

Motivations for Promiscuous Behaviour among Some Female Students in Institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study investigated motivations for prostitution among female students in an institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The main purpose was to capture reasons why some female students engage in prostitution in the face of immense challenges of the risk of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases and the deadly HIV and AIDS virus. A prostitute in the traditional African culture and the current Zimbabwean society is not only viewed with a lot of suspicion, but is regarded as immoral and a social deviant and misfit, yet prostitution is dramatically on the increase in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. This therefore calls for a thorough interrogation of the motives behind prostitution by female students. Using structured interviews and open and close ended questionnaires and focus group discussions, 180 female students and 30 male students were identified through purposeful, non random sampling process in an institution of higher learning. The study was taken in the period September 2009 to June 2010. The study found out that female students engage in prostitution because of poor family background, compounded by increased economic hardships currently being experienced by most Zimbabweans. Most of them said they were motivated to prostitution to raise money for fees, accommodation, typing of assignments and dissertations, and their general welfare. The first category of these University prostitutes comprises of those who are motivated by the daily demands of the stomach, because it is common knowledge that the stomach does not intertain appeals to reason and justice, but food. The main reason for prostitution therefore was poverty. The second category of prostitutes is made up of those who may be soundly funded by their guardians, but experience challenges in writing and passing assignments, dissertations and examinations. This sophisticated class of prostitutes thrives on luring lecturers and bright male students and exchange sex for good grades. The third category of female students who prostitute is for the sexual variety, pleasure and satiation. The study recommends that the Government funded assistance in the form of cadetship should be made more accessible to students in financial need. Institutions of higher learning should put in place programs that can empower students financially by offering vacation placements and engage in income generating projects on a large scale spearheaded by students. On the other hand, parents and guardians should ensure that they provide adequate money for those they are responsible for. The institutions of higher learning could also go a long way by ensuring that adequate on-campus accommodation is provided for their student population.

Key words: prostitution, female student, Zimbabwe, higher learning institution

Introduction

Prostitution is one topic in which the causes have been debated widely. Theories on prostitution include functionalist, feminist and social psychological view. The view which appears more appropriate is mostly a matter of opinion. Prostitution can be defined as sexual relations on a promiscuous and mercenary basis with no emotional attachment (Kornblum and Julian, 1998). Ford et al (2007:3) argue that 'prostitution is the act of rendering from the client's point of view, non reproductive sex against payment'. This definition is consistent with the legal notion of marriage: a contract linking husband to children borne by the wife. Jeffrey (2008:7) says prostitution is being globalised . . . through the process of economic development in countries previously organized around subsistence. . . in some cases particular forms of prostitution, is exported to the sites of industrial development.' For the purposes of this paper we shall argue that a prostitute sells non reproductive sex, that is commercial sex and a wife sells reproductive sex. Prostitutes make a living by selling sexual favors to anyone who will pay for them. Although most prostitutes are females, there are also male prostitutes, but both groups cater to a male clientele mostly albeit with a growing female clientele. From this discussion, it can be concluded that prostitution is all about the sexual pleasure of males, because the nature of our patriarchal society views men as human beings and women as lesser beings. To understand this, one has to unearth the social relations of power which are male supremacist in nature and invariably oppressive to all women (Best, 2003). A key element of this domination is that the interests of men come to be seen as universal although human rights activists think otherwise.

Sex is central to women's oppression, and the ideological construction of sex is around the penis, of which women, and therefore all prostitutes, are objects of its service. 'Women are complicit with this ideology in that they accept the second class status that is accorded to them and eroticise their subordination by accepting heterosexual relations, feeling unfulfilled if they are without a man to structure their desire. Women subordinate themselves in the service of men: men are nothing but their penises ...' (Thompson, cited in Best (2003:148). Herman describes prostitution as 'a worldwide enterprise that condemns millions of women and children to social death and often literal death, for the sexual pleasure and profit of men' (in Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009:35). Second -wave radical feminists ascribed all forms of oppression and domination as rooted in masculinity (Bryson, 1999); if we end male supremacy we have freedom for all and consequently the demise of prostitution.

