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I am an invisible woman **-A study about prostitution in Iran**

Socionomprogrammet

C-uppsats

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Abstract

Title: I am an invisible woman - A study about prostitution in Iran

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The purpose of this study was to explore the state of female prostitution in the city of Tehran, and besides, analyze the elements that can lead women to harlotry in Iran.

This research is based on three sources of information: firstly, interviews with three harlots in Tehran and I got help of a semi-structured interview guide. Secondly, I discussed prostitution with conscious resources that worked within the public services in Tehran and had experienced of working with female prostitutes. Thirdly I analyzed texts and reports about prostitution in Iran.

The data from interviews are tied to two theories: symbolic interactionism and feminism. The results show that the most significant factors that lead women to prostitution are family violence, poverty and running away from home. Beside these elements there were other factors, such as low level of education and unemployment, which were common among interviewees.

The data from text analysis show that prostitution is a major problem in the city of Tehran but authorities do not take sufficient measures to solve and prevent this problem.

Keywords: prostitution, feminism, symbolic interactionism

Introduction

Prostitution is a phenomenon that exists in most countries but how they react to it is affected by social and cultural factors that dominate their societies. Some societies have accepted prostitution and consider it functional while the other societies look at it as a crime and punish it with rough penalties.

In my opinion whether we consider it as a crime or function, this phenomenon causes undeniable difficulties for the person who is involved in it and for the society (for example it can cause physical and mental problems and can lead to other crimes such as smuggling and stealing). (Moazzami, 2003)

And I think when a social phenomenon becomes pathological and harmful for a person or a society, it is our duty to prevent it and the first step in this path is to find the factors that cause this problem.

Iran is a country in Middle East and this social problem exists in this country like in many other nations. Tehran is the capital city of the country and a metropolis that many runaway girls and women who have been the objects of violence and exposure choose this city as destination.

Even if one can observe them daily in almost everywhere, searching customers, these persons are invisible to the responsible authorities (for example: police and the government) and necessary actions are not taken to organize and manage these women.

It is interesting to know that there are no exact statistics about the number of prostitutes and how their situation looks like and the existing statistics which are performed by different authorities and organizations are incorrect and contradictory. It can depend on the sensitivity of this subject. (Interview with conscious resources)

Beside this problem there is another problem as well. Since freedom of speech in a society like Iran does not exist correctly and completely, talking about social problems such as prostitution is difficult. During many years the prostitution was taboo and no one wanted to talk about it , at least not officially. But in recent years concealing and silence have been over and finally, prostitution has officially been considered as a major social problem.

These facts made me think about something that could help these poor women and I decided to write my C-essay about this subject.

During the study I faced several problems (which are presented in method chapter) but despite them I continued my work and hoped that this essay could light up women's situation in a man-dominated society.

Purpose and questions

The first purpose is to illustrate the situation of female prostitutes and prostitution in Iran and since this phenomenon is multidimensional, I will focus on the laws that are connected to this problem and social services provided for these women. The second purpose is to explore the harlots' background and find the common denominators in their stories.

The main questions that led me during the study were:

1. How is the state of prostitutes in the Islamic law?
2. How is the state of prostitutes in human services in Iran?

3. How are harlots' individual, family and social backgrounds before beginning of prostitution?
4. Is there any common denominator in their stories?

Pre-understanding

Before the beginning of the study I had a specific picture of prostitutes. For me they were women with different kind of make up and clothes who sold sex for money. Their backgrounds, what they had been through and how they experienced their lives were indistinct for me. I could guess that most of them came from lower social classes and from poor families. It was not enough and therefore I thought it was necessary to get more information and insight about these women and their lives. I have lived in Sweden in 6 years and how the women are treated in this country, have always fascinated me. Respect and equality between men and women is very significant for Swedes and for me it was necessary to find out more about women in Middle East and their life stories and how they are treated. For this reason I chose my home country and the most exposed group in the society, prostitutes. I think these women are an exposed group in Iranian society and authorities do not take enough measures to solve their problems.

Definitions

The most researchers are agreed on the definition of prostitution. According to SOU, prostitution means buying and selling sex between two people usually for cash. This definition is taken from a research named "*könshandel*" and the researcher believes that *sexual exchange* is a better word than prostitution because in this definition the focus is not only on the woman and the man is also involved. (Statens offentliga utredningar [SOU], 1995:15)

Iranian authorities use many terms for calling a person who sells her body such as: harlot, prostitute, street woman, special woman, harmed woman, body seller and sexual worker. The usage of some of these terms is not free from problems. For example the expression *street woman* is not comprehensive and includes only a special kind of prostitution and not other kinds of it like selling sex at home or via phone. (Internet, www.geocities.com) The usage of the term *sexual worker* is criticized by persons who fight for liberty and right of women. They believe that this expression is the result of a masculine view to this problem and apparently it tries to respect female prostitutes, but by increasing the value of body selling to the level of working the consumers are cleaned. (a.a.)

