

**SEX WORK AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY IN THE BORDER TOWN
OF BEITBRIDGE, ZIMBABWE**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe is experiencing an ongoing downward spiral in its national economy, dating back to the early 1990s. The demise of the country's formal economy has led to unprecedented growth in informal economic activities including illegal forms such as sex work. The thesis seeks to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy in Zimbabwe with particular reference to the border town of Beitbridge.

In understanding sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge, the thesis adopts a livelihoods framework in providing key insights into the daily lives of sex workers including the context of vulnerability in which they live and work as well as the challenges they face constantly. In addition, because of the significance of patriarchy in shaping the lives of women and specifically sex workers in Zimbabwe, the feminist theory is used as a secondary theoretical framework. The fieldwork for the study is based on informal interviews and focus group discussions with sex workers as well as observation.

Diverse and interrelated themes are covered in examining the livelihoods of sex workers in Beitbridge, and these include sex worker income and expenditure, the motivations underpinning entry into sex work, the home origins of sex workers and their ongoing linkages with their areas of origin, occupational hazards such as client violence and health risks, stigma and discrimination of sex workers, and sex worker solidarity. Though the lives of the sex workers in Beitbridge are marked by precariousness and uncertainty, it is concluded that sex workers are not mere victims of their historical and social circumstances as they are actively engaged in constructing their livelihoods.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The sex work trade has become a multi-billion industry providing a living for millions of families worldwide. However, this profession has existed alongside widespread public condemnation based on moral, religious and medical grounds. As a result, sex work continues to be an important target of political, social and medical interventions. But given the global recession and the current economic and political upheavals in Zimbabwe, sex work has risen to the fore as an important source of livelihoods for unemployed and underemployed women in Zimbabwe. This thesis focuses on sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. In Beitbridge, there are a high number of commercial sex workers who operate in a highly volatile and precarious environment of informality and illegality.

This introductory chapter is divided into five sections. The following section (section two) highlights the context of the thesis and the third section details the thesis objectives. The fourth section then gives an account of the research methodology used to study sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge while the last section (section 5) outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Context of Thesis

The main objective of the thesis is to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. The town of Beitbridge is located in the southern part of Zimbabwe in Matebeleland South Province and is renowned for being the busiest border town in the country (IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003:29). The town is a hive of economic activity with large numbers of travelers and commercial goods crossing the border on a daily basis. Long queues of commercial trucks are a regular sight, as their drivers (most of whom are sex work clients) wait their turn to be cleared on both sides of the border. As a result, there is a large presence of male and female informal traders, truck drivers, commercial sex workers and irregular migrants crossing the border into South Africa and then back again (Mate 2005:2).

The term sex work is to be used in this thesis, rather than prostitution. The latter term has negative moral connotations as it is used to demonise and stigmatise women who provide sexual services as a way of living (Tekola 2005). The term is also used as a marker to denote any supposedly unrespectable women, particularly those who move into social spaces that are considered to be male-controlled territories (Gaidzanwa 1995, as cited in Hungwe 2006). The

term sex worker is a more inclusive and richer term than prostitute as it highlights the complex set of social relations involved in sex work, including the provider of sexual services, the buyers of sex and those who in different ways shape the transactions (including the state's regulatory institutions, the tourism industry and direct intermediaries between the sex worker and client) (Truong 1990).

The global literature on sex work raises a number of themes such as motivations for sex work, conditions of sex work, sex work and AIDS, sex work and patriarchy, and sex work and client relations. A study for instance in the Tarai border town of Nepal revealed how political and socio-economic crises have had a bearing on the increase of not only voluntary but forced sex work (Hausner 2007). Sex work in Ethiopia is also reported as occurring under conditions of abject poverty, police harassment and brutality (Tekola 2005). A project on HIV and AIDS prevention and cure reveals how female sex workers and their clients play an important role in the spread of the AIDS epidemic in Zambia and elsewhere (Family Health International 2003). In South Africa a study conducted in Hillbrow on migrant sex workers revealed how sex workers flock to South Africa in search of economic empowerment and even sexual freedom (Nyangairi 2010). In pursuing my examination of sex work in this thesis, my focus is on sex worker livelihoods. But it will become evident that any such examination invariably addresses the many themes highlighted here.

In Zimbabwe, sex work is illegal. The history of sex work in Zimbabwe is closely associated with urbanisation and other processes of capitalist development in towns, mines and farming settlements (Magaisa 2001, Moyo 1991, Gaidzanwa 1987). Rural women often saw towns as places of freedom from restrictive parents or in-laws. The absence of female employment in colonial towns such as Salisbury (now Harare) meant that these women looked for independent sources of income, leading at times to the provision of sexual services termed as *mapoto* arrangements (Hungwe 2006). Sex work continues to thrive in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The literature on sex work in post-colonial Zimbabwe often highlights the causes of, or motivations behind, sex work. In this regard, the possibility of viable livelihoods in Zimbabwe has been severely compromised since the 1990-1994 implementation of the economic structural adjustment programme and the subsequent fast track land reform programme (Raftopoulos 2004, Potts 2006, Chirisa 2009, Masvawure 2009). This context of vulnerability had led to increasing numbers of women resorting to sex work. One study in Masvingo by Muzvidziwa (1997) thus understands sex work as a hanging-on or survivalist strategy. The crisis in Zimbabwe has been externalised as well, in the sense that it has led to the migration of women to neighbouring countries to engage in sex

work (Mate 2005). As given by McFadden (1992) (cited in Magaisa 2001), the relationship between the AIDS pandemic and sex work is also prominent in the Zimbabwean literature as is the linkages between sex work and the prevalence of patriarchal practices. Thus sex work by women becomes contested while male promiscuity is considered acceptable.

In focusing on sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge, I draw upon the livelihoods perspective in theoretically framing my study. The livelihoods approach was originally developed with reference to rural areas but has been more recently applied to urban working people (Rouse and Ali 2000, Krantz 2001). The concept of livelihoods has proven to be analytically useful since it helps to provide a nuanced and detailed account of the ways in which people construct a living. It pinpoints and understands the resources or capitals which working people draw upon in pursuing livelihood activities as well as the various challenges they face in doing so. These challenges impact negatively on the construction of viable household-based livelihoods (Carney 1998, Scoones 1998, UNDP 2001, Rakodi and Lloyds-Jones 2002, Lyons and Snoxell 2005). The livelihoods perspective however tends to be gender-insensitive and hence feminist literature – in stressing patriarchal systems, practices and discourses – is integrated into the livelihoods framework in seeking to better understand the lives and livelihoods of the sex workers in Beitbridge (Jackson 2001, Liddle and Wright 2001). For instance, it is known that sex workers sometimes come from abusive relationships or refrain from marrying because of the possibility of emotional and physical abuse. Using this combined analytical framework will hopefully ensure that the thesis makes a contribution to the existing academic literature on sex work and sex workers.

1.3 Thesis Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is *to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe*. The secondary objectives include the following:

1. To understand and explain the motivations behind sex work in Beitbridge.
2. To understand the implications of rural/urban migration in Zimbabwe with reference to sex work in Beitbridge.
3. To examine the living and working condition of sex workers in Beitbridge.
4. To study the gendered social relations of sex workers and their clients at work and beyond their work.
5. To understand the public perspectives and attitudes towards sex workers and their work.

6. To detail the challenges sex workers face and their how they adapt and cope with these challenges.

1.4 Research Methodology

In this section, I outline the research methodology underpinning the thesis, including research design, research methods, data analysis, fieldwork challenges and research ethics.

1.4.1 Research Design

In this section I outline the research design that was employed in conducting this study. A research design can best be understood as a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research (Marvasti 2004:9, Babbie and Mouton 2001:74). Different research designs use specific and different combinations of methods and procedures. This study uses a qualitative research design. The main aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of the meanings and experiential dimensions of human lives and social worlds (Thorne 2000:68). Neumann (2003:146) argues that, as much as the qualitative research method has been criticised for not being as ‘accurate’ (at least statistically) as the quantitative method, it is nevertheless deeply insightful as it involves ‘observing people, recording what they say and also documenting the real events that take place’. In this way, it offers ‘thick descriptions’ which capture descriptively the world as experienced and lived. In studying sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge, this thesis enquires into the personal lives and experiences of these women and their social worlds and, as such, the qualitative methodology and research design is extremely suitable and relevant for this study.

Qualitative research collects data from direct fieldwork by for instance observations, in-depth and open-ended interviews, focus group discussions, and life histories (Babbie and Mouton 2001:280). Three research methods were used to collect evidence in pursuing the objectives of this research: in-depth interviews with sex workers, focus group discussions with sex workers and observation of the lives of sex workers. Such methods are argued by Sanders (2006: 463) as being the ‘most fruitful route into the sex work setting’ as they produce high quality in-depth accounts of this sometimes secretive world. The fieldwork was carried out in Shona, the language spoken by the sex workers and therefore communication was easy as I am a native Shona speaker.

Due to the sensitivity of any sex work research, entry into the field is always difficult for a researcher. Sanders (2006:449) therefore claims that there are methodological nuances needed in researching the female sex ‘industry’ because information that is usually generated about sex workers is tainted by biased media reports that impose moral judgments on how

women use their bodies to make money. In Zimbabwe, sex work occurs in an illegal context and therefore access to the field is challenging and difficult. As a result, the non-random snowballing technique of sampling was employed as a means of recruiting participants. Sampling involves the selection of participants from a broader universe or population based on particular features or characteristics, and the sampled participants enable a detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions which the researcher wishes to study (Ritchie et al. 2014:112). The snowballing technique involves selecting participants through referrals by initial participants of other individuals who share the same identity and similar experiences (Gentles et al. 2015). Random sampling was not possible because there is no well-defined population of sex workers in Beitbridge. Though the use of non-random sampling does not allow for statistical generalisation, there is a strong likelihood that, all other factors being similar, the lives of sex workers of Beitbridge as examined in this study speak to the livelihoods of sex workers elsewhere in Zimbabwe.

In order to gain access to the interview participants, I first had to get permission to conduct research in Beitbridge through the District Administrator. The District Administrator therefore had to give me written consent to do research based on an official letter from Rhodes University which identified me as a student conducting research for my Masters degree requirements. Therefore, with the use of this letter, I was able to commence my fieldwork. From there on, I employed the services of a local taxi driver by the name of Mr Goronga who doubled as both my mode of transport and my research assistant. Mr Goronga initiated my original access into the sex worker community as he provided transport services for a number of the sex workers in Beitbridge.

As a first step, Mr Goronga drove me around Beitbridge and gave me an evening tour of the main hotspots for sex workers in Beitbridge. Therefore, I was able to personally witness the sex workers soliciting for clients in their night regalia. This tour of the sex worker hotspots included the main bars, night clubs and brothels in Dulibadzimu (a high density area in Beitbridge) where sex workers could be seen as early as 6 pm standing by the gates of brothels waiting for clients to approach. This was useful as it gave me an opportunity to witness the women in their work environment (or natural setting). Mr Goronga was able to introduce me to my first interview participant, a sex worker by the name of Nomagugu, who became a main key informant and referred me to other sex workers for interviews. In addition, Mr Goronga introduced me to one of his colleagues (Mr Makhosi) who lived next to a brothel and was familiar with the sex workers at the brothel. As a result, I acquired

information from different sex workers in different social circles based on the brothels at which they worked.

1.4.2 Research Methods

The data collected in this study took place over a period of two months in July and August of 2015. This evidence collection was carried out in three phases. First of all, informal conversations were carried out with key informants and local community members in Beitbridge regarding the prevalence of sex work in the town. During these informal conversations, I was informed further about the hotspots where sex workers were likely to be found. Secondly, I carried out in-depth interviews with selected sex workers and then, thirdly, I carried out focus group discussions with groups of four women.

Twenty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews of at least one hour in length were conducted using a tape recorder with women who self-identified as sex workers (see Appendix 1 for interview guide). In order to avoid repetition of evidence, which is a drawback of the snowballing sampling technique as referrals may be within a particular kind of sex worker, I deliberately befriended sex workers practicing in different locations in Beitbridge so as to ensure diversity and heterogeneity. Therefore, the in-depth interviews were conducted with women who identified as street sex workers, bar based sex workers, truck based sex workers and home based sex workers. The use of semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed me to observe ‘expressions, words, sentences and symbols portrayed by the participants’ and to give the interviewees space to express themselves freely (Neuman 2003:66.)

Semi-structured interviews gave the sex workers a sense of autonomy and allowed them the opportunity to take a leading role during the interviews as they shared their stories. These interviews were conducted in Dulibadzimu, mostly in the late afternoon, after the sex workers had rested in the mornings as their work required them being up the whole night. Interviews were conducted in places the participants felt comfortable and safe to disclose information about their personal lives. Therefore, some of these interviews actually took place in the brothels, either in the sex workers’ rooms or the rooms of their friends, while some took place outside in the yard or verandas of brothels. Only the first interview carried out with Nomagugu, who later became a key informant, took place in Mr Goronga’s taxi parked outside the brothel where she worked (since at this point trust had not been gained with the sex workers and this was done to ensure Nomagugu’s safety).

In-depth interviews were discontinued after the information collected became repetitive or uniform. This is called saturation or a point in data collection when no new or fresh information emerges (Sandelowski 2008:876). I thus transitioned into focus group discussions (see Appendix 2 for the focus group discussion guide). I carried out two focus group discussions in the month of August 2015 with four women in each group. The main advantage of focus group interviews lies in their ability to allow for interaction of participants on a topic and to provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences (Babbie and Mouton 2001:292). In order to ensure diversity and to encourage openness, the sex worker participants were grouped according to their age groups. Therefore, the first focus group discussion comprised of sex workers in their late 20s to late 30s while the second focus group discussion consisted of sex workers below the age of 25. This helped to gain some insight into the different issues which sex workers face.

During all these phases of fieldwork, simple observation was also continuously relied upon to gain insight into the lives of sex workers by observing their living and working conditions and their interactions with community members and amongst themselves. Observation is a process whereby the researcher is able to observe and familiarise herself with the subject while possibly allowing for previously overlooked or ignored aspects to be seen (Kelleher 1993:126, as cited in Babbie and Mouton 2001). Observation in this study was an invaluable technique as it managed to familiarise the researcher with the social context within which sex work in Beitbridge occurred. The shortage of accommodation and overcrowded living conditions of sex workers became a vivid reality to the researcher since one would witness the lack of space in the brothels. The late afternoon interviews also allowed me to witness the women getting ready to go to work. Their appearance as signified by their provocative dressing (such as short dresses and short skirts which revealed skin) was insightful into the type of dressing sex workers used for their work.

1.4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves moving from the qualitative data that has been collected and arranging and analysing it into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations being investigated (Blanche et al. 2006:321). In order to arrange and analyse the data, the interviews were first transcribed verbatim whilst translating them from Shona to English using the Dragon software programme.

The interview transcriptions were then analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is the process of descriptively presenting and categorising the

qualitative data collected in a manner which does not distort the inherent meaning (Anderson 2007:3). As argued by Braun and Clarke (2006:80), thematic analysis requires an active role by the researcher in identifying the important themes that can be reported from the data itself. This was done by drawing out the salient or prominent issues brought up by the data and grouping them into broad themes which relate to the lives and livelihoods of sex workers. From there, I further teased out the main themes by identifying subthemes. The main and sub themes were checked to ensure that they speak to and respond to the key objective of the thesis and the secondary objectives.

Data was also analysed using the narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is defined as the systematic study of personal experiences and meanings through participants' stories (Thorne 2000:69, Elliot 2005: 39). Qualitative researchers agree that stories and storytelling is an effective way of developing an understanding of social groups, classes and culture as well as the structural relationships between them (Marvasti 2004:95, Elliot 2005:39). In this study, the sex workers were asked to narrate stories of their childhood upbringing as well as particular experiences in their lives as sex workers. This helped to enlighten the researcher on the recurrent themes in their stories.

1.4.4 Fieldwork Challenges and Research Ethics

As argued by Shaver (2005:296), there are challenges involved in the design of ethical and non-exploitative research projects with sex workers. This is due to the fact that membership in hidden populations (like sex workers) often involves stigmatised or illegal behaviour, and concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality are paramount and difficult to resolve. In the case of sex work, as a stigmatised profession in Zimbabwe and one which has long been illegal, gaining access to the field was challenging as an outsider. Thus when approached most sex workers were not willing to talk and would ask if the researcher was not there to collect information for the media or if I was a police woman. This was despite the fact that sex workers were increasingly aware of the new court ruling passed on the 27th of May 2015 which indicated that sex workers could not be arrested merely for purposes of loitering. Some of the sex workers still had a fear of being arrested.

Therefore, gaining the trust of the women was initially challenging. In order to gain their trust, I would produce the letter from the District Administrator clearly stating that I was a student from Rhodes University and that this study was only for my Masters thesis. This managed to assure the women that I was not affiliated with any media company. The use of a tape recorder also posed problems with some of the sex workers who thought it also doubled

as a camera and they were afraid of having their pictures being taken. This is depicted by a question raised by one sex worker: '*chinhu ichocho hachitore mapictures edu here? ko light ironderei?*' ['Doesn't that recorder take pictures of us, what is that light for?']. This was in reference to a small light that was on the recorder during the interviews. I had to reassure the women that it was merely a tape recorder and that no pictures would be taken.

I was faced with another challenge pertaining to the language used in the setting of the study. The sex workers revealed a propensity to use vulgar and dirty language when giving their narratives. These words are considered taboo in normal everyday communication outside of a sex worker setting. These included words such as *beche* (female genitalia) and *mboro* (male genitalia). The act of having sex with a client was referred to as *kusvirana* (fucking). These words were instrumental in introducing me to the sex work environment where sexual words were used freely and without restraint. However, due to constant communication with these women, I became desensitised to hearing these words and, in some cases, I used these words with the women in interviews and informal conversations which made communication easier. The sex workers also came from different parts of the country and the difference in dialects was noticeable as the sex workers used different terms from the common Shona terms with which I am familiar. Though the interviews were conducted in Shona, there are many dialects in Shona such as *Chimanyika* and *Zezeru*. Therefore, some of the women would speak Shona in their native dialect which proved difficult for me to understand as I spoke in the *Zezeru* dialect. I therefore at times had to ask the women to explain what they meant. The sex workers as well used a certain type of sex work language which would not be understood by an outsider and non-local. The sex workers had devised words to explain certain characteristics or incidents in their lives. An example is the use of *kukurechura* which was a new word I learned during the study. The word was used to refer to the refusal by clients in paying for the sexual services rendered or an act whereby a client would demand back the money he had paid a sex worker.

During the focus group discussions, I had to contend with problems regarding bringing the women together at the same time. Some of the women were not always available when the others were and, due to different time demands, I was forced to reschedule the discussions a number of times until I found a time that was suitable for all four participants in the focus group discussion. Different personality traits also made it difficult to set appointments especially with the in-depth interviews. Though all the women had been referred to me by a fellow sex worker, not all the sex workers were friendly. Some were intimidating and would ask me what I would give them in return. Others were very friendly

and forthcoming. During the interviews it was not always easy to continue as some of the women had been through particularly traumatic experiences and would be overtaken with emotions such as shame, sadness and grief. In that regard, since research is supposed to do no harm to the participant, I would have to stop the interview midway or skip the questions that had aroused the intense emotion in the women.

Another dilemma with which I was faced in the field and during the process of data analysis was regarding the translation of the interviews from Shona to English. As a native Shona speaking person, I was able to communicate with the women well in Shona. However, the transcribing process, which involved translating the interviews from Shona to English, was not always smooth. This is due to the fact that there are not always equivalents for every word when translating it into a different language. At times the true meaning of a term gets lost in translation (Sechrest et al. 1972: 41). This is the case with the women who preferred to use the term *mboko* to refer to clients who treated them badly. Though one could always try to come up with an English term for the word, there is no clear English equivalent for the term as it used to refer to a person with a distasteful character in the Shona language.

The shortage of accommodation in Beitbridge was another challenge I faced in my data collection. This existed despite significant development in the town with regards to the increasing number of lodges and hotels which have been built over the years. Beitbridge boasts of quality hotels and lodges with the Rainbow Hotel being the most expensive (charging from about 50 US dollars per night for a single room). Lodges charge from 25 to 35 US dollars per night. Thus reasonably priced accommodation for sojourners in Beitbridge is limited. As a result, I failed to secure any personal accommodation within my budget for the duration of the two months the fieldwork was conducted. I had to be accommodated by a friend who works as an immigration officer at the border.

Ethical considerations are central to any qualitative research (Scourfield et al. 2008:331). In the case of marginalised groups in society such as sex workers, more effort should be taken in ensuring the protection of these groups. This is so because sex work research is sensitive and requires disclosure of behaviour that would otherwise be kept private and personal (Shaver 2005, Sanders 2006).

Social research requires the voluntary involvement of participants, as well as their anonymity and confidentiality so that no harm is done to the participants. In this study I clearly stated to the interview participants that participation was voluntary and therefore informed consent was elicited from all the research participants. I did this by asking the women verbally if they wanted to take part in the research and that their consent would be

recorded on the recorder I used. Thus all the participants in the study acknowledged voluntary participation by stating their consent on the recorder.

As argued by Babbie and Mouton (2001:522), social research should never injure the people being studied either through the revealing of information that would embarrass or endanger their home and social lives. This study focuses on sex work as a livelihood strategy (moreover in a largely illegal context) and therefore care had to be taken to interview the participants while not exposing them to the local law enforcement agents such as the police (who had a reputation for arresting sex workers). Therefore, to protect these women and their livelihoods, I had to carry out the interviews from behind closed doors in the privacy of their places of residence. Subjects can also be harmed psychologically in a study. Due to the nature of the study, which required an enquiry into the personal lives of the sex workers, some of the women – as indicated – narrated painful events which had happened in their past and this created the danger of bringing up past psychological traumatic experiences. In these cases, I would clearly inform the women that they had the right to skip and choose not to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable answering.

Anonymity is the protection of one's identity therefore a participant is considered anonymous when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent (Marvasti 2004:138, Babbie and Mouton 2001:523, Elliot 2005: 142). Confidentiality is when a researcher can identify a person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly. Hence issues of anonymity and confidentiality centre on issues of privacy. In this study, in order to protect the identities of the sex workers from the public, I employed the use of pseudonyms which meant that no direct link could be made from the study to any of the participants.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis contains six chapters in total. The following chapter (chapter two) focuses on the theoretical frameworks which underpin the study, which are feminist theory and the livelihoods framework. However, feminist theory is only drawn upon to provide the study with a gender sensitivity which is lacking in the livelihoods framework as the main theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter three discusses the history of sex work in Zimbabwe dating back to colonial times and does so by locating sex work in a socio-economic and political context. It also identifies and discusses the main themes in the prevailing Zimbabwean literature on sex work.

Chapter four and five are the empirical chapters of the thesis. Chapter four provides an overview of Beitbridge and of the studied sex workers and, further, of the main characteristics of sex work in Beitbridge. Additionally, it examines the motivations behind entry into sex work as given by the participants and the rural/urban origins and ongoing linkages of these women as an integral part of their lives as sex workers.

Chapter five presents a detailed and illuminating account of the themes in sex work in Beitbridge and the lived experiences of sex workers. It thus considers client and sex worker relations, sex work income and consumption, health issues prevalent in sex work and public perceptions and attitudes towards sex work. It will become clear that all issues raised in the two empirical chapters have a bearing on the livelihoods of the sex workers in Beitbridge and the difficult challenges they face and endure.

Lastly chapter six summarises the thesis and links together the empirically-based chapters and the theoretical framework shaping the study. It highlights how the livelihoods framework in conjunction with the feminist emphasis on patriarchy can be used in a productive manner to understand sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMING

2.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. In understanding sex work as a livelihood, I use the livelihoods framework to provide key insights into the daily lives of sex workers in Beitbridge, including the context of vulnerability in which they live and work as well as the challenges they face. At the same time, because I focus on women sex workers specifically, the existence of patriarchy becomes of some significance and thus I also draw upon feminist theory to strengthen the relevance of the livelihoods framework for my study. The combined use of these two theoretical frameworks enables me to bring to the fore the multi-dimensional aspects of sex work and to trace it back to the social structures which paved the way for women's entry into sex work.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses feminist theory (and, more particularly, feminist theories) and how feminist theory – with its focus on patriarchy – relates to the phenomenon of sex work. The second section entails a comprehensive overview of the livelihoods framework and its relevance to understanding sex work. I conclude by tying together the two frameworks and indicating their combined implications for analysing the lives of female sex workers.

2.2 Feminist Theory

Feminism as a theoretical perspective has historically never been a unified body of thought as there are various forms of feminist theory (Mandell 1996). However, what seems to be common amongst all feminist theories is that they seek to offer an understanding of women's oppression, though what this oppression entails and how it is to be explained is open to debate. Thus the feminist theory, as a broad theoretical framework, is comprised of many strands and variations with different political agendas attached to them as well. In this section, I consider some of the main feminist analytical perspectives, including liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical and postmodernist feminism, and I seek to show the variations between them (Donavan 2001). My main purpose in outlining these theories is to highlight the significance of the existence of patriarchy given the likely importance of patriarchy to sex work, and I also draw conclusions about the various views on sex work from the viewpoint of the different feminist theories (Leigh 2008). A discussion of feminism is also important because the livelihoods framework, which forms the key theoretical framing for my study of

the livelihoods of sex workers in Beitbridge, tends to be gender-insensitive and thus the livelihoods framework needs to be bolstered by feminist inputs around the question of patriarchy.

Liberal feminists, historically, disputed men's inherent superiority over women and argued that instead both sexes were moral and intellectual equals and that men had denied women their natural rights (Donavan 2001). This denial of women's rights was identified by liberal feminists as being central to the inequality of women (Alexander 1987). Crucial to the liberal feminist agenda has been ending women's legal, economic and social dependence upon men; ensuring that women obtain the freedom and opportunity to engage in education and training; promoting open competition for men and women on the basis of a laissez-faire market economy; accelerating the process of modernity in which social organisations support the principle of meritocracy; and enacting laws and public policies guaranteeing equality of choice and opportunity (Mandell 1996:6). In this sense, liberal feminists tend to take the existing structures of capitalism as a given and simply seek to ensure, through liberal reforms, that women have the same opportunities as men in fitting into these prevailing structures which historically have marginalised them. However, liberal feminists fail to fully recognise that these reforms do not affect all women in the same manner because of institutionalised inequalities along the lines of class and race, such that these conditions of inequality (which lead to vast differentials between for instance rich white women and poor black women) cannot be addressed and resolved through meritocratic notions of equal opportunity. In this way, they underplay the structurally-based constitution of patriarchal systems and overplay the significance of agency in undercutting gendered systems of inequality. Liberal feminism also fails to properly theorise the relationships between the sites of economic production and domestic social reproduction or, more broadly, between the public and private lives of women (and men), such that the role of women as wives, mothers and caregivers receive insufficient attention (Mackinnon 1987). Because of these weaknesses, liberal feminists seem to have an incomplete notion of patriarchy (as a deep-seated system of structures, practices and discourses) by focusing on primarily legal and procedural reforms in undercutting patriarchy.

Marxism feminism provides a fundamentally different understanding of patriarchy than liberal feminism, with Marxist feminists strongly leaning on Marxism as a theory of inequality and power (Mackinnon 1987). Marxist feminists view the oppression of women as stemming primarily from the class character of capitalism in which women are defined as the property of men and the accumulation of profit necessitates the exploitation of women's

labour (Mandell 1996). They thus trace the origins of women's oppression to the introduction of private property under capitalism. Capitalism is understood as creating the sexual division of labour by allocating women to unpaid work in the sphere of social reproduction while men work in the public sphere and are directly engaged in the production of value and commodities. In this sense, women's work reproduces male labour power at no cost and thereby enhances capitalist profit. Insofar as women enter the labour market, they often do so within the secondary and less privileged segment of the market. Marxist feminists end up analysing capitalism primarily in class terms and thus reduce sexual oppression and inequality to class relations and class domination. As a result, gender oppression (and patriarchy) is seen not as having its own logic and conditions of existence independent of class. Gendered analyses are often simply added onto Marxist analysis to give the latter a feminist flavour (Hartman 1981). Also, by focusing on the economy and politics, Marxist feminism fails to privilege the cultural realm in understanding how patriarchy becomes embedded and reproduced in society. Nevertheless, its emphasis on structure and on social reproduction is of critical significance.

Radical feminism, unlike Marxist feminism, subscribes to the notion that women's oppression is the first, most widespread and deepest form of human oppression (Mandell 1996). Like Marxist feminism, though, radical feminists highlight patriarchy as a firmly-rooted structure but not understood in class terms. In focusing as well, and particularly stridently, on the domestic sphere of social reproduction, radical feminists have a social constructionist understanding of gender and also a pronounced cultural and experiential conception of patriarchy, with the latter deeply internalised within men and women. Further, radical feminists tend to view the state not as a class state but as a patriarchal state characterised by masculinity, with the masculine quality not reducible to the fact that men occupy the echelons of state power (Tong 1989). Due to the historical, culturally-pervasive and intrusive character of patriarchy, radical feminists argue that there is need for women to separate themselves for purposes of organising around and against patriarchy. Radical feminism tends to have at times a monolithic and undifferentiated notion of the category of 'women' which leads to a-historical and essentialist conceptions of men and women. But its understanding of patriarchy as involving complex sets of everyday practices is critical to understand how patriarchy exists and is reproduced.

