

State Control, Female Prostitution and HIV Prevention in China

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ABSTRACT By combining analysis of archival documents and data from 245 sex workers interviewed in south-west China between 2003 and 2007, this article argues that the AIDS crisis has prompted a shift in state discourse about prostitution in China from a victim to a victimizer perspective. Concomitant with this discursive shift is the gradual intensification of control over prostitution. Our data show that the victim perspective overlooks the fact that sex workers are agents who actively negotiate their work and lives amid limited options in post-socialist China. The victimizer perspective, on the other hand, misplaces the blame of unsafe sex practices on sex workers, while in reality it is their clients who refuse to use condoms. The data further suggest that repressive measures against prostitution premised on this victim–victimizer dichotomy inhibit the ability of sex workers to negotiate safe sex practices and aggravate their exposure to HIV risk. The repressive measures undermine the supportive professional networks of sex workers, increase economic pressure on the workers and increase their exposure to client-perpetrated violence.

In his work *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that state control of the individual's body and sexuality in the name of public health can be a source of repression.¹ Historians have produced an impressive account of the historicity of state discourses and disciplinary practices related to prostitution.² These scholars concur that the issue of prostitution control cannot be separated from the rise of public health discourse as a technology of power.³

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1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

2 Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Prostitutes in history: from parables of pornography to metaphors of modernity," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (1999), pp. 117–41; Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Elizabeth Remick, "Prostitution taxes and local state building in republican China," *Modern China*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2003), pp. 38–70; Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3 In China, women who exchange sex for money are referred to as "prostitutes" (*jimi*) or simply "women who sell sex" (*maiyin funü*). In this article, we use the term "prostitute" when discussing state discourse of prostitution and the less derogatory "sex worker" (*xing gongzuo zhe*) when discussing the circumstances of our respondents.

The latest figures released by the UNAIDS report estimated that there were 700,000 people living with HIV in China in 2007, including about 75,000 AIDS patients.⁴ Among the newly reported cases in 2007, the government claimed that 37.9 per cent were infected through heterosexual transmission and singled out sex workers and their clients as high risk groups, among others.⁵ UNAIDS estimated that there were 127,000 female sex workers and their clients living with HIV in China in 2005.⁶ These figures are alarming, but at the same time need to be interpreted with caution because of what Mary-Jo Good termed the “aesthetics of statistics.”⁷ In her book on the cultural politics of AIDS, Sandra Hyde convincingly showed how political, social and cultural prejudices have influenced the surveillance, screening and testing of HIV among the so-called risk groups, and hence the production and use of HIV/AIDS statistics.⁸ While we have to rely on government statistics to grapple with the magnitude of the vulnerability of sex workers to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we are constantly aware that these figures have been produced within existing social contexts which frequently mark sex workers as contaminated and needing to be rescued, disciplined and controlled. The AIDS crisis has further accentuated the disciplinary discourse. This article argues that it has prompted a gradual shift in the state narrative of sex workers as victims of social systems to victimizers who spread diseases. The victimizer discourse in turn has justified the introduction of harsher measures against prostitution since the late 1980s as a means of disease control.⁹

State Discourse and Action before AIDS

After the Communist Party came to power in 1949, it made concerted efforts to eradicate prostitution. However, although its rhetoric in doing so was harsh, its measures were not intended as punishment. The closure of brothels and the detention of prostitutes was for rehabilitation rather than punishment.¹⁰ While pimps, panderers and those who forced women into prostitution were treated

4 UNAIDS, *China Country Progress Report* (2008), available at <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/China.asp>.

5 *Ibid.*

6 UNAIDS, *2005 Update on the HIV/AIDS Epidemic and Response in China* (2005).

7 Mary-Jo D. Good, “Cultural studies of biomedicine: an agenda for research,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1995), pp. 461–73.

8 Sandra Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of AIDS in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 37–39.

9 Allen F. Anderson and Vincent F. Gil, “Prostitution and public policy in the People’s Republic of China: an analysis of the rehabilitative ideal,” *International Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1994), pp. 23–36.

10 Yu Ji, “Gaizao changji chengwei xinrenmin” (“Reform prostitutes into new citizen”), in *Shanghai zai gaifang hou de shehui gaizao (The Social Reform of Shanghai after Liberation)* (Shanghai: The Party History Research Institute, 1999), pp. 184–85; Wu Zhang Gao, “Yizhang Shi xiaomie changji yundong de lishi” (“The history of Yizhang Shi’s prostitution eradication campaign”), in *Hubei de chengshi he shehui gaizao (City and Social Reform: Hubei)* (Beijing: Hebei Party History Research Office, 1997), pp. 335–37; Giangnai Shan, *Zhongguo changji: guoqu he xianzai (Prostitution in China: Past and Present)* (Beijing: Law Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 7–36; Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 304–24; Anderson and Gil, “Prostitution and public policy,” pp. 31–33.

as criminals and faced severe punishments, including the death penalty, prostitutes were viewed primarily as victims. In the words of the Party, they were “the most exploited women,” “fallen wanderers,” and the spirit of government action was not to punish them but to “restore to normal their distorted souls, eliminate their bad habits.”¹¹ The tone of state discourse at that time was one of sympathy rather than condemnation, and coercive measures were mainly seen as a necessary evil because the souls of prostitutes were supposedly contaminated by the trade.¹² Consequently, facilities where women were detained were named “shelters” (*shourongsuo* 收容所). State propaganda highlighted the role of these reform facilities in re-educating, training and nurturing (*jiaoyang* 教養) women to be self-sufficient new citizens (*xinsheng renmin* 新生人民).¹³ Responsibility for handling prostitutes was not placed with the judicial system, but upon designated personnel within the Public Security Bureau, the People’s Procuratorates and area members of the Women’s Federation. The ultimate goal was to instil the moral standards of the new socialist state upon these women and to reintegrate them into family and work networks.¹⁴ In legal provisions, such as the 1957 Act of the People’s Republic of China for Security Administration Punishment, selling of sex carried a misconduct connotation. Under the provisions of the Act, a woman caught prostituting could be given a warning, or placed in detention for a maximum of ten days and fined up to 20 yuan.¹⁵

The state’s rhetoric about prostitutes as victims and its legal treatment of prostitution as a minor offence rather than a crime continued right up to the promulgation of the country’s first modern legal codification, the 1979 Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China.¹⁶ Because of the conception of prostitutes as victims, the law unleashed severe punishments on their supposed victimizers – the traffickers, pimps and brothel owners. Under this law, forcing a woman into prostitution carried a minimum sentence of three years’ imprisonment and a maximum of ten (article 140). Enticing a woman to exchange sex for money, or providing her with accommodation in which to do this, could carry a sentence of five years or more, in addition to a fine or confiscation of property (article 169). Human trafficking carried a five-year sentence.¹⁷ On the other hand, the legal treatment of prostitutes remained a duty of the Security Administration Punishment Act under the Public Security Bureau.¹⁸

11 Ji Yu, “Reform prostitutes,” p.184.

12 *Ibid.* p. 185.