In general we can say that prostitution is providing sexual services by women and sometimes by men and includes any kind of sexual relationships between two human being and the purpose of offering sex by the prostitute is to gain benefits, usually material. Prostitution has different types like street prostitution and prostitution at home which will be discussed in coming chapters.

Studies which are done before

In the years before and after the revolution, limited studies have been done about prostitution in Iran which seems to be the result of difficulty of reaching this group and also sensitivity of the topic.

My supervisor in the field had access to abstract of some studies that had been done about this topic and I will present them below:

Exploring family elements that are connected to prostitution among women between 15 and 35 years old in Horriat rehabilitating home in the city of Mashad (Adelian Rasi, 1998). In this study the researcher tries to examine those elements in the family background that have relativity with prostitution. The researcher interviewed prostitutes that came to a rehabilitating home for addicts in the city of Mashad that is in the northeast of Iran. All these women were between 15 to 35 years old. The results show that parents' separation, poverty and addiction in the family have direct connection with prostitution.

A study about factors which are significant in leading a person to prostitution. (Olyayi Zand, 1990). The aim of this study is to find those elements that can lead women to prostitution and then suggest which measures that can be taken for preventing prostitution. The population was women who lived in human services' centers and the researcher used both observation and interviewing for doing this study. The results show that the most significant factors that can lead women to prostitution are poverty, unemployment, and lack of organizations that can support helpless women. The suggestion for preventing prostitution was to having organizations that can help families economically and then education for children must be compulsory.

The distance between insignificancy and inability- A sociological observation over the characteristics and states of social damaged girls and women in rehabilitation centers (Sedigh Sarvestani, 1988-1993).

The main purpose of this study is the inspection of the state of rehabilitation centers and the rate of their effectiveness. Another objective is to inspect the situation of girls and women who stay in such centers. In this study the researcher interviewed all the women who lived in human services' rehabilitating centers and the personnel who worked there. The results reveal that the authorities do not take enough measures to help these women and they must develop their methods they use in working with these women.

I have also searched national and international studies about prostitution in Gothenburg's University's library (Gunda). I wrote the word "prostitution" and I got many hits. Because of this and lack of time it was impossible to write about all those studies. It was difficult to find studies that were related to my study. Therefore I have chosen some of the studies I found on Gothenburg's University's library and will present them shortly below. It contains both Swedish and international studies.

Prostitution i Helsingfors is a study written by Margaretha Järvinen. As the name of the study shows it is about prostitution in Helsinki under 1945-1986. Under this period prostitution was controlled under the provisions of the 1936 Vagrancy Act. This study is based on several sources of information. First the reports of interrogations of women arrested by the police in Helsinki. Second are 24 interviews with key persons in law enforcement, vagrant control

personnel and criminal investigation department. The second type of data includes interviews with 31 prostitutes (call girls, hotel prostitutes and homeless women with experience of prostitution). Another source is observations made in night clubs and local pubs in Helsinki. The first perspective that brings up and discussed in this thesis is functionalism. The second perspective is feminism. The third perspective is social interaction and control. But in the analysis the researcher uses two of these theories: social interactionism and feminism. The first purpose of the study is to analyze the roll of prostitution control and find out why and how this trade is controlled. The second aim is to study various levels of professionalism in the sex trade. Researcher's hypothesis was that the control of this trade has been directed not only towards professional prostitutes, but also towards amateur ones. The third aim is to find out if the control of prostitution is a form of universal control of women. The fourth aim is to study the careers and social backgrounds of women who arrested for prostitution. The study shows that control of prostitution was a display of male control over female behavior. Secondly the study reveals that prostitution registered by the police varies in the degree of professionalism and the young prostitutes of the 1960's were most amateurs. Thirdly the study shows that the women's prostitution careers as recorded by the police are correlated with their social resources and problems. Fourthly it is shown that the control of prostitution has existed as a general control of women in society. The Vagancy Act has not only been directed towards commercial sex trade, but also towards other types of female behavior. (Järvinen, 1990)

Making sense of prostitution (Phoenix, 1999) is another study which is done in London. The general aim of this research is to make sense of women's meanings and experiences of involvement in prostitution and shows that involvement in prostitution is made possible for some women because of the social and material conditions which they live in. The researcher interviewed 21 prostitutes and asked them about their life stories and experiences. The results reveal that the meanings that the interviewed women gave their involvement in prostitution were paradoxical. For example, both nothing to do with sex and everything to do with sex, both a means of combating their poverty and the source of their poverty, both a way to escape violent personal relationships and a source of violence within intimate relationships.

Another study which is done by Swedish social committee (socialstyrelsen) is *awareness of prostitution (kännedom om prostitution)*. This is a rapport that tries to investigate prostitution's extent and development in Sweden. The researchers have used several methods: semi-structured interviews, questionnaire and a systemic internet survey for interviewing authorities (for example: social services, police department and researchers) and those who are involved in prostitution. I will give a short presentation of the results of this study.

