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## Violence Towards Sex Workers. Analysis Based on Research into the Field of Indoor Sex Work in Poland

*Abstract:* The article presents the notion of violence in indoor sex work in Poland. It encompasses forms of violence experienced by female sex workers from their clients and co-workers. What is more, the paper presents how novice and more experienced workers define those experiences, together with the strategies that they apply when dealing with aggressive clients. Also discussed are the actions taken against the clients that present aggressive behavior by the managers and security workers of escort agencies.

The article is based on qualitative field research carried out in escort agencies in Łódź, Poland. The main techniques of data collection comprised observations and unstructured interviews. The data were analyzed in accordance with the grounded theory methodology.

*Keywords:* female sex workers, grounded theory, indoor sex work, prostitution, qualitative research, violence.

Violence towards sex workers<sup>1</sup> is one of the most crucial topics of contemporary research that refers to sexual violence. The specificity of this phenomenon is described by results from numerous projects carried out using non-probability sampling techniques. They have been carried out in various countries around the world (with different legal solutions, and diversified cultures, traditions and standards pertaining to the sexual field), and in various types of sex work. The research suggests a heterogeneous picture of violence towards sex workers. Although researchers generally agree that sex workers experience violence, they disagree when it comes to evaluating its scale and specificity. The researchers that share the abolitionist perspective perceive prostitution as “paid rape” committed by a man who pays for the right to use any form of sexual violence towards a woman (Dworkin 1992; Sullivan and Jeffreys 2001). Therefore, it is an oppressive relationship by definition. A consequence of this thinking is the assertion that prostitution breaks human rights, it is a kind of slavery, and the engaged persons sell their humanity (Barry 1995; Jeffreys 1997; Overall 1992; Pateman 1988). Arguments that support this opinion are provided by reports presenting shocking data on the physical and mental violence of clients and pimps<sup>2</sup> towards women (Farley 2004; 2005). Their purpose is to prove that violence and prostitution are interconnected.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms “sex worker” and “sex workers” in the article to refer to women involved in prostitution. While this is a significant narrowing of the term, it is often used by researchers as a synonym for female prostitution.

<sup>2</sup> Here, I use the term “pimp” after M. Farley.

Critics of this view consider that the number of negative incidents related to prostitution results not from its essence but rather from the penalization of this phenomenon, limited protection from the police, as well as the stigmatization and marginalization of sex workers (Kesler 2002; Weitzer 2005). They also put forward a thesis that, contemporarily, it is possible to organize prostitution in such a manner so it is safe for workers and not connected with violence. This view is supported by results from empirical research that has been carried out mostly in the field of indoor sex work. An example may be the research performed by Sanders and Campbell. It proves that the majority of meetings with clients take place without any incidents of physical, sexual or economic violence towards the workers (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 7).

The divergence of research results may be partially explained by the diversity of sex work types. Various paths that lead to prostitution and different working conditions mean that the threat of violence in particular sectors of sex work is fundamentally different (Ślęzak 2016b). Such a conclusion may be drawn from the results of research regarding the experiences of female sex workers who provide their services on the streets or indoors (e.g. in saunas, flats, brothels, or massage parlors, regarding the specificity of the local market of sexual services). The results of numerous empirical studies prove that indoor work is safer than outdoor sex work<sup>3</sup> (Barnard et al. 2002; Gilchrist et al. 2005: 390; Katsulis et al. 2010: 359; Sanders 2004a; Weitzer 2005a: 945). Here, an example may be the research conducted by Church et al. (2001), referring to client violence towards female prostitutes working either outdoors (40 in Leeds, 75 in Glasgow) or indoors (50 in Leeds, 75 in Edinburgh). In the research sample, half of the prostitutes working outdoors, and over a quarter of those working indoors, reported a form of violence experienced from clients in the previous six months, while 81% of the first group and 48% of the second had experienced violence from a client at some point in the past (Church et al. 2001: 525). Women who work on the streets most often declared that they were “slapped, kicked or punched” (47%), “threatened with physical violence” (39%), that they experienced “robbery” (37%) and “attempted rape” (vaginal or anal) (28%). Indoor prostitutes were most likely to report vaginal or anal “attempted rape” (17%), being held against their will (15%), as well as being “slapped, kicked or punched” and “threatened with physical violence” (14% each). Clear differences between the indoor and outdoor sex work environments are highlighted by the fact that while 27% of women working on the streets stated they had been beaten, this kind of violence was reported only by 1% of indoor workers (Church et al. 2001: 525).

The different character of indoor sex workers' experiences is also suggested by the research performed on this group of workers in Merseyside and Birmingham (UK) by Sanders and Campbell (2007). Only some of the respondents had encountered violence by clients during their work, while 71 out of 90 of the researched individuals in parlors in Merseyside, and 34 out of 45 in Birmingham, had not had any such experiences (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 7). However, it needs to be emphasized that the workers researched by Sanders and Campbell, although infrequently, still experienced various threats, nuisances and violence, e.g. robberies, non-negotiated sex acts, attempts not to pay the full amounts for meeting,

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<sup>3</sup> However, it must be stressed that the scale of violence experienced by street female sex workers does not justify the situation of grasping sex works in all of its types as a form of violence as such.

attempts to remove or removal of the condom, offensive language and rudeness (Sanders and Campbell 2007).