13 Gao Wu Zhang, “The history of Yizhang Shi’s campaign,” p. 337.

14 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 304–24.

15 Anderson and Gil, “Prostitution and public policy,” pp. 28–29.

16 Shao-Chuan Leng, *Criminal Justice in post-Mao China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985).

17 1979 Criminal Law of the People’s Republic of China.

18 Security Administration Punishment Act (promulgated in 1957 and amended in 1987).

In 1981, the Public Security Bureau issued a document to “sternly stop prostitution.”¹⁹ Although this document criticized prostitution for damaging the moral culture of society (*pohuai shehui daode fengshang* 敗壞社會道德風尚) and for constituting a threat to social order and stability (*weihai shehui zhixu de an'ding* 危害社會秩序的安定), the tone remained one of acknowledging that those who forced women into prostitution were the criminals (*fanzui fenzi* 犯罪份子) who needed to be punished, while prostitutes continued to be regarded as victims who needed to be educated and rescued (*jiaoyu wanjiu* 教育挽救). The document also continued to place emphasis on women’s ignorance as the main reason for their involvement in prostitution. It stressed the need to “patiently educate” (*naixin jiaoyu* 耐心教育) “fallen young females” (*shizu nüqingnian* 失足女青年). It also cautioned against discrimination (*qishi* 歧視) and intrusion into the work, study and life of those who had repented (*gaizheng* 改正).²⁰

State Discourse and Action after AIDS

Concomitant with the AIDS crisis, there has been a visible change in state discourse. In 1986, the State Council issued an announcement which asserted that its purpose was “to sternly uproot prostitution and stop the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI).”²¹ In this document, prostitution was portrayed as the main culprit for the spread of STI and subjected to increasingly severe legal treatment. Prostitutes and clients who were first-time offenders continued to be dealt with under the Security Administration Punishment Act, but this now contained an additional provision requiring the authorities to inform both the families of the offenders and local security bureaus.

For prostitutes and clients who were re-offenders, severe penalties were introduced (*congzhong chufa* 從重處罰). It is notable that the word “punishment” rather than the usual terms of “education” or “rescue” were used in respect of re-offenders. In a subsequent report entitled “Report about cracking down and uprooting prostitution and stopping the spread of STI,” this shift in state discourse to define prostitutes as criminals rather than victims was even more pronounced. Prostitutes and their clients were grouped together with other people involved in prostitution (pimps, panderers and traffickers) and categorized under the same term “illegal criminals” (*weifa fanzui fenzi* 違法犯罪份子). The report clearly implied that prostitutes were responsible for spreading venereal diseases by asserting that “following the increase of selling and purchasing of sex, STI also spread.” It further claimed that prostitutes participated in criminal activities by stating that “women who sell sex often gang together in groups of

19 Public Security Bureau, *Gong'anbu guanyu jianjue zhizhi maiyin huodong de tongzhi* (Public Security Bureau Announcement Concerning Sternly Stopping Prostitution) (1981).

20 *Ibid.*; Pan Suiming, Huang Yingying and Wang Jie, *Chengxian yu biaoding: Zhongguo “xiao jie” shen yan jiu* (Performing and Labelling: In-depth Study on Female Sex Workers in China) (Gaoxiong: Wanyou chubanshe, 2005), pp. 207–09.

21 State Council, *Jianjue qudi maiyin he zhizhi xingbing manyan* (Announcement to Sternly Uproot Prostitution and Stop the Spread of STI) (1986).

three, five, or even more than ten people according to their native origins. They are active in hotels and restaurants, and form a chain with other criminal activities” (*xingcheng liansuo fanying* 形成連鎖反應). It also distinguished prostitutes in old China from their contemporary counterparts by claiming that “the women who sell sex in contemporary times are completely different from those in old China who were mostly forced into prostitution for survival (*po yu shengji er maiyin* 迫於生計而賣淫). The prostitutes now mostly indulge in material comfort (*tantu wuzhi xiangshou* 貪圖物質享受), are lazy (*haoyiwulao* 好逸惡勞), and pursue the life style of parasites (*zhuiqiu fuxiu de jisheng shenghuo* 追求腐朽的寄生生活).”²² By implicating them in criminal activity, by attributing their engagement in prostitution primarily to their moral deficiency and by alleging their role in the spread of STI, prostitutes were reflected in state discourses as victimizers who needed to be held accountable for their actions.

The boundaries between crime and non-crime with regard to prostitution have become even more indistinguishable since then. National and local official documents issued after 1987 have begun to group selling and purchasing sex with selling and using drugs, human trafficking, organized crime and gambling into “criminal activities” (*weifa fazui xingwei* 違法犯罪行為).²³

The discourse of prostitutes as victims did linger to some extent, as shown by the focus on abductions of women and children during 1990 and 1991, the formulation of prostitutes as victims of traffickers and pimps by some segments of the government, and the enactment of the 1992 Law Protecting Women’s Rights and Interests.²⁴ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the victim discourse was gradually eclipsed by the victimizer discourse that found expression in an amendment to the Criminal Law in 1997. This amendment signalled an important turning point in the legal status of prostitution: a new clause stipulates that those who knowingly sell or buy sex while infected with syphilis, gonorrhoea or a sexually transmitted infection will be prosecuted and punished with jail sentences, criminal detention or public surveillance for a maximum of five years. Needless to say, this new provision targets and affects sex workers.²⁵

Another major means used by the state to combat prostitution is campaign-style policing (*yanda yundong* 嚴打運動). This is the use of concentrated efforts

22 State Council, *Guanyu yanli daji, jianjue qūdi maiyin he zhizhi xingbing manyan de baogao* (Announcement to Seriously Crack Down and Uproot Prostitution and Stop the Spread of STI) (1987, No.15).

