course with condoms, I will get only a few customers. Then it will be difficult to maintain my livelihood.”—Hotel-based sex worker, age 25

Gender-Based Violence

Experiences with gender-based violence were common among both groups of sex workers (Table 3). Forty-three percent of hotel-based sex workers reported that they had been injured or beaten in the 12 months prior to the survey; the perpetrators most often were emotional partners, clients or family members. In addition, 28% had been forced to have sex. Among street-based sex workers, 80% had received an injury or beating, most frequently from clients, emotional partners, police or people associated with the respondent’s sex work, and 54% had been forced to have sex.

Many respondents believed that they would be beaten if they became pregnant or if they insisted on condom use with a client or emotional partner. About a third of hotel-based sex workers (31%) thought they would be beaten if they became pregnant; they said that emotional partners and family members were the individuals who would be most likely to beat them. Two-fifths of street-based sex workers (40%) believed that they would be beaten if they became pregnant; emotional partners and clients were considered the most likely perpetrators. More than one in four thought they would be beaten if they insisted on condom use with a client.

Although participants in the in-depth interviews were not specifically asked about violence, the topic emerged spontaneously in nearly all of the interviews with street-based sex workers and about half of those with hotel-based sex workers. Together, participants described many types of situations in which they had experienced physical and sexual violence, and some discussed multiple episodes. A few had been employed as domestic workers and raped by a member of the household; they eventually lost their job, which in turn led them to go into sex work. For example, a 25-year-old street-based sex worker had the following experience:

“I came to Dhaka to earn my living. I met one woman who managed [to get] work for me as a house maid… One night my landlord had sexual intercourse with me forcefully… I came to know that I was pregnant. When my abdomen got heavier, my master [found out] and terminated me from my work.”

Nearly half of those who talked about violence described being beaten by clients, and a similar number said they had been beaten by police. One 28-year-old street-based sex worker described her experiences with the police in this way: “As I am working in the streets, I have to face a lot of problems, like police raids. The RAB [law enforcement agency] comes to beat us… The public also beats us… We are working here at risk.”

Although the police were perpetrators, they were also sometimes clients, as one respondent noted:

“Police, army… all kinds of people… come to us. They create a lot of problems. On the one hand, they come to us [to have] sexual intercourse. On the other hand, they lock us up and beat us. After this they come to us again. Just imagine how clever they are.”—Hotel-based sex worker, age 27

Participants also described other circumstances in which they had experienced violence. A few said that a client had lured them to a place where they were then raped by several men. Consistent with the survey findings, several mentioned that clients had beaten them for attempting to use condoms, and some reported that hotel staff had beaten them for the same reason:

“I have been beaten by many customer[s] for wishing to use condoms.”—Street-based sex worker, age 27

“No, I don’t force them [to use condoms]… I don’t have the nerve to say ‘no.’ Otherwise, the supervisor will beat me if clients [complain about] me.”—Hotel-based sex worker, age 22

Several women talked about the violence they had experienced at the hands of their husbands. They described having been beaten, scolded, kicked out of the house or “tor-tured” for a range of reasons, including for wanting to use a condom:

“If I wanted to use [a] condom, then he beat me and said ‘Why do you want to use [a] condom with me? Am I an outsider? Why should I use it with my wife?’”—Street-based sex worker, age 21

As a result of these experiences, women not only feared for their safety if they were recognized on the street as sex workers, but also struggled with the added burden of attempting to protect themselves and their clients from violence.