

Romanenko Veronika

The International Centre of Social Service Studies
St. Petersburg State University

«Social work with women involved in commercial sex»

The prostitution issue in Russia is becoming more acute especially due to social and economic changes of recent years. Such changes provided for building up of a more liberal model of sexual relations in general on one side and spreading of risk taking sexual behavior including supply and demand of sexual services in form of prostitution on the other side. Economic instability, impoverishment of certain groups of population, gender disparities promote development of sex industry. Social phenomenon of prostitution in modern Russia is marked by following development trends: rapid growth of prostitution level, juvenation of prostitutes subpopulation, diversification of prostitution types. Acknowledgement of such problems leads to need for reconsideration of social institution responsible for development of measures aimed at prevention of harmful consequences of prostitution. Previously the prostitution issue belonged solely to competence of workers of law enforcement agencies, nowadays social and medical aspects of that issue become obvious, hence there is a need for a comprehensive approach to problems of sex workers. In particular women providing sexual services require a specific focus.

Commercial sex workers are subject to high risk of socially significant diseases, consume drugs and alcohol, frequently suffer from sexual abuse, are in state of stress, depression and neurosis, are stigmatized and discriminated in society. On frequent occasions these women have minor children who can not get due care and education and are subject to various risks because of mother's mode of life.

According to data of sociological studies conducted in 2003 of attitudes and practice of women involved in prostitution in Saint Petersburg these women have a passive attitude to own health state, not always use condoms, visit the gynecologist sporadically and have irresponsible attitude to other's health (practise sex without condom at presence of symptoms of STDs and HIV) thus promoting further contagion. They have insufficient knowledge of ways of transmission of STDs and hepatitis, as well as on transmission routes of the HIV.

At the same time there is no clearly formulated comprehensive prevention program for this risk group nowadays, despite generalization of HIV epidemics and increased incidence of HIV transmission through sexual relations. Attention paid to women involved in sex industry as a risk group is insufficient, only a few nonprofit organizations provide social work for such women in Russia. These nonprofit organizations are able to provide certain services

for reduction of harm to health of sex-workers, nonetheless efficient prevention of HIV/AIDS and a comprehensive approach to health, social, psychological and legal problems of such women would be possible only through cooperation with the state institutions providing social services.

Hence, accounting for high risk of disease, violence, discrimination connected with prostitution and absence of prevention of this phenomenon may negatively affect development of modern Russian society in general, especially health of the youth, women of reproductive age and their minor children.

Today there is a long-felt need of conversion of repressive control over prostitution, being poorly effective in prevention of HIV/AIDS to preventive control based on close cooperation between state institutions and nonprofit organizations, non-judgmental attitude of society and of the state to women involved in prostitution, gender equality, development and introduction of new HIV/AIDS prevention programs in this risk group. These programs should be aimed not only at creation of awareness and granting access to means of contraception and medical services for sex workers, but at changing of attitude to sexual and addictive behavior as well. Solving of the abovementioned tasks can not be performed without participation of social work, which allows not only help women involved in prostitution but also develop social policy for working with youth and families and preventing commitment to sex industry. Prevention of risk taking sexual behavior among the adolescents and young adults, establishment of equal rights of men and women, raising overall sexual culture of population and creation of awareness about HIV/AIDS and risks connected with prostitution will prevent expansion in number of people involved into sex industry.