- The results show that 17% of country's municipality state that they *know* that prostitution exists while 17% *believe* that it exists.
- Many answers show that internet is an ordinary place to do prostitution and this fact that prostitution is usually discovered in connection to other problems such as drug abuse.
- The authorities stated different figures for number of those who are involved in street prostitution. Besides, there is no exact information about children and young people who have experience of prostitution.
- Both questionnaires and interviews reveal that police and social services have not enough knowledge about men who sell sexual services. The researcher's internet poll

shows that just 1/6 of those who sell sex are men and men are often customers of sexual services and the advertisements are mostly directed to this group.

- The study shows that police and social services want to gain more knowledge about prostitution and find good solutions for this problem.

Method

This essay is a qualitative study and I tried to inspect prostitution and its causes profoundly. The purpose was to light up these women's situation and understand this phenomenon through experienced people and those who are involved in this problem. According to the comment of Larsson (2005), a qualitative research inspects the purpose of the study comprehensively and in my opinion this kind of study suits my subject and purpose of the study. The author also writes that it doesn't mean that a qualitative study inspects a phenomenon from every possible viewpoints and it is necessary to have delimitations. Since a phenomenon like prostitution can be inspected from different aspects and it is not possible to do this under two month and for a C-essay, the focus has been on individual, familial and social aspects which can be associated to feminism and symbolic interactionism. Another reason for choosing this method was to be able to experience other persons' inner world. Larsson (2005) claims that through the experience of empathy the researcher tries to understand the inner world of the person and look at the issue from his/her point of view. I tried my best to improve my empathy and see the world from interviewees' point of the view. The perspective which is dominant in my study is phenomenological perspective that according to Kvale (1997) it means that concentration is on the experiences of interviewee and priority is given to his/her definitions and comments.

Designing the interview guide and gathering information

In a questionnaire the subject and purpose of the study must be considered and a good question should lead to production of knowledge and also good communication between interviewer and interviewee. The interview guide which is used in my study is semi structured and some themes which can be associated to my chosen theories were noted and some short questions were written. This was because of coming closer to the goals, getting information that was related to the purpose of the study and preventing confusion. Each interview took between 30 min to 1 hour and whenever the answers were unclear or needed to be questioned I asked questions. The interviewees were asked to talk about their lives before prostitution. I can say that a combination of different interview strategies were used such as: informal conversation interview which is the most popular type of interview and here the researcher should be able to control the conversation for getting proper and enough information (Larsson, 2005). Another interview strategy is common interview guide that means writing some themes and short questions which are not supposed to be asked in a special order. (a.a.) In another part of the study which focuses on the state of prostitution in Iran the information was given by text analyze that according to Larsson (2005) this means that the researcher uses official reports and published articles in his/her study. Besides document analyze I interviewed some sources who worked in the public sector whose name and title can't be mention in the study. (See ethical consideration) I should mention that all the information that I got (reports about prostitution in Iran and interviews with prostitutes and other sources) was in Persian and I, later, translated them to English.

Cooperation, communication and the problem of the study

Before leaving Sweden I contacted my supervisor in the field who is a social worker and a university professor in Tehran but as soon as I arrived I realized that it would be difficult to contact the interviewees. Because of the beginning of the New Year there was 2 weeks official holiday and people were on vacation and my work postponed automatically. After the holiday I contacted several centers and organizations that worked with women's addiction because these places work with addiction and some of the addicts are prostitutes and it was easy to find my interviewees there. But my attempts were without any results. Some people suggested searching these women in the streets but this suggestion was risky and dangerous. Finally after several attempts done by my supervisor and me one of the NGOs (non-governmental organization) in Tehran that was a rehabilitation center for addicts let me go there and interview their clients. At first I tried to interview 10 persons but because of the lack of time (I had already lost the most part of my time) I preferred to do 3 interviews. Two of interviews were recorded and then written on the paper word by word and the third one was written from the beginning.

Choice of population and samples

My population was the women who had sexual relationships in a period of time and their purpose by doing this was to gain money or other material things. My samples were typical cases and representatives of normal and usual cases in the society according to their social workers who had a long experience of working with these women. My goal was to have maximal choice to inspect different kinds of prostitution and prostitutes but because of the problems I named above and lack of enough time it was impossible.

Validity, reliability, generalization

Validity and reliability are inspected in qualitative researches different from quantitative ones (Larsson, 2005). In small qualitative studies a number of cases are inspected and they are supposed to be typical and according to Larsson (2005) we search for detailed validity. And somewhere else the same author in the same book writes that in qualitative studies the validity regards to the rate of précised data and the ability of researcher to analyze it. To achieve this goal it is necessary that questions can evaluate the study's subject properly. (a.a.)

The researcher should do his best to gather sufficient and exact information from interviewees and let them express their experiences and impressions in detail. This should help the reader of the research to illustrate a clear and apparent picture of the studied phenomenon with researchers explanations' and analyses' help. Generally the validity is in direct relation with the ability of researcher to control, ask questions and analyze the data. (Kvale, 1997)

According to the comment of Kvale (1997) reliability depends on consequences' consistency. At the stage of data gathering the researcher can ask several and similar questions which are concentrating on a special theme and subjects and test the consistency of the answers. At the stage of writing we can ask 2 researchers to do this job or one researcher can do it interval. This helps us to examine reliability in our study. I did not have the possibility to try out this method because I did the study by myself and it was difficult to contact and find another researcher who would and could help me to test this method.

