



University
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Centre for
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“Selling Love” in a State of Conflict

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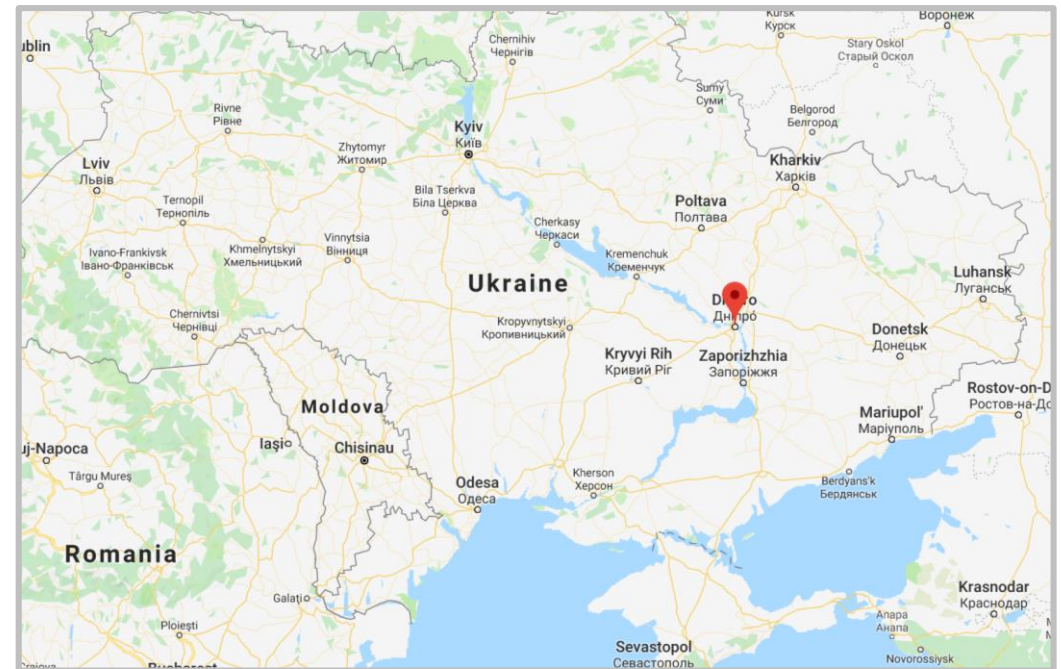
Ukraine

Armed conflict has been ongoing in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine since 2014.

This study takes place in the city of Dnipro city located approximately 200 km from the conflict zone.

Dnipro has been a key destination for internally displaced persons, and a transit city for frontline forces (Becker et al., 2019).

Ukraine has one of the highest rates of HIV in Europe and Dnipropetrovsk oblast has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in Ukraine (UNAIDS, 2019)



Sexual transmission of HIV and Sex Work

- Studies have documented ongoing HIV transmission via unprotected sex including through sex work (Balakireva et al., 2014; Aral et al., 2012).
- Female sex workers shoulder a disproportionate burden of the local HIV epidemic.
- In 2016, there were an estimated 80,100 female sex workers in Ukraine, with an HIV prevalence of 5.2% in a variety of working environments, often referred to as venues (UNAIDS, 2019).
- Venues are common meeting places where sex workers connect with clients, such as hotels or brothels, where they may also provide services but they may also relocate.

MACRO STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT:

- Time scale and dynamics of the conflict
- Geographic scale of the conflict
- Internal and external economic factors
- Political aspects of the crisis
- Socio-cultural milieu

Consequences:

- Characteristics and dynamics of parties (actors) involved
- Population movement, isolation and mobility
- Changing social sexual networks
- Increased levels of commercial or casual sex
- Health care service and infrastructure

SEX WORK ORGANIZATION AND PATTERNS:

- Typology and management structures of sex work
- Duration of sex work
- Mobile FSW groups in the conflict zone
- FSW/client population size and demographics/characteristics
- Economy of sex work

SEX WORK PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE:

