

University of Cape Town



**EMBRACE
DIGNITY**

Life Histories of Women who engaged in Sex Work

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UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

**The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project
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Abstract

Sex work is one of the most debated topics in Africa. It is an issue that has gained recognition from different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, law, health, and gender/woman studies. Sex work is currently criminalised in South Africa and therefore stigmatised. Sex workers are stigmatised by the society based on what they do without an understanding of how and why they entered into sex work, or understanding the factors that encouraged women to engage in sex work. Therefore this research explored the life histories of women who once engaged in sex work with the aim to bring a broader understanding of why women enter into sex work. A qualitative research method was used in which five life-history interviews were used to understand participants' experiences from childhood until now. Through exploration of life histories of these women, the study aimed to determine the reasons women enter into sex work, their experience as sex workers, childhood experiences that could have encouraged them to enter into sex work, and the reasons why they exited. A thematic analysis was used to identify themes and four themes were found from the data which are: childhood experiences, in which it was found from the study that there are certain experiences that sex workers experience during childhood; the reasons in which women entered sex work, where it was found that socio-economic circumstances are the reasons women entered sex work; women experiences of sex work where experiences such as experiences of violence, use of alcohol and drugs, and stigma from society were found; and the reasons these women left sex work and how.

Introduction

Sex work is one of the most debated topics in Africa. It is an issue that has gained recognition from different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, law, health, and gender/woman studies. All these disciplines have engaged with debates on sex work trying to tackle the issue of sex work in South Africa. Sex work is currently criminalised in South Africa under the Sexual offense Act 1957 (Richter, 2013). There have been debates and arguments about decriminalizing, legalizing, or regulating sex work in South Africa (Wojcicki, 2003). The argument on criminalization of sex work has been based on that legalizing sex work may increase human trafficking; while those arguing for decriminalization of sex work argue that criminalization of sex work violates sex workers' human rights, affects sex workers' access to health services, and increases stigmatization of sex work (Wojcicki, 2003). Arguments on sex work have also gained recognition from political parties as well; recently Cyril Ramaphosa, the current Vice president of South Africa, confirmed his support for decriminalization sex work. He proposed that he will give support to sex workers by ensuring that they receive proper health care, and that they do not receive stigmatization (Teke, 2016). Non-governmental organizations have also been engaging with debates on sex work, fighting for decriminalization of sex work for the past few years. Though the Constitution states that everyone has the same rights, the rights to dignity and respect, rights to non-discrimination, rights to choose an own occupation, and rights to choose whom to have sex with, sex workers still experience violation and stigmatization from the whole society (Wojcicki,2003). Sex work is viewed as immoral, degrading, and as a source of spreading sexual diseases in South Africa (Richter, 2008). Women who work as sex workers are labeled as "street whores", and viewed as worthless (Gould and Fick, 2009). Such stigmatization and labels leads to vulnerability to violence, where sex workers receive violation from the police, their clients, the society, and even their families (Gould and Fick, 2009).

There have also been debates on whether sex work is a choice or coercion; with some scholars arguing sex work is a choice and others arguing that there are other factors that motivate women into sex work (Jeffreys, 2009). Therefore, this research will conduct a study on the life histories of women who engage with sex work to explore experiences of sex workers. The reason I am interested in conducting this study is because the society stigmatizes sex workers based on what they do without an understanding of how they became sex workers, and why they continue working as sex workers. Instead of trying to understand

the social or economic factors that play a role in encouraging women to enter sex work or understanding their experience of sex workers, society stigmatizes them. Therefore, this research will bring about an understanding of why women enter into sex work. By conducting this research, it will bring broader understanding experiences of sex workers and why and how they engage with sex work; especially considering the South African apartheid history which exposed women into the struggle of poverty. Therefore, this research will not only be of value with the gender studies field but will be of value amongst other fields.

Literature Review

There has been research done on the life stories of women who engage in sex work in South Africa; however, most used quantitative study design, focusing mostly on the nature of sex work in South Africa, instead of the life histories of sex workers. From the literature review conducted, there are certain themes that emerged from the life histories of women who engage with sex work. The themes identified from the literature search will be discussed below.

Childhood experiences

Most research on life histories of women who engage in sex work found that there are certain experiences sex workers experiences during their childhood. Research found that most sex workers experienced sexual violence, loss of parents, poverty, teenage marriages, and teenage pregnancy. However, it is important to note that not all sex workers experienced such during their childhood. Teke (2016) conducted a study on female sex workers in Durban, South Africa. The study used three life history interviews to explore the experiences of sex workers in South Africa. It was from the study that participants had experienced sexual violence while they were still young; women reported that they had been raped during childhood, with some having experienced several sexual assaults while they were still young. The study also found that sex workers experienced early pregnancy, with women having reported that they fell pregnant during their teenage years (Teke, 2016). It was also found that most women reported that they got married during their teenage years (Teke, 2016). Some participants reported that they experienced loss of parents during their childhood, and therefore it reinforced the experiences they had during a later stage (Teke, 2016). It was also found that sex workers had experienced living in poverty from an early stage (childhood), therefore, some of them had to drop out of school (Teke, 2016). However, it is important to note that not all sex workers had

such childhood experiences; with one of the participants from Teke (2016) having reported that she had did not have difficult experiences during her childhood. Therefore, even though most sex workers do experience certain childhood experiences, not all experiences are the same.

Furthermore, Gysels (2002) conducted a study on life histories of women who engage with sex work as to explore the experiences of sex workers. From the life stories women told, it was found that like Teke (2016) study, women had experienced sexual violence during their childhood (Gysels, 2002). The study explored the life stories of three sex workers, and two of them reported that they were raped during their early teenage life. Another pattern that was found from the study was that all the women who participated in the study got married while they were teenage (Gysels, 2002). The study also found that they fell pregnant while they were still very young (age 14, 15 and 17). And like Teke (2016), Geysels (2002) found that all the women interviewed in the study experienced early marriages, and several (more than 2) failed marriages. One out of the three participants also reported that she lost her parents during her childhood, and therefore had to live in poverty (Geysels, 2002). Moreover, Pretorius and Bricker (2001) conducted a study on the experiences of sex workers. The study explored life stories of five women. One of the themes that was found from the study was that participants had experienced pervasive abuse and neglect during childhood (Pretorius & Bricker, 2011). The study found that participants experienced emotional abuse during childhood, in which they did not receive love and support from their parents (Pretorius & Brivker, 2011). Most participants reported that they were neglected by their parents (mostly mothers) while growing up (Pretorius & Bricker, 2011). It was found from the study that participants had experienced sexual abuse during childhood; they reported that that had been raped while still young. Some of participants reported that they had also been physically abused by their parents (Pretorius & Bricker, 2011). The studies discussed above shows that there are certain experiences that sex workers experience during their childhood; with most sex workers having experienced sexual violence, poverty, emotional and physical abuse, early marriages, and pregnancy during an early age. However, it is important to note that not all sex workers experience these experiences.