In this essay all the above factors are considered and efforts are done to have questions which are related to the subject and get sufficient and exact data.

In qualitative studies because of the low number of samples the generalization becomes low or impossible. (Larsson, 2005)

My goal was not to generalize and only clarification of some aspects of a social phenomenon was in my mind. But in the analyses we can observe a kind of analytic generalization which means that the analyses are done based on common denominators among different data. This can help us and the reader of the research to find how the results can be used in other situations and the possibility for generalization will be tested. (Kvale, 1997)

Ethical consideration

In every stage of a study we must be aware of ethical problems. First of all the purpose of the study must be improvement of condition for human being and not only to gain valuable knowledge. (Kvale, 1997) For me it was significant to clarify the situation of prostitutes in addition to gain knowledge.

Secondly it is necessary to satisfy the participants. (a.a.) For satisfying two of those women whom I interviewed I gave their social worker 5000 tuman for each one of them (about 40 Swedish crowns each). Later she handed them the money so they could buy necessary stuffs such as shampoo and soap. The third one refused taking money.

It is also necessary to make the participants aware of possible consequences and problems that can occur by participating in the study. (ibid.) All the participants in my study had been informed about the study's goal and consequences and I assured them that they would be anonymous and the used names are pseudonym. It is called confidentiality.

Beside these, they knew that participation was voluntary and they could stop it whenever they wished.

I have interviewed some conscious resources about prostitution in Tehran. They were employee in the public services and their name and title can not be mention in the study because they wanted to be anonymous and I respect that. But for avoiding confusion I will refer to these *conscious resources* during the study so the reader would understand that the information is gotten from these persons.

Another matter, that makes me think, is, if I hurt my interviewees with making them remembering and reviewing the old and bitter memories. Even if these kinds of interviews that concern private aspects of people's lives risk to become like psychological conversations and therapy (ibid.) I tried to refuse to ask direct questions about unpleasant memories.

After each interview I wrote it down and my notes were shown to the interviewees to find out how close my definitions and perceptions were to the reality.

Analysis

Kvale (1997) explains in his book how one can analyze interviews. I followed some of his advices.

The two first interviews are recorded but I could not record the last one because the social worker who was presented during the interview did not consent to this.

When the interviews had been implemented I listened to the recorded material and wrote down the interviewees' words. Then I categorized their stories in different categories based on those themes I had used during the interviews. Afterwards I analyzed the wanted data and

rejected unnecessary answers. (See the interview guide) and it made it easier for me to analyze the information but I did not write down pauses and my own words.

In the approach of analysis I used several methods. The first one was sentence concentration which means that the sentences used by the interviewee will be retold in short sentences and definitions while they keep their concepts and meaning. (ibid.) In the conclusion chapter I retold the stories of participants briefly and in short sentences. Then I used another strategy that is *sentence translation* and refers to translating and defining a text and examining it profoundly (a.a.). With help of this method I tried to understand the meaning of the comments and data I got from interviewees. And at last I began to find patterns which existed in participants' stories. I think these methods were appropriate for my study. Kvale (1997) claims that the first method reduces the data while the other method produces more text.

Theories

Prostitution is a multidimensional phenomenon and we can use many different theories for analyzing and explaining each aspect of it. Because of the lack of time I preferred to choose feminism and symbolic interactionism which I think can explain prostitution and many aspects of it very well.

B) Feminism

“It is about women’s suffer, the damages caused by a patriarchal society, sex discrimination, poverty, war and other problems caused by men and this movement is capable to be discussed in every territory there it is a man.”(Moazzemi,2003,sid.31)

I think the choice of this theory was proper here because prostitution is sexual exploitation of women and their values.

Lena Gemzöe in her book *“feminism”* (2003) categorizes inequality of men and women in four spheres.

1. Family environment: here the unequal job division between men and women at home is on focus. If we compare nowadays’ women with past times we see that today’s women do more work outside their homes while men do not work more at home.
2. Political and economical environments: in this area there are some inequalities as well. Women are still working at feminine areas and they have low paid jobs such as service occupations while men work in the area of business and industry.
3. Cultural insult of women: Gemzöe (2003) means that what women do at home is not considered and in medias there is a particular view about them which poses women as objects and the lack of independent and strong women is usual in this sphere.
4. Violence and sexual exploitation of women: this is the most often form of outrage and suppression against women.

According to Gemzöe (2003) in all these spheres the suppression of women and trying to do it is done by men. In the coming part I will present some kinds of feminism with help of Gemzöe’s book.

Liberal feminism)

It is based on liberalism. This ideology grew at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of 19th century. The main idea for liberalists is that all people have same value and must have same rights and liberty. These ideas have affected feminism and have contributed to liberal feminism. This kind of feminism tries to develop the rights, concessions and roles which are usually for men and make them possible and available for women too. These groups of feminists have fought for economical, educational, social and political rights for women and their main activities are in these areas. They believe in upbringing, education and changing attitudes for revoking women’s subordinate position in society.

