



Dynamics of Social Interaction and Survival Strategies in the Prostitute Community in Bungurasih Surabaya

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Abstract

The prostitute industry has long been a subject of research interest in the social, economic, and cultural contexts of various regions around the world. In Indonesia, especially in the Bungurasih area of Surabaya, the existence of the prostitute community raises various important questions regarding social dynamics, survival strategies, and the welfare conditions of the individuals involved in it. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand the dynamics of socio-economic life and to find out the survival strategies of prostitutes in Bungurasih Surabaya. This research uses the theory of symbolic interactionism proposed by George Herbert Mead. This research uses qualitative research methods, with data collection techniques in the form of literature studies and field studies, which contain two techniques, namely observation and interviews. The results of this research show that the dynamics of social interactions in the prostitute community are very complex and involve various parties, including fellow prostitutes, pimps, law enforcement officers, and the surrounding community. These relationships can be cooperative or competitive and are often influenced by economic factors and social controls. The prostitutes must overcome significant social stigma and discrimination, which can impact their psychological and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Prostitute; Community; Social Interaction; Survival Strategy; Bungurasih

Introduction

The prostitute industry has long been a subject of research interest in the social, economic, and cultural contexts of various regions around the world. In Indonesia, especially in the Bungurasih area of Surabaya, the existence of the prostitute community raises various important questions regarding social dynamics, survival strategies, and the welfare conditions of the individuals involved in it.

Prostitutes are individuals who actively offer sexual services with the main aim of obtaining wages or money from their customers. The decision to become a prostitute is often influenced by various factors, including economic pressures that force someone to look for ways to meet their financial needs. In addition, there are also situations where individuals do not have adequate access to decent work or are marginalised from society, so they are forced to choose the sex industry as a source of income.





Social factors also play a role in influencing someone to choose this profession. For example, traumatic experiences or past sexual abuse can shape perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality, prompting individuals to seek pathways that allow them to control or exploit those experiences. Apart from that, there are also cases where individuals fall into the sex industry due to addiction, mental health problems, or disturbing social environments.

The process of becoming a prostitute involves a series of complex steps full of challenges and risks. Many individuals enter the sex industry due to pressing economic needs or because of the limited employment alternatives available to them. After entering the industry, sex workers must set their rates for services, taking into account market demand, the risks involved, and the value of the services they provide. They must also be able to manage relationships with a variety of clients, maintain healthy boundaries, and ensure their personal safety and well-being. Health and safety risks always lurk, with the potential for exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and the risk of violence from clients. Not only that, prostitutes also have to face the social stigma attached to their profession, which can have a negative impact on their psychological and emotional well-being. However, for some individuals, becoming a prostitute may be the only way to meet their living needs in situations where alternatives are very limited or even non-existent. This emphasises the need for understanding, support, and efforts to reduce the stigmatisation of individuals involved in commercial sex work and improve their access to health and safety services.

Bungurasih is an area in Surabaya, Indonesia, that is known for the high level of prostitution activity there. Its reputation as a centre of high prostitution activity makes it an interesting backdrop for further exploring this complex phenomenon. There is still much that has not been understood in depth, especially regarding social interactions among members of the prostitute community and the strategies they use to survive.

Delving deeper into this phenomenon will involve a multi-dimensional approach. First, it is important to understand the social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the existence of prostitution in Bungurasih. This can include aspects such as poverty, economic instability, gender inequality, and the social stigmatisation of sex workers. Furthermore, understanding the social interactions among members of the prostitute community in Bungurasih will require research into their social networks, internal hierarchies, and any power dynamics that may exist between them. Are there particular groups or alliances among prostitutes, and how do these relationships influence their daily lives? How do you interact with clients and the surrounding community?

Further research in this area will require a sensitive and holistic approach, taking into account the perspectives and direct experiences of prostitutes themselves. This will help provide a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of prostitution in Bungurasih and how the prostitute community survives and interacts in that context. Therefore, the aim of this research is





to understand the dynamics of socio-economic life and to find out the survival strategies of prostitutes in Bungurasih Surabaya.

Library Study

The theory used in this research is the theory of symbolic interactionism put forward by George Herbert Mead. In Mead's view, symbolic interactionism is an examination of social behaviour from the actor's perspective, using introspection techniques to reveal something or the significance that may be there. Therefore, humans carry out actions depending on the meaning attached to them other than stimulus-response. According to Mead, before actually acting, a person tries to consider his options by thinking about them. Thinking through these options in covert mental processes before taking actual action. This theory is in accordance with the research that will be carried out, where this theory is used to be able to see and analyse the interactions that occur between prostitutes and the community, which in turn can determine the survival strategies used by prostitutes in Bungurasih.

Method

In this research, the qualitative research method is the method used (Sugiyono, 2016), stating that qualitative research methods are based on positivist philosophy and are used to investigate the state of objects that occur naturally, with the researcher acting as an important tool and methodology. Triangulation (mixed) data collection techniques, such as inductive data analysis, and emphasis on the importance of generalisation are characteristics of qualitative research. This research was conducted in the Bungurasih area of Surabaya. The subjects of this research are prostitutes who usually sell themselves around the Bungurasih area.

