

ASPECTS OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS OF SEX WORKERS

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Abstract: *Most of the time, the community stigmatizes sex workers, which has implications for the children, who end up being marginalized due to their mother's occupation. Given the fact that the status of a sex worker requires a completely different type of skills than that of the mother, this paper started from trying to understand how women became to practice commercial sex. It pertains also to the implications that this has on them and the relationship with the family and their children. The sociological survey based on the technique of unstructured, in-depth applied face-to-face interview was used as the research method. Poverty, low wages, low levels of education that did not allow them to access well-paid jobs, coming from disorganized families, traumatic episodes of abuse, abuse, homelessness, childhood rape are causes for which women have chosen to use his body as a source of income. Although many sex workers benefit from solidarity and protection within the family, it does not have a positive opinion towards the work performed by them, but in most cases, the partner gives it all the necessary support. Most sex workers who are also mothers try to give their children everything they need. The financial protection of the child is an important factor, which most often explains the choice of women to be sex workers.*

Keywords: sex workers; commercial sex; prostitution; pimping.

1. Introduction

Considered "the oldest profession in the world", prostitution has been a part of all civilizations, and of any type of community. Most of the time, women of "easy morals" were blamed, marginalized, or even punished for their job by being cut their noses or drowning. Prostitution is done by the manifestation of a voluntary act, it is a personal choice, it takes place in the absence of any form of coercion, it depends on the way in which a person internalizes social norms and values.

Fletcher believes that prostitution is a practice in which a person voluntarily engages in the provision of sexual services in exchange for a fee. In the author's opinion, prostitutes do not regard their profession as degrading, although there are those who regard this practice as exploitative. After considering both the good parts and the few hours that can be determined by them and the money earned, as well as the bad parts, the continuous harassment of the police, the commissions taken by the pimp, the precarious conditions in which they work, it is clear that those who practice prostitution prefer their profession otherwise they would not continue to practice it (Fletcher, 2003).

In Romania, prostitution is defined as "having sexual intercourse with different persons in order to obtain patrimonial benefits for oneself or for another" (Criminal Code, Special Part, Chapter VII, art. 213).

Law 61/1991 in the republished version does not explicitly mention the term "prostitution" or "commercial sex", but defines prostitution as "attracting people, in any form, in bars, parks, streets or other public places in order to have sexual intercourse with them to obtain material benefits, as well as the exhortation or determination, for the same purpose, of a person to commit such acts" (Law no. 61 of September 27, 1991, republished, art. 2).

Until 1947, prostitution was considered legal in Romania. If until January 2014 prostitution was included in the category of crimes and as a result was punishable by imprisonment from three months to one year or fine, now, starting with February 1, 2014, this is a misdemeanor. The fine for practicing commercial sex ranges from 500 lei to 1,500 lei. (Law no. 61 of September 27, 1991, republished, art. 3). Instead, "the determination or facilitation of the practice of prostitution or the obtaining of patrimonial benefits from the practice of prostitution by one or more persons is punishable by imprisonment from 2 to 7 years and the prohibition of the exercise of certain rights. If the determination at the beginning or continuation of the practice of prostitution was made by coercion, the punishment is imprisonment from 3 to 10 years and the prohibition of the exercise of certain rights. If the acts are committed against a minor, the special limits of the punishment are increased by half" (Criminal Code, Special Part, Title 2, Chapter VII, Art. 213).

Prostitutes come from both rural and urban areas, they come from different social classes (from those without education to those with a bachelor's degree) and practice prostitution for various reasons: low standard of living, poverty, desire to prosper on different social stages, due to amorous disappointments, a certain interest. Some do this for pleasure, others do not consider that they have another alternative to earn a living. Most of the time, in order to "escape" from reality, they consume alcohol or drugs (Aronescu, 2010: 31-32).

According to a study conducted in Romania, women who practice prostitution do not have a high level of education, they graduate at most high school. Regarding their relationship status, most sex workers do not live with another person, 37% of them have a cohabitating partner, 47% of the total number have a stable relationship. The income obtained from practicing this profession is used to pay bills, rent in some cases but also to support the family and children, as 75% of respondents have a child (Preda, Buzducea, Grigoraș, Lazăr, 2010: 80).

Sex workers are also socially excluded, unable to access the services and social benefits provided by the state to people in difficulty. Many of the women who practice prostitution do not have a stable home in order to benefit from social assistance that would ensure their guaranteed minimum income. As they are not medically insured, access to social services is reduced, some

women resort to emergency medical services in case of illnesses or unwanted pregnancies.

Unfortunately, even sex workers who have given up this profession do not benefit from social support services, rehabilitation programs, support to achieve abstinence from drug addiction, counseling and therapy, support / counseling to facilitate the qualification or obtaining courses or a job.