Radical feminism)

The main emphasize of this theory is on undergoing of women because of their gender and it is caused by men. In this group's opinion both men and women need freedom to bloom and achieve their goals but the social structure of power and patriarchy do not let women do this and they are under persecution and mistreatment and these are caused by patriarchy system. Besides, these feminists believe that such systems teach women that they are less worth than men and the women believe these thoughts and think they must be in lower positions than men and have to satisfy men's needs. This kind of feminism points to oppression of women in private sphere. This form of oppression can be seen in many forms such as men's control on women in the family, sexual oppression inside and outside the family, abuse of women and contempt for women.

Marxist feminism)

This kind of feminism is based on the theories of Marx and Engels. The Marxism tries to draw attention to economy for understanding a society, individuals' conditions and relationships and it is economy and job that determine power conditions in society. Marxist claims that solidarity with social class is superior solidarity with other women. This thesis is hardly criticized by feminists

Marxism has had an undeniable influence on feminism and feminists began to focus on women's position and participation in production. The Marxist feminism believes that the origin of masculine leadership is this hidden reality that men have economical productive tools and these are under men's control. Here the patriarchy is combined with the economical structure. This is followed by job division based on gender that means men control economy and women are at their service and must satisfy their sexual needs. Women can become free if they participate in production and labourmarket. According to this perspective the inequality between men and women will be disappeared when the women begin to work and become economically independent.

Socialist feminism)

Gemzöe in her book *feminism* (2003) explains social feminism together with Marxist and radical feminism. So I have chosen to use Moazzami's (2003) definition to explain this form of feminism. She describes it separate from other forms of feminism.

According to this group of feminists, men have transcended women because the women have always been prisoner in their biological structure. Pregnancy and taking care of children make them dependent to men and this problem results in sexual job division that means men works outside home and women take care of children and elderly at home. So for having an equal society it is important that women can control their bodies and pregnancy.

Symbolic interactionism

The theory claims that humans' self image develops in interaction with social environment. This self image is decided by the type of social situations which the individual has participated in and how the others have acted in these situations. Besides, this theory talks

about deviant behaviour and defines it as a behaviour that is stamped as deviant by society or a person. (Månsson in Meeuwisse / Swärd's red., 2002)

This theory was presented by an American sociologist named Herbert Blumer in 1936. He focused on relationships between individuals and claimed that human beings define each others' manners. The reaction of one person to the action of another one is not unconscious and automatically. The reaction is done based on the meaning and concept the action has for the person who reacts and the objects exist based on the concept that we give them. This process of defining and translating is specific for human being. (a.a.)

One of the important persons for popularizing this theory was George Herbert Mead. One of his theories is that the reality of social life is equal to social interaction between persons. It is important to notice that this reality exists before the person's birth and she becomes socialized and learns it. For being able to behave consciously and look at the past manners and predict the manners of others in the future the person must be conscious and aware of herself among the others. Ability to self reflection and self consciousness is particular for human being and the main key is the language. Language is a tool that transfers knowledge and making relationships will be possible through the exchange of verbal and non-verbal symbols. (ibid.) Then Mead analyzes *me* and the behavior of child and its environment. According to him in first months the child has imitative behavior. In next stage it starts to learn and takes other persons' roles (especially close people like mother and father). In this level it learns to see itself from others' eyes. This is the first step to self awareness. In third step the child's behavior controls by its conversation with significant other or the society. In this time the person can judge her behavior based on the societies expectations. Mead talks also about *I* which is the impulsive part of a person and it is the sign of deviant behaviors and is always in conversation with *me*. *Me* listens to *I* and judges what *I* says based on society's rules

The history of prostitution

Writing about the whole history of prostitution is out of this study's limit. So in this part it will be given a short and brief description of it in Iran. It could be interesting if I could give a summary about prostitution in the world history but because of the lack of time I prefer to focus on prostitution's history in Iran.

The history of prostitution in Iran

It sounds that harlotry is ancient history. It is more than 4000 years that prostitution appears in all pages of the history. In many ancient territories people had created Gods and symbols for this phenomenon. (Abounia Omran, 1997)

In many historical books and sources we can read that some of Iranian kings took dancers and prostitutes to the wars and men could enjoy being with non-married women besides their own wives. (ibid.)

According to a traveler's diaries, during the period of Safavi kings there were brothels in most of the cities of Iran. Even if governments decided some penalties for prostitution, prostitutes worked freely and they were known by their clothes and special manners. (a.a.)

About hundred years ago, governments supported prostitutes for compensating the low level of taxes. They arrested and blackmailed rich men while they had sex with prostitutes and these men were forced to pay government a sum of money for keeping their reputation. In some cities the prostitutes had become stoned or would be burned but it was not so usual. These penalties were only performed if the public found out about one's sexual affairs. Generally the women were more exposed than men in such situations and could be punished. (Abounia Omran, 1997)

According to Farmanfarmayian (1970) during the period of Pahlavi Shah (before the Islamic revolution) the government tried to organize the prostitutes in Tehran and gathered them in a building called *the castle of New City* that was an official brothel. Such places existed in other cities as well but this castle was the most famous one in the country. In addition to these places there were other places and other types of prostitution like street prostitution. Those women who were street walkers began their work in the beginning of the night and stood in special streets that were their workplaces. These places were decided by police department. (a.a.)