23 Chengdu, *Chengdushi guanyu jianjue chajin qūdi maiyin piaochang huodong de tonggao* (City of Chengdu Announcement about Seriously Uproot Selling and Buying of Sex) (3 July 1991); Central Committee of the CCP, *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui 1992 nian zhengfu gongzuo baogao* (The 1992 Government Work Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the People’s Republic of China) (20 March 1992); Pan Zhihua Shi, *Panzhihua shi guanyu yange qūdi juminlou nei meironglou nei an’mo wodian de jianyi* (Suggestions for Uprooting Massage Parlours within Resident Buildings in Pan Zhihua Shi) (14 August 2006).

24 Gail Hershatler, “Chinese sex workers in the reform period,” in Elizabeth J. Perry (ed.), *Putting Class in its Place: Worker Identities in East Asia* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1996), pp. 199–224.

25 Susanne Y.P. Choi and David Roman, “Law enforcement, public health, and HIV/AIDS in China,” in Paul Harris and Patricia Siplon (eds.), *The Global Politics of AIDS* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2007), pp.137–54.

to target special categories of illegal activities within a fixed time for arrest and severe punishment. The most prominent nationwide campaigns targeting prostitution were organized between 1983 and 1987, and between 1990 and 1996.²⁶ They are characterized by large waves of arrests, swift trials without due process, heavy official publicity, public parading, mass sentencing rallies and public displays of crime scenes.²⁷ Arrest figures reflect the intensified control of prostitution since the onset of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. In 1982 a total of 11,500 arrests related to prostitution were made. In the first six months of 2000 the number was 297,361.²⁸

The wordings used in the high-profile campaigns provide further evidence of the shift in state discourse about prostitution. When the first campaign was launched in 1983, it meted out severe punishment, including the death penalty, against those who “lure, house and force women into selling sex,” but did not specifically target the selling and purchasing of sex.²⁹ The relatively lenient treatment of prostitutes and their clients reflected the pre-reform and early reform period conceptualization of prostitutes primarily as victims of sexual exploitation. However, in the second nationwide campaign launched in 1990, severe punishments were also imposed on “unrepentant (*liüquan bugai* 屢勸不改) prostitutes and their clients.”³⁰ This shows an end to the pre-AIDS crisis attitudes, where legislation and provisions treated these two groups of people as qualitatively distinctive categories, with pimps and traffickers treated as criminals, and prostitutes and their clients as minor offenders.

By demonstrating how the AIDS crisis has prompted the post-socialist Chinese state to shift its discourse and intensify its control over prostitution, this article does not intend to suggest that the relationship between the state and prostitution is a simple oppositional one. The Chinese state is not a monolithic subject; it is a complex institution with different stake-holders and a vast array of subjects who operate at different levels (national, provincial and local), who have a variety of interests and competing goals (such as disease prevention versus law and order versus income generation). While the dominant state discourse of prostitution has shifted, local law enforcement may not necessarily follow suit. In fact, scholars on prostitution in China have observed a pattern of private and public collusion in the operation of the entertainment industry, and the selective and discriminate enforcement of national law against sex workers working in different venues. In some instances government officials are major patrons of the sex industry in China, and many local governments encourage the development of the entertainment industry as a means of attracting investment and consolidating

26 Murray S. Tanner, “Campaign-style policing in China and its critics,” in Borge Bakken (ed.), *Crime, Punishment and Policing in China* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 171–88.

27 Allen F. Anderson, and Vincent F. Gil, “China’s modernization and the decline of communitarianism: the control of sex crimes and implications for the fate of informal social control,” *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol.14, No. 3 (1998), pp. 248–61.

28 Juk Dong Zhu, “The problem of prostitution in the reform era: an overview,” *Public Security Research*, Vol. 4 (2001), pp. 92–96.

29 Pan Suiming, *Performing and Labelling*, pp. 195–263.

30 *Ibid.*

their legitimacy. This results in government and police protection for some well-connected entertainment venues, and crack-downs on others in order to be seen to comply with the political order from central government. When selective police enforcement of national orders on prostitution is practised, the most vulnerable section of the sex industry, such as drug-using sex workers and street-walkers, often become the prime target of police arrests.³¹

Beyond State Discourses of Victim and Victimizer: The Live Realities of Sex Workers in Post-Socialist China

Sex work arises under specific structural conditions of industrialization, urbanization and rapid rural-to-urban migration.³² Although most sex workers face formidable structural constraints in both their work and personal lives, they cannot simply be construed as victims. The victim perspective is flawed because it ignores the agency of sex workers that manifests in their continued efforts to minimize the health, physical and emotional risks associated with sex work, their entrepreneurial efforts to maximize profits, their collective endeavours to formulate a counter-discourse challenging the cultural bias against them, and the novel strategies they deploy to manage a stigmatized identity.³³ The profiles and lives of our 245 respondents provide further evidence of sex workers as agents who navigate on the fringes of society in post-socialist China. Their agency is not only reflected in their role as breadwinners for their families and in their decisions to enter prostitution, but also in the numerous strategies that they devise in order to avoid contracting HIV.

Our research site was a medium-sized city (population 610,000) in south-western China. The research team identified 171 establishments providing commercial sexual services in the area. These included 63 hair salons, 35 karaoke bars, 19 beauty salons, 12 saunas, 12 massage parlours, 3 night clubs, 22 hotels and 5 hostels. Three locations where streetwalkers solicit business were also identified. With the assistance of outreach workers from an HIV intervention project sponsored by the UK Department for International Development, the research

31 Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, p. 120; Pan Suiming, Huang Yingying and Liu Zhenying, *Qingjing yu ganwu: xi'nan zhongguo sange hongdengqu tansuo (Situation and Inspiration: Study on Three Red Light Districts in South-west China)* (Gaoxiong: Wanyou chubanshe, 2005), pp. 80–82.

32 Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Kamala Kempadoo and Jo. Doezema (eds.), *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989).

