

OUR STORY OF IMPACT

Transforming the Livelihoods of Vulnerable Women in Nigeria



VISION SPRING INITIATIVES

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About Vision Spring Initiatives

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) is a duly registered (RC 908183), non-governmental, not-for-profit human rights organization partnering with strategic stakeholders to achieve developmental rights of children, young people and other vulnerable groups and supporting their attainment of these rights using a multipronged and cross-sectoral approach.



Our Thematic Areas:

We strongly believe that rights are interrelated, inalienable and inseparable and therefore cannot be achieved in isolation. We therefore focus on the following thematic areas towards achieving our mission

1. Gender justice (Central and the core of VSI programming)
2. Education and Research:
3. Participatory Leadership/Political education
4. Sexual and reproductive health and rights
5. Movement building and partnerships

Our objectives:

- To promote gender equality in all spheres of our programming and develop literary skills amongst women and young persons.
- To advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people and vulnerable groups.
- To promote and advance education and research in Nigeria.
- To promote participatory leadership and advance youth inclusion in decision making.
- To collaborate with like-minded organizations for strategic partnerships on achieving gender equality.
- To engage with strategic stakeholders and demand implementation of laws and policies that guarantee the rights of women, girls and minority groups.

Our Target Beneficiaries:

- Children
- Young people
- Women
- Minority groups and
- Those made vulnerable by laws and policies.

This publication exists as a documentation of the various conversations that express the struggles and the experiences encountered by female sex workers and vulnerable women in the course of their trade; their actions and the skills they gained and developed during the course of the project that has changed and transformed their lives. There is still reluctance on the part of mainstream CSOs to partner with vulnerable women especially sex workers towards the realization of their rights and empowerment.

This documentation is therefore a call to attention of institutions to consider an inclusive approach to programming towards the protection of all persons and the empowerment of vulnerable women in the country.

Disclaimer: this publication is the sole production of Vision Spring Initiatives with support from Empower. Vision Spring Initiatives hereby state that all views expressed in this publication are not that of Empower.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Vision Spring Initiatives would like to extend a sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the realization of this project. Their support, expertise, and encouragement were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition and completion.

Appreciating Our Funding Partners

Vision Spring Initiatives expresses its gratitude to EMpower, for providing funds and resources which significantly enhanced the implementation of this project. Your contributions were invaluable, and we are grateful for the opportunity to impact the lives of young women and girls. The impact of your support will resonate for years, propelling them forward as they persist in their growth and strive to accomplish their goals.

Empowering Futures - Recognizing Vocational Center Partnerships

We are also grateful to the trainers and instructors at the vocational centers for providing the resources and environment necessary for our beneficiaries to learn and advance their skills towards becoming financially empowered and independent women. Their commitment to the skill enhancement and advancement of our beneficiaries cannot be over-emphasized. Without their unwavering support and dedication, our beneficiaries would not have the chance to gain the essential knowledge and expertise needed to excel in their chosen fields. We sincerely value their collaboration and partnership in empowering our beneficiaries to attain economic independence and self-sufficiency.

From Training to Triumph

We acknowledge the invaluable contribution of our beneficiaries, whose unwavering commitment to sharing their stories and participating in this project has been instrumental in its realization. They have bravely embraced the journey of empowerment and self-sufficiency by engaging in vocational skill training, and have been generously provided with the resources and capital needed to kick-start their own ventures, thus enhancing their livelihoods. Their relentless determination and perseverance have not only transformed their individual circumstances but have also served as a beacon of inspiration, igniting a spirit of ambition and self-reliance within their communities. We take immense pride in having played a role in their path to success and eagerly anticipate witnessing the continued positive ripple effects they create in their lives and the lives of those around them. Your contributions and dedication are crucial to the impact of this project.

Mentors of Influence

A special acknowledgement goes to our mentors - Mrs Nkechi Odebiyi, Mrs Bukola Owokodu and Miss Opeyemi Fagbemi for their mentorship throughout the process of this project. Their guidance played a key role in ensuring the success and growth of our beneficiaries. They provided invaluable support and expertise, ensuring that our beneficiaries received the

necessary guidance and encouragement to excel in their respective fields. Their dedication and commitment to mentorship have made a lasting impact on the lives of the young women involved in this project.

The Dream Team - Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI)

A distinguished acknowledgement and appreciation to the staff of Vision Spring Initiatives and volunteers for their valuable discussions and feedback during the various stages of this project. We are truly grateful for the dedication and consistent support demonstrated by each member of staff. Their expertise and diligence have played a crucial role in the success of this project.

Acknowledging Every Ally

To everyone mentioned, not mentioned, and those who supported Vision Spring Initiatives behind the scenes, thank you for being an integral part of this project's success. Your contributions are deeply appreciated.

EXCERPTS

Have you ever experienced/witnessed any form of human right violation?

"This happened to me recently, I had a client in my brothel who was supposed to pay me, he robbed me of my money and other valuable items. All these things make me tired of this our work."

Female sex worker

Do you think the money generated from sex work is enough to meet your needs?

"To go into our business is very easy, but to leave is usually difficult. If I have enough money, I fit stop the FSW work."

Female sex worker

On how they handled cases where clients refuse to pay for services rendered they had this to say

"To avoid problems sometimes, I usually return money to my clients when issues of quarrel occur because there is no one to defend us. Even If I report such cases to the management, they won't address the situation well"

Female sex worker

INTRODUCTION

Faces of Survival: The Realities of Female Sex Workers and Vulnerable women in Nigeria

Commercial sex work is a global age long practice. In Nigeria, it dates back to the 1900s. Sex work in Nigeria is not without many challenges ranging from vague and non-explicit laws on sex work and prostitution, severe human rights abuses, multiple forms of discrimination, brutality of law enforcement and denial of access to social services faced by sex workers. In Nigeria, sex work is further complicated by the country's entrenched patriarchal value system where sex work is criminalized, and female sex workers experience increased violence specifically increased sexual/gender-based violence (S/GBV) discrimination, stigma, and marginalisation due to the intersection of their profession/livelihood and gender. The COVID-19 Violence against women and girls (VAWG) national reports available show that there is a significant spike of violence against FSWs from clients, law enforcement, and community members, to name a few. Female sex workers who depend on sex work for their livelihoods are forced to face more precarious situations to sustain their livelihoods during this period where they are “more exposed to punitive measure to enforce COVID-19 regulations”.

Nigeria's legal landscape regarding sex work differs between the Northern and Southern regions, governed by the Criminal and Penal codes, respectively. The penal code outrightly deems female sex work illegal in all Northern states, while the Criminal code in the Southern region neither explicitly legalizes nor criminalizes sex work.

Legal Landscape and Impact on Sex Workers



Women's rights to control and own their bodies are compromised by clauses in these codes, and despite constitutional guarantees of fundamental human rights, sex workers still experience abuse and violence. These codes perpetuate a stigmatized view of sex work, leading to marginalization and discrimination against sex workers. Moreover, the lack of clear legal frameworks in the Southern region creates ambiguity and allows for inconsistent enforcement, leaving sex workers vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

Despite their contributions to the community, sex workers face unfair treatment, struggle to access healthcare services, and endure abuse from law enforcement agencies. This unfair treatment and lack of access to healthcare services further perpetuate the cycle of vulnerability for sex workers, making it difficult for them to improve their living conditions and seek help when needed. Additionally, the abuse from law enforcement agencies not only violates their human rights but also creates a hostile environment that discourages sex workers from reporting crimes or seeking legal protection.

In 2020 through funding support from Amplify Change Vision Spring Initiatives held a series of advocacy and capacity strengthening interventions aimed at enhancing the knowledge of sex workers identified across the six geo-political zones. The findings from this intervention indicated the need to support sex workers who were desirous of earning a living and contributing to national development away from sex work. This request was followed by a poll conducted in Lagos and Oyo states; the result indicated the need for capacity enhancement. Vision Spring Initiatives with support from EMpower undertook to support the needs of sex workers aged 18-30. The organisation chose Ikorodu, a peri-urban area with a high influx of sex brothels.

Ikorodu is a town in Lagos, Nigeria, located to the north-east of the metropolis. It shares a border with Ogun State and is located near the Lagos Lagoon. It is the second biggest local government area in Lagos State, with a population of over 500,000 people according to the 2006 census. Since then, the town has grown into a metropolis with a population of over a million people. The industries in the town are trading, farming, and it is worth noting that Ikorodu is the fastest expanding suburb of Lagos, owing to the rising migration of residents from nearby villages drawn to the town by its closeness to Lagos. The town's primary businesses include commerce, farming, and manufacturing, and the people of Ikorodu are kind and hardworking. In Ikorodu, sex work thrives alongside bars, lounges, brothels, hotels, and other establishments scattered throughout the town.

Vision Spring Initiatives (VSI) located in this peri-urban community through the support of EMpower with a deep commitment to social justice and following series of consultations embarked on a mission to empower female sex workers by equipping them with practical tools, essential skills and resources to facilitate their reintegration into society.

The aim is not merely to address immediate needs but to foster lasting change, enabling these women to transcend the limitations imposed upon them and carve out paths of independence and self-sufficiency.

Recognizing the importance of education and agency, Vision Spring Initiatives implements comprehensive programs designed to enhance the educational attainment and self-determination of sex workers. By fostering a supportive environment that champions their rights and dignity, VSI seeks to break down barriers and create opportunities for growth and empowerment within these often marginalized groups of society.

In doing so, VSI not only addresses the immediate needs of sex workers but also endeavors to effect broader societal change, challenging prevailing attitudes and prejudices that perpetuate their marginalization. Through collaborative efforts and a steadfast commitment to justice and equality, VSI strives to create a more inclusive society for all.

Commencement of Project Intervention for vulnerable women.

The first steps the organisation took towards implementing interventions for vulnerable women was to seek permission from the leadership of the brothels from where it planned to select project beneficiaries. Through a mapping exercise a total of ten brothels were selected – The organisation thereafter reached out to the Managers and Chairladies of the brothels explaining its significance. This collaborative approach aimed to encourage women and girls to participate in the initiative. Leveraging existing relationships established in previous projects with sex workers, it was easy to get the buy-in of the leadership without suspicion.

A total of 40 beneficiaries were selected, and attendance records were utilized to gather pertinent personal information. The focus group discussions, supplemented by structured questions, played a dual role in obtaining insights into the challenges faced by these women and understanding their preferences for potential interventions.