Analogical differences between the level of violence experiences by street and indoor workers are revealed by research performed in other countries, such as Australia, Canada and the United States (Lowman and Fraser 1995; Perkins and Lovejoy 1996; Whittaker and Hart 1996). They are another argument for not generalizing the results of research carried out in a single context in the field of prostitution as a whole. Treating sex workers as a homogeneous group is a simplification (Chancer 1993; Monto 2004; Weitzer 2000, 2005a: 946; Vanwesenbeeck 2001).

The smaller probability for indoor violence results from the presence of a greater number of people, which may deter a potential attacker. Other workers of the facility can also help to neutralize an aggressive client. In the case of indoor sex work, interactions with a potential client are longer, hence, the female workers can assess whether he is behaving aggressively more accurately and, in such a case, abandon the meeting (Sanders 2004a: 566). Therefore, the presence and awareness of formal and informal controls in street and indoor sex work is not the same (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 12).

An important issue related to the phenomenon of violence is whether the workers who experienced it report it to the police. The already quoted results of research by Church et al. show that only 35% (52/153) of prostitutes who had experienced violence from clients reported it to the police. What is interesting is the fact that incidents of violence were reported more often by women working outdoors (44%—41 out of 93) than indoors (18%—11 out of 60) (Church et al. 2001: 525). The complicated relationships between sex workers and police officers is shown by the fact that in numerous countries, policemen are the main perpetrators of violence towards them (SWAN 2014). This phenomenon occurs, most of all, in those countries where the legal and social status of sex workers is very low, and it is improbable that they would decide to report the violence experienced from police officers (Katsulis et al. 2010: 354). This is suggested, for instance, by the results of empirical studies carried out in Mexico, proving that sex workers (especially those who work illegally, i.e. without registration or a health card) are worried about local police extorting bribes and perpetrating sex violence (Katsulis et al. 2010: 353). The studies also demonstrate that those legally employed (registered as sex workers, with a health card, working in a zoned area or indoors in a legal establishment) turned to police for help in dealing with violence from their clients (Katsulis et al. 2010: 355). However, generally speaking, only a low percentage of incidents of violence are reported to the police. Because of the stigma connected with their work, the majority of sex workers avoid contact with the police (Katsulis et al. 2010: 355).

The presented research results pose a context for the analysis of the phenomenon of violence towards sex workers in Poland. Unfortunately, there are not enough studies that are totally devoted to this notion (Ślęzak 2016a). The only quantitative research performed on a more significant scale (400 women providing sexual services outdoors and indoors, in selected Polish cities) in 2002 by the team of Zbigniew Izdebski, did not directly raise the matter of violence. However, the survey questionnaire included two questions referring to violence from third parties. The results show that the majority of the respondents (88%)

had had an opportunity to refuse sexual contact with a client who did not suit them for whatever reason (Izdebski 2002: 74). However, almost every fourth (24%) respondent had been forced to perform unwanted sexual activities at work (Izdebski 2002: 73).

In the article, I would like to broaden and complement the picture with qualitative data which refer to the category of indoor sex workers. As the previously quoted data from research in other countries suggest, this category of workers experiences fewer incidents of physical violence than street sex workers. However, the researched I performed in Poland suggested that this work environment is also characterized by a high level of exposure to various abuse, both physical and mental. In my article, I will present the types of violence experienced by workers. I will also present the organizational context of violence, among others, the level of a client's aggression accepted in a given facility, along with the institutional manners of dealing with their dangerous behaviors. I will also draw attention to the fact that indoor sex work in Poland poses a somehow separate world, whose everyday functioning is governed by informal regulations, not necessarily referring to police protection and legal rules. I seek sources of this situation in the existing legal solutions, but also in cultural beliefs about persons who provide sexual services.

### **Legal Context of Sex Work in Poland**

Sex work in Poland is most intensively developed in the indoor sector. Escort agencies have until recently dominated.<sup>4</sup> They are a kind of brothel, providing their visitors with the possibility of using sexual services on the premises, at the client's place or in a hotel. The premises are different in many ways. There are those where several women work for themselves. But there are also such agencies that are managed by a manager that takes half of the money earned by the women working there. Some of the premises are located in detached houses in the suburbs. Others are situated in city centers or housing estates. Some have been operating in the same neighborhood for many years, others appear and disappear within weeks. Escort agencies are highly varied in terms of the level of security that they offer to their employees. In some of them, the female workers' safety is perceived as crucial for the existence of the premises. The managers believe that a woman who feels safe will be a more effective worker. However, other premises do not pay particular attention to that matter, or they even use violence against the workers. The perpetrators usually think that they will go unpunished, as sex workers will not dare report it to the police.

