

Between the University and the sex industry: a research with students selling sex

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Background: Being a university student has increasingly higher costs which led students to look for ways to earn money and solve their economic problems. In addition, they need a lot of time to study. In order to accomplish their objectives taking into account those needs, students may try to find other solutions. Thus, sex work may seem more attractive when compared to other jobs, because they can get big amounts of money in less time. However, sex workers may face several problems, including stress factors, one of them being the social stigma, which can have negative impact on their psychological well-being.

Research questions: (1) What are the characteristics of student sex workers?; (2) What are the motivations to enter and to continue in the sex industry?; (3) What are the stress factors associated with being an university student and a sex worker at the same time?

Method: We carried out a qualitative research conducting semistructured interviews with 7 participants who were or have been university students and sex workers at the same time. We also analysed 24 online sex work advertisements. The data was analysed through content analysis.

Results: According to the interviews and the 24 online advertisements, we found out that the sociodemographic characteristics were diverse: The majority of the students working in the sex industry are women, but there are also men, trans and non-binary persons, between the ages of 18 and 56; they identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual, have different nationalities and economic status and are doing sex work in cities far away from their parents' homes. Most of the students interviewed enter the sex industry and are still doing sex work because of economic factors but also because of the flexible working hours that this job provides. They also point out their own characteristics (*e.g.*, curiosity) and their political and artistic motivations to perform sex work. In addition, they state they are aware of the stress factors, but perceive it not only as having a negative (*e.g.*, difficulty on managing time) but also a positive (*e.g.*, having influent clients) impact on their lives.

Conclusions: We concluded that the reasons for the interviewed students starting, and continue, doing sex work are diverse. This helps to understand that this decision is not exclusively explained by economic factors. We concluded also that, beside the disadvantages, they perceive this activity as having advantages, which favors their continuity in the sex industry. The fact that the stress associated with sex work can be perceived either as positive or negative can led to the conclusion of different perspectives and positioning about sex work and their own situation.

Key Words: sex work, university students, prostitution, stress

Funding Sources: The research was not funded.