- Client volume
- Experience of violence
- Alcohol and drug use
- Psychological sequelae of trauma
- Sex services

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL - BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOUR:

- STI/HCV co-infection
- Condom Use
- Access/uptake HIV prevention/care
- Access/uptake harm reduction services

Modified Risk

HIV/STI transmission among FSW and client population

Table adapted by authors from Blanchard and Aral (2010)⁶ and Mock (2004)²

Sex Work as Work

- Abolitionist (or anti-sex work) views assert that female sex workers are inherently exploited.
- Unless abolitionists advocate for the elimination of all wage labour their arguments against sex work risk inconsistency.
- These arguments also dismiss important empirical research that identifies the agency exercised by sex workers (Benoit et al., 2017; Bruckert and Parent, 2013)
- This presentation builds on the understanding of agency as economic choice and that all labour choices are made subject to constraints.

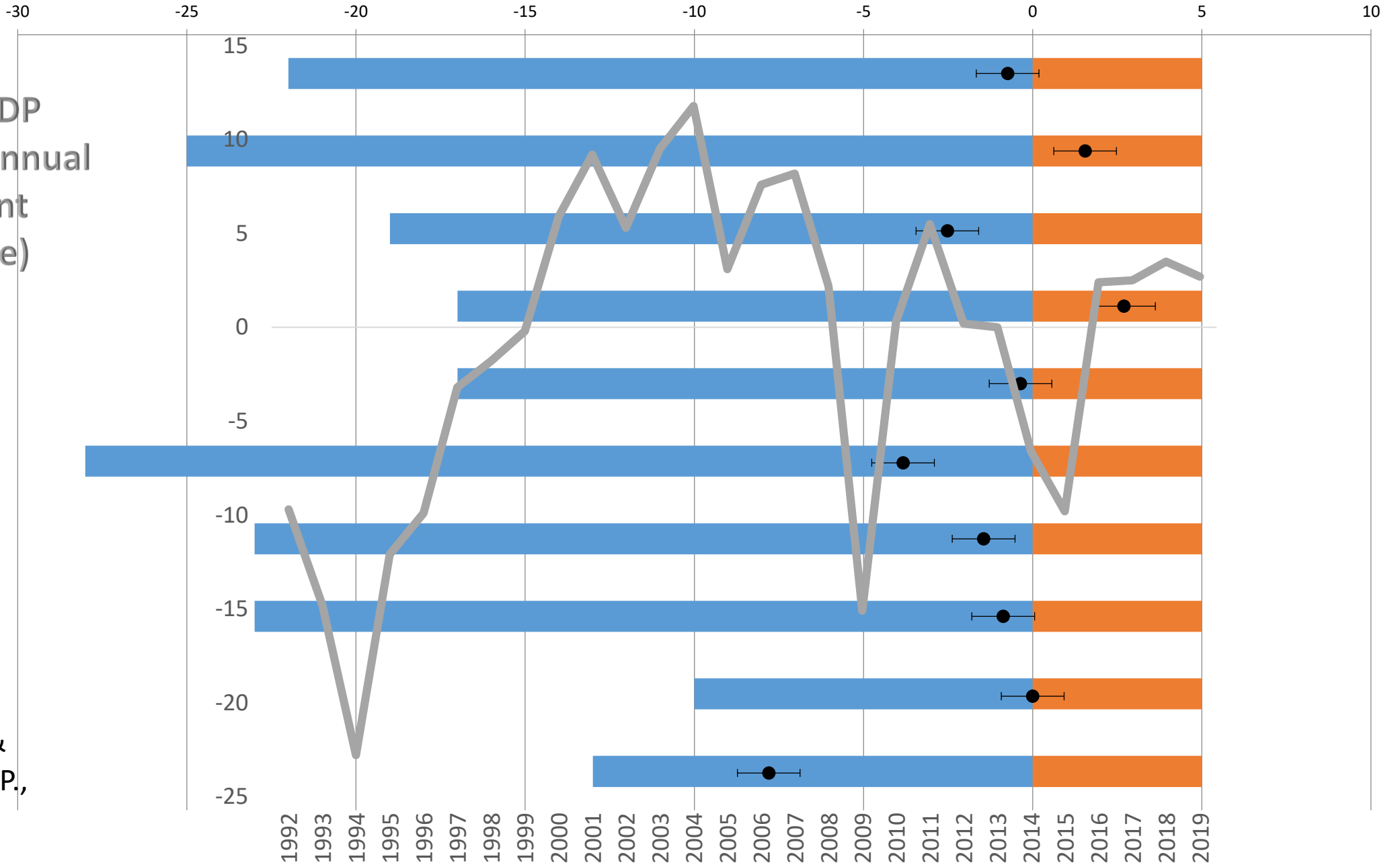
Objective & Hypothesis