The Polish legal system is constructed on the basis of abolitionist assumptions. Pursuant to current Polish law, prostitution is not illegal. However, the deprivation of liberty for a term of between 1 and 10 years is applied to everyone who by force, illegal threat or deceit, or by abusing a relationship of dependence or by taking advantage of a critical situation, subjects another person to practice prostitution (Art. 203 of the Penal Code). Furthermore, whoever, in order to derive material benefit, induces another person to practice prostitution or facilitates it (Art. 204 § 1 of the Penal Code) or just derives material benefits from prostitution practiced by another person (Art. 204 § 2 of the Penal Code) shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years. The presented legal

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<sup>4</sup> Currently, the group of sex workers working for themselves is on the increase, finding clients via the Internet.

provisions criminalize third parties, which is of substantial impact to how working condition of persons providing sex services are organized. It is especially visible in the indoor sex sector. In Poland, it is not possible to legally carry out businesses that would offer sex services (even if sex workers' rights were respected). Escort agencies operate despite that, because managers of some of them can take care of the artificial fulfillment of legal provisions. This is how they are left undisturbed by the law enforcement bodies. It happens through e.g. the registration of a business enterprise, for example, in the form of a trading and service company, a motel, the provision of lonely hearts services or performing massages. Officially, these agencies are legal companies that also hire employees. Agreements include positions typical for the above-mentioned branches, so the women work as cleaning ladies, receptionists, bartenders, dancers or masseurs, and they officially do not provide prostitution services. In some cases, they even sign a statement that they will not provide sexual services at work.

Other escort agencies do not take up such activities and their operation in a given city is possible until the police collect evidence against the persons that manage them.

Regarding the applicable legal provisions and manners of their evasion by third parties, each contact between the agency female workers and the police (e.g. related to reporting the violence incident from the client) may be perceived by the managers as a threat to the existence of the premises.

### **Research Project—Methods and Techniques**

The work situation of women who provide sexual services in escort agencies formed the subject of my scientific research conducted between 2007 and 2013 (Ślęzak 2016a). The analyses—included in the article—that refer to work security incidents of violence experienced by female sex workers, constitute a fragment of those broader studies.

The major techniques of data collection applied in the research included overt observation and unstructured interviews. The observations were performed in four facilities located in the third largest city in Poland, Łódź. These facilities were different in terms of size, popularity among clients, the number of women employed, decoration of the interior, and the scope of the services offered. They were all run by a manager and they hired security workers. The data that come from the observations were complemented with information from in-depth interviews. I interviewed 56 women who had some experience working in various types of premises in Łódź and in other Polish cities (among others, in Warsaw, Wrocław, Tricity, and Poznań). The researched women were different with respect to seniority, referring to work in the agencies (from a few days to a dozen or so years), age (from 18 to 56 years old) and education (the dominant type was secondary vocational education). Two respondents were of a different nationality than Polish and were in Poland due to their work in the sex business. One of them came from Eastern Europe and the other from South America. A transcription of the interviews was performed by the author, according to the recommendations of B. Poland (Rapley 2010: 111–113). An additional source of data was interviews with the workers of the premises where I carried out my observations. 7 security workers (men from 35 to 55 years old, with seniority of work in the agencies from 2 months

to 9 years) and 3 managers (from 25 to 60 years old, with seniority of work in the agencies from 6 months to 20 years) were my interviewees as well.

An assumption of the field research that I performed was to represent the perspective of the female sex workers. Therefore, the procedures of the grounded theory methodology are foundations for the analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). According to its assumptions, the researcher should focus on the empirical material, which is the source for the codes and categories which pose the foundation for the development of a theory. The basic analytical procedures that I employed were various types of coding (open, axial, selective, theoretical), creating and sorting memos, theoretical sampling and constant comparison (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I will present only selected categories in the article, related to the phenomenon of violence experienced by female sex workers. They are written in italics within the text.

The theoretical framework for my project was constituted by the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969). My attention was first of all focused on the level of interactions that take place among partners involved in violence (as perpetrators and victims). There is a continuous process of defining a situation, of their own and of their partner's role, that takes place during the interaction. The meanings developed within that process influence the actions undertaken by the interaction partners. The definition of the workers' situation has some influence on whether and how they respond to violence.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the paper assumes a perspective according to which sex work may be chosen by plenty of women, although it is as a result of a particular set of social, economic and political circumstances. Thus, I do not identify sex work with violence, however, I agree that in everyday situations, it can be interconnected with violence. These are the experiences that this article is devoted to.

### **Violence in Indoor Sex Work in Poland**

In the research that I performed, sex workers would describe numerous situations of experiencing violence from clients, on their own, or by their coworkers (Ślęzak 2016b).

The most common form, which was mentioned by all respondents, was verbal aggressions, with a differentiated intensity—from insults to threats and intimidation. In particular, clients under the influence of alcohol used vulgar language, both to refer to sexual activities and to the workers themselves. This kind of violence was connected with strong negative emotions of the workers. It was perceived not only as objectifying them, but also reminding them about and strengthening the felt social stigma (Goffman 2005). For a number of respondents, it was also an indicator that a given client may move to other kinds of violence, including physical aggression.

The experiences of sexual workers build a picture of differentiated forms of physical violence experienced. One of them was sexual violence: refusal to put on a condom, or an attempt to remove it during intercourse, or being forced to provide unwanted sexual services, brutal sex or even rape. A sign of objectification mentioned by the workers during the interviews was also clients' expectations that the intercourse would last the whole time paid for (usually an hour), with no breaks for rest or change of position to one less exhausting for

the woman. The interviewees also mentioned that some clients demanded the provision of sex service regardless of the situation (e.g. problems with an erection). Hence, the clients depersonalized the workers, treating them as non-persons, as a “reacting object,” which serves to fulfill all of their sexual desires.