33 Teela Sanders, *Sex Work: A Risky Business* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2005); J. O'Connell Davidson, *Prostitution, Power and Freedom* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998); Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Graham Scambler and Annette Scambler (eds.), *Rethinking Prostitution* (London: Routledge, 1997); Valerie Jenness, *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993); Joanna Brewis and Stephen Linstead, "'The worst thing is the screwing': Consumption and the management of identity in sex work," *Gender, Work & Organization*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2000), pp. 84–97; Susanne Y.P. Choi, Cheung Yuet Wah, and Kanglin Chen, "Gender and HIV risk behaviour among intravenous drug users in Sichuan Province, China," *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 62 (2006), pp. 1672–84; Maria Wawer *et al.*, "Origins and working conditions of female sex workers in urban Thailand: Consequences of social context for HIV transmission," *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 42 (1996), pp. 453–62.

team (the author and five female outreach workers trained by the author) visited 114 entertainment venues and successfully completed in-depth interviews with 45 sex workers between 2003 and 2007. We also conducted two focus groups with over 30 frontline workers in intervention projects. In addition, a questionnaire survey of 200 sex workers was conducted in 2005.³⁴

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic background of the 200 respondents from the survey. The mean age of the respondents was 25. Three-quarters of them were migrant workers (69 per cent intra-provincial and 6 per cent inter-provincial). Among the migrants, the median length of stay at the site was four months. Over 60 per cent had secondary school education or above. Around 70 per cent had acquired other work experience before becoming involved in sex work. Around 40 per cent of the women had a primary sex partner and an equal percentage had children. Twenty per cent were divorcees. Around one-third (27.5 per cent) were one of the main carers of their children and 11.5 per cent were their children's sole carer. Around 70 per cent sent remittances home regularly. Over one-third said that they were the sole economic provider for their families. Nearly all (97 per cent) maintained regular contact with family members. Slightly more than one-tenth (11.1 per cent) were drug users. Over 60 per cent were under severe economic pressure. With respect to entrance into sex work, nearly 80 per cent were introduced by relatives, neighbours or friends.

As the figures show, most women had some education and previous work experience in other fields. Far from the trafficked, abducted or kidnapped victims formulated by the state and media discourses, all except three were connected to family networks even after becoming sex workers. Economic factors rather than coercion were the main reasons why women started doing sex work. The following narratives provide a glimpse of these economic factors.

Doing this work is all for a living (*weile shenghuo* 为了生活). My son is 12 years old; my mother is 69 and my father 72. My ex-husband gambles and visits prostitutes. I would be happy if he didn't try to extract money from me. I used to work in a factory, but the wage was only 300–400 yuan. It was hardly enough (*genben bugou* 根本不够). After paying for my son's school fee and giving some money to my parents, I didn't have anything left ... but my son has an ulcer (*liuzi* 瘤子) that big [gesturing the size and position of the ulcer] on his left leg. I need to save money for his surgery. We have a mud house (*niba qide fangzi* 泥巴砌的房子), not a brick house (*zhuanfang* 砖房) and it looks as if it will collapse any time (*dou yao dao de le* 都要倒的了) ... I need money to fix it ... My parents are old. Old people get sick often, you need to pay for their medicine, and when they pass away, you need money to bury them, you can't just wrap them up in a mattress (*xizi* 席子)! (interviewee 4, streetwalker).

The engagement of this respondent in sex work was conditioned by dramatic economic and social transformation in the rural areas, which have altered opportunity structures in the job market, the value system, family structure and the role of the state in basic welfare provision. While there are more job opportunities for

34 Participation of women in this study was voluntary with informed consent gained from all participants. Interviews were conducted mostly in private and on a one-to-one basis to ensure confidentiality. All in-depth interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A little monetary compensation (approximately US\$6) was given to participants after completion of the interview or survey.

Table 1: **Socio-demographic Characteristics of Sex Workers Surveyed**

	No. of respondents	%
<i>Age (n = 200)</i>		
16–24	97	48.5
25–30	85	42.5
>30	18	9.0
<i>Migration status (n = 200)</i>		
Intra-provincial migrant	138	69.0
Inter-provincial migrant	12	6.0
Local	50	25.0
Mean length of stay for migrants (n = 154)	4 months	(SD 6.6)
<i>Education level (n = 199)</i>		
Primary or no schooling	71	35.7
Secondary	112	56.3
Tertiary	16	8.0
<i>Work experience before prostitution (n = 200)</i>		
Yes	144	72.0
No	56	28.0
<i>Primary sex partner (n = 197)</i>		
Yes	84	42.6
No	113	57.4
<i>Marital status (n = 200)</i>		
Married/cohabiting	72	44.0
Single	88	36.0
Divorced	40	20.0
<i>Children (n = 196)</i>		
Yes	81	41.0
No	115	59.0
<i>Care of children (n = 81)</i>		
Spouse and self	32	39.5
Self alone	23	28.3
Spouse alone	13	16.0
Grandparents	12	14.8
<i>Remittance home (n = 200)</i>		
Yes	138	69.0
No	62	31.0
<i>Sole provider for family (n = 200)</i>		
Yes	66	33.0
No	134	67.0
<i>Regular contact with family members (n = 198)</i>		
Yes	194	97.0
No	4	2.0
<i>Drug use (n = 199)</i>		
No	177	88.9
Yes	22	11.1
<i>Economic pressure (n = 200)</i>		
Yes	126	63.0
No	74	37.0
<i>Introducer to prostitution (n = 200)</i>		
Family	4	2.0
Friends	152	76.0
Neighbours	2	1.0
Nobody	30	15.0
Others	12	6.0

individuals, jobs for rural women are often low-end ones with wages that are hardly enough to make ends meet. Divorce rates are increasing and many men refuse to maintain their children after divorce. The reduced role of the state in the provision of education, health and old-age care means that families, particularly women, are forced to shoulder these burdens on their own.³⁵

For drug-users, sex work can become a means of survival. Although the provision of state subsidized methadone represents a great improvement in the state's handling of drug problems, current drug policy pays relatively little attention in helping ex-addicts to reintegrate into society.³⁶

Before I worked [sex work] because I needed money to buy drugs (*mai yao* 買藥). Now my husband and I both use methadone. It costs at least 600 yuan a month, and then we need money for food and rent. The minimum living cost (*shenghuo fei* 生活費) is 1,500 yuan. We don't have work. We get some social security (*shebao* 社保), which is 140 yuan a month ... That is why I need to do this [sex work] (interviewee 39, drug-using streetwalker).