Socialist feminism, in focusing on both class and gender, tries to bridge the gap between Marxist and radical feminism (Sullivan 1992:9) through intersectional analyses in which class and gender have their own conditions of existence and interrelate in varying ways

based on contingent circumstances. It thus would provide a basis for unpacking the notion of 'women' to examine the heterogeneity within it (McGregor 1990). As with the radical feminists, patriarchy is seen as pre-existing capitalism, with patriarchy being adopted, adapted and reinforced by capitalism. Social feminists examine the domestic labour of women and its contribution to reproducing capitalism, the ways in which women are excluded from or become integrated into the capitalist labour market on a subordinate basis, and the significance of socialisation in the home in the construction of gendered relations and practices. In this regard, socialist feminism likely has the most comprehensive understanding of patriarchy of the feminist theories discussed, as it emphasises both the structural and experiential dimensions of it and the ways in which everyday practices reproduce patriarchal relationships.

These four well-established feminist theories have more recently been challenged by other feminist work influenced by postmodernism (Butler and Scott 1992). Postmodern feminists challenge modernist thinking (on which the discussed feminist theories rest) (Flax 1990) by claiming that history and society are not marked by any logic of (linear or nonlinear) progression and that all modernist forms of rationality are themselves sources of oppression (Hughes 2002). Further, and importantly, modernist reasoning is based on masculine-based constructions (Fraser and Nicholson 1990:33). In addition, postmodern feminism seeks to take into account the standpoints and personal experiences of women of colour and particularly those living on the peripheries of capitalism. In this sense, the four mainstream feminist theories represent the perspectives of white, Western feminists who generalise from their own restricted and privileged conditions of existence and personal experiences which fail to capture the socio-political, cultural, geographical and economic diversities of women. This then entails a more historical, non-universalising and non-essentialist theory which seeks to address difference and multiplicity among women (Fraser and Nicholson 1990), and one with a particular sensitivity to women of colour.

In providing this review of feminist theories, I do not posit that one theory is inherently of more analytical value than the others. What I do suggest though is that it is possible to draw insights from the different theories in order to offer a working definition of patriarchy which is of importance in understanding sex work. In particular, I would argue that patriarchy is irreducible to class and that, as a social system, it entails a range of structures and practices as well as discourses (which seek to legitimise the structures and practices) which have legal, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions. Further, patriarchy is historically and spatially diverse, such that it takes on different forms across time and space.

Perspectives on sex work can be understood within feminist theory and particular feminist understandings, though there is not necessarily a concise link between a particular theory and views on sex work. Some feminists argue for the right and legitimacy of sex work. Pro-sex work feminists support sex work as the exercise of the right of women to practice their sexuality as they choose and argue that sex work should be legitimate and decriminalised (Sullivan 1992). Anti-sex work feminists tend to demonise sex work as a reflection of men's violence against women with sex work as a manifestation of women's oppression (Farley and Barkan 2008:45).

Overall, there seems to be an ambivalent relationship between feminist theory (and the feminist movement) and views of sex work. But many feminists condemn sex work. Radical feminism has at times advocated for the abolishment of sex work and its criminalisation arguing that sex workers are victims of the patriarchal mode of existence and the violence that comes with it (Kessler 2005, Bell 1994, Lebrun 1999:20). Thus in a study by Farley and Barkan (1998) in San Francisco, the vast majority of sex workers had been raped, physically assaulted and threatened with a weapon by their male clients. In a similar vein, Marxist feminists claim that sex work entails a form of capitalist exploitation as women are compelled to sell their bodies as commodities to be consumed by men (Tong 1998). Postmodernist feminists have a different reasoning on sex work. In denying that there is a universal female experience, Fraser and Nicholson (1990) highlight the existence of difference in female experiences such that sex work must first and foremost be recognised and understood in its proper social context, particularly the context of vulnerability within which many women, and specifically female sex workers of colour, live and work. Thus the legitimacy of sex work is sometimes put forward by a range of feminists (Lebrun 1999) with the right for women to choose sex work and pursue their sexuality defended; and hence the importance of legalising sex work albeit in a regulated manner (Jolin 1994, Jackson and Otto 1980). This also entails rethinking stereotypical images of sex workers as deviant, coerced and drug-addicted women who have fallen from grace, and recognising that women from all walks of life enter sex work and for a range of different reasons.

These controversies about sex work are explicitly about the morality of sex work, and less so about trying to understand and explain the existence of sex work – though, undoubtedly, the moral positions emanate from analytical claims about women, patriarchy and capitalism. My concern in this thesis is about analysing sex work and not prejudging the lives and livelihoods of the sex workers in Beitbridge. In neither condemning nor justifying sex work, I seek to understand the complexities of the lived experiences of the Beitbridge sex

workers and hence I recognise the importance of providing space for the voices of these sex workers to be heard. As well, while sex work undeniably takes place within the context of patriarchy, sex workers should not be reduced to nameless victims of structures. Their lived experiences and agency need to be highlighted as they seek to manoeuvre their way through troubling conditions of existence in the pursuance of dignified lives and futures.

2.3 Livelihoods Theoretical Framework

In this section, I discuss the main theoretical framework for the thesis, namely the livelihoods framework. I detail the main characteristics and then go on to discuss crucial aspects of it. Additionally, I consider the framework from a feminist (or at least perspective gendered) perspective. Normally, the framework is called the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework but I downplay the notion of sustainability as I do not consider this as critical to the basic tenets of the framework. At times, though, I do need to refer to ‘sustainable’ because of its historical association with the framework.

2.3.1 Key Dimensions of the Framework

The idea of sustainable livelihoods was first introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development of 1987. Later, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) expanded the concept by advocating for the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as a broad goal for poverty eradication. It stated that sustainable livelihoods could serve as ‘an integrating factor that allows policies to address ‘development, sustainable resource management, and poverty eradication simultaneously (Chambers 1987:10; Krantz 2001). In the following years, ‘sustainable livelihoods’ was to receive further elaboration and legitimacy through its acceptance by governments, non-government organisations and international forums around the world (UNDP 1997), with the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom being an ardent supporter. Thus, from earlier on, the framework had pronounced programmatic connotations (DFID 1997, Carney et al. 1999, Adato and Dick 2002:5, Meikle et al. 2001).

My concern of course is with the analytical dimensions of the framework. The framework is used conceptually to understand and analyse the prevalence of poverty at household level, and it does so by examining how households draw upon available resources in the pursuance of diverse livelihood activities in the context of vulnerabilities and crises which emanate from different sources (Scoones 1998, Adato and Dick 2002). The structural conditions of existence within which household livelihoods are located are important to the framework, but so are the capacities and agency of households. Crucial to the framework is

the notion of a livelihood. Though at times there is some definitional un-clarity (Carswell et al. 1997), a livelihood is ‘the means of gaining a living’, or ‘a combination of the resources used and the activities undertaken in order to live’ (Chambers 1995:vi, Scoones 1998). Chambers and Conway (1992:6-7) elaborate on this by claiming that ‘[a] livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for means of [earning a] living: a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide . . . opportunities for the next generation’. Sustainability, in terms of this definition, refers to intergenerational livelihood capacities which, in the case of sex workers in Beitbridge, are hugely problematic. Nevertheless, whether sustainability exists or not, livelihood activities are pursued with reference to vulnerabilities involving a range of stresses and shocks with which households seek to contend.

Initially, the framework was applied to rural areas but subsequently it has been shown to be of relevance as well to urban areas (Farrington et al. 2002, Moser, 1996, Moser 1998, Tacoli 1998, Rakodi 1997, Beale and Kanji 1999). Vulnerability is the insecurity of the well-being of households in the face of changing environments (ecological, social, economic and political) in the form of sudden shocks, long terms trends or seasonal cycles (Moser 1996). The framework also highlights the asset (or resource) portfolio of households, with the following resources or assets often spoken about: natural, economic/financial, physical, human, social and, less so, political (Scoones 1998:7, Adato and Dick 2002:9, Maxwell et al. 2000). To construct livelihoods, households draw upon and combine the ‘capital’ endowments which they have access to and control over (Adato and Dick 2002:9). Also brought to the fore are policies, institutions and processes which affect how people use their assets in the pursuit of different livelihood strategies, with these features (for example, policies) existing at household, community, national and even global levels. Included here would be patriarchal systems and practices. In what follows, I first discuss the assets (resources or capitals) and then the policies, institutions and processes.

2.3.2 Livelihood Capitals

The framework seeks to frame livelihoods not primarily in terms of the deficiencies or needs of households, but in terms of their capacities as expressed through livelihood resources. In this context, I discuss the main assets in this section.

Natural capital is cited by Krantz (2001:9) as the natural resource stocks and environmental and climatic circumstances (for example, land, forests, soil and rain) within

which households exist and over which they have access. This is often seen as particularly pertinent to rural livelihoods because of the reliance on land and natural resources in constructing rural livelihoods (Scoones 1998:6). Agriculture, including crop and livestock production, would be central to this as would be natural resources such as edible fruits, thatch grass, insects and wild animals. However, agricultural activities in rural spaces are increasingly difficult to pursue (given the neoliberal restructuring of global agriculture) such that households typically referred to as small-scale farming households often rely on other livelihood activities such as petty commodity trading. Further, there is an increasing trend of urban agriculture in the context of high rates of urban unemployment (DFID 1998, Rakodi 1993). Overall, women (compared to men) have more tenuous rights to land but are often the main labourers in agricultural activities.

Financial or economic capital is defined as the monetary base (such as income earned through employment or informal economic activities, credit or debt, savings, physical assets and investments) which is crucial to pursuing livelihoods in contemporary monetised economies under capitalism (Adato and Dick 2002, Krantz 2001). Financial capital is chiefly derived by income from the sale of labour power on the labour market, and it is especially important in urban areas because of the commodified character of urban economies (Moser 1998, Twigg and Bhatt 1998). However, households in agrarian economies, and even in deep rural areas, often require financial capital to access basic goods. Processes of deindustrialisation along with limited rates of national economic growth however have led to structural unemployment and, in the context of neo-liberalism, to a shift from full-time permanent employment to more irregular and non-standard forms of contractual arrangements, such as casual, part-time and contract work. As a result, urban economies today are regularly marked by a significant 'informal sector' economy, which often translates into erratic and unpredictable income streams (Benjamin and Amis 1999). Besides formal employment and informal economic activities, at times households are able to access credit or loans, but this is often difficult for poor households because of the absence of the required collateral for guaranteeing the repayment of loans (Meikle et al. 2001). Women in particular (and especially those who are heads of households) often are found in irregular forms of employment or in the informal sector which, together, contributes to the feminisation of poverty in urban spaces.

Human capital refers to the education, skills, knowledge, health, nutrition and labour power available to households in their pursuit of livelihoods (Adato and Dick 2002, Carney 1998, Krantz 2001). There is in part a connection between financial capital and human capital

as, for example, the prospects of employment, the kinds of employment accessed and the sheer capacity to work at all are dependent upon human capital. Inversely a strong financial capital base may facilitate and enhance access to education as well as to quality medical care (Crook 1996, Rakodi 2000). As well, human capital is affected by the quality of natural capital (notably in terms of negative impacts on health arising for example from pollution) (Meikle et al. 2001:11). With regard to women, the girl-child in patriarchal societies often has an uphill battle in accessing education due to beliefs and practices which designate the domestic sphere as the women's sphere. The enrolment of girls in education, compared to boys, is often undervalued such that, in times of crisis, girl-children may be withdrawn from school which, in the end, reduces female literacy rates. This in turn exacerbates the feminisation of poverty as the livelihood prospects for women are reduced.

Physical capital includes the transportation, roads, buildings, shelter, water supply and sanitation, energy, technology, communications or basic infrastructure that people require to live (Adato and Dick 2002:9). Housing is regarded as crucial because, for the urban poor, it may not simply be used for shelter to accommodate the household but as a productive asset and source of financial capital (for example, renting a room or using housing space as a workshop) (Meikle et al. 2001:11). Besides the quality of housing being important, the location of housing is also of some significance (Farrington et al. 2002:24), as it may or may not be close to available employment opportunities and commodity markets. Of course, the type of housing accessed by households depends quite fundamentally on the level of financial capital available. Access to water, sanitation and energy sources are a major dimension for both urban and rural livelihoods, and these often have a gendered dimension to them in that, in the main, women are responsible for instance in rural areas for collecting water and firewood for washing and cooking purposes.

Finally, social capital plays a crucial basis for constructing livelihood activities. Social capital comprises the social support mechanisms and networks within which households exist and which they lean upon in bolstering livelihood possibilities (Scoones 1998:8). This may also entail relationships of reciprocity (within kinship relations and amongst neighbours), which may take the form of loans, child care support or food (Dersham and Gzirishvili 1998 cited in Meikle et al. 2001:11) with this being especially critical during times of crises (Farrington et al. 2000). Women-only social networks of support are not unusual. The sharing and circulating of information within networks is additionally crucial, including details about opportunities for casual labour or informal economic activities in what Meagher (2006:555) describes as 'African entrepreneurial networks'. These social affiliations

and associations, while often of mutual benefit and a source of cohesion, may at times involve tension and competition because of the absence of trust or unselfish motives. Furthermore, social arrangements sometimes have political dimensions embedded in them which also generate conflict. More specifically, political affiliations may enable access to resources (such as state-provided services) or the denial of access, with often the ruling party appropriating and distributing resources amongst its supporters. This differential access may cause rifts between households at local levels and, clearly, it impacts on the capacity to pursue viable livelihoods.

2.3.3 Policies, Institutions and Processes

The livelihoods framework highlights the existence of policies, institutions and processes within which livelihood activities are pursued by households. Though these notions, as a whole, are subject to different understandings in different livelihood studies, they are meant to capture the existence of the wider economic, political and cultural arrangements or contexts which structure the locality of households. Clearly, these arrangements vary over time and across space, such that the specificity of such arrangements need to be identified and understood when undertaking a particular livelihoods study such as sex worker livelihoods in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe. The broader context provides opportunities and sets limits in terms of access to resources or capitals and thus influences the kind of livelihood activities pursued (Adato and Dick 2002). This context ranges from the global down to the local level.

The economic context has clear implications for household-based livelihoods with regard to the availability and distribution of resources (Douglass 1988). Of particular significance today is the worldwide system of neoliberal capitalism and the ways in which this system structures the political economy of particular nation-states and shapes household livelihood possibilities. It is well known that neoliberal restructuring has impacted detrimentally on the lives of urban and rural households by allowing the market mechanism to operate with only minimal state regulation (Katepa-Kalala 1997, Beall and Kanji 1999 Moser 1998). The African continent in particular has a long history of macroeconomic neoliberal policies, originally in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) dating back to the 1980s (Maxwell et al. 2000). Structural adjustment had a deleterious effect on wage-dependent urban workers and created new classes of vulnerable people while deepening levels of urban poverty (Demery and Squire 1996, Sahn, Dorosh and Younger 1996, Mabogunje 1994, Becker, Jamer, and Morrison 1994). Rural economies were also not spared, with neoliberal restructuring leading to the undercutting of state support and subsidies

for small-scale farmers. In both urban and rural areas, neo-liberalism (both during structural adjustment and subsequently) has affected access to land, employment and health services and has led to significant food insecurity.

Political institutions and processes also set the context for, and mediate the ability or inability to carry out, livelihood strategies (Scoones 1998). Hence, they can both enable and constrain the possibilities and practicalities of constructing household-based livelihoods. Government policies may, for instance, facilitate an environment conducive to the establishment of informal economic activities and it may implement programmes which strengthen the health care system. Alternatively, government policies may do the opposite for various reasons including mismanagement and incapacity (Davies 1997). As well, beyond such formal political arrangements, there may be informal arrangements within the political sphere based on clientism and corruption which favour some groups in society and not others. Additionally, the presence or absence of political space for urban and rural citizens to democratically voice their concerns, and the extent to which the state uses its coercive apparatus to close down livelihood options, also structure the livelihood capacities of households.

A further factor is the prevailing socio-cultural institutions in society, with patriarchy being of particular significance when it comes to women. The family and marriage as social institutions, the intricate link drawn between women and the domestic sphere, the ongoing resilience of gendered roles and practices, and the ways in which male and female sexuality is defined, all undoubtedly have a direct or indirect bearing on the ability of women (whether married or unmarried) to engage in livelihood activities and the kinds of activities available to them (McGregor 1990). But certainly female-headed households (headed by never married, divorced or widowed women) are an increasing phenomenon with diverse consequences for female heads in terms of constructing household livelihoods (Beall and Kanji 1999). It may allow for livelihood opportunities for widowed and divorced women which they never had before (such as direct access to land in the case of rural women) under the weight of their marital arrangement or it may lead to increased economic vulnerability because of the absence of available human capital. It should also be noted that feminist movements alter the prevalence of patriarchal arrangements, including feminist positioning around the legalisation or criminalisation of sex work. In some countries, sex work is legal and this increases the prospect and potential of sex work as a livelihood alternative for women (Wojcikiki 2003).

Overall, then, understanding policies, institutions and processes allows for the identification of restrictions or barriers and opportunities (or 'gateways') to pursuing

livelihoods (Scoones 1998). These barriers or gateways set the structural context within which households exist and pursue livelihoods, and thereby either deepen or lighten conditions of vulnerability. These structural conditions though do not determine livelihoods, as they rather set limits for what is possible and not possible, and thus households manoeuvre their way through the world as it presents itself. They may simply act within these structures or they may somehow seek to move against and beyond them, including in some cases resisting structures (such as specific state policies). Thus, households may act back against the global and national structures which shape their lives. This is illustrated by Beall and Kanji (1999) when they discuss about how black people in apartheid South Africa defied the pass law and influx control systems which prevented them from entering so-called white cities and towns. Such an example seems to have particular pertinence for sex work and its criminalisation.

2.3.4 Criticisms of the Livelihoods Framework

The livelihoods framework has gained recognition as a useful and successful analytical framework for comprehending the complexities of rural and urban poor livelihoods (Meikle et al. 2001). However, at times it has been romanticised by privileging its strengths and downplaying its limitations.

First of all, as argued by Adato and Dick (2002:26) a critical aspect of people's lives which is important in understanding people's decisions and choices and consequent livelihood outcomes are not fully captured by the framework. This critical aspect is culture. Thus, cultural capital needs to be integrated into the framework, including religion, tradition, language and symbolism. This, it is claimed, would allow for a more historically in-depth examination of local histories and the contemporary life-worlds of households. The kinds of livelihood activities pursued (and not pursued) and how households cope with stresses and shocks may often be culturally-specific and culturally-shaped. Likewise, it has been suggested that political capital needs to be more centrally incorporated into the livelihoods framework (Adato and Dick 2002:29). At the same time, both points lead to questions around the clarity of the conceptual distinction between capitals, and institutions and processes.

A second criticism is that the livelihoods framework fails to come to terms with the importance of global and national power relations and social inequality and how these lead to vulnerability and poverty at local levels. This is despite the fact that the framework seems to acknowledge these in its focus on policies, institutions and processes. Ashley and Carney (1999) thus stipulate that the framework tends to convey a consensual model of society by

almost conceptualising power imbalances and inequalities as aberrations and intrinsic to the system as it exists. Hence, it overplays the possibility of human agency at household level effecting change and fails to provide a proper structuralist analysis (Adato and Dick 2002).

Thirdly, in its focus on poverty, the framework is said to homogenise communities by not recognising fully the prevalence of intra-local socio-economic differentiation. In other words, poverty in itself is rarely uniformly distributed within an area (Krantz 2001) as communities usually do not represent collective social units uniformly affected by poverty. Indeed, at times, the extreme poverty of one household may be caused, at least in part, by the livelihood activities of another household. Related to this is that households as such do not have livelihoods, people do. And, in the case of households comprised of males and females, households are gendered. My study focuses on unmarried women but certainly in the case of male-headed households the importance of examining intra-household relations and dynamics would be critical to considering livelihoods at the household level.

This leads to a final, and very telling, criticism of the livelihoods framework, namely, its failure to provide a gendered analysis of livelihoods. This of course is a criticism which could be lodged at numerous theoretical perspectives. In the end, the livelihoods framework is constituted by concepts which are intrinsically gender-insensitive and thus gender is not built into the very construction of the framework. The framework, from the very start of analysis, does not address diverse conditions, assets and activities of the socially-differentiated groups of men and women. Gender is simply added on (as one of many institutional arrangements) but, again, it may not even be added on (Ashley and Carney 1999). It is for this reason that I try to examine the livelihoods of female sex workers in Beitbridge with patriarchy foremost in mind.

2.3.5 Gender and the Livelihoods Framework

In this context, it has been argued that all livelihood studies should prioritise gender (Pasteur 2002) even if, at first sight, gender does not seem relevant to a particular study. More specifically, gender (femininity and masculinity) is critical to understanding the very possibility of even engaging in livelihood activities, and it may be either enabling or disabling. As a general rule, men face fewer constraints in pursuing livelihoods as compared to women (Connell 2005). And, consequently, this has forced women into survivalist sections of the informal economy where they pursue livelihood strategies such as sex work (Tsikata 2009). But, in the case of women, what may appear disabling can in fact be enabling. Thus, though under neoliberal restructuring there has been a shift towards irregular and non-

standard forms of employment and, with these, less secure and more precarious forms of employment, the prevalence of for example part-time or temporary work may be of advantage to married women who are unable otherwise to be employed (as full-time permanent workers) because of their assigned domestic and caring responsibilities. In a different way, the prevalence of patriarchy and differential ways of asserting masculine and feminine sexuality may facilitate the possibility for women to engage in sex work.

It is noteworthy that there been some studies focusing on sex work as a livelihood strategy but such studies are not common. As Greenall (2008:1) argues, on the whole, studies on sex work as a livelihood are few and far between when compared to the livelihoods literature in general. An example of an existing study is that conducted by Hendriks (2008) in Kisumu (a town in Kenya) in which qualitative research on a total of 45 sex workers was carried out. Hendriks (2008) used the livelihoods framework to analyse the resources deployed by sex workers and the study revealed that the women entered sex work primarily to increase their financial income. As well, by increasing their financial capital, they enhanced other livelihood capitals. Hendriks (2008) highlighted that the sex workers in Kisumu were vulnerable to the risks of HIV exposure, and that their social relations (or social capital) were significantly altered by their debut into sex work as they tended to hide their sex work activity from their family and community members for fear of stigmatisation.

Another study carried out in Zambia examining relations between local Tonga women and immigrant fishermen in the Zambian Kafue Flats revealed that fish-for-sex exchanges are common, and thus sex work is based on the economic opportunities provided by the fish trade in conditions of poverty (Merten and Haller 2007). It was concluded that the general economic crisis and local livelihood changes were the primary reasons why women engaged in transactional sex while the fishermen profited from the women's economic dependency (Merten and Haller 2007:79). From this study, gender inequality is clearly discernible as the Zambian women are argued to be economically dependent on men for economic survival thus they resort to sex trade as an independent source of livelihood.

2.4 Conclusion

This thesis seeks to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe. In doing so, I use a combination of feminist theory and the livelihoods framework to provide a comprehensive and integrated analysis of sex work. As my thesis involves a livelihoods study, the livelihoods framework is the pivotal theoretical framework for the sex worker study. However, as highlighted already, the livelihoods

perspective is gender-insensitive and hence feminist literature – in stressing patriarchal systems and practices – provides a more nuanced understanding of the lives and livelihoods of sex workers (Jackson 2001, Liddle and Wright 2001). In other words, the gendered aspect, which the livelihoods framework fails to incorporate into its analysis of livelihoods, is substantially addressed by feminist theory.

In this light, Sullivan (1992:11) argues that the most characteristic feature of feminist approaches to sex work is their focus on the connections between sex, gender and power. Therefore, feminist analyses identify as significant the different structural locations which men and women tend to have in the sex industry (women as workers, men as clients) but they also connect this difference to an argument about power and to a wider theory of oppression which locates all women, whether they are sex workers or not, in a social system of male dominance and control. This social system of male dominance and control otherwise known as patriarchy can be cited as an institutional arrangement under the sustainable livelihoods framework. The feminist theoretical framework, by placing an emphasis on a gendered dimension of sex work, makes visible some of the power structures and mechanisms of patriarchy which operate both within and outside the sex work 'industry'. This fills a crucial gap in the livelihoods framework, namely, its inability to fully comprehend power and power relationships (Adato and Dick 2001).

The next chapter examines sex work in Zimbabwe both historically and during contemporary times, as well as identifying and discussing the themes found in the sex work literature on Zimbabwe. Hence, while the current chapter frames the thesis study analytically, the following chapter seeks to locate my study of sex workers in Beitbridge with reference to sex work in Zimbabwe more broadly.

CHAPTER THREE: SEX WORK IN ZIMBABWE

3.1 Introduction

Sex work has been argued as the oldest profession in the world (Bhunu and Mushayabasa 2012:1), with debates around it having moral, religious, health and sexuality connotations. Public debates on sex work in Zimbabwe have been polemical with some supporting sex work (or prostitution) as an acceptable profession and income-generating activity, and others expressing revulsion often because it means that women go beyond patriarchal norms (as belonging sexually to one man) through sex work. Thus, as Magaisa (2001:121) highlights, sex work is a controversial issue in Zimbabwean society and, despite the fact that it has been subject to restrictive laws in the past and present, the phenomenon continues to flourish in many parts of the country. In this context, the current chapter provides a nuanced and in-depth discussion of sex work in Zimbabwe.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first brief section seeks to provide a working definition or conceptualisation of sex work which is context-specific to Zimbabwe. The second section offers a historical overview of sex work in Zimbabwe dating from the colonial times to contemporary sex work but with a specific focus on the post-2000 period. The third section examines the main themes or issues brought up by the literature on sex work in Zimbabwe, including both major and minor themes.

3.2 Prostitution or Sex Work: Shifting Definitions

A thorough study of sex work or prostitution cannot be achieved without taking note of how sex work or prostitution is understood within specific social contexts. Sex work is understood differently by different groups of people depending on the cultural, social and political contexts of the societies where it occurs. For example, in their studies of sex workers, key scholars on sex work in Zimbabwe such as Magaisa (2001:123) define prostitution as an income-generating activity using one's sexual organs. Authors such as Bhunu and Mushayabasa (2012:1) refer to prostitution as sexual intercourse in exchange for remuneration. It is vital to note how these definitions, unlike others, tend to be gender insensitive by not strictly limiting sex work as a female phenomenon but as a profession practised by both men and women. This is due to the fact that studies in Zimbabwe (and indeed elsewhere) have revealed an increasing number of male sex workers or prostitutes (Mtetwa et al. 2014).

In Zimbabwe, using the term prostitute and sex work synonymously poses the danger of convolution. This is so because authors such as Hungwe (2006:33) state that the term prostitute which translates to *hure* in the Shona language is culturally-laden and is used not only to describe sex workers but as a marker to denote any supposedly unrespectable women, particularly those who move into social spaces that are considered to be male territory (Gaidzanwa 1995). This is argued as dating back to colonial Southern Rhodesia whereby the increase in the female population in colonial towns such as Salisbury and Bulawayo meant a shift in gender relations coupled with an increase in the branding of women as ‘prostitutes’ (or *mahure*). Women who therefore sought to redefine themselves and stepped out of societal rules and expectations of respectable women became known as prostitutes.

Furthermore, Hungwe (2006:35) goes on to mention that married women who moved to towns to live with their husbands sought to differentiate themselves from unrespectable women (“the prostitutes”) and hence the term came to encompass both women who were unmarried and earned independent incomes and those engaged in *mapoto* arrangements. *Mapoto* arrangements are stated by Barnes (1992:598) as gender relationships free of the ties and obligations of formal marriage in which bride-wealth was not paid to the woman’s relatives. In this arrangement, a woman performs all wifely duties including domestic and sexual services. In this respect, Zimbabwean society places a high premium on bride-wealth and formal marriage as a sign of respectability for women and, therefore, women who fall outside of this spectrum by cohabitating with their partners tend to be labelled as prostitutes.

However, given the multiple definitions that prostitution is given in Zimbabwean society, for purposes of this study the term prostitution or sex work in Zimbabwe will be used in a morally-neutral manner to refer to a woman engaging in sexual services for remuneration. It is imperative to underscore that, in this study, sex work and prostitution will be used interchangeably as sex work literature still widely uses the term prostitute though preference will gravitate towards the use of the term sex work. The term ‘prostitute’ has negative moral connotations as it is used to demonise and stigmatise women who provide sexual services as a way of living (Tekola 2005). Hence the term sex worker is a more inclusive and richer term as it highlights the complex set of social relations involved in sex work, including the provider of sexual services, the buyers of sex (or clients) and those who in different ways shape the transactions (including the state’s regulatory institutions, the tourism industry and direct intermediaries between the sex worker and client) (Truong 1990).

3.3 Historical Overview of Sex Work in Zimbabwe

In order to understand the nature of sex work in Zimbabwe, its meaning for those involved and its implication on society as a whole, there is need to locate the historical context in which sex work in Zimbabwe occurs. Wasosa (2011:27) stresses the importance of locating sex work or prostitution in its proper socio-historical context as research within anthropology on Shona peoples has shown that the practice was not present before the rise of colonialism but is traced back to the advent of colonialism. It should be noted though, that if sex work did occur during pre-colonial times, any attempt to trace it back to such times may be futile as there is a high probability that it was not documented. Therefore, documentation on prostitution can only be traced back to colonial times.