*I lit a cigarette and he says this: “fuck, I don’t pay you to smoke cigarettes, I pay for fucking” [woman, 22 years old, 3 years of work in the agency].*

*The hardest part is when, let’s say, a guy has these requirements that it is a full hour, or demands changes of positions and other stuff, and when you tell him, for example, that maybe we will do it another way, or do it like this, because it is somehow painful for me, they don’t agree because they paid for it [woman, 32 years old, 1.5 years of work in the agency].*

The respondents also mentioned incidents of struggling, destroying clothes, beating, suffocating, burning their bodies with cigarettes, or being threatened with a weapon. It must be stressed that the most brutal forms of violence were experienced by woman during meetings outside the premises, at the client’s place. On the other hand, cases of beating or suffocating, forcing unwanted sexual services or so-called rough sex and incidents of not using a condom, also took place within the facilities, behind the closed door of the room where the worker was alone with the client.

Aggressive actions suggest objective treatment of the workers by some of the clients (Aronson et al. 1997: 533). While many men during a meeting with a sex worker look for experiences described in the literature of the subject, such as “The Girlfriend Experience,”<sup>5</sup> there are those who, while striving to fulfill their fantasies, and under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicating substances, are violent towards them. Clients that take such actions assume that the female workers, because of how they earn money, should agree to all sexual services, regardless of what was arranged at the beginning of the meeting. Hence, they make any attempt to execute (also by force) even those actions which were not agreed on or which are clearly rejected by the worker. This is supported by the structural circumstances of the *in the room* interaction. The internal status of the client remains hidden, while claims regarding the paid for service are undisguised and explicit (cf. Gorzko 2005: 14). It also happens that clients who are public figures (politicians, artist, sportsmen, but also e.g. policemen) try to use their social status, believing that they can do more during such a meeting, including violent behaviors. This group of clients is often responsible for economic violence, which is manifested by avoiding paying the full amount for the service, especially for additional acts. In the researched facilities, the clients paid a proper amount for a standard meeting (lasting half or a full hour), which included only selected sexual services. If the client expected other services, he could agree on their provision with the worker and pay an extra charge for them. Regarding the presence of security workers, cases in which the client did not pay the basic rate for the meeting (paid in advance, at the beginning of the meeting) practically did not occur. However, cases of “bargaining” to lower the prices of additional services were frequent. In contrast to the “standard” charge that the worker needed to share with manager of the facility, the whole amount for “additions”

<sup>5</sup> The GFE consists in behaving towards a client in a manner that is typical for emotional relationships. Therefore, during a meeting, the client may feel as if he is experiencing it with a girl that seeks contact with him because of who he is, and not because of the money that he is paying her (Weitzer 2005b: 224).

went to her. Therefore, she often did not receive any support from the side of the security workers in the attempts to extract the due amount from the client. It also happened that the clients blackmailed particular workers, threatening that if they did not provide the additional service, they would demand to have the paid amount returned in whole. Women in a tough financial situation were not always able to risk their source of income, so they decided to provide these sexual services against their will.

Clients that demonstrate aggressive behavior usually have the feeling of asymmetry, believing that the power is completely on their side during the meeting. A source of these beliefs is posed by common ideas about prostitution, which allow the clients to think that they are the ones who control the course of the interactions, and the prostitute is not entitled to any rights because of her marginal position. In this context, an important matter is whether the workers themselves feel and are willing to demonstrate the fact that they control certain aspects of the interactions, and they may count on support from other workers of the facility while enforcing it. It is crucial how sex workers define their involvement in prostitution. Strategies applied by the workers are also different, depending on their experiences, which result from seniority and how work is organized in a given facility. In the next sub-chapter, I will present some factors that can increase the risk of violence experienced by sex workers.

## **Factors Contributing to Sex Workers' Vulnerability to Violence**

### **The Internalized Negative Picture of a Prostitute**

The results of my research prove that novice sex workers shared negative social beliefs about the role of a prostitute. While applying the terminology of Erving Goffman, this role posed a “profoundly discrediting attribute” (Goffman 2005: 34), resulting in social stigmatization of persons who realize it. As an effect, stigmatized persons may be perceived by their partners in interactions (and by themselves) as not fully valuable, “less socially desired,” and burdened with negative qualities and defects (Goffman 2005: 32; also Koken 2011; Sallmann 2010; Scambler 2007; Tomura 2009). The interviewees who internalized this perspective especially strongly interpreted any bad experiences connected with the provision of sexual services as a penalty for breaking moral rules. Therefore, they were inclined to accept violence as an indispensable element of sex work, as they did not deserve better treatment in their own eyes.

### **Oppressive Agency Management Style<sup>6</sup>**

The beliefs described above pose good foundations for actions undertaken by the bosses that manage the agencies in an *oppressive* manner. They try to avoid the weakening of the self-esteem of the women employed at their premises, so it would be easier to manage them. The

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<sup>6</sup> It is one of the management styles of agencies that I differentiated within the course of data analysis. Here, it is typical of the *bosses'* strive for maximization of profit, at the cost of, among others, the female workers' safety. A different strategy is applied by managers, who administer the facilities in a way that I called *professional*. In such kinds of premises, women are treated as workers with determined rights and duties that both parties should respect. What is more, the managers take care of their safety. This matter will be developed in a further part of the article.