Turning to working conditions, 10 per cent of the women surveyed were streetwalkers (Table 2). The majority (89.5 per cent) worked indoors. The mean age of first sexual transaction was 22 years old. The mean number of clients per day was 1.5. Around 6 per cent of our respondents earned less than 50 yuan per intercourse. This group were all streetwalkers and would fit into tier 6 (*jienü*) of Pan Suiming's eight-category classification of sex workers in contemporary China.³⁷ Around 82 per cent charged above 50 but below 130 yuan per intercourse, and these were predominantly women working in hair salons, beauty parlours, bathhouses and saunas. They would fit into tier 5 (*dingdong xiaojie*) of Pan's classification. The remaining 12 per cent charged over 130 yuan per intercourse. This group all worked in karaoke bars and night clubs, and they would fit into tier 3 (*santing*) of Pan's schema. These figures suggest that the majority of our respondents were on the lower to middle end of the sex work spectrum.

With respect to the profiles of sexually transmitted infections, 0.5 per cent of our respondents were found to be HIV positive and 16.5 per cent were infected with a sexually transmitted infection. Nearly 80 per cent said that they were very scared of being infected with HIV. Despite their concern, only 43 per cent said that they had always used a condom with clients in the past three months.³⁸ Among those who did not always use a condom, around 77 per cent said that

35 Deborah S. Davis and Wang Feng (eds.), *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Deborah Davis and Steven Harrell (eds.), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

36 S.Y.P. Choi, Y.W. Cheung and Z.Q. Jiang, "Ethnicity and risk factors in needle sharing among intravenous drug users in Sichuan Province, China," *AIDS Care*, Vol.19, No. 1 (2007), pp. 1–8.

37 Pan Suiming, *Cun zai yu huang miu : Zhongguo di xia "xing chan ye" kao cha (Existence and Ridicule: A Survey of Underground Sex Industry in China)* (Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 1999), pp. 168–69.

38 Although 43% might sound low compared to rates of consistent condom use in the West (see e.g. Sanders, *Sex Work*, p. 160), it is relatively high compared to studies conducted in other parts of China, which reported between 15 and 58% (see Ruan Yuhua *et al.*, "Syphilis among female sex workers in southwestern China: Potential for HIV transmission," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, Vol. 33, No. 12 (2006), pp. 724–25; Susanne Y.P. Choi, Kan-lin Chen and Zen-qing Jiang, "Client perpetrated violence and condom failure among female sex workers in south western China," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2008), pp. 141–46.

Table 2: **Working Conditions of Sex Workers Surveyed**

	No. of respondents	%
<i>Workplace (n = 200)</i>		
Indoor	179	89.5
Street	21	10.5
Mean age of first prostitution	22.3	(SD 6.82)
Mean number of clients per day	1.5	(SD 0.93)
<i>Price per intercourse</i>		
Below 50 yuan	12	6.0
51–79 yuan	42	21.0
80–129 yuan	122	61.0
130 or above	24	12.0
<i>Consistent condom use with clients last three months</i>		
Yes	86	43.0
No	114	57.0
<i>Scared of being infected with HIV</i>		
Very scared	156	78.0
Scared	43	21.5
Not scared	1	0.5
<i>Reasons for non-consistent condom use (n = 107)</i>		
Client refusal	89	77.2
No condom	10	8.8
Unwillingness of self	1	6.1
Others	7	7.9
<i>Client drunkenness in last non-condom sex (n = 90)</i>		
Yes	36	40.0
No	42	46.7
Don't know	12	13.3
<i>Co-workers discussed condom use</i>		
Yes	165	82.5
No	34	17.0
<i>Co-workers supported condom use</i>		
Yes	186	93.0
No	13	6.5
<i>Co-workers criticized non-condom use</i>		
Yes	154	77.0
No	46	23.0
Mean number of co-workers stand by me	4.54	SD 9.8
Mean number of co-workers to borrow money	2.64	SD 2.0
Mean number of co-workers to discuss relationship problems	2.01	SD 1.6
Mean number of co-workers to discuss health issues	2.86	SD 2.2
<i>HIV</i>		
Positive	1	0.5
Negative	199	99.5
<i>STD</i>		
Infected	33	16.5
Non-infected	167	83.5

client refusal was the main reason. Around 20 per cent cited client drunkenness as the main reason for the last non-condom commercial sex.

This group of women was extremely vulnerable to client-perpetrated violence (Table 3). Over two-thirds of the respondents (68.4 per cent) reported that they had experienced some form of abuse from clients in the previous year. Among them, 63.5 per cent reported verbal abuse and 32 per cent reported physical violence (26.5 per cent were pelted with objects/pushed/shoved/grabbed/slapped, 15.6 per cent were hit with fists or bitten, 8.6 per cent were threatened with a weapon, 10.1 per cent were choked, 6.5 per cent were attacked with a weapon). With regard to sexual violence, a staggering 48.5 per cent were victimized by at least one form of sexual violence: 33.5 per cent were threatened into providing oral sex, 20.5 per cent were forced (forced is defined as the use of physical violence) to have oral sex, 8.5 per cent were threatened into providing anal sex, 7 per cent were forced to have anal sex, 33 per cent were threatened into having sex when they wanted to terminate the transaction, and 23 per cent were forced to have sex when they wanted to terminate the transaction.

The finding that the responsibility for the practice of unsafe sex lies mainly with clients contrasts strongly with state discourse which depicts sex workers as victimizers who are responsible for the spread of STI, and highlights the gender bias in this discourse. In fact, these women are exposed to the risk of STI because of men who place their own sexual pleasure above the health and well-being of their sex partners.

After a sex worker gains knowledge about HIV/AIDS, even if you don't give them condoms they will buy condoms themselves. Whether you have rice to eat or not is a more important problem (*chifan wenti geng zhongyao* 吃飯問題更重要).³⁹ If clients refuse to use condoms, they [sex workers] have no other ways but to accept. It is mainly a problem of clients (*zhuyao shi piaoke de wenti* 主要是嫖客的問題) (frontline worker, AIDS intervention project).