We describe the sex work industry in Dnipro as characterized by distinct venues which are the context in which female sex workers work and navigate the risk and decisions making in their work lives. We hypothesize that female sex workers in all venues exercise agency.

Methods

- Mixed-method design:
 - serial mapping,
 - cross-sectional bio-behavioural surveys (sex workers n= 560; clients n = 370), and
 - semi-structured interviews (sex workers n=43) with female sex workers (aged 14+) and their male clients (aged 18+)
 - September 2017 to October 2018 in Dnipro, Ukraine.
- Bio-behavioural surveys: analyzed using STATA.
- Lab results: Dried blood spot sample (DBS) sent to the National HIV and Retrovirology Laboratories, Winnipeg, Canada for serological confirmation and HIV viral sequencing analysis.
- Interviews: transcribed and translated to English. Content and thematic analysis was performed using NVivo12 to examine the frequency of themes, the characteristics of each theme, and sorted into sub-themes.

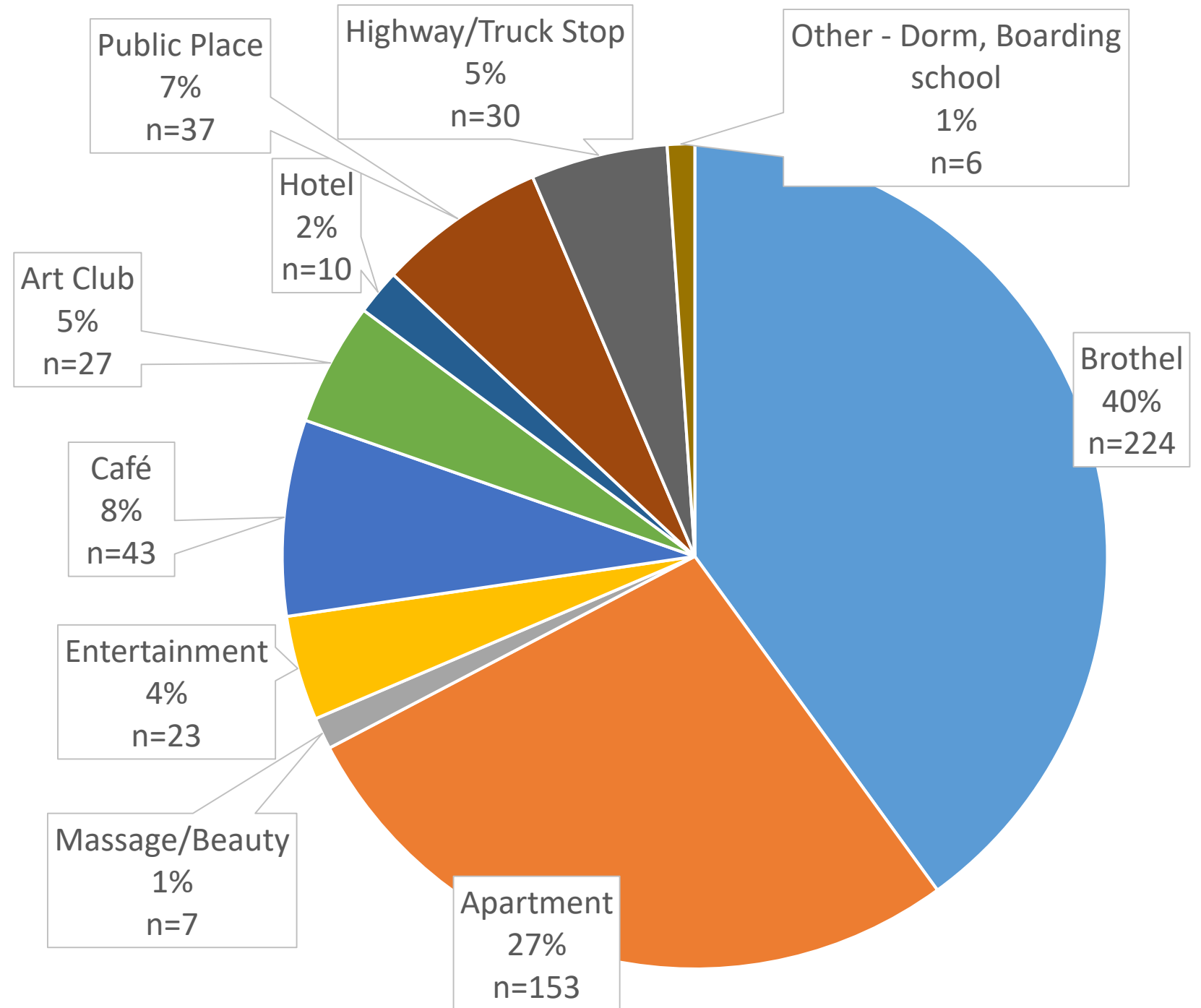
Years involved in Sex Work and Time of HIV Infection