3.3.1 Sex work in colonial Southern Rhodesia

Authors who have examined the history of sex work in Zimbabwe claim that the emergence of prostitution in Zimbabwe and in other countries in sub-Saharan Africa is closely associated with urbanisation and other processes of capitalist development in towns, mines and farming settlements (Magaisa 2001:103). In support of this view, Bourdillon (1987:321) claims that sex work is relatively new to Shona society, brought about largely by urban environments which necessitated sex work as a means of survival in the harsh environment ushered in by colonialism.

The advent of colonialism resulted in a shift in African societal structures and gender relations. The introduction of the tax system, whereby black African families were required to pay taxes such as cattle and hut tax, was instrumental in the emergence of a black migrant labour force in the towns, mines and commercial farms engaged in wage labour (Barnes 1992:591). This black migrant labour force, both local and foreign male workers, required the comforts of home exemplified by domestic and sexual services from women. Simultaneously, Hungwe (2006:34) writes that during the colonial era many women saw towns as places of freedom from patriarchal structures, restrictive parents or in-laws, abusive marriages and the drudgery of agricultural work. As a result, these women migrated to towns in search of work which often involved sex work as the formal industries catered for male employment more so than female employment.

This signified the origins of urban prostitution which, according to Muzvidziwa (1997:76), dates back over a century to the rise of colonial towns. The absence of female employment in colonial towns such as Salisbury (now Harare) thus meant that women looked for independent sources of income, leading at times to the provision of sexual services termed as *mapoto* arrangements (Hungwe 2006). These women in a sense became migrant labourers

in their own right, leaving behind rural areas and families to earn money in mine compounds and towns (Barnes 1992:591). It is apparent therefore that, from such an early historical period, sex work or prostitution arose from the mobility of African women in search of not only employment prospects as a survival strategy but also sexual and cultural freedom. In this context, Schmidt (1991:749) notes that bride-wealth, paid by the husband's family on marriage to the wife's family, was a lucrative source of income for rural African families and this led to an increase in forced marriages. Because of this, rural women sought to emancipate themselves and escape such oppressive patriarchal traditions by fleeing to towns.

The colonial state opposed this female migration to urban centres. Barnes and Win (1992:25) report that until the 1940s cities such as Salisbury were officially designated for white residents and black migrant workers and therefore the presence of rural women posed a problem for colonial authorities. The state only provided bachelor accommodation in towns and the lack of family accommodation and formal wages for rural migrant women made prostitution a lucrative business (Barnes 1992). As such, in a bid to gain control over the mobility of rural women and regain authority over urban space, attempts were made by the colonial government to control prostitution through such means as vagrancy legislation which made prostitution illegal (Muzvidziwa 1997:75).

Dating back to the colonial era, the state is seen as interfering with prostitution and establishing ways to initially control it but then, later, adopting a more intolerant stance by taking drastic measures to eradicate it through its criminalisation. This is a theme which continues to pervade contemporary sex work in Zimbabwe. During colonial times, the state's approach to sex work was in fact ambivalent at first, as authorities were divided over the merits of sex work in the urban areas. According to Barnes (1992:600), one colonial medical director expressed the contradictions of the white settler state's policy on prostitution (either by controlling or eradicating it) by highlighting that prostitution was a necessary evil under white rule: when there were so many urban African men living apart from their families, prostitution became crucial as a safeguard for white urban women. In this light, prostitution became the easiest way to avoid what the white settlers termed the "black peril" (which was the sexual interaction of black men and white women), something the white colonialists considered as an abomination (Barnes 1992). At the same time, prostitutes were feared for being the cause of venereal infections which was one of the great phobias of the white population; and thus the colonial state had to be seen to be doing something against prostitution (Schmidt 1991).

3.3.2 Sex Work in Zimbabwe Post-Independence

Despite its illegal status dating back to colonial times (before 1980) and attempts to control it through such means as vagrancy legislation, sex work thrived and continues to thrive. At political independence in 1980, the newly elected Zimbabwean government sought to transform society by ridding it of all social ills including racial, economic and oppressive gender relations (Seidman, 1984:419). Prostitution was regarded as was one such social ill.

The Zimbabwean government was following the lead of other African democratically elected governments by seeking to eradicate sex work. As argued by McClintock (1992:84), in the 1980s in Zimbabwe the police, acting under the directives of the government, launched massive assaults on single, independently working urban women in putative attempts to “clean” the cities of prostitution under an operation dubbed “Operation Clean-Up”. Specifically, in 1983, just three and a half years after independence and under the pre-independence vagrancy law, women were picked up from the streets, hotels, cinemas and even at home in a campaign to end prostitution; and they were detained until they presented their marriage certificates or proof of employment. Those who failed this screening process were sent to a rural resettlement camp (Seidman 1984:419).

According to McClintock (1992:85), in these resettlement camps, women were subjected to appalling abuse. Much as such operations were strongly opposed by the public who protested the scapegoating of women “merely because they showed some independence”, most people objected only to the indiscriminate harassment of women and not to the idea of “resettling prostitutes” (Seidman 1984:419). Several women’s groups were in fact at the forefront in support of “Operation Clean-up” as an effort to strengthen the sanctity of the family. One comment passed by a member of the public revealed the general animosity towards sex workers in Zimbabwean society. As noted by Seidman (1984:420), this commentator supported “Operation Clean-up” by police in stating that it was going to result in some men giving their wives their full pay-package for a change instead of spending money on prostitutes in beer halls and nightclubs.

Sex work became further entrenched in Zimbabwean society after the failure of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), from 1991, in engineering economic growth. In this respect, scholars such as Wasosa (2011:28) report that, in post-colonial Zimbabwe, the state was plunged into an unprecedented political, economic and social crisis which was a result primarily of bad governance and economic mismanagement by political leaders. In a bid to revive the economy, the government – inspired by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund – introduced the ESAP as a typical neoliberal programme but,

instead of reviving the crisis, ESAP deepened it (Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003). As outlined by Hammar and Raftopoulos (2003:6) and others (Wasosa 2011:28), the effects of this structural adjustment programme were immediate and sustained to such an extent that – during the 1990s – there was a marked increase in interest rates and inflation, a 65 per cent fall in the stock market, and a 40 per cent decline in manufacturing resulting in retrenchments and company closures. The overall impact was a reduction in urban standards of living. This crisis continued unabated and had its culmination in the financial meltdown of 14 November 1997 (which is termed ‘Black Friday’) when the Zimbabwean dollar fell from around 10 dollars to below 30 dollars (to the US dollar) within four hours of trading time (Bond and Munyanya 2003:xii). This, coupled with the payment of gratuities to war veterans of Z50,000 dollars and monthly pensions of Z2,000 dollars, dwindled further the national treasury reserves.

Wasosa (2011:29) highlights that this socio-historical context set the scene for increasing prostitution as an economic necessity for women struggling for daily survival. To give one example, in his research on sex work in Masvingo town in 1995, Muzvidziwa (1997:76) revealed that the research site was one that was characterised by declining disposable incomes such that sex workers were trapped in a low-return equilibrium situation meaning that prostitution did not necessarily lead to improved urban livelihoods. He thus states that, in Masvingo, prostitution was a survival strategy and (like most low status and low paying work) it did not offer an opportunity to accumulate capital for investment purposes (Muzvidziwa 1997:76).

Intriguingly, Muzvidziwa (1997) also notes that during the 1990s the phenomenon of rural sex work rose to the fore. But Magaisa claims that studies of prostitution have been conducted in urban areas only with little regard to the rural dimensions of sex work (2001:103) such that the historical trends of rural sex work remain under-researched. This absence of research is based on the assumption of a link between sex work and the corrupting (and ‘foreign’) influences of urban life, leading to the myth that sex work was predominantly an urban phenomenon. Rural areas were seen as free from the evils of urban life and thus as the uncontaminated bastions of traditional culture and practice which inhibited the practice of sex work (Magaisa 2001). It seems that the post-colonial era became pivotal for raising awareness of rural sex work.

Before independence, prostitution undertaken by urban black women was in large part confined to black residential areas, and notably urban beer outlets (Muzvidziwa 1997:80). However, the political and racial freedom attained at independence meant that social spaces

or physical areas previously designated as white places were now accessible to the black citizenry; and sex workers slowly but surely began to occupy these places. As a result, post-independence sex work studies revealed the emergence of various types of sex work such as hotel prostitution, backstreet prostitution, advertised prostitution and organised prostitution in massage parlours or clubs. The number of sex workers in urban areas, during the 1990s, is unknown. A study conducted by Ngugi et al. (1996) on the impact of peer-mediated programmes among female sex workers in reducing sexually transmitted diseases and HIV transmission refers to a 1991 survey indicating that there were about 12,000 female sex workers in Bulawayo alone, which is the second largest city after Harare; about 9,500 of these sex workers were said to be bar-based rather than brothel or street based (1996:244).

Public discussion in Zimbabwe around sex work rose increasingly to the fore in the 1990s in the context of the AIDS pandemic, as sex work or prostitution was construed as an aid in the rise of the pandemic. Indeed, since the beginning of the AIDS pandemic, it would seem that literature on sex work has increased considerably (Magaisa 2001:122). This is attributed to the fact that sex workers are a high risk group and their HIV prevalence rate is very high, often 4-20 times that in the general population (Mtetwa et al. 2013:1). As a result, attempts by the Zimbabwean government to reduce HIV transmission rates meant an increase in HIV and AIDS prevention measures targeted at sex workers.

3.3.3 Post-2000 sex work in Zimbabwe

The numbers of sex workers in Zimbabwe continue to be on the increase given the economic and political history of the country post-independence and particularly the events which were to occur after the year 2000. The ushering in of the 21st millennium in Zimbabwe was marred by increased political and economic hardship in Zimbabwe (Wasosa 2011:30). Consequently, the social relations and norms that may have inhibited women from engaging in sex work are disintegrating as survival is sought at all costs.

The Zimbabwean economy, already weakened by ESAP and payment of war veteran gratuities (Mupedziswa and Gumbo 1998), plummeted further due to the state's land reform policies. Of significance was the fast track land reform programme in Zimbabwe dubbed the "Third Chimurenga" (or war of liberation) which saw the forceful removal of white commercial farmers to be replaced by black indigenous local farmers (Raftopoulos 2006). This move stoked public criticism globally to the extent that Western sanctions were imposed on Zimbabwe, which reduced the amount of foreign aid and direct investment channeled into the country. Fast track reform led to a pronounced decline in the agrarian economy which had

serious implications for the national economy as a whole, including in urban centres where urban poverty deepened because of deindustrialisation. As argued by Potts (2006:287), the depth and breadth of poverty in Zimbabwe is the cause and effect of the increasing informalisation of the economy and this has had a ripple effect on the rural areas. The detrimental effects of fast track were compounded by the state's Operation Murambatsvina also known as Operation Restore Order in 2005 which led to the massive destruction of informal housing and businesses in cities and towns around the country. Current statistics on unemployment and poverty in Zimbabwe indicate rates of 90 percent for both (Phiri 20 May 2013).

It was during this period of intense urban (and rural) poverty that the sex work trade flourished. In illustration of this, media reports show how poverty has become so rampant that there has been a major increase in the number of teenage sex workers. For example, an article by the *British Broadcasting Corporation* (entitled "Zimbabwe girls trade sex for food") reports how the Save the Children aid agency, in an interview with the deputy head teacher of a large school with 1,500 pupils east of Victoria Falls, uncovered that hundreds of the school's female students as young as 12 are now selling their bodies for whatever they can get to survive (Thompson 12 June 2009). In addition, research carried out by O'Donnell et al. (2002) in the Binga district in Matebeleland North (one of the most remote and poorest areas of Zimbabwe) is illustrative of the increasing prevalence of commercial sex work in the post-2000 period. Sex work in Binga has increasingly become a coping strategy for women and girls as young as 15, coming from rural areas in times of stress to earn money from commercial sex work, especially since 2001 when food security in rural areas began to deteriorate.

In the context of entering sex work with the decline in food security and the rising cost of living in the post-2000 period, sex workers were to face further challenges from the various attempts by the police as the law enforcement agent of the state to eradicate prostitution. Anti-prostitution campaigns were carried out by the police as almost replicas of the Operation Clean Up of 1983 (Phiri 20 May 2013). An article by *Al Jazeera* titled "Zimbabwe Cracks Down on the Oldest Profession" writes that, after a long hiatus on crackdowns on prostitution, the police had resumed these operations which started with Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa* (Chipo Get Married), Operation *Chengetedza Hunhu* (Maintain Your Dignity) and Operation *Zvanyanya* (It's too much) and the more recent Operation *Dyira Bonus Kumba* (Take Your Bonus Money Home) launched in December 2013 (Phiri 20 May 2013).

Police harassment and brutality is a common problem for sex workers around the world, and feminist groups, women's rights activists and sex worker organisations have all mobilised and lobbied against what they have termed human rights abuses by the police (Scorgie et al. 2013:6). One such proponent of sex worker rights in Zimbabwe is Beatrice Savadye, a prominent women's rights campaigner and director of the Real Opportunities for Transformation Support. According to the *Financial Gazette*, Savadye accused the police of discriminatory, unfair and hypocritical practices when she was quoted as saying: "What is even more worrying is that there is selective application of the law as we do not see males who solicit for sex being arrested as well" (Kunambura 2014). The ushering in of Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity in 2009, as an attempt to resolve the economic and political crisis in the country, was unintentionally important for the sex work debate within government (Christian Century 2010:19). As the main opposition political party in Zimbabwe (the Movement for Democratic Change) shared power with the traditional ruling party (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front), the issue of the criminalisation of sex work was debated with women's rights activists within the government championing decriminalisation.

The current trend of feminism within the country has led to the rise of feminist movements in support of women rights as well as sex worker rights (Magaisa 2001:133). As a result, sex work programmes have been initiated not only to advance sex worker rights but to improve sex worker access to health services. According to Cowan et al. (2013:2), female sex workers only became recognised as an important group to reach with regard to HIV prevention and treatment services in the context of Zimbabwe's National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2006-2010. To further strengthen this cause, in 2009 the Centre for Sexual Health, HIV and AIDS Research (CeSHHAR) was formed (Cowan et al. 2013). As reported by the *Herald* newspaper in 2013, CeSHHAR took the initiative and registered 12,383 sex workers throughout the country up to the age of 60. Of these women, 10,445 were being treated for sexually transmitted diseases, while 2,132 tested positive for HIV and have since been referred for anti-retroviral treatment (*Chipunza* 12 November 2013). The sex work programme co-ordinator with CeSHHAR (Ms Sibongile Mtetwa) said that these figures were just the tip of the iceberg as they only represent women who have come out in the open, while the majority still operated in their closets (*Chipunza* 12 November 2013).

Increasing awareness of their human rights and a need to be recognised as entrepreneurs in their own rights, sex workers in Zimbabwe have in recent years endeavoured to form coalitions and support groups to help each other. The *Daily News* reported recently

that a group of retired prostitutes have started a consultancy for commercial sex workers in Zimbabwe. A 65-year old sex worker identified as Linda Mankarankara claimed that the consultancy would teach new sex workers about the industry and the dangers of prostitution (Majaka 13 July 2014). This shows an effort by sex workers to professionalise their line of work. Sex workers in Zimbabwe have in fact shown great resilience and ingenuity in protecting themselves from abuse by the public as well as police harassment. An article featured by *New Zimbabwe* in 2015 titled “Sex workers switch to mobile payments” divulges how sex workers in Harare are now demanding that clients pay for services through mobile platforms to avoid being duped. This move is also argued to provide protection from thieves and corrupt police officers who demand bribes (*New Zimbabwe* 21 March 2015). Earlier on, in 2013, a local radio and news company had reported how commercial sex workers in Zimbabwe were turning to the internet to advertise their wares after the police clampdown code named “Operation Zvanyanya” saw their businesses suffering a massive blow (*Nehanda* 9 September 2013).

The history of sex work in Zimbabwe is a long one which can be traced back to the early colonial period and sex work continues to be pervasive throughout Zimbabwe today. In the following section, I identify and discuss themes prevailing in the academic literature on sex work in Zimbabwe both pre- and post-independence. In the main, these themes have already been raised if only in passing in the historical account.

3.4 Themes in Sex Work

A thorough analysis of sex work literature for all historical periods reveals a cross-section of certain recurrent issues or themes which are central to sex work. These themes need to be explored in greater detail so as to provide a sensitive and nuanced analysis of the sex work phenomenon specifically in Zimbabwe, and to demonstrate the contribution of the thesis to the prevailing literature. The themes identified in this literature deal with a broad spectrum of issues which relate to motivations for sex work (including questions about the relative significance of structure and agency), conditions of sex work, and challenges and consequences of sex work. The themes are covered in terms of major and minor themes.

3.4.1 Minor Themes in Sex Work

I start off with the minor themes in the literature, specifically, alcohol and drug abuse, migration and border towns, underage sex work, and sex work and patriarchy.

3.4.1.1 Alcohol and Drug Abuse

One of the recurrent themes in literature on sex work in Zimbabwe alludes to the strong correlation between sex work and alcohol and drug abuse. Proponents of this argument, such as Bhunu and Mushayabasa (2012), suggest that prostitution enhances alcohol and drug misuse and vice versa. However, this argument also implies that the existence of a relationship between drug/alcohol misuse and prostitution in and of itself does not imply causality. While some women turn to prostitution to fund their drug/alcohol addiction (which often leads to the entrapment of women in sex work), others resort to drug/alcohol misuse to effectively sell their bodies without remorse and inhibition (Bhunu and Mushayabasa 2012:2).

These authors make a compelling case in as much as sex work in itself implies the violation of a woman's body mostly for desperate reasons such as the need to survive. The physical and emotional pain associated with the nature of sex work can be argued to be damaging and destructive to a woman's wellbeing. In a conservative society such as Zimbabwe, sex workers are reviled and seen as deviant beings devoid of any morality and lacking in religious and cultural virtues (Wasosa 2011:28). In such a case, it therefore seems likely that women involved in this trade at times resort to drugs and alcohol misuse as a form of escapism.

To underscore the link between sex work and alcohol abuse, it is significant that a large number of interviews or observations in sex work research have been carried out in pubs or beerhalls. Sex work researchers have targeted pubs and bars as these are the places most frequented by sex workers and their clients. A study done at a bar/disco complex in Harare in 1989 reveals how bars and beerhalls have been the main source of business for sex workers and clients (Wilson 1989). According to Ngugi et al. (1996:244), in a 1992 national survey of 815 female sex workers and 918 clients in Bulawayo, 80 percent of sex workers and 82 percent of clients reported seeking commercial partners in bars. These statistics also further disclosed how commercial sex episodes occur after alcohol consumption. Another study, conducted by Lewis et al. (2005:364), notes how HIV prevention programmes in rural Zimbabwe are being implemented at drinking establishments due to the association between alcohol consumption and commercial sex. From such evidence it is sensible to argue – as Bhunu and Mushayabasa (2012:15) do – that to effectively address the social problems of alcoholism and prostitution requires strategies that target both issues simultaneously, rather than dealing with one only.

3.4.1.2 Migration and Border Towns

Migration has risen as an integral part of sex work in Zimbabwe. It is contended that migration is important in that it relates to the social origins of sex workers as well as speaking to the possible motivational factors behind entry into sex work (Busza et al. 2014). Migration can take two forms, either local migration or international migration.

As noted in the historical account, the rural to urban migration of both men and women in colonial Zimbabwe had huge implications for the consolidation of sex work or prostitution in urban Zimbabwean society. Hence, from early on, rural to urban migration has been central to the commercial sex work. Post-colonial Zimbabwe is also characterised by migration but with cross-border migration now taking on a special significance. Authors on sex work and migration, such as Busza et al. (2014:85), have linked the migration of sex workers to the political and economic collapse in Zimbabwe. As a result, Zimbabwean men and women are increasingly migrating to neighbouring countries including South Africa, Zambia and Botswana where sex work is a viable option of survival (Crush 2003, Polzer 2008, Polzer 2009).

Palmary (2009) writes that media attention on migrant girls has centred on their engagement in sex work, which demonstrates the currency of the phenomenon. An article entitled “No one wants to be a prostitute” reported how the Zambian Immigration Department had received numerous concerns about “an influx of illegal Zimbabwean immigrant women in Zambia engaging in sex work as a survival tactic” (IRIN 2007:1). Border town sex work has been cited as well as remunerative for Zimbabwean sex workers seeking men with disposable incomes and sometimes crossing back and forth the border into neighbouring countries. The *Herald* reported that the border town of Chirundu which borders Zimbabwe and Zambia has become a harbour for sex workers (Matambanadzo 1 June 2012). In addition, Busza et al. (2014:88) disclosed how one of the ten sex workers interviewed in their case study on the migration experiences of sex workers revealed how she had been to the Botswana, Zambia and South Africa borders for sex work purposes.

3.4.1.3 Underage Sex Work

Underage sex work is a dimension of sex work which has caused considerable concern in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean law prohibits sex with minors; however, this has not deterred some men from seeking child sex workers. According to the Criminal Law Act of 2004 (section 87), allowing a child under the age of 18 to become a prostitute is punishable by paying a fine or imprisonment of up to ten years or both (Government Gazette 2005). It is often the case that sex workers under the age of 18 remain particularly hidden since they are considered

victims of sexual exploitation and fear interference from child protection if they become known to authorities (Busza et al. 2014).

According to Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003:150), the presence of street children in the cities and towns of Zimbabwe has exacerbated underage prostitution due to the abject poverty and lack of livelihoods for these children. Research carried out by Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003) on street children revealed that opportunities for girls to make a living on the streets are limited and case studies have indicated how most of these girls use sex as a means of sustenance. These street children are orphaned by the AIDS pandemic (and therefore robbed of families to provide for them) or enter the streets because of the high levels of unemployment and poverty in their households. As well, as more urban families are sucked into poverty and household income generated from street children becomes increasingly important, protection of girls becomes diminished as they find their way onto the streets in greater numbers to earn household income through sex work (Mupedzahama and Bourdillon 2000) or income for themselves.

Documentation on underage sex work in Zimbabwe reveals appalling evidence of children in the ages of adolescence (12-18 years) engaging in sex work. Magaisa (2001:103) even argues that prostitution in the rural areas involves children as young as nine. The Center for Sexual Health, HIV and AIDS Research (CeSHHAR) records that, since its inception in 2009, it has registered sex workers as young as the age of 12 (Chipunza 12 November 2013). Teenage sex work in contemporary Zimbabwe has also been linked to drug abuse and alcoholism. An article titled “Harare police raid teenage sex work” (*Zimbabwe Latest News* 20 November 2012) highlights this. In this context, child protection services in the country have been established (such as the Girl Child Network) but the elimination of underage sex workers is challenging as these children operate in secrecy. Consequently, these children are a very high risk group in the transmission of HIV as they are likely to be excluded from sexual health research thus limiting prevention and treatment services from reaching them (Busza et al. 2014:86).

3.4.1.4 Sex Work and Patriarchy

Zimbabwean culture like most African cultures is historically patriarchal, at least since colonialism. It places a higher premium on the male sex than the female sex. Years of oppressive gender inequality culminated in discontent by African women of their perceived subordinate and inferior position in comparison to men. Within this socio-cultural context, it has been argued that sex work or prostitution exists as a form of resistance to the power

yielded by men over women. As claimed by Magaisa (2001:122), feminist perspectives have thus sought to analyse sex work as a manifestation of gender antagonism. Wasosa (2011:27) maintains that, even during colonialism, oppression for black women tended to derive not only from race and class but from gender as well. In the face of this triple burden, women engaged in prostitution in order to acquire sexual freedom and economic freedom.

Sexuality in present-day Zimbabwe still resembles traditional sexual norms and values which allowed for the existence of polygamous marriages characterised by a man having more than one wife and yet the same arrangement was not accorded to women (Magaisa 2001:107). Prostitution is thus seen as cultural defiance in that it challenges patriarchal demands for one-sided monogamous unions as the basis of socially approved female sexuality. Magaisa (2001:122) in fact asserts that sex work is not only sexual 'deviance' but also an active rebellion against the conventional customs and obligations of women in Zimbabwe. In this respect, there is less condemnation of men (whether married or single) in Zimbabwean society who have multiple sexual partners as compared to their female counterparts. This male double standard of affording themselves greater sexual freedom, thereby dividing women into girls for sexual pleasure and girls for marrying has been criticised by women advocating for gender equality (Magaisa 2001:122).

There has been an emergence of a feminist perspective which argues that sex work is attractive as an opportunity to exercise women's sexuality free from the binds of marriage. According to Magaisa (2001:131), prostitution is also seen as women's emancipation from both male domination and the traumas and nightmares of marriage. Previously-married sex workers echo this sentiment as their disillusionment with the institution of marriage, abuse in marriage and bitter divorces precipitated their entrance into sex work. However, it is noteworthy to mention that there is a certain degree of ambivalence towards marriage by sex workers. Studies have discovered that as much as sex workers lamented the negative features of marriage, some hoped to find a marriageable partner recognising that it meant material support from a man. In this sense, sex work became a hanging on strategy while marriage was the aspiration (Muzvidziwa 1997, Magaisa 2001).

3.4.2 Major Themes in Sex work

The major themes in the existing literature are sex worker/client relations, single mothers and the feminisation of poverty, health of sex workers, sex work and the government, and sex work as a livelihood strategy. Though the focus of this thesis is on sex work as a livelihood

strategy, in the end, the various themes (both major and minor) are embedded in the theme of livelihoods, as my Beitbridge case study will demonstrate.

3.4.2.1 Sex Worker/Client Relations

The sex worker and client relationship is one which of course is vital to the existence of sex work as a trade. Sex work services have been documented as being used by a heterogeneous composition of Zimbabwean men with varying ages, incomes and educational backgrounds (Magaisa 2001:106). These men are married, divorced, widowed or single. The use of sex workers by married men poses a health threat in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV to their wives. The Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) for 2010 and 2011 released by the National Statistics Agency revealed that a quarter of all men who are currently married or living with a partner have at some stage paid for sexual intercourse (Southern Africa Litigation Centre and the Sexual Rights Centre 2012). Statistics also reveal that in total almost one in five men in Zimbabwe between 15 and 54 years of age has paid for sex at one time. So a significant section of the male population uses the services of sex workers (Southern Africa Litigation Centre and the Sexual Rights Centre 2012).

Client and sex worker studies discover how clients are categorised into two main groups, namely, regular or repeat clients and new clients. According to research, this difference has huge implications on the pricing strategy of sex workers, the specific sexual and other services offered and the use of condoms in sexual episodes (Muzvidziwa 1997:84). Sex workers narrate how they were more likely to give regular clients personalised service (including cooking and laundry) and discounts for sex at times as compared to strangers or new clients. Further, relationships with new clients were observed to be conducted in a business-like manner (Muzvidziwa 1997:84). In a study conducted on the price of sex and condom use determinants among female sex workers in eastern Zimbabwe, it was discovered that sex workers tended to favour and sell sex on credit to regular and repeat clients due to the familiarity established (Elmes et al. 2012:576). Client payments in the study were reported to have been in the form of cash though payments of goods also prevailed.

Sex work literature has portrayed sex worker and client relations as tenuous, and as fluctuating between civility and camaraderie to intense hostility (Scorgie et al. 2013). Though sex workers generally strive to establish and maintain cordial relationships with their clients, this did not safeguard them from physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their clients (Muzvidziwa 1997:80). Patriarchal attitudes of men, and the intense stigma attached to sex work in Zimbabwe, reinforces the abuse that sex workers experience at the hands of clients.

All prostitutes lament the physical dangers characteristic of sex work with sex workers reporting rapes, beatings and theft at the hands of their clients (Scorgie et al 2013:5). Studies have also found that there is an alarming pattern of gang rape by clients which is distressingly common (Scorgie et al. 2013).

The assumed ownership of sex workers by their clients is a problem with which sex workers have to contend with in their dealings with clients (Magaisa 2001). The narratives of most sex workers show a pattern in which sex workers are objectified as a sexual commodity by their clients due to the payment of their services. This in turn has resulted in some clients demanding unprotected sex or willing to pay higher prices for unsafe sex (without condoms) which further endangers the lives of sex workers by increasing their chances of HIV infections and sexually transmitted diseases (Cowan et al. 2013:2). The eastern Zimbabwe study likewise revealed how the sex work environment was one in which clients dominated decisions over unsafe sex (Elmes et al. 2014:576).

Not all sex worker/client relations are characterised by violence and hostility. In some instances, client sex worker relationships have been progressive, by initially starting off as purely economic and then developing into normalised romantic relationships. For Magaisa (2001:127), a normalised relationship is one which begins as a sexual transaction but later assumes that of a boyfriend and girlfriend or husband and wife relationship whereby the man takes some limited responsibility for the welfare of the woman. Other clients simply pay rent for the sex worker (with whom they have established a relationship), thus providing advantages for the more enterprising sex workers. However, these relationships may be exploitative, as it is argued that client-boyfriends seek to capitalise on these often-shallow relationships by ensuring sex for free (Magaisa 2001).

