“IT’S ALSO A KIND OF ADRENALIN COMPETITION” – SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE SEX TRADE AS VIEWED BY CLIENTS¹

STANISLAV ONDRÁŠEK, ZUZANA ŘIMNÁČOVÁ, and ALENA KAJANOVÁ

Abstract: The main goal of the article is to describe selected aspects of the sex trade as viewed by clients who make use of the services provided by sex workers. We use data obtained through a content analysis of selected topics discussed on an erotic forum called Nornik.net. The topics were: Can a person stop “screwing”?; what was your first contact with the sex trade and how can a person hide their visits to sex workers? In the course of the analysis, we identified an additional category that featured in all the topics: “trophy collecting”. The discussants perceive sex workers as a commodity to be purchased and subsequently evaluated. The discussants tended to compete among themselves to visit the most sex workers or to be first to visit the latest sex worker. The discussion forum serves as a support centre and contains hints and tips on different areas of “screwing” and related issues. The forum also displays certain features of a community.

Key words: sex trade; sex worker; discussion forum; client.

Introduction

The sex trade is a multidisciplinary issue addressed by experts from different fields. While the medical perspective is primarily concerned with sexually transmitted diseases, the legal perspective looks at how national legislations deal with the sex trade. For example, the Czech Republic has no legislation defining either the sex trade or prostitution. However, there are efforts to introduce a law regulating prostitution (Rozkoš bez rizika, 2015). Current Czech law neither expressly allows nor forbids the sex trade in the Czech Republic and regulates only some aspects, such as human trafficking, pimping or the safeguarding of children. The psychological perspective primarily explores the mental impacts of sex work, including post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from working in that environment or from the frequent violence committed by clients (Farley & Barkan, 1998; Romans, Potter, Martin, & Herbinson, 2001). Finally, the sociological perspective considers for example motivation for

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entering into and remaining in the sex trade, looks at the social background of sex workers, socially pathologies relating to the sex business, and so forth.

Many studies deal with the sex trade (for example Ditmore, 2006; Murphy, 2010; Rössler et al., 2010, etc.), but they focus primarily on those providing sex services. Sex workers' clients are an invisible group, despite being integral to the sex trade, as they create the demand. It is interesting that even government regulation of the sex trade looks only at the supply side, and rarely at the clients. Sweden is an exception as it was the first country to target the purchase of sex services rather than the provision of such services (Ekberg, 2004). The motivation for keeping sex workers' clients invisible may stem in part from the fact that they form a hidden population.

We decided to use the Nornik.net erotic discussion website for our analysis as sex workers' clients are a hidden population and are difficult to approach and research. Analysing the web forums they visit provides us with limited access.

The goal of the article is to describe how sex service clients perceive sex workers, what their first contact was like and whether they are able to stop the visits.

Sex worker clients

The relatively high rate of visits to sex workers has shocked society since first unveiled in Kinsey's studies. But difficulties with the research methodology have often resulted in the number of clients and sex workers being under- or overestimated. As Gillernová, Kebza, and Rymeš (2011) state, in the early 1990s about 9% of men had had sex with a sex worker in the Czech Republic. At that time, there were around 10,000 sex workers in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office, 2005).

Current estimates indicate that there are up to 25,000 workers providing erotic services (Czech Statistical Office, 2006). Each woman working in the sex trade has an estimated ten clients per week on average (Weiss, 2011). The latest figures show that approximately 20% of men have had experience of the sex trade; however, not all male users will admit to regular or even one-off experiences.

The typical client of a woman working in the sex trade in the Czech Republic is a man aged around 35. The age structure of clients does not correspond to the usual elderly-man stereotype. Men under 25 years of age constitute 19.6% of the client group, while men over 65 years make up only 9.6%. Most clients are married or have a steady partner and they like to take risks (Malinová, 2008). Erotic services tend to be used most by men with secondary vocational schooling and least by university graduates (Štalmachová, 2007).

Most of the research on sex workers' clients investigates the motivation behind the take-up of paid sex services. In 2000, Xantidis, an Australian sexologist, published a study on sex workers' clients. He compared 60 clients and 60 non-clients. They did not differ in age, family status, situation or education. He found out that 70% of the clients visited sex workers once per month or more. The main motive given by the clients was that sex with a sex worker was less complicated than with another woman (82% of respondents). This was followed by an increased need for sex (79 %) and to try out a change of sexual partner (76 %). But most clients rejected the idea they were seeking an emotional relationship with a sex worker (59%) (Xantidis, 2000). There has been no comprehensive study into the motivations

