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A Border Context of Violence: Mexican Female Sex Workers on the U.S.–Mexico Border

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Abstract

Female sex workers (FSW) represent a population confronted with an array of intersecting social problems. We explore the case of FSW in Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez to understand the everyday violence associated with sex work within the unique context of Mexico. Life history interviews were conducted with 109 FSW revealing violent acts by clients and other sex industry employees (bar owners, police, other FSW). The risk of violence by different types of persons associated with the sex work industry varied by venue and geographic area. Moreover, the violence was shaped by the social structural constraints of dominant gender ideologies.

Keywords

female sex workers; Mexico; violent victimization

Female sex workers (FSW) represent a population confronted with an array of intersecting social problems, including violent victimization, infection with HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), psychological distress, substance use, incarceration, and poverty. In particular, high rates of physical and sexual violence are reported among FSWs (Beattie et al., 2010; Church, Henderson, Barnard, & Hart, 2001; El-Bassel, White, Wada, Gilbert, & Wallace, 2001; Miller, 2002; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2009; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Most occupationally related violence that FSWs experience occurs at the hands of their clients (Church et al., 2001; Farley & Barkan, 1998; Inciardi, Lockwood, & Pottiger, 1993; Kurtz, Surratt, Inciardi, & Kiley, 2004; Sterk & Elifson, 1990). However, sex workers report a wide range of violent victimization. For example, results from intensive interviews with FSWs in the United States reveal lifelong patterns of abuse and victimization. These include experiencing sexual, physical, and or verbal abuse and witnessing various forms of domestic violence during their formative years; violence on the streets from pimps,

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strangers, and clients; and experiencing greater and more severe violence from intimate partners than from clients or strangers (Dalla, Xia, & Kennedy, 2003).

Moreover, research has consistently shown that outdoor versus indoor prostitution is associated with higher levels of violence perpetrated by clients (Church et al., 2001; Katsulis, Lopez, Durfee, & Robillard, 2010; Miller, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). For example, Jody Miller (2002) found that sex workers in outdoor venues such as the street had more significant experiences of violence, coercion, and harassment than indoor sex workers in Sri Lanka. Similarly, Raphael and Shapiro (2004) found in a study of FSWs in Chicago that women who work in outdoor venues generally reported higher levels of physical violence whereas women who work in indoor venues were frequently victims of sexual violence. Nonetheless, although distinctions have been made with regard to types of venues and risk exposure, it is important to note that in general, FSWs are vulnerable to experiencing violent victimization regardless of where they work (see Farley, 2005).

Much research has focused on violence in the lives of FSWs in a variety of international contexts, including Canada (Lowman, 2000; Shannon, Kerr, Bright, Gibson, & Tyndall, 2008), China (Choi, Chen, & Jiang, 2008), England (Whittaker & Hart, 1996), India (Panchanadeswaran et al., 2008), Scotland (Barnard, 2008), South Africa (Dunkle et al., 2004), Sri Lanka (Miller, 2002), and the United States (Dalla et al., 2003; Kurtz et al., 2004). Understanding the unique contexts in which violence in the sex work industry occurs is especially important considering that rates of violence against sex workers differ across countries (Farley, Baral, Kiremire, & Sezgin, 1998). However, there is little information on the violence experienced by FSWs in Mexico and specifically along the U.S.–Mexico border. This is an important omission given that the U.S.–Mexico border is an area that has been recently associated with lawlessness and violence (Amnesty International, 2010). Therefore, we contribute to existing research by examining the distinct types of violence to which Mexican FSWs are exposed at work within the unique context of the U.S.–Mexico border. The data were collected in Ciudad Juarez and Nuevo Laredo and are presented by focusing on four types of individuals with whom sex workers experienced violent encounters: clients, coworkers, police, and bar owners. The social structural as well as contextual constraints associated with violence are also addressed.

Gender, Globalization, and Sex Work in Mexico

Gender is a system of inequality that is created and recreated in daily experience (West & Zimmerman, 1987) as well as a social construction of categories created through a system of boundaries that delineate female and male, feminine and masculine (Gerson & Peiss, 1985). Thus, the gendered order is never stable and complete, but is contested and subject to challenge and renegotiation (Gerson & Peiss, 1985). There is a plurality of ways that gender is constructed: People “do gender” in situational ways (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Nevertheless, gendered practices are influenced by social structural constraints that are realized through embodied social action (Messerschmidt, 2012). Power is an important structural feature of gender relations because, historically, power relations among women and men have been constructed on the basis of gender (as well as sexual preference; Messerschmidt, 2012). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized as the form

of masculinity that structures and legitimates hierarchical gender relations between women and men, between femininity and masculinity, and among men (Connell, 1987). These masculinities can appear at the local, regional, or global level (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Dominant femininities and masculinities, however, are not always associated with and linked to gender hegemony but “refer fundamentally to the most celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity and femininity in a particular social setting” (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 38).

Within the context of Mexico, two cultural concepts are used to show the proscribed difference in power and status between men and women: *machismo* and *marianismo*. The hegemonic masculinity is characterized as male power, aggression, and honor as *machismo*. Conversely, the domestic and inferior nature of women is symbolized by *marianismo*. Mexico is generally understood to be more patriarchal than the United States (Barajas & Ramirez, 2007) and research has demonstrated that Mexican culture magnifies the difference between gender roles to a greater degree than many other cultures do (Alvirez, Bean, & Williams, 1981; Galanti, 2003). Indeed, international migration from Mexico to the United States has been shown to refashion gender ideologies and gender strategies among both women and men (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Smith, 2006; Vasquez, 2011). Through their roles as mothers and wives in Mexico, women are expected to center their lives on taking care of their family and to not be involved in paid labor (Livingston, 2004).

Moreover, the patriarchal ideology of the larger Mexican society imposes the cultural norm of “connectedness” to men for Mexican women that contributes to their subordination (Amaro, 1995). This emotional need for connectedness with men creates a situation in which women put everyone else’s desires before theirs. *Marianismo* is important because it “promotes self-sacrifice for family” (Fuller, 2004) and is a key part of a woman’s role and her femininity. The symbolism associated with the female role requires that women become self-sacrificing martyrs who accept violence and abuse from men because of their inferiority to them. However, gender roles in Mexico are fluid and changing especially as a consequence of increasing globalization.