3.4.2.2 Single Mothers and the Feminisation of Poverty

Though male sex workers exist in Zimbabwe, female sex workers are by far the most dominant, owing to the disempowered and low position women occupy in Zimbabwean society. Of particular significance in this regard is the presence of single mothers as sex workers and how this relates to the feminisation of poverty (which, itself, is precipitated by the subordinate position of women). Undoubtedly, the current and ongoing economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe can be cited as a compelling factor aggravating the state of single mothers in the country (Alao 2012, Palaez and Palaez 2007). A study on the experiences of street children by Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003:150) revealed that girls had mothers struggling to survive and provide for their children due to the absence of the fathers. The

economic dependence of women on men, in the context of the patriarchal notion of women as confined to the domestic sphere, makes women particularly vulnerable if unmarried, such that sex work becomes a survival strategy for single female headed households (Rurevo and Bourdillon 2003:150). In this way, the phenomenon of single motherhood intensifies the feminisation of poverty thus acting as a catalyst for sex work (UNDP 2004). Writing on the United States of America, Ditmore (2011) divulges that approximately 70% of female prostitutes are single mothers struggling to support their children. Likewise, sex workers in Zimbabwe have cited reasons behind the prevalence of single motherhood such as divorce, impregnation and desertion by partners, and death of a spouse (Mtetwa 2014). Interviews with sex workers in studies carried out demonstrate how women, in desperate attempts to provide for their children, have effectively disregarded societal attitudes to sex work. Economic necessity takes precedence, and thus female sex workers highlight the need to provide school fees, food, clothes and other essentials, such that fulfilling their parental role (or motherhood) compelled them to enter into sex work (Magaisa 2001).

Magaisa (2001:115) argues that the phenomenon of single motherhood amongst sex workers has serious implications. Despite its economic necessity and importance, sex work for single mothers tends to reproduce poverty in the lives of their families, particularly given that sex work is an unstable and fluctuating source of income. As well, the role of parenting falls solely on the female sex workers and it may be difficult for the single mother to separate spatially her parental responsibilities from her sex work activities. There is therefore the danger of creating an intergenerational cycle of sex workers in families as children who are aware of their mothers' source of income become socialised into accepting the legitimacy and significance of sex work activities. In this way, the daughters of sex workers are likely to become involved in sex work, after learning – though not being taught as such – this particular survival strategy from their mothers. In this regard, Magaisa (2001) refers to one of his study participants as claiming to have beaten up her 15-year old daughter who had become a sex worker.

3.4.2.3 HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The issue of sex work and HIV/AIDS is one which cannot be overemphasised as these two are interlinked closely within the literature. Studies conducted by medical sociologists and anthropologists have mainly been interested in the role prostitutes play in contributing to AIDS infection rates (Wilson 1990, McFadden 1992). Despite the criminalisation of sex work, the Zimbabwean government has taken steps to incorporate sex workers in its AIDS

national policies. The Zimbabwe National AIDS Strategic Plan for 2006–2010, as mentioned in the historical account, identified sex workers as a key population group that was particularly vulnerable to HIV (Mtetwa et al. 2013:2). In 2009, Sisters with a Voice (SWV), with funding from the United Nations, was established under the auspices of the National AIDS Council (NAC) with the aim of providing HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services for sex workers to improve their rights through providing clinic services. As of 2014, Sisters with a Voice operated in 16 different sites all over Zimbabwe from the initial three it started with in 2011 (Mtetwa 2014).

However, though such important programmes have been started, a recent survey carried out suggests that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is still exceedingly high among female sex workers in Zimbabwe and that their engagement with prevention, treatment and care is sub-optimal (Cowan et al. 2013:9). This could be attributable to the fact that sex workers are not aware of these services, or that there are problems pertaining to the distance to facilities, transportation costs, opportunity costs, time constraints, and a fear of a positive HIV result (Cowan et al. 2013). Hence there is need to invest effort and resources into reducing these barriers for sex workers.

There is considerable literature suggesting that HIV and sexually transmitted diseases are the biggest risks to sex workers, even more so than other risks including physical and sexual violence, police harassment and competition between sex workers (Busza et al. 2014:90). The character of the sex work transaction, and particularly the power of the client and the desperation of the sex worker, has been responsible for the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted infections especially more so in unprotected sexual episodes. As found by Magaisa (2001:114), and as indicated earlier, generally the decision to use or not use condoms rested with the client, who could demand sex without a condom at a higher price. However, in cases of dire poverty, the need to make higher earnings by sex workers took precedence over the threat of HIV infection (Elmes et al. 2014). This ongoing trend of the refusal to use condoms by clients has compelled sex workers to resort to other means of protecting themselves. An article by *The Zimbabwean* titled “Sex workers using anti-HIV drugs instead of condoms” discloses how a sex worker by the name of Sheila claims that most sex workers do not use condoms even when they know the HIV status of the client due to the high earnings from unprotected sex. Instead, these sex workers have come up with their own HIV prevention strategies whereby they go to a clinic the next morning to get emergency anti-retroviral drugs to suppress the virus (Mandizha 22 April 2014). Therefore, despite the increasing awareness of condom use in Zimbabwe as a basis for HIV prevention,

the need to make money often takes priority over perceived health threats, and may explain why there are still high levels of HIV prevalence amongst sex workers.

3.4.2.4 Sex Work and the Government

The criminalisation and intense stigma attached to sex work shapes, as noted already, interactions between sex workers and their clients, but it also influences the relationship between sex workers and the government and particularly the police (Scorgie et al. 2013:1). In this light, sex workers are regularly treated as social pariahs or social renegades who are deprived to the core (Wasosa 2011:30) and the police respond to their activities accordingly.

Sex work is addressed in the constitution of Zimbabwe under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of 2004 on sexual crimes and crimes against morality. Prostitution is defined, quite broadly, as the process in which a male or female person who for money or reward does either of the following: allows other persons to have anal or extra-marital sexual intercourse or engage in other sexual conduct; or solicits other persons to have anal or extra-marital sexual intercourse or engage in other sexual conduct (Feltoe 2004). It is within such a definition that sex work is regarded as a criminal offence in so much as it includes soliciting for sex for payment, living off or facilitating prostitution, procuring a prostitute or allowing a child to become a prostitute (Feltoe 2004). However, there has been controversy regarding the legal status of sex work in Zimbabwe. The literature generally maintains that sex work is illegal in Zimbabwe but authors such as Magaisa (2001) maintain that prostitution itself is not illegal but loitering and soliciting for purposes of engaging in sex work are illegal.

This assumed criminalisation of sex work stems from colonial times when the Rhodesian government made prostitution illegal and sought to control it by using the Vagrants Act (Barnes 1992). Despite the fact that sex work was never legal, during the colonial period it at times was tolerated (Muzvidziwa 1997:75). The new Zimbabwean government adopted a zero-tolerance approach to sex work. The government proudly explained that it was addressing prostitution with a zero tolerance approach towards sex workers at the March 2012 hearings of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on Zimbabwe (Southern Africa Litigation Centre and the Sexual Rights Centre 2012). Earlier, I referred to a number of police crackdowns on sex work from the early 1980s (Seidman 1984:419, Phiri 2013). In such operations, women are arrested and charged with soliciting for the purposes of prostitution but were often later fined and freed (Phiri 2013).

Much as the state illegalises soliciting, in practise the authorities seldom formally prosecute sex workers under anti-prostitution laws since solicitation is difficult to prove and enforce (Scorgie et al. 2013:2). Further, these police crackdowns have stoked much criticism with the Zimbabwean police being accused of human rights violations, police brutality and harassment. These police actions are said to be rampant in the country with sex workers reporting that they have suffered from physical beatings or rape by the police if they fail to pay them bribes (Frances 2007). According to Mtetwa et al. (2013:5), sex worker narratives reveal the public humiliation, discrimination and disrespect suffered at the hands of the police. An article by *The Standard* titled “Zimbabwe police worst abusers of prostitutes” reported that a survey conducted by the Open Society Foundation indicated that Zimbabwean police were ranked top in terms of harassing and physically abusing sex workers, compared to police in other countries including South Africa, Russia, Namibia, United States and Kenya (Ndlovu 21 July 2012). No doubt, the criminalisation and hostile approach to sex work as a trade by the state and its repressive machinery has been a significant catalyst adding to the entrenched stigmatisation and intense discrimination towards sex workers (Scorgie et al. 2013:2).

During the unity government in Zimbabwe (from 2009 to 2013), the main opposition party in the country – as noted earlier – pushed for the legalisation of sex work (Zimbabwean Community Network 2011). Thabita Khumalo, a Movement for Democratic Change Member of Parliament, gained media attention due to her unwavering support for the decriminalisation of sex work and her petition to establish a Commercial Sex Workers’ Union affiliated to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). Even after her demotion from the party in 2012, Khumalo maintained that decriminalising prostitution would address three important issues pertaining to sex work, namely, corruption, HIV and women’s rights. She even suggested that the word ‘prostitute’ be changed to ‘pleasure engineer’ (Kunambura 2014).

There are signs now of a more tolerant position by the government towards sex work but, certainly, sex work in Zimbabwe remains a controversial issue with a range of moral, religious and health connotations. Legalising sex work would require disregarding the entrenched (and patriarchal) moral and religious aspects of Zimbabwean society which prohibit multiple sexual partners for women. Whether legal or not, and whatever patriarchal practices and discourses do exist in Zimbabwean society, sex work has been and remains a crucial livelihood strategy for many women in the country.

3.4.2.5 Sex Work as a Livelihood Strategy

In whatever form or context, sex work occurs in Zimbabwe and it has been a significant attempt at survival for women in a society rife with power and resource limitations. Though the literature cites various motivational factors behind sex work, the pre-dominant determinant continues to be economic (Southern Africa Litigation Centre and the Sexual Rights Centre 2012). In this respect, sex work becomes more a matter of survival than morality (Magaisa 2001:105). A wealth of sex work studies thus reveal that sex workers take up sex work to support themselves and their dependents (Wilson et al. 1990:611). This implies a link between sex work and poverty especially among single mothers who lack the skills and resources to survive in ways that society considers dignified. And, for Magaisa (2001), prostitution in rural Zimbabwe is an arrangement for living which suits the income-generating capacities of women in particular circumstances. Hence it is no surprise that most sex workers suggest that the government should empower them economically by funding income-generating projects for women (Magaisa 2001:114).

Women in Zimbabwe today, like men, have to deal with the ongoing the economic and political crisis but, additionally, they contend with pronounced patriarchal traditions that disempower them economically and socially. Successful entry into the formal labour market, even during times of pronounced economic growth and stability, is difficult for women and they often find themselves in the secondary labour market with irregular and precarious forms of employment arrangements. At times of crisis, when formal employment opportunities are absent and real wages have declined, the lives of women become even more difficult. Hence, even women who remain formally employed (but with meagre salaries) have had to resort to sex work to make ends meet. Wasosa (2011:31) writes for example of an unnamed teacher at a certain Glen View school in Harare who was cited in a story in the *Herald* newspaper as being a prostitute.

The literature on sex work in Zimbabwe which touches on sex work as a livelihood emphasises that prostitution is simply a desperate survival strategy – often pursued by single mothers – which does not allow for enhanced livelihoods over time (Muzvidziwa 1997:76, (Kang’ethe and Mafa 2014). In other words, sex work is a ‘hanging-on’ livelihood activity (Muzvidziwa 1997:75) in which the earned sex work income is for immediate and basic consumption needs. Generally, sex workers do not consider sex work to be a permanent occupation such that entry into sex work (especially for the very poor) is an act of desperation rather than a carefully planned career path (Magaisa 2001). Hence sex workers view their sex work trade to be a temporary arrangement which would be abandoned at the earliest

convenient time if alternative income sources emerged. In the meantime, while remaining as sex workers, they appear to seek to supplement their sex work income through other income generating activities, such as street vending (IRIN 2007).

In the case of Zimbabwe, women also find other ways of making a living through sexual encounters, without considering themselves as sex workers. One way, which involves the emergence of what are popularly called ‘small houses’, may be viewed as a kind of pseudo prostitution. This is where a woman has a concealed relationship with a married man (normally a rich man) for a period of time without any formalisation of their relationship (Sachikonye 2011:175). However, unlike professional sex work or prostitution, the remuneration for women in ‘small houses’ is not immediate and the relationships can be carried out over a long period of time with various favours such as love, buying food, and paying house rent. In a society stricken with poverty, these ‘small houses’ in common with sex workers seem to be driven by the need to survive.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of the literature on sex work in Zimbabwe by providing both an historical and thematic account. Clearly, there are a diverse range of themes, both major and minor, which pervade the existing literature. Of particular importance to this thesis is sex work as a livelihood strategy, a theme which has been intermittently addressed by the literature. At the same time, this particular theme, as my following empirical chapters on Beitbridge ably show, is intimately connected with the other themes raised in this chapter. In presenting my case study findings in the next two chapters, I in a large part provide a descriptive overview on a thematic basis. In other words, I do not seek to relate my theoretical framing of the thesis to my case study in these two chapters, as I do this in the concluding chapter to the thesis. Nevertheless, questions around patriarchy (as depicted in feminist theory) and the many dimensions of the livelihoods framework (including the challenges faced by sex workers in pursuing their livelihoods) run throughout the two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: SEX WORK MOTIVATIONS AND HOME ORIGINS/LINKAGES FOR BEITBRIDGE SEX WORKERS

4.1 Introduction

This, and the following chapter, elicits a discussion of the research findings of the study on sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. Debates on sex work in Zimbabwe have begun to focus more on the implications of sex work as a livelihood strategy for Zimbabwean women in the wake of the political and economic crisis in the country, including massive unemployment and increasing poverty. The phenomenon is also particularly rampant in the border towns of Zimbabwe, notably Beitbridge.

In light of this, this first empirical chapter focuses on the contextual factors underpinning sex work in Beitbridge. The following section (section 2) provides a broad overview of, and background to, the research site namely Beitbridge. Section 3 offers an account of the sex workers who participated in the Beitbridge study in terms of key variables, while section 4 highlights the key characteristics of sex work in Beitbridge given that sex work varies contextually, including spatially. Section 4, in providing a sweeping overview of sex work in Beitbridge, also (at least in passing) raises key themes addressed later in the chapter. Thus section 5 raises the question of motivations for engaging in sex work in Beitbridge and section 6 addresses the rural (and urban) origins of sex workers along with their ongoing connections to their places of origin. Other themes are raised in the following chapter (chapter 5).

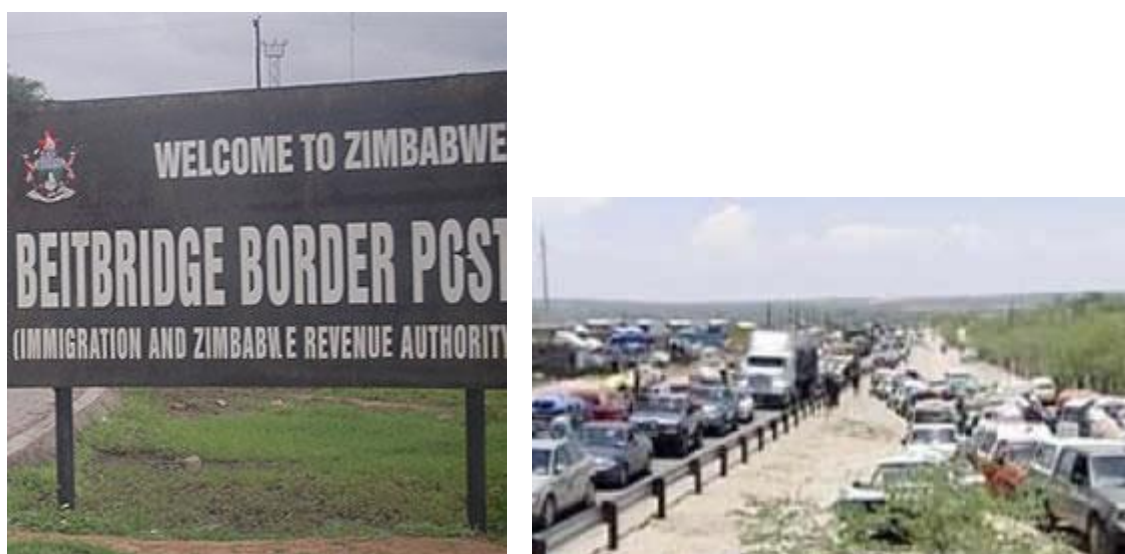
4.2 Background of research site: Beitbridge

The town of Beitbridge, which is commonly called Mzingwane, is situated along the Zimbabwe-South border in Matebeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. Beitbridge also popularly refers to the border post and the bridge spanning the Limpopo River which forms the political border between South Africa and Zimbabwe. SIDA (2003) estimated that the town of Beitbridge had a population of about 21,909 in the early 2000s. However, as of 2013, the population of Beitbridge was 26,459 according to the GeoNames geographical database (Geonames 2013). The district of Beitbridge (in which the town is located) lies in an arid, low lying, low rainfall and chronically food deficit agro ecological region and therefore crop production is impossible without irrigation (Mate 2005:4). Locals in Beitbridge town, because of the absence of formal employment opportunities, often rely on other forms of income including informal sector activities. This includes a significant presence of female sex workers in the town, who mostly seem to be single. Households in Beitbridge, broadly

speaking, struggle in a desperate manner to reproduce themselves materially (Rutherford 2001). A study by FH1 (2003) discovered that most local residents of Beitbridge, and mainly males, migrate to South Africa in search of employment prospects due to the proximity of the country. As a result, women are left to take care of children and domestic duties, whether in houses in town or rural homesteads. In this context, the study concluded that about 60% of the population is female.

Its presence along the South African border has made Beitbridge the busiest and most lucrative border town in Zimbabwe (See Figure 4.1). Over the years the town has experienced an unparalleled spurt of growth and development attributable to the proximity of the border. In fact, Mate (2005:5) argues that Beitbridge is reportedly Africa's busiest border post in terms of volume and value of goods (and human and vehicular traffic) passing through it. The border post operates 24 hours round the clock every day of the year. In 2005 it was recorded that an estimated 7,000 truckers passed through the border post per month, most of them spending from several days to more than a week waiting to clear goods (Mate 2005). On average, 250 commercial trucks passed through the border daily with peaks at the end and beginning of the month, while hundreds more are held up on either side of the border pending paper work to clear goods (Mate 2005:5). These truckers form a large pool of clients for sex workers who solicit in the streets, bars, truck stops and clubs selling sexual services.

Figure 4.2: Beitbridge Border Post Sign and Traffic Congestion near Border Post



Source: *New Zimbabwe*, 26 January 2015.

The town of Beitbridge has a history of being overcrowded in terms of accommodation and, as far back as the early 2000s, has reached crisis proportions (Mate 2005:21). Based on the understandings of local people and study informants, this overcrowded condition is attributable to various factors including the destruction of informal settlements (called *baghdads* locally) by the town council in 2002 and the influx of migrants from all over Zimbabwe into Beitbridge wishing to cross the border illegally into South Africa for purposes of looking for employment. The *baghdads* were considered as an eyesore for tourists in the town council's attempt to increase tourism in Beitbridge ahead of the 2002 solar eclipse. Internal migrants who fail to cross into South Africa often end up taking up residency in Beitbridge. Moreover, South African authorities regularly deport Zimbabweans illegally in South Africa and these deportees often remain within Beitbridge hoping once again to enter South Africa.

Thus the swelling population in Beitbridge, most of whom are unskilled, find themselves in competition with one another with reference to marginal and irregular forms of employment or informal activities (including sex) and 'misemployment' such as theft. Local Beitbridge residents therefore, along with more temporary sojourners, seek some form and level of income to sustain themselves. In the case of temporary sojourners, this is in order to raise money to return to South Africa, for upkeep in the interim, or to remit to expectant families back home (often in rural parts of Zimbabwe) (Mate 2005:6). As such, FHI (2003) noted that the Beitbridge border post is the Wild West of Southern Africa. This is due to the fact that life is fast, rough and unpredictable, as people survive on a hand to mouth basis, making and often losing money quickly to thieves, sex workers or to conmen masquerading as security agents. The increase in people seeking employment in Beitbridge has indeed paved the way for the growth of illicit informal traders such as foreign currency traders or black market dealers, commercial sex workers and criminal elements commonly known as *magumaguma*.

Beitbridge has a number of neighbourhoods both low density and high density. The high density area called Dulibadzimu is where most informal traders seem to reside and operate from, including numerous criminal elements. It is also known for housing most of the town's brothels locally known (in Shona) as *mabooking* or simply *booking* in its singular form and accommodating most of the town's sex workers. The town's bus terminus and rank are also situated in Dulibadzimu where hundreds of travellers going to or returning from South Africa pass through. The town's informal workers as well as criminal elements throng local taverns, shebeens and the club scene in Dulibadzimu in search of entertainment. The

busy night life of Beitbridge (and specifically in Dulibadzimu) is not only ideal for the hundreds of sex workers who start to swarm the streets as early as six pm until dawn looking for clients, but also for robbers looking to pounce on unsuspecting prey. Amongst these night revellers are *amagumaguma* (or self-styled travel consultants) as well, who assist the desperate with information on how to cross the border illegally or even personally guide them through the bush at night. These *amagumguma* have a reputation for being notorious criminal elements that in worst case scenarios have been known to rob, rape and murder their clients.

4.3 Sex Worker Profiles

Recently the debate on sex work in Zimbabwe has intensified over the decriminalisation of sex work, sex worker rights as well as the rise of sex work as a livelihood strategy in the wake of innumerable political and economic challenges the country is continually facing. Sex work has become rampant in Beitbridge as a livelihood strategy for scores of unskilled and uneducated women migrants from all across Zimbabwe as well as local women, all in a bid to survive. A total of 25 female commercial sex workers were interviewed in ethnographic research carried out in Beitbridge. All women reported that they identified themselves as sex workers. The table below (Table 4.1) details the demographic composition of these women.

In terms of age, 40% of the sex workers were in the low age range of 21-25 years while the second most common age group (36%) was that of 26-30 years. As the years increased less sex workers were recorded as being active, with 8% of those interviewed being in the 31-35 years age group and 16% in the 36-40 years. The youngest age recorded for the sex workers was 21 years old and the oldest 40 years. Younger women seem to be more actively engaged in sex work due to the fact that they would still be in the early stages of their 'career' where they earn more money than those women who have been in sex work for longer. Clients indeed tend to be more attracted to younger women than older women as they are perceived to be youthful and more desirable than their older counterparts. This is illustrated by one sex worker aged 23:

When you first start it never seems as if you will ever fail to get money; when you start it will be exciting. The men come to you and say they want young blood not old grannies that are boring (Mildred July 2015).

Table 4.2: List of Participants in the Study

NAME	AGE	EDUCATION	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	ORIGINS	PLACE OF RESIDENCE
Elizabeth	28	Form 2	divorced	5	Beitbridge	Private home
Cynthia	38	Form 4	widowed	2	Harare	Private home
Loveness	21	Form 3	impregnated	1	Harare	Brothel
Margaret	30	Form 2	divorced	1	Masvingo	brothel
Mildred	23	Form 2	divorced	2	Masvingo	Brothel
Nomagugu	26	Form 4	divorced	3	Victoria Falls	Private home
Hilda	27	Form 4	divorced	2	Mberengwa	Brothel
Jennifer	38	Grade 7	divorced	2	Mwenezi	Brothel
Sharon	25	Form 4	divorced	2	Victoria Falls	Brothel
Siwinile	35	Grade 7	divorced	2	Bulawayo	Brothel
Tatenda	21	Form 1	divorced	1	Masvingo	Personal home
Thulani	27	Grade 6	impregnated	2	Kwekwe	Brothel
Chipo	40	Form 2	divorced	1	Hwange	Brothel
Ruth	29	Grade 7	divorced	0 (died)	Binga	Brothel
Tendai	30	Form 4	widowed	3	Masvingo	Personal home
Chipo Mongani	25	Form 4	impregnated		Mutare	Brothel
Abigail	28	Form 3	divorced	2	Harare	Brothel
Tafadzwa	25	Form 2	divorced	2	Chivi	Brothel
Catherine	26	nil	divorced	4	Kwekwe	Brothel
Memory	31	Form 2	impregnated	0 (died)	Zvishavane	Brothel
Tanaka	30	Form 4	widowed	1	Mberengwa	Brothel
Thuleki Sibanda	37	Form 3	divorced	2	Bulawayo	Brothel
Grace Nyathi	24	Form 4	widowed	1	Kwekwe	Brothel
Molene Magona	23	Form 3	divorced	1	Kadoma	Brothel
Theresa Magura	24	Form 2	divorced	1	Kwekwe	Brothel

All the sex workers reported to have no educational qualifications. Though the highest educational level reached was form 4, which is the Ordinary level in the Zimbabwean educational system, none of the women had passed their exams. Four women (16%) had attended school up to grade 7, thus completing primary school education. Only 8 women (32%) have reached the Ordinary level of Form 4 in secondary school but had not proceeded to the Advanced level due to various reasons such as an inability to afford school fees for the Advanced level, poor results or marriage and impregnation. One sex worker reported that she had not proceeded to Advanced level because her parents had never encouraged her to continue with schooling as she had only passed with four subjects. Only one sex worker (4%), Catherine, reported that she had never attended a day of school in her life.

Divorced women constituted the highest proportion of the sex workers at 72%. In this study, the term divorce is used synonymously with separation, both referring to a woman who no longer lived with a partner. Some women had been widowed (16%) whilst 12% had never been married but had been impregnated by their lovers. Every participant in the study was a single mother except for two participants who divulged that they had once given birth but lost their children in death. The sex worker with the highest number of children had five while the least number of children was 1. Most women seemed to have dependents consisting of their children and extended family.

The sex work industry in Beitbridge is comprised of a large number of migrant women who have migrated from other parts of the Zimbabwe as sex workers and hoped to re-market themselves as sex workers in Beitbridge. Some migrant women though wanted to become cross border traders but had ended up living in Beitbridge after failing to cross the border and, in failing to find any form of secure employment, they ended up self-employed as sex workers. Only one of all the sex workers (4%) reported that she was a Beitbridge local, and the rest considered Beitbridge only as a place of work and not as home. This is characteristic of most sex work in border towns, which draws a large number of migrant women to the peripheries of the country in search of work and better prospects, only to opt for sex work because of the absence of formal employment. One woman from Harare who is currently a sex worker narrated how she ended up in Beitbridge:

My friend and I were stranded here in 2010 when we came to Beitbridge intending to cross the border into South Africa and we became stranded when magumaguma [conmen] stole our money. We both had five hundred rand each so we were left homeless and that's when a girl who lived at a booking told us that if we wanted to

make fast cash we could try sleeping with men at the brothel and since then up to now we have been doing this work (Abigail, July 2015).

4.4 Character of sex work in Beitbridge

This section provides a broad overview of the character of sex work in Beitbridge with regards to for instance the categories of sex workers, accommodation and places of work, and mobility. I end the section by introducing key themes around which I organise my presentation of the lives and work of the Beitbridge sex workers. The sex work industry in Beitbridge has become a major informal source of livelihoods for hundreds of local and migrant impoverished, unemployed and single women. In fact, the increasing number of sex workers in Beitbridge has become a popular topic for the media over recent years in Zimbabwe.

In order to provide a multi-dimensional synopsis of the sex work arrangements in Beitbridge, sex workers were classified into different categories based on the type of sex work practiced. This classification is derived from the sex workers' own understandings of their work and is based on the location from which they operate, with place of work or location being an important variable in the sex work industry. Sex workers in Beitbridge seemed to be divided into four main categories with most floating in and out of these categories: street based, bar or tavern based, truck stop based and home based sex workers. However, it should be noted that, though a few sex workers seemed to operate exclusively from one place, overlapping places for a particular sex worker existed as reported by most research participants, who revealed that they solicited for clients in numerous places depending on the availability of clients. Therefore, most sex workers were not exclusively operating in one area or the other. Elizabeth aged 28 thus reported that:

When I started I went straight to the bar called Kalahari and I saw I enjoyed it at the bar and I ended up changing places. I would go to a place called kumalugs or kwaterry. Then I once went to the truck stop kwaAndy and I worked there so I go everywhere even in the street wherever I like I go (Elizabeth August 2015).

This speaks to the fluidity of sex work across the four categorises. One sex worker named Chipso aged 25 mentioned how she preferred working at the truck stop along the Lutumba road but on weekends visited bars such as Kalahari and Eland because the bars were busiest on weekends. In contrast, Thuleki aged 37 was exclusively a home based sex worker and preferred to have clients make appointments for home visits. In such a case, the home was deemed most suitable because the sex worker felt comfortable and safer when operating

within familiar surroundings. In addition, this preference for home based sex work was mostly noted among the older sex workers who preferred to operate in secrecy and feared public discrimination. However, the younger ones appeared to have a disregard for public opinion and would openly solicit for clients from any location.

Beitbridge sex workers lamented about the lack of accommodation in the town. The town harbours a vast number of migrant nationals from all across Zimbabwe and this, coupled with the increase in the number of sex workers in the town, creates a high need and demand for brothels. Hence brothels have become a relied upon source of accommodation and place of work for sex workers. These brothels are mostly located in the Dulibadzimu high density suburb and have become a huge source of income for local landlords who have turned their houses into brothels. These research findings reveal a similar trend as reported by an article titled 'Brothels thrive in Beitbridge' (*Bulawayo24 News* 5 September 2012) which indicated how there was a proliferation of brothels in Dulibadzimu despite warnings by the town council that it would repossess houses that harbour sex workers. Despite this, as soon as it gets dark at night, a number of sex workers provocatively dressed at the gates of brothels (called *mabooking*) become visible. Most of these brothels are conveniently situated more specifically near Dulibadzimu Bus Terminus in proximity to the large flow of travellers passing through Beitbridge as well as near local bars, clubs and taverns.