Reasons women enter sex work

From the literature conducted, it was found that factors such as poverty, unemployment, failed marriages, education obstacles, and peer influence drive women into sex working.

Fielding-Miller et al (2013) conducted a qualitative study to explore the context, experiences, and health services needs of sex workers in Swaziland. It was found from the study that due to the high rate of poverty in Swaziland (with about two-thirds of the country living in poverty), women were exposed to the struggle of hunger (Fielding-Miller et al, 2013). It was also found that abandonment by children's fathers' motivated women into sex work as they had to provide for their children. Sinha (2015) also conducted a study on the reasons women enter sex working in India using an analysis of forty-six short life portraits and three life-history interviews collected from mobile female sex work. Like Fielding-Miller et al (2013), Sinha (2015) also found that women entered sex work because of poverty. Failed marriages were also found to have been one of the reasons women entered sex work from Sinha (2015) study. Furthermore, Swendeman et al (2015) conducted a study on the intersection of resources, agency, and achievements in the pathway to sex work in India. The study aimed to investigate the complex interplay of choice, socioeconomic structural factors, and empowerment influencing engagement in sex work. It was found that contexts of disempowerment, constraining resources, and agency motivated women into sex working (Swendeman et al, 2015). The study found that familial poverty, loss of a partner, and limited job opportunities were reasons women entered into sex work. Balfour and Allen (2014) did a review of the literature on sex work and social exclusion. In their study, they did a review on factors that drive women into sex working. It was found that financial needs, housing issues, exposure to violence, family exclusion, mental health, low education, and facing discrimination forced women into sex working (Balfour & Allen, 2014). Therefore, from the study reviewed above, women enter sex work because of poverty, failed marriages, and difficulty to find employment.

Reasons women continue with sex work

Though studies showed that there are certain reasons women enter sex work, it was also found that there are also reasons women stay in sex work. Sinha (2015) conducted a study on the reasons women enter sex work in India. It was found from Sinha study that women preferred sex work as compared to other jobs they had worked before; women from the study reported that they had worked as housemaids, helpers, construction workers, waitresses, and hotels, but had struggled to find decent jobs (Sinha, 2015). By decent jobs, they meant job opportunities without sexual harassment. The study found that in most jobs these women had worked, they were sexually harassed by employers or colleagues and thus leaving them

feeling violated (Sinha, 2015). Therefore, they felt that if they had to work and still have unpaid sex with employers/colleagues, it was better to work as a sex worker and earn from it. Though women were motivated by their socio-economic situations to enter sex work, it was found that after entering this kind of work, women felt that it gave them more freedom and autonomy (Sinha, 2015). Women reported that compared to other jobs, sex work gave them more control over their lives as it offered them flexibility (Sinha, 2015). Swendeman et al (2015) study also found that women reported that they had worked in other jobs before in which they had been exposed to sexual violation and therefore decided to join sex work as they could not find other decent jobs (Swendeman et al, 2015). It was also found that after entering sex work, women felt that they had autonomy and control as the work is flexible (Swendeman et al, 2015). Sex workers reported how the job offered them a chance to have time to look after their families and still work. Gould and Fick (2009) also conducted a study on selling sex in Cape Town. The study aimed to understand the broad experiences of women who sell sex in Cape Town. The study found that although women were motivated to enter sex work because of financial need, they were satisfied with the freedom the job provided (Gould & Fick, 2009). Most participants reported that they earned more than enough as compared to their earnings from previous jobs (Gould & Fick, 2009). Therefore, though there are certain factors that encourage women engage with sex work, they choose to stay in the industry because of the autonomy, flexibility, and better earnings.

Sex Work and violence

Studies on sex work have shown that sex workers experience violence from the police, the clients, pimps, brothel owners and people around where they work. Most studies found that a lot of sex workers experience violence and corruption from the police. Gould and Fick (2009) conducted a study about selling sex in Cape Town. The study aimed to understand the broad experiences of women who sell sex in Cape Town. It was found from the study that sex workers experience violence from police; Gould and Fick (2008) study that 47% of street sex workers have been threatened by the police, 12% have been raped, 19% have been slept with by the police as an exchange of arrest, and 63% have been sworn at by the police (Gould & Fick, 2008). Most of the women interviewed in the study reported that they have experienced sexual and physical abuse from police (Gould & Fick, 2008). Participants also reported that police sometimes financially abuse them by taking their money instead of arresting them; this shows that sex workers experience several kinds of violence from police. The study also

found that sex workers experiences violence from their clients. Gould and Fick (2008) study found that 37% of sex workers reported that they have been abused by clients, 72% have had clients refused to pay, and 34% have been raped. Some sex workers reported that they have also had clients forcing them to pay back their money. Sex workers from the study also reported that they have been threatened by clients; with one sex workers having mentioned that she was once stabbed by a client (Gould & Fick, 2008). Brothel-based sex workers also experience violence from brothel-owners; most sex workers reported that some owners threatened to expose them when they wanted to leave the industry.

Sex Work and Health

There have been a lot of studies on health and sex work. Most studies found that sex work is usually linked with sexual diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Lineberger, 2010; Rickard, 2001). There have also been debates that sex work increases HIV rates, while others argue that criminalization of sex work put sex workers on risk of HIV (Wockiji, 2003). Audrey et al (2000) conducted a study on risks experienced by sex workers in Johannesburg. The study aimed to explore experiences of female sex workers in relation to HIV and condom use. It was found from the study that sex workers' clients are reluctance to using condoms which make them vulnerable to sexual diseases. Participants reported that they have experienced abuse from clients for refusing to have unprotected sex (Pettifor et al, 2000). Women reported that many clients will offer more money for sex without a condom or will go to another woman who is willing to have sex without a condom or will try to force them to have sex without a condom (Pettifor, 2000). Gysels (2002) also conducted a study on women who sell sex in Uganda trading town. The study conducted thirty four life history interviews on women who work as sex workers in Uganda. Like Pettifor et al (2002) study, Gysels (2002) study found that sex workers experience vulnerability to sexual diseases. The study required participants to keep a diary in which they recorded whether they had safe sex with clients or not. In most days, sex workers recorded that they did not have safe sex with clients. This articulates that sex workers are vulnerable to sexual diseases. Furthermore, research has also shown that sex workers find it difficult to access health services. Sex work is stigmatized and that makes it difficult for sex workers to access health care as to avoid stigmatization. Gould and Fick (2008) study on selling sex in Cape Town found that sex workers avoid seeking health care as health care workers treat sex workers with disrespect. Pettifor et al (2000) study also found that sex workers reported there are no sex worker friendly health services.

They stressed that there is a need for provision of sex workers' health care as sex workers are vulnerable to sexual diseases. Therefore, stigmatization of sex work deprive sex workers from accessing proper health care.

