



SELLING SEX IN CAPE TOWN

SEX WORK AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING
IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CITY

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Research methods and findings of a two- year study on the sex work industry in Cape Town

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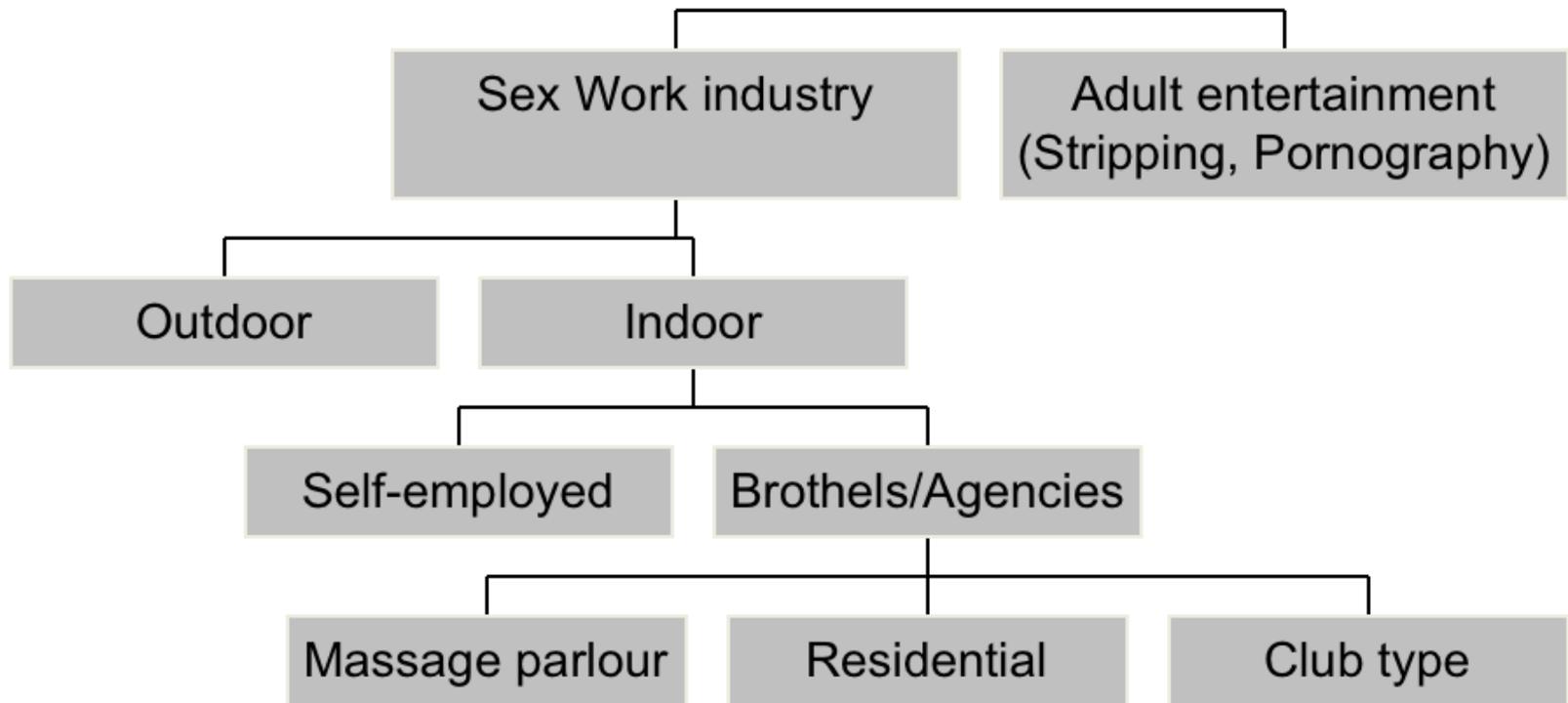


Research Objectives

- To develop a reproducible model for researching sex work industry
- Develop better understanding of the industry in Cape Town
- Determine extent to which sex workers have control over their working conditions in a criminalized industry
- Understand complex relationships between sex workers, pimps and brothel owners
- Determine prevalence of trafficking and to understand and reflect needs of victims (not to be covered in this presentation)
- Make recommendations to inform policy



Terms and definitions



Methodology

Research area:

140 suburbs, 54km radius from Cape Town CBD

Sex worker and academic advisory panel

Mapping indoors and outdoors

- Indoors: database based on media analysis and data capture with verification (included Chinese, Thai)
- Outdoors: intensive observation and documentation, consultation with sex worker advisory panel, sex work assistance (14 sites, 30 visits)



