

ARE PRIVATE SEX WORKERS REALLY FREE?

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Abstract

This article has two levels. The first deals with the perception of sex business from the perspective of private sex workers; the second points out the interpretation mistakes that may occur within the qualitative data analysis. This article is the result of a project focused on reflections on the private sex business. The research was carried out with the help of biographic-narrative interviews with 36 women who work in the private sex business in the South Bohemia Region and Prague. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim and evaluated in the ATLAS.ti program with the use of the grounded theory method. In the results, freedom emerged as the central category; it pervaded all interviews and topics, including the motivation for prostitution. So, for the respondents, it appears that this is a central topic. The respondents primarily mentioned the freedom to choose their working hours; no supervisor; the freedom to choose clients; the freedom provided by the high income. They also noted the contrasting lack of freedom in other jobs. A comprehensive analysis with the use of contrasts showed this freedom can however be an alternative consequence of an ego-defence strategy of women in sex business.

Keywords: *Freedom; Interpretation mistakes; Motivation; Sex business; Sex workers*

INTRODUCTION

The sex business has been addressed by a number of experts and is the subject of many political and scientific discussions. In the Czech Republic, sex workers and the sex business are primarily dealt with by the organization Rozkoš bez rizika (Pleasure without risk). The staff of this organization has published a number of publications, such as *"From the Sex Business to the Labor Market?"* This publication is focused on the analysis of legislation and the possible return of sex workers to the legal labor market (Šídová et al., 2013). Another publication is *"Sexual Violence. Why Nobody Asks?"* This deals with

sexual violence in general but includes a chapter analyzing the violence committed against sex workers by clients (Šídová, 2014). In this context, it is necessary to mention the monothematic publication by the authors Kutálková et al. (2016): *"Not that! Analysis of Violence in the Sex Business and its Solution."* This publication only focuses on this accompanying phenomenon. The mentioned publications focus mainly on the area of the street and club sex business and, as Poláková (2016) states, it is difficult to obtain relevant data about the private sex business because it is a hidden group. This was our motivation to focus on this area of the sex business and the persons working in it. Our aim

was to provide the missing information and contribute to a greater awareness of this specific area. The following research questions were defined before the study began: What is the lifestyle of women in the private sex business like, and what is their self-reflection like? What is the women's motivation to enter the private sex business? How do private sex workers perceive their work?

The article addresses two levels. The first consists of the results of the qualitative research focused on how private sex workers subjectively perceive their work and their motivation to enter the sex business. The second consists of potential interpretation misrepresentations that researchers can make when studying the target group in question.

Private sex business as the subject of interest

In general, the sex business can be divided according to the environment in which paid sexual services are provided, specifically: street, club, hotel, private sex business and escort services (Ross et al., 2014; Weitzer, 2009). Within the sex business hierarchy, we can call the private sex business an "elite" sex business, compared to the street sex business (Long, 2012). When focusing on the historical development of the sex business in the Czech Republic, we can see that in recent years, the offer of sexual services has been shifting from the streets and clubs to private flats. These flats provide greater anonymity to both the sex workers and the clients (Ditmore, 2006). Sex workers in the private sex business are a very closed group – they seek social and health services very rarely.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative research strategy was used for the data collection. Specifically, it consisted of biographic-narrative interviews. The research set was made up of private sex workers from the Czech Republic ($n = 36$; a theoretical saturation of the research set was achieved). The set included private sex workers from the South Bohemian Region ($n = 19$) and Prague – the Czech capital ($n = 15$). The respondents had the following age structure: average age 27 years, lowest age 18 years, highest age 55 years. The private sex workers included in