Real GDP growth (annual percent change)

(Daniuk, C & Sandstrom, P., 2019).

Sex Workers' Main Venues



Brothel n=224

- Median age 25
- First identified as sex worker at age 20
- Average to above average self-identified SES
- Average to high self-identified prestige of venue
- Client solicitation (multiple answer): 90% manager, 43% self, 20% middle person
- Client Volume in 30 days: mean 24 (sd 8)
 - Military client volume: mean 1.3 (sd 1.7)
- Total monthly income from SW 11699 (sd 3988) = 487 US\$ (sd 165 US\$); which represents 78% (sd 19) of total monthly household income
- Dependents: 24% 1+ children, 12% husbands/boyfriends, 18% parents/grandparents, 5% Other family

Apartment n=153

- Median age 26
- First identified as SW 20
- Average to slightly above average SES
- Average to above average prestige
- Client solicitation (multiple answer): 91% manager, 74% self, 28% middle person
- Client Volume in 30 days: mean 26 (sd 8)
 - Military client volume: mean .86 sd 1.3
- Total monthly income from SW 10195 (sd 3400) = 424 US\$ (sd 141 US\$); which represents 70% (sd 16) of total monthly household income
- Dependents: 42% 1+ children, 14% husbands/boyfriends, 30% parents/grandparents, 3% Other family

Art Club n=27

- Median age 22
- Started doing sex work at age 20
- Higher SES
- Above average to high prestige
- Client solicitation (multiple answer): 44% manager, 22% self, 48% middle person
- Client Volume in 30 days: mean 16.7 (sd 6.8)
 - Military client volume: mean 1 sd 1.4
- Total monthly income from SW 11935 UAH (sd 4832) = 496 US\$ (sd 201); which represents 75% (sd 22) of total monthly household income
- Dependents: 11% 1+ children, 4% husbands/boyfriends, 19% parents/grandparents, 4% Other family

Highway/truck stop n=30

- Median age 30
- First identified as SW at age 24
- Lower SES
- Low prestige
- Client solicitation (multiple answer): 13.3% manager, 93% self, 43% middle person
- Client Volume in 30 days: mean 27 (sd 9.3)
 - Military client volume: mean 4.29 (sd 2.69)
- Total monthly income from SW 10821 (sd 7170) = 450 US\$ (sd 298); which represents 88% (sd 12) of total monthly household income
- Dependents: 40% 1+ children, 23% husbands/boyfriends, 54% parents/grandparents, 10% Other family

Results of qualitative analysis: interviews with sex workers

- The analysis of interviews paints a picture of work place agency congruent to that presented in other empirical studies of sex work (Benoit et al. 2019, 2018, 2017).
- In the interviews sex workers expressed the various forms in which their decision making mitigated risks associated with their work but also where certain pressures made it necessary to cede to the normally held boundaries, incurring riskier activities.