Methods

Qualitative data collection

- Interviews with brothel owners (n=19 + 1 pimp)
- Interviews with sex workers (indoors and outdoors n=20)
- Focus groups discussions with emphasis on determining agency (2 focus groups, 10 participants)

Quantitative Methods

- Survey based on representative sample size
- 83 indoor surveys administered (8.7% of population)
- 35 outdoor surveys (14% of population)



Research limitations

- Didn't include adult entertainment
- Didn't include transactional sex
- Didn't investigate children being sexually exploited in gangs
- Spoke to people who self identified as sex workers



Profile of brothel owners

- 19 Brothel owners and managers whose businesses represented a range of business models and income.
- Respondents represented cumulatively 142 yrs of experience (longest = 16 years, least experienced = 1 month, average = 8 years).
- Of the 19 respondents 14 were owners, 5 managers (managers limited decision-making power).
- Nine men (of which 8 owners), 10 women (4 owners, 6 managers).



FINDINGS



The business of brothels

- Four types of agencies in Cape Town:
 - agencies that are little more than establishments that rent rooms on a short-term basis from which several women work as sex workers on a more-or-less permanent basis
 - club-type agencies that generate income also from the sale of alcohol. Several such agencies also offer adult entertainment (e.g. stripping and dancing)
 - massage-parlours that clearly advertise themselves as such through signage outside the establishment and that offer sexual services for sale but do not sell adult entertainment or alcohol
 - residential agencies that are extremely discreet and are operated from residential homes in suburbs or from flats (apartments)
- Of the nineteen respondents, **1** owned a room-rental agency, **5** were owners/managers of massage parlours, **5** were club-type agencies and **8** were residential agencies