In general, due to the Mexican economy’s susceptibility to forces of globalization, persistent financial crises, and industrial restructuring, Mexico’s citizens have had to engage in a wide spectrum of alternative income-generating survival strategies within this market economy (Curtis & Arreola, 1991; Finnegan, 2010; Lacey, 2010). Mexicans less integrated into the formal economy structure have had to take advantage of opportunities in the unstructured sectors of the informal economy. Only 30% of women participate in the formal labor force; however, women are overrepresented in the informal labor market, which provides greater flexibility necessary to meet the domestic demands placed on them (Merino, 2010). Nonetheless, women’s participation in the informal economy is largely determined by a gendered ideology relegating them to positions such as street vendors, homemakers, domestic workers, and sex workers.

Thus, in the U.S.–Mexico border region, financial need is a major motivation for women to initiate and continue in sex work (Bucardo, Semple, Fraga-Vallejo, Davila, & Patterson, 2004; Cepeda & Valdez, 2002). In addition to their low economic status, FSWs in the border

region have other poverty-related risk factors such as low educational attainment, multiple financial dependents, low literacy, and inconsistent knowledge of HIV and STIs (Bucardo et al., 2004; Patterson et al., 2008). In addition, many of these women have migrated from the interior of Mexico in hopes of crossing the border into the United States (Cepeda & Valdez, 2002). When they are unable to do so, women find themselves with few options for employment and financial support with limited job opportunities, low levels of education, and untenable working conditions in the skilled labor sector (Bucardo et al., 2004; Cepeda & Valdez, 2002). Therefore, the sex work industry becomes a livelihood option for many women in Mexico because it provides them with the opportunity to be financially independent. In doing so, women find themselves acquiring multiple roles to balance the demands of their professional and familial obligations (Ramos, Aguilar, Anderson, & Caudillo, 1999).

Prostitution in Mexico is quasi-legal. Mexico's states have either abolitionist policies where sex work is a misdemeanor or reglamentarist policies where sex work is limited to specific areas of cities referred to as *zonas de tolerancia* (red-light districts). In these areas, sex workers are required to be registered and are subjected to regular medical exams (del Rio, 2002; Uribe-Zuniga, Hernandez-Tepechin, Chiriboga, & Ortiz, 1995). Although limited, previous research has documented the experience of women who are engaged in prostitution in Mexico. For instance, investigators in Tijuana collected narratives from local sex workers that addressed women's experiences pertaining to family circumstances, first sexual experience, employment opportunities, and violence (Castillo, Gomez, & Delgado, 1996). Similarly, another qualitative study conducted in Tijuana found that positive aspects of sex work identified by women working in the industry are flexible work hours and good income (Bucardo et al., 2004). Yet another qualitative research study focused on self-perceptions of sex workers within the context of the larger community. This study reported that more than 80% of the Mexican sex workers did not publicly acknowledge their involvement because of the stigma associated with this profession (Castillo, Gonez, & Delgado, 1999). In this manner, women were able to maintain their involvement in prostitution while also fulfilling their socially accepted roles as mothers and wives. Similarly, Castañeda, Ortíz, Allen, García, and Hernández-Avila's (1996) work with sex workers in Mexico City revealed that women were constantly living in a double bind as mother and prostitute. That is, they had to manage their lives as prostitutes without letting their families know of the profession, or justify it to them in some way if it was revealed. Finally, one study conducted on a U.S. border city in the early 1970s identified a typology of prostitution bars in this city: those catering to U.S. clients and the other to Mexican citizens (Roebuck & McNamara, 1973). The authors argue that there are many protective factors connected with the bar setting and health registration system. These include women being protected from police harassment, medical checkups, and meeting clients in a situation minimizing risks of violence.

In sum, research has shown that within Mexico, sex work is highly stigmatizing for women given their gendered expectations. This is the case even in areas where prostitution is legal. Despite this stigma, some research points to some perceived benefits of sex work including a higher income for fewer hours worked as well as the flexibility to help manage a family. This article will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by describing the violence that women working as sex workers face on a daily basis at the hands of their clients. We

elaborate on the contextual constraints contributing to violence including the influence the venue context and the geographic context of prostitution areas have on victimization experiences. We also describe how the social structural constraints of the gender system in Mexico influence violence. Finally, we document the violence perpetrated by other industry employees including bar owners, other sex workers, and the police.

Method

Context: Violence on the U.S.–Mexico Border

The women in this study were recruited from two Mexico border cities: Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez. The U.S.–Mexico border stretches approximately 2,000 miles and extends from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. The area includes four U.S. border states (25 counties) and six Mexican states (39 municipalities). It is estimated that 12.4 million people currently live along this border region, including 6.9 and 5.5 million in the United States and Mexico, respectively (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). However, 90% of the population along this border is highly concentrated in 12 binational metropolitan areas (“Between Here and There,” 2001), including the two Mexico cities that are the focus of this study.

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, is located directly across the Rio Grande River from Laredo, Texas, and is 165 miles north of Monterrey, Mexico. One of the largest cities in the state of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Laredo has an estimated population of 589,309 (Gobierno Municipal de Nuevo Laredo Tamaulipas, 2008). Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, is located directly across the river from El Paso, Texas. Ciudad Juarez is one of the largest cities in the state of Chihuahua, and the fourth largest in Mexico, with an estimated population of 1.3 million people (INEGI, 2010). These cities are major points of population growth, human transboundary movement, and commerce. The economic base of these two cities is strongly tied to the United States, especially the tourism and import–export activities of the *maquiladora* (industrial plant) industry involved in the production of textiles, chemicals, plastics, rubber, autos, and metals (Cañas, Fullerton, & Smith, 2007). The thriving international legal commerce, however, is matched by that of the illegal underground economy based on illicit drugs, sex work, money laundering, and contraband (Curtis & Arreola, 1991; Finnegan, 2010; Lacey, 2010).

The increasing widespread violence associated with Mexico’s Drug War that started in 1996 is a major concern, especially for those who live in the U.S.–Mexico border region. Mexico’s Drug War has resulted in the deaths of more than 30,196 persons in the last 4 years. Moreover, Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez have experienced a large number of killings related to turf wars between Mexican drug gangs. In 2010, there were 4,427 and 1,209 drug-related killings in the states of Chihuahua (Ciudad Juarez) and Tamaulipas (Nuevo Laredo), respectively (British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2012). In addition, in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, the serial murder of young women is taking place and is a major concern in the community. Beginning in 1993 and continuing to the present, approximately 878 women and young girls have been murdered in and around the industrial border town of Ciudad Juarez (Arsenault, 2011). Reports indicate that most of the victims were young female *maquiladora* employees who were sexually assaulted, tortured,

and mutilated. This led to the designation of this femicide as the “maquiladora murders” (Pantaleo, 2010). Despite the extensive investigations by local, state, and national authorities, the murders continue causing widespread fear and outrage in this border community. It is within this context of violence that these women live and work.