Selection of beneficiaries was followed by needs assessment to enable VSI to understand the needs of the target beneficiaries. The project employed focus group discussions as its primary methodology to understand the challenges and experiences of sex workers and vulnerable women. This approach facilitated a deep understanding of their perspectives by creating a secure environment where beneficiaries could openly share without the fear of judgment or stigma. The focus group discussions not only encouraged participants to connect with others who shared similar experiences but also nurtured a sense of community among them. This methodology provided a comprehensive grasp of the issues faced by sex workers and vulnerable women, subsequently informing the development of targeted interventions and support services.



RESULTS

Human Rights Violation experienced by Female sex workers.

Through focus group discussions, the organisation was able to generate below information.

Have you ever experienced/witnessed any form of human rights violation?

Speaker 1: *Yes, it happened to me. A customer came to me one afternoon, gave me #1000 for my services. It happened that the money was fake, I have been collecting such money for a while and I accused him of spending fake money for me. It turned into a quarrel and nobody could defend me and I was at a loss because I couldn't spend the money.*

Speaker 2: *Yes, I have also experienced a form of human right violation before. There was a time a client carried me for day break. We had an agreement on the amount my service would cost and he made payment, the following morning when I wanted to be going, he threatened to collect the money he paid earlier, but I didn't allow him to have his way eventually.*

Speaker 3: *We usually experience various forms of verbal abuse from different people*

Speaker 4: *The police usually abuse us too, they usually raid our brothels just to take advantage of us and exploit us by collecting money from us.*

Speaker 5: *Yes we experience various forms of abuse. Like robbery, stealing of our phones*

Speaker 6: *This happened to me recently, I had a client in my brothel who was supposed to pay me, he robbed me of my money and other valuable items. All these things make me tired of this our work*

Speaker 7: *there are some clients who intentionally pull out their condom during sex, if we complain, they forcefully have sex (rape) and eventually not pay us*

How have you handled the several forms of human rights violation mentioned above?

Speaker 1: *The brothel owners don't usually protect us, they usually protect the clients*

Speaker 2: *The brothels have a fine book, if we misbehave to our clients we will be fined, so most of the time we usually let our clients go even if they abuse us.*

Speaker 3: *Even if the there is a case of abuse, and the FSW calls some human right organizations for help, even after their intervention, the FSW will still receive fine and might even be evicted from the brothel*

Speaker 4: *To avoid problems sometimes, I usually return money to my clients when issues of quarrel occur because there is no one to defend us. Even If I report such cases to the management, they won't address the situation well*

Speaker 5: *Even If we report such cases of violence to the management, they won't address the situation well, the brothel owners usually protect the clients*

On how they handled cases where clients refuse to pay for services rendered they had this to say:

Speaker 1: *There are cases where clients refuse to pay even after we have engaged them*

Speaker 2: *Yes, we usually experience cases of fight. It happened to me once, the guy had sex with me, and didn't release, he requested for his money, I had to pay him back to stop the quarrel.*

Speaker 3: *Although we usually collect our money before we have sex with our customers, but if the clients say they did not release, it usually lead to fight and the client will want to collect the money back*

Speaker 4: *There are some cases that clients don't want to pay when they did not release, we usually report to the brothel owners and they intervene by making the client pay half of the initial agreement*

Speaker 5: *yes we usually experience things like that. That is why we usually collect our money before we engage in sexual activities with our clients to avoid fight.*

Speaker 6: *Clients differ, there are some good clients that are loyal who make payment for our services, while there are bad ones who will not want to pay.*

Speaker 7: *yes, we usually experience things like that.*

Speaker 8: *As a sex worker like me, what I usually do is, after bargaining with the client, the first thing to do is to collect my money.*

Speaker 9: *Some of the clients are usually drunk and after having sex with them, they may say they won't want to pay and this might result in quarrel*

SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF FSWS AND GENERAL WELL-BEING

Have you received a comprehensive education about safe sex practices before? Will you be interested in undergoing comprehensive training on sexual, reproductive health and rights?

Speaker 1: yes we have received education about safe sex practices, although it might not be comprehensive. We would like to be trained on safe sex practices

Speaker 2: yes, but we don't know it all. We would be interested in learning about our sexual reproductive health and rights

Speaker 3: Yes, some people usually come to teach us how to fix the condom and how to take care of ourselves.

Do you have adequate access to sexual and reproductive health resources? (e.g. condom, lubricants), If yes, how often do you use them?

Speaker 1: Yes, we have access though we usually buy condom and lubricant

Speaker 2: Sometimes, the clients come with their own condoms, though we usually don't use their own for safety reasons. Some might want to use the opportunity to go with the condom after sex, so we use our own and dispose after sex

Speaker 3: Yes, we have access though we usually buy condom and lubricant at a high rate

Speaker 4: We use the male condom more consistently than the female condom because it is not every one of us that can afford the female condom

Where do you seek for health care assistance in cases of human right violation related to rape, clients not using condom/protection?

Speaker 1: We usually call nurse to come and treat us in the brothel

Speaker 2: We also have some nurses that come to treat us in the brothels and the price is usually expensive

Speaker 3: We also buy medication to treat ourselves

Speaker 4: We also ensure to use condom before having sex with our clients. In some cases, the clients usually use style to tear the condom, but we usually ensure they use condom before we have sex with them.

Speaker 5: Sometimes, I usually do scan if I have some stomach ache

Speaker 6: In case of any sickness, most times we buy medications for ourselves maybe for infection.

Speaker 7: Most times we use condoms and turn down clients who don't want to use condom

Speaker 8: In cases where condom mistakenly burst, we take some medications like PREP, PEP, gin

Speaker 9: Some NGOs usually come to test us in our brothels

ECONOMIC SUSTENANCE

Do you think the money generated from sex work is enough to meet your needs?

Speaker 1: No, the money we usually generate from our business is not enough to meet our needs

Speaker 2: At times, we might go some days without having clients

Speaker 3: There are times, the money we make is just for feeding and we are not able to save, and that's why some of us have no savings

Speaker 4: No, the money is not usually enough though we earn daily

Speaker 5: To go into our business is very easy, but to leave is usually difficult. If I have enough money, I fit stop the FSW work

Speaker 6: No, the money is not usually enough though my plan is to do the FSW work temporarily and find other things to do

Speaker 7: No, we have so many responsibilities that we spend on, for instance, I am a single mum, and I need money to cater for my child

Speaker 8: The money is not enough for us

Speaker 9: No, the money is not enough to meet our needs

Speaker 10: Some of us have children that we take care of and the men don't care about the children or how we are taking care of those children. Most of the money we make go into feeding of our family

Speaker 11: There are times, the money we make is just for feeding and we are not able to save

How much are you able to save from the money generated from your sex work business

Speaker 1: We don't usually make up to 50k per day. But all those doing hookup can get up to that. It also depends on the location.

Speaker 2: Sometimes, I don't get clients every day. I have kids that I feed and the money is not enough, that's the reason we are on the street

Speaker 3: On an average we make #7,000 per week,

Speaker 4: There are some weeks we don't even save anything because of how much we pay on other services in the brothel. For instance, house rent is about #25,000, feeding and lots more

Speaker 5: On an average, I am able to save #1,000 per day

Speaker 6: Many of us have separate account for savings, but we are unable to save because of the plenty responsibilities

Speaker 7: We usually save small small, but it also depends on the location

Speaker 8: There are some weeks I don't even save anything

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND FSWS

Will you be willing to start a business if you are provided with the necessary support needed to learn and start a business of your own?

Speaker 1: Yes, we are willing to learn and start a business to serve as a side hustle

Speaker 2: yes, I want to learn a business that will make me get money to move out of the brothel

Speaker 3: Any work I see, I can do, and this learning of business will not affect my brothel work

Speaker 4: Yes, we are willing to learn and start a business

Speaker 5: Yes, we are willing to start a business. I love business a lot but I don't have money to start

Speaker 6: Yes, we are willing to do business. I get business wey I dey do before

Speaker 7: Yes, I want to leave the street. I want to upgrade my business

Are you willing to learn how to improve or boost your income by learning a business and undergo training on saving culture?

Speaker 1: yes, we want to save

Speaker 2: yes, because some of us have bank accounts, but nothing is usually in the account, I want to learn how to save

What business will you be interested in learning

Speaker 1: Make up

Speaker 2: Hair dressing

Speaker 3: Tailoring

Speaker 4: Catering

Speaker 5: Nylon making

Speaker 6: Soap making

Speaker 7: Hair braiding

Speaker 8: I usually sell clothes before while I was in the child bearing phase, but my shop was robbed, I will like to continue selling cloth

Speaker 9: I am working with LAMATA but, we are not well paid, so I want to learn business

Speaker 10: *Food business and catering*

Speaker 11: *I have shop wey I dey make hair, I go there in the morning and in the evening, I go to the brothel, but I want to improve my skills in hairdressing*

Speaker 12: *Selling of wine*

Speaker 13: *Decoration and catering (Event Planner)*

Speaker 14: *Selling ladies wears like cloths, bags*

Speaker 15: *Selling of Clothes*

Speaker 16: *Selling of Provisions*

Speaker 17: *Catering*

Speaker 18: *Food Business*

Speaker 19: *Tailoring*

Will you be willing to commit to learning a business under the tutelage of a mentor for a stipulated period?

Speaker 1: *Yes, we are willing to learn and add more skills*

Speaker 2: *Yes*

Majority of other speakers said yes to the above question

These findings represent the feedback provided by women during focused group discussions, offering valuable insights into their challenges and suggesting areas where Vision Spring Initiatives could provide interventions.

3. I have a shop where I make hair. I go there in the mornings and go to sex work business in the evenings but I want to improve my skills in hairdressing.

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES, LIVES AND JOURNEY OF VULNERABLE WOMEN THROUGH VSI LENS - PROJECT EMPOWERHER

Before VSI conducted the needs assessment, we recognized the importance of providing comprehensive training in Human Rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Business Management, and fostering a savings culture. To achieve this, we enlisted the expertise of a finance and business consultant. The training sessions were conducted in two batches to accommodate the significant number of women expressing interest in the program. The primary goal was to empower these women by imparting knowledge about their human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, and financial and economic literacy.