Studies discussed above showed that there are themes found on the life stories of women who engage in sex work. The literature reviewed showed that there are certain childhood experiences that sex workers experience. Most studies showed that sex workers experiences sexual violence, poverty, loss of parents, early pregnancy, and early marriages during childhood. It was also found that factors such as poverty, difficulty finding employment, and failed marriages encouraged women to engage in sex work. However, it was also found that even though there are factors that encourage women to enter sex work, factors such as flexibility of sex work hours, better earning, and autonomy of sex work encourage women to stay in sex work. The literature reviewed also showed that sex workers experiences violence from clients, police, brothel owners and health care workers. Research also showed that there is a link between sex work and HIV/AIDS, with literature having showed that sex workers are vulnerable to diseases.

Research Questions

This research investigated the life histories of women who once engaged in sex work. Though the research question is broad, the study explored the experiences of women who engage in sex work. The study aimed to understand the experiences of sex workers from childhood until where they are at the moment. Through exploration of life stories of these women, the study aimed to determine:

- Sex workers childhood and teenage experiences
- Reasons women enter into sex work
- Women experiences as sex workers
- Reasons they exit sex work

Methodology

Framework-Feminist Standpoint

A feminist standpoint was implemented for this study. Feminist research aims to explore women issues by researching women's experiences. Feminist research standpoint is defined by a focus on women's concerns, action orientation, recognition of the subjective role of the

researcher, and critique of the distinction between the personal and political (Terr-Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). It aims to explore women experiences as to provide a better understanding of issues faced by women. Feminist research is also invested in tackling discrimination and oppression faced by women on a daily basis (Terr-Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Through exploration of women's experiences, it also aims to transform and raise awareness of women's oppression. Feminist standpoint also acknowledges the power dynamics that may exist between the researcher and the participants, and is committed to eradicating such power-imbalances. This standpoint was used for this study because the study aimed to explore female sex worker's experiences of sex work, and understand the reasons they entered sex work.

Qualitative research method

Qualitative research method was used for this study. “Qualitative research focuses on people behaving in natural settings and describing their world in their own words” (Cozby, 2007:107). This research method was used because it gives an emphasis on collecting in-depth information and understanding the participants’ inner world; and therefore, will be a good fit for understanding participants’ experiences. Qualitative research is also useful for revealing hidden information or emotions from participants and this study aims to do so. The method is the best fit out of all the other research methods as it aims to fully understand the experiences of sex workers. The study also wanted to make sense of sex worker's feelings, experiences, and their social situation as they occurred in their real world, as to determine the reasons these women became sex workers. Therefore, qualitative method was the best fit for this study.

Interview

Interview data collection method technique was used for this study as it gives a more natural form of interacting. And because the study aimed to explore experiences of female sex workers, interviews give a natural space to get to know participants better. Life history interviews were used to for this study. Life history interviews aims to get an overall picture of the participant’s life by allowing them to tell their life story in a chronological order (Angus, 2014). Life-history also allows the researcher to explore participant’s micro-historical (individual) experiences within a macro-historical (history of the time) framework (Angus, 2014). Life history interviews were used for this study as it gives a space to converse in a

way that allows both participants and the researcher to direct the conversation as the questions will be open ended, allowing the participant to openly tell their story, but also allowing the researcher to direct the order for the story to be told.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 5 street-based female sex workers over the age of 21. Women that were recruited for this study are women who had engaged with sex work before but have exited sex work. This study specifically used female sex workers and not male sex workers as it is a feminist research aimed to understand women experiences. It also used women over the age of 21 as they have the capacity to give consent

Sampling Method

A non-probability sampling method was used to sample participants. The type of non-probability sampling that will be used for this study is a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling method depends not only on the availability and willingness of participants to participate in the study but also on the selected population. Purposive sampling concentrates on people with particular characteristics that are needed to assist with the research question (Cozby, 2007). This sampling method was used as the study focused on experiences of sex workers, and they are not easily accessible. Thus, a Non-Governmental Organization called Embrace Dignity was used to access participants. The organization is committed to addressing issues that cause prostitution, and to help sex workers with exit strategies. It provides

Ethical considerations

For a study to have a good conduct, there are ethical considerations that should be made. Ethics can be thought of as the study of good conduct and of the grounds for making judgments about what is good conduct (Trusted, 1987). To ensure the results validity of the conducted research, the following ethical considerations are planned as follows:

University of Cape Town Code of Conduct

The UCT research code of ethics was followed to ensure that the study will be ethical. The code of ethics has four ethical considerations that I will discuss below.

Researcher and Research Community– It states that the researcher should be responsible for their own research; that their findings are valid; reporting the research findings and its limitations. It also states that the researcher should ensure that the research is communicated with honesty, clarity, and the researcher’s accountability. The researcher should also not misuse the research for their own person gain. This research, therefore, ensured that the above-mentioned considerations were taken into account.

Researcher and participants- the code of ethics also states that the researcher should be responsible for the participants’ safety by protecting them from any harm that may be exposed to participants. These may be physical, psychological, or physiological. It also states that the research should always put participants’ interests before their own interest. Informed consent forms should also be handed to participants, and should be written in a clear concise language. It also stated from the code of ethics that the researcher should respect participants’ rights to withdraw from the study if they feel the need to. This study put participants’ interest first before the researcher’s. Participants were given informed consent with detailed information of the study, their rights to participate or withdraw from the study, and insurance of anonymity. Participants signed the informed consent as a way to acknowledge their willingness to participate in the study. Because sex work is a sensitive topic as some of the sex workers may have gone through difficulties in their life, this research may impose psychological harm to participants. Therefore, counseling services were offered to participants who may feel psychologically harmed by the study.

Researcher and Society- the code of ethics also states that the research should contribute to the society. As already mentioned above, there is a gap in South Africa’s sex work literature for studies on reasons women enter sex work, therefore, this study filled out that literature gap. The study also benefitted Embrace Dignity NGO by giving them information on why women enter sex work. Embrace Dignity is committed to helping sex workers exit this industry by giving them exiting strategies; therefore, having a study that entails reasons women become sex workers in the first place will help them provide effective exit strategies. Also, because sex workers are stigmatized by the society, this study gave a broader understanding of why women engage in sex work, and thus hopefully reduce stigmatization.

Researchers and Sponsors- the UCT Code of Ethics states that if there are any remuneration arrangements between participants and researcher, they should be outlined on the informed consent. This study will not have any kind of remuneration arrangement with participants.

Informed Consent

An informed consent was handed to the participants before the start of data collection. Participants will be fully informed of the purpose of the study and the procedures that will be followed. Risk and benefits that may be expected from the study were fully informed to the participants. In this study, the only possible risk that was expected from the study was participants' exposure to emotional and psychological harm as sex work is a sensitive topic. In terms of benefits, the study explored reasons women become sex workers, and thus the results will be able to help those who want to exit sex work as the cause would have been identified. It also informed participants that their participation in the study will be kept confidential. Participants were also informed of their rights to withdraw from the study if they feel uncomfortable with continuing, and their rights to inform us to not use their data if they feel otherwise. The informed consent also displayed details of researcher for participants to use if they have any questions. The final report of the study will also be available for participants to access if they need it.