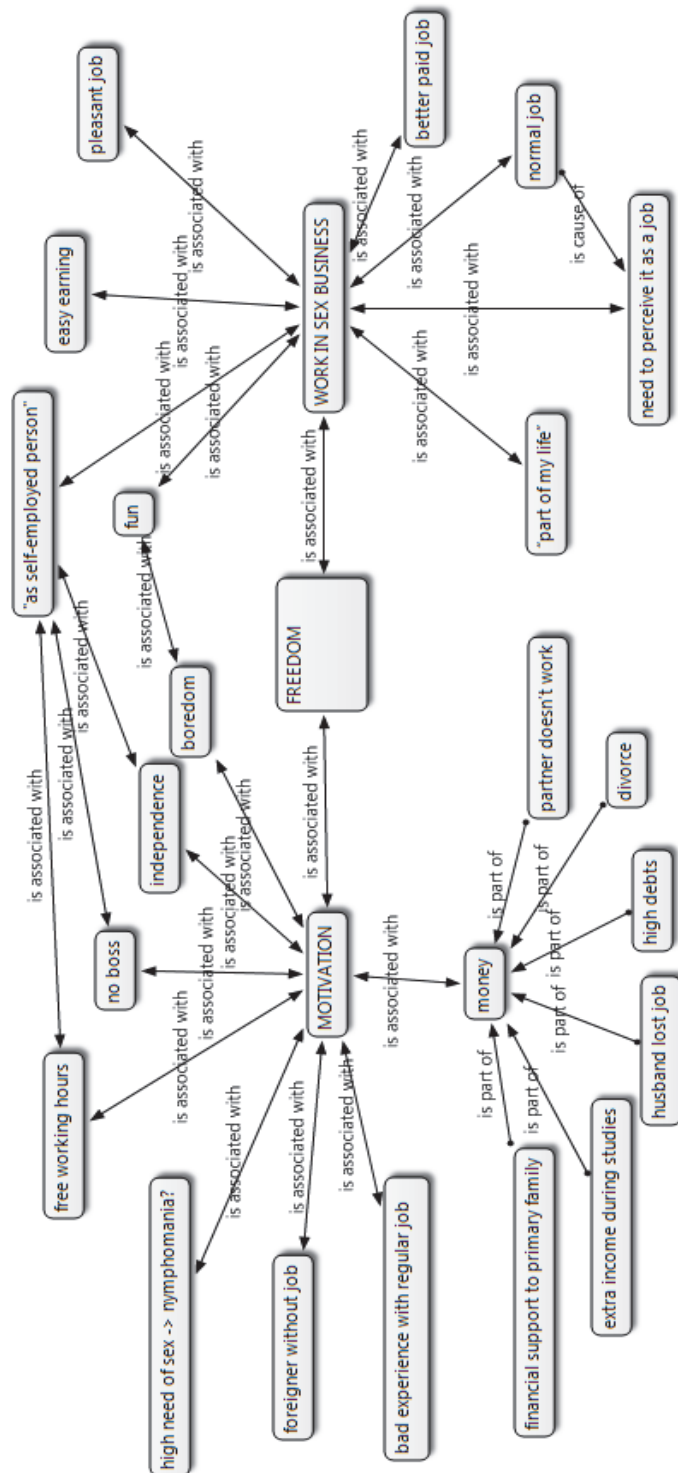
the study had been active in the sex business for different periods of time – from half a year to 20 years, the average being five years. From the perspective of education, the research set included seven women who had completed elementary education, eight women with secondary education and an apprenticeship certificate, 18 women with secondary education and a school leaving exam, and three women with a university education. The interviews included, among other things, the question of how the sex workers perceived their activity in the sex business and what had motivated them to enter it. Private sex services are advertised primarily through printed and internet advertisements, which is how we approached them. Other sex workers were approached through the snowball sampling technique. Before starting the interview, the respondents were familiarized with the study goal and with the potential uses of the acquired data. The interviews were then conducted and recorded on a recording device with their consent. The acquired data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed with the help of the grounded theory method in the ATLAS.ti program. In the initial stage, all interviews were encoded by open coding. Subsequent code categorization and axial coding allowed us to gradually search the connections between individual categories and codes. At the end of the data analysis, and within the fulfilment of the grounded theory principle, we made selective coding and determined the central category.