*bosses* that the interviewees worked for perceived them in a simplified, stereotypical and negatively characterized manner, adopting a superiority attitude towards them, in respect to both intellect and morality. Contempt towards the worker resulted in episodes of mental violence towards them (most of all humiliation and ridiculing).

*Anyway, the boss called us names, which I didn't like at all: "you morons, you idiots, you morons with no school." This killed me the most [woman, 30 years old, 5 years of work in the escort agency]*

Mental violence was very often accompanied by physical and sexual violence towards the workers, perceived by the *boss* as defenseless and financially dependent on him.

*There is a boss who is an alcoholic, and when he drinks too much he beats the girls, because he unloads his aggression on these girls. He has two favorites, and the rest are treated very badly. [woman, 2 years of work in the agency]*

*Oppressive bosses*, being violated on themselves, are not interested in their workers' security. This is reflected in the lack investment in the security of the premises and accepting all clients, regardless of their behavior towards the workers and the type of services they expect. In the case of a conflict between a worker and a client, seldom do the *bosses* stand by their workers. They are rather ready to burden them with a financial penalty for the unsuccessful meeting. Work in this type of facility is usually taken up by women who, regarding their situation (e.g. addiction to psychoactive substances), are not hired in "better" places, so they look for work elsewhere, even at the cost of being endangered with violence to a greater extent. They also employ women who are not oriented in the local sex work market, and who are not aware of any alternatives. This risk is especially high in the case of foreigners, who often have no regulated issues related to stay and work in a given country. What is more, they often do not know the language or the regulations or prostitutions, thus the feeling of dependence on the *boss*, who takes advantage of it.

### **Lack of Experience in Sex Work**

Novice workers are especially endangered with violence. With no experience in sex work, they usually accept the rules established by the *boss* without any protests. It is usually the result of their not knowing that the agency can be organized in a different way. They often believe that they cannot oppose the *boss*. During the interviews, some women admitted that the existing working conditions were as expected in such premises. An example here may be a fragment of one of the interviews conducted with a novice worker, with one week's experience.

*I hope that I will not meet an exhausting one, with regard to you know what. And this is what I'm afraid off, very much. That someone gets pissed off, and then I don't know. I wouldn't go to him, I guess. But I don't know if you can do it. I need to ask the boss. [woman, a week of work in the agency]*

It means that it is not obvious to the quoted worker that she can refuse to meet a client who acts aggressively. Before she decides to reject him, she should ask the *boss* whether such a solution is acceptable in the facility. Even in such a crucial matter as their own safety and health, the female workers do not follow their own assessment of the situation. She is ready to act as ordered by a person whose objective is not her wellbeing but his own profit.

The novice workers usually had problems with setting and maintaining boundaries in relationships with clients. The reasons were their poor mental condition resulting from the perception of the self through the prism of social stigma and the “prostitute” image—someone who has no right to protest, regardless of what a client wants.

*The client will ALWAYS know that the girl is new. It doesn't happen that a client goes with a girl and not know that she is new. Because a new girl acts differently from a girl who has worked here for a while. You become more courageous with every day, month, that's for sure. It comes with time. At the beginning, I was you know, very GOOD. When I remember my second client, he was TERRIBLE, he fucked me badly, and if he fucked me that way now, he would simply be kicked out of here. But I was new then, I didn't know if I was allowed to do that, to YELL at him, I thought that because he paid me so he could do it, and I didn't say anything. And now I know what I CAN and what I CAN'T do. I WOULDN'T LET myself do it now. [woman, 22 years old, 3 years of work in the escort agency]*

### Normalization of Violence<sup>7</sup>

However, it needs to be noted that, together with an increase in experience in sex work, there was a change in the definition of which behaviors of the *boss* and clients were perceived by the workers as a *natural* (i.e. such that you need to get used to them, although it does not mean accepting them) element of working in an agency, and which clearly crossed a boundary. Workers with longer experience often encountered various form of violence, although they did not necessarily define them as such. This is related to a change in the definition of violence and the actions that it encompasses. This change results from comparing own experiences with those from significant others—co-workers from the agency. It is also significant that they become familiar with and assume the manner of defining a safety standard in the reference group (Kuhn 1976; Shibusatani 1962, 1976). Traumatic incidents from their own or their co-workers' past modify the meaning of currently experienced acts of violence. Actions which are perceived by novice workers as unbearable may seem *not so bad* to more experienced workers. Perceiving and defining what happens during an interaction with a client also changes when a worker is under the influence of psychoactive substances. Numerous studies prove that workers under the influence of alcohol are more prone to violence, as their ability to recognize the risk is lower, and they have fewer chances to free themselves or run while being attacked by a client (Chersich et al. 2007; George and Stoner 2000 as cited in Li et al. 2010: 194). The risk of aggressive behavior towards the workers also grows, when the clients remain under the influence of alcohol (de Graaf et al. 1995 as cited in Li et al. 2010: 194).

All of this means that the workers with longer experience also perceived a certain level of violence as an element of the *work situation*, *occupational risk*, which you need to get accustomed to.