Home prostitution was another form of this job. These special homes were placed in rich regions of the city and were administrated by pimps. (ibid.)

The third form of prostitution was prostitution in cafes and cabarets. Prostitutes in these places worked as dancers and waitresses. They began their work at the end of the night and their duty was to please men and their needs. For these girls these cabarets were good places for chasing customers and for men these were places for finding prostitutes. (a.a.)

The current state of prostitution in Iran

During the years after the Islamic revolution in Iran the above named centers for prostitution were closed and religious mood that dominated the society caused the restriction and concealing of prostitution. The occurrence of 8-year war between Iran and Iraq caused big problems in the economy of the country. (Interview with conscious resources)

Consuming as a value took an important position in people's lives and inflation and class-distance increased. On the other hand fast increasing population of young people was followed by social and cultural problems and the country laid waste by poverty and unemployment. (ibid.)

One of the major problems in the society after the 8-year war is prostitution. Even if there is no exact statistics about harlotry, one (based on unofficial and official sources) can make conclusion that in recent years it has increased. (a.a.)

This problem is connected to other problems. It should be mentioned that the lack of programming during the deconstruction of brothels has have undeniable affects on spreading of this problem. This action has spread the prostitutes over the cities and it has caused the lack of control over the prostitution by the government and police department. Now we can observe customers and applicants searching their sexual goods in the streets and this has made the face of cities unpleasant. (a.a.)

My interview with conscious resources show that there is a significant problem and it is lack of good solutions for spreading information about how the girls who have problem at home can get help and be supported. Most of these girls have no place to turn to when they face problems and pressure. The problems make it difficult for them to stay and they decide to run away. This matter causes other problems. Most of these women do not have any planning when they run away and no place to stay. They must earn money for being able to provide themselves. What is the easy way to earn money? Selling sex probably.

Two prevalent types of prostitution in Tehran

Prostitution at home

There are some houses in different parts of the city that involve in and provide prostitution. The owners of these houses organize and support girls and women and they gain considerable amounts from this job. Most of the girls and women who work in such networks are divorced and runaway and claim that they do this job because of poverty.

According to researches done by conscious resources in Tehran many of the managers of such gangs work in the barbershops and they communicate with girls and women and find them through this job. It is worth to mention that the police finds some of these homes time by time and arrests those who are involved but there are many hidden brothels and this fact makes the police powerless in battling this social problem. (a.a.)

Street prostitution

We can call this type of prostitution the apparent form of prostitution in Tehran. One can observe women standing in the streets wearing special dresses and makeup which attract customers. Each of these women has definite price depending on her age and beauty. The younger and more beautiful ones do not stand wherever and do not get in every car. They usually choose northern part of Tehran which is the rich region of the city and search their wealthy customers. Most of these women and girls have run away from their homes and come to Tehran without having any planning. Because of this lacking of the programming they face many problems such as not having shelter and money. These factors make them do anything to earn and get money. (a.a.)

The state of prostitution in Islamic law

Interpreting the Islamic law is difficult and complicated and needs experts who can analyze and discuss it. Therefore I will give a brief view over it just for acquainting readers with this kind of law. For getting this information I talked to an attorney in Tehran and some texts about the Islamic law were analyzed.

In Islamic law there is no specific definition of prostitution but it does not mean the lack of juridical interference and allowance of such actions. There are other titles and definitions of sexual relationships that based on them, all extramarital sexual actions are defined and criminalized. Although there is not any definition of prostitution in the law but some of the crimes like fornication and indecent behavior have common faces as prostitution and will be judged. This means that the punishment of prostitution includes a great range of punishments based on the type of the crime (from some lash hits to the punishment of being stoned). For example if the prostitute has a husband her punishment is being stoned and if she is not married she will be punished by 100 lash hits. It should be said that rough punishments like being stoned are rarely executed.

Prostitution and social services

In Tehran there are three rehabilitation centers for helpless and needy women. Different groups such as prostitutes, beggars, runaways and addicts are kept in these places.

The whole rehabilitating process includes three steps: 1. receiving the client
2. rehabilitation 3. discharging and following-up. (Sarvestani, 1988-1993)

In the first step whether the clients are arrested by the police or introduce themselves voluntary, they are brought to welfare offices by the court. Then they will be divided in two groups:

- A) Girls and women near to social damages: these are individuals who have run away from their homes because of various kinds of problem at the home, the ones who are rejected by their families and those who are not ready to live independently and risk joining criminal gangs and illegal connections.

