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Prostitution



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Synonyms

Harlotry; Streetwalking; Whoredom

Definition

A sexual activity provided by women, men, and transsexuals in exchange for payment.

Introduction

Prostitution is sometimes called the “world’s oldest profession” and has been practiced throughout ancient and modern culture. The beginnings of this profession date back to ancient Mesopotamian civilization and expanded to ancient Greece, Rome, Japan, and China (Sanger 2015).

History of Prostitution

In antiquity, prostitution was connected with a secular rite (Sanger 2015). In the temple of the goddess of love, priestesses in exchange for donations for the goddess would offer up their bodies (Doufor 1902). Once a year in the Mylitty temple in ancient Babylon, each woman had to give herself to a foreigner, who would pay, in order to fulfill their sacred duty (Doufor 1902). In ancient Greece, the first brothels (*lupanarium*) were created in Athens by Solon in the sixth century BC. Prostitution was public and legal in ancient Rome (Sanger 2015). A special office was established in 260 BC, which was coordinated by an aedile. Aediles were responsible for guarding the peace in the *lupanarium* and controlling the taxes of income from prostitutes (Sanger 2015). Prostitution life was a concern in many public places. In the Roman baths, for example, special cabins existed, where erotic massages and oral and classic sex were performed by both female and male prostitutes (Sanger 2015). Prostitution practices from ancient Rome were uncovered on a fresco from Pompeii. Prostitution was common in many large cities during the Middle Ages. Professional prostitutes wore red bows on their arms as a sign of pride of guild membership, with the income from brothels feeding the municipal treasury. In the Middle Ages, the first similarity to red light districts was established, with the names of the streets referred to erotic or sex services (e.g., *Pousse-Penil* or *Puits d’amour*).

Attitudes began to harden against prostitution in the sixteenth century. Syphilis transmitted to Europe from Columbian expeditions to America could have contributed to this (Harper et al. 2008). Practicing this profession became a crime, a transgression against human and divine laws. Together with this new type of crime, new ways of administering the penalty were created. Published by Charles V in 1530, *Norms and the Police Reform* severely prohibited prostitution with the penalties contained in them being extremely cruel. The eighteenth century was “The Golden Age of Prostitution,” and during this period, prostitution was widely popular. There were numerous places in Paris and London where prostitutes could receive training in order to be professional and adaptable (Roberts 1992). Prostitution began to develop in the USA at the beginning of the nineteenth century, where bawdy houses were tolerated in American cities (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988). New Orleans is viewed by historians as the largest city brothel of all time. Various systems of regulating prostitutes and monitoring brothels were developed in Europe (Head 2009). Many prostitutes sexually served soldiers of both sides during World War I and World War II. Many soldiers were exposed to venereal diseases through these interpersonal contacts. In the Japanese war brothels, 200,000 women from China and Korea, called “comfort women,” were forced into prostitution (Head 2009). Sex tourism, defined as travelling for sexual intercourse, emerged as a controversial aspect of Western tourism and globalization in the late twentieth century.

Regulation and Control

Prostitution functioned on the borderline of legality for centuries. The dynamic development of various erotic sectors was conducive to prostitution. Prostitution and the use of its services were socially stigmatized. Lack of control in many countries led to a different pathology, emerging as a profession whose cultivation was exposed to condemnation, violence, illness, and a breakdown of personal life. The prospect of quick earnings attracted women from different backgrounds, initially achieving success and then realizing the competition.

Prostitution is prohibited in 4 European Union countries, illegal in 16, and legal in 7 (Danna 2014). In the Netherlands, prostitution is legal and the most popular, especially in Amsterdam. Sex workers in the Netherlands, like in most European countries, were illegal prior to 1911 and considered criminals. New Dutch laws, however, legalized brothels, and sex workers began to be seen as any other business (Kilvington et al. 2001). Sex workers in the Netherlands have gained full social, legal, and employment rights but lost their anonymity (Kilvington et al. 2001).

Regulation and control of this profession could significantly contribute to reduction of the frequency of sexually transmitted diseases, reduce crime on prostitutes and their clients, and eliminate prerreproductive prostitution.