Sex workers in Beitbridge refer to local brothels as *bookings* which is a term derived from the fact that the women book themselves into these brothels or *kumacurtain* (a term derived from how they use curtains to divide a room into many portions where each sex worker has her own mattress and works from). When asked where they lived, most sex workers reported that they lived and worked in *bookings* while a few indicated that they rented their own personal places in Beitbridge where they lived. However, even those who had personal accommodation tended to work from brothels as well. The sex workers complained about the steep fees charged in these brothels. Sex workers said that the standard rate of accommodation in brothel rooms was 70 rand per day per sex worker which was due every morning in advance. In some cases, sex workers would pay as much as 150 rand per day. Sex workers noted that they could share one (curtain-divided) room with as many as 8 sex workers. Margaret aged 30 reveals the severity of the situation:

Accommodation is a serious problem, even up to 8 of us can sleep in one room and we use curtains to demarcate everyone's space. Imagine how bad it is when we get clients and we all have to sleep with our clients in that one room. At times you can

actually see and hear people in the act. We are now used to it but it is not healthy
(Margaret July 2015).

This depicts the squalid and unsanitary living and working conditions to which sex workers in Beitbridge are exposed due to the shortage of accommodation. Those who preferred their privacy and personal space, and could afford to do so, rented rooms in local houses in Dulibadzimu for about 60US dollars per month, where they went to sleep and rest after work. These women were charged in United States dollars and not South African Rand. Though Zimbabwe has adopted the use of the United States dollar as its local currency, locals in Beitbridge trade in both dollars and the Rand due to South Africa's proximity. This arrangement of sleeping at local houses was done also by sex workers who lived with their children in Beitbridge.

This situation reveals a deeper underlying trend of desperation to survive in Beitbridge and a high level of informality under which the sex work industry in the town operates and thrives, with landlords even risking the loss of their houses to the town council by converting them into brothels to make a living through daily rentals from sex workers. Sex work in Beitbridge occurs in a larger context of increasing urban poverty and a rising informal and illegal sector through which a significant number of formally unemployed people pursue precarious livelihoods. As a result, the town experiences a high crime rate with a large number of rapes, robbery, assaults and murder reported on a daily basis to the local Zimbabwe Republic Police charge office.

Mobility is an integral part of sex work (Busza 2004, Nyangairi 2010). For instance, a study conducted by Nyangairi (2010) on migrant sex workers in Hillbrow in Johannesburg discovered how migration was an integral part of the lives of Zimbabwean sex workers, with migration occurring at both international and local levels. All sex workers interviewed in the Beitbridge study, with the exception of one, highlighted that they were originally from other parts of Zimbabwe and had migrated to Beitbridge in search of work. The sex workers revealed that they preferred to move from place to place, and to change locations both locally within Beitbridge and outside Beitbridge, almost as a marketing strategy. According to the sex workers, clients flocked to visit 'new faces' and liked to sleep with new women, and therefore moving from one place to another was a way of meeting new clients and maximising income.

The evidence from Beitbridge revealed three types of mobility or migration practised by the study participants. This first relates to the mobility of sex workers between the four categories mentioned above, and involved internal migration within Beitbridge whereby a sex

worker would move from for example streets to bars to truck stops (and back again) soliciting for clients. Secondly there was intra-country migration whereby women moved from other parts of the country to practice sex work in different towns thus alternating between towns as sex workers. When asked if they had ever practiced sex work elsewhere in the country (apart from Beitbridge), a number of sex workers answered in the affirmative and stated they had practiced in towns such as Masvingo (a few hundred kilometres north of Beitbridge) and even other border towns such as Victoria Falls along the Zambia-Zimbabwe border. Nomagugu aged 26 had travelled all over Zimbabwe working as a sex worker in towns including Harare (in the Avenues area in the centre of the city), Hwange, Gwanda and back to Beitbridge.

The third type of migration was international in which sex workers temporarily moved to other countries to practice sex work and then return home. Four of the sex workers interviewed prided themselves on being seasonal sex workers outside of the country mostly in Johannesburg, South Africa where they would temporarily live and work for a few months. Others considered themselves international sex workers due to the fact they had passports and would accompany their truck driver clients to different countries providing sexual services. In this regard Elizabeth aged 28 who had practiced sex work in Hillbrow (Johannesburg) for about three months from February 2011 to April 2011 narrated the thrills, joys and pains of being a sex worker in Johannesburg and stated how sex work in Johannesburg was contextually different from Zimbabwe:

Sex work in South Africa is more painful and tougher than in Zimbabwe because there you should be naked to have a market; also the women compete in dressing; you will be working just to buy nice clothes because people there dress well (Elizabeth August 2015).

The international experiences of the women are forever etched in their minds. Chipso aged 25 was able to recall the exact date of her international sex work debut when she states that her first day of sex work in Johannesburg was on 5 May 2010 when she met a Nigerian man who later became her lover. She had made a friend called Leoba who initiated her into sex work and advised her to use a pseudonym when dealing with clients after which she adopted the fake name Samantha. Leoba's advice also highlighted the differences in Beitbridge sex work and Hillbrow sex work when she advised Chipso to show more skin:

"Here in South Africa men like to see legs, so it is better you go upstairs and remove your skin tights and stay with the top you are wearing. Trust me you will get more clients especially because it's your first day". So I went to my room and removed the

tights though I was so shy. I really made a lot of money that day, I think I made R1200 (Chipo July 2015).

Wherever sex work occurs, it is not always comprised of a homogenous group of women with common backgrounds and experiences apart from the obvious common fact of selling sexual services. In other words, sex work is contextually diverse (Parsons 2006, Agustin 2007). Though the need for economic survival seemed to be a binding force amongst the interviewed sex workers in Beitbridge, the sex work industry in Beitbridge showed considerable internal diversity. The female sex workers come from different backgrounds though they have more or less similar experiences in their lives as sex workers. The evidence of the sex workers interviewed exposed crucial dimensions of their lives which speak to the salient issues or themes which continually pervade the sex work industry in Beitbridge, and which bring to the fore the diversity between the women.

The themes identified in the fieldwork carried out in Beitbridge deal with a broad spectrum of issues which relate to various aspects of the lives of sex workers. These include the following: motivations for engaging in sex work (including questions, sociologically, about the relative significance of structure and agency); rural/urban origins and linkages; sex work income and consumption patterns; client and sex worker relations; public perceptions towards sex work; and health issues in sex work. I categorise these themes, which overlap, and present them accordingly in this and the following empirical chapter.

4.5 Sex work motivation

The following quotation from a Beitbridge sex worker is insightful as it summarises the various motivational factors behind entry into sex work. It highlights the socio-structural positions as well as individual disposition and personal choices that shape sex work entry narratives:

The women would have been married before and some wouldn't have and would have just left their parents' homes and started going to bars and night clubs. Some would have been orphaned at a young age and are left with no one to take care of them not even one, and then you try to look for a job but because maybe you are not educated or you do not have connections you end up becoming a sex worker. Most of us have never gone to school and can't even read. What kind of a job would you get without an education? (Mildred July 2015).

Scholars such as Nyangairi (2010), Campbell (2000) and Bowen (2008) argue that exploring initial pathways into sex work plays a pivotal role in explaining the sex work phenomenon

and debunking myths about the industry itself and its participants. This also ensures intervention programmes (be it health or sex worker empowerment programmes) are tailor-made to suit the specificities and contextual circumstances of sex workers.

Data collected in Beitbridge demonstrates how sex workers have been driven into this profession by structural factors beyond their control which included childhood experiences, marital disintegration, the feminisation of poverty and a lack of education. However, some of the women seemed to be engaged in sex work as a personal career choice which afforded them sexual freedom. By so doing, these women were engaged in sex work as an act of agency. Agency is defined as the means by which people exercise their internal powers and capacities to intervene in events that go on around them (Barnes 2000).

4.5.1 Childhood experiences

A number of the participants narrated how the death of one parent or both parents had financially and socially crippled their lives. These sex workers had experienced family disintegration due to the breakdown of the family structure in their lives. Sociologists of course often regard the family as the cornerstone of society in its role in the socialisation of individuals by preparing them to be functional parts of society. However, in cases where the family disintegrates, the children are regularly the main victims and worst affected. In addition to the death of a parent or parents and thus becoming a single or double orphan respectively, homelessness and child marriages are also traumatic experiences for children and adolescents or even young adults.

4.5.1.1 Death of a parent/s

The death of a parent or parents creates a certain level of disintegration in the family either financially or socially or both. Some of the sex workers narrated how the death of a parent or both parents had affected their lives and left them lacking guardianship and financial security such that they had to resort to sex work to survive. One of the participants, Ruth, recalls how life changed for her after the death of her parents:

My parents died as I was growing up and that is when life became difficult. I was 21 years old when they died and then I moved to stay with my grandmother. So she started taking care of me till I became independent and could take care of myself and I became a sex worker so I could afford to buy food for my grandmother and for myself (Ruth July 2015).

Two sisters (Theresa and Thulani), who are both sex workers, gave an account of how life became difficult when their parents died. The sisters were subsequently separated so they

could live with different families within the kinship network and they were abused, a situation which eventually led to engaging in sex work as a means of livelihood:

We were taken by different relatives when our parents died so we lived separately and we were not happy. I lived with my uncle's son and his wife did not treat me well. I would do more housework than the other children and I did not feel loved. When I was caught with a boyfriend my guardian told me I had to leave because they could not take care of someone's wife so I left (Theresa July 2015).

4.5.1.2 Child marriage/Early marriages

The Girl Child Network (GCN) in Zimbabwe claims that, from 2008 to 2011, an estimated 8,000 girls have been forced into early marriages or have been held as sex slaves (Sibanda 2011:2). Child marriage in the case of girls is defined as: “Any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing” (IPPF 2007:7). This involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration, and under civil, religious or customary laws (Sibanda 2011). In situations of poverty or economic crisis, marriage is seen at times by the parents of girl-children as a source of wealth generation to escape the cycle of poverty and thus the girl-child is married off. The wealth arises from the payment of *lobola* (or bride-price) to the parents of the bride by the husband or husband's family which usually comes in the form of money and cattle. Sexual relationships in child marriage (and of course outside marriage) are said to involve statutory rape insofar as the girl is below the age of 16 and the husband is an adult. The cognitive and psychological development and maturity of these child-brides is often disturbed as they become saddled with the roles of mothers and wives at an early age. And these child marriages often end up in divorce thus leaving the women with limited options but sex work. As Mildred and Margaret indicate, respectively:

I got married at 15 years old to a man born in 1970. We had a 21-year difference. I had my first child at 17 and the second one at 19 years but we later divorced and I became a sex worker (Mildred July 2015).

I was in form two when he impregnated me so after I gave birth he came and got me so we could live together. When my child was grown up we started having marital problems and I went back to my mother's rural village (Margaret July 2015).

Two of the other sex workers (Sharon and Hilda) had both been married at 17 years and both had failed marriages. Though 16 is regarded as the age of consent for sex and marriage and,

at that age, sex is no longer deemed as statutory rape, the women confessed that they were still young and immature, and deeply troubled by the experience of an early marriage.

To highlight, then, child marriage with teenage girls can be regarded as a form of rape, namely, statutory rape. With reference to Zimbabwean legislation, this is insofar as the male (above the age of 18) has sex with a girl below the age of consent which is 16 (Sibanda 2011, UNICEF 2008). In the case of the Beitbridge sex workers, any child marriage in which the (now) sex worker was under the age of 16 violated Zimbabwe's statutory rape law. However, there was a lack of justice for these sex workers who experienced child marriage as they reported that their cases had never been reported to the police.

4.5.1.3 Running away from home

A study by Campbell (2000) showed how sex workers had been driven into sex work by homelessness after running away from home to escape hardships. Catherine aged 26 described how, after her parents divorced, life became tough for her because she had to live with an abusive grandfather. Catherine had never attended a day of school in her life and driven by the hardships of home escaped at a young age:

I fled home at 13 years and I became a street kid due to hardships; first I worked as a maid in Harare and in different places then I got initiated into sex work by my cousins at a young age. I would get paid at times and at times I would not because I was young. I started sex work before I even had my first child, I was 13 years old when I became a sex worker and I met my husband through sex work (Catherine July 2015).

A similar experience of homelessness drove Tafadzwa into sex work after she became a street kid:

My step mother did not treat me well; she was very rough and abusive because I was not her child. So I ran away from home, fleeing the situation at home and I went to Zvishavane where I became a street kid and, as a street kid, I ended up having sex with whoever pleases and some would give me money and some would not give me money. So that's how I lived till I met some girls who said they rented a place and I went to stay with them and they taught me how to rent my own place and go to the bar (Tafadzwa July 2015).

The causes of this homelessness are also at times attributable to teenage delinquency. Thus, some sex workers noted that their initial sex work pathway was through a sense of teenage rebellion and not necessarily to life's hardships. As Chipu put it:

I did not have challenges per se growing up its just that I had no freedom growing up at my house so I ended up leaving the house going to clubs with others and I saw that the world was exciting and fun. So I joined a dance group in 2008 and 2009 and I ran away from home and went to Harare where I started sex work from there I came to Beitbridge (Chipo July 2015).

4.5.1.4 Child/Underage Sex work

Despite the ongoing efforts to legalise sex work in Zimbabwe, child prostitution still remains illegal. The Criminal Law Act of 2004 (section 87) criminalises a child under the age of 18 who becomes a prostitute. My Beitbridge study did not specifically interview underage sex worker. However, some of the sex workers interviewed admitted to being underage sex workers when they initially started sex work. This is the case with Tafadzwa and Catherine:

I ran away from home as a child fleeing the situation at home and I went to Zvishavane where I became a street kid and as a street kid I ended up having sex with whoever pleases and some would give me money and some would not give me money so that's how I lived (Tafadzwa July 2015).

I fled home at 13 years and became a street kid. I tried working as a maid in Harare until I got initiated into sex work by my cousins at a young age, I would get paid at times and at times I would not. I started sex work when I did not even have a child (Catherine July 2015).

These cases of underage sex work show a correlation between running away from home and early entry into sex work. This evidence supports an earlier study on street children in Zimbabwe that revealed that, due to limited opportunities for girls to make a living on the streets, they resorted to sex as a form of livelihood (Rurevo and Bourdillon 2003:150). But due to their vulnerability and lack of knowledge, they fail to negotiate for payment all the time with clients.

A focus group discussion I conducted also revealed how there is increasingly a number of young girls migrating to Beitbridge to be sex workers. One of the sex workers in fact admitted that her brothel accommodated underage sex workers and, apparently, such sex workers prefer to operate in secrecy and to stay hidden due to the illegality of underage sex workers and the possible fear of being rehabilitated as victims of sexual exploitation (Busza et al. 2014). The following comment was made in the group discussion:

We meet some sex workers who are younger than me in the bar. Some of them are 15 years or 12 years old. It just depends on the body. Most people born in 1997 go to the

bar. There is a small bodied girl from my home town who was born in 1997 whom we stay with at the booking. She also goes to the bar to do the same profession (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

This phenomenon of underage sex work needs to be understood in the larger context of increasing poverty in Zimbabwe, whereby girl children flee homes due to abject poverty in search of greener pastures.

4.5.1.5 Teenage pregnancy

Early impregnation and the absence of financial support from the family places the financial burden of taking care of the child on the mother. Educational attainment, in this context, is deferred to a later time and often times the mother never gets another opportunity to proceed with her education. This limits the number of employment prospects available to these women which makes sex work a possible alternative (Campbell 2000, Hendriks 2008). This is illustrated by the experiences of Thulani:

I was still 14 years in 2003. I gave birth to a son called Wesley. After I gave birth my mother died. That is when I became a prostitute (Thulani July 2015).

Loveness was impregnated at the age of 16 and she shares the same sentiments and sense of responsibility about her child, which has resulted in her being a sex worker:

I was naughty when I was in high school so I was impregnated when I was doing my form 3 and my parents chased me away from home. Since 2011 when I was impregnated I started staying at the booking and I gave birth to my child at the booking until I sent her home (Loveness August 2015).

Childhood rape which may lead to teenage pregnancy is an issue which was raised by one of the sex workers. In this respect, studies cite childhood sexual abuse as a predictor for sex work entry, along with other factors such as broken homes and running away from home as well as drug abuse (O'Neill 1997, Farley 1998). The case of abuse in Beitbridge involved Molene (aged 23) who was both a victim of rape and childhood marriage after her lover, who was a teacher at her school, raped her. As she recalls:

He grabbed me when my friends and I were walking back home after school so I delayed going back home and when I finally arrived home that day I was told to leave so that's how I got married. Hazvisirizvo zvatanga tawirirana taidanana hedu asi pakurara tese tanga tisina kuwirirana vakazoitazveginya [We hadn't agreed on that, yes we were dating but we had not agreed on having sex so he used force to have sex

with me]. It wasn't rape. We had started dating when I started form 3 (Molene July 2015).

This chain of events in Molene's life involved a series of unfortunate incidences which led to a forced marriage to her rapist after she discovered she was pregnant. Though Molene does not characterise this as rape (in that she was dating her rapist), clearly it is classifiable as such. As well, the lack of justice for her rape depicts the gender imbalances embedded in Zimbabwean society which is typical of a patriarchal society where women are regularly viewed as subjects of pleasure for men. The subsequent failure of this marriage left her socially isolated with no formal education, skills and opportunities for employment thus sex work became a viable option.

4.5.2 Marital Breakdown

None of the participants in the study were married at the time the study was conducted, though most (except for three) were married in the past. The high rate of divorce or separation amongst sex workers is significant, including in terms of entry into sex work. The number one cause of marital breakdown cited by the sex workers was gender based domestic violence, though four of the women had experienced marital breakdowns due to being widowed. Gender based violence (GBV) is physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence carried out against a person because of that person's gender, and it is regularly manifested through acts of domestic violence (Human Rights Forum 2011).

A study in Zimbabwe showed that 60% of murder cases that went through the courts were related to domestic violence (Getecha et al. 1995). Though the government of Zimbabwe enacted the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 to protect women against gender based violence, such violence continues to occur (Human Right Forum 2011). The sex workers in Beitbridge reported they had suffered some form of abuse at the hands of their husbands which had precipitated the failure of the marriage. Because of the need to provide for her-self (and in some cases children) financially, and given the loss of male financial support, these women ended up exploring sex work as a survival strategy. One sex worker, Catherine fled her husband an ex-convict after he became physically abusive, and she became a sex worker to support herself and her children. Similarly, Jennifer recalls her marriage ordeals:

My husband was abusive, he would beat me up and cheat, would not give me money whether it was pay day, end of month or not. I would not know where he spent it; he would not want you to ask him where the money was. If you tried asking for the money

you would get a beating. He would say to me “wakambopfeka uniform ukaenda kubasa here? Unobvunza mari yangu unoenda kubasa?” [Have you ever worn a uniform and gone to work? You ask me about my money, do you work?]. He would not want you to ask about his money; all he could do was buy groceries for the house; you would never get cash to hold it in your hands (Jennifer July 2015).

This narration brings to the fore the sexual inequalities and gender based power relations in Zimbabwean society, as manifested in the household sphere, and how these patriarchal practices precipitate entry into sex work. This is also illustrated in a Zimbabwean study carried out by Magaisa (2001) in which sex workers interviewed viewed sex work as a form of sexual and cultural freedom from oppressive gender roles and patriarchal systems.

Marital breakdown is also intensified by the patriarchal system of polygamy. Polygamous societies uphold double standards whereby a man is allowed to have more than one wife while a woman is not allowed the same right and freedom. This leads to discontent amongst wives and conflict in marriages which result in high rates of divorce and separation. Polygamy was widespread in the past, but it is a practice that remains pervasive in parts of Zimbabwe. Siwinile’s account reveals how her marriage fell apart:

My husband found another wife and I returned to my home village where I began my trade as a sex worker. So up to today I am not married and I fend for myself (Siwinile August 2015).

Polygamy is also related to infidelity in marriage, with the husband impregnating another woman and taking her as another wife. In this respect, many research participants confessed that their husbands had been unfaithful in their marriage:

We divorced with my husband because we lived in different places and he impregnated another woman. He lived at Inkomo Barrack in Harare and I was staying in Bulawayo. I only met the other woman when we went to the rural village and she was already pregnant so there was no other option she was already his wife so that’s how I left (Portia July 2015).

Long distance marriages in the case of Portia had seemed to be the catalyst in the breakdown of her marriage. Another sad case of the failure of a marriage due to polygamy is evident in Margaret’s story:

He had three wives so I left him. He told me if you want to stay you can stay but I found it difficult to stay with someone who would not have an intimate relationship with me or talk to me or give me even bath soap or food. Everything I needed I would get from my relatives (Margaret July 2015).

The death of a spouse, though not involving a marital breakdown, is significant in that it often leads to financial insecurity and emotional trauma for the widow. Sex workers who had been widowed revealed how their lives had changed for the worst after the death of their spouses and how they had enjoyed happy marriages in some instances. The case of Cynthia aged 38 shows how happy marriages still exist in Zimbabwean society but sadly, due to death, women are left financially unstable and have to resort to sex work:

I was happily married for 12 years till my husband died and afterwards my husband's father took all my property because we had bought the house from him and we were not legally married so life was very hard for me and my sons (Cynthia July 2015).

This statement reveals the lack of financial support from extended families after the death of the male spouse, which is attributable to the lack of security behind customary marriages which are not always recognised in a court. There is also a tendency amongst the relatives of some men, though this is illegal, to take over the property of a legally-married couple after the death of the husband which, again, reflects the prevalence of patriarchal dispositions in Zimbabwe.

4.5.3 Economic crisis

Despite the various social and personal factors behind any entry into sex work, the main underlying motivational factor which is at the root of all sex work activity is economic necessity. Increasing urban and rural poverty and unemployment plague Zimbabwe (Leubker 2008:19; Magure 2008; Potts 2006). The rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe is over 90 percent and there are ongoing retrenchments as well as dwindling real salaries which fail to meet the basic costs of life. This leaves the informal sector as the main source of employment or livelihoods for the bulk of the citizenry. Coupled with a lack of education, the study participants seemed to be locked in cyclical and structural poverty both prior and during their engagement in sex work. The need to obtain some source of financial income (no matter how unpredictable and erratic) in a harsh economic environment precipitated entry into sex. Margaret's narrative fully encapsulates this:

I came to Beitbridge to do this work after I left my job as a bar maid at some night club in Nemamwa, Great Zimbabwe. It was the time when there were a lot of hardships in 2008 and my employer could not afford to pay me so he decided to close his bar and that's when I came to Beitbridge (Margaret July 2015).

Cynthia made a similar point:

Life was very hard; it was difficult to work because our economy was very bad at that time. It was in the year 2006 so I had no money and no job, I was once in a marriage of convenience with a Nigerian man in whose shop I worked but immigration caught us because we weren't living together and he was deported. I failed to get another job and started sex work (Cynthia July 2015).

Similarly, a study carried out on sex work as a livelihood strategy in the town of Kisumu in Kenya unravelled how sex workers were driven into this trade due to a lack of financial security intensified by a lack of education. A revelation by Elizabeth encapsulates this:

Most women are the ones who are unemployed and don't have jobs because most men can steal or get high position jobs reserved for men in offices; such as now, there will be a lot of contract work and men will be the ones being employed and obviously most women are not getting access to those jobs (Elizabeth August 2015).

It is often the case that women are in fact able to enter contract work (and other forms of irregular employment) and thus they become concentrated in the less privileged labour market segments. But this reflects a patriarchal labour practice which treats women as worthy of less pay and privileges than male workers, and contributes to the feminisation of poverty. The point raised by Elizabeth though highlights the sheer dearth even of such irregular forms of employment in Zimbabwe and hence the need for women (who were once confined to the domestic sphere in marriages) to seek some kind of income through the informal sector, including by way of sex work. The advantage for women in the case of sex work is that they do not need to compete with men, and are not subject broadly speaking to gender based discrimination or inequality in the workplace. After all, only women can sexually satisfy heterosexual men and, given the acceptance in Zimbabwe for men to prove their masculinity by engaging in sexual promiscuity, female sex workers have a ready market.

Access to formal employment, even if it were readily available in Zimbabwe, would be a serious problem for women, particularly those from rural areas. This relates to the issue of women and education and how patriarchy feeds into this.

4.5.3.1 Patriarchy and Education

In this respect, patriarchal systems generate gender-based inequalities, the sexual division of labour and male oppression of females in society. Despite the growing trend of liberal feminist thinking and gender equalising initiatives in Zimbabwe, at least officially and even then erratically, the sexual division of labour which places women in the domestic sphere

endures in the rural areas. This is evident for example in the low rates of girl child education in rural areas due to the high number of girl child dropouts (Mawere 2012:12).

Like most studies on sex work, this study confirms the prevalence of limited educational qualifications in the sex worker community in Beitbridge (Nyangairi 2010:102; Archavanitkul and Guest 1994:282, Hendriks 2008). The highest educational level recorded in the interviews was Ordinary level but none of the women who claimed to have reached Ordinary level held a certificate at hand or had formal evidence of passing. Some of these women stated that they had written the exams but had not collected their results, therefore they did not know if they had passed or not. Other sex workers mentioned that they had failed the Ordinary level exams and had not rewritten:

I went to school up to form four. I never tried to go for Advanced level. I don't know why my parents failed to send me for Advanced level; maybe I had failed because I have four subjects. At that time when I finished school in 2004 it was a time when if a child gets up to form four then they were finished with school (Tanaka July 2015).

In some instances, the sex workers reported that they were very intelligent but, due to a lack of financial resources and of concern by parents for them to get an education, they failed to continue with their education:

I went to school up to form two. If I had money, I could go back because I was very bright at school but my situation at home was very difficult because the people I stayed with used to abuse me. So when I would go to school I would think about what would have happened at home and fail to listen to the teachers teaching. In grade 7 I came out with six units. I wrote grade 7 in 2003. And in 2005 when I stopped going to school I was in form two (Tafadzwa, July 2015).

This relative lack of education further buttresses the argument by Sanders et al. (2009) that, for women, the decision to enter sex work is predicated on the limited educational opportunities available (especially in rural areas) which therefore limits access to better paying jobs. This resonates with Margaret's narrative:

I chose to be a sex worker because there is no other work I can do in my life. I did not continue with my education. I stopped going to school at form two and there is nothing I can do with my form two education (Margaret July 2015).

4.5.4 Single Motherhood and the rise of female headed households

Marital breakdown (including separation and divorce), the death of male spouses, out of wedlock births and childhood experiences of teenage pregnancy, as well as the rise of

feminist ideas, decline in patriarchal influences and personal choice in being a single mother, have played varying roles in the emergence of the phenomenon of single motherhood whereby there is now a marked increase in the number of female headed households (Kange'the and Mafa 2014, Yarber and Sharp 2001, World Bank 2003). All sex workers in Beitbridge claimed that they were the breadwinner of their families and had dependents and children for whom they cared. To quote two sex workers:

I take care of my own family; no one helps me take care of them, as my kids' father is in prison. My first child has his own father; he is the one I divorced but he doesn't even pay child maintenance (Tafadzwa July 2015).

I have five children. I take care of them and my older sisters children (Elizabeth August 2015).

The feminisation of poverty in Zimbabwe is intensified by the increase in the number of single mothers and female headed households (Alao 2012, Kang'ethe). Due to the current circumstances of dwindling incomes and deepening urban (and rural) poverty in Zimbabwe, most households struggle to survive even on the incomes of a married couple. Thus the situation becomes dire in the case of single female headed households and may lead to sex work. The death of a spouse contributes to single motherhood:

My husband paid good bride price for me and I never thought in my life I would ever end up as a sex worker but one day when he was coming from the rural areas going to Masvingo he got into a car accident and he died and life became difficult (Chipo July 2015).

However, the matter of agency should always be considered in understanding the pathway of women into sex work. In this sense, some sex workers claimed that sex work gave them a form of cultural and sexual freedom to live their lives without the control of men. A focus group discussion revealed how some sex workers prided themselves in their independence:

At times a girl can grow up with a single mother or would have seen other sex workers going to the bar living their independent lives, getting into their own houses, exchanging sexual partners and just aspire to be like that and start thinking that ndinenge ndichizvitonga ndisingatongwe neumwe munhu [I will be in charge of myself no one else will control me] (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

4.6 Rural Origins and Linkages

The previous life and past experiences of sex workers (including their childhood and marital backgrounds) along with the current context of serious economic challenges in Zimbabwe, combined to play a crucial role in shaping the current lives of the women in Beitbridge and their entry into sex workers. To further examine the lives of these women, I now explore their rural/urban origins and linkages. This is important as migration from rural areas to Beitbridge remains significant for sex workers and the socio-cultural systems embedded in rural areas continue to govern the lives of sex workers. Further, rural and urban poverty acts as a push factor driving women into sex work.