The resulting data allowed the creation of the following categories: Motivation, Work in the sex business, and the central category of Freedom. The resulting analyses were graphically processed with the help of networking. These are shown in Diagram 1.

RESULTS

Motivation to enter the sex business and the subjective perception of it

One of the topics the interviews dealt with was how the sex workers subjectively perceive their work in the sex business, and what their motivation to perform that job is. According to scientific literature, money is the primary motivation for entering the sex business (Benson and Matthews, 1995; Hughes, 2004; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013), as it brings a relative-



Source: GAJU 029/2016/S

Diagram 1 – Motivation and subjective perception of work in the sex business

ly fast and high income which is paid immediately and in cash. This motivation is also related to the need for higher amounts of money due to drug addiction or providing sex services directly in exchange for a shot (Cobbina and Oselin, 2011; Jeal and Salisbury, 2004; Potterat et al., 1994). Malinová (2005) defines three kinds of motivation for entering the sex business: first, the motivation of external pressure in which the sex worker is manipulated into the sex business. The second is motivation by the worker's own need, in which the sex business represents fun, excitement or even the opportunity to achieve orgasm. The third is motivation by rational deliberation, in which sex workers enter the sex business believing that it is a well-paid and proper job in which they can determine their own working hours. However, this division does not include the area of the private sex business, as the literature remains silent about it and it is uncertain whether this will ever change.

They are varied motivations to enter the private sex business. The respondents stated that money was the most frequent motive, which corresponds with the literature:

"I always had a job that was not well paid, and I wanted to have more money"... (IN1, 26 years old).

"It was a fine source of extra income during my university studies. It was enough to do it twice a month, and I had a lot of money" (IN12, 45 years old).

"Well, of course money was the greatest motive" (IN14, 30 years old).

However, the analysis showed that income or its increase for personal needs are not always the primary goals of sex workers. Their primary motivation to enter the sex business is often based on sudden or long-lasting adverse situations in the worker's close social environment. For example, the respondents reported situations of loss of income of one family member, mainly of the husband or the partner. *"Well, one income left the family... as my husband lost work"* (IN29, 35 years old). When the husband or the partner cannot (or does not want to) find a new job that could replace the missing income, everything may rest on the respondent – who then decides to enter the sex business because it provides relatively high and fast earnings. Divorce or the time after a divorce may present a similar and sudden situation: *"Well, first of all, after*

the divorce I left everything to my husband..." (IN5, 50 years old). One person (the woman in this case) often leaves all the assets to the other one and lands in a situation when she needs money for new housing, etc. Another situation in which a woman enters the sex business for other than personal reasons is an adverse financial situation in the immediate family. It is then an effort to support the family with money: *"I just want to live in some way and I want to be able to afford something and to help others, my Mum and my boyfriend, respectively"* (IN7, 24 years old). Providing financial support to the immediate family is frequent in poor families and in underdeveloped countries where the woman is often forced to enter the sex business by the family – as is stated by Demleitner (1994).

In addition to money, a great motivation reported by the sex workers in our study was free working hours, or the opportunity to choose the working hours. Furthermore, they also liked the fact they had no boss: *"I am free, I have enough money and I am not a slave to anybody"* (IN31, 25 years old). Having no boss may also be related to the fact that there are no pimps in the private sex business (May et al., 2000). However, sometimes this "function" may be held by the owner of the rented flat or, in some cases, by the sex worker's partner who tolerates their partner working in the sex business thanks to the profit.

The above statement contains another motivation, specifically independence/freedom. Freedom (or independence) as a motivation to work in the sex business is also reported by Bernstein (2007), Perkins and Lovejoy (2007) and Weidner (2001). Weidner (2001) further states that some sex workers may receive some excitement from their work, which was confirmed by our study too: *"Well, at the beginning it was just kind of fun, like some pocket money, why not? So I started in clubs, just for fun. I usually don't take it as work, but as fun"* (IN24, 38 years old).