of sex workers' visitors. Related studies have suggested that there are two most frequent motives: trying out a new unconventional sexual practice unavailable at home and a lack of satisfaction at home owing to the partner being ill or pregnant (Jacobson, 2002). Many men also make use of paid sex services to get the arousal they miss at home or to compensate for a lack of self-confidence. There are also men who simply want to chat, feel misunderstood or find sex with a sex worker easier (Kovařík, 1993). As König-Hollerwöger (2009) states, there is no clear motivational client profile. But there are many men who look for adventure and compare the search for sex workers to hunting. Other clients feel restricted or frustrated by their relationships. There is also a group of men who seek out the sex trade so they can behave aggressively and violently with a woman, or who are interested in specific groups like very young girls or pregnant women (König-Hollerwöger, 2009). Feminist theories on the sex trade explore aggression and violence, arguing that violence is perpetuated against women and men obtain sexual satisfaction from feeling dominant and attempting to control the woman (Connell, 1987; Barry, 1995; Freeman, 1996; Nelson-Butler, 2015).

Some researchers have developed typologies of sex trade clients based on motivation. Vanwesenbeeck (2001) distinguishes three main types of clients:

1. Business clients, who regard sexual intercourse with a sex worker as a business transaction. Negotiating and paying for the service bring some kind of pleasure as well.
2. Romantic clients, who want to establish a relationship with the sex worker, preferring to chat, and often lonely and elderly. An extreme variant is a man who imagines he is able to save the woman and take her away from the bad crowd.
3. Misogynous clients with a violent nature. Men who like to show off their power and dominance over the sex worker; they are often aggressive. They frequently refuse to use a condom. This group favours street sex workers, as they see them as inferior and more financially viable.

Weiss (2010) presents another typology, which includes another type in addition to the romantic type:

1. The experimenter, seeking out-of-the-ordinary or uncommon experiences, needing something not available at home. He sees sex as an adrenalin sport.
2. The consumer, who sees sex as just a bit of fun and relaxation, and does not want commitment. Sex with a sex worker is often cheaper than investing in a proper relationship with a partner/wife.
3. The patient, who may have increased sexual needs or even a sex addiction. Or he may feel ashamed at having a sexual dysfunction and less embarrassed when paying for a service. This group may include men who long for different sexual practices, but are afraid to tell their partner.

In addition to the experimenter and consumer, Månsson (in Månsson & Cervantes, 2004) also includes clients who define themselves as men with a "dirty-whore" fantasy. Such clients are attracted to sex workers because of the excitement, adventure and a slight feeling of contempt. They view themselves as decent, moral people, in comparison to sex workers, whom they consider to be morally inferior, and deserving only of disregard and to be perceived as sex objects (Freeman, 1996). Connell (1987) states that men partaking in the sex trade often feel the need to obtain power and control over the woman; they are dominant, and that status is confirmed through the sex worker.

Nornik.net

Nornik.net is the most frequented erotic discussion forum in the Czech Republic; another example is Masher. To enter the site, the user has to acknowledge s/he may view materials containing pictures, videos and texts of a sexual nature which could offend somebody and which are intended only for persons aged over 18. The forum contains many different topics and categories. Discussions are also held within regional subforums and refer to experiences in different countries. Topics are also categorized by the sex trade hierarchy. The user can also find other topics enjoyed by “screwers”, for example, on the effects of viagra and the best way to hide infidelity.

By 21 June 2017, Nornik.net contained a total of 241,365 posts, covering 3,119 topics. The number of registered members was 36,779. Each “screw” has a rating next to his name, depending on length of membership, for example “virgin screw” or “addict screw”.

Methods

The method used in this qualitative research was the content analysis of posts on the site. We looked at three topics discussed by sex workers’ clients on Nornik.net:

- Can a person stop seeking out and using sex services?
- What was the motive for your first visit to a sex worker?
- How can a person hide their “screwing” from their wife or girlfriend?

Although the virtual world, by its very nature, provides its users with anonymity, no nicknames or names are given in the article to preserve anonymity. The age of the discussants generally ranges from 21 to 60 years; the average age was 37 years and the average duration of “screwing” was nine years. The terms “screw” and “screwing” (in Czech: “norník” and “noření”) were defined by the discussants who refer to themselves that way. The information obtained from the discussion forum was analysed using Atlas.ti and elements of grounded theory (open and axial coding). The file of posts was converted into text, and then open coded and sorted into categories. When performing the axial coding, the categorization was completed first and then, using networking, we searched for relations between the codes and categories.

We used all the posts relating to the selected topics and so did not saturation of the file. In total, there were 256 posts by 173 different discussion-forum users.