Research Design and Instrumentation

Life history interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) were conducted with 109 Mexican FSWs in Nuevo Laredo ($n = 45$) and Ciudad Juarez ($n = 64$). The life history instrument was designed to provide quantitative and qualitative data through the use of open- and closed-ended questions. The interview schedule consisted of six broad themes: demographics, career trajectory, clients, drug use, sexual behavior, and HIV/AIDS. The life history interviews for this study were conducted face-to-face in Spanish with respondents in the field. Rapport was established and informed consent was obtained from all study subjects before participating in the study. Subjects received a financial incentive of US\$15 as well as condoms for their time. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 min. Informed consent was obtained from the institutional review board at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Recruitment and Sampling

Recruitment of women was carried out by outreach specialists who were native Spanish-speaking women indigenous to the respective communities. In Nuevo Laredo, the outreach specialists included two women employed at a local drug treatment center who were familiar with the area and already experienced in community outreach. Similarly, the three female outreach specialists in Ciudad Juarez were employed as part-time health outreach workers at a local *promotora* that was implementing a street-based drug and sex education program. All outreach specialists attended a 2-day training that focused on the project objectives and research methods, as well as on safety and ethical issues in the field.

In the first step for recruitment and sampling, the outreach specialists systematically mapped the study areas by identifying potential recruitment locations or venues including bars, clubs, hotels, and *salones* (dance bars). During the course of fieldwork, outreach specialists generated detailed field notes documenting the physical space of the venues and surrounding areas as well as descriptions of people and activities related to sex work and drug use. A total of 107 venues in Nuevo Laredo and 76 venues in Ciudad Juarez were identified. A random sample of 44 venues in Ciudad Juarez and 30 in Nuevo Laredo were selected for the recruitment of the sample of 109 sex workers (see Cepeda, 2011).

Venues and Areas of Prostitution

In Nuevo Laredo, prostitution occurred in two geographic areas: a *zona de tolerancia* and a more clandestine area. Nuevo Laredo is unique among Mexican border cities in that its *zona de tolerancia* was geographically located outside the central area of the city in a physically enclosed compound with individual businesses that cater specifically to prostitution. The more clandestine area known as *Zona Centro* was located in downtown Nuevo Laredo, which was known for its flashy highly trafficked retail district that catered to American tourists, Mexican shoppers (from the interior of Mexico), and other foreign visitors. Prostitution in this area is illegal. The majority of these prostitutes worked in bars or clubs,

whereas a small number worked on the streets as streetwalkers. Given the illegal nature of the activity in this area, prostitutes reported being employed as waitresses or dancers in the bars and clubs. However, the majority of these women self-identified as prostitutes. Nonetheless, there were some bars that had women who considered themselves *ficheras* or taxi dancers. These bars attracted clients who paid 5 to 10 pesos (= US\$0.50-US\$1.00) to dance with a *fichera*.

The second area in Nuevo Laredo, the *zona de tolerancia*, has long been known to U.S. tourists as “Boystown.” City health officials and law enforcement have designated *La Zona de Tolerancia* as an authorized area of prostitution (red-light district) since the 1960s. On entering this area, there was a small police detention center that included a holding cell. Next to it was a small snack shop that sold tacos, hamburgers, potato chips, and soft drinks. Adjacent to both these places was a public health clinic staffed by two medical doctors, a nurse, and a male receptionist (our interview site on the premises). Each sex worker working in this area had to submit to a physical examination for sexually transmitted diseases on a weekly basis and had to carry a validated health card. The majority of the places within this area were female prostitution venues. Unlike the *Zona Centro*, this area did not have any streetwalkers, but did have prostitutes working out of rooms as big as 5 × 5 closets. Another unique feature of *La Zona de Tolerancia* is that the sex workers lived in small rooms above the bars and clubs inside the *zona*. The sex workers in *La Zona de Tolerancia* were managed by a *madrota*, an older woman hired by the bar owners. The *madrota* was in charge of organizing and taking care of the women.

Prostitution in Ciudad Juarez was conducted in primarily three geographic areas. The first, identified as *Zona Centro*, is located in the heart of Ciudad Juarez’s downtown area. The *Zona La Paz* is located adjacent to the downtown area and the final area, *Zona Cervecería*, is located in a residential neighborhood near downtown. Prostitution in these areas is illegal. A wide variety of venues were located in *Zona Centro* that attracted different types of American and Mexican clients. There were several streets within this vicinity that were lined with bars, one after the other. Numerous hotels that cater to prostitutes and their clients were also found throughout. Many of these hotels openly acknowledged the business they obtain from the sex workers in the area.

Zona La Paz encompassed a four-block area adjacent to *Zona Centro*. *Zona La Paz*, however, was distinct in its geographic makeup in comparison with the other two areas. The few streets that make up this area consisted of only pedestrian traffic (no vehicles allowed to circulate). During the day, all along the middle of the streets, there were stands that cater to local residents with vendors hawking fruit, meat, clothing, and appliances. Surrounding these stands, the streets were lined with bars and hotels and scantily dressed young girls standing in front of these venues. Most of the day, there was a heavy flow of pedestrian traffic down the streets including men, women, and children in search of a good bargain. At night, the stands closed, but the bars and hotels remained open and the streets became inundated with potential clients, venue sex workers, and streetwalkers. *Zona La Paz* was literally a *mercado* (market) where everything imaginable is being sold both day and night.

The final area known as *La Zona Cerveceria* was located in a working class semi-residential neighborhood. *La Zona Cerveceria* was found next to a large brewery that encompasses almost one entire block in this neighborhood. At first glance, this area looked like a residential neighborhood. A closer look, however, revealed bars and hotels interspersed throughout the area. On some streets, the bars were more covert with little or no signs up front. Most of the patrons were locals with only an occasional American tourist. There was also a main street in the area that was lined with bars and hotels. These were easily identifiable by the medium-sized orange and white signs reading, “*Carta Blanca*” (name of a local beer). This area was also known to be frequented by *tráileros* (U.S. long-haul truck drivers), who were able to park their rigs on the wide streets and visit the venues. Most of the hotels in this area were small and tended to go unnoticed, whereas some owners of private homes were also known to rent out rooms for a set price.