4.6.1 Rural/Urban and Urban/Urban Migration in Beitbridge

Discussions of Zimbabwean sex work have long associated sex work with the mass movement of rural women to urbanised towns in search of work and better prospects in life (Magaisa 2001, Barnes 1992). Beitbridge sex work fits into this broad narrative, as urban development precipitated by the presence of the Zimbabwean-South African border has drawn a large number of women migrating from rural areas and other urban centres. Nevertheless, due to the economic challenges in Beitbridge itself, these women end up entering the world of sex work. All of the sex workers with the exception of Elizabeth (who was originally from Beitbridge) stated how Beitbridge was only a place of work and still considered their place of origin (often rural areas and specific villages) as home.

This trend of migration to Beitbridge in search of work is evident in the evidence collected:

I come from Mwenezi, Sarahuru. We [her and her sister] are still based there with our parents because we are both divorced; my sister first came here after she left her husband when they fought and she ran away so she now told me to come here and we started staying here (Jennifer July 2015).

I lived in Zvishavane with my father and step mother but my father stroked in 1989 and life was unbearable so I left Zvishavane and came here to be a sex worker (Memory July 2015).

Apart from rural poverty (which predates independence from colonialism in Zimbabwe), there is the deepening phenomenon of urban poverty which has particularly emerged in the wake of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe (Potts 2006). This was pivotal in the emergence and presence of a relatively new type of migration, involving movement from towns in the centre of Zimbabwe to far away border towns where the proximity to neighbouring countries also provided employment prospects for the women migrants. Some

of the sex workers studied thus stated they had come to Beitbridge from the capital city, Harare, in search of work due to acute poverty:

I was impregnated by my employer's son when I worked as a maid in Harare; they chased me away from their house and refused to help me. I could not survive in Harare, I was jobless and Harare is too expensive so I came to Beitbridge (Abigail July 2015).

A new entry in sex work, with six months in the business, stated:

We lived in the nice parts of Kwekwe town and then I came to Beitbridge after my husband caught me cheating and refused to help me take care of my child when my child fell sick from hernia, I needed to make money so I came here (Grace July 2015).

Beitbridge town is popular in the wider sex work community in Zimbabwe due to the high rate of sex work returns in the town:

I chose Beitbridge because it's a border town so when I came I knew it would be good for business, as opposed to going to Nyamapanda where the border isn't as busy as the one here (Portia July 2015).

As argued by Wolffers (2002) and Nyangairi (2008:114), sex workers are highly mobile individuals and rarely practice sex work in their places of birth. Hence, much as Beitbridge was considered as greener pastures due to the presence of the border and high rates of informal activity, sex workers revealed Beitbridge offered a safe haven for them to work freely with relative anonymity (although their friends or relatives occasionally visited the town). This is illustrated by Margaret:

I was embarrassed to be seen doing this work by the people I had gone to school with so I chose to come here (Margaret 2015).

This is only a place of work. I saw I could not work from home because of the way they would treat me and my children. I don't want people calling my children mwana wehure [the child of a prostitute] so I would rather work far from home (Tendai July 2015).

Rural origins (and linkages) are a central part of the lives of many sex workers and often a bulk of sex work income is remitted back to rural homes. A study by Archavanitkul and Guest (1994:274) for example on the role of economic factors in the migration of sex workers revealed how sex workers in Thailand provided a major source of income for their families of origin. Muzvidziwa (1997) also highlights the reliance of sex work income for survival by rural families in Zimbabwe. Similarly, the Beitbridge study participants reported

that they remitted a large portion of their income to their families. These women stressed that they were the main breadwinners in fact for their families of origin:

I send money to my parents back in Victoria Falls for upkeep and for my child. I can send about 100 [United States] dollars every month (Nomagugu July 2015).

I am the only one working in my family, so I make sure that my siblings, my mother and my children have clothes and food. When I started sex work I looked for a stand for them there in the rural areas and I built her [the mother] one round hut (Tafadzwa July 2015).

Busza (2004:238) argues that, despite the adherence to moral values in rural areas and a general disapproval of sex work as “bad work”, there seems to be a shift in perceptions towards sex work as a taboo and demonised profession to a legitimate profession, or at least as one acceptable as a form of livelihood activity and income generation for rural existence. Quite possibly, the ongoing scourge of rural poverty has eroded long-established values and brought about this change. When asked if their families were aware of the source of the funds they received, some sex workers replied in the affirmative. They stated that, even though their families initially disapproved, they eventually accepted it because the need to survive took precedence over any moral values:

I told my two brothers [about my sex work] and they beat me up but now they are now used to it. When they come to visit, they carry some of the things I would have bought back to Binga and just tell me not to forget to take my ARVs (Ruth July 2015).

At times you know that they know what you do, but they don't say anything to us or, if they do, all they say is we cannot control you or stop you; just be careful because if we stop what will they eat, there will be no food at home (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

4.6.2 Ongoing Family linkages

Sex work studies have argued sex workers are socially isolated individuals who often times lose contact and cut ties with their families due to the stigma and discrimination associated with sex work (Balfour and Allen 2014:3). Evidence collected in Beitbridge invalidates this notion, as the sex workers in Beitbridge indicated that they were not always ostracised by their families but maintained close relationships with them (though they preferred to visit their families back home than have their families visit them in Beitbridge). This guaranteed them a certain level of anonymity especially for those who kept their work a secret:

I go back home to Victoria Falls after about three or four months; they don't come here because they don't know the kind of job I do. They think I am a domestic worker (Sharon July 2015).

Because of our job we can't always live with our children. We miss them a lot so we try to visit them and our families as much as we can when we get money. It's not like we forget about them. They are the reason we are here (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

In some cases, visiting family is not always possible but the sex worker would still make an effort to invite her family to Beitbridge even for a limited amount of time:

They can come here when we call them to come and get groceries but we won't want them to know what we do. We usually take them to the medium density suburbs near Caltex [in Beitbridge] to a relative's where they spend the whole day; then they come here later on and we get a taxi and go with them to the buses so they go home but at least we would have seen them (Jennifer July 2015).

Maintaining traditional networks and ongoing linkages with family back home was mutually beneficial. The family is guaranteed a source of income while, in turn, the linkage provides a source of emotional and moral support for the sex workers. The home of origin is seen as a place of refuge in times of trouble. Sex workers thus reported that rural kin act as a support system for sex workers especially in times of sickness or when their children fall sick. Families are responsible for taking care of sex workers when they get sick and nurse them back to health:

Yes I do visit my relatives such as when my child got sick with nhova I went back to the rural village with her for three months to get treated but I also used to go before I had a baby (Tatenda July 2015).

If you get sick no one will take care of you as much as your family back home, so we contribute money and even call your family back home and tell them that you are coming they should wait for you (Molene July 2015).

The role of grandmothers and mothers of sex workers in particular cannot be over emphasised. Grandmothers and mothers play a pivotal role in the lives of sex workers as a source of comfort to them and as nurturers. Some sex workers confessed that they had not been open about what they do for a living to their family members except to their mothers and grandmothers who knew what they did because of the close relations they had with them:

Only my grandmother knows what I do. I told her the truth after she asked me where I got HIV from so I don't know if there is anyone else she told after I told her or she kept it as a secret (Margaret July 2015).

I visit my family often. I can see my grandmother three times; my grandmother knows and she doesn't like it and she says "I want a better life for you; you can get married again, if you stay here in the rural areas" (Mildred July 2015).

The impregnation of the girl child regularly means that the role of childrearing falls on the mother and her relatives. Therefore, most sex workers reported that they never knew their fathers and had grown up with their maternal relatives. As such, the mother or grandmother seems to play a pivotal role in the lives of sex workers mostly due to the absence of male support.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter served as an introduction to the discussion of the empirical data collected in the study on sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge. Data collected revealed the lure of Beitbridge for a large number of migrants and informal traders from across Zimbabwe. The study participants were drawn from a large group of sex workers who were engaged in various types of sex work in Beitbridge which ranged from street, bar, truck to home based sex work. Sex work is governed by the contextual specifications of the area in which it occurs. Therefore, sex work in Beitbridge has specific characteristics owing to the town's unique factors such as the shortage of accommodation in the town, the high presence of an informal sector and the existence of the busiest border post in the SADC region. These and other factors either had an enabling or constraining effect on sex work. In outlining the lives of sex workers in this chapter, I highlighted the motivations underpinning entry into sex work as well as the home origins of the sex workers and their ongoing linkages to their home areas. In the next chapter, other themes are explored and discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: BEITBRIDGE SEX WORKER RELATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy in Beitbridge. Sex work and client relations, living and working conditions, public perceptions and every sex work challenges come together to govern the sex work trade in Beitbridge. On this basis, the chapter is divided into four main thematically-based sections. The following section (section 2) discusses sex work income, expenditure and consumption. In section 3, client and sex worker relations are examined with the experiences with clients falling along a continuum ranging from violent encounters to romantic love. In section four I detail the health hazards that come with sex work. In section five, I highlight public perceptions and attitudes towards sex work which have an impact on the stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion of sex workers in Beitbridge. Lastly, in going beyond the thematic discussion, I discuss the history and lives of two sex workers to show the diversity in the lives of Beitbridge sex workers.

5.2 Sex work income and expenditure

The key purpose of engaging in sex work, like any other form of work be it formal or informal, is to ensure a source of income (Hendriks 2008:45, Nyangairi 2010, Bowen 2013:15). A field study carried out in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique on mobility and HIV and AIDS in southern Africa revealed that, generally, the bulk of people in Beitbridge have some level of disposable income primarily as a result of informal trading with commercial sex work being a crucial source of this income (IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003:29).

5.2.1 Sex work Income

Based on my fieldwork findings, income from sex work in Beitbridge was inconsistent and variable depending on a number of factors such as type of sexual activity undertaken and length of sexual episode, location, how the sex worker was dressed, the type of client, time of month and the economic climate. However, there seemed to be standard rates for sexual charges depending on location. Sex workers reported that the standard rate for a sexual episode for street based sex work was different from that charged in bar based and truck based sex work. Street based work yielded the least amount of income with the standard rate for a 'short time' being R20. Short time referred to a single sexual episode which lasted from

about five to ten minutes and ended when a client ejaculated. Hilda explains the concept of a ‘short time’:

It's determined by how long a man takes to ejaculate; so if a man takes an hour he has to pay more money because your money would not be tallying with the amount of time you are taking (Hilda July 2015).

At the same time, the standard rate for a ‘night’ which referred to the provision of sexual services for an entire night ranged from R150 to R250 for street based sex workers. However, these charges were subject to change depending upon the client, as sex workers indicated that some clients were generous enough to pay more if they were overly satisfied by the sexual services:

If the client is impressed by how good you were, he can even pay you more and give you 30 or 40 rand when you had initially charged him 20 (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

Some clients nonetheless preferred to negotiate for lesser charges, with the rate going down to as little as R15 especially with Malawian clients who sex workers accused of being frugal with their money:

Ana Chimwene vakaomera kunyanya [Malawian men are the most stingy]. They want you to reduce the price to 15 rand from 20 rand but, because you need to buy food, you can just get the 15 rand and buy chicken cuts for your family to eat (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

Bar based and truck based sex work yielded a higher income with the standard rate for a short time being R50 rand and for a night ranging from R250 to R300. This difference in charges was based on the expenditures women incurred in travelling to bars and truck stops looking for clients:

Short time at the trucks and bars it's also 50 rand but if there is no money its 30 rand. At the bar it's more because there is no guarantee you will get a client. You can go to the bar for days and fail to get a client so you can spend two or three nights till you get a client. The streets are better because they are busier; the 20 rand clients will be walking up and down (Ruth July 2015).

This variation in income was also based on the type of clients, with sex workers reporting that they charged truck drivers more than the typical street clients as truck drivers were known to offer more money. Truck drivers, it was said, offered as much as \$100US for sex, albeit unsafe (or unprotected) sex. This corroborates that of an earlier study on sex work in Beitbridge which discovered that truck drivers were prepared to pay considerable money as a

‘risk allowance’ to cater for the possible consequences of unsafe sex for the sex worker. This allowance was supposed to cover the sex worker’s future STI treatment or to compensate for any possible HIV infection (IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003).

The sex workers claimed as well that their income tended to increase based on the way they dressed and the sexual skills they had. Provocative dressing is viewed as a form of identification of sex workers by clients and a way of advertising one’s ‘wares’:

We also have our own type of dressing which draws clients to us; this dressing is seductive and is intended to draw a large number of men to you so I can wear a bum short and go to work (Margaret July 2015).

Clothing thus is viewed as enhancing a woman’s looks thereby contributing to the money she can make. Clothing, make up, cosmetics and good hair was viewed by the women as valuable physical assets which, if well-coordinated, could attract more clients and higher earnings. As Sharon said:

It’s important because as you know men have always liked beautiful things, they like beautiful women. If you bath well, dress well and smell good you get more clients; men are disgusted by scruffy looking women (Sharon July 2015).

However, there was a group of sex workers who seemed to oppose this view and stated that one’s sexual skills and reputation were a more important factor in determining income, and more so than physical appearances. For Tendai, dressing up and physical appearances played a minor role:

You may have a pretty face and wear nice clothes but if you don’t have good sex skills, what is the point? A man will leave you if he is not satisfied sexually. They want good sex and not physical appearance, though obvious bathing and personal hygiene is compulsory (Tendai July 2015).

The sex work industry is one which, like any other, does not occur in isolation as it exists currently in the broader context of a harsh economic climate in Zimbabwe characterised by massive retrenchments and dwindling salaries. This situation was lamented by sex workers who argued that they were experiencing a reduction in their sex work income as a ripple effect of the economic crisis:

We don’t make as much money as we used to when things were better. Now things are hard for everyone so when clients don’t have money it means we also don’t have money. When they lose their jobs how can someone come to you and pay for sex (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

Due to the inconsistencies and instability of their incomes, the sex workers stated that their money was usually fast cash, or (not so) easy come but easy go. Thus most of the sex workers were unable to give a definite amount for their daily or monthly incomes and, those who endeavoured to do so, could only give a rough estimate of more or less R4,000. This of course raises serious questions about the sustainability of sex work as a livelihood strategy if it failed to provide a reliable source of income and, even more so, opportunities for investment and savings.

Though the sex workers stated that they preferred to be paid in monetary terms (that is, cash), some acquiesced to the fact that they occasionally received other forms of payment besides money, such as foodstuffs, cell phones and clothes. Thus, some sex workers operated on a strictly cash only basis, but others were more flexible and would negotiate with clients who were short of cash but in need of sex. Sharon highlighted this:

At times a truck driver can say he has no cash but has groceries in his truck so we could exchange that for sex. You could end up with a 5 litre of cooking oil, 1 kg of surf and a bar of soap (Sharon July 2015).

Broadly speaking, sex workers in Beitbridge highlighted that sex work was their only livelihood strategy and source of income, though some had other less important forms of income. Those who solely relied on sex work income cited factors which inhibited their capacity to perform other work. These factors included the absence of any other form of employment in Beitbridge as well as the time consuming and physically strenuous nature of sex work, such that they had no opportunity or ability to simultaneously engage in any other work:

I am up all night so during the day I have to rest because I will be tired. Day time is our time of rest so at times it's hard to do anything else (Tanaka July 2015).

Other sex workers who had entrepreneurial skills reported that, apart from sex work, they had other sources of income, albeit smaller than their overall sex work income:

I sell braids, cobra [floor polish] and drinks so roughly in a month I get about R800 or R500 profit from what I sell (Cynthia July 2015).

Some sex workers confessed that they had never explored avenues of income generation apart from sex work, but others revealed that they had sought employment opportunities working as shop assistants or domestic workers but had consequently ended up in sex work as it provided a larger income than their previous jobs. Even other women seemed to have shown great ingenuity and resourcefulness and, at least, claimed that they had pursued

various options open to them which all had failed compelling them into sex work. Jennifer put it this way:

I am not lazy. I have tried to sell bananas and sadza but zvakaramba [it didn't work out] it was not profitable (Jennifer July 2015).

This statement, I would argue, is suggestive of the importance of debunking traditional notions widely held by society of sex workers as lazy, deviant individuals (Clarkson 1939, Tekola 2005). In the case of Jennifer, she had shown great resilience in eking out a living through whatever means possible.

Apart from directly receiving money from clients, the sex workers also stated how they had come to rely on the *stokvel* system (or a savings club) as a way of receiving lump sums of cash. The *stokvel* (locally called *kutamba round*) is whereby the women (ten in the example from the study) would each contribute a fixed amount of 100 Rand per day which would be collected and given to one woman each day (a total of R1,000), and all the women would take turns to receive this full amount. This rotational system of giving each other money was reported as not only a source of income but a way of encouraging savings and investment and circulating money amongst themselves. However, though this system mostly involved sex workers only, other local women in a few cases would be involved if they could afford to contribute the agreed upon amount. As well, at times, particular sex workers survived on handouts from fellow sex workers especially during circumstances marked by crisis. If a sex worker was sick and was hospitalised, or if a sex worker died and her body needed to be sent back to the rural home for burial, the sex workers conveyed that they all tried to contribute financially by collecting money from each brothel.

5.2.2 Sex work expenditure

In this context, sex workers in Beitbridge shared a huge sense of moral responsibility in providing for their families. As such, sex worker income is mostly spent on remittances to families for their upkeep. Archavanitkul and Guest (1994:292) argued that remittances from sex workers contributed significantly to the overall income of their village based households and enabled those households to enjoy a relatively high standard of living. This is illustrated by sex workers like Tafadzwa:

When I started sex work I was able to buy my mother a stand in the rural areas and I built her one round hut. I also make sure that my mother, siblings and children have clothes and food (Tafadzwa July 2015).

Other sex workers stated how they had become employers in their own right by hiring help for their families in the rural areas to take care of their children. Therefore, they had to send money occasionally to pay their helpers:

I send money back home to buy food and pay school fees for my child as well as pay the person I hired to take care of my child (Chipo July 2015).

The bulk of sex worker income however is spent on accommodation in Beitbridge. The overcrowded character of the town of Beitbridge has created an acute shortage of accommodation which has had the adverse effect of the overpricing of accommodation. (Mate 2005:21, IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003). Sex workers in Beitbridge constantly grumbled about how the standard rate of accommodation of R70 per day was exorbitant. This daily rental fee for brothels took up a large portion of their income, such that it left them with insufficient income to pay for their other daily expenses.

Study participants described how their income was also spent on operational expenses associated with the sex work trade in Beitbridge. These expenses were incurred in the purchase of products that can be regarded as tools of the sex work trade. These included clothes, make up and cosmetics to enhance the attractiveness and seductiveness of the sex worker as a marketing tactic. As well, the sex workers conveyed that they had to set aside money for tissues, cotton and condoms which were important for their work. In as much as condoms were given out for free at the clinic and hospital, sex workers testified that some clients preferred to use different brands of condoms deemed as better quality than the free protector-plus condoms. Hence, the women occasionally had to buy condoms from supermarkets or bottle stores.

In the case of sex workers who lived with their children, the amount of income consumed by daily expenses was excessive. Tatenda, who lived with her six-month old baby, spoke about the high cost of living in Beitbridge:

I have to pay 60USD per month for the personal room I rent whilst I also pay the daily fee of 70 rand at the booking because I can't live with my child at the booking. On top of that, I pay a woman I hire 30 Rand daily to take care of my child every night when I go to work. This together with food means that I don't always have a lot of money left. My child needs diapers and food (Tatenda July 2015).

Elizabeth, who had the highest number of children (five) amongst all the study participants, mentioned how she often struggled to make ends meet:

I have to buy food for my children, send them to school, buy uniforms for them and it is so difficult because the fathers do not help in any way (Elizabeth August 2015).

Due to the absence of cooking facilities in the brothels where they stayed, many of the sex workers reported that they had to continuously buy food on a daily basis:

All you have is your mattress and blankets in the booking. We are not allowed to cook so we buy sadza to eat for five rand or a dollar (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

There were instances though of sex workers who were able to save and invest their income, including being able to buy cars with their sex work income. One sex worker told about her friend, also a sex worker, who had bought a car which operated as a taxi in Beitbridge. During a focus group discussion, when asked if they had been able to buy anything tangible with their money, all four sex workers claimed that they had been able to furnish at least in part their rural homes back home or their private homes in Beitbridge with consumer goods such as televisions, lounge suites and beds.

5.3 Client and sex worker relations

Client and sex worker relations are tenuous and fall along a continuum with women who have undergone varying degrees of extreme violence to friendships and romance with clients. However, in order to understand the complexity of these relationships, it is important to provide an overview of the type of clients who frequented sex workers in Beitbridge.

5.3.1 Client Profiles

The clientele for Beitbridge sex workers is a broad and heterogeneous group of men with varying demographic profiles such that there no typical client. Sex workers, in general, are non-discriminatory in that any male can be a client as long as they can pay for the sexual services provided. In this respect, the evidence collected in this study coincides with that of an earlier study in Beitbridge (IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003:7) which spoke of a vast client pool. The clients of the local sex workers comprise local informal traders (including touts known as *mawindy* from the nearby Dulibadzimu bus terminus); border jumpers; travelers passing through the border to and from South Africa; truck drivers; and businessmen importing cars. Other clients included government officials such as the police and border officials (including clearing agents, as well as Zimbabwe Revenue Authority and Immigration officials) who visited sex workers in civilian clothing.

Sex workers seemed to classify their clients into repeat and once off clients. Once-off clients were total strangers who came once for sexual services and never returned, while repeat clients were those who were regulars (both paying and non-paying clients). The non-paying clients were accused of being stingy and frugal. These included, as indicated

previously, Malawian men who were perceived by the sex workers as being the worst paying clients and always negotiating for a lesser payment than the standard R20. However, due to the competitive nature of sex work in Beitbridge and the desperation to survive, the sex workers confessed that oftentimes they ended up accepting a lesser fee. Local Zimbabwean men were the most popular in terms of generously paying the sex workers. More specifically, the women reported local touts (*mahwindi*) and thieves or robbers paid them more money due to the fact that they had large sums of fast cash which they could spend on sex workers. Despite the generous tips from thieves and robbers, they posed a threat to sex workers. For instance, sex workers end up being accused as accomplices to the thieves by the police, along with other problems:

Thieves pay more but they rob you afterwards or stab you with a knife and they are possessive; they start thinking you are their wife or tell you that you are not good in bed. They also put you in danger with the police or CID officials [Criminal Investigation Department]; especially when they get caught by the police, you are accused of being an accomplice (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

This association of sex workers and robbers is usually mutually beneficial. Sex workers noted that robbers frequently visited sex workers because they were a source of accommodation for most homeless robbers who were being sought by the police; thus cohabitating with a sex worker provided a secret hide out for the robbers on the run. Simultaneously, the sex workers benefit as they are paid generously by the robbers despite the dangers that came with harbouring them from the police:

The truth is local robbers and thieves really pay us a lot; the CIO [Central Intelligence Organisation] also once asked for my details and told me to get in touch if my boyfriend came back so they could arrest him. But when he came back I did not tell them, as he had a lot of money with him. The following day they found me and beat me up and they said I knew where he was (Focus Group Discussion number 1 August 2015).

Nomagugu (aged 26), who also took part in the focus group discussion with other three sex workers, recalls her own experience:

When I first met Craig my ex-boyfriend he asked for 'short time' for fifty rand and he paid and then he wanted a night for 300 and he paid then we went to my house. He had stolen money about 90000 rand from the border and he was on the run from the police and so they came looking for him at my house and they beat me up badly I

couldn't walk because [of the beating] (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

Any association with local thieves subjected these women to police brutality and violence. The danger that clients may pose to sex workers is also evident in Mildred's previous relationship:

In Masvingo I was living with a thief I met as a sex worker. We used to go to the bar together to drink alcohol so, when we came here, we were caught by some men who had guns and they told us to lie on the ground till we told them where the stuff he [the sex worker's male friend] had stolen was (Mildred July 2015).

These women revealed a tendency to continuously engage in toxic relationships with such men even though the sex workers were exposed to danger as a result. This reveals, in the end, the materialistic aspect of these relationships. Even some of the clients who were robbers had a history of physically assaulting the sex workers. Yet the women continued to go back to their abusive lovers driven by the need to make money, and only later to terminate the relationships when the men ran out of money and could not afford to provide for them anymore.

In some cases, the sex workers provided domestic services in addition to sexual services to their clients to increase their income. This was only done for a select grouping of clients who were prepared to pay more than the average R20 for a short time. These better-paying clients thus enjoyed additional (non-sexual) services albeit for a price higher for sex than the other clients. This domestic service provision was, as well, a strategy used by sex workers to induce the clients to stay longer with the sex workers and thereby spend more money on them:

We can cook breakfast even for the one day clients especially if you see there is a lot of money [from the clients]. You have to take advantage so you take their clothes and wash them whilst they are sleeping then you also sleep with them afterwards. We can make them stay for some days with us cooking and washing for them and sleeping with them. We just don't cook for the 20 rand clients (Focus Group Discussion number 1, August 2015).

The interviews also revealed the presence a certain type of client, namely, married men who frequented sex workers. Married men were popular amongst sex workers because they paid well. This of course gives an insight into the high level of infidelity in Beitbridge, which is part of a broader and ongoing pattern of extra marital affairs in Zimbabwe and the rise of the 'small house phenomenon' (Musiyarira 2011:24, Razemba 2013). The 'small

house' is a Zimbabwean metaphor used for women who engage in extra marital affairs with married men. Some of the sex worker participants in the study in fact seemed to double as both sex workers and 'small houses'. As Tafadzwa indicated:

Yes I do have a boyfriend but he's someone's husband. We are in love. The wife knows about it but she doesn't know me or know where I stay. We just know each other over the phone in calling each other and shouting at each other (Tafadzwa July 2015).

As in the case with Tafadzwa, other sex workers had both sexual and romantic relationships with married men. However, there were some sex workers who seemed to have simply single once-off encounters with married men by providing sexual services but not entering into romantic relationships with them. One sex worker narrated an experience with a married man:

A married man once went home with me from Kalahari bar and when we were at his house his wife came back during the night. The wife found the bedroom door locked and she started knocking belligerently. I had managed to wake him up so he woke up and unlocked the door. It was obvious he was with someone in the bedroom. I could hear her go back to the kitchen unit to get a pot. Probably she wanted to beat me with it, so that's when I escaped and all I could wear was a skin tight. The couple started fighting but I had to run to save myself (Siwinile July 2015).

Despite the income they made from married clients, some of the sex workers confessed that they did not enjoy sleeping with married men because, as women (and formerly wives), they had gone through the painful experience of infidelity by their former husband. Elizabeth provided the following detailed account of one incident:

I was hired by a married man and when we arrived at his house his wife was at home sleeping in their bedroom, so he said to her 'buda ndiri kuda kurara nebhebhi rangu' ['leave the room, I want to have sex with my baby'] and all she could do was ask him what he was doing. It didn't please me but as someone who desperately needed money I had to be daring and I knew I had security because the man was saying no one will beat you up. So I knew that even if I slept there, the wife could not come and beat me up but I was still scared. The wife spent the whole night crying. In the morning, I was given my money but when I was leaving I found a group of people waiting for me outside in the street. I think the wife had called her neighbours saying come and see this prostitute in my house with my husband so the husband was the one who had to scare them off and tell them not to touch me (Elizabeth August 2015).

This account shows the endurance of oppressive patriarchal systems and power imbalances embedded in Zimbabwean society where women are viewed as inferior and second class citizens as compared to men. In this scenario, the wife of the married client is depicted as a voiceless and defenceless victim of her husband's infidelity and is unable to stand her ground. Additionally, it highlights the phenomenon of gender based violence suffered by female spouses whereby, in this case, a married woman suffered emotional trauma and humiliation by being chased out of her matrimonial bedroom so her husband could sleep with a sex worker.

5.3.2 Client Violence, friendship and marriage

Similar to other occupations, sex work shares a number of characteristics with other occupations which include workplace violence (Seib 2007:19). As argued by Weitzer (2000), different kinds of sex worker experiences have varying degrees of violence, victimisation and exploitation, as well as agency and choice, which highlights the complexity of sex work.

Pervasive violence was evident in the current lives of the sex workers in Beitbridge with many narrating horrifying stories of gender based violence at the hands of clients. This violence usually took the form of physical violence through being beaten up and robbed or being stabbed with knives and other weapons. In some cases, this violence was of a sexual nature in which sex workers are raped. These findings tally with those of, for example, a case study in San Francisco which reported a high rate of physical assault and rape of sex workers subsequent to entering sex work (Farley and Barkan 1998, Bowen 2013:47). Tafadzwa highlighted:

Tinorohwa nemaclients [We are beaten up by clients]. For example, I was once stabbed and dumped at the Limpopo River. A client had hired me at the bar and said to me let's get a taxi and go to my house. Since I was still new to Beitbridge, I did not know that he was leading me on a stray path into the bushes near the Limpopo River. I was also so drunk so I kept following him till I found myself in the Limpopo river and he slept with me without protection and afterwards he stabbed me and stole my phone and money. He thought he had killed me but he hadn't; I just fainted and woke bleeding and had to start walking slowly towards town (Tafadzwa July 2015).

Another sex worker narrated a painful experience of her rape ordeal:

I brought a client home from the bar and after we had sex I asked for my money and he refused to give it me and then he started forcefully stripping off my trousers again then he raped me. But I got him arrested and he was charged with rape but his

relatives paid bail for him and he was released. It was painful for me (Loveness August 2015).