Results

When analysing the Nornik.net discussion forum, we focused on the three topics containing the highest number of posts. The topics concerned whether a person can stop seeking out and using sex services; what the motive was for the first visit to a sex worker; and how a man can hide his “screwing” from his wife or girlfriend. In the course of the analysis, we identified an additional category featuring in all the topics being investigated, which we called “trophy collecting”. We have summarized all the relations between the various categories and codes in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1: Sex trade as viewed by clients.

Source: GAJU 029/2016/S.

Can a person stop it?

The ability to stop screwing is frequently discussed by the “screwers”. One group tends to think that they would stop using sex services if they found themselves in a stable relationship. This group mainly uses the services of sex workers because don’t they currently have a partner: *“when I had a girlfriend, I didn’t go to visit prossies”* (novice).

But the discussants who believe that it’s not possible to stop “screwing” form a larger group. There are several motives. Satisfying the biological need for physical satisfaction whilst avoiding becoming emotionally engaged is one: *“of course he breaks it (relationship with his girlfriend) by playing around, but I probably agree that he ONLY wants to screw, and that’s why he won’t stop”* (novice). Another motive was the need for excitement: *“there are certain kinds of men who constantly need new excitement, and you can’t do anything about that”* (screwed). A specific group of motives related to claims that men cannot stop using sex services, as it natural for that section of the population: *“All guys long for new stimuli. It is natural”* (addict screw), or: *“I understand that if the partner finds out about the screwing, it’s not good news. But it’s different for guys than it is for women”* (advanced).

Some discussants thought the problem was that sex services were like a drug and they compared “screwing” to an addiction: *“sex is part of life, but paid sex is a DRUG, you can say what you like”* (addict screw), *“But the worst thing is that it’s an addiction!”* (addict screw). One poster states that a person can stop, but only for a limited time: *“so the answer is, basically, that if a guy tries to, he will only manage to stop for a while”* (novice).

One motive for why the discussants cannot stop is the fact that sex services are a hobby that gives them time out from everyday life: *“Screwing is my little world and it belongs only to me. My better half isn’t in it, my beloved children aren’t in it, the jealous wimps from work aren’t in it, my drinking mates and other friends aren’t in it. It’s something that is just mine”* (novice).

First contact with the sex trade

First contact with the sex trade was another area focused on in the analysis. We examined the motives behind the discussants’ visit and their first impressions. Curiosity was the first motive: *“Of course it was curiosity that got me here”* (novice). The “screwers” also stated that they needed new sexual contacts even when they had a partner: *“I go to distract myself only about twice a year. With my girlfriend, it is boring after a while”* (virgin) or that they lacked sexual satisfaction: *“Why? Because of a lack of sex”* (addict screw).

Friends are an important reason for the first contact. Many discussants were introduced to the sex trade by a friend who went to a night club or private with them. Friends also encouraged them to visit: *“Once my best friend told me... Stop chasing girls on dating sites and go to a brothel instead... You’ll get the girl you wish for and you won’t have any trouble with her”* (expert screw).

Impressions of the first contact with the sex trade varied, ranging from negative experiences—*“The start, the first visit to the private, was hard. I came across a ‘don’t touch my boobs don’t touch my hair-shoot your load and fuck off’ worker. On top of that she had hairy legs, ugh! I spent almost three years plucking up the courage to try again,”* (expert screw)—to fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease—*“I quit because it’s not*

worth the risk. I had oral sex without a condom and was really scared” (virgin)—to positive experiences—“*The first visit was nice; my first impression: I liked it*” (virgin).

How to hide visits to sex workers?

The discussants on Nornik.net make up a community that shares hints and tips on how to hide visits to sex workers from wives and girlfriends. The first type of advice relates to the car. The posters discussed where to park the car to avoid possible confrontation: “*only leave your car at places where its presence can be reasonably explained (shopping-centre car park: ‘Honey, I went to look at the earrings you liked last time’)*” (expert screwer) or what to take with them: “*I have almost everything in my car, a sweatshirt, shower gel, toothbrush, everything [is] well hidden*” (novice).

The second type of advice was about returning home after “screwing”. There were pieces of advice on how to behave upon return or how to control one’s emotions: “*Stay calm, especially if she asks questions. Also control yourself and don’t come home overjoyed after a good time and don’t provoke any unnecessary questions*” (addict screwer). Some discussants stated that flexible working hours can be an advantage when trying to hide their “screwing”: “*flexible working hours are an advantage, as you can screw before/after a meeting and you don’t have to explain where you were*” (expert screwer).

By sharing these hints and tips, the discussants try to prevent conflicts with their partner or to solve potential conflicts.