B) Girls and women with social damages (special women): those who earn money from illegal relationships (sex) and women who have illegal (extramarital) sexual relationships without getting money. (Kourepaz, 1996)

In the next step (rehabilitation) each person has about 6 months to one year for being rehabilitated and then will be discharged. But in reality some of them stay about 3 to 5 years or sometimes more than this. There are no certain and specific programs for rehabilitation and reforming these women and what these places do, is mostly keeping them in a place away from the society. (Sarvestani, 1988-1993)

The last step is discharging and following-up. From the beginning of the process the personnel who work in these places think about the discharging which can be done in different ways. Some of the clients escape from the centers and sometimes they will be arrested and brought back. Those who are aggressive will be taken to mental hospital or prison. If the client has a family the personnel try to call them and persuade them to accept her. (a.a.)

The most important defections of these places are the lack of financial facilities, educated and trained staff and proper method for following-up. (a.a.)

Sarvestani (1988-1993) mentions that it is significant to say that there are many good social workers in welfare offices but it does not mean that they can handle all kinds of problem just because they are social workers. They need to be specialized in different subject areas and must have proper programming.

Above I gave a short description about girls and women who came in contact with social services and because of the lack of statistics and researches I do not have enough information about those who do not contact welfare offices. I just get to know that some of them who are addicted are supported by NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and are rehabilitated there. (Conscious resources)

Interviews with three women

In this section I will introduce the interviewees and retell their stories shortly. As I said before the names are pseudonyms. It would be meaningful if I could interview their families for getting more information but it was not possible because firstly, this problem (prostitution) is a sensitive issue. Secondly, the interviewees did not have good relationships with their families. And thirdly, two of them had their families in other cities and it was difficult for me to go there in view of the lack of time.

Nahid)

She was a 30-year old woman who was born in a rural family of nine children in a southern city. She was sold to a 50-year old man against money when she was 8 years old. She described this as followed: *“when I was 8 years old I was forced to leave the school. My father wanted me to marry a 50 years old man and when I said that I did not want that older man I became knife cut by my cousins.”*

She was physically assaulted and hurt by his father, cousins and uncles during her childhood. Her father was a farmer and her mother a housewife and the father was the breadwinner. She saw her mother as a victim of her father. She said: *“I would have a great family if I did not have a father. I love my mother more than anything”* and when I asked if she was a victim too she answered: *“Yes. I am my father’s victim”*

When Nahid was 10 years old she ran away from home and came to Tehran where she met some men and started to have sex against money. She had a low level of education (5th grade of elementary school) and all her jobs were temporary and low paid. When I asked her opinion about the reason of her problems she said: *“poverty and my father. I hate him and I wish he was dead”*. Then she told that she sells her body when she needs money. *“Why should I do prostitution when I have enough money?”* was her comment. The most interesting part of the interview was her definition of a good man. She said: *“a good man is a man who can be a good breadwinner and could support his family economically. What a man is good for if he can not support his family economically? ”*

Finally when I asked if she had anything else to say she answered: *“I just wish there were places that families who couldn’t talk to their children could turn to so they would have a better relationship and their daughters had not been forced to run away from home”*

Fatemeh)

A 19-year old girl from south of Tehran. She ran away from home because of physical punishments and the violence she got from her brother. *“He controlled my moves and interfered in everything I did”* she said.

“One day after school my friends and I went to a park and it became late and I did not go back home because I was afraid of how my brother would react. Now I wish I had gone home. I could get just some slaps in the face or body. Nothing more”

On the first day of escaping she met a woman who was the manager of a brothel and she suggested sex for cash. After sometimes she met a man and married him but after a while she got divorce because *“he did not work and he hit me all the time”*, she said. After the divorce

she went back to the brothel manager and began prostitution again. She said the same thing which Nahid said: *“I do prostitution when I need money.”*

She had studied until third grade of high school and had got many temporary and low paid jobs.

She described her family: *“my parents got divorce when I was 9 years old. When my father left us my brother became man of the family and took his place.”* and both of her parents had low level of education. The mother was a housewife and she had a deficient communication with her mother.

She continued: *“Nowadays it is my uncles who provide us and give us money every month. My father comes home twice or three times a month but it does not make a difference in our lives.”*

According to her the main reasons for her prostitution were poverty, unemployment and her father. Some minutes later she added: *“I would not be in this situation if I was not under my brother’s pressure.”* She believed that if her parents had staid together her brother would never mistreat her and she wouldn’t escape. It was interesting when she said: *“I won’t marry if I find a good and well paid job”*.

Kobra)

A 21 year-old girl who was born in a family of six children in the south of Iran. Her mother was a housewife and her father and brothers were the breadwinners.

During her life she was always mistreated by her mother and brothers. She always saw herself as a victim and a worthless person. *“I wondered all the time why they mistreated me. I was their daughter and sister. Wasn’t I worth anything?”*

She continued: *“In a birthday party I lost my virginity. After some months my family found it out and I became punished and prisoner in a storeroom for 4 months and became physically harmed and assaulted (when she showed me the scares on her body I became shocked). I even missed my sister’s wedding.”*

After these incidents she ran away from home and came to Tehran where she met some guys who gave her money and stuff in exchange for sex. She said: *“now I have three boyfriends. They are my boyfriends and not just my lovers and customers. They provide me and buy me everything I want.”*

She was a student of second grade of guidance school when she ran away and she became forced to work for being able to provide herself. She had had just low paid jobs.