Confidentiality and Respect of Dignity

Participants' identities were kept confidential; their names or age were not disclosed to anyone. Pseudonyms were given to participants when analyzing collected data. Raw data will be kept by the researcher in a safe place. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor had access to raw data.

Reflexivity

Feminist research argues that it is important to acknowledge the relationship between the researcher and participants and the power imbalances that may arise during the research. Most researchers come from a middle class, white and educated background, which influences not only behavior towards the participants but also the questions asked by the research, as well as the way in which the answers to these questions are interpreted (Parker, 2005). Though I am a black, lower-middle class women, my educational background brought about power inequalities that may affect the amount of information participants may give or withdraw from me. My identity as a black woman, however, provided comfort to participants as we can both identify with certain women struggles. The fact that there were no remuneration arrangements for participants may affected the richness of the information they gave me as they were aware that they will not receive anything; however, I feel like I still

managed to get informative data from the interviews. The feeling of guilt also developed on my side as I was aware that participants were not to be remunerated. Especially because sex work is a sensitive topic, there is a time where I felt like I was using participants for their stories without giving them anything in return. Also, as Sex Work is a sensitive topic; other challenges were expected when interviewing participants about their experience on such a topic. When doing a research on sensitive topics, one must build a research relationship with the participants as to allow the researcher access to the participants story (Ceglowski, 2000). As much as developing a relationship with participants is important, it can also be challenging for the researcher to determine the level of the relationship developed. This is a challenge that I had to face when conducting interviews because I had already developed an attachment with the ladies I interviewed and when they got emotional during the interviews, I did not know how far I should go to comfort them.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data obtained from the interviews. Thematic analysis is mostly used for qualitative researches and involves drawing patterns from the obtained data and converting them into themes. It is defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2008: 79). Steps of doing a thematic analysis include familiarizing oneself with data, coding themes, reviewing them, defining them, and using themes to transcribe a story. This analysis method was used because this study employed an interview technique method, and thus data obtained from the interviews will be analyzed into themes. Also, because the study aimed to investigate the reasons women become sex workers by exploring their experiences; theme-coding was needed to explain these reasons.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to investigate life histories of women who once engaged in sex work. The study explored these women's life experiences from childhood to where they currently are at the moment in their lives. After the data was collected, a thematic analysis was used to identify themes and four themes were found from the data. The first theme is childhood experiences, in which it was found from the study that there are certain experiences that sex workers experience during childhood. These experiences include being raised from a poor

background, living in poverty, facing education obstacles, early experiences of sexual relations and experiences of sexual or physical violence during childhood. The second theme found from the study is the reasons in which women entered sex work, where it was found that socio-economic circumstances are the reasons women entered sex work. The third theme found from the study is women experiences of sex work where experiences such as experiences of violence use of alcohol and drugs, stigma from society were found. The fourth and final theme found from the study is the reasons these women left sex work and how, where it was found from the study that even though women entered due to economic circumstances, they also left sex work due to economic circumstances. The four themes found from the study will be discussed in details below.

a. Childhood Experiences

As already discussed above, it was found from the study there are certain experiences such as raised from a poor background, living in poverty, facing education obstacles, early experiences of sexual relations and experiences of sexual or physical violence during childhood that are experienced by sex workers.

Poor Background

Like Teke (2016) who conducted a study on life histories of female sex workers in Durban, South Africa and found out that most sex workers experienced living in poverty from an earlier age, this study also found that sex workers had experienced been raised from a poor background during their childhood. When participants were asked to describe their childhood, they reported that they were born in poor families and experienced poverty throughout their childhood life. For instance, participant's one describes how her childhood life was like, and the extent of poverty her family faced when growing up:

“the time I'm [I was] growing up euuuww [sighs]...too much suffering. [...]. one house [we lived in], and then we got [we were] six because the sisters of my mom were there [living with us]. Even the time I'm young, i grow up i didn't go to school to fix my house because i grow up my family is very poor family. I remember the other day a social worker come to my house in Eastern Cape to write... I see after two days the social worker are coming for [with] food to eat. I grow up, i need to go to school.... and then the day after Christmas, -ama-[the] social workers come to help poor family.[.....]. eishh [sighs], the

time i grow up i think the stress is the start [-ed]. To grow up and see my family they are poor, sometimes it takes 2 days without food in the family.”

(Participant 5, 2016)

The above extract shows sex workers' experiences of living in poverty and how the extent of these experiences of poverty affected their lives. When asked about their family background, most participants reported that they had been raised in a poor background with their mothers working as domestic workers and their fathers absent from their lives. Below participant three and participant one described their relationship with their fathers during childhood:

“I did not have a relationship with him [her father]. I hated him. [.....] [paused] the hatred I have with [for] him. [.....]. I went to his house, my mother told me I must not go there because I am not going to get what I expected, I wanted, I will get disappointed. Then, I went there, I found him with his wife then I greet them then I told him what I wanted, I said that I needed a tracksuit to go to school with it's winter now. So my mother does not have money to buy for me. Then he was the one replying, his wife just kept quiet, and then he said he doesn't have money for me, he has money for my brother that comes after me. Then since then I did not want to see him.”

(Participant One, 2016)

Pretorius and Bricker (2001) study on life histories of women who engage in sex work found that women had reported that they experienced neglect by their parents more especially their mothers when growing up. However, as the above extract from participant one shows, this study found that participants experienced neglect by their parent, but unlike Pretorius and Bricker (2001), women from this study were abandoned by their fathers and not their mothers.

Furthermore, even though the study found that women who engage in sex work have experiences of living in poverty during their childhood with about four out five participants having been raised from a poor background, it is important to note that not all sex workers were raised from a poor background with one participant from the study having been raised in a rich family when growing up. Below Participant Two describes her family background during childhood:

“We were raised by my grandmother. She was raising us like a queen [laughs]. She loved us and spoiled us very much. [...] because I was living like I’m in a rich family because when my father came back and my mother came back and my mother went back she started to build a big home for us, a big home a big house and buy us 11 cows and build the yard with {a Xhosa name} [laughed] and the gate also. They even hired someone to look after us”

(Participant Two, 2016)

The above extract shows that even those most women who engage in sex work experience living in poverty during their childhood, not all sex workers were raised within a poor background.