*Also unpleasant situations happen. You need to keep it in mind in this profession. [woman, 32 years old, 2 years of work in the escort agency]*

*This work is always connected to some risks in general, with opinions, and with everything, but simply here there is bigger money, and the girls take a risk this way. There is always a danger. [woman, 24 years old, 4 years of work in the escort agency]*

<sup>7</sup> This notion is approached more broadly in the article (Ślęzak 2016b).

Incidents of violence, apart from other negative and risky experiences (e.g. being afraid that the client will use the information about a given woman's workplace to blackmail her, worrying about her health, unwanted pregnancy, etc.), are perceived as a cost of obtaining a higher income. Hence, from the perspective of the respondents, the sex work is governed by other standards than "normal" jobs. Therefore, it needs to be taken into account that violence may be experienced while performing these professional duties. Only by acquiring experience may you learn to identify risk, prevent violence and work out techniques to react if incidents arise.

### **Sex Workers' Actions in the Face of the Threat of Violence**

The awareness that the risk is "always" present makes it necessary to *monitor* the actions taken by the clients. It seems that continuously focusing on their own security poses a common feature of all kinds of sex work (cf. Sanders 2005). In the case of the women that I researched, it means following a principle of *minimal trust* towards the clients, and taking an array of *preventive actions*, beginning from the first moments of the interactions until the man leaves the facility. The *categorization and selection* of clients is of crucial significance, as it should indicate potentially aggressive persons. In this context, great significance is ascribed to the workers' sharing information on clients, especially those with inclinations towards aggressive behaviors. Apart from rivalry for clients, which undoubtedly takes place among the workers, numerous researchers of indoor sex work mention cooperation in this scope (Campbell 2007: 11; Katsulis et al. 2010: 349). It allows the female workers to avoid an encounter with dangerous clients. However, if a meeting takes place, the workers employ a series of strategies that allows them to reduce the risk of violence. They embrace various aspects of interactions, from proper preparation of clothes (avoiding jewelry and elements which could be used for tying up or suffocating), to managing the course of interaction with the client, through "cooling" his emotions. An element that also plays a significant role is humor. As described by Sanders (2004b), with humor the workers try to unload tensions and change tense moments of the interaction into jovial banter, which allows them to decrease the risk of violence. Another action employed by sex workers which is intended to increase their safety is avoiding services provided outside the premises (e.g. at a private apartment or in a hotel) (also mentioned by e.g. Katsulis et al. 2010: 349). They prefer to meet in the agency, therefore, in case of violence, they may count on help from the security workers.

### **Facility-based Safety Policies and Procedures**

The workers' safety is also influenced by actions undertaken by managers and security workers at the premises.

The manner in which the managers treat the workers has a great impact on their feeling of security. If the workers believe that the *boss* cares about their health and life, and that in case of danger he will be on their side, they feel safer. They also have a better position to negotiate adequate conditions during meetings with the clients.

*There was this client here, and he started: "You whores, fucking bitches." And the girls were like: "What? Are you talking to us?" So we went to our room. And the boss heard it. And he said: "Sir, please leave, you won't insult*

*the girls here.” So, such a boss is alright! And in other places they wouldn’t pay attention to this, only MONEY matters. And here, I can’t say that. They take care of us, and they pay attention. Such a client is asked to leave. [woman, 32 years old, 2 years of work in the escort agency]*

The people who manage the facility influence the level of job security first of all through introducing and executing the principles that refer to the behavior of clients within the premises. For that purpose, the *bosses* of facilities of the *professional style of management* invest<sup>8</sup> in the systems of client control, treating them as indispensable operational costs. The basis for such systems is usually posed by security workers, who often have electronic security devices at their disposal: alarm buttons and monitoring devices, placed in selected places in the facility (e.g. at a bed in every room for meeting with clients), and systems of closed circuit cameras (at the entrance to the premises, in generally available places). According to the female workers, if a client is made aware that security workers can be called at any moment if there is such a need, his level of aggressiveness is reduced.

*It sometimes happens that if your nerves are shot you can scare them. When nothing else works, I say: “Listen, calm down, there are cameras here, and they will come and take you if you keep being aggressive.” And it usually works. I don’t know if these security guys are strong or not, but no one would like to find out. Just seeing them scares them. [woman, 23 years old, 4 years of work in the escort agency]*

Therefore, in the facilities where the security is perceived by the clients as effective, the workers have a stronger negotiating position in interactions.

*You feel better when you have security at your back. You know that if something goes wrong, you can go to him, he’ll go to the room and say: “Do it this way or that way” and ok, the matter’s closed. And the client won’t give cheek anymore, because he knows that he’ll be thrown out. So, they know here that we’ve got security, and you know, high-class, as you say. [woman, 25 years old, 2 years of work in the escort agency]*

Despite that, the level of acceptance of risky behaviors of the clients is much higher in escort agencies than in other entertainment facilities, and decisions about the intervention are made very carefully.

*There were cameras, porters, it was calm [...] Unless a real drunk came, so we asked them to leave, or when they were really vulgar, they were too intrusive, we had this special alarm we called and the guys came and threw such blokes out. [woman, 3 years of work in the escort agency]*

It means that different security methods are applied in the case of “really drunk,” “really vulgar” or “too intrusive” clients, which allows us to notice that the mere act of becoming drunk, or the vulgar and intrusive behavior of the client, is not a cause for intervention. Only crossing a certain boundary, beyond which the behaviors become “really” troublesome, forms a reason for intervention. A key matter is that the boundary should be located in a similar place, both to the security guards and the sex workers. Too restrictive reactions of the security workers may discourage the clients, who “are looking for fun,” and too liberal ones would not encourage women to work in a given facility.

