

## Do YOU refuse a condom?

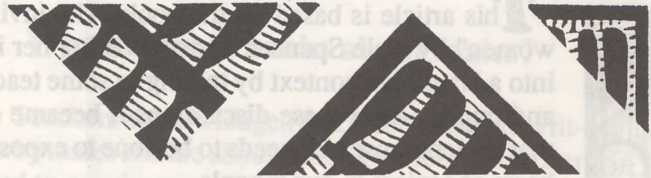
The assumption that prostitution is the oldest profession of women is generally accepted as true; omitting the fact that the oldest fundamental role of women has always been that of child bearer, child rearer and house worker. And for the sake of completing the 'accepted' assumption: - Just as war is the oldest profession of men.

The problem of prostitution is not one of major concern in Namibia. It is largely ignored by the public and authorities, though some people are vaguely aware of certain 'red light' areas in the city of Windhoek where sex workers operate from hotels and bars.

But even if commercial sex in Namibia isn't practised to the same grave extent as in countries such as the Philippines and Thailand, this section of the community, and their clients, are at great risk of contracting and spreading the HIV (AIDS) virus, because of their high number of sexual partners.

People buying or selling sex should be target groups for AIDS campaigns. In this trade, condoms are often refused because they are believed to reduce pleasure and interrupt sexual activity. Many clients believe that, rather than using condoms, they can avoid infection by washing after sex and by selecting a clean-looking partner.

People buying or selling sex are not likely to change their sexual behaviours. Thus, they are more likely to engage in safer sex when it involves a minimal amount of behaviour change and loss of pleasure. As sex workers often operate from hotels and bars, information concerning AIDS can be displayed in public bars. Bar staff



hotel managers and doormen could be important for disseminating information and condoms to clients.

A problem probably closer to the Namibian community involve those sexual relationships which are not neither 'true love', nor monogamous nor 'commercial'. Increasing economic hardship leads to situations where even women with stable partners may encounter pressure to find other lovers who can contribute to the maintenance of the household.

Many men and women have a number of sexual partners without being involved in commercial sex as such. A woman, for instance, may provide sex in exchange for housing, food, or a father for her children. This is a common phenomenon throughout the world. It is believed that these men and women are at even greater risk of contracting the AIDS virus since they will often try to hide the facts of having other lovers from their 'marital' partners.

Thus, all men and women must recognise the risk of AIDS and other venereal diseases in their sexual relationships. This emphasises the importance of incorporating sexual health and AIDS prevention into family planning clinics and primary health care centres. Certainly, all men and women should have access to low-cost condoms.

(Written with reference to IPPF's AIDS Watch)



High-risk hangover: Gloria waiting for clients