The data collection technique that will be used in this research is in the form of literature studies taken from books or articles that have similarities to this research. The second collection technique is field study, in which there are two techniques for obtaining data, namely observation, which is a technique in the form of observing research subjects. Second, interviews are a collection technique where the researcher will ask in-depth questions that will be answered by the research subjects.

Results and discussion

1. Dynamics of social interaction

The dynamics of social interaction in the prostitute community are the result of various relationships that exist between individuals inside and outside the community. Within the prostitute community, there are various forms of interaction, which include relationships between prostitutes, with pimps, with law enforcement officers, and with the surrounding





community. Interactions between prostitutes can vary from cooperation to competition, depending on factors such as location, rates, and personal relationships. Relationships with pimps are often based on economic transactions but can also be influenced by the control and power that pimps have over prostitutes.

On the other hand, interactions between prostitutes and law enforcement officers often occur in the context of law enforcement against prostitution, which can include pressure or oppression on prostitutes. Meanwhile, interactions with local communities are often filled with stigmatisation, discrimination, and various responses, ranging from acceptance to rejection. The norms and values that apply in the prostitute community include rules regarding prostitution practices, security, tariffs, and self-protection.

Social control in the prostitute community can come from internal sources, such as norms implemented by community members, or from external sources, such as law and law enforcement. Prostitutes often experience stigmatisation and discrimination from society at large because of their work, which can lead to unfair treatment, exclusion, or violence. In facing stigma and discrimination, sex workers can adopt various strategies, such as forming support networks, advocating for their rights, or seeking help from non-governmental organisations.

Overall, the dynamics of social interactions within the prostitute community reflect the complexity and challenges faced by individuals involved in the commercial sex industry, as well as the varying responses from society and social institutions. In this context, it is important to understand that prostitutes are individuals with needs and rights that need to be recognised and respected, even though they are in a profession that is often considered controversial. With a deeper understanding of these dynamics, it is hoped that a more inclusive space and respect for the diversity of individuals in society will be created.

2. Survival Strategy

In an effort to survive, commercial sex workers carry out various economic activities offering sexual services, which is the main source of income for prostitutes. Rates for sexual services vary depending on factors such as the sex worker's age, appearance, and location. Some prostitutes may charge higher rates if they have an attractive physical appearance or work in a more exclusive location. Apart from sexual services, prostitutes can also sell other goods or services, such as food, drinks, or handmade goods. This is done to supplement their income and provide an alternative source of income. For example, some prostitutes may sell snacks or drinks to their clients or use creative skills to make items that can be sold. They must be good at managing their income to meet their daily needs and plan for the future. This includes the ability to save and avoid unnecessary expenses. Good financial management





helps prostitutes survive in unstable economic situations and reduces dependence on pimps or other parties who might exploit them.

One of the strategies that prostitutes use to ensure clients come back is building relationships with them. By providing satisfactory service and being friendly, prostitutes can build client loyalty, which has a positive impact on their income. Networking with other prostitutes is also important for safety and emotional support. Sex workers often share information about clients, safe places, and ways to avoid danger. These networks can provide much-needed protection and social support in risky work environments. Apart from this, prostitutes also maintain relationships with their families, although some prostitutes choose to sever ties with their families due to social factors. On the one hand, the family can be an important source of emotional and practical support. Some prostitutes stay in touch with their families and receive support that helps them survive difficult conditions.

In terms of health, they must have regular health check-ups to prevent and treat sexually transmitted diseases and other diseases. In addition, prostitutes must learn to protect themselves from dangers such as violence and harassment. Following health education programmes and developing self-defence skills can be an effective strategy to improve their safety.

In the survival strategy of prostitutes, it is not uncommon for them to get help from pimps. The role of pimps in the lives of prostitutes varies. Some pimps help prostitutes by providing shelter, protection, and access to clients. They usually take a portion of the prostitutes' income as compensation for these services. However, other pimps exploit prostitutes by taking most of their earnings and using violence to control them. Sex workers who find themselves in this situation often live in fear and find it difficult to escape. In this case, prostitutes are also vulnerable to violence and exploitation. For example, many prostitutes experience violence from clients and pimps and are involved in relationships where they do not have full control over the work environment. In addition, prostitutes often face social stigma that worsens their conditions and limits access to the health services they need.

To reduce risks and increase their safety, sex workers use various strategies, such as using condoms, negotiating with clients, and participating in health education programs. However, these efforts are often hampered by power imbalances in their relationships with clients and pimps, as well as by a lack of adequate legal and social support. It is important for the government and relevant parties to encourage prostitutes to know their rights and seek help if they are exploited or abused. Efforts to support sex workers can include legal reform, increased access to health services, and empowerment programmes designed to help them achieve safer and more stable lives.





