
Shining Light On The Lives Of Sex Workers: A Step Towards Humanity

Abstract

Sex work, is like any other profession in the world and the workers involved in such trade must be allowed to conduct their business freely without government intervention. That is to say, decriminalization of sex work is what is needed rather than legalization. Although there is a thin line of difference between prostitution and sex work, the activity remains the same. Consent is an essential element of sex work whereas many sex workers regard themselves as prostitutes, however, others do not. . There are around 42 million sex workers around the world and providing these people with a platform equipped with equal opportunities and destigmatizing their profession is a step towards seeing the world through humanistic lenses.

The present research has adopted the doctrinal method of study.

Introduction

Statement of Problem

There has been limited awareness and research focused on the consensual sex work and sex trafficking. In most countries, selling sex is illegal and therefore the legality presents a unique challenge to conduct business freely. The adult entertainment industry has been functional far from the eyes of the law making it easier for sex trafficking to take place. The possible solution for which is not the legalization, but the decriminalization of sex work. The majority of the research related to the sex industry is rooted in HIV prevention and safe sex practices which has resulted in the ignorance of consensual sex workers thus allowing the social stigma around the subject to remain heightened. The term sex worker refers to any person who exchanges services of sexual services of a sexual nature for anything of value. This definition however, does not adequately address the issue of consent which plays a key roles in categorizing the types of jobs in the sex industry. There are arguments against this saying that the people entering this industry of their own free will are being coerced by a patriarchal society. However, the organizations who fight to decriminalize prostitution argue that sex can be completely consensual. Although consensual sex workers have made a conscious decision to monetize their sexuality and bodies, they are commonly grouped with those who are forced into the industry against their will. These individuals are commonly categorized as victims of sex trafficking. Regarding all sex workers as human trafficking victims fails to acknowledge the myriad of experiences of working in the adult industry.

Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to analyze consensual sex work by examining the phenomenological researches conducted by various sources and to understand how the decriminalization of sex work will be a step towards the abolition of sex trafficking and help to establish a humanistic approach in the society.

Literature Review

Definitions

Sex work: Sex work is the provision of sexual services for money or goods.[Sex worker refers only to those who have consensual sex and have chosen to join the sex industry without force or coercion ie., by free choice. [1: Cheryl Overs Sex Workers: Part of the Solution page 2, 2002]

Commercial sex usually involves three parties: a sex worker, a client and a third-party agent. It is defined as the exchange of money for sexual services. Commercial sex act includes prostitution, pornography, and sexual performance in exchange for any item of value, such as money, drugs, shelter, food or clothes. [2: Shared Hope International : What is Sex Trafficking? <https://sharedhope.org/the-problem/what-is-sex-trafficking/>]

Third parties are people who play ancillary roles in commercial sex. These include arranging meetings between sex workers

Clients are people who pay with cash or other resources for sexual services either explicitly or within an agreed package that includes other services such as entertainment or domestic service.

Prostitution is the practice of engaging in sexual activity with someone in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables. Prostitution is commonly used to dehumanise people in the sex industry. [3: Encyclopaedia Britannica : Prostitution <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prostitution>]

Sex trafficking occurs when someone uses force, fraud, or coercion to cause a commercial sex act with an adult or causes a minor to commit a commercial sex act.

Prostitution as an Old Profession

Prostitution as the “world’s oldest profession was coined by Rudyard Kipling in his short story, On the City Wall(1898) where the tale opens with the immortal line “Lalun is a member of the most ancient profession in the world”. Since then the expression has fallen into common parlance as a historical truth. However, researches show that prostitution may have simply been one of the oldest currencies in the world rather than a profession. For most of human history we have done without money and it is doubtless to say that there was no such ‘profession’ then as we know now as a service done in exchange for money. Even systems of bartering goods, rather than money, depend largely on the domestication of cattle. (Davies, 2002) The commodification of sex, and selling of sexual favours as a profession, is firmly linked to the establishment of money and economic markets. Researching ancient sexuality is difficult because historical records are always mediated through the author’s world view. In fact many cultures had no word for ‘prostitution’. It was the British Invasion that led to the invention of a such a word which was a ‘vice’ according to the Christian missionaries (Lorin Andrews, 1865)

A Timeline of Sex Work Research

Early research on the adult industry began in the 1970s which focused on the problems of

prostitution which examined the deviant personalities of the sex workers involved. During the 1980s and 1990s, the subject of research focused on why the young people enter the sex industry. These researches serve as a standpoint for the current understanding of the topic by linking prostitution to physical and sexual abuse, parental abuse and frequent victimization. (Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997).

In the late 1980s the HIV epidemic was reflected in the literature of the time when the researches conducted showed the occupational hazards of sex work and sex workers (primarily women) as the vectors of the HIV disease. This contradicted the reality which was reinforced by a study conducted in San Francisco, CA in 1991 which showed that only 2% of non-injection drug using sex workers tested positive for HIV.

The Sex Industry

Sex Industry Hierarchy

Within the adult industry, there is an unspoken hierarchy often defined by the following criteria: the profit earned, the level of safety, and how services are marketed and solicited. Sex workers in individual arrangements are at the top of the hierarchy since they tend to have limited physical proximity to clients thus lowering their overall risk for violence and contracting STIs. Pornographic actresses and actors come next in the hierarchy since they work under a specific environment. However, there is a level of risk in that individuals in these professions are frequently harassed by their agents and managers.

