: how often, who refers them, why, what is their particular role

3. Thinking about your interactions with sex workers, can you describe some of the issues you have dealt with?

Probes: health, safety, insecure housing, children and family problems, experiences

of sexual and physical violence, interactions with the police, stigma and discrimination

4. In your experience, what do you think are the most important issues affecting sex workers?

Probes: access to services, health, safety, sexual and physical violence, interactions with the police, family and community dynamics, stigma and discrimination

5. Is there any particular story (or stories) that stands out in your experiences interacting with sex workers?
6. Does your organisation provide any specific services for sex workers? If so, what are they?
7. What challenges, if any, have you experienced in your work with sex workers?
8. Do you have any recommendations for improving the way your organisation provides services for sex workers?

Probes: success stories, examples of good practice

9. Are you aware of any other services not already mentioned that are available to sex workers in Old Fadama?

Probes: Legal, health, social welfare, emotional wellbeing

10. Thinking more broadly, are there any services or programs that you think would be helpful to sex workers?

11. Is there anything else we haven't talked about that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX D: Consent Script:

We invite you all to participate in today's discussion. Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in it if you do not want to be a part of the discussion. You do not have to explain why you do not want to take part. Not doing the discussion will not affect your future activities with Theatre For Change. For people who do not want to particularly, you can wait in another area while we have the discussion.

For those who want to be in the discussion, the information you share will be protected confidentially and your name will be kept anonymous in order to protect your privacy.