The prostitute as victimizer discourse not only overlooks the role of clients in safe sex practice, it also ignores the complexity involved in condom negotiation. Condom negotiation is not only about HIV knowledge and attitudes of sex workers; it also involves an array of actors, including their clients and the gatekeepers of entertainment venues, such as owners and managers. It is also shaped by cultural and structural factors beyond women's control, including gender norms of sexual negotiation, norms of trust and intimacy, poverty, gender inequalities, social attitudes towards sex work, and government policies.⁴⁰

39 The Chinese like to use eating rice (*chifan*) as a metaphor of survival and livelihood. See Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, pp. 33–34.

40 Pan Suiming, *Situation and Inspiration*, pp. 163–214; Guomei Xia, and Xiushi Yang, "Risky sexual behavior among female entertainment workers in China: implications for HIV/STD prevention intervention," *AIDS Education and Prevention*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2005), pp. 143–56; Sandra T. Hyde, "Selling sex and sidestepping the state: prostitutes, condoms, and HIV/AIDS prevention in southwest China," *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2000), pp. 108–36; Susanne Y. P. Choi and Eleanor Holroyd, "The influences of power, poverty and agency in the negotiation of condom use for female sex workers in mainland China," *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2007), pp. 489–504; Tiantian Zheng, "Cool masculinity: male client's sex consumption and business alliance in urban China's sex industry," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 15, No. 46 (2006), pp. 161–82; Uretsky Elanah, "Mobile men with money": the socio-cultural and politico-economic context of 'high-risk' behavior among wealthy businessmen and government officials in urban China," *Culture, Health*

Table 3: Client-perpetrated Violence against Sex Workers in the Last Year

	No. of respondents	%
<i>Verbal violence</i>		
Yes	127	63.5
No	73	36.5
<i>Physical violence</i>		
Yes	63	32.1
No	133	67.9
<i>Sexual violence</i>		
Yes	97	48.5
No	103	51.5

Women's Strategies for HIV Prevention

Confronted with multiple health and physical risks at work, our respondents have devised novel strategies, such as screening, checking, vaginal douching, self-medication and negotiating condom use with clients, to protect themselves from STI. Client screening based on certain socio-demographic and behavioural markers is regarded as essential in order to reduce exposure to certain occupational hazards, including client denial of payment liability, perpetration of violence, forced unprotected sex and exposure to STI. Checking the genitals of clients for signs of abnormality and STI is another protection strategy women interviewed commonly use. By offering to help wash the genitals of a client, women take the opportunity to make a thorough examination of the client's sex organ before continuing the transaction. All of the 245 respondents interviewed reported purchasing disinfectant from pharmacies to cleanse their vaginas after each sexual transaction.

With increasing understanding about the transmission of HIV, many sex workers have learned that the above strategies are ineffectual methods for preventing HIV and cannot be a substitute for consistent condom use. They have therefore deployed strategies to persuade recalcitrant clients to use condoms.

If a client refuses to use condoms, I will say some flattering comments ... flirting works wonders (interviewee 20, hair salon).

I will say, "What will happen if you get a disease and pass it to your wife?" I tell them they are out to have fun, not to get sick (interviewee 2, karaoke bar).

footnote continued

and *Sexuality*, Vol. 10, No. 8 (2008), pp. 801–14; Carole Campbell, "Male gender roles and sexuality: implications for women's AIDS risk and prevention," *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 41 (1995), pp. 197–210; Leah Gilbert and Liz Walker, "Treading the path of least resistance: HIV/AIDS and social inequalities – a South African case study," *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 54, No. 7 (2002), pp. 1093–110; Quarraisha A. Karim, Abdool S.S. Karim, K. Soldan and M. Zondi, "Reducing the risk of HIV infection among South African sex workers: socio-economic and gender barriers," *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 85, No. 11 (1995), pp. 1521–25.

They [clients] complain that there is no flesh (*mei de ganjue* 沒得感覺) after using a condom. They said it was like wearing socks to wash your feet (*chuan qi wazi xijiao* 穿起袜子洗脚) ... I will say that using a condom can prolong the time of love making (interviewee 19, night club).

I scare them [clients] by telling them that thousands of people have died of AIDS (interviewee 11, hair salon).

If a client refuses to use a condom ... I say okay, if you don't care that I may have AIDS (interviewee 17, streetwalker).

The above quotations show the diversity of discursive tactics used by women. These included providing information about the health risk of STI and HIV/AIDS, their routes of transmission, the protection provided by condoms, the responsibility of men to protect their wives from STI, and the positive role of condoms in prolonging the time of love making. Although these discursive tactics do not always work, they demonstrate the resourcefulness and agency of our respondents and their willingness to practise safe sex to protect their own and their clients' health.

The Consequences of State Control Tactics on HIV Prevention

Official discourse often justifies intensified control of prostitution on the ground that the state is forced to intervene because of the increased threat of venereal diseases. In spite of this ostensible justification, our data suggest the reverse effect: the Chinese state's intensified control and arrest of sex workers since the late 1980s has become a structural obstacle of safe sex practices. Repressive measures undermine the supportive professional networks of sex workers, increase economic pressure on them and increase their exposure to client-perpetrated violence. These negative consequences may in turn weaken the ability of sex workers to negotiate condom use with clients, and exacerbate their vulnerability to venereal diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Sex workers working in the same establishment or location often share food and living quarters, and spend their waiting time chatting, playing mahjong, knitting and watching television together. These activities provide the basis for the development of a sense of community. The solidarity of such informal networks is further strengthened by native ties that channel women to work in the same establishments. For example, in our survey, the respondents said that on average they could count on between two and three friends working in the same workplace to lend them money in times of financial crisis, two friends to discuss relationship problems, and nearly three friends to provide information on STI. These informal networks also serve as conduits of information, and agents of social support that enhance women's ability to insist on condom use with clients and reduce their exposure to HIV-related risk behaviour.⁴¹ Information about effective means of STI and HIV prevention, proper ways of applying condoms,

41 T. Ghose, D. Swendemna, S. George and D. Chowdhury, "Mobilizing collective identity to reduce HIV risk among sex workers in Sonagachi, India: the boundaries, consciousness, negotiation framework," *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (2008), pp. 311–20.

strategies to prevent condom failure (slippage and breakage during intercourse) and methods to screen out potentially violent clients or clients who refuse to use condoms is circulated through these networks. For example, in our survey, 82 per cent of respondents said that their co-workers discussed condom use, 93 per cent said that their co-workers supported each other to use condoms with clients. Data from in-depth interviews also confirm the positive role of these informal networks.