Let's explore the experiences, lives and journey of these women...

Stigmatization, Discrimination and Victimization

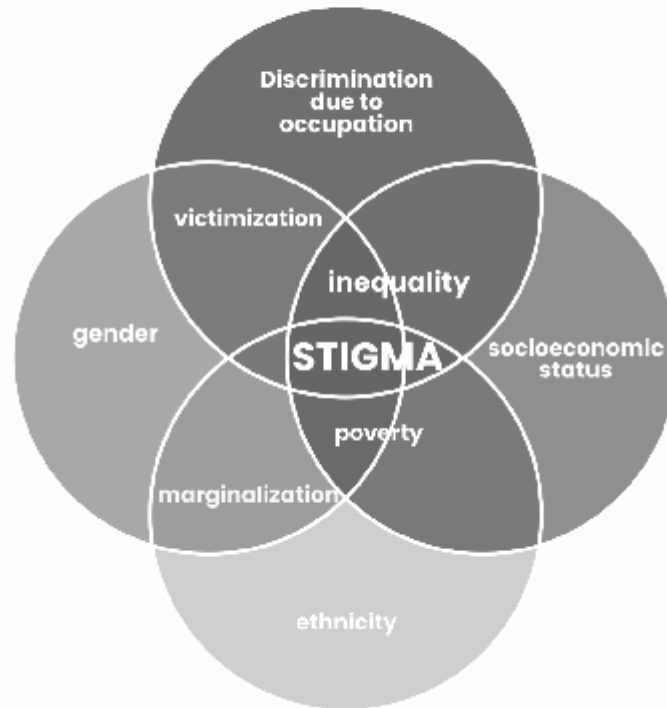
Addressing the pervasive stigma surrounding the sex industry is paramount, as it permeates every facet of this complex landscape. From shaping legislative frameworks to influencing law enforcement practices, stigma dictates the treatment of sex workers and significantly impacts their overall well-being.

The consequences of stigma go far beyond legal and enforcement issues, altering the nature of interactions between sex workers and various stakeholders who are critical to their health and livelihoods. Whether dealing with police officers, healthcare providers, outreach workers, welfare agents, landlords, clients, family members, friends, or intimate partners, stigma casts a long shadow, amplifying pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Despite its tremendous implications, many people are still unaware of stigma's insidious repercussions, both direct and indirect. This lack of comprehension highlights the critical need for increased awareness and focused initiatives to eliminate stigma and its far-reaching implications for marginalized individuals and communities.

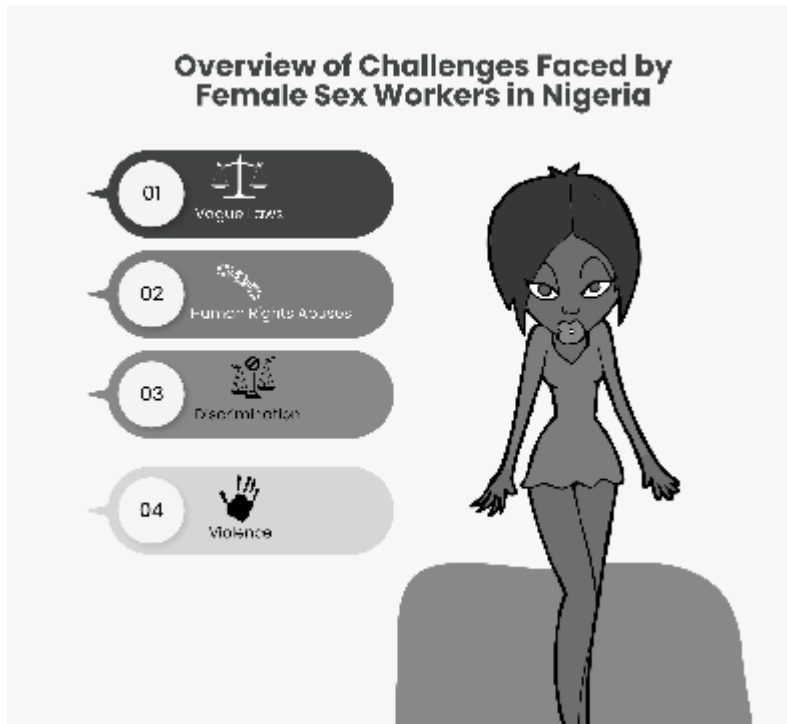
Numerous researchers assert that sex workers often bear the brunt of discrimination due to being unfairly scapegoated for various societal issues, such as the perceived disintegration of traditional family structures, the spread of sexually transmitted infections (particularly HIV/AIDS), rising urban crime rates (especially drug-related offenses), and the perceived corruption or moral decay of young people.

FACTORS THAT LEAD TO STIGMA IN SEX WORK



While the roots of stigmatization against sex work may stem from deeply rooted norms surrounding sexuality, the industry has become entangled in a web of other prejudices, aggravated by the fact that many individuals engaged in sex work face discrimination on multiple fronts. These intersecting stigmas, whether tied to occupation, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, create formidable barriers to accessing essential resources. Consequently, those combating such compounded marginalization find themselves ill-equipped to mitigate the detrimental effects of intersecting stigmas on their well-being and social integration.

This has rendered these women susceptible to further victimization and discrimination, and outright violation of their rights, and lack of access to medical and social support and services that improve their standard of living. As a result, these women often face a cycle of marginalization and inequality, which hinders their ability to escape poverty and improve their overall well-being. Additionally, the lack of awareness and understanding about their unique challenges further perpetuates the systemic barriers they encounter on a daily basis.



Human Rights Violation by Law Enforcement Agents (Police)

The Nigerian police are not trusted by the population they undertook to protect because they often assault, manipulate, exploit, and humiliate citizens as a form of intimidation to achieve personal gains, especially from those who are involved in activities like sex work. Many FSWs in Nigeria do not trust the police because members of law enforcement subject them to unjust assaults, public humiliation, coercion aimed at obtaining bribes, and stripping them of their personal property. Previous research has also shown police brutality as a regular form of (violence) experienced by sex workers in their daily lives, and police personnel typically mistreat them when they are arrested.

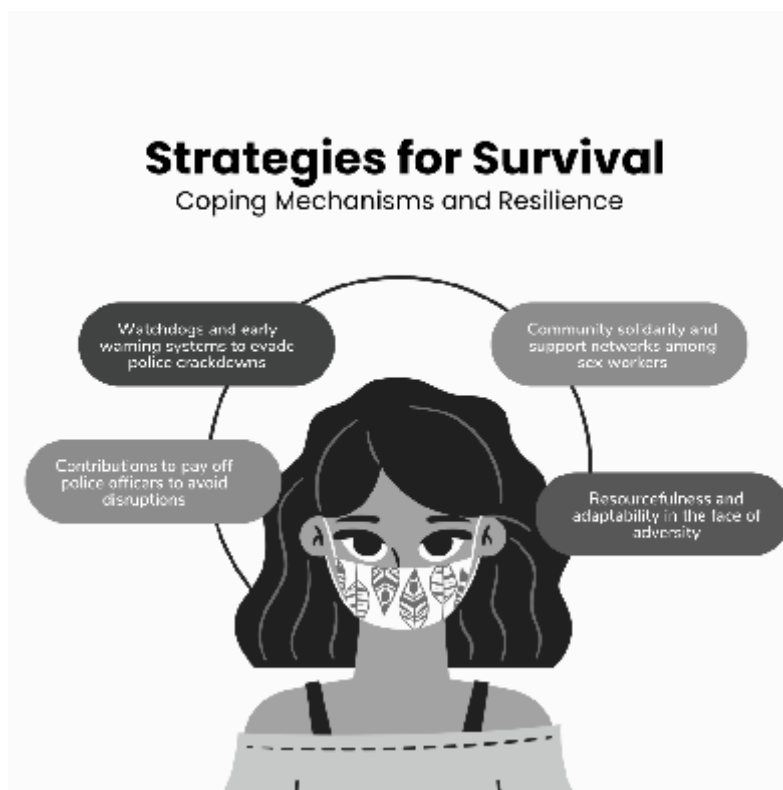


They beat, assault, and rape those in custody, and they threaten to shoot anyone who tries to escape. Thus, police violence and threats of execution appear to have instilled fear in some of them. Although they all see fear as a part of their job and daily life, many appear to be scared of getting beaten up by police officers. Accordingly, the majority of them mentioned that they were willing to comply with officers' instructions to prevent beatings, but they perceive police actions to be an infringement on their fundamental rights.

Speaking with our beneficiaries, we learned that the police “raid” their brothels, harass them claiming they are hiding “yahoo boys” and criminals in their rooms using it as a means to intrude their privacy and go as far as arresting them and demanding bribes. If they are unable to pay their way out, some of them are compelled to have sex with the police officers to secure their release.

“The police usually abuse us too, they usually raid our brothels just to take advantage of us and exploit us by collecting money from us.”

Sex workers employ strategies to evade police crackdowns. They disclosed that they enlist the help of “watchdogs,” whom they compensate to alert them via phone of police presence. These watchdogs typically include local traders, street individuals, and shop owners with whom they interact regularly. Positioned near the entrances of streets or junctions near brothels, these watchdogs serve as early warning systems.



Furthermore, our beneficiaries reported instances of collusion between police and sex workers during crackdowns. They revealed that, in order to avoid frequent raids and arrests, they appoint a representative among themselves to collect contributions. This individual then allocates funds to pay off police officers, thereby preventing disruptions to their operations.

Human Rights Violation by Clients and Hotel/Brothel Owners/Managers

The project beneficiaries shared harrowing accounts of rights violations perpetrated by both their clients and the managers/owners of hotels and brothels. They have recounted instances of theft, physical and emotional abuse, and even sexual assault at the hands of some clients. Shockingly, some clients have resorted to coercive tactics, refusing to use condoms or prolonging sexual encounters beyond consent, often aided by the consumption of drugs and alcohol to enhance their stamina.