Experiences of physical or/and sexual abuse

Furthermore, like the studies that were discussed in the literature review, this study also found that most sex workers experience physical and sexual violence during their childhood. Teke (2016) conducted a study on life histories of sex workers in South Africa, and it was found from the study that women reported that they had experienced sexual violence during their childhood, with most of them having been raped when still young and having experienced sexual assaults during their childhood. Gysels (2002) study on life histories of women who engage in sex work also found out that sex workers had experienced sexual violence during their childhood; with one out of three sex workers who were engaged in the study having been raped during their early teenage life. Pretorius and Bricker (2001) study on experiences of sex workers also found that sex workers had experienced sexual abuse, emotional abuse and physical abuse during their childhood. Participants reported that they felt that they did not receive love and support from their parents; they experienced getting raped during childhood, and also an experience of physical abuse. Like the studies discussed above, this study found that women who once engaged in sex work had experienced sexual abuse during their childhood were participants reported getting raped when they still young. Participants also reported experiences of physical and emotional abuse during childhood, where they felt like they did not have enough love and support from their parents or guardians. Below participants talk about her rape experience during childhood:

“[when] I was 14 or 15 I got raped by someone that used to visit in my neighbour.[...]. when I escort my friend I met this guy, he asked me that can I escort him he will buy me a pack of chips, I say okay and said bye to my friend.[...] so when we go, near by the shop he said no

we are going to this house near by the shop. I said okay. I go with him and he was talking to his friend outside, the owner of that house. They were busy talking, talking, talking...I was feeling the fear but I did not want....I was busy saying the devil is the liar nothing will happen to me. So this guy came back alone with not the owner of the house. He locked the door when I asked 'what is happening, what are you doing?', he started to come to me and hit and take off my clothes. He raped me. So, I was full of blood. [Crying]”

Participants also reported experiences of emotional and physical abuse in which three out of five participants from the study had experienced physical abuse when growing up. Below Participant three emotionally explains the way her grandmother used to physically abuse her when she was a child.

“My grandmother didn't even want me to go play outside but my cousins they were going to play with other children. If I come back from school I was playing and I am dirty she would beat me like hell that why you like this. But also my cousins are also dirty, we were playing together. I grew up like that [Sobbing].”

(Participant Three, 2016)

“I think our parents were over-beating us because each and everything we were doing they were beating us up. If you don't come back by 6 at the house they were beating us. And not beating as a child, we would have marks.”

(Participant Four, 2016)

Early experiences of sexual relations

Moreover, the study also found that sex workers usually experience sexual relations during an early age. From the study, it was found that participants had their first boyfriends at the age between 15 and 17, fell pregnant during their teenage years, and some got miscarriages during their teenage years. These results confirm other studies on life histories of sex workers that found out that sex workers had early experiences of sexual relations. Teke (2016) study on female sex workers found that sex workers experienced early pregnancy, in which women reported that they fell pregnant during their teenage years, and got married at an early age. Geysels (2002) study also found that all the women who participated in the study got married while still young, fell pregnant at an early age, and had several failed marriages throughout

their lives. Like Teke (2016) and Geysels (2002), this study also found that participants experienced sexual relations during an early age.

Education Obstacles

Furthermore, it was found from the study that sex workers had experienced education obstacles during their childhood lived. Even though, some of the studies discussed from the literature review found that low education was one of the reasons women entered sex work, none of the studies explained further the significance of education obstacles on these women's life. From this study, it was found that women faced education difficulties during their teenage in which most of the participants dropped out of school while doing grade 9/10. Below participants their experiences:

"I dropped at school in 2008 in grade 9. Yes. uhhmmm, after dropping out i went to stay with my boyfriend. Then we broke up with my boyfriend and i didn't go straight at home. i went to my other friend's place and i stayed there with her parents. Then we would go out and drink."

(Participant one, 2016)

"I finished in grade 10, because i started seeing an old man and he told me that i must drop out of school and i dropped out."

(Participant Three, 2016)

From the extract above, participants explains when they dropped out of school, and why they dropped out and how this changed their lives going forward. However, even though participants mentioned that they dropped out of school because their partners or boyfriend, they also mentioned the way in which their neighbourhood, the schools they went to, and teachers' attitude could have influenced their difficulties with school. Below Participant One explains the kind of school she went to:

"Kids from that school they were negative. It was the attitude of the teachers it was also negative. And then even now when I am watching TV and the news in the area that surrounded the school, they speak of negativity there, nothing positive. All of them are thinking negative." (Participant One, 2016)

“Kids of that school they were not thinking about school work. only one thing when we were sitting in the lunch, sometimes when we sit and eating our lunch we always talked about our school work, where we suffer and where we don't suffer, where we need help and where we can help another person. so there they will think about where we are going to go on the weekend, how was the last weekend, what was not good in terms of the weekend enjoy themselves, and who has the boyfriend and who does not have the boyfriend, and who's smoking...all the things that does not matter”

(Participant One, 2016)

The above extract shows the way in which participants' environment and the kind of school they went to influenced their attitude towards education and their decision to drop out of school. When asked about their school experiences, participants explained that they enjoyed school during their childhood, but their attitude towards school changed once they moved into high school. They mentioned that their teachers' and peers' attitude discouraged them from furthering their education as the environment was too negative. Participant Two, even noted that her attitude towards school changed once she moved from Eastern Cape to Cape Town, and explained that Cape Town students' attitude towards education is negative as compared to that of students in Eastern Cape. This articulates the way in which the environment affects teenagers' attitudes towards education, and how this affects their lives going forward.

b. Reasons of Entering Sex work

Furthermore, the second theme found from the study is the reasons in which women entered sex work, where it was found that socio-economic circumstances are the reasons women entered sex work. It was found from the study that factors such poverty, unemployment, abandonment from parents and peer influence encouraged women to enter into sex work. Below I will discuss the reasons in which these women entered sex work.

Economic Reasons

Fielding-Miller et al (2013) conducted a qualitative study to explore the context, experiences, and health services needs of sex workers in Swaziland and it was found from the study that women entered sex work because of the high rate of poverty in Swaziland (Fielding-Miller et al, 2013); Sinha (2015) study on the reasons women enter sex working in India using an

analysis of forty-six short life portraits and three life-history interviews also found that women entered sex work because of poverty. Swendeman et al (2015) conducted a study on the intersection of resources, agency, and achievements in the pathway to sex work in India and found that familial poverty, loss of a partner, and limited job opportunities were reasons women entered into sex work. The above mentioned studies shows that women enter sex work because of economic reasons, and like above discussed studies, this study also found that women entered sex work because of they needed money. However, even though economic circumstances are reasons these entered sex work, factors such as education obstacles, abandonment from parents, and limited job opportunities encouraged these women to enter into sex work. Below participants explains how they entered sex work.

“When i dropped out of school, my mother she chased me because i dropped out. So she said i can't stay here if i am dropping out of school i must go stay with him [the boyfriend]. Because she know that i was having that guy, because she used to say that okay i don't eat home i eat outside, i drink some [Xhosa name for alcohol].”

(Participant Three, 2016)

“I dated this guy and my mom chased me out of the house. And then this guy was not working so he could not support me. So i had to find another place to stay because i couldn't stay with him. I met this friend; she was like my sister's age.”

(Participants Four, 2016)

Above participant Three and Four explains that after their parents chased them out of the house, they had to find other ways to support themselves and therefore entered into sex work for financial reason. Below, participant Two explains how inability to find a good-paying job encouraged her to enter into sex work.