Sometimes, a person may see entering the sex business as the only way to earn an income. This is the case in the statement of one respondent who said that she was motivated by having been refused by many employers because of her foreign nationality: *"At that time nobody wanted to employ me because I am a foreigner. That was very, very complicated..."* (IN20, 34 years old).

The increased need for sexual contact after e.g. a breakup with a partner was a surprising motivation to start being a sex worker: motivational tendency consisted of a high need of sexual contact, accumulated after the breakup with a partner: *“Primarily the fact that I am nymphomaniac and I broke up with my boyfriend and I needed sex really daily. Because I had been used to it for many years, and suddenly there was nothing. So primarily, primarily the need”* (IN26, 55 years old). Or due to a bad experience with work outside of the sex industry, which escalated into resignation: *“I tried it, but it’s a nightmare to me. Everybody tells me that I am short, I can’t reach anywhere, can’t carry anything, I am slow. So I have given up on normal jobs”* (IN11, 21 years old).

As for the respondents’ perception of working in the sex business, they agreed that it is a job as any other — but with a lot of benefits, and very well paid. They often compared working in the sex business to a trade and compared themselves to self-employed persons. This is explicitly supported by some statements: *“Then I got some clients, so now I am really well and it is mostly about the money, it is a different job, I can say a pleasant job, and I am flexible... nobody is my boss...”* (IN1, 26 years old).

“I direct the flow of orders by myself; imagine a self-employed person working for himself so that he directs his work by himself. I have the same thing” (IN36, 25 years old).

However, we also found that their subjective perception showed some deviations from their outward presentation. When the respondents spoke about legal work, they often called it “normal” work, in contrast to work in the sex business.

The last step of the analyses consisted in identifying the central category of “Freedom”, which pervaded all interviews and topics. The sex workers mentioned freedom or independence in all interviews in relation to both motivation and the perception of sex business. Thus, it can be concluded that the vision of freedom or independence is part of both the motivation and the subsequent perception of the sex business. Table 1 below, shows some of the respondents’ statements in which freedom is often explicitly revealed.

Are private sex workers really free?

The qualitative research may bring along with it a lot of misrepresentations. The credibility of the qualitative research may be endangered at three levels (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The first is reactivity, in which the researcher’s presence may affect participants’ opinions and behaviours. The second is the so-called researcher’s effect, when the research is affected by the interviewer’s personal attributes. Such attributes include gender, race or age (Padgett, 2017; Tavakoli, 2013). The third level is the participant influencing the research, for example if they are not willing to provide accurate answers or are unable

Table 1 – The link between freedom and the motivation to enter the sex business and its perception

Motivation to enter the sex business	Perception of work in the sex business
<i>“Freedom and sex”</i> (IN28, 23 years old)	<i>“... Freedom (time for myself) means a lot to me”</i> (IN6, 30 years old)
<i>“What motivated me to do this job?... Money and freedom”</i> (IN11, 21 years old)	<i>“Would anyone understand that freedom is for me more important than some menial job?”</i> (IN23, 27 years old)
<i>“I’m such a person who does not enjoy working time and being somewhere from eight to four, doing what they tell me, I do not like it”</i> (IN2, 23 years old)	<i>“No one gives me orders or tasks. When I go home early no one is screaming at me, no one is watching me and I can do what I want in the job... it is such a very free job”</i> (IN5, 50 years old)
<i>“I am free, I have enough money and I am not a slave to anybody”</i> (IN31, 25 years old)	<i>“... It suits my freedom, nothing to do and not basically someone’s slave or servant...”</i> (IN14, 30 years old)

Source: GAJU 029/2016/S

to answer the question. Such inability may be caused for example by unclear questions (Padgett, 2017). In our research, gender could have the greatest influence; however, the data was mainly collected by women, and when comparing and analyzing the interviews with a male interviewer, no differences suggesting any misrepresentations were found. Another impact could be caused by the recording device, specifically the voice recorder, as the respondents could be nervous because the interview is being recorded and so adapt their statements out of fear that the interview will be heard by somebody else.