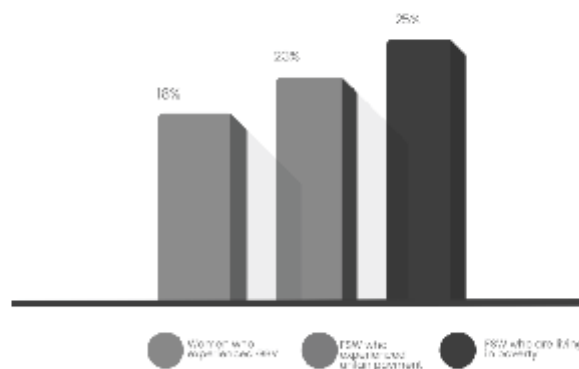
“Yes, we usually experience cases of fight. It happened to me once, the guy had sex with me, and didn't release, he requested for his money, I had to pay him back to stop the quarrel.”

“Yes, it happened to me. A customer came to me one afternoon, gave me #1000 for my services. It happened that the money was fake, I have been collecting such money for a while and I accused him of spending fake money for me. It turned into a quarrel and nobody could defend me and I was at a loss because I couldn't spend the money.”

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

18%

Of Female Sex Workers reported experiencing gender-based violence from their male clients.



SOURCE: VSI

Moreover, these women have lamented the lack of recourse when faced with payment disputes, as managers/owners often compel them to provide additional services or issue refunds to dissatisfied clients. Disturbingly, they also reported being exploited by managers/owners who exploit their labor without compensation, coercing them into entertaining visiting guests without remuneration. These accounts paint a distressing picture of exploitation and abuse within the sex industry, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive measures to safeguard the rights and well-being of sex workers.

“The brothels have a fine book, if we misbehave to our clients we will be fined, so most of the time we usually let our clients go even if they abuse us.”

“To avoid problems sometimes, I usually return money to my clients when issues of quarrel occur because there is no one to defend us. Even if I report such cases to the management, they won't address the situation well.”

Throughout the training, it became evident that the participants lacked awareness of the laws and policies safeguarding their rights, as outlined in the constitution. Shockingly, many had experienced various forms of abuse and violation from law enforcement agents, brothel owners, managers, and even some clients. The training served as a crucial tool to enlighten the women about their rights, particularly those outlined in the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015. It shed light on the myriad of challenges and struggles faced by these women in their daily lives and trades.

Discrimination by Healthcare Providers

Sex workers often encounter pervasive discrimination and stigmatization when seeking healthcare services, which amplifies existing barriers to accessing essential care. Healthcare providers, influenced by societal biases and misconceptions surrounding sex work, may exhibit judgmental attitudes and discriminatory behavior towards this marginalized population. The criminalisation and stigmatisation of sex work influence community perceptions of sex workers, reinforcing stigma and discrimination both in healthcare settings and in day-to-day life. As a result, sex workers frequently experience reluctance to seek medical assistance, fearing mistreatment or condemnation from healthcare professionals.

Moreover, the intersectionality of discrimination compounds the challenges faced by sex workers in healthcare settings. Sex workers who belong to marginalized groups based on factors such as ethnicity, gender identity, or socioeconomic status often face compounded stigma and discrimination, further limiting their access to equitable healthcare services. This intersectional discrimination not only undermines their right to healthcare but also prolongs cycles of marginalization and exclusion.

Furthermore, discriminatory practices within healthcare systems contribute to the sustenance of health inequalities among sex workers. Discrimination can manifest in various forms, including refusal of treatment, neglect, verbal abuse, or even denial of confidentiality. Such mistreatment not only ruins trust in healthcare providers but also dissuades sex workers from seeking preventive care and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health issues, and other medical concerns, ultimately compromising their health conditions and well-being. Addressing discrimination against sex workers in healthcare settings is crucial to promoting health equity and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of occupation or social status, receive dignified and respectful care.

Stigma affects individuals and communities in varied ways, with discrepancies observed both within and across targeted groups. These disparities stem from the contextual and resource-specific nature of stigma, where access to key resources such as wealth, education, social status, and power plays a pivotal role. Additionally, the impact of stigma is influenced by factors including geographic location, historical period, prevailing political climate, and societal values. These multifaceted dynamics contribute to the differential experiences of stigmatization among diverse populations.

As a society, it is imperative for us to adopt a more empathetic and inclusive approach towards female sex workers. Acknowledging their integral presence within our communities, we must recognize, respect and protect their rights as equal members of society. This entails affording them fair treatment and ensuring access to essential resources and services necessary for their well-being. This includes guaranteeing safe working environments, facilitating access to comprehensive healthcare, and establishing supportive systems to assist those who wish to transition out of the industry. By challenging and addressing the stigma and discrimination surrounding sex work, we can strive towards fostering a society that is characterized by compassion, fairness, and equity for all individuals.

Throughout the training, it became evident that the participants lacked awareness of the laws and policies safeguarding their rights, as outlined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Shockingly, many had experienced various forms of abuse and violation from law enforcement agents, brothel owners, managers, and even some clients. The training served as a crucial tool to enlighten the women about their rights, particularly those outlined in the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015. It shed light on the myriad of challenges and struggles faced by these women in their daily lives and trades.

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights

The highest achievable level of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) represents a fundamental human rights, as reinforced by various international and national laws and statutes such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Conference on Population

and Development (ICPD), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These frameworks underscore the significance of sexual and reproductive rights, which encompass the fundamental rights of individuals to obtain information, services related to SRH, and the necessary resources and assistance to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, including decisions regarding the spacing and timing of childbirth. It is imperative that all individuals have the freedom to exercise their SRH rights devoid of coercion, discrimination, and violence. Furthermore, the global spotlight on SRH and rights remains prominent, evident in initiatives like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal number 5, which aims to secure universal access to SRH services and rights.

Sex workers encounter numerous intertwined structural obstacles that hinder their basic sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights, including their ability to access SRH services. SRH care encompasses various services, such as maternal and newborn healthcare (including antenatal, perinatal, and postnatal care), family planning services (such as contraceptives, fertility services, and safe abortions), and services addressing HIV/STIs, HPV-related cancer prevention, and other reproductive-tract issues.

The criminalization of sex work stands out as one of the most formidable barriers to accessing SRH care. It not only restricts sex workers' access to and utilization of healthcare services but also undermines their access to condoms, including their right to possess and negotiate their use, whether independently or as part of practicing dual contraceptive methods. Moreover, criminalization can hamper HIV testing, hinder access to social services and support, and elevate the risk of HIV/STI transmission as well as instances of physical and sexual violence. According to some of our beneficiaries, they mentioned that they hardly visit the hospital to access SRH or general health services to avoid discrimination. They would rather employ the services of auxiliary nurses or self-acclaimed nurses who visit them at different times to test and treat them.

“One day, I went to the hospital because I wasn't feeling too well and one of the nurses who recognized me as sex worker was the one that attended to me and she mentioned that the nature of my job is the reason for my illness and she made comments that hurt me. 'This ashawo work no go help you, e no good for you'. Since that day I told myself I won't go to the hospital again.”

“we usually call nurse to come and treat us in the brothel”

“We also have some nurses that come to treat us in the brothels and the price is usually expensive”

When we inquired further about their knowledge of SRHR, we discovered that their familiarity

was mainly limited to condom use, while this is commendable, we found a gap in their adherence to best practices related to STI testing, treatment, and contraception. This gap in knowledge and practice regarding STI testing, treatment, and contraception could potentially lead to increased risks of unintended pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections. It is crucial to provide comprehensive education and resources on SRHR to ensure individuals have access to accurate information and can make informed decisions about their sexual health. By addressing this gap in knowledge and practice, we can empower individuals to take control of their sexual health and reduce the prevalence of STIs and unintended pregnancies. Additionally, comprehensive education on SRHR can also help to destigmatize discussions around sexual health and promote open dialogue among individuals, leading to healthier relationships and overall well-being. We inquired with these women about their receipt of SRHR training or their willingness to undergo such training, and their responses were affirmative. Recognizing the importance of this, VSI took proactive steps to intervene by equipping these women with comprehensive information aimed at enhancing their quality of life.

“yes we have received education about safe sex practices, although it might not be comprehensive. We would like to be trained on safe sex practices.”

“yes, but we don't know it all. We would be interested in learning about our sexual reproductive health and rights.”

Economic and Financial Constraints

Economic and financial constraints often drive women into sex work due to limited employment opportunities and insufficient income-generating options. In many societies, women face systemic barriers to accessing education and employment, which restrict their ability to secure stable and adequately paying jobs. Discrimination in the labor market, gender wage gaps, and lack of affordable childcare facilities further exacerbate financial pressures on women, pushing them towards sex work as a means of survival. Additionally, economic downturns, job losses, or familial financial crises can compel women to turn to sex work as last resort to support themselves and their families.

Furthermore, the feminization of poverty places women at a heightened risk of entering the sex industry. Women are disproportionately affected by poverty globally, often due to factors such as unequal access to resources, property rights, and inheritance. Economic vulnerability and social exclusion leave many women with few viable options to sustain themselves financially. In such circumstances, sex work may emerge as a pragmatic choice, offering a source of income that is relatively accessible and potentially lucrative compared to other available alternatives. Structural inequalities and societal marginalization trap many women in cycles of economic hardship, pushing them towards sex work. Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual

orientation, and migrant status limits their access to education, healthcare, and housing, leaving them economically disadvantaged and prone to exploitation. In this context, sex work can seem like a way for these women to take control of their financial situations, despite the increased risks and vulnerabilities it entails.

Further investigation revealed that their limited income, compounded by poor earnings, was a significant hindrance. The women openly shared their struggles, highlighting the inherent unsustainability of their profession. Some engaged in additional "side hustles" to augment their income, yet financial constraints persisted due to bills and responsibilities.

"No, the money is not usually enough though my plan is to do the FSW work temporarily and find other things to do"

Notably, some of these women were caregivers to children and younger siblings who remained oblivious to their source of income.

"No, we have so many responsibilities that we spend on, for instance, I am a single mum, and I need money to cater for my child."

"Some of us have children that we take care of and the men don't care about the children or how we are taking care of those children. Most of the money we make goes into feeding our family."

One significant example is a 22-year-old female sex worker from Abia state, Southeastern Nigeria. She ventured to Lagos to visit a friend engaged in sex work, eventually adopting the trade herself. Supporting her younger brother and parents in the village, this young lady concealed the nature of her work, with her family believing she pursued a career in hairdressing, an interest she had previously practiced before relocating to Lagos.