Size of the industry

Indoors	964
Outdoors	245
Total	1209

Of which 89% female, 9% male, 2% transgender

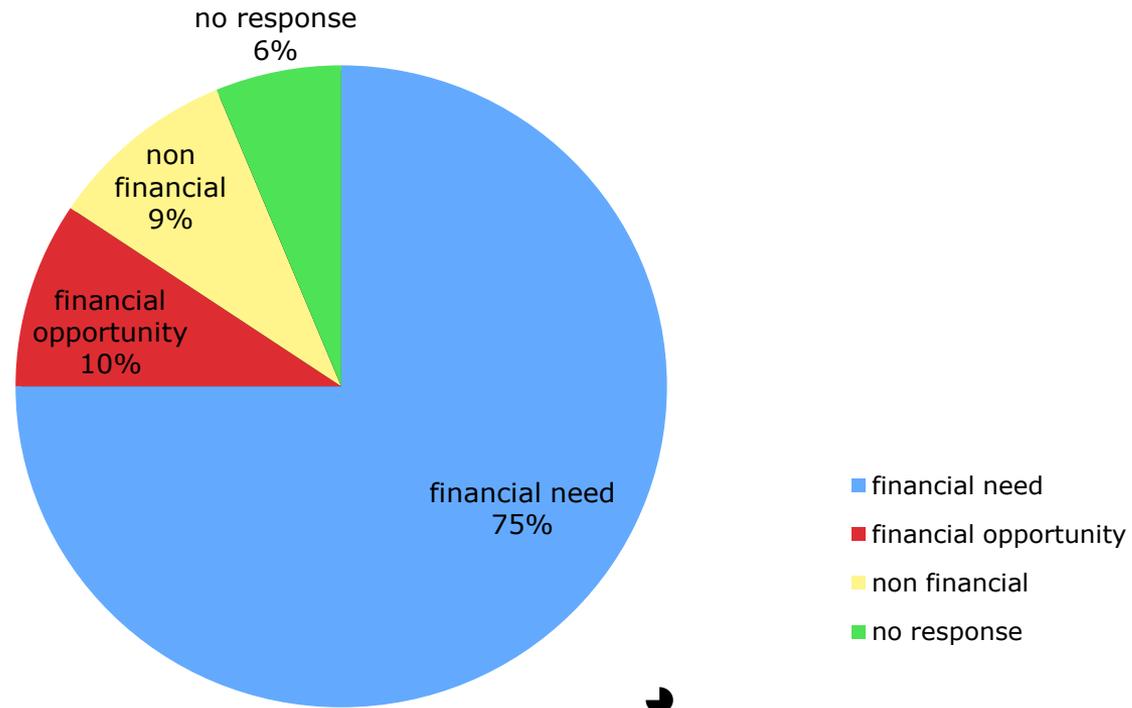


Profile of sex workers in Cape Town

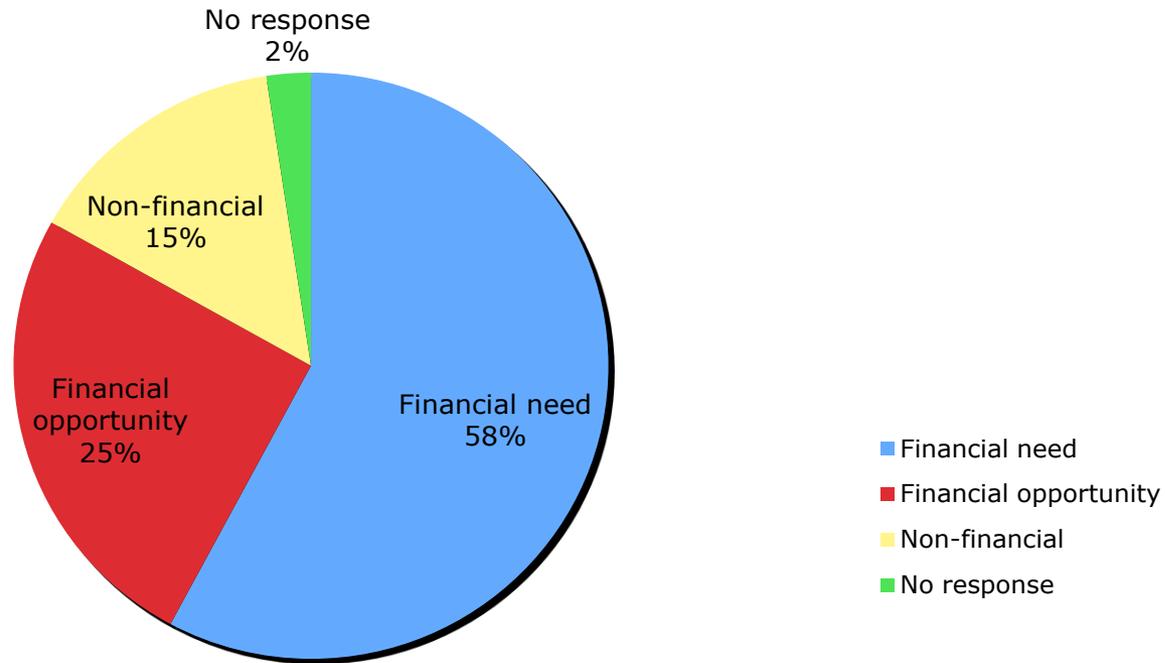
- Mean age 29 (street-based and brothel-based)
- Minimum age 19 (20 street-based)
- Maximum age 46 (47 street-based)
- Largely black South African women (95%)
- Number of years in sex work (average 6,5 street based; brothel based 4,6 years)
- Fluid industry – sex workers move in and out of the industry according to financial circumstances



Reasons for entry into the industry (street based)



Reasons for entry into the industry (brothel based)



Why sex work?

- Between 70 and 80% had done other work besides sex work:
 - Waitressing, domestic work, factory, retail, admin, security, massage and beauty
- Could earn 3-5 times more in sex work than they could in other jobs
- Ability to earn cash fairly quickly
- More flexible working hours
- No skills required



Earnings in street based sex work

Level of education	Past earnings	Current earnings	Differential
Tertiary	R4000	R6000	1,5 times
Matric	R1560	R2700	1,7 times
Other high school	R1279	R3587	2,8 times
Primary school	*R693	R3771	5,4 times

* Just under half had never done any other work

Earnings in brothel based sex work

Level of education	Past earnings	Current earnings	Differential
Tertiary	R9 333	R25 000	2,6 times
Matric	R2 427	R10 186	4 times
High school and course	R3 013	R11 062	3,7 times
Only high school	R3 737	R12 344	4 times

What sex workers say

Motivations for entering the industry

“I am in my third year now. This is the first place I am working at. I used to work for a group of attorneys who moved to Pretoria. I saw an advert in the newspaper that said: ‘earn big bucks’. I have a teenage daughter to support and I was divorced. I was unemployed. When I got to the agency he explained what I would be doing. I was shocked when I heard what it was about and said I needed to think about it. Especially since I hadn’t been with a man for 11 years (since I was divorced). I start at 6am and I leave between 12 and 1pm because I am a long distance runner and have to train.”

“Its an easy way to make money and a fast way of making money without stealing. I make money to survive and support my mother.”

“When it is out of season on the boat neither me nor my husband has a source of income, and this is a financial necessity for me to support us both.”