The duties of the security workers are not only limited to interventions in extreme situations, but they also include an array of actions which should prevent violence from clients,

<sup>8</sup> In agencies managed in an *oppressive* manner, generally there are no investments in security systems.

or cease it as quickly as possible before it develops. Therefore, their task is to minimize the danger of a client (first of all, a group of clients) who provokes situations that are dangerous for workers and other guests. For that purpose, the security workers perform a *selection* of the men who want to get into the facility. It is stricter in more popular clubs, which aspire to be an exclusive place for richer men. If a facility has some difficulty in attracting new clients, it usually allows everyone inside. In such a case, the risk of violence from the clients is higher.

In the researched agencies, security workers applied a multi-level system of selecting clients, evaluating them according to the following criteria:

- the risk of dangerous behaviors (more or less probable), assessed on the basis of the behavior of a client currently, and in the past (if he is a *regular visitor*), but also whether the client came alone or in a group (which increases the risk of trouble);
- the status of the client in a given facility (if he is a regular client or one who is there by chance, evaluated as “good” or “bad”);
- the kind of risk (e.g. aggressive behaviors, “whining” after alcohol).

*Selection* is, first of all, based on observing the behavior and appearance of potential clients, as well as knowledge about their past behaviors in the facility (if they have already visited it in the past). Clients who proved to be aggressive are remembered by the security and are not allowed to enter the agency. In the remaining cases, the decision is not a simple and automatic translation of an evaluation of the appearance and behavior of the clients. It is made according to the current *traffic* in the facility each and every time. It is in the agency’s interest to accept as high a number of clients as possible (taking into account the logistical possibilities of the facility), so during *selection*, the workers continuously need to consider what will be a lesser evil in a given situation: accepting an “uncertain” client or the risk that no other one will come that night; letting in a drunk client who may cause some problems, but he is a *regular visitor* and he may stop coming to the facility if he feels that he was treated badly; letting in a noisy group of clients who can potentially cause problems, but also provide earnings to several workers.

Security workers also *monitor behaviors* of the clients during their stay in the facility, as it can change drastically under the influence of the consumed alcohol or interactions with other clients. Therefore, the security workers make continuous decisions whether the behavior of a client may be deemed *acceptable* or of there is a need to react:

*These were typical bodyguards, LARGER THAN LIFE, there were three of them, so if there is a situation we are secure, because when somebody spilled some alcohol, as he was too drunk, or he was in a bad temper, he was taken out of the premises. Because they felt that there may be a danger in the room, because if he’s already aggressive in the main room, you never know how he will behave in the bedroom [woman, 2 years of work in the escort agency]*

Cooperation between security and the sex workers is crucial. Sex workers often inform the security workers about their worries towards the potentially dangerous clients, and leave the doors to the room where the meeting takes place slightly open. It allows them to leave the room faster in a crisis situation. It also increases the probability that someone will hear a call for help and will respond.

In the case of a crisis situation, the security workers make a decision about the manner of bringing it under *control*. They need to decide which measures will be effective in

a particular case; will it be enough to intervene visually or verbally, or will it be necessary to react sharply. Here, it needs to be emphasized that the clients are victims of physical violence on the part of the security workers. It is, paradoxically, a mechanism analogical to that which dares the clients to behave aggressively behavior towards the sex workers. A client that has been beaten by the security of an escort agency seldom reports this fact to the police, because he is afraid of the consequences of revealing (e.g. to close family) that he had been using sexual services. It provides the security workers with a feeling of impunity. I don't want to say through this that they overuse their power in each case, but they have no scruples and they tend to be brutal during an intervention. In turn, workers who report such situations talk about it as being the right punishment for breaking the rules of the facility:

*At the beginning, a client came and he was a little drunk. But later, he picked up this heavy ashtray, and my friend and I dodged it, and the ashtray hit these mirrors. He went mad. And when the security guys came this was no joke anymore. They took him by his hands, put him in the room they had for security guys, and they beat him there. Then the third let him go and off he went. You messed up so you got kicked on the ass. Simple as that. If you can't behave yourself, go to a doctor. Then we observed him on the CCTV, he went back to his car, but he came here drunk. He took a load of paper towels and stopped the bleeding somewhere in the ear, so there were tons of these towels lying around later. But he caused it, so he needed to get beaten, and it happened. He asked for this himself. [woman, 35 years old, no data]*

Thus, the security workers play a role of an internal protection service which, within their own circle, without involving the police, deals with any problems connected with maintaining security in the facility. Therefore, anything that happens in the agency remains in the agency, which secretly carries on working.

Regarding the mandatory reporting of incidents of violence from clients that take place at given premises, this increases the risk that the police will close the agency. Therefore, the existing legal situation creates a unique context for experiences of violence which take place in escort agencies. The manner in which the female workers react to violence is not only an individual matter of a given person, but it is also a significant decision for the existence of the organization. Hence, sex workers who would like to continue providing sex services in a given place, report matters to the police only in extreme cases. They usually allow the security workers to punish the clients—the perpetrators of the violence. However, it also means that the clients may not suffer any consequences of their aggressive behavior.