“So i was working on the weekends, so during the week i was always sleeping or taking my CVs somewhere. So i found out that my cousins, i heard some igossip from icommunity that my cousins were sex workers.” [.....]. “They had money that i work for 3 days but every day they came back with that money hei, i started to get stressed.” [.....]. “So i started to ask my sister that do you mind if i can go with you for just 3 days”

(Participant Two, 2016)

When Participant Two was asked how she entered sex work, she mentioned that after losing her mother, she had to take care of herself and her younger sister. She mentioned that even though she was already working in saloon during weekends when she lost her mother, she was positive that she would get a permanent job; and submitted her CVs on different companies during the week. However, after struggling to a full time job, and seeing her cousins make a lot of money, she was pressured to enter into sex work. This shows that, as much as participants entered into sex work for economic reasons, they were also influenced by peer pressure. Below, participants explain how they were introduced to sex work.

Introduced by a lady friend

Furthermore, it was found from the study that sex workers had been introduced to sex work by a lady friend, a family member or a colleague; with three participants having been introduced by a lady friend, one by a family member, and one by a colleague. This shows that sex workers are more likely to be introduced to sex work by someone they know rather than by someone they did not know. Gould and Fick (2009) study on sex work in Cape Town also found that Forty-seven percent of brothel-based sex workers and 72 percent of street-based sex workers said someone else had introduced them to the work. We followed up by asking who this someone was. The study also showed that it is far more likely for sex workers to be introduced to the industry by a friend or family member than by an unknown third party (Gould & Fick, 2009). Below participant Three and Participant Four explains how they were introduced to sex work:

“After that [after breaking up with a sugar daddy] i started to...i was so broke after that man left me, so one of my friends is the one who took me to the street.”

(Participant Three, 2016)

Even though most participants were introduced by someone they know, they willingly entered sex work. Below Participant Four explains how the lady she was staying with forced her into the industry.

“So one day the lady told me they need one person at the fishery. I was very happy because i have a job. She told me one Saturday late you must prepare yourself we are going to work tonight we are going to leave my baby to his father. [...]. We walked up to Bellville in Vootrekker road. We walk we walk. On our way walking we see there are sex workers. Then i

asked her about that "what's happening? Is this place for prostitution and sftaa?" ten she told me "yes, and we coming to do this work. You go to a car and you tell them you are young you are not R50"...Then I was like Yhooo. Then she started shouting at me that "i can't stay with you, you can do money and i am the only one who's putting food on the table. I have a family to look after and i can't put another...another like, another work on my shoulders. You must work your old sister""

(Participant Four, 2016)

The above extracts shows the way in which peer pressure influenced women to enter into sex work.

c. Experiences as Sex Workers

The third theme found from the study is women experiences of sex work where experiences such as experiences of violence use of alcohol and drugs, stigma from society were found. Below we will discuss sub-themes found under women experiences of sex work.

Financial Stability and Flexible Hours

Though women were motivated by their socio-economic situations to enter sex work, it was found that after entering this kind of work, women felt that it gave them more freedom, more autonomy, and provided them with more money. Sinha (2015) study on reasons women enter into sex work found that women reported that sex worke gave them more freedom and autonomy. Women reported that compared to other jobs, sex work gave them more control over their lives as it offered them flexibility (Sinha, 2015). Swendeman et al (2015) study also found that women reported that they had worked in other jobs before in which they had been exposed to sexual violation and therefore decided to join sex work as they could not find other decent jobs (Swendeman et al, 2015). Swendeman et al (2015) study also found that after entering sex work, women felt that they had autonomy and control as the work is; they reported that the job offered them a chance to have time to look after their families and still work. Like Sinha (2015) and Swendemam et al (2015) study, this study also found that sex work offered women financial stability, and it allowed them to work within flexible hours. Even though women were encouraged by certain circumstances to enter sex work, they all reported that the money was good. Below Participant One and Participant Two explains their experiences as sex workers.

“In terms of the money, it was good because i had the money anytime i wanted. When it is hot i know that you can have the money, when it's raining you know that the clients will call you. It's either you go to their place or you tell them where you are going to meet, maybe at a B&B, or sometimes at your place. Maybe you know some of the clients you know they are honest and they have a lot of money so you end up showing them where you are staying.”

(Participant One, 2016)

“So i started to dress nice, and to buy furniture, food, and so I see that this life is good you have everything, toiletries, new hairstyle every week, money for booze. yhooo i started saying ha this a life.”

(Participant Two, 2016)

The above extracts from participants' shows that women liked the flexibility and stability sex work offered. They explained that it was possible for them to work despite the weather, and they were able to afford anything they wanted.

Stigma from the Society

Furthermore, even though participants reported that the job offered them stability and flexibility, they also reported that it was stigmatised and therefore they suffered discrimination from the society. As already mentioned in the introduction, sex work is currently criminalised in South Africa and therefore very stigmatised. It is viewed as immoral, degrading, and understood as a source of spreading sexual diseases in South Africa. It is therefore stigmatised, with sex workers ignored, treated with disrespect by the society. Below participants explains the way the society responded when they found out they found out they were engaging with sex work.

“There's stigma from the road from the community follows you. Because even sometimes when people they don't know, but they will be a...people they will suspect you of doing something. They will call you in the name of what you are doing, but they don't know if you are doing exactly. Because i noticed when my mother's house is in Harare now, they will say "yhooo, you have money like maxhosa", you see?....you have money like a prostitute”.

(Participant One, 2016)

When asked whether they community knew what she was doing, Participant Two explained that the community called her different names for been a sex a worker. She reported that even after she had stooped, they still call her different names. She mentioned that this was to an extent that they would tell her baby's father that he is dating a prostitute, and she had to ask Embrace Dignity to ensure her baby's father that she was not engaging in sex work anymore.

“Yhooo, to me neh, it was hard. Because when i have gone through a lot, and when you are going to buy drinks there will say like yhoo the business was good. So we have that thing but we just ignore them. And what happened to my baby's father, they were also telling him that you are in a relationship with a prostitute. And he came to me and confronted me about that, but that time i was already at embrace.”

Because sex work is considered as immoral and unacceptable in the society, it was found from the study that sex workers felt the need to hide their work from their families and partners, but reported that they found it hard to do so. Women from the study reported that they would lie to their families and partners about what they were doing. Below participants explains how they managed to keep their job from their families.

“I will go during the weekend and lie to him. i am not going to go to my mother's home and come back, i will go to my friend in Site C where i know i can go to the road in the afternoon and go home later Sunday. Or maybe I'll say that we are to do workshops, we are going to that workshop and lie to him. Sometimes i had a client that i know that he is regular during the night, then i will go there and go on Friday and sleep on Friday, Saturday and come back on Sunday then i will know i will have a lot of money on me because he was paying daily as i charged.”

