

The significance of “safe places” i.e. drop-in centers in the implementation of HIV prevention projects among sex workers in

Serbia

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Issues: to analyze the significance of JAZAS' drop-in center for sex workers as a 'safe place' in which activities can be implemented, but also a 'space' in which HIV/STI prevention can be implemented and evaluated more in depth

Background of sex work in Serbia:

• Sex work is illegal in Serbia, punishable by 30 days imprisonment and/or a fine under the Public Peace and Order Law

• High level of discrimination and stigma

• Marginalization

• Health services not always attainable

• Social services not always attainable

• High degree of violence by pimps, clients, police

JAZAS in action (since 2004):

• lobbying for decriminalization (projects, training for members of parliament, round table meetings, union of public prosecutors of Serbia involved)

• facilitation of implementation of Anti-Discrimination Law through projects

• Outreach work in the field

• Medical doctors/mobile medical unit in the field

• Social worker in the field

• Legal advice in the field, trainings for law enforcement



DROP-IN

Opened in 2008

Drop-in services:

- Medical doctors: gynecologist, dermatologist, general practitioner, psychiatrist: available for consults, minor exams and referrals
- Lawyer: legal advice, consultations and reports: to internal control, ombudsman
- Social worker: consultations, welfare, child support, documentation
- Self-support group: capacity building, empowerment, support
- VCCT (Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing for HIV, HCV, HCB)
- Shower/laundry facility

Drop-in center as a 'safe space':

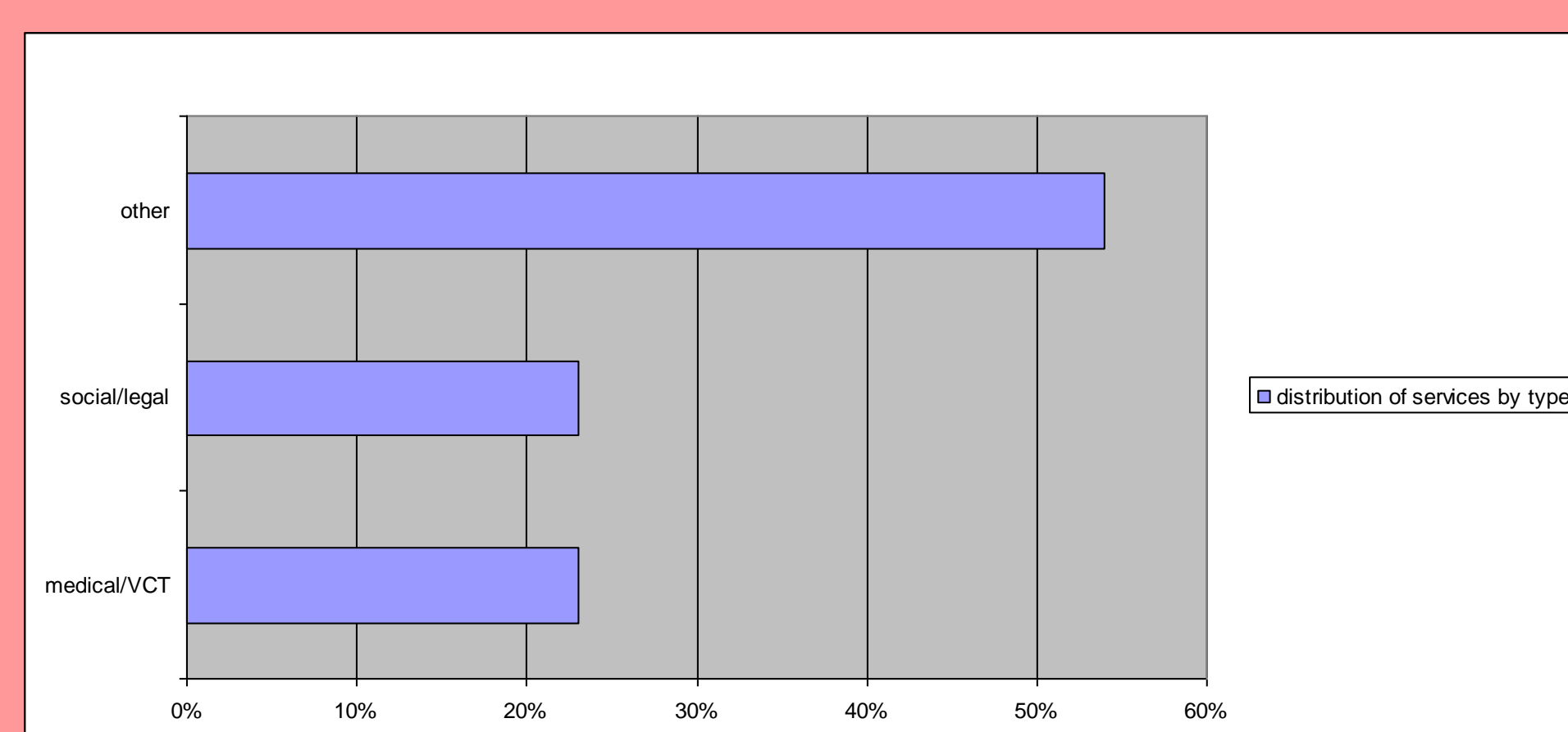
- 'Safety': from weather, from pimps, from police, from 'outside world'
- Socialization: informal gatherings, meetings with peers and center staff, visits to theater
- Supportive environment: acknowledgment, empowerment
- peer education: participation of peer educators in conferences/meetings (SWAN), involvement in drop-in center activities

• Aside from the harsh conditions of work in the streets and the existent stigma in society, there is a degree of discrimination WITHIN the sex worker community pertaining to drug use, gender, ethnicity, age and social status.

• The drop-in center as a "space", doesn't merely offer safety, or the protection of the outside world; it is a "space" in which sex workers are accepted, their work recognized as 'legitimate' and more importantly where their identities are acknowledged and not merely their status as members of a vulnerable group.

• The advantages of this safe place are that more time can be spent on prevention efforts, but more importantly the time spent socializing with their peers and center staff has proven to be a significant 'tool' in the dissemination of prevention information.

Distribution of services at the drop-in center 2008-2010



Total number of contacts: 1423
Total number of services: 1668

*the category 'other' pertains to contacts/visits to the drop-in center for reasons other than services. These include:

- Shower/laundry facility
- Tea/coffee
- Soups/snacks
- Chatting/socializing
- Talking to peer educators
- TV/internet
- 'hanging out'

Because of the time spent at the drop in center, the time needed for clients to relax, shower and get a snack, the center staff have ample opportunity to provide prevention information through informal conversations.

Next steps:

To lessen stigma against sex workers and to empower sex workers to take part not only in the social environment but also to take agency for

Lessons learned:

The decrease of stigma within the sex worker population, the incorporation of sex workers in all aspects of the drop-in center activities, peer education and efforts to include sex workers in the wider society (i.e. visits to theater, conferences, meetings) has proven to be a powerful tool in prevention.