Prostitution is as old as humanity itself, it is sometimes referred to as the oldest profession but its place in society and the prevailing attitudes towards it have varied. Occasionally, secularized prostitution has been legitimized somewhat reluctantly. The usual rationale for this is the belief that no matter what society attempts to do about prostitution, there will be prostitutes and men will patronize them, therefore it is better to have the practice out in the open where it can be supervised to some extent and also raise the much needed revenue for the state through income tax remittances deducted from the female prostitutes. A recent study by the International Labor Office estimated that in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Phillipines and Thailand, between 0.25 and 1.5% of the female population work as prostitutes and that the sex sector accounts for between 14% of the gross domestic product (Lim,1998) cited in Ford et al (2007). In some cases prostitution has been banned, and the female prostitute has been considered a fallen woman, degraded and disreputable. Besides, prostitution has its own hazards ranging from the risk of being infected with sexually transmitted infections, violence, to the imminent threat of acquiring the deadly HIV and AIDS Virus. According to Ford et al (2007) prostitution has an unusual feature, it is well paid despite being low skill, labor intensive and female dominated. According to a Swedish newspaper (Affonblad, September 25 1998) prostitutes in that country earned as much as US\$ 1 750.00 a day which amounted to a month's earnings in a regular unskilled job. Prostitutes are not a homogenous group. There are several, fairly well-defined levels of prostitution with typical differences in education, fees, methods of attracting customers, and types of customers served. Fees for services vary not only according to the class of the prostitute, but also according to the community or neighborhood in which the prostitution occurs. For example, in an affluent area, the prostitutes may charge more compared to a downtown brothel.

Most societies consider prostitution unacceptable, dehumanizing and degrading, yet prostitutes exist in large numbers in modern societies. The reasons of engaging in prostitution vary from one prostitute to another, although poverty and prior sexual abuse top the list. Williams and Kornblum (1998) found out that young women who live in communities characterized by severe poverty and the visible presence of prostitutes tend to regard part-time prostitution as a means of obtaining money. In other words these females become prostitutes to earn money for a living. Pickup, Williams and Sweetman (2001) similarly found out that escalating poverty can lead women into dangerous situations as they try to maintain their livelihood. Poor or displaced women may resort to prostitution as a strategy for supporting their families- a strategy that makes them vulnerable to sexual violence. Pickup, Williams and Sweetman (2001) further maintain that poverty, unemployment and homelessness may cause women to seek unequal sexual relationships in which the male partner provides for them as is acceptable in most patriarchal societies of which Zimbabwe is one. A study of the factors leading to child prostitution in

Chile by Pickup, Williams and Sweetman (2001) found out that it was extremely difficult for young girls living in poverty to change their situation. Girls who came from violent or poor families, and who had often received limited education, were confronted by tremendous difficulties in finding work. Prostitution was one of the few options for survival, providing a salary far much greater than most other forms of paid work. Pressure from within the family can also easily lead to early prostitution and exploitation. Hunter (2002:114) identifies two main types of transactional sex in South Africa – “sex linked to subsistence” (for which poverty is a key player) and “sex linked to consumption” (for which poverty is not a key player). Bene and Merten (2008) illustrate the multiple meanings of transactional sex in an African context. The authors in a study of female fish traders in a number of African countries demonstrated how fish – for –sex is resorted to as both a short term survival strategy in times of economic crisis and longer term business strategy for profit maximization. The female fish traders enter into temporary marriages with fishermen in order to have an uninterrupted supply of fish. However, Muzvidziwa (2002) points out that these temporary unions are not confined to periods of economic hardships but incorporated into the female fish traders’ long term business strategy. Researchers who include Hubbard and Sanders (2003), Ihamaki (2001), Elmore –Meegan, Conroy and Agala (2004) highlighted that one of the reasons prostitutes give for being in the profession was it supplements their income from their day jobs which does not sustain their families. This is akin to university female students also entering into business strategies with their male clients during study period at university. The premise of this paper is that prostitution by female students at a university is conditioned by the following realities: poverty, bad influence, not contented with what they have and seeking favors.