Statistics show that most sex workers have experienced at least one pregnancy (one pregnancy - 36%, two pregnancies - 28%, three pregnancies - 20%, four pregnancies - 8%, five pregnancies and over - 6%), but the percentages increase if the age of the subjects exceeds 26 years. Unfortunately, the majority of abortions are suffered by underage persons (Vintileanu & Roman, 2000).

Most of the time, the community stigmatizes sex workers, which has implications for children, who end up being marginalized due to their mother's occupation. Therefore, a prostitute who is also a mother can be seen as a social problem given that prostitution is considered an illegal activity and the mother's duties may conflict with the "profession". Due to her status but also to the implications of the profession, the woman may neglect the mother role in favor of the profession. A great importance in the child's education has both the activity provided by the mother and the standard of living, education and the social status that influences the mother-child reality.

2. Methodology

Given the fact that the status of sex worker requires a completely different type of skills and role prescriptions than that of a mother, this paper started from trying to understand how the woman came to practice commercial sex but also the implications that this has on the relationship with the family and the child.

For the study we selected 23 mothers practicing commercial sex, aged between 19 and 32 years, working in the area Bucharest - Ilfov. The study period was July-November in 2019. For the sampling of individuals, the snowball method was used, which consists of interviewing the persons recommended by another respondent. Thus, initially, a person from the research population was identified who then recommended another person, who in turn did the same.

The group consists of a small number of subjects, as their willingness to participate in the proposed research was quite low. On the other hand, there is currently no database of sex workers for us to access a larger number of people in this category. The results obtained by the participation of a small number of subjects do not allow the results of the interview to be extended to the population.

The study complied with the ethical norms of scientific research, always respecting the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, the subjects being able to withdraw at any time of the study.

The objectives of the study were:

- Identifying the causes that determine sex workers to choose to practice prostitution;
- Analyzing the forms of solidarity and protection within the family of sex workers.
- Analysis of how a mother tries to protect her child from the criminal environment.

Research questions:

- Do material shortages cause some women to have commercial sex?
- Does the family remain in solidarity with sex workers, even if society stigmatizes them?
- Do the children of sex workers benefit from solidarity and protection in the family?

To be able to achieve the objectives and to answer the research questions, the chosen approach is a qualitative one, as it aims to analyze in-depth the approached topic, so that the data collected are relevant for the study. As a research method, a sociological survey based on the interview technique was used to find out and interpret in-depth the data necessary for the research. The technique used is the unstructured, in-depth interview applied to face to face.

3. Data interpretation

One of the aspects pursued in this research refers to the causes that determine women to choose to practice commercial sex. In this regard, the majority of respondents (17 women) stated that they chose to practice prostitution because of poverty. *"I have to work to have my own house and I have a purpose, and if I start building a house now, I take my child with me, because he can't sit next to me because I don't have the possibility,"* said a woman in the age of 21 years. Most of the time, the woman is the one who supports the whole family, the husband/concubine not having a job. *"He doesn't work, I provide and that's fine."* (woman, 19 years old) *"Who? My lazy husband, he doesn't like work, I make money and he does the rest with the children, with the house... we have money and it's good"* (woman, 28 years old).

Low wages have led some study participants to choose prostitution as an easy way to earn more money. Some respondents said they had dependent children and elderly parents, and *"the family situation is not bright"*. Others are either divorced or abandoned by their husbands with young children and have failed to identify another alternative to a higher income. *"I tried to get a job ... he gave me a miserable salary, I could barely afford it"* (woman, 24 years old).

Another identified cause is the low level of education that prevents women from finding decently paid jobs that cover their needs. *"It's not for me, I would like to make honest money, but it's hard here, it doesn't give me a job because I don't have a school, prostitution is how I make money to live"* (Woman, 23 years old).

The motivation to practice prostitution comes on the same background in all the situations described by sex workers: the need to earn money in the context in which society does not offer them the chance for a well-paid job. Some of them mask the decision of prostitution as a moral motivation (for example, *"to earn money to stay with my child"*).

The deficit of educational climate is another reason why the women interviewed chose to practice prostitution. Most come from disorganized families, families in which problems of excessive alcohol consumption and aggression or conflict are not absent. *"My father drank until he fell into the ditch, he gave all his money for a drink. He would come home and beat my mother until he bruised her ... for fear I would run away with my mother in the garden and sleep there"* (woman, 31 years old).

In some cases, respondents suffered traumatic episodes of abuse, mistreatment, eviction, which later led them to choose to use their bodies as a source of income. *"The man with whom our mother lived to beat us. A few times he drove us away from home ... we had nothing to eat"* (woman, 26 years old).

