

Chapter 2 Entering the Commercial Sex Workers' Community

Some General Behaviour Patterns of CSWs and Their Clients

As you begin your work in the commercial sex work environment, it may be helpful to keep in mind some of the general behaviour patterns of CSWs and their clients. We mention them here because these characteristics can affect your work, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. We have discovered the following general characteristics among the commercial sex workers with whom we have worked. However, never assume that all CSWs or clients are alike. They are all individuals with individual personalities. You will need to spend time identifying the characteristics common among the CSWs where you live and work.

CSWs:

- often practice their trade far away from the place where they have been raised and call home.
- are highly likely to move from place to place.
- are often driven to practice this profession for economic reasons. They do not often regard themselves as having entered into a lifetime vocation.
- may wish to conceal their identity and may not provide their real names or addresses.
- often do not know their clients, and do not want to know them. They see their relationship with them as strictly a business transaction.
- often resent interrogation about their clients.
- often have a regular boyfriend with whom they have a special relationship.
- usually have children and family members whom they support.

Clients:

- often wish to conceal their identity.
- are not a cohesive group with similar backgrounds, norms, and values—as a group they do not have the characteristics of a community (we'll talk more about the characteristics of a community later in this chapter).
- often have multiple partners within a hotel and also move frequently between the hotels.
- interact more comfortably with owners and managers than with CSWs.
- some patronize CSWs very regularly, while others are only occasional clients.

Examples of different types of commercial sex worker

When you hear the term "commercial sex worker", you may think you know exactly who practices commercial sex work in your community and where you can find them. However, our experience has shown us that there are many different types of CSW. We will briefly list some of the different types of commercial sex work that exist in Nigeria. Remember that the situation may be different where you live and work. You will have to spend a lot of time identifying how commercial sex work is set up where you live. You may be able to identify other sub-groups of CSWs by seeking information from the groups you have already located.

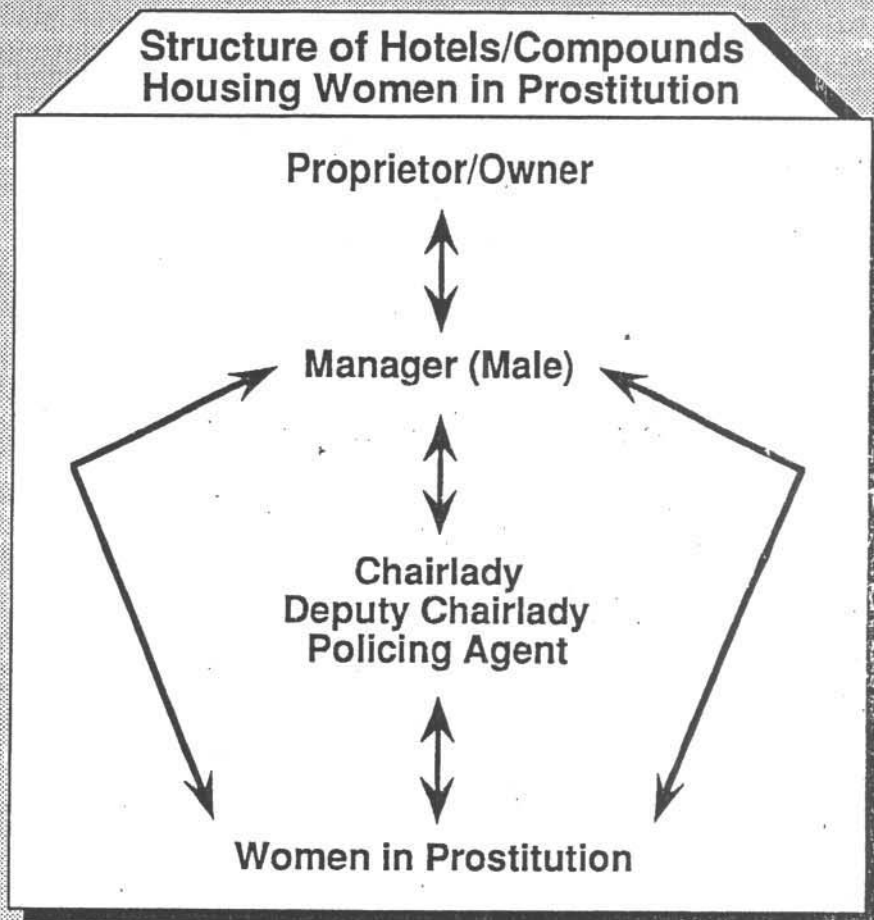
- 1) Full-time residential CSWs- live and work in hotels, compounds, or brothels. Most of their clients are local Nigerians. Many of them have children or family members to support and require money not only for their needs but for the needs of others.
- 2) Part-time non-residential CSWs- work in bars, large hotels and nightclubs. Sometimes they are referred to as "club girls" in urban areas. Often they serve foreigners and wealthy businessmen. They can be difficult to reach since they have no formal or easily recognizable social structure.
- 3) Home-based CSWs- work in their homes. These women are very difficult to identify and locate as they are very discrete. They usually have just a few, very regular clients.

Commercial Sex Worker Social Structure

All groups of people that live, work, or play together have a **social structure** that serves as a foundation for their community. We will discuss what the word community means shortly. The words **social structure** refer to the relationships that exist between the different people that make up the group. In order to illustrate, let us describe the social structure surrounding the commercial sex work we found in Calabar. It is through these social structures that you "enter" into the community and begin to understand how you can work to strengthen it to support AIDS prevention activities.

Example from Calabar

We chose to work primarily with full-time, residential CSWs who live alone or with their children at the hotels and compounds where they work. This group has a formal organizational structure as seen in the figure below.



The hotel is run by the proprietor or owner. He employs a manager (a male) to sell drinks, collect rent from the women in the hotel, handle disputes with clients and law enforcement agents, and act as his representative in the day-to-day operation of the hotel. The women elect a chairlady, deputy chairlady and a policing agent from among the CSWs that work in the hotel. Together these women are responsible for the maintenance of law, order and hygiene in the hotel and the welfare of the CSWs who work there.