Additional Procedural Information

Several methodological procedures developed by Valdez and colleagues facilitated the use of specific techniques (Valdez & Kaplan, 1999). These included *entrée* via gatekeepers; acquiring authorization and establishing legitimacy; and comfort, presence, and visibility among the outreach specialists in the research areas. For instance, personal contact with government officials by the lead author provided several suggestions as to safety precautions for outreach specialists while conducting the research. In addition, gatekeepers (Whyte, 1943) were used to gain *entrée* into venues and help establish the presence of outreach specialists among the sex worker population.

Eligibility criteria included women above the age of 18, working in one of the selected venues, and self-report participation in the exchange of sex for money or drugs in the respective venue. Field staff approached potential respondents as they crossed a predetermined line (i.e., those who walked through the sitting area and approached the main bar) or entered a specific area such as the dance floor of the respective venue (Muhib et al., 2001). Interviews were arranged and conducted in the field. In *La Zona de Tolerancia*, the interviews were conducted in a private room at the health clinic located immediately on entering the area. In the downtown areas, the interviews were conducted in quiet public locations where privacy could be somewhat ensured (e.g., back of restaurants, public parks). All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

The interview data were transcribed in Spanish and analyzed in the source language (Spanish). This method is congruent with recommendations to conduct analyses in the native language of respondents to maximize accuracy (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor, & Maliski, 2008). The first author, who is fluent in Spanish, thoroughly reviewed all quotes used in this article to ensure translation accuracy from Spanish to English. The Spanish transcripts were inputted into the NVivo software system for coding and conceptual mapping of emergent dimensions in the qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was accomplished through a line-by-line reading of the qualitative data. Core coding categories were identified, including family, drug use, violence, entering the profession, and sexual behavior. Selective coding proceeded after the core categories were identified, which led to more specific

nuances in the core coding categories. Specific formal patterns emerged that reflect the distinct circumstances and reactions to current threats of violence experienced by the women in this study, including forced sex, condom use negotiation, and sadistic sex with clients as well as patterns of violence with other industry employees (e.g., other sex workers, local police, and bar owners). The analysis was conducted by the first author and a research assistant who independently coded and jointly discussed their findings to refine categories and reduce bias.

Findings

Las Mujeres (*The Women*)

All of the women in this study were Mexican nationals actively engaged in the sex work industry either in Nuevo Laredo or Ciudad Juarez. On average, the women were 29 years of age. The Nuevo Laredo women were slightly younger than those in Ciudad Juarez. The women in Nuevo Laredo averaged 27 years of age, whereas in Ciudad Juarez, the average age was 30. Ages ranged from 18 to 46.

The majority of the women (68%) reported being either single or living with someone without being legally married. Seventeen percent reported being separated, whereas only 6% indicated they were currently married. More than three fourths (77%) of the women indicated they were mothers. There was an average of 2.4 children among the mothers. Seventy-five percent of the 84 women with children had custody of them and were residing with them. Of those children who did not live with their mothers, the majority of mothers indicated that the children were living with other family members, including grandparents.

An overwhelming majority of the women had only minimal formal education. The average number of years of schooling among the women was 6.9 years. Twenty women (18%) reported that they had attended a technical (vocational) school at some point during their lives.

Sex work history revealed that the average age of initiation into sex work was 18, and the average length of years worked as a prostitute was 8. The women in this study reported working in the sex industry an average of 20 days a month. In the week prior to their interview, women reported an average of seven clients. The prices for services varied depending on the sexual act and the type of venue. For instance, in Nuevo Laredo, sex workers catering to lower-class clients reported charging from a minimum of 10 pesos (approximately US\$1) for oral sex to 100 pesos for other types of sexual activities (e.g., vaginal or anal sex). However, in the venues that catered to U.S. tourists, prices ranged from 100 to 400 pesos. Similarly, in Ciudad Juarez, the prices ranged from 30 to 500 pesos.

Violent Victimization

More than half of the women (61%) reported that they have experienced some type of violence in the course of their sex work career, which as noted, spanned an average of 8 years at the time of the interview. Among the women who experienced violence, an average of two violent incidents in the previous 30 days was reported. Women were also asked to identify the individuals involved in the majority of these violent episodes. An overwhelming

72% were with clients, followed by 17% with other sex workers. The remaining incidents were with police (6%) and bar owners (3%) at their respective places of employment. The context in which these women were undertaking their profession is conducive to violent confrontations with numerous types of individuals with whom they have contact during the course of their work.

Violence From Clients

The women in this study reported that most of the violence they experienced was at the hands of their clients. The range of violent attacks with clients ranged from pushing and shoving to more severe attacks with weapons. A large number of these violent incidents occurred behind closed doors when the sex worker and client were in the process of engaging in the exchange of sexual services. The violence was facilitated by the relative isolation of the areas in which the rooms are located where the actual sex act takes place. The incidents varied depending on the circumstances surrounding the confrontation and the manner in which the sex worker reacted to the eminent threat.

The forced sexual act—The first type of violence encountered by the Mexican FSWs in this study was associated with clients attempting to force them to engage in a sexual act not agreed-on when the negotiation was made. This usually took place while the sex workers were providing the services or just prior to initiating them. In the violent cases described, there were some women who acceded to the client's demands after being physically abused. In others, the women managed to talk their clients out of forcing them to accept their demands after initially being hit. Although all were physically abused, the extent to which the women were assaulted varies. For instance, after being physically assaulted, Virginia, a 40-year-old sex worker working in a bar in *La Zona de Tolerancia* in Nuevo Laredo, described how she was able to convince the client not to make her engage in anal sex:

He was an American client from the other side. After drinking with him for about an hour we went to the hotel. The first thing he did was grab my arm strongly and push me towards him. He began to take my clothes off and got into a position to have anal sex. Even if I could not understand him I knew what he wanted. I pulled away from him and told him no. He got really mad. He came towards me and told me I was a liar. He slapped me and threw me to the floor. I told him he never said what kind and that I did not do that. After a few minutes he settled down and agreed to vaginal sex. I was lucky that I walked out only with some bruises.

Similar to Virginia, many of the women expressed the fact that they were lucky to have received only minor injuries from clients. Several women even felt that being hit, slapped, or pushed was not considered a violent incident, but rather just part of the work. For instance, Hortensia, a 32-year-old sex worker who worked in a downtown area, felt that violence is not that much of a problem. While discussing some of her encounters with clients, it became evident that she was a victim of violence more often than she perceived. Hortensia stated,

The arguments with clients are always about what they want to do with me. Instead of putting myself in a situation where I am going to be mistreated (physically), I like to do everything in peace. For instance, the other day I went with a client to a hotel. I thought he only wanted to have vaginal sex because that was what we had

agreed. Well, what he wanted was to have anal sex. I resisted at first and he slapped me three times. I thought he was going to do something more serious. He turned me over and forced me to have sex. I did not cry but some tears did come out. When I left the hotel he apologized and left.