Misrepresentations can also occur during working with the data and its subsequent interpretation. The qualitative research may include misrepresentations caused during coding – when it is only carried out by one researcher, without further analysis, or without multiple coding (Johnson and Waterfield, 2004; Saldaña, 2015). In our research, the coding was completed by 2 researchers, each of them coded the interviews separately and then they agreed about differing codes.

Risky research, with respect to misrepresentation, can be a research in which the participants are persons from a marginalized group, for example the Roma or homeless persons – who may give unclear or false information. Giving such information may be caused by fear of restrictions or by an attempt to impress the researcher, and the resulting misrepresentation is based on the participants' adaptation strategies (Kajanová and Mrhálek, 2016). In the case of our research, we can see that sex workers also show adaptation strategies; it is a process that may last years: *"Well, thanks to the fact that I have been doing it for three years, it is a normal job to me, a very well paid job, I have never had a better time"* (IN1, 26 years old). On the other hand, when researching marginalized groups, qualitative research design in the context of grounded theory is often used (Kozubík, 2013; Kozubík et al., 2018).

During the primary analysis, the researcher may get the impression that it is a favourable and free job; however, during a deeper analysis of some other statements, we discover that the statements of sex workers are influenced by rationalization. Rationalization generally constitutes one of the most frequently used ego-defence mechanisms. Rationaliza-

tion includes excuses for one's preceding or future decisions and searching for all of the positive aspects that can be found in a specific decision-related action (Myers, 1950; Steele, 1988). The individual tries to explain something unacceptable or unpleasant in an acceptable manner. So we can come across rationalization both before and after entering the sex business: *"It looked very innocent, it was offered to me and I said to myself, when we're not having a good time, I'll go into it, and I won't repeat it again; well, the conclusion wasn't like that, but there was an offer that if I met the man and if we did that thing, so I'd earn as much as a normal person earns in a month, you know"* (IN7, 24 years old). *"Well, the first time, it was quite a stressful situation, but as the time goes by, you lose the stage fright, and you realize that you can take it just as a job"* (IN3, 30 years old).

The rationalization may also be caused by the social stigma related to working in the sex business (Sallmann, 2010). This was also reflected by the sex workers in the interviews: *"I know that I may be ashamed of this job, but it is just a job, and it is certainly better paid than if I worked as a shop assistant somewhere"* (IN28, 23 years old). *"I perceive it differently at different times... Sometimes better, sometimes worse... The positive aspects certainly consist of the freedom, the contentment, freedom and mainly the money; and the negative aspects include the feeling of a bad job, the feeling of not building anything, of stagnating, and of course the depressions"* (IN31, 25 years old).

The resulting frequent mentions of or references to freedom, liberty or independence may constitute a specific construct, resulting from rationalization and adaptation strategies, which may serve as protection against harm to the self-esteem of the private sex worker or to her general self-perception. This raises the question: Are private sex workers really free?

CONCLUSIONS

Private sex workers have various motivations for entering the sex business. The primary motivation is a lack of money, but also freedom or independence.

Freedom is also related to the subjective perception of working in the sex business – when private sex workers perceive the sex trade as work; a trade that is well paid and provides them with a lot of freedom. But the analysis showed that such perceptions and motivations are distinctively influenced by rationalization and adaptation strategies of the sex workers. Our study contributed to an understanding of the motivation of the women to enter the private sex business, as well as the subjective perception of that work by the sex workers. At the same time, due to lack of information, this specific and expanding form should also be addressed in the future.

In solving the methodological issue, we have recognized the need to interpret interpretations. In other words, it is necessary to realize that informants often talk about their wishes as a reality. This may not be due to the intention to confuse the researcher, but unconscious defensive strategies. When carrying

out research work, the researcher should take care to avoid misrepresentations that could devalue the research, not only during the data collection but also during its subsequent interpretation. During the lessons of research methodology, academic workers should also focus on the interpretative level of the research and teach the students to search for deeper meanings hidden in the participants' statements; primarily if the participants come from hidden and marginalized groups – which is the case with those working in the sex business.

Conflict of interests

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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