Thomas cited in Kornblum and Julian (1998) associated prostitution with parental neglect combined with the need for the young girls to adjust to competitive social environment, or is it a situation where men need sex release and women need money. Jennifer James’ research cited in Kornblum and Julian (1998) on prostitution revealed that the female prostitutes had been raped or otherwise sexually abused before becoming a prostitute. This suggests that once women have been sexually abused, they are more likely to be labeled or to label themselves as morally degraded and that this condition is a likely precursor to self-identification as a prostitute.

According to the functionalist paradigm, prostitution exists because it is useful in society as a way of coping with male sexuality. The Conflict or Marxist analysis argues that prostitution exists because women are oppressed, are viewed as things rather than human beings (Freire, 1990), and some poor women especially are attracted to the life as a means of survival, i.e. females participate in prostitution

not out of choice, but for their very survival. Meeke and Calves (1997) and Pettfor, Beksinka and Rees (2000) view transactional sex through a single lens: as a survival strategy of economically disadvantaged women. This may be true of Zimbabwe but it does not explain why relatively well off young women at university engage in the practice Masvawure(2010). Interactionists on the other hand maintain that prostitution exists because once they become part of the prostitute sub-culture women base their identity and social life on that subculture. Henceforth, prostitutes become stigmatized and cannot leave the life without great difficulty.

The functionalists believe there are two main reasons why a person would become a prostitute. The first reason deals with sexual morality. The argument is that our sexual morality system, while condemning prostitution, actually encourages it. We live in a society that encourages the belief that sex with a spouse is 'meaningful' while sex with a prostitute is 'meaningless'. This idea may actually encourage men to seek sex with a prostitute if all they want is meaningless sex. Additionally certain sex acts, such as oral copulation or anal sex, are considered immoral by most African societies, Zimbabwe included. This means that the common belief among society is that these acts should not be done with one's spouse. This may motivate men who desire these acts to seek the services of an 'immoral' prostitute. Another reason proposed by the functionalists is the belief that prostitution actually serves to strengthen sexual morality. Thomas Aquinas likened prostitution to a sewer that helped keep the palace clean, the lesser of two evils (Jolin, 1994). Basically the sex industry keeps the respectable women pure because men can satisfy their immoral desire elsewhere. To radical feminists, women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. A prostitute, in their view, does not act out of free choice, but is a victim of coercion in both its subtle and direct forms. Intimate relationships which entail monetary and /or material exchanges are necessarily exploitative Majanga, Groies and Mbwambo (2007). As in the case of the socialist and Marxist feminists, once equality has been achieved and the structuring of society corrected, prostitution as we know it will play a diminished role in society.

Feminists believe that the functionalist theory is nothing more than a reflection of our society's sexist views. They believe that the men partaking in the acts are just as immoral as the prostitutes themselves. They argue that prostitution is a small part of the larger patriarchal system in which men dominate the exploited women. Feminists argue that society teaches boys to dominate girls and are expected to continue this behavior into adulthood. On the other hand, society teaches girls to be submissive to boys, and to remain that way into adulthood. To prove this the feminists point out that prostitution is more prevalent in societies in which there is a greater presence of gender inequality. The basic idea is that prostitution and male patriarchy support each other. This is because prostitution supports and

encourages the idea that all women can be bought or are less valuable than men. In a study of transactional sex among female fish traders in Malawi, Swindler and Watkins (2006) argue that these relationships are part of a broader “systems of inter dependence that characterize African societies” and in which “women need patrons to provide for them while men need clients who provide them with an outlet for the display of power, prestige and social dominance” (p12). Transactional sex for the female fish traders acts as a safety net. This paper is further premised on the assumption that for the female university students’ transactional sex can be a safety net on a number of levels.