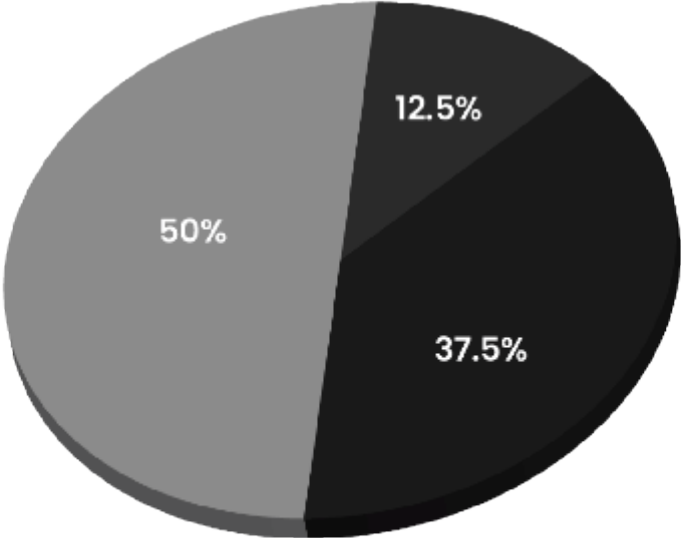
To assess their proficiency in business management and their savings habits, VSI probed into how these women managed their trades. For those engaged in side businesses (side hustles), VSI examined their business management strategies and how they navigated the challenges of running their businesses, as well as their approaches to saving.

The findings revealed a prevalent challenge: a significant portion of their income and earnings was allocated to various expenses such as brothel/hotel room fees, security, electricity, food, clothing, family support, fines, and police fees. Consequently, saving for personal endeavors or learning a trade proved to be a difficult and overwhelming task. In the contemporary, fast-paced, consumer-driven society, cultivating a savings culture has become essential.

"There are times, the money we make is just for feeding and we are not able to save"

A chart showing responses about saving money from sex work business

- SAVES
- RARELY SAVES
- DOES NOT SAVES



Recognizing the need for financial literacy, VSI equipped these young women with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective financial management. The aim was to empower them to make informed financial decisions, fostering independence in the process. This initiative not only contributed to their economic empowerment but also enhanced their overall financial well-being.

Furthermore, the training played a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality faced by these women. By providing them with tools to overcome financial challenges, VSI aimed to create lasting change. A financial expert was enlisted to conduct the training, covering topics such as budgeting, setting financial goals, understanding the importance of savings and long-term investments, initiating a business, and managing entrepreneurial endeavors. VSI also inquired about their openness to participating in vocational skill training, viewing it as a pathway toward self-reliance, independence, and a way to transition out of their current profession or as a means of earning extra income.

“yes, I want to learn a business that will make me get money to move out of the brothel”

“Any work I see, I can do, and this learning of business will not affect my brothel work”

“Yes, we are willing to start a business. I love business a lot but I don't have money to start”

“Yes, we are willing to do business. I get business way I dey do before

“Yes, I want to leave the street. I want to upgrade my business”

As an organization, we firmly believe that the impact of this training extends beyond the individual participants. The positive ripple effect is expected to influence their families, peers, and communities as they put their newfound knowledge and skills into practice.

PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT - PROMOTING WOMEN'S LIVES THROUGH SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

VSI envisions a society where gender and social justice becomes part of everyday life and we view economic and financial sufficiency as a means towards attaining this vision hence, the essence of this project with the support of EMpower. This project is aimed at giving these women hope and new chances at making informed decisions that will further improve their quality of lives and those connected to them directly or indirectly. The aim of this project was that at the end, these women are better equipped with skills, knowledge, agency, and resources towards attaining independence and leading impactful lives.

Following the completion of assessments and training, VSI utilized the gathered information and insights to formulate programmatic initiatives specifically designed to offer interventions. These initiatives are aimed at empowering and equipping these women with the necessary skills and resources to achieve self-sufficiency. The EmpowerHer project spanned a 12-month timeline, encompassing crucial stages such as needs assessment, participant recruitment, training sessions, and the selection of beneficiaries. The project also entailed the identification and assignment of mentors to chosen beneficiaries, the screening and selection of vocational centers, and the facilitation of connections between beneficiaries and trainers at their selected vocational centers.

Empowerment Through Training and Support

Breaking the Cycle of Marginalization

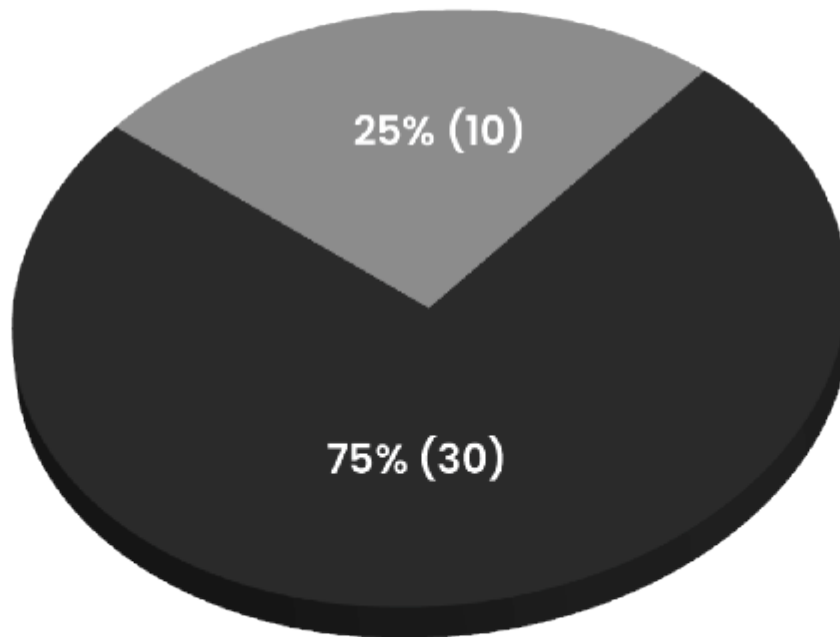


The initial phase, comprising needs assessment and participant recruitment, spanned one month. Subsequently, the training sessions focusing on business management, sustenance skills, and savings culture were conducted in two parts over a two-month period. Another month was dedicated to the selection of beneficiaries for vocational and financial empowerment, including the identification of mentors and linking them with the chosen beneficiaries. The process of identifying and selecting vocational centers, as well as linking and facilitating learning opportunities for beneficiaries at these centers, was carried out over the course of a month. The remaining months of the project were dedicated to the actual training sessions. Given the diverse nature of the chosen vocational skills, the duration of individual training programs varied. Some beneficiaries underwent training for three, six, or even twelve months, depending on the complexity and requirements of their selected skills.

- **Selection of Beneficiaries:** It was a challenge selecting only 10 beneficiaries out of the 40 persons trained by VSI. However, selection was made based on a few criteria; age, willingness, commitment, passion, definite idea of the skill they would want to learn, those who already had skills that needed an upgrade and availability.
- **Mentorship:** Mentorship plays a pivotal role in fostering independence and overcoming challenges, and Vision Spring Initiatives deemed it essential to integrate mentorship into its programs. The primary goal was to offer beneficiaries opportunities to build relationships

Women who participated in the training session and were selected

- NOT SELECTED
- SELECTED



beyond their usual circles, providing accessible assistance in navigating challenges and offering social support. The mentors also played a crucial role in monitoring and assessing the beneficiaries' progress in their respective training, providing feedback on challenges, opportunities for improvement, and contributing to organizational development.



Linking of mentors with selected beneficiaries

The mentorship initiative extended over a six-month period, although the mentors generously agreed to remain available beyond the project's duration. These mentors, dynamic and dedicated women, are deeply committed to empowering women and girls in Nigeria. Operating their own NGOs and volunteering for Vision Spring Initiatives, they have impressive track records in supporting the development and empowerment of young women and girls. Their selection was facilitated not only by their qualifications but also by their residence in Ikorodu, ensuring accessibility.

Communication between mentors and mentees primarily took place virtually, involving routine calls, check-ins, chats, texts, and the exchange of pictures. This approach allowed for continuous monitoring of progress, assistance in overcoming challenges, and the provision of emotional support when needed. The mentorship program aimed to guide and support mentees in achieving their goals and overcoming challenges, with virtual communication methods ensuring consistent contact, regardless of physical distance.

The outcomes were impactful, with significant improvements noted in the personal and professional development of mentees. Reports from mentees highlighted increased confidence and motivation, emphasizing the value of having a reliable source for advice and encouragement. The mentors, in turn, found fulfillment in contributing to others' growth. This mentorship program emerged as a valuable tool for fostering meaningful connections and empowering these young women to realize their full potential.

Meet Our Mentors



Nkechi Odebiyi

- Founder, Virgin Pride Nigeria Foundation and volunteer, Vision Spring Initiatives.

She is a trauma care specialist, a trained and certified therapist, Youth Coach and family reconciliation expert, a trainer, a writer and a mentor. Her Masters Degree is in Public Relation and Advertising. She offers free counseling training to school counselors and free therapy to students. She offers free counseling services to survivors of GBV.

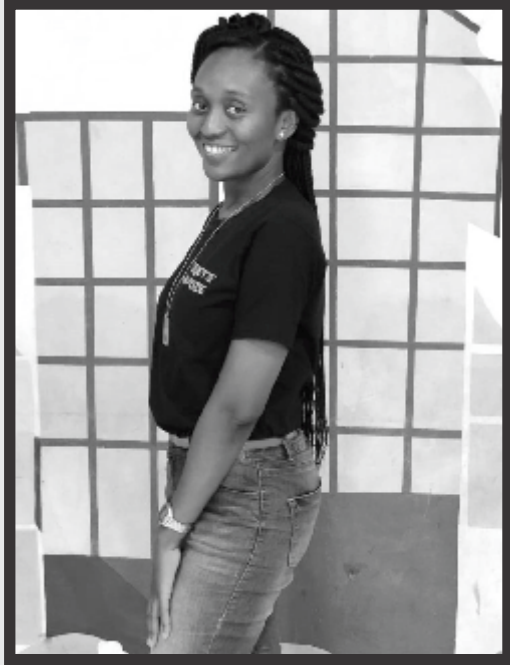


Bukola Owokodu

- Founder, Damsy Foundation

Damsy Foundation has been championing interventions in OVC Comprehensive Care, Empowerment, Health and Youth Educational Development as well as protection of children's rights since its inception. She is an extraordinary role model whose everyday life revolves around her commitment to helping individuals reach their full potential in life. She is also a Mentor, Business Coach and Entrepreneur.