In one case, the interviewee was the victim of a rape in childhood, at 13 years old. *"I got in the car with him, he said he was taking me home ... he stopped the car and ..."* (female 22 years old). She believes that was the incident that made her choose to practice *"the oldest profession in the world"*, but also *the fact that she is convinced that she can do nothing else. "I don't know how to do anything, what else to do, I have to put something on the table ..."*

A rather important aspect observed during the discussions refers to the moment when the women started to practice this profession. The answers given by the respondents show that a large part of them started prostituting themselves after giving birth, due to insufficient income. Thus, one of the respondents states the following *"After I made the boy, you realize ... it was necessary"* (woman, 26 years old). Another respondent motivates her choice by *"lack of money, not everyone has it, I had nothing to feed the child"* (woman, 21 years old). Practicing prostitution, these women stated that they pursued the financial protection of the child, because their income was insufficient and they needed the necessary resources to raise and care for him.

Another aspect pursued in this study refers to the forms of solidarity existing in the families of sex workers, respectively to the solidarity of the parents, as well as of the partners, respectively of the spouses. Regarding the parents' opinion about the work performed by these women, we identify two profile typologies for sex workers: the category of those who exclude negative aspects from the dynamics of these actions, motivating their gestures on social difficulties in terms of integration, adaptation and social inequity. , and the category of sex workers who are fully aware of the compromise of this profession. Several respondents (9 women) stated that they have not kept in touch with them for several years, and others mentioned that they have not kept in touch with them because they do not support them in what they do. *"I don't talk much with my mother. I don't want to, she always tells me to look for*

another job [...] she tells me she works normally, she doesn't do it anymore" (female, 27 years old).

One of the respondents said that her parents support her in everything she does, and that only her mother knows about her job, and who does not agree with it. *"Yes, we get along well. Of course, he doesn't agree... how can he agree with this thing? You're already big in your family, I don't listen to her anymore, but when it comes to a mistake, you realize she's right, aren't you?"* (woman, 24 years old).

Other respondents mentioned that the parents know what they are doing, only that they have no opinion about the profession practiced *"Yes, they support me. She has no opinion that she has been doing this job for 5 years"* (Woman, 32 years old), and another that her parents support her in everything she does, only they do not know that she is a prostitute. *"Nobody knows"* (woman, 20 years).

From the statements of the sex workers, we deduce that concerning the parents this form of solidarity is weakened, if the parents either do not agree or do not express any opinion in this regard. This reluctance of parents to express their opinion may result from the fact that they are put in front of the accomplished fact, although they know that society has a low tolerance for this kind of practice. There are also situations where parents do not know about this, so it is not possible to talk about the existence or absence of solidarity.

The analysis of the relationships between the partners refers to the support given by the woman's partner, the support given in general but also in terms of the profession. Based on these ideas, most have responded that their partners support them in everything they do, including the profession they practice. A participant in the study referring to the relationship with the partner says that *"Yes, he supports me ... you realize that if not, she was not with me. It doesn't matter as long as I bring the money home"* (female, 28). However, if in ordinary couples, marital solidarity is what builds and welds relationships, for the category of sex workers, the motivation comes from the material dependence of which these women are aware and always use it as a first resource to maintain relationships. Four of the respondents stated that they have no relationship *"No. He didn't want to be with me anymore ... he found another one, the child says that he is not with him ... that it can be anyone's"* (woman, 23 years old); *"No ... we had a child and we broke up, he doesn't care about the child, he sends him money but rarely, he only came once to see him since we broke up"* (woman, 26 years old).

From the perspective of conjugal relations, in most cases the close connection between them is observed, the partners support their partner in terms of the activity undertaken. A possible explanation for this may be financial resources. If the family needs income, and the woman is the only person who supports the family, then the partner gives her all the necessary support so that the economic function can be achieved. In the case of those who are not involved in a relationship and have separated from the child's

biological father, it goes without saying that the solidarity function was not achieved or was not well coagulated, which led to the disintegration of the couple.

Considering the partner's involvement in raising and educating the child as a form of solidarity within the couple, in six cases the women's partner was not the child's natural father, but they were somewhat involved in his upbringing and education. For example, one of the respondents says that *"They get along well, the child is at school, and at afterschool, he comes in the evening to eat, he goes to bed and every day it's the same thing. He's at my mother's on the weekends or when I go out he stays with them longer"* (woman, 25 years old). Another respondent admits that her husband is the one who spends more time with the children *"My husband, he stays with them ... he helps with homework"* (woman, 27 years old).

If the mother is no longer in a relationship with the child's father (4 cases), the situation is as follows: *"Contact the child. Yeah, he's not really involved like that ... he's gone abroad. Yes, it's okay with the money, he sends some money from time to time"* (woman, 25 years old).