Escorts and call girls/boys provide sexual services to a regular client base in another business assume more risk and make less money than the previous tier. Brothel, Massage and Bar workers fall lower in the hierarchy because they serve more clients, and earn the same amount of money as the tiers above. Street work is at the bottom of the hierarchy because it is reportedly the most undesirable form of sex work because of the physical danger, unpredictability, and high stigma.

Reasons for Working in the Sex Industry

A phenomenological research conducted on the lives of consensual sex workers 'lives done on a group of sex workers from Nevada in the United States where the legal adult entertainment industry generates millions of dollars in revenue showed that there are primarily four reasons why they do what they do and would like to continue to work in the sex industry. The findings of the research are as follows:

1. The adult industry provides professional and personal agency

Seven out of ten participants said their profession allowed them to support themselves financially. One of the participants mentions how the adult industry provides opportunities to gain power, she says, "Sex work gives you the money to leave an abusive husband, or to finally deal with your health issues from childhood, or to work through some sort of debilitating disease... many sex workers have health issues, and suddenly having the money to deal with those. And we can be our own boss, if I can't go to work because I'm sick today."

2. Disclosure is an impactful and ongoing process

All 10 participants spoke about the effect of disclosing their profession on their romantic, familial, and social relationships. One of the participants says that she talks about her profession with nearly all her friends and family because it is important to humanize the profession. Despite their views, a majority of the participants stated that they hesitated to talk about their professions to their therapists because of the fear of being judged.

3. Professional and personal lives are compartmentalized

. All participants indicated a separation between their personal lives and their professional activities. This theme became overtly apparent when participants discussed their romantic relationships. One of them theorized about why the fundamental understanding of this separation was so important within a relationship, "I have a theory that we are naked waitresses who deliver sex. So if you wouldn't be mad at your partner for eating a meal that someone else has cooked and delivered to them, or drinking a coffee that someone else has served and brought to their table and poured and walked away, then it's the same as what we do. So, you can't blame the work, and when you try to, you're not valuing physical labour the way you do with professional athletes. And it's just delivering a cup of coffee naked. It has different risks, sure, but so does all manual labour, and that's really all it is. If you don't have that fundamental understanding it's not going to work. That's why many sex workers fight with their partners, why there's often an abusive dynamic. They have problems because it's hard for people not to be attached to it"

4. Sex work can provide an opportunity for self-exploration

Aside from financial support, eight participants stated that sex work provided them with an opportunity to explore different facets of their identity and sexuality. It provided an avenue to explore and strengthen their personal boundaries. They have standards for who gets to spend time with them and whether or not they would like to see a client again (based on the client's treatment) thus allowing for an express exercise of power and free will.

Decriminalisation of Sex Work

"Everybody has sex," says Tamika Spellman. "The only difference is that we charge for it."

Sex workers across the countries have faced several issues, sexual abuse from the regulating authorities being one of the many, and the only solution that they are advocating for is decriminalization: the removal of criminal penalties for selling and buying sex. Getting rid of the penalties is the only way to keep sex workers safe and to guarantee them full human rights as sex workers. New Zealand removed criminal penalties in 2003, and Amnesty International called on all countries to do so in 2016.

Mogulescu, a Sex workers' rights advocate argues that criminalization of sex work makes people who are in the commercial sex industry less safe. In particular, criminalization forces sex workers "to move their work or structure their work in such a way as to avoid police contact," she explained. Criminalization of sex work also puts sex workers at risk of police violence. One of the victims reported that she had been made to perform sexual favours to avoid being

charged with prostitution. The Nordic model has emerged as a response to this, which eliminates criminal penalties for selling sex but retains penalties for buyers. Sweden (in 1999) and Norway have adopted this model. However, some sex workers' rights groups say the Nordic model still hurts sex workers because it keeps the sex trade underground, criminalizing the buying of sex exposes workers to many of the same harms as criminalizing the sale. A committee member at DecrimNY (an organization which aims to shape New York City and State policy and public opinion around people in the sex trades) says that "sex workers' rights groups say the Nordic model still hurts sex workers. Because it keeps the sex trade underground, criminalizing the buying of sex exposes workers to many of the same harms as criminalizing the sale".

In 2012, the World Health Organization recommended that countries work toward decriminalization. Amnesty International made a similar recommendation in 2016.

Conclusion

The results of this study highlighted the aspect of consent in the lives of the sex workers distinguishing them from trafficked sex workers. The treatment of sex workers can further be improved with psychotherapy, with an improved way in which the sex workers treat themselves. Psychotherapeutic treatment, it has been analysed, must be provided in a safe environment where there is no fear of being judged for the profession. It is important to keep personal values separate from professional values. Often sex workers have a fear of being authentic with figures of authority out of fear that it may be used against them in some way. Decriminalisation is the solution, henceforth. Under legalisation, sex work is controlled by the government and is legal only under certain state-specified conditions. In the Netherlands, brothels have been legal since 2000, but only if they comply with specific requirements. coercion is more likely to take place outside the regulated spaces. Therefore, analysis of sex work and legal status to sex workers will definitely allow sex workers to exercise their human rights, destigmatize their profession and prevent human trafficking.