We tell each other which one [client] was rude (*xiong 兇*), which one [client] was long (*cha 長*) [penis], which one last night refused to use a condom (*bu dai tao 不帶套*) (interviewee 3, hair salon).

That client had gone too far (*tai gufen 太過份*). He was very drunk, refused to use a condom, and slapped the *xiaojie* (小姐, a euphemism for sex workers). The owner (*laoban 老板*) was not there, so we [the other sex workers] argued with him and forced him to pay the bill and to compensate the girl 200 yuan (interviewee 31, night club).

I live with other girls. Many clients know that we do business and have money and will want to rob us. Sticking together is safer. If there are problems, for example clients refuse to pay or use condoms, we help each other out (*huxiang bang yixia 互相幫一下*) (interviewee 20, streetwalker, also peer-educator).

Furthermore, such networks are agents of socialization and social control.⁴² In our survey, over 70 per cent of respondents said that their co-workers criticized sex workers who did not use condoms with clients. A study in China showed that women working in establishments with established norms of condom use were less likely to experience condom slippage and breakage.⁴³ The authors argued that this was because women working in establishments with an established norm of condom use may receive training on condom use skills from their co-workers. Secondly, they may also be subjected to greater peer pressure to enforce consistent and correct use of condoms.⁴⁴ In establishments where all the women use condoms with clients, non-condom sex may be regarded as a lapse of the occupational code of conduct and hence be condemned, criticized or ridiculed.⁴⁵ Finally, clients visiting establishments with an established condom-use norm may feel a greater need to be compliant with the discourse of safe sex.⁴⁶

The formation of these networks, however, has been hampered by frequent police raids and arrests.⁴⁷ After release, sex workers may not return to the same venue for fear of becoming the target of further police action. The fear of police raids and arrests is part of the reason why sex workers change work

42 Sanders, *Sex Work*, pp.158–74.

43 Choi, Chen and Jiang, “Client perpetrated violence,” pp. 141–46.

44 Wiwat Rojanapithayakorn, “The 100% condom use programme in Asia,” *Reproductive Health Matters*, Vol.14, No. 28 (2006), pp. 41–52.

45 Sanders, *Sex Work*, pp. 158–74.

46 *Ibid.*

47 The lack of a local residence permit among our respondents is not a major reason for their mobility because, unlike in major cities in the coast, respondents in this small city in south-west China reported that police did not really enforce the residence regulation. See also Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, p.180.

venues and locations frequently, thus greatly reducing the stability and strength of their networks with co-workers.

I just arrived a few days ago. I will stay at a place for one or two months and then go home ... now the police keep a close eye on us. It is really dangerous. If caught, it is even more humiliating (*geng meilian* 更沒臉) ... so basically I change venues every one or two months (interviewee 16, sauna).

Our survey showed that women on average stayed in the same establishment for four months. The rapid turnover of women undermines the HIV prevention work of health personnel and outreach workers, because it creates great difficulties for outreach workers trying to build up a stable and trusting relationship with women.

Outreach work is very difficult. The lower the class (*dangci* 檔次) [of sex workers], the more suspicious (*jiebei* 戒備) they are towards us, probably because lower-class sex workers like drug-using sex workers and streetwalkers are often the target of police arrests. We need to let them know that we are not the police, we will not harm (*weihai* 危害) them ... They worry that we are undercover police (*gong'an jiaban* 公安假扮) ... Even if we give them money to talk to us, they still refuse ... The only way to gain their co-operation is to visit them once or twice a week, to say hello and give them some small presents, and to slowly build up the friendship (*pengyou guanxi* 朋友關係) ... The problem is that because of so many raids and crackdowns, the chance that we will find them again the next time when we return (*huifang* 回訪) is low ... (frontline worker, AIDS Intervention Project).

Police raids and arrests also increase the economic pressure of sex workers, in particular drug-using sex workers and streetwalkers.⁴⁸ Studies in various parts of China suggested that around 10 per cent of sex workers are drug users.⁴⁹ These women face tremendous economic pressure because they need to earn enough money each day to support their drug habit.

He asked me my price. We were still bargaining ... He said he would give me 50. He said he would not use a condom. I thought that maybe I could persuade him to use one after we arrived at the guesthouse. Yet he insisted on not using a condom. He said that it was uncomfortable. I didn't have any money at that time. If I still didn't get any money, I would definitely suffer the pain of craving (*fa duyin* 發毒癮) (interviewee 39, streetwalker).

In a climate where competition for clients is already intense because of the continuous supply of women from rural areas, police raids scare potential clients away, seriously interrupt the livelihood of women and put these women in an even more powerless position in negotiating safe sex with customers. In fear of losing their customers and suffering the pain of craving, women often succumb to pressure to have unsafe sex:

Competition is fierce ... The police ... are everywhere. How can we find business? If there is business, we need to take the opportunity (*zhuajin jihui* 抓緊機會) ... even if they [clients] refuse to use condoms ... If we don't make use of the time when the police are not around to do business, the police will return soon (interviewee 19, streetwalker).

48 Pan, *Situation and Inspiration*, pp. 82–86; Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, pp. 146–49; Elaine Jeffreys, “Debating the legal regulation of sex-related bribery and corruption in the People’s Republic of China,” in Elaine Jeffreys (ed.), *Sex and Sexuality in China* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006), pp. 159–78.

49 Y.X. He *et al.*, “Community-based survey of drug use and behaviour among female injection drug users,” *Chinese Journal of AIDS & STD*, Vol. 9, No. 6 (2003), pp. 343–46.

Some customers don't use condoms. They stay for [the intercourse] a few minutes. They say using a condom would take longer time. They are afraid of the police (interviewee 23, streetwalker).

