**SOC 3290 Deviance**

**Overheads Lecture 24: Prostitution 2**

\* Today we continue our look at prostitution by considering:

- the problem of defining prostitution

- misconceptions about prostitution

- its extent in Canadian society

- a profile of Canadian prostitutes

- entry into prostitution

- theories of prostitution

**Defining Prostitution:**

\* Prostitution not easily defined: not simply “exchanging sex for money” as surveys suggest. Consider:

- exchanging sex for other goods/services

- marrying for money

- “marriages of convenience” (i.e. for security)

- arranged marriages / negotiating over dowries

- marrying for immigration status

\* Where do you draw the line? Canadians surveyed consider sex for money wrong (62%), but fewer (53% ) think the same of exchanging sex for other goods. Disagreement on definition of prostitution

\* Sociological definition: prostitution is:

(1) Sexual in nature (i.e. exchange of money/goods for sex at time)

(2) Relationship involves neither love nor affection

(3) Either a full or part time vocation

(4) Engaged in by men, women, straight & gay, youth & adult

**Misconceptions about Prostitution:**

\* Many misconceptions are fostered by curiosity, controversy & the media. The facts are that:

- most prostitutes are NOT forced into the life by threats, violence,

& drugs (though to some extent for teenage runaways)

- most prostitutes do NOT work for pimps, but are “self-

employed”

- there are relatively few links with Canadian organized crime

- most prostitutes are not addicted to drugs

- most have criminal records, but for minor & prostitution offences

- prostitution is NOT prominent in the spread of STD’s & AIDS

- prostitution isn’t necessarily distasteful & unpleasant work,

especially for those with little education/job skills when

comparing their options

- prostitutes aren’t necessarily guilt ridden with low self-esteem

- prostitutes don’t necessarily despise their customers

- prostitutes are largely heterosexual & have enjoyable sex lives

with those they love

**Extent of Canadian Prostitution:**

\* Official police data is virtually useless:

-number of charges doesn’t = number of prostitutes

-arrests for offences other than prostitution related ones

-high status prostitutes rarely arrested

-“victims” won’t come forward

-“crackdowns” distort official figures

\* Police estimates of number of prostitutes in urban areas: largely speculative, but estimates generally follow population:

- larger cities: 500-600 full time (many more part time)

- medium cities: 100-400

- small municipalities: 20-100

**A Profile of Canadian Prostitutes:**

\* Most between 22-25, beginning career in teens

\* Career lasts about 10 years (women working longer)

\* Ratio of females to males 4:1. Most single (20% of women married)

\* About half from “broken homes”

\* Most from lower- middle or middle class backgrounds

\* Majority have little formal education (call girls the exception)

\* Many have suffered physical/sexual abuse at home

\* We must be *cautious* about *assuming* that humble origins + abuse = a career in prostitution. Many people experience both & don’t become prostitutes, & prostitutes may make such claims to ward off stigma

**Entry into Prostitution:**

Lautt (1984): three entry points:

(1) exploitation by pimps (mostly teenage runaways)

(2) recruitment by a “big sister figure” (youth peer groups)

(3) conscious pragmatic decisions (older individuals 18-24)

\* Novices must learn the subculture (“training”):

(1) *Job skills*: -initiating contact

-negotiating services & fee

-protecting self from hazards

-soliciting discreetly & effectively

-payment up front/ inducing orgasm ASAP

-knowledge of fee structure

-avoiding STD’s /suspicious customers

-protecting oneself

-not using alcohol/drugs while working

(2) *Subcultural values/ideologies*:

-not undercutting competitors/leaking information

-to exploit clients

-acquiring self-protective rationalizations (e.g.

performing “vital social functions”/ not hypocrites)

\* Most common activities: manual & oral sex, followed by intercourse (contrary to stereotype, prostitutes will NOT ‘do anything with anyone”)

\* Incomes vary: Males earn more than females (esp. pimped females)

Street prostitutes earn less than escorts

Youth earn less than adults

**Theories of Prostitution:**

\* Three major theories attempt to explain prostitution:

(1) *Functionalist theory* (Davis): Prostitution persists because:

-Sexual morality (“meaningful” vs. “meaningless” sex; “moral” vs. “immoral” acts sex) unintentionally encourages it

- prostitution functions to strengthen the sexual morality of

“conventional” women

Problem: functionalist theory is sexist in its definitions of morality

(2) *Social psychological theory*: People become prostitutes due to:

- predisposing factors (parents promiscuity, neglect, or abuse)

- attracting factors (money)

- precipitating factors (unemployment, connections or

pressure from others)

Sociologists & psychologists emphasize different factors

(3) *Feminist theory*: sexism & patriarchy explain prostitution:

- creating both supply & demand at the same time

(socialization, unequal social structure/opportunities)

- selling bodies as commodities reinforces sexist

views/reproduces patriarchal structures

**Conclusion:**

\* Today we have concluded our review of prostitution, defining it, reviewing its characteristics, members and practices, and attempting to explain it in various ways.