

Reaching young women who sell sex: Methods and results of mapping to identify young women to prepare for DREAMS Impact Evaluation in Zimbabwe

Tarisai Chiyaka¹, Phillis Mushati¹, Bernadette Hensen², Sungai Chabata¹, James Hargreaves², Sian Floyd², Isolde Birdthistle², Joanna Busza², Frances Cowan³

¹ Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Research (CeSHHAR), Zimbabwe ² London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK ³ Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK

Background

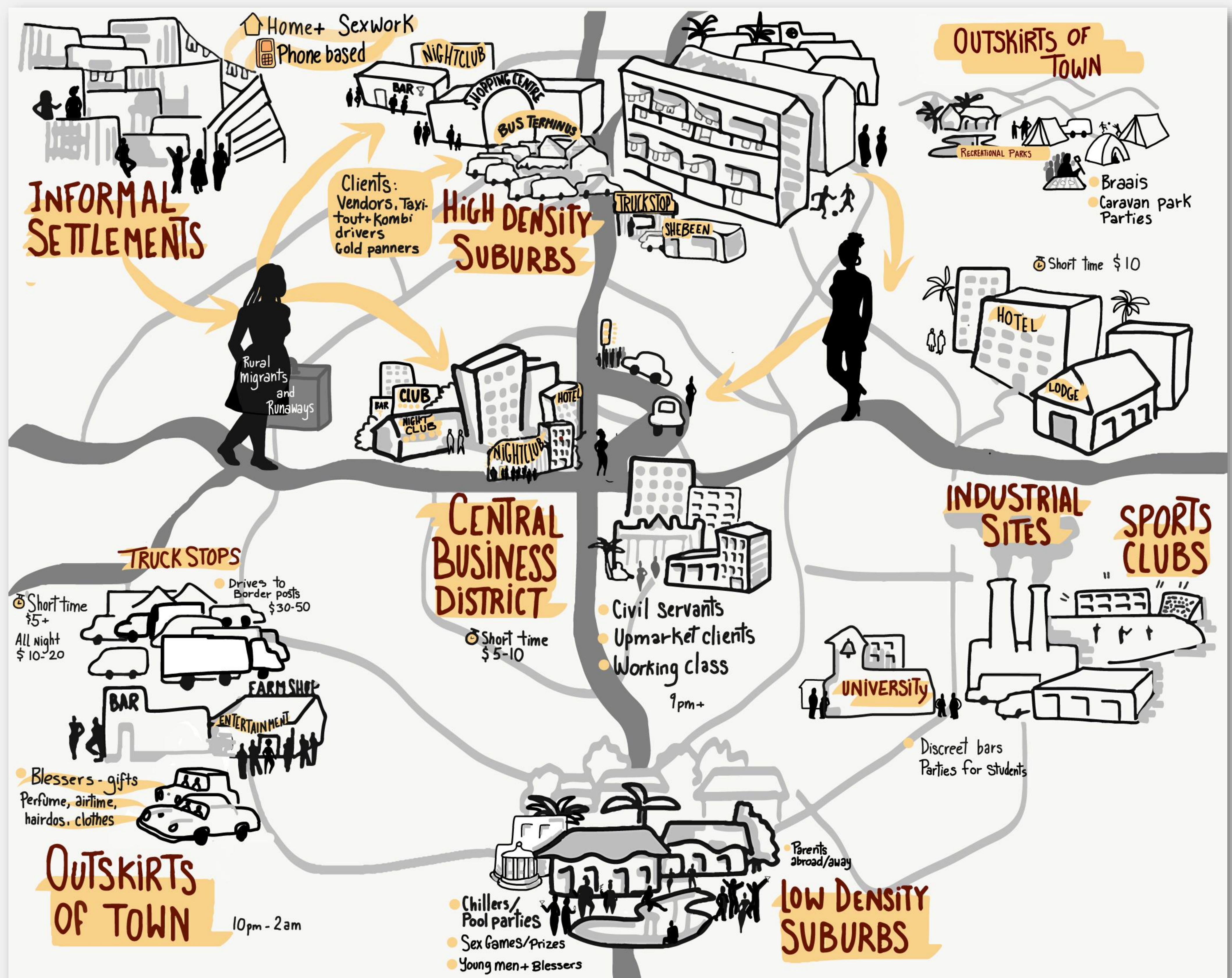
- Young women who sell sex (YWSS) are at high risk of HIV due to a high number of sexual partners, difficulty negotiating condom use, increased susceptibility to violence, and limited access to health services.
- In Zimbabwe, DREAMS provides clinical services, HIV testing, educational opportunities, work experience, violence prevention and post-violence care, and – in four sites – oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to YWSS aged 18 to 24.
- DREAMS is being evaluated using cohorts recruited through respondent driven sampling in two DREAMS and four non-DREAMS sites.

Methods

- We conducted geographic and social mapping to characterise YWSS environments before recruiting the cohorts.
- We aimed to understand the organization and structure of young women's engagement in selling sex, their social networks, and feasibility of recruiting YWSS into cohorts.
- Using a structured and iterative process to identify key informants and "hotspots", we conducted several informal discussions, interviews, and observations, completing a matrix of YWSS geographies and typologies in each site.

Findings

- We found considerable **diversity** in how and where YWSS sell sex.
- As shown in the map, **venues** include bars and night clubs, recreational facilities, the street, and organised events.
- Mapping identified previously undocumented **forms of sex work**, such as university functions and home parties, at which sex competitions and introduction to older male clients were arranged.
- In the 4 **university** towns, there were unique opportunities for YWSS to transact sex at organised parties. University students were least likely to identify as sex workers.
- **Hostility** between younger and older sex workers and differences between YWSS who did and did not self-identify as sex workers were also observed.
- In all sites, YWSS **move around** varying hotspots to avoid being identified, and were **reluctant** to mix with older sex workers.



Credit: 'Annalee Kornelsen with Drawing Change'

Discussion

- Successful intervention and research design rely on in-depth understanding of local contexts and risk environments.
- Our geographic and social mapping of YWSS – across six sites in Zimbabwe – provides one example of a structured yet informal rapid appraisal to guide subsequent recruitment of a hard-to-reach population.
- We gained deeper understanding of the local sex work environment. This revealed differences between younger and older women, and also convinced us that approaches to engage young women who see themselves as sex workers must differ from ways to reach those exchanging sex as a temporary livelihood.
- The findings help guide the DREAMS impact evaluation to ensure equitable access in the recruitment of the cohorts.
- Our results and (sample) visual map may provide a starting point for research into YWSS in other contexts.