(Participant One, 2016)

Experiences of Violence

Moreover, it has been found from different studies that sex workers experiences violence from their clients, the police, and from the people the work with as well. Gould and Fick (2009) conducted a study about selling sex in Cape Town and it was found from the study that sex workers experience violence from police; with about 47% of street sex workers having been threatened by the police, 12% having been raped, 19% have been slept with by the police as an exchange of arrest, and 63% have been sworn at by the police (Gould & Fick,

2008). Like Gould and Fick study, this also found that sex workers had experienced violence with all the ladies having been raped by their clients, robbed by skollies(thieves), and received violence from the police.

When asked about their experiences with clients, participants reported that they had experienced violence from clients in which they have been raped, clients have refused to pay them, they have been stabbed by clients, and some clients have refused to wear a condom. It has been found from studies that sex workers are found to be more vulnerable to sexual diseases as most clients refuse to use protection. Pettifor et al (2002) conducted a study on female sex workers in Johannesburg and it was found that sex workers' clients are reluctant to using condoms which make them vulnerable to sexual diseases. Participants reported that they have experienced abuse from clients for refusing to have unprotected sex (Pettifor et al, 2000). Women reported that many clients will offer more money for sex without a condom or will go to another woman who is willing to have sex without a condom or will try to force them to have sex without a condom (Pettifor et al, 2000). Like Pettifor et al (2002), this study found that women have had experiences with clients who refuse to use protection and thus exposing them to sexual diseases. Participant Five even reported that she had a client who refused to use protected and infected her with HIV/AIDS and also got her pregnant. This shows the extent to which sex workers experience violence from clients and how this can affect the rest of their lives. Below participants explain their experience with clients:

“Sometimes they break the condom, sometimes while they still busy they will open the knife and want to stab you, and want to take the money. A lot of things happen” [...]. “Someone come from the street and say let’s go in, when you say the money they say I will give when we finish. Then you just do and they say I don’t have money. So you find different people and different behaviour.”

(Participant One, 2016)

“In my first day i was not lucky, because i got raped the first day [laughed]. The first day i got raped. And i was pointed with a knife. I was waiting on the street and this guy came and he took me and we go to the bush. And i was already take off my clothes, and i said give me the money so i would lie down. And he was like i don't have the money. I said huh, why? when i was putting my clothes he was already taking out the knife and he raped me. In my first day.”

(Participant Three, 2016)

Participants further explained that they do not face violence from clients only but they experience violence from the ladies they work with also. All participants reported that they had been threatened by other ladies while working on the streets. Below Participant Three explains her experience with other ladies, the competitiveness on the road and the extremes in which ladies go to get rid of their competitors.

“It’s dangerous. Even from the girls that were staying there, it is very dangerous. Because from the girls when they see that every client wants you, they’ll make some things, even hire some skollies to come and rob you, they take the money, so it’s dangerous even from them. Others they will stab you because they want you to have scars on the face so that the client will not come and buy you again. and from the clients, because of it’s just a road in the forest so there’s no houses so we have to get in the car and find a place to do it; so it is too risky because sometimes clients can go with and go far with you and run away with you because like the car or take the gun or, so.”

(Participant One, 2016)

Participants further explained that they also had bad experiences with police, in which they had experiences getting arrested by the police and police asking for sex in exchange of being locked. This shows the way in which criminalisation of sex work influences mistreatment of sex workers by police below Participant Four compares her experience with police with that of apartheid.

“You see the police...it makes me have the imagination of apartheid time when our grandmothers were holding passport in their hands. But now in prostitution, is not about holding something when you see the cops, it’s about throwing something when you see the cops, throwing condoms and hiding yourself. So every time when you see a police car you would...sometimes you won’t run, you just drop...you just throw the condoms and walk.” [....]. *“Sometimes they [police] take you and go sleeping in cell for the whole weekend. They take your money and they don’t give it back. Sometimes they are asking for not to lock you up for sex because you won’t sleep there then you will have to have sex with them.”*

(Participant Four, 2016)

Using Drugs to Cope

Sex work has been linked with drug use, in which most studies argue that women engage with sex work to pay for their drug use. Young et al (2000) conducted a study on Prostitution, Drug Use, and Coping with Psychological Distress. They argued that women may enter prostitution in order to fund their drug use; however, sex workers likely increase their drug use in order to deal with distress caused by sex work. However, unlike Young et al (2000), this study found that sex workers engaged with drugs as a way to cope. As much as participants reported that sex work granted them stability and flexibility, they also reported that it was dangerous working on the road, and therefore used drugs to cope. Below participants explain their experiences.

“I did not feel anything because i was smoking and drinking the first time. So i don't think...I don't feel anything. Because when you smoke...” [....]. “Because i don't have my own mind to think what is going to happen, what is not going to happen, what i am going to do, what i am not going to do.”[.....] ““I must go around asking someone to give me R5 then I will buy Dagga and I started to smoke then that is when I can have the knowledge to go. But if I did not smoke I would then, I would see reasons why I don't want to go. Because I will say I'm tired it's Sunday, its Monday people are at work. I will come up with excuses.”

(Participant One, 2016)

d. Reasons of Leaving Sex Work

The fourth and final theme found from the study is the reasons these women left sex work and how they left. The study focused on sex workers who had already left the sex work industry, and therefore it further pursued the reasons these women left sex work. The women interviewed on the study were already working with Embrace Dignity which is an organisation that helps sex workers exit sex work. Embrace Dignity offers these women counselling, several trainings (ie. Computer training) and offers them an opportunity to run workshops in their communities informing people about the dangers of sex work. It was found from the study that even though sex workers exited sex work through Embrace Dignity, they exited because of economic reasons and opportunities to further their education. Below participants explain why and how they stopped:

“Embrace Dignity came to the road where we were standing and then they told us about their people and their mission. And i started to[say]; let me go now because i am not sure if this people are going to do what they say. Because there were a lot of people that will come and say come to us we will help you, we will do this and that and then they don't do it. So i was even saying to my friends that let us go and gamble at Embrace Dignity and see maybe if our lives are not going to change.”[.....] “: so i come here when the run the workshops, and in the meetings i started to come bit by bit. Then i was one of those chosen to do courses and then we went. Then we started to do English classes and computer doing the training, then start and do that. So i will tell myself that they give us money for the taxi, me i must take the trim then i can save the taxi money. Then i know that i can spend the R10 then be left we the R40. Then i came buy something to eat tonight and there's no need for me to go to the road during the night when i am coming from here. So i started to try to appreciate what i have at that moment. Then we had, we had to get the intern for 2 years.”

From the above extract Participant One explains that when she started working with Embrace Dignity, she was not sure if she would stop and thus continued working on the road. However, after receiving training and facilitating workshops, she got too busy and did not have enough time to go to the road. She also explained that she would save transport money and use it to buy food and therefore did not see any need to go to the road as she had enough food for the day. Other participants also reported that money on the road became less as they had fewer clients, and therefore they were wont making that much money anymore. This shows that as much as these women entered sex work for financial reasons, they also left due to financial reasons as Embrace Dignity was giving them enough money to support themselves. Therefore, one can argue that sex workers are motivated into sex work by financial circumstances, and if given other ways to make money, they'd exit the industry. Participants also reported been given an opportunity to go back to school encouraged them to exit sex work. Below Participant Four explains.