“I couldn’t find other work and I have children to support.”

Working conditions in brothels

- Paid as freelance employees
- Work 6-13 hours, six days a week
- Those at brothels give 36 – 60% of what they earn to the brothel owner
- Fines as high as R5000 for staying away from work
- 25% indicated that they had been threatened by a brothel owner



Working conditions outdoors

Only 3% of street-based sex workers had pimps

Pimps often boyfriends (in 75% of cases)

Street based sex work and the police:

- 19% had been arrested (3 and 10 times a month)
- 47% threatened by police officer
- 12% had been raped by a police officer
- 28% asked by police officer for sex in exchange for release from custody



Deception and Force

- 93% of those in brothels knew what they would be doing, and all those on the street
- Found out about work through friends, family or newspaper adverts
- Force by a third party not a major feature of the industry (financial force, pimps, drug addiction)
- Most at agencies and all those on the street could leave if they wanted



Findings – children

- No evidence of children indoors
- Few children encountered outdoors (5 children)
- No involvement of adults/third parties in all 5 cases
- Social conditions result in children selling sex, rather than force from others
- Problems with access to services and limited institutional support



What sex workers say

“Its private and discreet, no-one knows what you are doing. The money is good. But there is always a quiet week in the month when you don't earn much .”

“On the night shift there are problems because guys have been drinking. Clients will take a chance about using condoms.”

“I have had a violent client at another agency. One client tried to force himself onto me so I punched him.”

“I had a client who tried to choke me, I jumped on him and choked him back.”

“There is nothing that you can do if someone is violent with you. There is no counselling for trauma and you can't go to the police because they call you a whore and it won't go anywhere.”

Indoor Focus Group Responses

- Motivations remarkably similar - financial responsibilities, or expectations from families or dependents (including children) they were unable to meet.
- Most of the women responded to advertisements in the newspaper's adult entertainment section and were aware of what they were getting involved with. Awareness often tempered, at least initially, by a measure of denial.
- Unanimous in the view that it is not a job that they like doing, or would choose to do should their range of options have been wider.
- Motivating factor was "no skills required".
- Once working "good money" kept them involved.
- All saw sex work as a short-term solution (unclear to what extent this is a function of the stigma around sex work)

Indoor responses cont.

- Agencies safer than working on the street.
- Disadvantages of formal employment without the advantages.
- Perception of having no rights.
- Would change nature of relationship between sex workers and sex workers and bosses.

Outdoor Focus Group Responses

- Motivation for becoming involved related to need to support dependents, could earn more this way than as a domestic worker, introduced by others, drug dependency.
- Dangerous to work on the street (threat from police, pimps and clients), rates lower than in agencies.
- Most shared stories of violence or abuse and relied strongly on instincts about clients.
- Advantages: freedom to come and go as you please and to negotiate rates and to use drugs, advantage of anonymity for clients.
- Varied responses about the police - some good and some bad.
- Felt as though they had some control over their interactions with clients.
- While pimps can present a threat, also add to security (none of the women present worked with pimps).

What would make sex workers feel safer

- “Cops should protect us and stand with us when we are working. They should help us and not beat us up.”
- “People in the community should react and also protect us. Security guards should also help us. Witnesses should say something when the witness things.”
- “If the police can protect us and not steal from us and our clients.”
- “The police who give me a hard time and I am scared of them. I would be safer if I did not have to watch out for them.”

Conclusions

- Range of experience/motivations in the sex work industry
- Sex workers are isolated from the authorities and services
- Sex workers/agency owners and clients are an important source of information about exploitation/abuse and trafficking that should be recognised
- Sex workers themselves are concerned about children in the industry and people who are forced to do this work



Conclusion (trafficking)

Focussing societal concern on trafficking alone, distracts us from addressing the broader, and more complex social issues that a study such as this reveals. If, as has been found in Cape Town, the number of individuals who can be said to be victims of trafficking, and who require assistance from the state, are relatively few in number, and are a small percentage of the population of the sex work industry, intervention by the state may be modest and focussed. The small numbers, in other words, are not a reason not to make resources available to combat the problem. However, there is little justification for addressing this problem without at least giving some consideration to how the lives and circumstances of a larger population with similar experiences can be improved.



Recommendations of the study

- Decriminalisation of sex work (to limit opportunities for trafficking and increase reporting/access to information). Illegality of the industry allows for conditions of exploitation to continue unchecked and limits recourse
- Industry regulated through labour legislation and laws that govern other businesses
- Change attitudes of the police to sex workers



Determining an appropriate intervention