Service and Deviation

Individuals who work in the field of prostitution are called “sex workers.” The term “sex workers” includes prostitutes who are streetwalkers, who work independently with clients, work through agencies, or who work in sex clubs or massage parlors (Clements 1996; DeCou 1998). Offering sex over special websites is particularly popular in the sex business (e.g., Prokop et al. 2018). Approximately 90 percent of sex workers are female, 10 percent male, and less than 1 percent transsexual (McGuire and Gruter 2003). The majority of prostitutes are of a reproductive age, ranging from 20 to 25 years old, which usually have the highest price per hour (Sohn 2016a; Prokop et al. 2018). A worrying phenomenon is present-day prerreproductive prostitution (age 6–15), particularly in Asia. Berkman (1996) estimated that approximately a million child prostitutes are abused in India, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

Sex workers provide not only classic sex but also sex massages and/or oral stimulation (sometimes for an additional fee). Moreover, different sexual deviations are also catered to anal penetration (client or prostitute), rimming, fisting, watersports, scat, sadomasochism (e.g., BDSM, sadistic personality disorder), and gangbangs (Pitts et al. 2004; Adriaenssens and Hendrickx 2012).

Customer Preferences

Males generally prefer younger and attractive females (Buss and Schmitt 1993). An individual who employs a prostitute's services uses the short-term pleasure without long-term effort. Additionally, engaging the services of a prostitute fulfills sexual desires not supported by regular partners (Pitts et al. 2004). Sohn (2016a) has demonstrated the price of sex with a prostitute as a good measurement of revealed male preferences. Sohn's (2016a) study, based on 8560 prostitutes from Indonesia, found that the price of sex decreased with the prostitute's age. The same results were found by Prokop et al. (2018) based on 2379 Polish prostitutes, where age and the body mass index negatively correlated with the price of sex. However, breast size (except for very large breasts) and the number of sexual offerings were positively associated with the price for sex (Prokop et al. 2018). Clients' preferences play an important role in unsafe sex with prostitutes, contributing to the transfer of venereal diseases (Adriaenssens and Hendrickx 2012). The first reason for unprotected sex is motivation for the additional price for sex without condom use (Adriaenssens and Hendrickx 2012). The second reason may be inspired for fear of violent reactions by clients (Willman 2008; Shannon et al. 2009). These two possibilities are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

Male Prostitution

Male prostitution has been found in almost all modern and ancient cultures (Dynes 1990) but has been studied far less by researchers. Male sex workers sell sexual services for women or men. Apart from money, heterosexual male prostitutes seek out sexual benefits and novel sexual practices. Females who make use of male prostitution often do not have time to get involved in relationships or have certain sexual requirements.

An Evolutionary Perspective

There is no evidence that prostitution has influenced the evolution of any aspects of human behavior, but we can use an evolutionary perspective to explain female engagement in prostitution and male (but not female) investment and cues of

male preferences for female prostitutes. First, the parental investment theory suggests that females are reproductively more limited in terms of sex, and thus, females are choosier about sex than males and invest less in intrasexual competition (Trivers 1972). Indeed, females engage in prostitution more than males, and about 69% of American males have solicited a prostitute. In contrast, less than 1% of females solicited a male prostitute (Kinsey et al. 1948). This suggests that females can utilize male material investment as exchange for sexual intercourse. Secondly, the sexual selection theory (Darwin 1871) suggests that intersexual attractiveness is associated with preferences of fertility and/or good genes. Male preferences for young females with low BMI and medium sized breasts, typical cues of female fertility (Jasienska et al. 2004), strongly support the idea that female prostitutes exploit men's ancestral preferences for fertile females. Females may further exploit men's preferences by means of plastic surgery, specific clothing, etc. Finally, the sperm competition theory (Parker 1970) posits that sperm from two or more males can compete for fertilization in the female reproductive tract. Males prefer cues of low sperm competition intensity (Prokop 2015), which ultimately increase paternity certainty. Young and less experienced female prostitutes are more attractive to males (Sohn 2016b), and popular media often provide information that young females can sometimes sell their virginity for hundreds of thousands of dollars. According to some evolutionists, sexually transmitted infections causing infertility and, in turn, divorcees can contribute to the prevalence of prostitution (Rózsa 2000; Apari et al. 2014).

Conclusion

All this information supports the idea that male preference for female prostitutes is a short-term mating strategy, ultimately influenced by the high probability of conception. These ancestral preferences still persist despite the frequent use of contraception in the modern world.

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