Her experiences typically involved less severe injuries, but at the cost of being intimidated by threats of physical violence and accepting client demands.

Condom use—A second type of violent encounter described by the FSWs was related to clients refusing to use condoms. More than 60% of the women interviewed reported having problems with clients refusing to use condoms at least once during the time they have been working. Many women accepted the clients' requests for no condom use as a way to minimize the potential for being physically harmed. There were cases, however, in which the women were subjugated into having unprotected sex through the use of physical violence. Teresa, who worked in a downtown area, described her experience:

He was a young man about 21 years old, Mexican. When he arrived at the bar I tagged him as mine. I thought he was a good guy since he had a decent appearance. We went to his house which was close to the bar. When we got there we went to his room and he locked the door. We were going to start to have sex and I asked him to wear a condom. When I said this he got mad and told me he would not and that I had to do it with him. I tried to convince him but he only got more mad and told me to shut up. He reached over to get something from a drawer near his bed. I then saw that it was a knife. He put it to my throat and threatened me if I did not have sex with him. He did not hurt me, but I did think he was going to kill me.

Rosario, a 25-year-old sex worker working in Nuevo Laredo, recounted a similar story with one of her clients. Rosario was approximately 5 feet tall and had long black hair and a dark skin tone. Her slender and petite figure made her look younger than she was. In speaking with her, it was obvious that she was self-conscious about a 2-inch long scar she has on her left cheek. Rosario explained about the scar:

This happened about two weeks after I had started to work. I had only had three customers. These first three customers had used condoms. Some co-workers had told me about the condoms but I did not have any money to buy them. I had not even seen a condom before I started working. All they told me was that they were used so that I would not get sick. When I left with this client I never thought this would happen. The client wanted oral sex and he started to push my head down. I asked him if he had a condom, but he would not listen to me and would only continue to hold my head. I asked him to not make me do this and that's when he got mad. He hit me with his fist and he had a ring on. I felt the pain immediately and blood began to come out. He then slapped me across the face and hit me so hard that he busted my lip. He began to insult me and all I could do was cry. He forced me to give him oral sex without the condom while I bled. Finally, he got up and left and threw 30 pesos at me. I had to go to the hospital to stop the bleeding and get stitches. And that's how I got this.

Rosario indicated that she thought she would never go back to selling her body, but she said she had no other recourse, especially because she had no family in Nuevo Laredo. This sentiment was often expressed by sex workers who were from other places in the interior of Mexico.

The sadist—The third circumstance that led to violent encounters with clients was associated with what some women identified as sadistic clients. Some described situations in which the client began to exert pain on them for their own sexual pleasure. This usually involved men slapping, biting, and tying down the sex workers without their consent. This in turn led to resistance on the part of the women and aggression and physical assault on the part of the clients. This type of physical assault was initiated abruptly without any provocation on the part of the sex worker. In many instances, the women said that they did not know what was going on and did not understand the reason for the sudden physical violence. In describing her violent physical attack, Araceli, a 26-year-old single mother of two, explained,

I was kind of suspicious of this client when I went with him to the hotel. There was something about him I did not like. Before leaving with him I had used cocaine so that I could work the night. He began to kiss me and tell me that I was very pretty. He told me he wanted to do something with me and that he would pay me more. I was not sure what he meant but I did not say “no.” All of a sudden he used a tie to bond my hands. He then turned me around on the bed and started to bite my back and spank me. I began to yell. He grabbed me by the back of my neck and put my face into the pillow so I could not breathe. He told me he would pay me more if I did not cry. The only thing I could do was take the pain. He bruised my wrists, back, and butt. He paid me 350 pesos but I still felt bad the next day and did not go back to work for a few days.

Irma, a 22-year-old divorcee who worked in *La Zona de Tolerancia*, described a violent situation with a client whom she described as *loco* (crazy):

When we arrived in the room we began to have sexual intercourse. All of a sudden he turned me around and grabbed my arms. I thought he wanted to have sex from behind but since he had not paid for that I fought back. But what he started doing was slapping my butt and pinching it. The only thing I could do was scream because it hurt. I know he was high on cocaine. I could not get loose. He would just hit me harder and all I could do was scream louder. Finally, some guards came in and kicked him out.

In this instance, Irma was able to escape from her client because the venue where she was working had security. Women who work in hotels or on the streets in the downtown areas are not afforded such protection.

Contextual and Social Structural Constraints Influencing Client Violence

In examining these violent encounters with clients and the circumstances in which they occurred, it is implicit that there were contextual and social structural constraints that contributed to the risk of violence. The contextual constraints were related to the geographic

area where the venues are located (i.e., *La Zona de Tolerancia* and the downtown areas) and the physical structure/layout of the venue where the sex worker makes contact with the client and engages in the sexual exchange. For instance, the variation in types of indoor venues these sex workers operated in influenced their violent victimization. The women worked out of two types of venues. The first were bars or dance clubs where sex workers contact clients in the bar and engage in the sexual exchange in rooms located immediately behind the bar. The contact, negotiation, and exchange take place in one location. The venues in *La Zona de Tolerancia* were characteristic of this type. The women in these venues had a little more sense of security given that police, guards, bartenders, bouncers, and other bar employees were in close proximity in case their assistance was required with an unruly client.

The second type of venue was the most predominant in this research because it was characteristic of the downtown areas (*Zona Centro*, *Zona La Paz*, *Zona Cervceria*) where prostitution is illegal. These venues are bars and clubs where the women contacted the client, negotiated the sexual services, and performed the sex acts in two different locations. Many of the sex workers in both cities worked out of these types of venues. Once they solicited their clients, the women had to exit the establishment and locate a hotel or motel to perform the sexual services. These hotels catered specifically to the sex workers in the area. The owners and hotel attendants (usually one person at the desk) were aware of the prostitution activity in the area and therefore, took advantage of the women's business. Sex workers reported getting either nightly rates of 60 pesos or more short-term rates of 40 pesos. All of the hotels where women were recruited were secluded and extremely unkempt and dirty. It was common knowledge among the locals in these two cities that these hotels were not for the general public. On leaving the bar venues, the sex workers were left to fend for themselves in cases of physical or sexual violence by clients. The streetwalkers who work in the downtown areas also reported the same situation, although their risks were even greater given that the contact and the sexual exchange were conducted in alleys, cars, and hotels.