Methodology

The study is informed by the radical feminist perspective which explores the gender and politics of relationships as ‘the personal is political’ Bryson (1999). The notion of empowerment was an appropriate focus considering the study context. The meaning of empowerment is socially constructed through dialogue and emerges through dialogue and interaction with others. An institution of higher learning from three institutions was chosen from a particular province in Zimbabwe using convenience sampling. The study used both qualitative and quantitative designs. The population of the study was female students in the institution of higher learning between the ages of 20 to 26 years of age. Purposive sampling was used to select 20 key informants, 10 males and 10 females, for the structured interviews on the prevalence, motivation, categories and hazards of prostitution among female students. One hundred female students were selected through purposeful, convenience, nonrandom sampling process to answer questionnaires relating to motivations for prostitution, the clientele, the hazards, the perceptions of the female prostitutes, the social background and intervention strategies. Endeavors were made to find a representative typical average sample of female students in the institution of higher learning from all the faculties. The questionnaire was completed within a one hour lecture period. The researchers also held focus group discussions with 60 female students (4 phases of 15 per group) which added to the richness and variety of information on the prevalence, motivations, the fees charged, the places frequented to pick up clientele, measures taken to deal with defaulters in payment, gender violence and socio economic issues related to prostitution among female students in institutions of higher learning. The focus group discussions were chosen through purposeful maximum variation sampling depending on the perspective it was expected they could offer. The study was carried out during the period of September 2009 and June 2010. A pilot study to establish the reliability and validity of the research instruments was conducted among 30 respondents sampled from the target group but did not participate in the actual study. The purpose of the study and students’ right not to participate were explained verbally as well as in printed form before the

questionnaire was administered and the interviews were conducted. To protect privacy and voluntary nature of participation, the instructions emphasized that the subjects were free to omit any question they did not wish to answer. The participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

The respondents to the study are referred to as female students who engage in sex with any willing buyer for a fee. The findings garnered from the study are discussed in the following section.

Definition of a prostitute

Respondents were asked to give their definition of a prostitute. All of them (100%) concurred that a prostitute is one who exchanges sex for money or favors. Some of the most frequent responses were:

A prostitute is one who sleeps around for a payment

A prostitute is one who exchanges her body for money

A prostitute is one who exchanges sex for money .

Motivations for prostitution

Eighty of the respondents said poverty motivated them to engage in prostitution. The respondents said that their parents could not afford the exorbitant fees charged by the university. Besides tuition fees, they had to contend with other educational costs such as accommodation, typing and printing of assignments and dissertations, hair dressing, clothing, food and other related basic needs associated with their daily survival. The other reason rooted in poverty was the need to supplement fees which parents were incapacitated to manage because of the meager salaries they were being currently paid. Another interesting reason cited by sixty of the respondents was to enjoy sex. Some respondents were motivated to participate in prostitution to get favors such as access to internet, free photocopying and printing, and the privilege of not standing in queues for enquiries and payments at the bursar's department. The most frequent responses from participants were;

To supplement my fees

To supplement my pocket money

Poverty

To enjoy sex

My father cannot afford to pay my fees as he is unemployed

My father cannot afford to pay my fees as he is a peasant farmer and also pays fees for my other siblings

My father is lowly paid

Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that no one really introduced them to prostitution, they found themselves involved in subtle ways to make ends meet, they had to survive. Eighty percent of the respondents said they were influenced by their friends who were in similar situations with them, particularly poverty as an influencing factor. The other issue raised was that of sharing the same room with other female students already involved in prostitution, where a client was brought into the room for the individual by the room-mate. In some instances the students were not content of who they were and were adventurous and wanted more.

Categories of female prostitutes in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe

The study established that there are three categories of prostitutes in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The first category comprises of those who prostitute not out of choice, but because of the dire need of their very survival in terms of their welfare and accommodation. Sixty percent of the respondents said that they became prostitutes largely because their families were too poor to meet the costs of their university education, food, clothing, and accommodation. University education has of late gone beyond the reach of many families in the current Zimbabwe largely because of the dollarisation of the economy and the meager salaries being paid to most workers in Zimbabwe. For example tuition fees, accommodation, food and incidental expenses would require a student to pay \$700.00 each semester while Civil Servants who form 73% of the parents of these students are receiving net monthly salaries of US\$ 150. It is of paramount importance to point out that in Zimbabwe the current poverty datum line is US\$600, which is way beyond what most guardians of these students are earning. It is against this background that 60% of the respondents argued that compelling their parents to adequately fund them was not only out of question, but a dream, as their parents had other costs to take care of such as looking after the other siblings, rentals and so on. Consequently, this category of female students had no option except to sacrifice by any means necessary to raise money for the cost of their education and related survival costs as a university student in the twenty-first century. This category complained that labeling them prostitutes was not only insulting their entrepreneurial skills and intelligence, but rather castigating them for being poor and almost amounted to asking them to suspend their university education up to when their parents would be financially sound. They also cited the high cost of accommodation both off-campus and on-campus as a major motive for prostitution. From the study it was found out that rentals were as high as US\$70 per-person in a room where they were in most cases accommodated in fours. The respondents also complained that the cost of typing and printing assignments and dissertations was beyond their reach, and they had no alternative except to exchange

sex for money to meet these basic needs. The respondents pointed out that most of their lecturers made them more vulnerable to prostitution as they refused to mark handwritten assignments, in other words according to them handing in an untyped assignment for marking was equivalent to non-submission of assignment. One of the respondents said that one of her lecturers even had the audacity to subtly threaten them into typing assignments by repeatedly saying to them in class:

‘Whether the water melon falls on the knife or the knife on the water melon, the water melon suffers. You must understand who the water melon and the knife is in a student lecturer relationship’.

Such sentiments reveal how vulnerable to prostitution female students in institutions of higher learning are largely because they come from poor family backgrounds compounded by their strong will to manage the politics of the stomach and the dire need to complete their studies so as to reduce their future vulnerability to sexual abuse. Previous research findings have revealed that when young females are faced with imminent prolonged poverty, prostitution is the only available option to dollarize them in a dollarized economy, or to accommodate them where they have been subjected to homelessness because of wanting to access university education which is not available near their homes. The majority of the respondents(78%) revealed that they had experienced sexual violence in their homes, usually in the subtle patriarchal traditional forms of ‘chiramu’ or at school and university perpetrated on them by family members, teachers ,fellow students and male lecturers at university.

The second category of prostitutes is largely made up of well funded female students who thrive on luring male lecturers, members of the non-academic staff and male students. This class of prostitutes lures fellow male students to write their assignments and dissertations in exchange for sex and or money. Asked about why they behaved so, some of them responded thus;

To compensate on lost research time while partying.

We normally engage identified capable male students, you are assured of a good grade.

To create more leisure time and have a peace of mind, you have no pressure to beat deadlines, someone else does that on your behalf.

Some of these guys come from poor family backgrounds, they equally need money for their survival, we pay for their mental labor, they write our assignments, we give them money, fair deal, each one plays his or her part diligently.

Others in this category lured male lecturers into having sex with them for better grades. There were also others among this group who exchanged sex with members of the non-academic staff for favors such as easy access to the internet and computers for the purposes of typing and printing assignments and dissertations.

The same class of prostitutes also exchanged sex for easy and comfortable registration at the Bursar's and IT Departments.

The third category is a rare type, they prostitute for the purposes of conquering perceived male heroes, particularly male lecturers who according to this category are a proud and pompous lot. Weitzer (2005) noted many prostitutes emphasise that they engage in sex work out of the satisfaction with the control it gives them over their sexual interactions . . . (p213). The idea is to brag to fellow female colleagues that the perceived victim has weaknesses like any other normal human being. This category rarely demand payment for sexual favours, they may actually here and there offer monetary rewards for good services rendered to them, their main purpose of prostituting is to enjoy sex from a variety of men before being permanently privatised by a single man through marriage, the objective is sexual pleasure, sexual gratification and satiation which may prove hard to come by once one is married. Asked about their motivations for prostitution, the majority of them cited sexual abuse prior to prostitution as the prime cause. According to this category of university prostitutes, all men oppress and exploit women. One of the respondents lamented thus:

The relationship between men and women is that of a rider and a horse, the rider gives a horse quality oats not out of love, but to get a good ride, that's how most men treat women, so we deal with them using the very weapon they cannot do without, sex, that is where our power and strength to revenge for prior sexual abuse by men lies.