### Summary

While comparing the results of my research with the results cited in the first part of the article, some similarities as well as differences may be noticed. Like the studies regarding indoor sex work performed by Sanders and Campbell (2007), my respondents had experienced various types of risk connected with sexual work. In contrast to those studies, a number of women experienced physical violence. This discrepancy may result from the hybrid character of Polish indoor sex work. The premises that operate in Polish cities are strongly differentiated in terms of applicable work rules and how female workers are provided with safety. Therefore, the level of violence towards the women in various premises is different. The lack of quantitative research does not allow me to provide the scale of the

phenomenon of violence experienced by workers in escort agencies. However, the qualitative research allows us to see that workers' responses to violence depend greatly on how they themselves define their work in the agency. Women who share stereotypical beliefs about the role of a prostitute more often accept experiences of violence as unavoidable. It first of all happens in the case of novice workers, as well as those who worked only in the facilities of the *oppressive style of management*. In interactions with *oppressive bosses* and client, they "learnt" that violence is a "normal" element of sexual work. In turn, the provision of sexual services in a facility of the *professional style of management* (where the right of the women to safe work is respected, and where the female workers teach each other how to react to incidents of violence, and how to prevent them) allows them to start believing that violence does not need to be a necessary element of sexual work.

The provision of security in indoor sex work depends on the collective actions of a number of actors, starting with the people who manage the facility, to the security workers, to the female workers themselves (similar conclusions were drawn by e.g. Sanders and Campbell 2007: 11). It is crucial that the experienced workers introduce the *novices* to the principles of working with a client, in the scope of the ability to control conflict situations and cool down emotions, both of the client and of the worker herself. However, on the basis of my observations, I need to state that such a message was not always realized in the researched facilities. It happened that the coworkers, who theoretically should present empathy and support the harmed friends, behaved as an audience and commented on the incidents of violence with neutrality, or even blamed the victim for the incident ("she screamed too silently, it was noisy in the agency," "she shouldn't have answered him in such a boorish manner," "you need to be careful with him," "she should have left the doors open"). Blaming the victim may prove strong insensibility towards the acts of violence, as a result of long-term exposure to such situations (Aronson et al. 1997: 514). At the same time, it may express the defensive attributions applied by the respondents, according to which violence happens only to those who provoked it in some way (Aronson et al. 1997: 207).

My research suggests that acts of violence in indoor sex work are not perceived in the same manner as in other relations between workers and clients in service professions. For escort agency workers, violence is an element of everyday risk. Therefore, in the observed facilities, the acts of violence towards the sex workers were not always met with the proper reaction of the remaining workers. In the *oppressive style of managing* a given facility, the satisfaction of the clients was often more important than the security of the female workers. On the other hand, even if the client was "punished" for his aggressive behaviors, the "justice" was administered by security workers, not by reporting such cases to the police. As a result, even actions which aim at protecting the rights of sexual workers strengthen the image of sex work as belonging to the underworld, where violence (and various crimes) are natural. This situation results from legal regulations applicable in Poland, which discourage people from reporting such violent incidents to the police. As a result, the workers depend on whether, and to what extent, the person managing the facility decides to bear the costs connected with security, and whether the applied solutions are effective. While starting work in a new facility, a female worker cannot be certain if she will be safe there. There are no formal or legal mechanisms that might promote sex work safety. This contributes to the exploitation of women, putting them in the position of sex victims. They

are blamed for placing themselves in situations in which they can be attacked (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 13). As a consequence, violence towards sex workers is explained and justified as a result of women breaking the applicable moral and sexual standards. As suggested by Stanko (1990) and other feminist criminologists, making the women responsible for the avoidance of risk means that the reason of the crime is ascribed to the (female) victim rather than to the (usually male) perpetrator (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 12). Such an approach to crime prevention emphasizes that it is the sex workers who should take all the steps necessary to reduce the risk of dangerous situations, as the state adopts no responsibility for the hazardous circumstances that they work in (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 13). Such views may be perceived as an expression of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2000), which reflects the social marginalization of women in the society. Their experiences of poverty, gender discrimination and other forms of social inequality, which result from their structural position, elevate the probability that female sex workers may experience violence during their work, which will not be met with a proper reaction from the police (Katsulis et al. 2010: 358).

Regardless of the legal solutions which are mandatory in the country where they provide services, sex workers deserve prophylaxis of physical and sexual violence like any other person. Its perpetrators should be treated analogically to those in other forms of violence towards women and workers. Its victims should receive the necessary support in dealing with the consequences of such experiences. These actions should refer to all persons, regardless of whether they want to leave the sex work or carry on with it. To make it happen, a number of countries need to change their legal regulations, especially if it criminalizes the provision and organization of sex services. However, something that is more significant and maybe harder to perform is the cultural change regarding the approach to sex workers, as well as revision of stereotypical beliefs about them (Sanders and Campbell 2007: 15). This requires the development of respect for sex workers' human and civil rights (Sanders and Campbell 2007). Such a social and legal environment would allow the proper conditions to be created so the workers would not be afraid of reporting any incidents of violence to the police, thanks to which they would be working in safer conditions.

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