Interestingly, Irma (described above), although exposed to a violent client, was fortunate to have been working in a venue in *La Zona de Tolerancia* where the sexual encounters take place in rooms behind the bar. For those women who have to engage in sexual encounters with clients in hotels or cars, their risk of victimization was confounded by their isolation in places where other individuals are not around to assist them if a violent situation emerges. This was the case with Alejandra, who was a streetwalker in Ciudad Juarez. One of her regular clients drove by to pick her up and was supposed to take her to his apartment. On noticing that they were driving further and further toward the outskirts of the city, she said that all she could think of was the women who were being killed (i.e., the *maquiladora* murders). After demanding that the client stop and turn back, he became very upset and responded, "Then I want to have sex right now." Alejandra continued,

I accepted but I told him he had to pay me first. He got really mad and he told me that I had to do it or else. He paid me and I began to give him oral sex. But the more I tried I could not get him to get an erection. We were there almost half an hour. He began to get mad again and began to pull on my arm and hair. I tried to

pull loose but I couldn't. After hitting me a couple of times I was able to get off the car. He took off and left me who knows where. I had to walk a lot before getting to downtown.

Structurally, the larger community, especially with regard to gender roles in Mexico, affects these women's views of themselves, which has implications for their perception of victimization. That is, not only were women exposed to violent physical encounters, but they also faced being subjected to clients' verbal abuse. This verbal abuse was evident when the women described these incidents. None, however, talked in depth about the verbal abuse and for the most part, only mentioned it when describing physically violent incidents. It was not until probed about the verbal abuse that they would talk about it. Many of the women seemed to feel that this abuse, both verbal and physical, was to be expected given the work environment. In fact, many expressed that they accepted this abuse because they felt it came along with the shame and stigmatization associated with their profession in the larger Mexican society. This was the case with Hortensia described above. Similarly, another sex worker said, "What are you going to do? We know that this job is not very dignified. We have to accept how people see us and with that comes the way some of our clients treat us."

Violence From Other Industry Employees

Violent encounters with clients were not the only form of violence that the FSWs experienced at work. Violent encounters with individuals who are part of the social milieu that encompasses the sex industry along the border were also evident. These individuals included other sex workers, local police and security guards, and bar owners. Although the nature of violence with clients was associated with the actual sexual act and negotiation, the violence described in this section was associated with the circumstances and responses pertaining to economic characteristics of the sex industry.

The sex industry in these two cities is a business like any other. Those involved or participating in it are constantly looking out for their best interests and ways to make a profit. For the women in this study, confrontations and physical aggression with people they work with were again viewed as being part of the business. Much of this violence went unreported, especially violent encounters with police, due to fear of further retaliation or physical harm. Similar to violent experiences with clients, the circumstances and reasons for violence with these individuals varied. However, there was a specific pattern observed with regard to the negative consequences associated with engaging in violent confrontations with these individuals. First, violence with coworkers resulted in adverse working conditions and fear of retaliation. Second, violence or confrontations with police resulted in possible incarceration. And last, violence with bar owners could result in being thrown out of the bar where contact with clients is more secure. It is because of these negative consequences that many women attempted to avoid such encounters; but for other women, tolerating the physical violence was a way to avoid negative repercussions.

Coworkers—Violence with female coworkers was pervasive. Seventeen percent of the 109 women reported being involved in violent altercations with other sex workers. The circumstances under which a large number of these incidents occurred were associated with sex workers competing for clients. This type of violence is less common among

streetwalkers. Those who spoke about such violent incidents explained that on establishing a client as your regular, it is often understood that they are off limits to other sex workers. Some even said it was sort of an unwritten code to not take your fellow coworkers' regular clients. Sometimes, however, there were circumstances in which competition for regular clients creates a tense environment in which verbal confrontations escalate into physical assaults.

One such example was cases in which regular clients decided to seek out the services of other sex workers. It seems as though one of the reasons for soliciting sexual services from sex workers is to have the luxury of having distinct women at the client's disposal. For the sex workers, however, a regular client meant a steady amount of income generated every time this client visits the venue. Thus, this created a volatile situation in which the sex workers find themselves negotiating their safety, while trying to increase their earnings. As Patricia, a 21-year-old single mother of two, explained,

Not only do you have to watch clients but also women you work with. Sometimes these are more dangerous than the clients themselves. For instance, the last time I got into a fight with a coworker was about two months ago. I was at the bar waiting for clients. This man came in and he came up to me. I had seen him but I did not know that he was one of Susana's clients. Besides he's the one who came up to me. We went to the hotel and had sexual relations. When I come back to the bar, some other worker had told Susana I had left with her client. She got in my face and started to tell me, "What the fuck are you doing going with my clients?" I told her he had come up to me and besides you were not here to take care of him. She told me that this kind of thing is not done between us and all kinds of insults. I could not hold back and I slapped her. We got into it and started pulling our hair and hitting. They separated us but I still got scratches and bruises.

Patricia stated that the tension between her and Susana continued for a while. They did not talk to each other, and the other women in the bar began to take sides on the matter. She said it was uncomfortable, but that eventually things got back to normal—at least until the next fight between two other women broke out.

Some women took their chances in taking clients from coworkers to make some extra cash. This was the case with Valeria, a 26-year-old sex worker who has been working in the industry for 3 years. According to Valeria, in this type of work if you do not hustle each night you may have no clients at all. Sometimes, this required taking clients that you know do not belong to you. She described an incident she had with a coworker in a bathroom located next to the rooms they use to provide the services to clients in *La Zona de Tolerancia*:

I had been sick from a cold the week before. I did not work for a couple of days which is why I did not have any money. When I went back to work I tried to work as many hours as possible. That's why I decided to take one of my coworker's customers away. She did not notice when he came in. She was with another customer but I knew that if she saw him she would go with him because it was safe payment. I sat with him and started to talk. I convinced him to go to the room

immediately. When we got up my coworker saw us and came towards us. She asked where we were going and told me that I knew he was her customer. He was a “gringo” from the United States, and although he did not understand us he knew what was going on. He told my coworker that he wanted to go with me that night. She could not do anything but she did threaten me. At the end of the night I was in the bathroom. My coworker came in and started telling me things. She grabbed one of the mirrors, broke it and grabbed a piece and attacked me. I tried to take it from her but she cut me on my chest. She was really drunk and I was able to leave the bathroom.

Although Valeria was aware she was violating the unwritten code, she also knew she had to try to make up for clients lost the week prior. Valeria was fortunate that the violent encounter did not result in more serious injuries, but it did place her at risk of future retaliation by this particular coworker. In addition, other women working with her felt they could not trust her and saw her as not following the agreed-upon rules of the occupation.