Meet Our Mentors



Opeyemi Fagbemi

- Etiquette Consultant for Nigerian Etiquette for Professionals Society for schools and organizations and volunteer, Vision Spring Initiatives

Opeyemi Fagbemi is an Etiquette Consultant for Nigerian Etiquette for Professionals Society for schools and organizations and also a volunteer for Vision Spring Initiatives, she is an advocate for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for women and young girls whose interests spans gender equality to helping young girls make good and informed decisions based on their access to the right information. She loves working with young girls.

Linking and Learning of Beneficiaries at Vocational Centers

The beneficiaries were given the autonomy to choose their preferred vocational centers based on their proximity to their residences and the type of training they wished to receive. This approach ensured that the beneficiaries had a say in the decision-making process and allowed them to choose the most suitable center for their needs. They selected from a diverse range of specialized vocational skills to learn from. These skills include make-up artistry, nail design, hairstyling, fashion design, culinary arts, and catering. Each skill requires a unique set of talents and techniques, and the beneficiaries were eager to learn and develop their skills in their chosen areas. They were committed to being the best in everything related to their industry, to becoming experts in every meaning of the word. They have become proficient in their disciplines thanks to their intense dedication, and they are now prepared to take on new jobs and clients.

THE FUTURE

The future we envision for these women is one where they are equipped with skills and resources that will propel them into socio-economic independence and to lead an impactful life. Following the recruitment, selection and training phase, the last phase is providing those who successfully followed through their vocational training with start-up resources and capital to kick-start their journey. VSI with support from EMpower held a graduation and award ceremony for these women to celebrate their tenacity and accomplishments throughout this journey. The essence of the graduation ceremony was to inspire a sense of belonging, accomplishment, and self-assurance that accompanies conquering a significant milestone. We view their journey through the project's phases as a remarkable achievement, and this ceremony celebrated their dedication and perseverance.

In attendance of the graduation ceremony were representatives of MDAs such as the Lagos State Ministry of Health (LSMOH), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), community leaders, trainers and instructors of the young women, mentors, other NGOs, media, staff of VSI and well wishers. Through this project we aim to propel these women into self-sustainability, independence, and empowerment and we believe that they would also pay it forward and empower other young women - the ripple effect. We are not stopping here; it is not the finish line. VSI is committed to standing by our beneficiaries every step of the way, offering constant mentorship and support whenever they require it. VSI remains dedicated to closely monitoring their progress and extending assistance whenever necessary. With enthusiasm, we eagerly anticipate launching the second phase of this transformative project, as it allows us to extend our reach and empower even more vulnerable women across Nigeria.



EMpowerHer Beneficiaries at the graduation and award ceremony.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges

At the outset of the project, VSI anticipated certain challenges such as resistance from the leadership of the brothels/hotels, commitment and participation of the participants throughout the period of the project. Additionally, VSI also recognized the potential difficulties in ensuring the safety and confidentiality of the participants, given the nature of the project. However, despite these anticipated challenges, VSI remained determined to address the issues. VSI leveraged on its existing relationship and network with the National Sex Workers Association and was able to secure the partnership and collaboration of the women in participating in the project.

Another challenge faced during the course of this project was the commitment level of these women. During the focused group discussions, VSI was impressed with the show of enthusiasm from the women to learn a skill and to be mentored, but following the selection, linking and learning, some of these women dropped out from their vocational training. When VSI inquired as to why they dropped out or couldn't continue, few of their responses were; "I no fit stay for shop from morning to evening without making money, what if customer come find me?"

"I get children wey wan go school, I need to make money for their school fees and feeding"

These women revealed that they would not be making or earning daily income during the course of the training while they have responsibilities, so, this led them opting out from the training. They mentioned that while they would want to learn their selected skill, they needed a means of earning daily income to enable them sort their bills and responsibilities.

One of the young women who opted out mentioned that she lost her mother and it made her the sole breadwinner of her family, and she needed to ensure she made daily income to send home. VSI supported her during her mourning period through her mentor who provided psychosocial support, VSI also made visits to her residence for check-ins and to also persuade her to continue but she mentioned that she couldn't. While we had these responses, we also had those who were willing to go through the training period regardless of their challenges and these women have started earning incomes with their skill.

Another challenge we faced was the inconsistency of the young female sex workers due to restrictions by their chairladies and brothel managers. Because they're new to the trade, they are mandated to work extra to pay for expenses and cover up bills. These led them to opt out and focus on earning from the trade to cover bills and expenses.

Lessons Learned

It has become evident that our efforts to empower vulnerable women in Nigeria cannot be done in silos. Collaboration and partnership with various relevant stakeholders are essential elements in the journey towards enabling women to become self-sustaining and independent individuals.

Through VSI's experiences, we have recognized the significance of engaging with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and other key actors to create an all-inclusive support system for vulnerable women in Nigeria. By combining together resources, expertise, and networks, we can address the multidimensional challenges faced by these women more effectively.

Furthermore, strengthening collaboration allows for the sharing of best practices, innovative ideas, and resources, ultimately amplifying the impact of our interventions. By working hand-in-hand with relevant stakeholders, we can develop comprehensive strategies that address not only the immediate needs of vulnerable women but also the underlying systemic issues that perpetuate their vulnerability.

In essence, our journey has emphasized the importance of building strong partnerships to create sustainable solutions for socioeconomic support and empowerment of vulnerable women in Nigeria. Moving forward, we remain committed to building collaborative efforts that prioritize the well-being and prosperity of women across the country.

Recommendations

For Legislators and Law Enforcement Agencies

1. **Provide Sensitization and Training:** This will involve conducting regular training programs for law enforcement agents on human rights, gender sensitivity, and the provisions of the law and policies that protect women such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015). Also, Sensitize officers about the importance of treating all individuals with dignity and respect, irrespective of their occupation or economic status.
2. **Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms:** This will involve enforcing strict disciplinary measures against law enforcement officers found guilty of assaulting, exploiting, or humiliating citizens, particularly vulnerable groups like sex workers. Also, Establish independent oversight bodies tasked with investigating complaints of police misconduct and ensuring accountability or strengthening bodies that already exist.

3. **Enhance Legal Protections:** This involves ensuring that the provisions of the law and policies such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015), the Maputo protocol, etc, are effectively implemented and enforced, with specific attention to protecting the rights of vulnerable groups like sex workers.
4. **Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations:** Collaborating with civil society organizations (CSOs) working on human rights and gender issues to provide training and support to law enforcement agencies, and also facilitate dialogue between law enforcement agencies and CSOs to address systemic issues and develop strategies for promoting the rights and protection of vulnerable groups.

For Healthcare Providers

1. **Sensitization and Training:** Conduct and implement comprehensive and inclusive training programs for healthcare providers to increase awareness and understanding of the unique needs and experiences of vulnerable groups such as sex workers.
2. **Establish Safe and Inclusive Spaces:** Create healthcare environments that are welcoming and safe for vulnerable women, free from discrimination, judgment, bias, and stigma. Also, ensure confidentiality and privacy to build trust and encourage open communication between these women and healthcare providers.
3. **Advocacy and Policy Reforms:** Collaborate with Civil Society organisations (CSOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) to challenge stigma and discrimination, promoting laws and policies that prioritize the health and well-being of vulnerable women.

For Brothel Owners and Managers

From the experiences shared by the female sex workers during the focus group discussions, brothel owners and managers made themselves supreme heads. They are mostly men and a few women who serve as chairladies. The brothel owners/managers and chairladies assert power in various harmful ways on sex workers such as extortion, insecurity, and all forms of violence and embarrassment. They also leave the women at the mercy of their clients who abuse and violate them like stealing from and physically abusing them. The following are VSI's recommendations;

1. Eliminate unnecessary levies on female sex workers staying in the brothels..
2. Improve working and living conditions in the brothels to follow laws that protect the safety and health of female sex workers.
3. Informed consent must be a standard in the interactions between female sex workers and their clients.

4. Implement protocols and regulations that protect female sex workers from all forms of abuse and violation by clients.
5. Engage with Civil Society Organisations and law enforcement agencies to understand the needs and concerns of sex workers and collaborate on initiatives to promote their rights and well-being.

For Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

1. **Conduct Comprehensive Needs Assessments:** Before initiating any empowerment project, they should conduct thorough needs assessments to understand the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by vulnerable groups. This will help in formulating responsive and all encompassing empowerment programs for vulnerable groups.
2. **Collaboration and Partnerships with Relevant Stakeholders:** Collaborate with government agencies, CSOs, NGOs, community leaders, and other stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and networks in designing and implementing empowerment programs.
3. **Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:** Integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights training into empowerment programs, ensuring that women have access to information, contraception, maternal healthcare, and support for reproductive rights by addressing stigma and discrimination in healthcare, supporting capacity building of healthcare providers particularly in primary care in the provision of respectful and non-judgmental care for vulnerable women, including sex workers.
4. **Empowerment through Education and Skills Development:** Prioritize education and skills development programs that equip vulnerable women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to pursue economic opportunities and achieve self-sufficiency. Also, provide training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, savings culture, and business management to enable women to start their own businesses and be economically independent.

For Funders

1. Prioritize funding for comprehensive empowerment programs that address the diverse needs of vulnerable women, including access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social support services.
2. Encourage multi-dimensional approaches that recognize the intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization faced by women and address root causes of vulnerability.
3. Allocate resources for capacity building initiatives aimed at strengthening the organizational and technical capacity of grassroots organizations and civil society groups working to empower vulnerable women.

4. Provide training and support in program design, monitoring and evaluation, financial management, advocacy, and sustainability planning to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.
5. Prioritize funding for initiatives that amplify the voices and perspectives of vulnerable women, ensuring their meaningful participation in decision-making processes and advocacy efforts.
6. Support initiatives that empower women to articulate their needs, advocate for their rights, and drive change within their communities and beyond.