Decisions, decisions, decisions

1. Entry
2. Location – work environment
3. Price setting
4. Health & safety (Security)
5. Service provision – which types of services to provide
6. Client solicitation
7. Client screening
8. Client volume – work load/hours

Entry

- *I am lazy, I do not want to work there, work hard somewhere, if I understand that I'll work an hour or two hours a day and earn 1000 hryvnia and ... for a thousand hryvnia now people work for a week. Something like that (laugh), if honestly, I'm too lazy to work somewhere in the ATB [store] I do not know, or somewhere else, go to work at 8 am and come home at 8 pm for the 150 hryvnia per day. Well, somehow it's not enough for me. I just take it as a job, I do not know, many people have more disgusting work than I have. (age 33, public place)*
- *No, we couldn't get out of there simply. We had to pay money and it was big money. We didn't have such money and we had to look for it, because we wanted to live normally. And so, as I know, my friends were doing... They were making money. They offered me also to do the same, also to sell love for money. (age 24, apartment)*

Client Screening

- *Well, firstly, what condition he is in can be detected by phone. The owner doesn't let them. (age 38, brothel)*
- *Well, you know, I probably already learned somehow ... I never sit with aggressive ones, and I already see by the man who he is. And I will not go with someone I do not like. (age 38, public place)*
- *Clients, if girls have ATO guys as clients. Well, I heard, I'm not with ATO guys, I'm afraid of them. (age 44, entertainment venue)*

Service provision

- *They often ask me for anal, but this is for me hard labor. Of course, I can, but this is not for me. I have ... But! For the money I'll do! Have to. (age 39, public place)*
- *Generally, the most that - sex without a condom. We do not do it. I, for example, very rarely allow this for extra payment. 500-600 UAH. Yes. And so, generally, I'm not telling the client that there is such an option. As though, there is no such service. Because you allow this to such a person, when you see that he is dressed well. All is well-groomed, shaven, smells nicely everywhere. Then you can with him, like, do this. To be engaged in such sex for additional money. (age 41, brothel)*