Yet another situation that increased the likelihood of FSWs engaging in violent confrontations with one another is what was identified as “slow nights.” Those who experienced violent confrontations with coworkers identified this as being the second reason for initiating fights with other sex workers. When it was a slow night, there were only a limited number of clients for the women working. The busiest nights for sex workers in Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez were Friday and Saturday. That means that for the rest of the week, many of the women were either not working or were sitting around competing for clients. As Sandra, a streetwalker, explained, “It’s hard to get clients when the majority of us are in a bad mood.” The tension builds as the slow nights continue, as one woman explained,

None of us had been with a client that night. It was 10 p.m. and it was slow. We were waiting and I said something like, “Why don’t you go home because there’s not going to be any business.” This woman who had just started told me why I didn’t go home. I cussed her out and she came at me. I’m taller than her so I threw her to the floor and got on top of her and slapped her several times until the bartender pulled us apart.

The pressure of knowing that there are no clients and therefore no money to pay bills or buy food was often times overwhelming for these women.

Bar owners—Although not as common, violence perpetrated by bar owners was reported by a small percentage of the sex workers interviewed. This type of violence represents the powerlessness the women feel when they are working. Although the bar owners were not directly paying the sex workers for their services, they felt they had a certain right to demand things of them by virtue of letting them work out of their bars. This was even the case in venues where the sex worker does not get paid for being a waitress. In the view of the bar owners, they were giving these women the opportunity to contact clients in their bars. The few women who refused to concede to their demands were subjected to violence and threatened with being thrown out of the bar.

Clarisa explained the dual repercussions when she refused to give in to the bar owners' demands to work more hours:

I had already worked from 7 p.m. and it was already 4 in the morning. I had made arrangements with my mother to go with my son to the doctor early in the morning. Saturday is the only day I can take him to the doctor without him missing school. The bar owner found out I was leaving early. He called me and asked me why I was leaving. I told him and he said I couldn't because the place was full and there were clients to tend to. We were in a small room that is his office. I told him I would stay late next weekend but he did not listen. He grabbed me hard by the arm and threw me against the wall. He said that here there is no negotiating and that what he says has to be done. "If you leave you're not coming back." I hit my head hard on the wall when he threw me. I can't afford to lose the money I make with clients. I had to do what he demanded, there was no other way.

The way this particular bar owner treated Clarisa as property depicts the control the bar owners have over the women. Even when the women were not receiving any salary from the bar establishment, they were at the mercy of the proprietors:

Those assholes don't even pay us for the work we do for them in their bars. The job I had before he had me as a waitress. He told me I would get more clients like that. They were a bunch of lies; he only wanted me to work for free. Since it was my first job when I got to Nuevo Laredo I could not leave. I like places where my job is to get clients to buy drinks and get them as my clients so I can make my own money.

The extent of injuries from bar owners was usually bruises resulting from slaps, pushes into walls, and forceful handling. The women involved in these altercations reported that the benefits of contacting clients in bars outweigh the risks of getting clients out on the streets.

Police—The sex workers on the streets did not have to worry about bar owners. Nonetheless, they did have to deal with another threat of violence from police and security guards, who know of their participation in the sex industry. Prostitution in Mexico is restricted to certain areas of the city. However, there were those areas in the city where prostitution takes place clandestinely and is not regulated by the city health departments, as previously described. This was the case for streetwalkers, whose risk of victimization was twofold: Working clandestinely on the streets put them at risk of being victimized by clients and by law enforcement authorities.

For sex workers working indoors in bars and other types of venues, the hiring of security guards and police by the owners served as protection against violent victimization even in the downtown areas where prostitution is illegal. Streetwalkers, however, had to constantly deal with the daily harassment and threat of incarceration from police. For these sex workers, the presence of police was a risk factor for violent victimization. The streetwalkers identified in this research were geographically located in the downtown areas. The context in which they worked made them readily visible to the local authorities who tend to police the areas on foot. The following field notes described how two police officers harassed a streetwalker:

I saw her walk by about 10 minutes after I had arrived at the restaurant. I knew that the only way I could talk to some of these women was to observe the scene first and then attempt to approach some of them. The location of the restaurant was perfect in that I was able to observe all the pedestrian and automobile traffic down this main street. In watching this young, slender girl dressed in a short skirt and high heels, it became apparent she was trying to get someone's attention as she strolled up and down the street with a sexy sway in her walk. The street was busier than usual but yet she stayed on the main street. Approximately, half an hour later I noticed two young policemen dressed in their dark blue uniforms and baseball style caps approach the young lady. They began to talk to her as she tried to walk by them. They would not let her go by and cornered her at the end of the street. All I could see was her nodding her head no as they continued to talk to her. This went on for about 5 minutes until they escorted her out of my sight. The manner in which she yanked her arm away from one of the gentlemen as he tried to escort her away made it obvious she was not very content with their presence.

A few days later, the outreach worker was able to approach this same woman who explained how the cops in this area are constantly harassing sex workers for what they call their "*cuota*" (quota)—a specified amount of money they have to pay so they are not thrown in jail. The amount varied from 30 to 50 pesos every time they were stopped. She went on to describe how most of the police in this area know the girls who are working the streets and therefore take advantage of the fact that they will pay their *cuota* to avoid the risk of being imprisoned.

For those women who hesitated to pay the *cuota*, the threat of incarceration and physical assault was evident. For instance, a 34-year-old sex worker in Ciudad Juarez described her encounter with the police where she works:

I was outside one of the bars when a couple of police came by. They began to search me and I told them I had nothing. They asked for the quota just for standing where I was. I told them I was not going to give them nothing because I was tired of them doing that. They took me to jail where I was for a couple of days.

Luisa was not as fortunate when she refused to pay the amount:

I saw them when I got close to one of the food carts in the street. I tried to hide but it did not work. They caught up to me and started to tell me things like, "Where are you going sweetheart? What's your rush?" I told them to leave me alone and that I had already paid some cops the day before. But they kept bothering me. I got tired of telling them no and they got tired of hearing me say no. One of them began to insult me and kicked my knee. I fell to the floor and they continued to kick me. They left me really bad and threatened me if I said anything. Of course, I could never report it because who is going to believe a prostitute.

Luisa's incident occurred approximately at midnight on a Thursday evening. The area in which she worked was secluded within a marketplace that sets up during the day. She reported that she constantly has to deal with this type of harassment and the risk of being hurt or incarcerated. Although only 6% of the women reported this type of violence, the

frequency does not minimize the risk of victimization by the very law enforcement institution that is supposed to keep them safe.