For Community Leaders

1. Take a stand against discrimination and stigma directed towards vulnerable women, including sex workers, by promoting tolerance, acceptance, and respect for diversity within the community.
2. Address harmful stereotypes and misconceptions through community education and advocacy efforts, challenging prejudice and promoting inclusive attitudes towards all individuals, regardless of their background or occupation.
3. Collaborate with CSOs and NGOs, healthcare providers, government agencies, and law enforcement agencies to ensure access to essential services, including healthcare, education, legal assistance, and economic opportunities for vulnerable women.
4. Support initiatives that promote economic empowerment and livelihood opportunities for vulnerable women, including vocational skills training, entrepreneurship programs, and funding.
5. Lead by example and demonstrate a commitment to gender equality, social justice, and human rights within the community, modeling respectful and inclusive behavior towards all individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social status.

For Media

The media play an important role in amplifying the voices of vulnerable groups, telling their stories and shaping the opinions and knowledge of the public. Negative reports and use of derogatory languages in coverage can have damaging results for vulnerable groups like female sex workers. The media has the responsibility to help counter bias, stigma, stereotypes and general misconception that stand in place of accuracy about the circumstances of vulnerable women. Below are further recommendations;

1. Media should adopt a human rights-based approach in news reporting.
2. Provide accurate and balanced coverage of issues affecting vulnerable women, highlighting their experiences, challenges, resilience, and success.

3. Foster inclusive and participatory media practices that prioritize the representation and inclusion of marginalized voices, including women from diverse backgrounds and communities.
4. Use the power of the media to advocate for policy and social reforms to address the root causes of vulnerability and promote the rights and well-being of women.
5. Establish partnerships and collaborations with CSOs, NGOs, and grassroots organisations working to empower vulnerable women, collaborating on campaigns, initiatives, and awareness-raising efforts and also leveraging media platforms and networks to amplify the impact of advocacy campaigns, mobilize public support, and hold policymakers and decision-makers accountable for addressing the needs and rights of vulnerable women.

APPENDICES

Mentorship Summary Report from Bukola Owokodu

Project Title: Empowerment for Vulnerable Women in Nigeria: Providing Mentorship, Business Sustenance Skills & Empowerment For Women In Nigeria

Project Overview:

The project titled "Empowerment for Vulnerable Women in Nigeria: Providing Mentorship, Business Sustenance Skills & Empowerment for Women in Nigeria," aims to empower vulnerable young women through various means such as providing access to resources, vocational training, startup capital, and social support. As a mentor, it has been my privilege to guide and support two participants throughout this period.

Activities and Outcomes:

1. **Initial Meeting and Goal Setting:** On the 19th of June, 2023. The mentorship program began with an initial meeting where the participants and we had an opportunity to get to know each other better. We discussed their aspirations, challenges, and set specific goals they wished to achieve during the program.
2. **Knowledge Sharing and Skill Development:** Over the course of the training period, the mentoring sessions focused on sharing insights, knowledge, and experiences related to their vocation and business. We explored various topics including business management, marketing strategies and leveraging social media to drive sales. My Mentees actively engaged in these discussions, asking relevant questions and expressing a strong desire to learn and grow. At the first meeting with them, I helped Otete Sandra Anita to open an Instagram account for her business. ***The handle is dands_makeover.***



dands_makeover



8 posts

69 followers

26 following

D & S Makeover

- Makeup
- Gele
- Bridal Hair Styling

Following

Message



Highlights



3. **Emotional and Social Support:** In addition to the business-related aspects, a significant part of the mentoring program focused on providing emotional support. I created a safe and non-judgmental space for the participants to share their thoughts, concerns, and experiences. Counseling, support and encouragement were provided to help them cope with the challenges they face and improve their overall well-being.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** From June till date, I maintained regular communication with the participants via phone calls and WhatsApp messages. This enabled me to monitor their progress and provide guidance whenever needed. I also kept detailed records of their achievements and challenges to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Outcomes Achieved:

I am pleased to report that both participants have made commendable progress during this period. They have demonstrated a high level of commitment and determination towards their personal and professional growth. Some notable accomplishments include:

1. **Improved Knowledge and Business Operations:** Both participants have applied the knowledge gained during our sessions to enhance their skills and business operations.

Otete Anita opened her business page on the 19th of June, 2023 with zero followers, as at 27th of September, her page has grown from 0 follower to 47 followers.

Otete has improved tremendously and can now do makeup with little or no supervision. She did her first test on the 13th of September, 2023 and she passed. She surpasses her Boss expectation and was impressed.



Figure 1: The makeup she did when she started her training

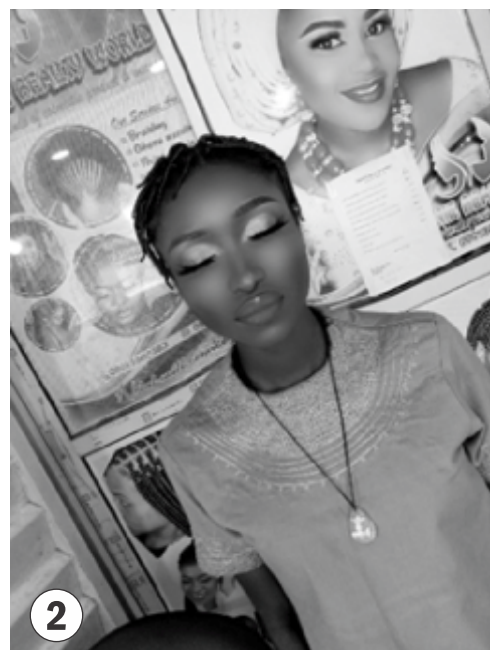


Figure 2: Her recent jobs



Figure 2: A major improvement over her jobs



Figure 4: Nails she fixed when she started her trainings



Figure 5: Recent jobs

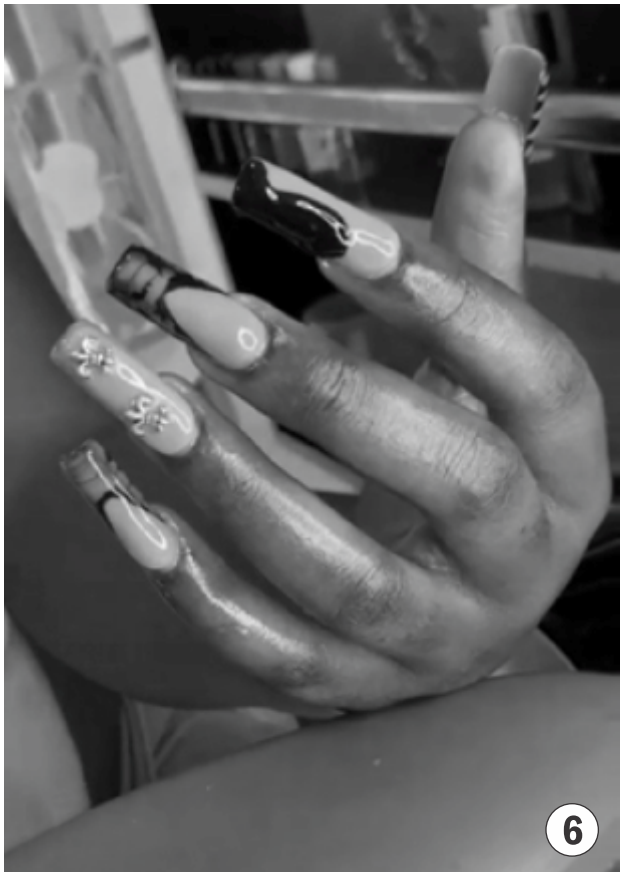


Figure 6: Recent jobs

Ayo Oluwadamilare has also improved tremendously. She surpasses her boss's expectation when a client came to the shop to fix her nails and her boss was not around. Her boss asked her to fix the nails. The client was impressed and her boss was wowed. This is commendable.

2. **Strengthened Emotional Well-being:** The provided counseling and peer support have proven to be an invaluable resource for both participants. They have developed healthier coping mechanisms, learned stress management techniques, and have reported feeling more empowered and resilient in their personal lives.

Future Plans:

As we move forward, the participants have expressed a desire to continue their journey of growth and development. They are committed and eager to leverage additional opportunities for vocational training, access to resources, and ongoing support.

Recommendations:

Based on my experience and our discussion during the period of mentorship, we recommend the following:

1. **Continued Mentorship:** Considering the positive results achieved thus far, I highly recommend extending the mentorship program, providing ongoing guidance, and support to the participants. A long-term commitment will ensure sustained growth and empowerment for them. They should still have access to me even after the project/mentorship period
2. **Assisting them with Startup Working Kits-** Based on my conversation with them, they do not have the resources to get a startup kit after the training and are unsure if VSI will provide working tools for them. I recommend that VSI should consider purchasing the major tools that they will be needing to start their own business after the training for self-reliance.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the mentorship program for vulnerable young women has proven to be an effective means of empowering them to develop sustainable businesses and improve their overall well-being. The participants have shown tremendous growth, resilience, and motivation to succeed. With continued support, VSI is confident that they will achieve their goals and make a positive impact in their lives and communities.

Pictures of Beneficiaries completing their Training



Ayomide - Celebrating the end of her training with staff of VSI and other well-wishers.



Anita - Celebrating the end of her training with other young women at her training center.



Blessing - Receiving her certificate of completion from her instructor and celebrating with her other colleagues at her training center

Pictures of Beneficiaries completing their Training



Zainab - Celebrating the end of her training with her instructor and colleague at her training center.