One of the respondents also made the following remark;

When a man says 'I love you', immediately go on your guard, my experience with men of whatever class has taught me that men have no love, the truth is that only one part of their body loves one part of my body, his penis wants my vagina, period!

From the responses from this category of prostitutes, the motive is vengeance for past sexual abuse, by turning their sexual partners into victims of meaningless sex. These respondents need a voice which is not sexual exploitation but empowerment so that they are able to deal with the past experience of sexual abuse.

The clientele

Respondents were asked to list their clients. Common on the list were lecturers and businessmen. However, there were also a few other clients such as kombi or taxi drivers, private sector and non- governmental organizations employees. The

clientele base covered all the races and covered nearly all the provinces in Zimbabwe. Research has established that there is a correlation between age and earning potential, the younger the woman, the higher the income (Edlund and Korn, 2002). The female students were aged 20 to 26 years and studies in Ireland found that the average age of a prostitute is 26 years (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009). The respondents in the study asked for payment in the form of money, foodstuffs, clothes, hairdos, entertainment and free accommodation. The potential to get high earnings was there as most studies have documented the lucrative income that can be generated. Edlund and Korn, (2002) described prostitution as well paid. Responses to the enquiry on the fees charged varied, depending on the targeted customer. For 'sugar daddies', wearing revealing clothes was the most frequenting response. Some respondents actually went out of their way to lure targeted clients by stalking them and even using the social network media such as facebook and twitter. Difficult customers were threatened with exposure to their wives or students, and threats to humiliate them in front of their colleagues. From the interactions and dialogue between the respondent and clientele there is need for gender empowerment for both so that they do not perpetuate negative stereotypes about male and female behavior and sexuality.

Hazards of prostitution

Violence against prostitutes has been extensively documented and twenty of the respondents mentioned it as a hazard. Sixty percent of the respondents recognized that prostitution has hazards because of HIV and AIDS and or unplanned pregnancy, a clear indication that they engage in unprotected sex. Two of the respondents indicated that they can be physically assaulted by the wives of some of the married men that they have affairs with if they find out.

Intervention strategies

The main intervention strategy raised was the reduction of university tuition fees and the re-introduction of Government loans which should be made easily accessible to disadvantaged students. A respondent suggested that prostitution be legalized as has been done in several countries so that they can conduct their business in a safer environment. Another suggested that the University could employ students in most of the areas which need low skills so that they can become self sufficient.

Conclusions

The paper explored the motivations for prostitution among female university students. The research findings revealed that prostitution is prevalent in tertiary institutions. The paper established that prostitution is fuelled by a number of factors of which the economic challenges seem to be paramount. There is need to explore various avenues to ameliorate the effects of the phenomena on society's social fabric especially if it affects the female youths. Issues of economic and sociocultural inequality that support and enhance gender inequality need to be addressed at various levels. An important task for institutions of higher learning is advocating for and enabling students to confront oppressive structures. This type of empowerment is as important as behavioral empowerment whereby the students possess the skills and ability to deal with issues of sexuality and prostitution.

Recommendations

The study recommends that parents and guardians seriously consider adequate funding for those they are responsible for so that female students in institutions of higher learning do not find themselves in a financial dilemma where the situation dictates that they exchange sex for their very survival. The Government has made available the CADETSHIP program to finance the economically disadvantaged students through grants or loans. The students should pay back the money upon completion of their studies as soon as they are formally employed. The money which the students pay back should be channeled into a revolving fund which future students should also access. Such a revolving fund will go quite a long way in assisting students from poor family backgrounds. Institutions of higher learning should also ensure that they have enough on-campus and off-campus accommodation to avoid situations where students are over-crowded and exploited by landlords. It is high time that institutions of higher learning should be fully responsible for their students' welfare. The study further recommends that institutions of higher learning empower students through vacation placements and income generating projects. A further study could explore the reasons why male students are also engaging in prostitution.

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