In sum, sex work primarily occurred in two geographic areas in Nuevo Laredo (a *zona de tolerancia* and downtown) and three areas in Ciudad Juarez, all of which were located in and around downtown. The risk of violence by different types of persons associated with the sex work industry including clients, other sex workers, bar owners, and the police varied among types of venues and their respective geographic areas. Moreover, the violence experienced by these women was shaped by the social structural constraints of dominant gender ideologies in Mexico.

Discussion

The U.S.–Mexico border is characterized by highly mobile populations, drug trafficking, and drug-related violence. The context of violence and lawlessness places FSWs at an increased risk of violent victimization. Nonetheless, there is little information on the violence experienced by FSWs in Mexico and specifically along the U.S.–Mexico border. The women in this study must survive in a society that has clearly defined gender constraints that limit their choices in the labor force. Entering prostitution is a means for them to broaden their options. That is, women enter the profession as a way to economically support themselves (Cepeda & Valdez, 2002).

The contextual and social structural constraints associated with the U.S.–Mexico border influence FSWs' experiences of violence with clients and others with whom they interact at work (coworkers, bar owners, police). The setting in which the client is contacted and the location in which the sexual encounter takes place contribute to the women's vulnerability for violent victimization. In the bars and clubs in *La Zona de Tolerancia* (red-light district) in Nuevo Laredo, the negotiation and performance of the sex act are conducted in the same building. This means that there are other sex work industry employees to help the women if they are threatened with violence. However, for sex workers in the downtown areas (*Zona Centro* in Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez, and *Zona La Paz* and *Zona Cervceria* in Ciudad Juarez), the threat of violence is more predominant. The sex workers in these areas, in particular the streetwalkers, are more at risk of violence from clients. These workers, once they solicit their customers, have to exit the bar and locate a hotel or motel to perform the sex act. On leaving the establishment, the sex worker is left to fend for herself in cases of physical or sexual violence by clients. The streetwalkers also find themselves in the same situation, although their risks are greater than those who work regularly in established venues. That is, having to provide services in isolated locations including hotels, motels, cars, and streets, away from the bars where the initial contact takes place, puts these women at higher risk of client victimization. Unlike the women who are providing services within the premises of the bar, the women leaving the premises have no safety net when they encounter a violent client. These findings are similar to other studies that have documented the difference in violence between outdoor and indoor prostitution (Church et al., 2001; Katsulis et al., 2010; Miller, 2002; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). However, the situation in Mexico is complicated by whether the sex worker is working in a downtown area where prostitution is illegal or in a *zona de tolerancia* where prostitution is legal. That is, there are

clear risks and benefits to the three sex work options: indoor and outdoor venues in illegal areas and indoor venues in a *zona de tolerancia*.

Women working in the downtown areas where prostitution is illegal may operate out of a bar or similar venue. These women are usually employed as waitresses, although they are not paid by the owners for this work. Thus, the bar owners act as a type of pimp in that they control the women's access to clients within the bar and are compensated by the free labor that they receive from the women. This places women in a vulnerable situation and increases their susceptibility to violence from bar owners. Streetwalkers operating in the downtown areas are able to operate independently in that they do not have a bar owner controlling their work. However, streetwalkers are exposed to greater risk from clients as well as risk of violence from the police. These women are not afforded protection from police abuses like the women working in bars. In addition, in some cases, streetwalkers are forced to pay police officers a "quota." Overall, women in this context are in a situation in which they are controlled not only by clients but also by either bar owners or the police.

The women working in *La Zona de Tolerancia* work in bars and are similarly subject to control by bar owners. Within this context, women do not work under the pretense of waitressing, because prostitution in this area is legal. The women in these venues are charged with getting clients to purchase as much alcohol as possible as compensation for the bar owners. Women working in *La Zona de Tolerancia* are subject to less violent risk compared with the other two options (bars and clubs in the downtown areas and on the street). However, they must work under constant surveillance and control. The bars in these areas employ *madrotas*, older women who are in charge of the sex workers. In addition, the sex workers often live in rooms above the bars and are subject to weekly health exams. Moreover, they are officially recognized in that they must carry government-issued ID cards identifying them as sex workers. Also unique to the bar setting is the documented violence among the sex workers themselves. Clearly, the violence with other sex workers came as a result of competition for clients. These incidents were not associated with any type of emotional trespassing associated with clients, but rather with economic motivations.

Moreover, the social structural position of women and, even more importantly, of prostitutes in Mexican society creates an environment that contributes to violent encounters. The stigma of sex work within the highly patriarchal Mexican society has been described previously (Castañeda et al., 1996). However, we found that these gendered constraints mean that women do not recognize the violence enacted on them, or they feel they deserve it as part of their job. Some women in this study accepted the violence and abuse to which they were subjected as being part of the job.

These women find themselves in highly vulnerable positions if they contest clients' requests for specific sexual acts (anal, unprotected). In total, almost two thirds of the women in this research had been confronted with violent encounters with clients at least once during their working careers as sex workers. This rate is 10% to 15% higher than other data on the lifetime incidence of violence against sex workers by clients in different settings (Beattie et al., 2010; Church et al., 2001; El-Bassel et al., 2001; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2009; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). This finding may reflect the highly volatile context of the U.S.–Mexico

border region (Amnesty International, 2010), as well as the highly stigmatizing and gendered nature of sex work for women in Mexico. Nevertheless, violence related to the negotiation of the sex act and condom use is not unique to Mexican FSWs (Shannon, Strathdee, et al., 2009; Wechsberg, Luseno, Lam, Parry, & Morojele, 2006). However, the women's reports of violence perpetrated by sadistic clients appear to be unique to this setting. Women reported that some clients would inflict pain, such as biting and slapping during the sex act, as a form of sexual gratification on the part of the client.

This study is significant because it contributes to the existing knowledge of violence among sex worker populations that are entering the profession as a viable income-generating source. Moreover, the data demonstrate that other industry employees (bar owners, police) should be more closely regulated to ensure they do not exploit sex workers. This study also shows the importance of considering contextual and social structural constraints that are specific to different international settings. Finally, this study found increased sexual risk through violent subjugation by clients, which places these women at higher risk of HIV and other infectious diseases. The study provides evidence for the association between condom negotiation and violence among sex workers and thus risk of HIV and other STIs. Therefore, existing health regulation and STI prevention programs that exist in Mexico need to consider the types and circumstances surrounding the violence that heightens women's risk.

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