This account also sheds light on the prevailing failure of the justice system in Zimbabwe in protecting sex workers. As argued by Seib (2007:20), this is attributable to the illegal context in which sex work occurs specifically in the case of Zimbabwe. This not only reduced the likelihood of reporting violence to the police but the lack of action by the police. Sex workers in Beitbridge claimed that, although reporting their violent attacks, rapes and robberies to the police, their cases were hardly taken seriously and their perpetrators went free. Mobile sex workers such as Elizabeth who had practiced sex work in Johannesburg, South Africa recounted the pervasiveness of client violence even in other places:

In Johannesburg a group of four men who had hired me for the night drugged me and took me to a certain place in Sandton and they all had sex with me and I was heavily drugged. But when I woke up, I had my money which they had put next to the bed but my whole body was sore and I was weak and I knew vainge vanditamba rough [they had ill-treated me] (Elizabeth August 2015).

Nomagugu had a particularly sad experience of violence from a client (who became her lover) which had left her traumatised and averse to dating anymore. This violence took place during the first week in which I had made initial contact with the sex workers during my fieldwork. After failing to miss a prearranged interview consecutively for three days, I was finally able to interview Nomagugu; and she proceeded to mention how she had been admitted to hospital after a recent attack at the Eland bar by her ex-boyfriend who was a client. As she recounted about her ex-boyfriend Craig:

[He] beat me up at the bar on Monday. He attacked me with a beer bottle and cut my arm with the broken beer bottle and pulled my weave from my hair. It was so bad I bled a lot and was admitted into hospital where they stitched my arm; that's why you could not find me (Nomagugu July 2015).

Her stab wounds were still fresh and therefore, as a researcher, I listened attentively to her painful experience as well as literally observing the consequences of this client violence first hand. The focus group discussion with Nomagugu, Elizabeth, Mildred and Ruth was insightful in this regard. The women reported how, three weeks prior to the interviews, a fellow sex worker had been stabbed with a knife by a client after he had demanded his money back and she had refused to give him back.

The interviews in fact brought to the fore a common pattern of clients refusing to pay for sexual services rendered or demanding their money back after their sexual encounters.

This habit commonly termed *kukerechura* by sex workers was cited as one of the major drawbacks of sex work and regularly led to violence. Furthermore, refusal to comply with the client's demands, which is linked to refusal to pay for services, was cited as one of the causes of client violence. Memory describes her experiences as follows:

Kukerechura is when a client sleeps with you and demands his money afterwards or he robs you of your personal money earned from sex work and the money he would have paid you. Some can take out a knife or threaten you or even stab you. To protect yourself you end up giving him, or you quickly call on others for help especially here in the bookings where its overcrowded people will hear you and come quickly (Memory July 2015).

To guard against *kukerechura* the sex workers reported that they had devised coping mechanisms so as to guarantee payment for their services, Sex workers in Beitbridge mentioned that they now preferred to have clients pay for services before they have sex and they would give this money to their fellow sex workers for safe keeping. Further, some mentioned that they asked their clients to pay them through the mobile payment system common in Zimbabwe such as Ecocash whereby the money is transferred into a mobile banking system. This coincides with an article featured in the *Mail and Guardian* for the 5th to 11th of July 2015 which reported that sex workers in Zimbabwe had adapted to the use of mobile cash to guard against theft and to cater for clients who could not pay cash upfront (Smith 2015).

These traumatic and violent relations with clients are juxtaposed to the harmonious and friendly relations that sex workers had with some of their clients. Sex workers interviewed thus reported that not all clients were abusive and violent. A number of sex workers maintained that they had forged friendships with their clients based on mutual understanding and respect. These clients even provided financial support to sex workers when they were stranded:

I have become friends with some of them. I can call them when I need help because sometimes you fail to get clients for two or three days and you live from hand to mouth and you need money for food. When things are really tough and I do not have money for my child's school fees, I do have friends who are clients who loan me some money and, if they are far, they send me money via eco-cash (Cynthia July 2015).

Some sex worker-client relationships became emotive, with sex workers providing emotional support for their clients who in turn did the same. Clients were known to visit sex workers in search of comfort and escapism from daily problems and life's difficulties. Sex workers

described how these clients could be going through work stresses or marital problems and needed a stranger to listen to them.

Occasionally these client and sex worker relations turned romantic. Some sex workers mentioned that they had ended up dating their clients and being in love with them. As in the case with married men, a focus group discussion revealed that these women would even fall in love with married men and then feel betrayed when these married men in turn cheated on them:

We don't know why but we also feel pain when our boyfriends who are married also end up cheating on us. Tinotonzwa kurwadziwa kukuru [we are greatly hurt by this]. At times you get attached because that person is good to you and will be treating you well (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

At times, client and sex worker romantic relationships had led to marriage. When asked if they knew any sex workers who had married ex-clients, the interviewed sex workers recounted that some had wedded and now lived with their ex-client husbands. In such cases, these men expected their (ex-sex worker) wives to be faithful but sex workers explained how it was not always possible and, in some cases, these marriages failed due to infidelity by the woman. The main factor for this, they explained, was that once a woman became a sex worker, exiting sex work even after marriage was an uphill battle due to the seemingly 'addictive' nature of sex work. The sex workers testified how sex work became a habit and way of life for them, apart from being a livelihood strategy. As the old adage goes, old habits die hard.

5.4 Health issues (HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and abortions)

Classical debates on sex work focused on the public health implications of sex work more than any other aspect (Doctors for Life 1997, Davidson 2002). Sex workers are argued to pose a danger to public health by spreading HIV/AIDS and STIs. Contemporary studies on sex work have sought to provide a more multi-dimensional approach to sex work by exploring other aspects, besides health, inherent in the sex trade such as livelihood themes (Merten and Haller 2007, Hendriks 2008, Greenall 2008). Nonetheless empirical evidence collected in this study still emphasises certain health issues brought up by sex work though not necessarily in a manner which condemns sex workers and their way of life.

5.4.1 Physical Health

Due to the multi sexual partner character intrinsic to sex work, sex workers constitute a high risk and vulnerable group to health hazards such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The earlier study on Beitbridge reported that the highest rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence was recorded in the sex worker community (IOM, CARE and SIDA 2003, Mtetwa et al. 2013:1). Despite attempts by local health authorities and non-governmental organisations to reduce the rate of HIV/AIDS transmission within Beitbridge, the disease continues to affect a large proportion of sex workers in the town. The most obvious reason for this was attributed, by the sex workers, to the constant refusal by clients to engage in protected sex (i.e. using condoms). Though some sex workers did not reveal voluntarily their HIV status, most sex workers in the study openly confessed that they were HIV positive and had been infected by their clients through their work:

Obvious we now have it but we still have to protect yourself, live healthy and go on anti-retroviral treatment (Abigail July 2015).

One sex worker recounted the story of how she had been HIV negative when she first started sex work and, though being careful with clients, she had ended up being infected by a lover:

When I left my husband I was HIV negative and I moved to Masvingo where I became a sex worker and I met a boy named Munyaradzi who told me to stop sex work and that he would take care of me and my two children. We then lived together for six months and he had not told me he was HIV positive so when I got sick I went and got tested and I was HIV positive. I was so angry I confronted him and told him he had to move out (Mildred July 2015).

This account is ironic as it demonstrates a trend whereby women face a larger risk from the people they trust compared to random strangers (or clients in the case of sex workers). A study on migrant women in sex work confirms this trend where sex workers were more at risk in socially approved relationships with husbands and boyfriends than with clients (Nyangairi 2010:120).

In Zimbabwe, there are well-established education campaigns around HIV as well as an increasing number of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programmes countrywide educating sex workers on the dangers of unprotected sex. But sex workers cannot always choose safe sex (Lewis et al. 2005, Cowan et al. 2005:371, Ngugi et al. 1996). Structural factors such as sexual violence and perpetual poverty play a restrictive role in limiting the options available to sex workers. Sex workers in Beitbridge explained how they could not

always refuse the large sums of money offered by clients for unprotected sex because they needed the money:

Some offer you as much as \$100 for unprotected sex and because you need money you will agree and maybe you would not have had a client for days or that night and you have no money and you need to pay booking rent so you end up taking it (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

Condom aversion by clients has been reported as one of the main causal factors behind STI transmission for sex workers (Hendriks 2008:63, Elmes et al. 2014). Sex workers in Beitbridge highlighted how clients would implement exceptional and even extreme measures in having unprotected sex, which included not only offering more money but going so far as to deliberately tear condoms while having sex. Chipso maintained that, as sex workers, they had to put the condoms on the men because some tore holes in the condoms. Even when some condoms broke during the sexual encounter, clients were known to refuse to stop and put on another one, as described by Thulani:

You can hear the condom break at times and you tell him to stop so you can put on another one and some will not stop and continue to use force (Thulani, July 2015).

Jennifer explained the reasons men usually gave for not using a condom:

Most men don't like condoms as vanoda nyoro [they want it raw]. They say that its not sweet or nice if it's covered in paper, because then they don't feel anything. Others say to us: how can you eat an orange with the peels on? It does not taste sweet so I guess it's the same for them (Jennifer July 2015).

Other than being exposed to STIs and HIV/AIDS, sex workers in Beitbridge were susceptible to unwanted pregnancies and abortions. They bemoaned over the fact that pregnancies were an unwanted expense as it increased the number of dependents on them by adding an extra child to the household. As a result, the women related that they had to abort the pregnancies. Abortion posed a health threat to these women as some self-induced abortions led to death. Two of the women confessed to falling sick from abortions, including Loveness:

Condoms used to burst lot when I started sex work and I got pregnant but I did not know who the father was. I had a problem trying to abort the pregnancy. It made me sick. I saw that keeping it would be a problem so I still aborted because it would have bothered my parents and given my mother and father stress (Loveness August 2015).

The sex workers in Beitbridge expressed their gratitude over the presence of a sex workers' clinic that had been initiated in recent years by the MSF (Doctors without Borders)

NGO. This mobile clinic was established to provide free medical and counseling services to the sex worker community in Beitbridge. The clinic only comes to Beitbridge once a week on Thursdays only. As reported by the sex workers, the mobile sex workers' clinic had made a significant impact on their lives by providing them with access to condoms, ARV treatment and therapy, as well as conducting regular medical checkups and tests on sex workers to look for any STD and HIV infections. The clinic also provided counseling services for the sex workers and the nurses manning the clinic were well known and appreciated for their good rapport with sex workers. It was stationed on Thursdays in a central place at the Dulibadzimu bus rank in Beitbridge which made it accessible to all the sex workers. This initiative has been ingenious as it provides the sex worker with the opportunity to seek medical help in a non-discriminatory environment since it was specifically for sex workers and not open to the general public.

Research on health services has been laden with evidence on how sex workers face discrimination and stigma when seeking medical treatment (Scorgie et al. 2013:457, Mtetwa et al. 2013:1). A study on access to antiretroviral treatment for sex workers in Harare indicated how sex workers faced gross discrimination and exclusion in public health institutions such as hospitals and clinics when seeking treatment. The sex workers reported being told to queue in different lines as compared to non-sex workers and on how they would be attended to last or spent long hours without receiving any attention (Mtetwa et al. 2013:4).

Conversely, the Beitbridge sex workers stressed that they did not face any discrimination or exclusion from the health workers at the mobile clinic or the general hospital. When the clinic was not available, the women reported that they would seek help from the local Beitbridge hospital and, when asked if they had ever faced any discrimination at the hospital, none of the workers replied in the affirmative. This seems to portray the presence of a change in attitudes towards sex workers especially by health care workers:

Yes there is the sex workers clinic and hospital and some peer educators who move around teaching us. They distribute free condoms to us and they tell us that if we don't have condoms we should go and collect them from the hospital or clinic (Hilda July 2015).

These peer educators were cited as ex sex workers who now moved around teaching sex workers about HIV prevention and treatment, distributing condoms and offering advice and counseling on health issues to sex workers. Therefore, the sex workers' clinic also serves as a form of job creation for sex workers wishing to exit sex work. However, the sex workers

reported that this was a privilege that only the better educated sex workers would enjoy. As Mildred put it:

Some sex workers end up leaving sex work for good and getting other jobs such as when the free sex workers mobile clinic started, many sex workers were recruited to work in the clinic and were trained. This was mostly those who had gone to school up to form 4 since these women are said to grasp concepts faster (Mildred July 2015).

The sex workers highlighted that, due to the sex workers' clinic, the previous high sex worker mortality rate in Beitbridge had been significantly reduced. Sex workers now lived longer due to the availability and accessibility of free medical treatment. As Tatenda put it:

Before the clinic came many of us were dying from sexually transmitted diseases. They would flare up and infect the whole body and we would not have access to medication so the nurses there are important people to us. Some counsel you and give you emotional support when you test HIV positive. They also keep your status private and confidential (Tatenda July 2015).

5.4.2 Mental and Emotional Health

There are many factors influencing the mental health of sex workers. These factors are derived from the past experiences and the current living and working conditions of sex workers such as violence from clients (Seib 2007:147). While none of the sex workers in this study confessed to being on any mental health treatment, they however reported that they had faced some psychological trauma and emotional distress from their past lives and current lives as sex workers, which can be inferred to have a bearing on their mental health well-being. These emotional and mental issues are attributable to abusive relationships and marriages for most of the women:

I was only happy in my first marriage but the second one we didn't really get along. He was verbally abusive and this made me very unhappy and in the end you end up controlling yourself but it will be eating at you in your heart at times; he won't be able to beat you up but is very abusive in his actions (Elizabeth August 2015).

These words depict the presence of an emotionally distressed marriage for Elizabeth. In another case, a sex worker highlighted the mentally and emotionally taxing nature of sex work and the need to exit sex work if given an opportunity:

Sex work is painful, such as for me there are times when I cry over how I can reunite with my ex-husband because of my current situation and what I have experienced. I

personally would even want to go back to him and reunite with him because I later realised when it was too late that the reason I left him was petty (Mildred July 2015).

Sex workers in Beitbridge also testified to drawing upon a number of coping mechanisms to deal with mental and emotional stresses. These mechanisms included the use of alcohol and drugs as well as seeking spiritual guidance and relying on religious doctrines for comfort and solace from stress. Though, in some cases, drug and alcohol use is a determinant factor for entry into sex work to fund an addiction, it is also used as a strategic move to desensitise the sex worker from the remorse of selling her body (Bhunu and Mushayabasa 2012:2). With reference to drug and alcohol use amongst sex workers in Beitbridge, these factors do not always hold true. None of the sex workers interviewed relied on sex work to fund drug and alcohol addictions (in fact, none of the women confessed to having a drug or alcohol addiction). All of the women testified to using drugs and alcohol at some point in their lives as sex workers due to variable reasons such as peer pressure, as a form of social drinking/entertainment in bars and clubs, and as a coping mechanism for emotional stress. As Catherine put it:

Initially I used to drink alcohol because my friends had influenced me to drink alcohol and I thought I was drinking to relieve my stress so I started drinking but now I don't drink (Catherine July 2015).

Likewise, Elizabeth indicated that:

I used to drink to be stress free but I stopped after I got sick. I also used to sniff drotsky [cocaine] because I used to enjoy it (Elizabeth August 2015).

However, overall, drug and alcohol use was reported to have a downside for the sex workers in Beitbridge. The women interviewed were aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug use and some had stopped drinking alcohol due to medical reasons such as being on ARVs, whose efficacy is reduced by alcohol and drug use. Others such as Ruth had stopped because they feared getting drunk and forgetting to take their HIV medication. Drunkenness was also associated with vulnerability to attacks by clients and therefore some preferred not to drink while on the job. Alcohol and drugs as well posed a threat to the physical health of sex workers especially when they were abused. One sex worker admitted to the dangerous widespread use of cough syrups by sex workers as an alternative to alcohol, since cough mixtures are cheaper and contain a high alcohol content that has an intoxicating effect:

I also use Broncho. Some use it as medicine for flu. It costs R100 but it's dangerous. If you drink it, it just comes and piles up in your stomach. You don't go to the toilet, not even to urinate (Loveness July 2015).

My study in Beitbridge further reveals the emergence of a new theme, namely, the reliance on religious doctrine by a number of the sex workers as a source of comfort and solace for distress and for spiritual guidance. Sex workers cited going to church for spiritual guidance and relying on prophets to predict their future. During the focus group discussions, all the sex workers present admitted to being Christians and believing in God though not all frequently attended church. The reason behind this was the stigma and discrimination they faced at church once the church members knew their profession:

Even at the churches we also want to go and pray with the others but they look down upon us and start preaching about prostitution being a sin; they can judge us but we didn't choose to do this job. Even in the bible Jesus saved the prostitutes like Mary Magdalene (Focus Group Discussion number 2, August 2015).

However, other sex workers admitted to being active members of their churches:

I believe in Christianity. I go to church every Sunday. Today we were watching the live PHD ministry for Magaya's church. That's the church I attend. That's why you see I'm wearing these wrist bands (Tanaka July 2015).

I believe in God and going to church. I grew up in SDA [Seventh Day Adventist]. But when I'm in Johannesburg on Sunday I go to church at Christ Embassy and here I go to Christ Embassy in Beitbridge When there are prayers I also go for prayers and when it's fasting time I also fast and participate in church activities (Chipo August 2015).

As Christians, church going sex workers would seem like an oxymoron to early abolitionists who believed sex workers to be morally depraved women who needed 'saving' from sex work (Clarkson 1939). However, the Beitbridge evidence reveals that these women were self-proclaimed Christians who seemed to have a moral compass and a clear understanding of what religious doctrine viewed as right or wrong. The sex workers claimed to still uphold their moral values and their religious principles, but acknowledged that their engagement in sex work contradicted these values while poverty and the need to survive had been an impetus into their sex work livelihoods.

5.5 Public perceptions of sex work and the sex worker community

This research for this thesis took place during a pivotal and crucial time for sex work in Zimbabwe with the recent 'legalisation' of sex work in the country. The Constitutional Court on the 27th of May 2015 delivered what has been construed as a landmark ruling after outlawing the prosecution of nine women accused of sex work, a ruling which many

interpreted to mean sex work had been legalised (Mushava 2015). An article by *Newsday* titled 'Go for sex workers', in which the First Lady of Zimbabwe (the President's wife) encouraged Zimbabwean men to go for sex workers, illustrates the shifting perceptions of sex workers by the public spearheaded by the state leaders (Mushava 2015). But negative attitudes towards sex work continue to pervade society and have shaped broader societal perceptions towards sex work within mainstream Zimbabwean society, and they have led to the stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion of the sex work community. The effect of this segregation of sex workers as an immoral community not only increases the victimisation of sex workers but only serves to unify the sex workers and establish sex worker solidarity triggered by the commonality of their plight.

Sex work research elaborately focuses on the stigmatisation and discrimination associated with sex work on both a public and private level, as it has been labeled as the 'whore stigma'. As argued by Pheterson (1993), the whore stigma has been derived from the fact that sex workers are seen as challenging traditional patriarchal structures and gender norms by having sex for money and are thus perceived to be selling their virtue as women. This stems from the restrictions patriarchal systems and structures place on female sexuality whereby a woman is deemed as moral and virtuous or honourable by adhering to one sexual partner as opposed to men who are not held up to the same strict standard. At the same time, sex workers in Beitbridge disclosed that attitudes by family towards them usually changed from initial anger to tolerance due to the contribution of sex work to the household incomes. Therefore, none of the sex workers reported that they experienced sustained or prolonged stigmatisation and discrimination by close family members and friends. However, they experienced occasional and varying levels of public stigmatisation and social exclusion by the larger community:

I think the stigma issue is serious because some of us grew up being told sex work is wrong so there is a lot of stigma towards us. Even to go to social events as a sex worker or to my children's schools there is stigma because, instead of them helping us, they chose to alienate us and judge us. It becomes difficult for us to access social services. Even when we want financial help to pay school fees for our children, the headmasters just tell us to go and sell tomatoes. At social welfare [a government department] we do not qualify for grants. Even with the police if you go and want to report that someone has abused you, they ask you what you are doing and start laughing at you saying that 'mahure munonetsa' ['you prostitutes are a problem'] (Cynthia July 2015).

The use of *mahure* (a Shona term which translates as ‘prostitute’) is a derogatory term which refers to a woman with loose morals (Gaidzanwa 1995). This use of derogatory language towards sex workers illustrates the ‘whore stigma’ and is common in Beitbridge, thereby illuminating the intensity of the victimisation sex workers face. Public humiliation was an integral part of the lives of sex workers in Beitbridge and was as an outward manifestation of the stigmatisation and discrimination they experienced and felt intimately. Tafadzwa communicates how sex workers were victims of verbal abuse by the public:

If people know you are a sex worker, even if you meet them in a very decent place, they can say whatever they want about you and embarrass you in a very inappropriate place. Even if you are with your relatives they shout obscenities at you; even if you pass through the [bus] rank, they start shouting saying words like, Iro hure iro [there is a prostitute], so people do not treat us well (Tafadzwa July 2015).

This social exclusion of sex workers was also reported to have intensified the shortage of accommodation available for the sex worker community. Sex workers stated that brothel owners charged extortionate prices for rooms because it was difficult for sex workers to get personal accommodation elsewhere because house owners did not want to have sex workers living in their houses (even if they did not engage in sex work at the house).

5.5.1 Police harassment and brutality

Police harassment and brutality is a common theme in the lives of sex workers (Muzvidziwa 1997). Even though the Zimbabwean legal system is taking strides to decriminalise sex work, the worst experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination reported by the women were through their victimisation by the police. The criminalisation of sex work in Zimbabwe and state attempts to eradicate sex work in the past had normalised and intensified police brutality and harassment towards sex workers.

The women reported how previously the police would extort bribes from them, as well as physically assault and harass them by chasing them in streets which resulted in many women fleeing to safety and some even falling and hurting themselves. The women lived in constant fear of the police but, due to current and ongoing changes in sex work laws, they could now operate more freely without fear of being arrested or the police demanding bribes in the form of money or sex. Accounts of the bad relations between sex workers and the police are given below:

We used to get injured running away from the police when they used to chase after us and if they fail to catch you, they could even end up raiding the brothels kicking and

breaking the doors. Others would arrest you and tell you if you did not want to get locked up you had to do something which usually meant pay them a bribe of about fifty rand each. At times they would say you can decide to have sex with them so they let you go free (Mildred July 2015).

We were getting harassed and being chased by the police all the time and being forced to sleep in jail at the charge office. They would tell us to remove our jerseys and sleep when we were cold, so we say to those who passed this law we support and thank them they have really helped us a lot (Tanaka July 2015).

The sex workers were keenly aware of the implications of the new law which outlawed any arrests of sex workers for soliciting. They expressed their appreciation of the freedom they now had to operate more openly:

I like what the president said that prostitutes should not be arrested. The police no longer arrest us for loitering as they did before and even if you paid the fine they would not release you till the next day. We were abused as prostitutes. At the charge office we were made to clean toilets which had not been cleaned for the past 3 months. Female police officers would kick us. We were beaten but now we can go up to a month without being arrested (Tendai July 2015).

The police still offered some minimal form of resistance to the legal changes regarding sex workers, as is implied in this statement. Though the general public and the police now know that sex workers could not be arrested anymore on the assumptions of loitering, sex workers reported that a few police officers would occasionally try to arrest them in the hope of extorting bribes but were unsuccessful at times since the women now knew their rights.

5.5.2 The sex worker community

The sex workers had come up with coping mechanisms to overcome the stigma they faced. Some said that they simply preferred to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to the verbal abuse. In some cases, they resorted to social alienation. Cynthia states that, to cope with the stigma, she tried as much as possible to stay away from the community and socialise with her fellow sex workers only. A high level of sex worker solidarity was reported by the Beitbridge sex workers and this helped to unify and bring the women together to fight against their plight.

In fact, due to the stigma and social exclusion that sex workers in Beitbridge experienced, the role of social networks in the sex work community was vital. Social networks facilitated the dissemination of information within the sex work community and acted as a kind of social glue, a point which Archavanitkul and Guest (2006:282) also

highlight. During a focus group discussion, the women explained how they tried to present a unified front and relied on their social networks for financial, moral and emotional support for each other whenever they could.

However, it would be myopic to over romanticise this sex worker solidarity because sex worker relations were occasionally marked with competition and jealousy like in any other job market. A focus group discussion exposed how there were various moments of competitive struggles and even violent encounters with other sex workers over clients. The increasing number of sex workers in the town worsened the competition amongst sex workers for clients. Molene stated that:

Some sex workers get possessive over clients so when that person sees a client going to someone else the next time, the sex workers gets angry. I was once attacked in the bar by another sex worker when they saw me talking to a man and she said I was stealing her man and she threw beer on me and wanted to beat me up (Molene July 2015).

Divisions in the sex worker community also existed especially between the street based and bar based sex workers. Data collected revealed that street sex workers did not get along with bar based sex workers because of the fight and contestation over client territory. Street sex workers who occasionally visited bars tended to be ‘bought’ by men who thought they were new sex workers. This created conflict with bar based sex workers.

5.6 Sex worker life histories: Mildred and Chipso

In addressing the range of sex work themes in this and the last chapter, a coherent account of the life of any particular sex worker has not been provided. In this context, in this section I outline two stories or brief life histories of two contrasting sex workers, namely, Mildred and Chipso.

Mildred, a 23-year old mother of two children grew up in Mashava a village in the Masvingo district and is the fourth child in a family of five children. She has three older siblings and a younger sister. Mildred was orphaned in 2006 at the age of 14. Mildred’s parents both died in the same year within three months of each other, her father in March and mother in June, both due to sickness. However, at the death of her parents, Mildred was separated from her siblings who were taken by their uncle (their father’s brother) under his guardianship. Mildred only found out later that the man she grew up knowing as her father was not really her father but stepfather and that she was the child of an affair her mother had while she was married. As a result, Mildred alone had a different father from her siblings.

Mildred's childhood was turbulent as she was the child of a marital affair. There are times when she would be sent to live with her grandmother (her mother's mother) when her parents fought. At other times her mother would be chased out of the house by her stepfather and Mildred would not understand why he would tell her mother to leave with Mildred alone and not also her four siblings. However, this only became clear after her stepfather died and she was finally told the truth. Thereafter she was sent to live with her grandmother, or her mother's mother.

Mildred has no educational qualifications though she attended a local rural school in her rural home called Bere High School. However, after her grandmother took her in, she stopped going to school at the Form two level due to lack of finances. Life also became unbearable for Mildred, as she did not live well with her mother's relatives. The only person Mildred would get along with was her grandmother. Her mother's brother (uncle) became physically and verbally abusive towards Mildred. Mildred claimed that her uncle hated her because he had hated her mother when she was alive. He would deny her food to eat and say to her "*enda unokumbira amai vako vakubikire chikafu*" ["go and ask your mother to cook food for you"]. If he physically assaulted her, he would tell her, "*enda unochemera amai vako kuguva uko*" ["go and cry on your mother's grave"]. Unable to bear the abuse, Mildred then decided to leave her rural home and look for a job in town in a phone shop whilst she also sold sadza. But this did not work out and Mildred became a child bride to a mechanic from Nemamwa a village also in the Masvingo district. This mechanic was born in 1970 and had a 21-year old age difference with Mildred. Afterwards she had two children with the mechanic.

At her marriage, Mildred claims that her husband only paid the initial bride price and did not finish paying off the rest of the bride price. Mildred also lived with her mother in law together with her husband and two children and she did not have good relations with her mother in law. They would fight over the church to which Mildred should go. Zimbabwean culture requires a married woman to attend her husband's family's church. Therefore, Mildred was required to start attending the Roman Catholic Church but she would refuse because she wanted to go to the apostolic church locally known as *mapostori* or *madzibaba*. This conflict with her mother in law affected her marriage as Mildred's husband would take his mother's side. Her marriage further crumbled due to the domestic violence she faced. Mildred's husband was an alcoholic and liked to frequent village bars and come home late after a night of drinking. Mildred's husband was also addicted to gambling, and this is depicted in the quotation, "*Aifarira kutamba makasa apa achidiyiwa mari*" ["He also loved to

gamble and would lose all his money”]. After losing all his money from gambling, Mildred reported that her husband would come back home angry and would start arguing and would beat her up. He would also physically assault her when she would ask him about his whereabouts.

As a result, her marriage was only short lived from 2007 to 2011. Mildred then left her husband and went back to her rural village where he followed her after a week; she had left her children at the husband’s home. However, her relatives would only allow her to go back with him if he paid more money that he owed for bride price. Sadly, this demand for more money was not met as the husband could not afford to pay them. As a result, her husband returned to his village never to return again. Mildred then decided to leave and look for a job in Masvingo town where she stayed with her older sister who owned a brothel.

Mildred decided to start a small business, buying and reselling eggs and peanuts in town near Croc Motors in order to take care of her children who still lived with her mother-in-law. Her income allowed her to move out of her sister’s house and rent her own place. However, she became friends with some girls who lived at her sister’s brothel. They managed to convince her to start going to night clubs and bars with them and drinking alcohol. Her business started suffering and she failed to raise any money for her children. Hence she started having sex with men she met at the bars and charging them money. Though initially this was only meant to raise some capital to rejuvenate her business, Mildred started enjoying sex work and became a fully fledged sex worker. Currently Mildred lives at a brothel in Beitbridge where she pays 70 rand daily and works anywhere she can get clients from, including the truck stops or at the night clubs and bars or from the streets.