Regarding the situations in which the partners are also the parents of the children (in 13 of the cases) the woman is more involved in their upbringing and education, the partners not having a significant contribution in connection with the upbringing and education of the minors. *"The more I take care of the children ... the more he helps like that ... not too much"* (woman, 23 years old). Thus, we can talk about the presence of solidarity in the family, in cases where the partner is not the biological father of the child, and yet is involved in raising and educating him. This aspect is relevant for defining the relationships within the family and can mean that it is a cohesive one, and the ties between the members are close. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the biological fathers of children, who do not constantly contact the children, and the relationship with the child's mother is one governed by issues that strictly concern the child. The involvement of the partner in the care of the child, when he is also the father of the child is low, but this does not concretely imply a lack of cohesion between members, but only reveals a lower contribution of the paternal part in raising and educating the child.

Protecting the child from the environment in which the mother works is a rather important factor for its harmonious development. Most of the respondents stated that they try not to be away from home for too long, in order to be able to give the child all the necessary attention. *"Well, he doesn't have to find out, he doesn't have much time to go home. She is also with school, she has nothing to do..."* (woman, 27 years old) or *"I just don't take them with me because I'm not crazy, yours takes care of them, she has nothing to look for, boys they stay at home in peace"* (woman, 24 years old).

In none of the cases at this time the child does not know what his mother is doing, so most argued that they would never find out what they were doing. A 32-year-old respondent believes that children will never find out that they practice prostitution. *"They won't find out, because it cannot be found out..."*

I don't have another possibility ... for them I do it ... they learn, they go to school" (woman, 32 years old). Another respondent, aged 23, stated that *"I hope she doesn't find out, that I won't do this my whole life anyway, to make a house for myself and then I stop, and then I don't do it anymore"*.

Some respondents are of the opinion that if the children find out what they are doing, they will have nothing to reproach them *"I don't know what they could reproach me for since it has and I give them everything. Maybe a little shame, money, or what I wanted, he has nothing to blame me for"* (woman, 26 years old). *"When she grows up maybe she will realize ... she will go to school and she will get better"* (woman, 29 years old).

Mothers want to protect their children from their professional entourage and hide from them the source of the income they earn, but there are also situations in which they consider that they are doing this for the good of the children, thinking that they would never blame them. The answers also indicate another form of protection, which shows that women prostitute themselves so that the little ones have all the necessary resources to be able to develop harmoniously. Financial protection is one of the duties that parents have towards their children and which is achieved by summing up the financial resources to be used in favor of the child.

Study participants who had girls were asked how they would react if, when they grew up, girls practiced the same job. In this sense, all mothers had a protective attitude towards their daughters, and they did not want them to end up practicing the same profession as them in the future, but to learn in order to have access to a well-paid job. *"That's why he goes to school so that he doesn't do like me, he won't be like me and he will find work"* (woman, 28 years old). *"I don't want this for her, not to do like me, because I give her everything and be happy"* (woman, 21 years old). Most respondents believe that the mother's role is to provide the child with everything he needs so that he does not have to resort to such criminal acts as his mother.

Expectations and desires for the future of children do not differ significantly, single workers want for their children a *"happy life"* (woman, 31 years), or *"to learn, to be well and not have health problems. That I take care of the rest"* (woman, 25 years old). One can observe the devotion of mothers towards children, but also the fact that they want for themselves everything they did not have, namely: an adequate education and a better future.

Two of the respondents failed to fulfill their role as mothers, and the children are raised in one case by the parents of the interviewee, and in the other case by an aunt.

4. Conclusions

Family life has indisputable importance in any society, within the family, the primary socialization of children is formed. Social relationships are influenced by family life, and the child's behavior will be influenced by what he learns within the family.

The causes that determined the study participants to practice commercial sex were mainly: poverty, low wages, low level of education that did not allow them to access well-paid jobs. Most come from disorganized families, families in which there are problems of excessive alcohol consumption, aggression, or conflict, have suffered traumatic episodes of abuse, abuse, eviction, rape in childhood. Sex workers who are also mothers state that the appearance of the child in the family determined them to choose this path, in order to give their children a decent life.

Research has shown that most sex workers who are also mothers respect their duties and often try to be as close as possible to the child to give him everything he needs. There are also situations in which the mother does not have a very close relationship with the child, being overwhelmed by responsibilities that she is not prepared to face, to which is added the lack of a partner to support her, so she places the responsibility of raising and caring for her parents, relatives.

Although sex workers enjoy solidarity and protection within the family, it does not have a positive opinion of the work they do, but in most cases, the partner gives it all the necessary support.

The main reasons why the relationship between sex workers and family has cooled down is mainly due to the fact that she chose to practice this profession. The financial protection of the child is a rather important factor, as most of the time this can explain the choice of women to be sex workers.

Sex workers want to protect their child from all the factors that could influence them in a negative way, not wanting their own child to ever practice this profession, but to have a better future and education, in order to access legal, better-paid jobs. None of the children know what his mother is doing, and no one in his immediate environment has ever made it clear to them. Most sex workers say they do not want to work long hours in this field, but to find a legal job and rehabilitate.

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