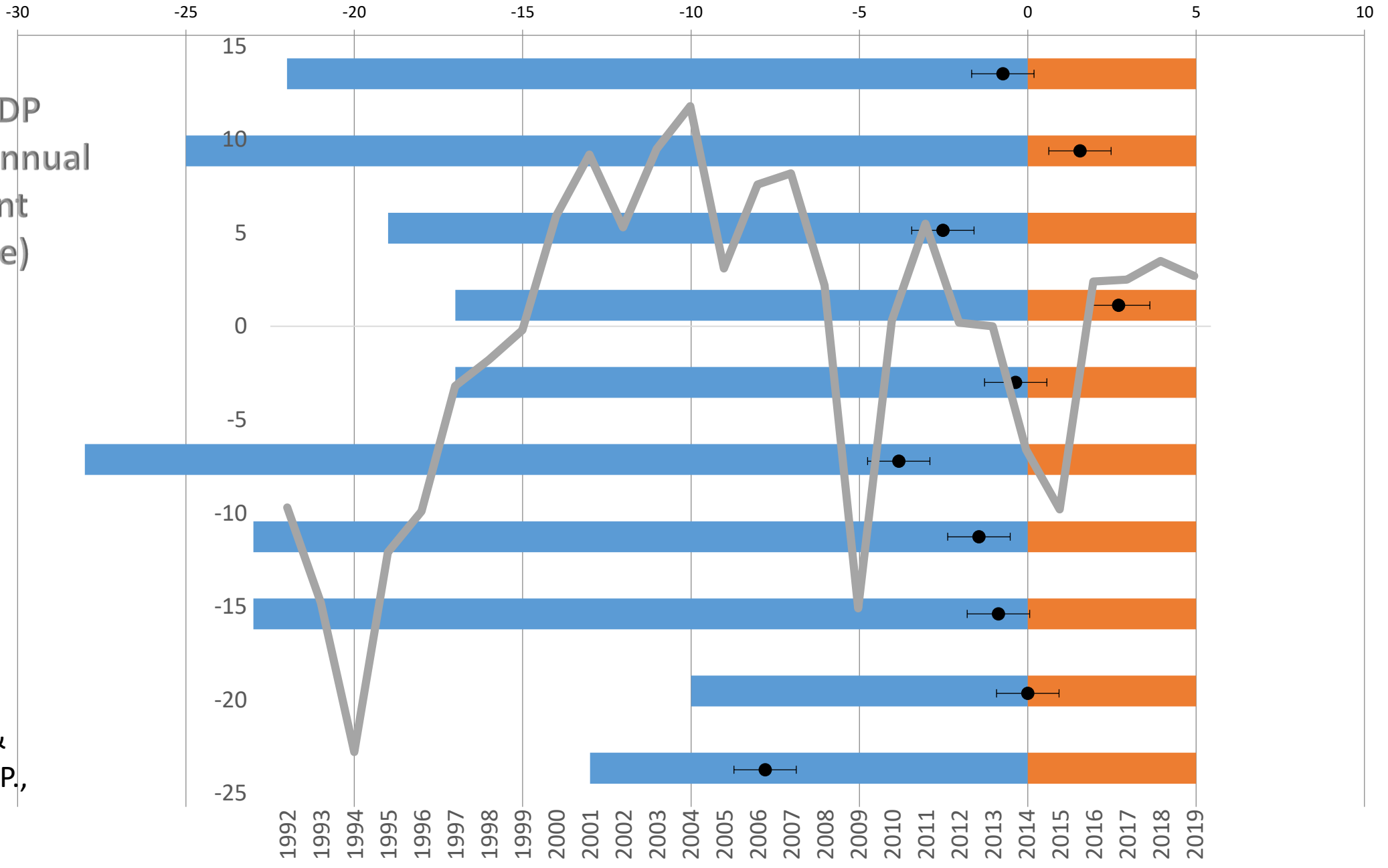
Price Setting

- *Before, it was 800, it was 500... Well now one thousand... Well, probably, due to the fact that everything is becoming more expensive, we become more expensive too, the condoms are expensive. (age 35, own/rented apartment)*
- *It increased several times, not at once. Other offices started rising their price too. And then ours. (age 18, brothel)*
- *Yes, of course. The regular ones get discounts. If a man requests this, then price goes down. Yes, it is decreased by 100 hryvnias. Not for everyone. If a person asks by phone: please, can you give a discount? Then, of course, I do. Because I don't have as much work, so I can't lose this client. (age 38, brothel)*

Discussion

- Sex workers exercise their agency in making decisions in their everyday work places but they vary according to the situation of constraints surrounding those decisions.
- Often related to options for alternatives, financial pressure, and incentives for risk taking.

Years involved in Sex Work and Time of HIV Infection



Real GDP
growth (annual
percent
change)

(Daniuk, C &
Sandstrom, P.,
2019).

Conclusions

- Sex workers, like others doing wage labour, exert agency and negotiate choice on an ongoing basis but are also subject to constraints.
- Sex workers mitigate the risks present in the workplace but risks may be accompanied with financial reward. In a situation of increasing pressures due to the conflict, related economic downturn, and decrease in demand there may be more incentives to risk taking for some workers.
- Our preliminary results suggest that the sex work environment may be made riskier due to conflict, primarily attributable to consequences related to economic downturn.

Implications

We suggest the decriminalization of sex work, improving access to preventative care, tailoring programming to respond to the changing atmosphere of conflict, and **ultimately acknowledging that sex workers are workers.**



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