At the age of 25, Chipo is a single mother of one. Chipo was born and raised in Mutare by her single mother. She comes from a family of two children and started her grade one in 1997 and finished her Form 4 or Ordinary level ten years later in 2007 at Sakubva High School. Chipo reported that she did not face any serious challenges growing up. Chipo’s family was not necessarily very poor or very rich, and she lived a comfortable life. Her mother was a hardworking and enterprising woman who made an effort to provide a living for her family through chicken rearing along with child maintenance from Chipo’s father; thus her family would not struggle a lot. Chipo grew up with her mother while her brother grew up with their father and Chipo mentioned that she was very happy with her mother and that she had a happy childhood.

Though she was happy growing up, Chipo reported that she had no freedom growing up at her house. Her mother was a strict parent and so Chipo felt trapped and ended up

leaving the house going to clubs with others. That is where she discovered a whole new different world that was fun and exciting to her. Chipo started enjoying the party lifestyle. Hence after finishing her Ordinary Level at school, and instead of continuing with her education, Chipo stopped going to school. Chipo states that she could have gone to school and received a good education because her parents could afford to send her to school and always had the money, but she says that she was not very bright in school. She says that “*ndanga diri dofo*” [“I was dumb”] so there was nothing she could have done. Therefore, she wanted to run her own business. But she met a friend who became her best friend and this friend was in a dance group; so Chipo ended up joining the dance group in 2008. The dance group was comprised of six girls and they would travel across the country performing synchronised dances in night clubs and bars. Thus they went to places such as Hwange, Bulawayo and Masvingo performing in night clubs. They would also sleep with men for money after performing their dances; therefore, they would be sex workers at times. These men would see the girls dancing on stage and approach them for sex afterwards. At times they would sleep with the club owners.

In 2009 Chipo and her friend left the dance group and ran away from home to Harare to become sex workers. She thus became a sex worker at the age of 20. In that same year, in September, Chipo left Harare and decided to become a sex worker in Beitbridge. Her friend later got married and had a wedding and now has two children with a man she met whilst she was a sex worker. Once in Beitbridge, Chipo dated a man called Mike and broke up with him when she found out he was married. From there on, she resumed her sex work and crossed the border and went to South Africa (she specifically crossed the border into South Africa on 5 May 2010 during the football World Cup). Chipo sought to practice sex work in Johannesburg where she was until 2011, upon which she returned to Zimbabwe and fell pregnant and gave birth to her son whom she named Moreblessing. After a year, in 2012 she then went back to Johannesburg where she again worked as a sex worker. Since then she has become transient working and moving from Johannesburg and back to Beitbridge and back again.

As a sex worker, Chipo was able to start a chicken project at home in Mutare and also opened up two boutiques one in Mutare and one in Beitbridge. But her businesses failed to do well when her mother got very sick and Chipo had to pay for the hospital bills and thereafter she ran out of money. Currently, Chipo lives in Beitbridge at Lutumba, a famous truck-stop along the Harare-Beitbridge highway where she works from. Chipo targets the truck drivers who stop for a break at the Lutumba truck stop. At Lutumba, she lives in a brothel where two

women share a room paying 75 rand per person which is due every day. Chipo works at the truck stop at Lutumba during the week but on weekends goes to local bars and night clubs in Beitbridge such as the Kalahari and Eland clubs. This is because the bars and night clubs are the busiest on weekends. However, Chipo stated that she will never become a street based sex worker (picking clients up in the streets like the others) because she would never accept the standard street sex work payment of 20 rand. Therefore, she prefers to go to the truck stops and night clubs where the fee for a short time episode of sex is 50 rand.

However, she also rents her own place in Mutare so she comes to Lutumba to work and look for money and, when she has made enough to travel, she crosses the border into South Africa and goes to Johannesburg to work as a sex worker in night clubs and bars. When she goes to Johannesburg, she temporarily rents a flat in Hillbrow and works from night clubs in Midrand or Randburg or Germiston. The last place Chipo worked at was at a club in Randburg called Chick Tiger. Despite being a sex worker, Chipo is an active member of a local church in Beitbridge.

5.7 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter sought to give a detailed and nuanced synopsis of key themes pertinent to sex work in Beitbridge and also the diversities in the sex worker community by detailing the lives of two sex workers, Mildred and Chipo. Sex worker income is intermittent and inconsistent and a considerable portion of the income is spent on accommodation, while some income is also remitted home to families. Sex worker relations with clients are fluid, with some relations characterised by extreme physical and sexual abuse while others were more respectful and marked by camaraderie which could end up in romance and marriage. Health problems for sex workers are numerous, including issues around sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection as well as unwanted pregnancies and abortions; but emotional distress is also present. Public perceptions of sex work are shaped by the legal and social context in which sex work in Zimbabwe occurs. The previous criminalisation of sex work, and current religious doctrines and patriarchal attitudes all have a bearing on the stigmatisation, discrimination and social exclusion that sex workers continue to face. In the concluding chapter (chapter 6), I examine the many sex work themes addressed in this and the previous chapter (which are all relevant to sex work as a livelihood strategy) in the context of the thesis objective and the theories framing the Beitbridge study.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Given the current trend of economic decline and political upheaval in Zimbabwe, the country's formal economic sector has been undercut while the informal sector is increasingly providing a means of livelihoods for the bulk of unemployed and underemployed Zimbabweans. In the face of dwindling household incomes, food insecurity and abject urban and rural poverty, sex work is in particular becoming a livelihood strategy for poor rural and urban women. In this context, this thesis sought to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy for single female-headed households in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. In doing this, the livelihoods framework with a pronounced feminist input was used to analyse the complexities of sex work in Beitbridge as a highly vulnerable but important livelihood strategy for female sex workers. In a sense, though I did not pursue this in the thesis, sex work could possibly be understood as a form of paid domestic work in which women receive remuneration for their roles of social reproduction. The reasoning is that other forms of domestic responsibilities such as household chores, food provision and child care can be sub-contracted out or outsourced to external agents, then sex as a biological need is increasingly being outsourced as well by men.

This concluding chapter has one main section. This main section (section 2) highlights how the objectives of the thesis were fulfilled by the Beitbridge study. The focus is on the main objective of the thesis and the way in which the theoretical framework of the thesis links to the empirical evidence from the study of sex workers in Beitbridge. The concluding section to the chapter provides brief outline of how the thesis has contributed to the existing literature on sex work as livelihood strategy.

6.2 Reflections on the Thesis Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy for single female-headed households in the border town of Beitbridge, Zimbabwe. The secondary objectives included the following:

- a. To understand and explain the motivations behind sex work in Beitbridge
- b. To understand the implications of rural/urban migration in Zimbabwe with reference to sex work in Beitbridge
- c. To examine the living and working condition of sex workers in Beitbridge

- d. To study the gendered social relations of sex workers and their clients at work and beyond their work
- e. To understand the public perspectives and attitudes towards sex workers and their work
- f. To detail the challenges sex workers face and their how they adapt and cope with these challenges.

The first empirical chapter (chapter 4) addressed the first two subsidiary objectives by examining sex work motivations and the rural/urban origins and linkages of these sex workers. The second empirical chapter (chapter 5) spoke to the last four subsidiary objectives by highlighting the living and working conditions of sex workers, their relations with clients, the public and societal attitudes and perceptions towards sex workers, and the many challenges which arise in the lives of sex workers. Combined, all the themes contained in these subsidiary objectives delimit and characterise the livelihoods of sex workers in Beitbridge.

The main objective of the thesis is to understand and explain sex work as a livelihood strategy for single female-headed households in the border town of Beitbridge in Zimbabwe. In order to do so, I drew upon primarily the livelihoods framework to analyse sex work as a household livelihood strategy. A livelihood consists of the capabilities and assets (including both material and social resources) and practical activities pursued in constructing a means for living (Scoones 1998:4). Livelihoods invariably encounter everyday challenges, as well as unexpected shocks and stresses, and coping mechanisms are regularly enacted in trying to counter the effects of these problems. The household assets or capitals identified by the framework and seen as pivotal in constructing livelihoods include natural, economic/financial, physical, human and social capital. Further, the availability of, or access to, such assets is structured by the broader social, economic, political and cultural context which either enables or constrains possession of or control over these capitals. Therefore, the framework examines the prevailing policies, institutions and processes which structure or govern what assets are available to households in the pursuance of livelihood strategies. Certain impediments and obstacles, which often relate back to the broader context, occur in the pursuit of livelihood activities and these create the vulnerability context for a household-based livelihood. Vulnerability is therefore those conditions or events (such as shocks, trends and seasonal variations), as well as structures, processes and institutions which enhance or inhibit livelihoods (Farrington et al. 1999).

Sex work in Beitbridge can be understood as a livelihood strategy as defined in terms of the livelihoods framework. As a livelihoods strategy which encompasses their existence as sex workers, it is strongly shaped by the assets or capitals to which these women have access and which they utilise and draw upon to earn a living as sex workers. For the sex workers in Beitbridge, not all assets are of equal significance because their accessibility and availability vary, such that certain assets tend to predominate. As well, different assets were used for different reasons, some to directly accomplish the activities associated with sex work and others to prevent or solve challenges which arise in the lives of sex workers. Further, sex work in Beitbridge occurs in a context shaped by broader policies, institutions and processes (of which patriarchy is particularly important) which together interact to shape the vulnerability of sex workers, their access to assets and the many challenges they face. In what follows, I unpack the different dimensions of the livelihoods framework and relate it to my Beitbridge study, starting with the issue of livelihood assets.

6.2.1 Utilising Livelihood Assets by Sex Workers in Beitbridge

Natural capital is comprised of natural resource stocks (such as soil, hydrological cycle, water, air and genetic resources) from which assets useful for livelihoods flow. Though natural capital is normally associated with rural livelihoods, it is also of relevance to urban livelihoods. The demise of the Zimbabwean economy and subsequent challenges in rural areas in terms of food insecurity has a bearing on urban livelihoods at least in an indirect manner. In situations where rural food production is decreasing for whatever reasons (for example, land shortages and perennial droughts), rural people often migrate to urban spaces if only temporarily. In fact, most of the sex workers interviewed in Beitbridge were rural women who had fled the rural areas as migrants in search of an income. In this regard, the livelihoods framework speaks of three kinds of livelihood options for rural households (Scoones 1998). These are agricultural intensification (or extensification), livelihood diversification and migration. Therefore, in cases where agricultural livelihood strategies heavily reliant upon natural capital fail to provide for rural families, migration becomes a livelihood strategy, as is the case with the Beitbridge sex workers. And, given that the Beitbridge women maintain linkages with their rural homes (including supporting their rural families when possible), their movement into Beitbridge can also be understood as entailing livelihood diversification vis-à-vis their rural homes.

Physical capital comprises of physical infrastructure and physical assets that can be utilised to make a living, which include transportation, roads, buildings, shelter, water supply

and sanitation, energy, technology and communications that are needed to pursue a livelihood activity. Of particular significance to sex workers in Beitbridge is the question of accommodation. The shortage of accommodation and the cost of any available accommodation in Beitbridge expose the sex workers to squalid living (and working) conditions and act as a crucial vulnerability factor. Most sex workers live at brothels, and a significant portion of sex worker income is taken up by the payment of the exorbitant rate of brothel fees (of 70 rand per day) as charged by the landlords. Additionally, the fact that sex workers are stigmatised and harassed means that they cannot be particularly choosy when it comes to accepting accommodation. There is more affordable accommodation in Beitbridge, but once landlords owning this accommodation learnt about their activities as sex workers, they would be denied accommodation. Subsequently, this creates a high demand for brothels which are in turn over-priced because brothel owners are aware of the dilemma that sex workers face. The brothels are also marked by overcrowded conditions including the absence of privacy in relation to engaging in sex with their clients.

The presence of the sex workers' clinic, as an element of physical capital, had an enabling and enhancing effect on the pursuit of sex work as a livelihood strategy through the free provision of condoms, contraceptives, antiretroviral drugs and other medication and treatments. Though AIDS and sexually-transmitted infections and diseases are still a common occurrence and thus is a huge source of vulnerability in sex work as a livelihood strategy, the clinic had made great strides in reducing the cases of transmission and sex worker mortality, and making sex work a safer and less risky venture.

Human capital entails the skills, knowledge, education, health, nutrition and sheer ability to work (Farrington et al. 2002). Livelihood possibilities become limited for both men and women with no educational qualifications and skills. None of the women interviewed in Beitbridge had any significant educational qualifications and skills and thus they turned to sex work as a viable livelihood option. This was due to the informal nature of sex work which required no formal educational qualifications or skills. However, when interviewed, the women did mention our human capital dimensions of significance to their work.

For example, language skills were said to be valuable especially amongst the sex workers who dealt with foreign clients. Though some foreign African languages could be learnt in part, the women admitted that English was the most valuable language especially when dealing with foreigners as it is widely recognised as an international language and thus a main medium of communication. However, in order to be fluent in English, one had to receive an education, and therefore the sex workers who had attended school up to secondary

level were more fluent than those who had only attended up to primary level and those who had never attended school. Sex workers who failed to converse in English sufficiently reported to being restricted to only local Zimbabwean clients, a factor which also impacted on their level of income. But, in some cases, women argued that sexual encounters did not require much communication as both parties knew what to expect and what role to play.

Other skills which the women claimed they needed were tacit skills, namely, sexual and interpersonal skills. Sexual skills were mostly known by the local term of *chikapakapa* which has no English equivalent. The more a woman was adept in this sexual skill (or sexual dance in fact), the more she could retain her clients and increase her client pool. Other skills mentioned by the sex workers were interpersonal skills such as the ability to be friendly to clients. Though these can be argued to be more like personality dispositions in some cases, the sex workers regarded these skills as important for their work. In cases where a sex worker was friendly and bold, it became easier to approach clients and initiate sexual talk as opposed to those who were shy. Some of the sex workers confessed that they had come up with coping mechanisms to limit their shyness by drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana which gave them a certain level of confidence and made them feel less inhibited.

Social capital or assets are the networks of support and reciprocity that may exist within and between households and within communities, and which people can call on for such matters as loans, child care support, food and accommodation. In the pursuit of sex work as a livelihood strategy, women in Beitbridge reported that their social networks with family, clients, boyfriends and fellow sex workers, and within the Beitbridge community at large, could either help them to increase their income levels thus enhancing their livelihoods or undercut their livelihood activities.

The study revealed that sex workers in Beitbridge do not live in isolation and exclusion from their family, though the family remains elsewhere. Most of the women (especially the single mothers) were household heads in as much as they were the main breadwinners in their families. Hence they maintained close-knit relations with their families which acted as well as a support system for sex workers when they needed help. All of the sex workers mentioned that they visited their families as often as possible and that their families provided emotional and mental support while in turn the sex workers provided financial support.

Social networks, in the context of patriarchy, are often discriminatory and limit women's access to markets and to a range of assets within the public institutional spheres, and this had implications for sex workers in Beitbridge. In Zimbabwe, male promiscuity is

almost considered natural but, for women, it is considered the exact opposite. This leads to problematic relationships between sex workers and the wider community. In my study, the women reported that their social relations with the broader community were mostly strained. Thus, once the community knew about their source of livelihoods, they were excluded from certain social benefits by virtue of their work. The women mentioned that they had to keep their work a secret especially in church as they faced widespread condemnation and moral judgment based on their work. The sex workers also stated that name-calling and public humiliation by members of the community was common and that they would often be publicly shamed in places such as the Dulibadzimu bus rank by touts and local men. As a result, the women stated that generally they could not rely on the community for any sort of help as community structures and institutions were built up in such a way that excluded and marginalised sex workers.

A particular social relationship which played at times a role in enhancing the social capital of sex workers was their relationships with clients and boyfriends. These social relationships were not however always reliable as they were quite tenuous. The relationships alternated from being violent to being friendly to being romantic. As well, there was considerable variation between the sex workers based on their client base and the personality dispositions of their clients. Those sex workers who had friendly, regular and generous clients mentioned that in turn they had a reliable source of income. At times, such clients (acting out the role of almost a boyfriend) would provide loans and even handouts when the sex worker needed help, and this often allowed the sex worker to send money or take food to their rural homes. Violence from clients is however a common and major problem, and indeed vulnerability, for sex workers in Beitbridge and it relates back to the prevalence of patriarchal practices in Zimbabwe more broadly. In this context, sex workers in Beitbridge showed signs of resiliency and ingenuity in minimising the effects of client violence (and other problems) by ensuring a high level of sex worker solidarity and close social networks amongst sex workers which they drew upon to overcome the challenges and dangers in sex work. The women provided financial, emotional and physical support for each other. This might include as well the simple sharing of information, including passing on warnings amongst each other about possible police raids on a particular brothel.

Financial capital is very critical as it refers to the financial resources which underpin the survival and sustainability of households. Financial capital comprises income sources and other forms of financial support such as bank loans. For sex workers in the Beitbridge study, the main source and in most cases the only source of income and cash flow was through sex

work. However, when asked if they had other sources of income, a few of the women reported that they sold foodstuffs, clothes and other household goods which provided them with an additional, though not significant, source of income. Overall, the income from sex work is irregular and unreliable. Despite the inconsistency in sex work income, the women report that the income yielded from sex work was sufficient to cater for themselves (including brothel accommodation) and their families to varying degrees, including purchasing at times household assets for their rural families. The women were also able to afford to send their children to school and to buy food and clothing for their families. But the rising unemployment, declining formal employment incomes and deepening poverty in urban areas in the country was having a negative impact in terms of their volume of clients and the amount chargeable for their sexual services. For these same reasons (for example urban unemployment), they had no option but to continue as sex workers.

In terms of other expenditures, the sex workers needed items to enhance their sex work activity. Thus, during the interviews, the sex workers in Beitbridge mentioned they needed items such as provocative clothing, cosmetics and toiletries. The prevalence of second-hand clothes (locally termed *mabhero* or bales) in flea markets has made clothing in Zimbabwe relatively cheap. Therefore, the women reported that they were able to buy their provocative clothing such as shorts, mini dresses and skirts at significantly cheap prices at flea markets. This in turn enhanced their livelihood by making them more presentable and more marketable to clients.

Ultimately, the most critical livelihood asset for the sex workers in Beitbridge is financial capital which forms the very basis of their livelihood. But to understand their presence in Beitbridge in the first place it is necessary to make sense of their rural origins and the dwindling of agricultural activities (or natural capital) there. Despite being relatively uneducated in terms of formal schooling, the sex workers develop certain tacit skills which enhance their financial income. Physical capital in the form of accommodation is a challenge but the presence of a sex worker clinic is enabling. Lastly, social relations have different effects, as they are sometimes negative in terms of abusive clients and public stigma but also positive at times for instance with reference to supportive clients and family, and intra-sex worker community solidarity. Overall, though, the livelihoods of sex workers in Beitbridge are marked by deep vulnerabilities which I now elaborate on more fully with reference to policies, institutions and processes structuring sex work in Beitbridge.

6.2.2 Policies, Institutions and Processes Shaping Sex Work in Beitbridge

To reiterate, policies, institutions, and processes affect access to livelihoods assets and the form and depth of vulnerability, with this structural context being enabling or disabling. Sex work in Beitbridge occurs in a context shaped by the national economic, political, social and cultural context in Zimbabwe. Stemming from the early 1990s structural adjustment programme and the more recent fast track land reform programme, amongst other reasons, the national economy of Zimbabwe has been on an ongoing downward spiral. The dwindling of household incomes, the absence of formal employment, and challenges around agricultural production, have all paved the conditions which have almost necessitated the growth of sex work as a livelihood strategy for unemployed women with no prospects of gaining formal employment. Certainly the large number of rural migrant women engaging in sex work as depicted in the study is a vivid manifestation of this. But, in the end, the structural context does not determine entry into sex work as women make rationale though perhaps desperate choices in engaging in sex work. These women use their status and identity as women to their distinct advantage and, in doing so, feed into the pronounced patriarchal environment of Zimbabwe in which men express their masculinity by way of multiple sexual partners.

In this regard, the breakdown of marriage as an institutional arrangement has also had a bearing on prompting sex work as a livelihood strategy for single, divorced and unmarried women. None of the sex workers interviewed were presently married and, though a few had been widowed, some of the women expressed their lack of contentment and disillusionment with marriage. In fact, many of the sex workers had previously been involved in marriages marked by abuse by their husbands, again a sign of masculinity in Zimbabwe. Sex work became a means of providing for their families (often including children) without the help of male spouses. Thus, patriarchal practices go a long way to explaining the rise of the sex work phenomenon, though it may be argued that sex workers exchange one form of abuse (with some husbands) for another form (with some clients).

Meanwhile, changes with regard to the law on sex work in Zimbabwe are having a huge impact on the lives of sex workers in Beitbridge. There are signs of decriminalising changes with the state moving towards more tolerant approaches to sex work. This has led to a reduced amount of police harassments and arrests throughout the country. According to the women interviewed, this process has safeguarded their livelihoods by immensely limiting their vulnerability to police action and it has also increased their chances of legal representation in courts of law. Previously the women would not be taken seriously when reporting to the police the abuses they suffered at the hands of clients, but now this is

changing. The decriminalisation of sex work in Zimbabwe, together with sex worker activism, has been at the forefront of the fight for sex worker rights and recognition.

However, legal changes alone do not guarantee sex worker safety and recognition and this is in large part because patriarchy (as indicated by feminist theory) does not exist purely and exclusively within the realm of formal and legalistic procedures. Rather, patriarchy as a set of practices and discourses is deeply embedded in the world of the everyday. The institution of patriarchy disempowers women and oppresses women by placing restrictions on their sexual freedom and mobility. Sex workers in Beitbridge are direct or indirect victims of patriarchal structures which elevate men over women and place women within subordinate positions at a household, community and national level. They thus formed a marginalised group which experienced public discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion based on patriarchal norms which view women who decide to have more than one sexual partner as social deviants. Therefore, in this context, patriarchy can still be viewed as a crucial source of vulnerability for sex workers as it plays a constraining role in their pursuit of sex work as a livelihood strategy by shaping the negative societal views and perceptions of sex workers.

Whether or not sex work should be conceptualised as a source of liberation for women or as just another form of male oppression I do not seek to answer. In this respect, I simply highlight that many of the sex workers interviewed expressed how they viewed sex work as a form of financial independence as they could pursue their own livelihoods without relying on men. And some indicated that sex work had freed them from abusive (marriage-based) patriarchal relationships and that they enjoyed their new-found freedom as it gave them freedom of mobility and the use of their bodies without male control.

6.3 Conclusion

The previous section drew the connections between the theoretical framing of the thesis, the main objective of the thesis and the empirical evidence about sex workers in Beitbridge. In this concluding section, I indicate some of the contributions of the thesis, no matter how insignificant, to the existing literature on sex workers.

First of all, the thesis sought to analyse sex work as a livelihood strategy with a proper balance between structure and agency. Structural contexts set conditions for lives rather than determining them. In this regard, I tried to show that sex workers are not simply victims of structures but ingenious and resilient women who make choices in pursuing sex work as a livelihood. Secondly, and with specific reference to the Zimbabwean literature, the thesis provides an all-embracing study which touches on the main themes prevailing in the

literature. In other words, the themes are interconnected and, in order to come to an understanding of any particular theme as well as of the complexity of sex work as a livelihood activity, it is necessary to offer such a wide-ranging and inclusive examination. Thirdly, the thesis is very suggestive of the need to study sex work as a livelihood strategy from a feminist perspective and by privileging patriarchy in particular. In this way, it becomes critical for the livelihoods framework to be rooted firmly in feminist theory.

Despite these contributions, there is clearly significant research which needs to be done on sex work as a livelihood strategy, including comparative work of sex workers in Zimbabwe, personal narrative histories of particular sex workers, and the ways in which patriarchy both enables and disables sex work. It is hoped that this thesis will stimulate research on these and other crucial research topics on sex work in Zimbabwe and beyond.

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APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. General information for the researcher

Date:

Starting time:

Ending time:

Contact to the respondent:

Location:

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Ethnic background, age, education, marital status, children, dependents , current living situation?
2. What do you do, where? how? why did you choose your type of profession?
3. Are u a freelancer, street based, home based or bar based?
4. Do you drink alcohol and why?
5. Are you taking any drugs and why?
6. Who introduced you to sex work? How old where you when you started?
7. How did you grow up? Your family history?
8. Tell me about your experiences as a sex worker?

Physical Capital

9. What specific tools are necessary to do your work? Do you have all these tools?
10. Where did you get them from?
11. Is physical appearance important for your job?

Financial Capital

12. How do you charge your services and how much do you charge for one client?
13. Are you involved in any other work to make money? If yes how much money do you make from that job?
14. How many clients do you have in a day, week, month?
15. How much money do you make in a day, week, month?
16. Do you get any other form of payment besides money?
17. Is the money you make sufficient for you and your family?

Human capital (Skills, education, health)

18. What skills do you need for your job?
19. Do you have all the skills you would want for your job?
20. Do you have any other family members or friends of your household who contribute to your household or who work?
21. Do you have any educational qualifications or certificates?
22. How important is education to you, is it necessary for your job?
23. How important is good health for your job? What can you say about AIDS and stds and do you worry about that?
24. Do you have any health problems?

Social Capital

25. How close are you with your family, friends? Do you still maintain any linkages with them? Do you visit each other?
26. Is your family aware of what you do for a living?

27. How mobile are you, how often do you stay in Beitbridge? Do you ever practise in other areas?
28. Do you ever visit your family back home? If not why not?
29. Who helps you take care of your family?
30. If you have a problem who do you contact?
31. How is your relationship with other sex workers? Is there any competition?
32. Can you cite any other reasons compelling women to enter this line of work?
33. How old were you when you got married? Were you happily married. If not why not?
34. Have you ever experienced any form of abuse? Physical, sexual, emotional or mental and by whom?
35. Are you dating anyone and if not why?
36. Would you mind being in a serious relationship or remarrying and if yes why?
37. Who are the people important to your job apart from your clients and what are their roles? Do you have anyone that you report to? Pimps?
38. Are there any Organisations that help sex workers in your area? Do you use their services?
39. Is there a self help group among sex workers here?

Client/Sex worker relations

40. Is there a relation/contact with your clients next to sexual intercourse?
41. Who are your clients and where do they come from? Demographic composition of your clients?
42. How do your clients treat you, what is your relationship like with them?
43. Apart from sexual services do you provide any other services to your clients?

Political capital

44. Are you aware of the illegality of your profession?
45. Are you aware of the recent judgement by the constitutional court which disallows the police from arresting women on the suspicion of loitering?
46. How do you feel about this recent judgement or how has it impacted your work?

Policies/ processes/ Institutions

47. How do you feel about marriage and why do you feel that way?
48. Why do you think most sex workers are women?
49. Do you think women are oppressed in Zimbabwe specifically in your line of work?

Problems and risk encountered

50. What problems do you face in your job?
51. How do you protect yourself or minimise these risks?

Stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion

52. What do people say about your job?
53. Does your family./friends/community know about your job?
54. Have you ever experienced discrimination or stigmatisation, how do you cope?
55. How do you feel about what you do for a living?
56. How do you feel about your work? Benefits?
57. Do you enjoy your work?
58. What are your aspirations?
59. Where would you like to see yourself five years from now or ten years?
60. What do you think sex workers in Beitbridge or Zimbabwe at large need?
61. How sustainable is the work you do?
62. Do you have any other information you would like to share or you think is important to share?

APPENDIX 2 – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINE

1. Can you tell me about yourselves? Ethnic background, age, education, marital status, children, dependents, current living situation?
2. What do you do, where? how? why did you choose your type of profession?
3. Are u a freelancer, street based, home based or bar based?
4. Do you drink alcohol and why?
5. Are you taking any drugs and why?
6. Who introduced you to sex work? How old where you when you started?

Physical Capital

7. What specific tools are necessary to do your work? Do you have all these tools?
8. Where did you get them from?
9. Is physical appearance important for your job?

Financial Capital

10. How do you charge your services and how much do you charge for one client?
11. Are you involved in any other work to make money? If yes how much money do you make from that job?
12. How many clients do you have in a day, week, month?
13. How much money do you make in a day, week, month?
14. Do you get any other form of payment besides money?
15. Is the money you make sufficient for you and your family?

Human capital (Skills, education, health)

16. What skills do you need for your job?
17. Do you have all the skills you would want for your job?
18. Do you have any other family members or friends of your household who contribute to your household or who work?
19. Do you have any educational qualifications or certificates?
20. How important is education to you, is it necessary for your job?
21. How important is good health for your job? What can you say about AIDS and stds and do you worry about that?
22. Do you have any health problems?

Social Capital

23. How close are you with your family, friends? Do you still maintain any linkages with them? Do you visit each other?
24. Is your family aware of what you do for a living?
25. How mobile are you, how often do you stay in beitbridge? Do you ever practise in other areas?
26. Do you ever visit your family back home? If not why not?
27. Who helps you take care of your family?
28. If you have a problem who do you contact?
29. How is your relationship with other sex workers? Is there any competition?
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57. Where would you like to see yourself five years from now or ten years?

58. What do you think sex workers in Beitbridge or Zimbabwe at large need?

59. How sustainable is the work you do?

60. Do you have any other information you would like to share or you think is important to share?