“I was, i never thought of going to school, but when i met Embrace i wanted to go back to school. and with the classes that i took there...like, i couldn't start a computer but today i have an email address, i go online to check emails. I know how to answer a cell phone properly. I once was a chef in a Chinese restaurant, i was a chef there working in food industry. Embrace took me to training for cooking for like 6 months. So i am from Joburg with that skill of cooking. Yes. I am doing everything, classess. i can handle my anger when

someone comes to me with a cold feet. I know how to handle a person. I can communicate. I'm a better English speaker. I am good in writing. Yes."

(Participant Four, 2016)

In terms of current and future plans, all participants reported that they are in a good place in their lives at the moment. They reported that even though it can be financially challenging at times, they never think of going back to the road again, and that they would rather find other ways to make money before they consider going back to the road. Most of them have already started their own small businesses to financial support themselves, while some of them are willing to back to school. All the ladies currently facilitate workshops in Embrace Dignity to inform the society about the dangers of sex work.

Conclusion

This research explored the life histories of women who once engaged in sex work with aim to bring a broader understanding of why women enter into sex work. A qualitative research method was used in which five life-history interviews were used to understand participants' experiences from childhood until now. Through exploration of life histories of these women, the study aimed to determine the reasons women enter into sex work, their experience as sex workers, childhood experiences that could have encouraged them to enter into sex work, and the reasons why they exited. A thematic analysis was used to identify themes and four themes were found from the data which are: childhood experiences, in which it was found from the study that there are certain experiences that sex workers experience during childhood; the reasons in which women entered sex work, where it was found that socio-economic circumstances are the reasons women entered sex work; women experiences of sex work where experiences such as experiences of violence, use of alcohol and drugs, and stigma from society were found; and the reasons these women left sex work and how.

Based on the results from the study, I argue that there are structural forces that motivate women to engage with sex work. the study found that during childhood, most sex worker s experience living in poverty, facing education obstacles, experiencing violence, and engaging in sexual relations while still young; these are factors that later play a role in encouraging women to engage with sex work. It was also found from the study that all participants

reported that they had attended high schools where teachers and students had a negative attitude towards school and thus encouraged them to drop out of school. The study also found that some sex workers tried looking for decent jobs but they couldn't get any. Therefore, I argue these are structural factors that encourage women to enter sex work and thus need to be acknowledged instead of stigmatizing sex work. Especially within a South African context where the apartheid left structural forces that affect people within a lower economic class.

I further argue that criminalization of sex work in South Africa only furthers the marginalization and stigmatization of sex work. As found in the study, sex workers receive stigmatisation from the society, violence from clients, police, gangs and other ladies they work with on the road. Therefore criminalization of sex work encourages such violence towards sex workers as there is no policy that protect them from the clients or any other bodies that may violate them. Therefore, I argue that instead of criminalizing sex work, the state should work with sex work organizations in order to help women who like to exit by offering them training that could enhance their skills and thus their chances of having a stable job. However, it is also important to note that not all sex workers would like to exit sex work, as it was found from Gould and Fick (2009) study that sex workers reported that they had worked in different places before but felt that they earned more than enough as compared to their earning from previous jobs. Therefore, I argue that the state should acknowledge structural forces that encourage sex workers to enter into sex work before criminalizing sex work; and develop ways to help women who would like to exit, but also develop policies to those who prefer sex work as compared to other jobs.

Furthermore, this project highlights the need for further research in this area of study in South Africa, especially in terms of understanding in-depth experiences of sex workers as most research on sex work in South Africa are quantitative studies that only highlights sex work related statistics instead of sex workers experiences. This research used life history interviews with the aim to fill the gap in the literature in this study area. It also highlighted the different factors that encourage women to engage in sex work, and the different power dynamics that plays a role within their day to day experiences. Therefore, argues that structural forces should considered and acknowledged by the state instead of criminalising sex work without understanding the experiences of sex work and the reasons they engage in sex work.

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Appendix One: Interview Guide

1. Introduction
2. Tell me about yourself (Name, age, where you stay, marital status, number of children)
3. Childhood – Where you were born/ grew up
 - Living conditions (neighbourhood, daily activities)
 - Economic circumstance
 - Family background (relationship with parents and siblings)
 - Education
 - Friends and relationships
4. Teenage Years – Family (relationship with parents and siblings)
 - Social life (friends, what did you do with your friends, any boys you liked?)
 - School life
5. Adulthood – School (when did you finish? Which grade? Further education?)
 - Work (what was your first job? When? At what age? What other jobs did you have? How did you get them? What was the experience like?)
 - Marriage/relationships (how was your experience with relationships? Are you married? Where and when did you meet your spouse? How does your partner feel about your work (sex work)?)
 - Children (do you have any children? When did you have your first child? How do they feel about the work you do (sex work)?)
6. Experiences as a sex worker – when did you start working as a sex worker? How long?
 - How did you get into sex work
 - How was it like working as a sex worker?
 - What were your experiences with clients (what makes a good/bad client)
 - What did you like/ dislike about sex work?
 - What was your experience like the first time? How did you adjust with time?
 - How much money did you make?
7. Current/ Future- What are your thoughts on South Africa current Law on criminalization of sex work? Elaborate

- Why did you stop working as a sex worker?
- What are you working on/as currently? How has that been for you?
- Do you ever think of going back into sex work?

Appendix Two- Consent form

Consent to participate in a study Life Histories of women who engage in sex work

Dear Participant,

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by a postgraduate gender studies student from the University of Cape Town. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you may not understand before deciding whether or not you would like to participate.

Purpose of the study

This study is conducted to investigate the life histories of women who engage in sex work. The study aims to explore the experiences of women who engage/engaged in sex work from childhood until adulthood. Through exploration of life stories of these women, the study aims to determine the reasons women enter into sex work, and their experiences as sex workers.

Procedures

Should you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last not more 1h30.

After this, you will be allowed to ask any further questions you may have about the study.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

There are no possible risks that could occur during this interview.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in this study that is connected to you will remain entirely confidential. It will not be disclosed to anyone without your consent. Your name will not be used in the study, and there will be no way to link your results to your name once the study has been completed.

Participation and Withdrawal

As stated previously, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation in this study at any time without any consequence. There is no penalty for

withdrawing from the study. You may also refuse to answer questions that you are not comfortable answering.

Queries

If you have any queries or concerns about this research, please contact:

Mususumeli Suzan Ramudzuli: rmdmus001@myuct.ac.za

I have read the above and am satisfied with my understanding of the study, its possible benefits, risks and alternatives. My questions about the study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participation in the research study as described. I have been offered copies of this consent form.

Signature of participant

Date

Name of participant (printed)

Researcher