3. Influencing factors

There are several factors that cause prostitutes to do work and often get negative comments from the public. These factors are divided into two categories: internal factors and external factors. These internal factors contain factors that originate from the prostitutes themselves. These internal factors consist of the following: 1) Household dysfunction and disappointment due to failed romantic relationships can cause individuals to engage in prostitution as a means of employment. 2) Sexual desire and curiosity may motivate individuals to choose work that fulfils their sexual demands, such as engaging in sex work as a prostitute. 3) Individuals with a distorted self-concept may choose prostitution as a means to achieve their goals, as seen in cases where individuals engage in prostitution to finance their college education.

The next factor is external factors, namely factors that come from outside the prostitutes themselves. These external factors include social factors and economic factors. Social factors that influence someone to have a prostitute job include: 1) individuals can be influenced to engage in prostitution because of social contextual elements that create a permissive atmosphere towards this profession. These factors may include the lack of laws against prostitution as well as the proximity of individuals working in the prostitution sector to the person in question. 2) Parental encouragement can increase children's self-confidence in pursuing a career in prostitution. In this scenario, parents are sometimes involved in the profession of prostitution, with the mother engaging in prostitution and then forcing her daughter to follow the same path. 3) The living environment can also influence a person's decision to engage in prostitution as a profession. This element can manifest in various forms that motivate individuals to engage in prostitution, such as limited educational opportunities, environmental conditions, and the fulfilment of biological and sexual desires.

External factors also include economic factors that influence someone to become a prostitute. This economic factor is the main factor in someone becoming a prostitute. These economic factors represent the traditional incentives for individuals to engage in prostitution, with particular emphasis on financial considerations and how money influences the decision to take up prostitution as a profession. Individuals may be forced to choose jobs that offer more money, such as engaging in prostitution, due to economic pressures and poverty. Sometimes, a person chooses to engage in prostitution because of the challenges of finding a job that provides enough income to cover daily expenses. Apart from social and economic factors, an external factor that influences individuals to become prostitutes is the lack of legal policies. In Indonesia itself, legal policies already exist to stop prostitution activities. Legal regulations regarding commercial sex workers in Indonesia are still unclear. This means that there are no firm and definitive provisions in the Criminal Code that regulate the prohibition





of prostitution. However, the Criminal Code prohibits pimping or facilitating prostitution, but the fines imposed are not effective enough to deter anyone involved in such illegal activities. This is what makes so many individuals, especially women, willing to use their bodies for other people.

Closing

1. Conclusion

The research results show that the dynamics of social interactions in the prostitute community are very complex and involve various parties, including fellow prostitutes, pimps, law enforcement officers, and the surrounding community. These relationships can be cooperative or competitive and are often influenced by economic factors and social controls. CSWs must overcome significant social stigma and discrimination, which can impact their psychological and emotional well-being.

In social interactions, sex workers often form solid networks with fellow workers as a form of emotional support and protection between fellow sex workers. They share information about clients, safe places, and how to avoid raids by law enforcement officers. These relationships create solidarity, which is essential for their survival amidst social and legal pressures.

On the other hand, pimps have a dual role in being able to help but also exploit prostitutes. They act as intermediaries, connecting prostitutes with clients and providing a workplace that is safe from external interference. However, on the other hand, pimps also often take large economic profits from the work of prostitutes and can apply strict control and violence as a form of domination.

Survival strategies implemented by prostitutes include wise financial management, building good relationships with clients, and maintaining personal health and safety. They often save some of their income in case they face difficult times or when they decide to leave the world of prostitution. Additionally, maintaining health through access to medical services and education regarding sexual health is critical to preventing infectious diseases and ensuring long-term well-being.

There are factors that influence individuals to become prostitutes, consisting of internal factors such as household dysfunction, past trauma, sexual desires, and distorted self-concept, as well as external factors such as economic pressure, social environment, and lack of effective legal policies. Domestic dysfunction, such as violence or divorce, often drives individuals to seek escape and sources of livelihood outside the home. Economic pressure is the dominant factor, and the lack of decent work opportunities makes prostitution the last option for survival.





Local communities often show an ambivalent attitude towards the existence of prostitutes. Some felt disturbed and demanded firm action from the government, while others showed sympathy and understood the complexity of the situation faced by prostitutes, especially regarding the economic factors that pushed them into this profession. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the lives of prostitutes in Bungurasih is needed to reduce stigma, improve health and safety support, and develop more humane and effective policies. Support from the government and non-governmental organisations is urgently needed to provide economic alternatives for prostitutes, comprehensive health services, as well as rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes accompanied by a more empathetic and human rights-based approach for prostitutes.

2. Suggestion

With the rise of prostitutes in Bungurasih, the government should increase supervision and law enforcement by increasing public awareness about the importance of education and women's empowerment. In addition, the government can improve the economic capacity of the community by providing financial assistance and training. By providing individuals with better options to improve their social and economic status, their likelihood of engaging in prostitution can be reduced.

In addition, governments can improve individual living standards by offering financial assistance and training programmes to increase knowledge about the importance of quality of life in improving social and economic status. By developing a better understanding of the importance of quality of life, individuals can increase their capacity to improve their social and economic status, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will engage in prostitution.

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