Trophy collecting

The discussions all touched on a topic we encoded as “trophy collecting”. The discussants rated the number of sex workers they visited in a specific period – “*This year I want to notch up at least 30 different ones, and I’ve already got 26*” (addict screwer) – or for example the number of women of different nationality – “*I also collect nationalities, I collect them secretly*” (addict screwer).

If a new sex worker comes on the scene, the discussants “compete” over who will be first to visit her and report back.

The clients liken trophy collecting to hunting and sport; the number of women visited and the fight over who will be among the first clients of a new woman on the scene can be seen as a form of competition: “*... it is actually a sport*” (novice), “*Yes, and at the same time a kind of adrenalin competition ...*” (addict screwer).

Discussion

The analysis of the discussion-forum data produced some very interesting information, of a type processed in a limited number of studies. Most of the research deals only with sex workers, their past, health and motives for joining the sex trade (James & Meyerding, 1978; Malakouti et al., 2016; Petrocchi et al., 2016). The research also frequently investigates violence committed by the partner (El-Bassel et al., 2004). But very few studies look at the clients; one exception is an extensive study by Bianchi, Popper, and Lukšík (2007) on supply and demand

in sex services in four countries—Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia—that found that the purchase of sex services does not imply the purchase of intimacy but of power and of somebody else who subsequently loses independence. This may also be true in relation to our finding that some men are satisfied merely by thinking about “buying” a woman. The act of paying stimulates pleasant feelings in them. The emotional subtext of paying may be about increasing the client’s male-female power relations (Månsson, 2006). We can see that commodification is occurring here, with the woman (sex worker) becoming traded goods. This client type is the most frequent. Vanwesenbeeck’s (2001) refers to them as the “business type”.

The most interesting finding of our study is that most clients agree that paid sex with a sex worker becomes an “addiction” over time and that it is very difficult to stop. This may be related to for example the excitement related to the illegal nature of the sex trade, a full-blown addiction to sex satisfaction or to “hunting out” excitement (Sanders, 2008; König-Hollerwöger, 2009). Our study showed that men do in fact try to “hunt down” the latest sex worker or visit as many of them as possible. They also compete among themselves over who will be first to report back on a new worker.

The forum also includes different hints and tips on how to hide visits to a sex worker from a partner or wife. The discussants share different banalities, but also give serious advice. Van Landingham et al. (1994) states that unmarried men have nothing like this and that only a small number of unmarried men take measures to hide visits to a sex worker. By contrast married men are very careful to hide their activities. This may be related to adrenalin, fear of discovery or it may be a part of the hunt.

One group of “screwdrivers” agreed that one way of “stopping screwing” was to fall in love and form a stable relationship. We can see an analogy here with sex workers’ efforts to escape the sex trade and their frequently expressed desire to leave the sex trade if they find a stable partner worth leaving it for (Ondrášek & Kajanová, 2017). This can be contrasted with the fact that the discussants stated that they considered it difficult to establish a stable relationship or that they did not in fact try to establish one, which may be related to the easy availability of sex services, compensating sometimes for the feeling of loneliness (Birch, 2015).

Further, we found that the primary reason for visiting a sex worker was either curiosity or a lack of sex, which is similar to Xantidis’ (2000) finding that one of the main motives is an increased need for sex and a desire to replace an existing partner. This motive was also given by the Nornik.net sex workers’ clients.

We are aware of limitations with our study. The first relates to the self-selected sample. As the discussion forum posts come from a specific group of clients, it can be expected that the group will be specific in some regards. Therefore the results cannot be generalized to all clients engaged in the private sex trade or the sex trade in general. Another limitation is the fact that the virtual environment tends to distort the results. This is because as Kubelová & Kajanová (2009) state, discussants on the internet have the opportunity to answer if they wish to and if they are interested in the topic being discussed.

Conclusion

Our content analysis of the Nornik.net discussion forum enabled us to identify several common aspects of the sex trade as directly viewed by the clients/ forum users. We found

that most sex workers' clients perceive women as goods. The forum has become home to a specific community which shares experience and competes over the number of sex workers visited, but also exchanges hints and tips on different areas of "screwing". The client group constitutes a considerable, yet invisible, part of the sex trade, creating demand for sex services. It is therefore important that the other side of the sex trade, that is, the client side, should be investigated to ascertain its views on sex workers and on "screwing" in general.

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Institute of Social and Special-paedagogical Sciences,
 Faculty of Health and Social Sciences.
 University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice,
 J. Boreckého 1167/27,
 370 11 České Budějovice,
 Czech Republic
 Emails: ondras00@zsf.jcu.cz, rimnaz00@zsf.jcu.cz, kajanova@zsf.jcu.cz