L-R Panel session with a community leader Chief Badejo, Mentor Bukola Owokodu, financial expert Olubusayo Ogunmade and VSI staff as the moderator Aanuoluwapo Owoseeni



L-R EMpowerHer Program officer Mary Udoh, beneficiary Faith Jude, trainer Jhennie, and representative of the National Human Rights Commission Adetola Sijude



L-R Project Director VSI Ngozi Nwosu-Juba, family of beneficiary, beneficiary Bright Egoh, trainer Kingsley and VSI staff Mary Udoh

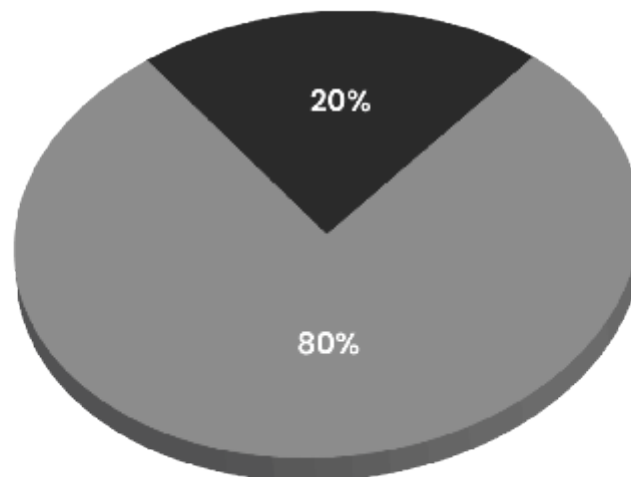


L-R Rep NHRC Adetola Sijuade, VSI staff Aanuoluwapo Owoseeni, Rep Lagos State Ministry of Health (LSMOH) Dr. Wuraola, VSI staff Mary Udoh, and mentor Bukola Owokodu

Result Infographics from Endline Interview

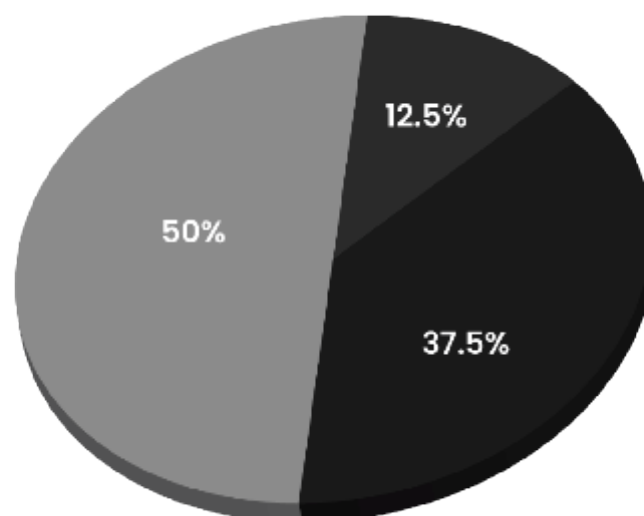
A chart showing the impact of financial literacy training on sex workers income.

- NO INCREASE IN INCOME
- INCREASE IN INCOME



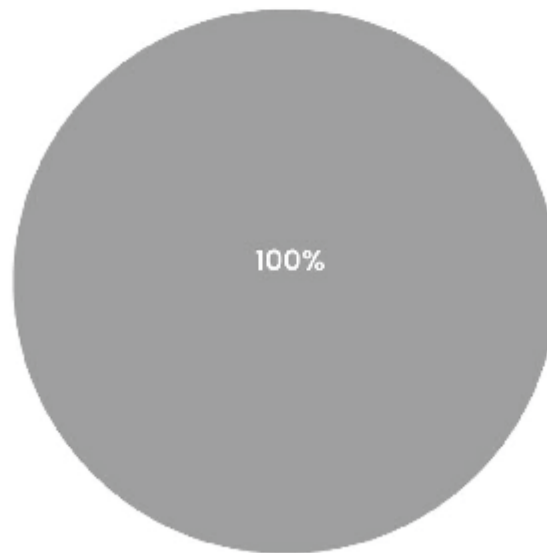
A chart showing responses about saving money from sex work business

- SAVES
- RARELY SAVES
- DOES NOT SAVES



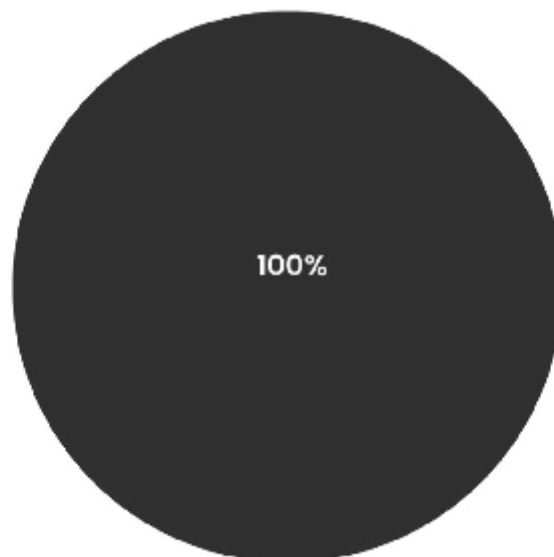
Did the vocational training program provide adequate support and resources to help you learn and develop your skills?

- YES
- NO



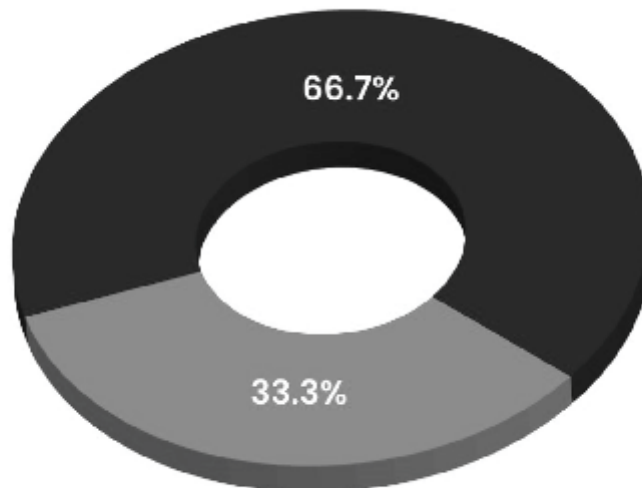
Do you plan to continue utilizing the skills you acquired through the vocational training program in the future?

- YES
- NO



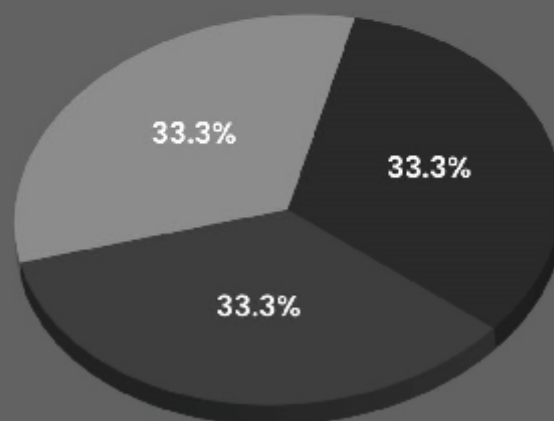
Have you received any formal vocational training before this program?

- YES
- NO



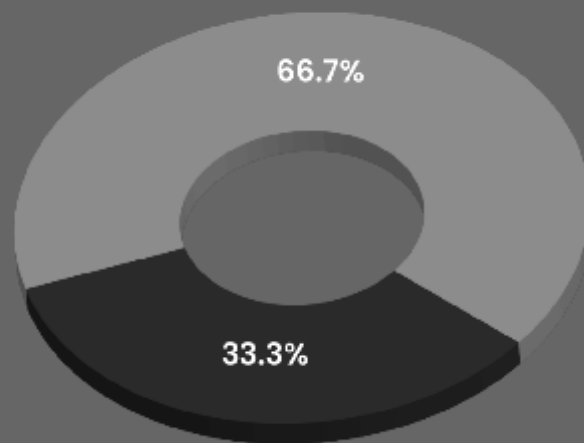
What type of vocational training program did you receive from VSI?

- CULINARY
- HAIRDRESSING
- BEAUTY THERAPY/MAKE UP



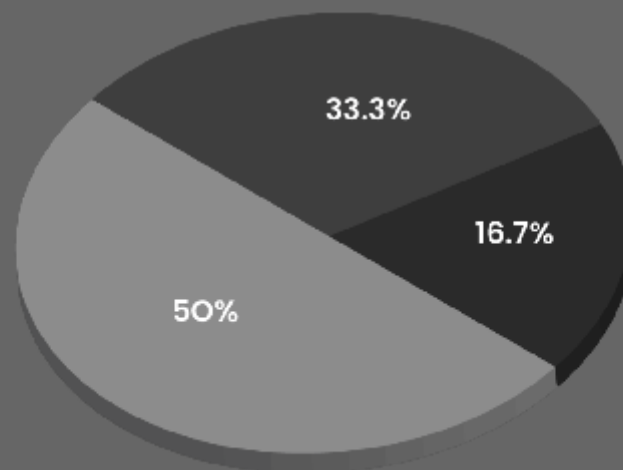
Have you had the opportunity to practice and apply the skills you learnt in real-life settings?

- YES
- NO



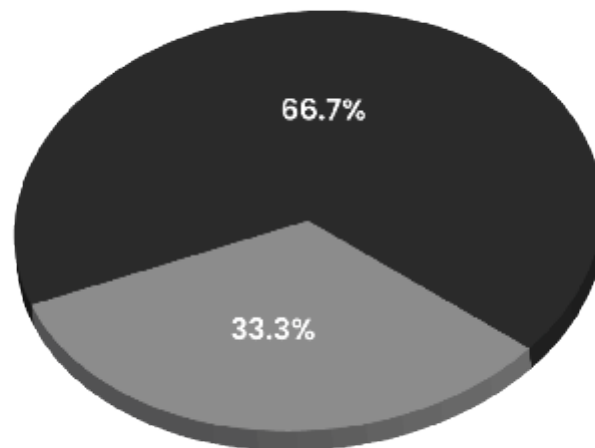
This chart shows the level of confidence participants have in performing the skills learnt during the vocational training program.

- VERY CONFIDENT
- CONFIDENT
- NEUTRAL



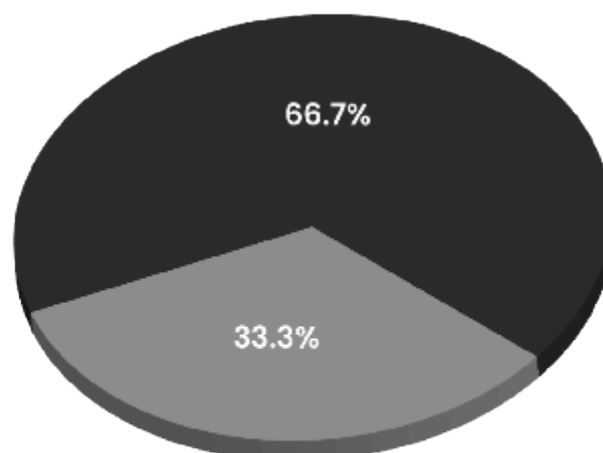
Have you utilized the skills you acquired through the vocational training program to generate income in any way?

- YES
- NO



How satisfied are you with the vocational training overall?

- VERY SATISFIED
- SATISFIED



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