The fines imposed by police once sex workers are arrested directly increase their operational cost. Many women incur debts from owners and managers of the establishments where they work because they need to borrow money to pay for police fines. The average price per transaction for a woman working in a hair salon is around 80 yuan, from which she earns 50 yuan and the owner/manager 30 yuan for commission. The police usually demand fines between 2,000 and 5,000 yuan. This means that a woman has to serve between 40 and 100 clients to pay back a loan that she borrows to cover a fine. Taking the mean number of clients per day in the research site, this means that a woman will have to work for between one-and-a-half and three months to repay a police fine debt to her owner/manager. This indirectly increases the control that managers and owners have over sex workers, and reduces their ability to resist pressure from owners/managers to accept clients who refuse to use condoms, or clients who agree to pay a higher price for non-condom sex.

Client-perpetrated violence is an obstacle to the practice of safe sex because it may be directly used to make sex workers comply with unprotected sex, or it undermines the control sex workers have over enforcing the contract.⁵⁰

We agreed 50 [approximately US\$6] for one [sex] ... but then he wanted me to provide oral sex ... I didn't want to ... he jumped on me and grabbed my head and forced his penis into my mouth ... no matter how hard I struggled, I couldn't get rid of him ... I was infuriated because he ejaculated into my mouth ... I felt so disgusted that I vomited ... Then I wanted to go ... He said it was just oral sex, he hadn't had the real one ... he refused to give me money ... when we were to have [vaginal sex] I asked him to put on a condom ... he refused and threatened to ejaculate into my mouth again ... I threatened to bite [his penis] but he said if I dared he would kill me right there ... (interviewee 36, streetwalker).

Before we started, he asked if it would be okay if we didn't use condoms, I said no. But then when we started, he just pinned my hands down and entered [pushed his penis into her vagina] (interviewee 16, sauna).

The illegal status of sex work means that sex workers are unlikely to report violent crimes to the police.

This work is illegal. How can we seek help from the police? We worry that they will arrest us ... Plus some of the police are rotten ... what they want is to sleep with us ... without paying (interviewee 36, streetwalker).

The police are a threat; I will never rely on them. Calling the police is like dragging yourself into fire (interviewee 16, sauna).

Because sex workers are afraid to report violent crimes to the police, perpetrators of violence are emboldened because they can be sure of immunity. A respondent recounted how, after raping her, her client boasted to her that he would never be arrested by the police.

50 Kendra Nixon, Leslie Tutty, Pamela Downe, Kelly Gorkoff and Jane Ursel, "The everyday occurrence: violence in the lives of girls exploited through prostitution," *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 8 (2002), pp. 1016–43.

He [the rapist] said “you are a woman for sale (*waitou mai de* 外頭賣的). At most the police would only treat the case as one of refusing payment liability (*dang de shou bu liao qian* 當得收不了錢) ... Today I did not take your life (*meiyou yao ni de ming* 沒有要你的命), even if I kill you, nobody will care.” I guess he was right. Even if I call the police, when they hear that I am a *xiaojie*, they would probably think that I deserve that (*huogai* 活該) (interviewee 8, streetwalker).

The illegal status of sex work in China and intensified police crackdowns increase the suspicion of sex workers towards the police and their fear of being arrested. This in turn inhibits sex workers from seeking police help in order to deal with violence, and increases the vulnerability of sex workers to violence. Sexual violence in turn exacerbates women’s risk of contracting HIV/STI because most sexual violence occurs in contexts without the use of condoms.⁵¹

Conclusion

Historical analysis of prostitution in Italy, Great Britain, the United States, France, Argentine and China all show that concerns of venereal diseases were one of the major motivations behind the institution of a regulatory regime and tightening control of prostitution.⁵² Mirroring these historical patterns, this article suggests that the crisis of AIDS and the rationale of public health have prompted a shift in state discourse from sex workers as victims to sex workers as victimizers who spread diseases. The victimizer perspective has in turn provided public security a *de jure* reason for forcefully intervening against prostitution in post-socialist China. Our data not only show that the victim perspective is fundamentally flawed, but also reveal the grave defects of the victimizer discourse. Furthermore, they question the effect of punitive measures in helping to combat the spread of STI.⁵³ Our data suggest that repressive control measures against sex workers undermine the supportive professional networks of sex workers, increase economic pressure on them, and increase their exposure to client-perpetrated violence. These negative consequences may weaken the ability of sex workers to negotiate condom use with clients and aggravate their exposure to HIV risk. Our data thus suggest that state control of prostitution may in the end exacerbate the very problem the state seeks to address.

Instead of locating prostitution in post-socialist China within the broader social milieu of rural underdevelopment in the midst of rapid economic modernization, the Chinese state views it as a “vice” and sex workers increasingly as vectors of diseases. Studies in other countries have demonstrated that interventions

51 *Ibid.* pp. 1016–43.

52 Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in history,” pp. 117–41; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*.

53 See also Pan Suiming, *Situation and Inspiration*, pp. 199–200; Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice*, pp. 204–06; K. Shannon *et al.*, “Mapping violence and policing as an environmental–structural barrier to health service and syringe availability among substance-using women in street-level sex work,” *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2008), pp. 140–47; E. Nick Larsen, “The effect of different police enforcement policies on the control of prostitution,” *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1996), pp. 40–55; Ivan Wolffers and Nel van Beelen, “Public health and the human rights of sex workers,” *Lancet*, Vol. 361 (2003), p. 1981.

that encompass three elements – respect for the human rights of sex workers, using the principles of harm reduction to address the structural obstacles of safe sex practices, and championing community empowerment by acknowledging the agency of sex workers – are often more effective in increasing the rates of safe sex practice, health promotion and disease reduction.⁵⁴ In order to use innovative policy initiatives to promote safe sex practices among sex workers and protect the health of this group of women as well as the general public, the post-socialist Chinese state thus needs to thoroughly re-examine its existing policy and its underlying assumptions.

54 D. Kerrigan, *Community Approaches and Government Policy to Reduce HIV Risk in the Dominican Republic. Horizons Research Summary* (Washington, DC: Population Council, 2004), pp. 1–49; Monica R. Biradavolu *et al.*, “Can sex workers regulate police? Learning from an HIV prevention project for sex workers in southern India,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 68 (2009), pp. 1541–47.