When I asked her about who the responsible one to her problems is she answered: *“I find myself guilty to everything. Nobody is responsible or guilty but me. Not my mother, not my father and not even that guy who took my virginity.”* According to her poverty and running away from home are two significant elements that can lead women to prostitution.

Analysis of data

When we look at the stories of these women we can find some common denominators that will be presented below:

- all of these women and their mothers had low level of education
- all of their mothers were housewives
- the interviewees were unemployed or had temporary and low paid jobs
- they have been subjected to physical and mental violence and abused by the men in their families
- the men were breadwinner in their families
- they all agreed on this point that poverty and running away from home was the reason of their prostitution
- they all had bad relationships with their fathers or brothers
- they had more than 3 sisters and brothers
- all of these three women had no children

According to the common denominators named above and with the help of theories presented in previous chapter I will analyze data.

Education

According to liberal feminists tradition gives men special privileges such as education and economical facilities. (Gemzöe. 2003)

It could be seen that all the interviewees and their mothers had low level of education.

Tradition gave the men of these families the power to control every aspect of women's lives. Their wives had no education nor did their daughters. Education is a privilege that is given to men.

For example when Nahid's father wanted her to marry an old man she was forced to drop out from the school. She had no other choices. It was a man who made decisions for her life and she should obey. Her education was not so significant to her father and other things such as money were superior education.

A famous proverb says that knowledge gives you power. I think the education can increase women's knowledge and expands their views and it can lead them to this insight that they are under pressure and can make them avoid violence and exposure. This is maybe what the men in these families are afraid of.

It is worth to mention that even their fathers and brothers had low level of education. But because the education is a privilege for men, according to liberal feminists, these men can begin to study whenever they want and nobody can deny them the right to study unlike the women who can study if the men agree with it.

Job and poverty

The Marxist feminism believes that the origin of masculine leadership is this hidden reality that men have economical productive tools and these are under men's control. This is followed by job division based on gender that means men control economy and women are at their service and must satisfy their sexual needs. According to this perspective the inequality

between men and women will be disappeared when the women begin to work and become economically independent. (Gemzöe, 2003)

These women and their mothers were either jobless or had low paid jobs. Job division was clear in these families. The mothers were housewives and the male members of the families were the breadwinners. This fact gave the men power to control women's lives and the women were forced to obey the men.

These girls who ran away from home tried to be free by providing themselves without men's help but it was impossible because of the low level of education and they always turned to a man for earning money. They had learnt that the women must satisfy men's needs. It was interesting that all of them believed that it must always be a man that could provide them and for surviving they must be in connection with men. Nahid, one of the interviewees said: " *because of the poverty the men are forced to make their wives and daughters go to work.* "

For her it is obvious that it is always a man who works outside home and women work just under special circumstances. Just like them. They are under special circumstances and must work and the only work they can do is prostitution because it is well paid and does not need any skills. I think these are results of tradition and patriarchy. The women are dependent to men and their money. And even if they try to be independent it does not work and they must go back to men.

Violence, relationships with male members of the family and running away

As Gemzöe (2003) says violence is the most prevalent forms of suppression of women. Women are under persecution and mistreatment and these are caused by patriarchy system. Such systems teach women that they are less worth than men and the women believe these thoughts and think they must be in lower positions than men and have to satisfy men's needs. This form of oppression can be seen in many forms such as men's control on women in the family, sexual oppression inside and outside the family, abuse of women and contempt for women.

We see that all of the interviewees had been subjected for humiliating, physical and mental assaults that made them run away from home.

They all had bad relationships with the male members of the family. Specially Nahid who expressed herself in this sentence: "*I hate my father*" and repeated this several times during the interview. And it is not shocking if we consider the circumstances and all violence these women had gone through. She added that her mother could not oppose Nahid's father and if she did that she would be hit.

These women have been mistreated all their lives and have learned that they are worthless and lower than men. We see that Kobra wonder if she is worthless. Why should she be mistreated if she was not worthless? And we see how she blames herself for what have happened to her. She said: "*I wouldn't be here if I had obeyed my family and tolerated the violence.*" She think that her family had right to be violent and mistreat her. I wonder why? Because she believes that violence is a part of life and she must accept it.

These girls ran away from violence and mistreatment. It can mean refusing injustice and impose. But how long they can fight?

Children and pregnancy

According to social feminism pregnancy and taking care of children make the women dependent to men and this problem results sexual job division that means men works outside home and women take care of children at home. (Moazzami, 2003)

Another fact that was common among these women was that they were raised in families with more than 3 children. These mothers did/could not control their bodies and even if they could not afford the children they continued making children because they had no other choices. It was their men who made decisions at home.

These facts had influenced my interviewees and they did not want to have children while they could not afford them. It can be explained in this way that their mothers were prisoners in their bodies and could not control their lives and their biological structures. These three women are daughters of those mothers. They have been mistreated and have gone through terrible accidents. These factors have made them aware of those problems that can be caused if they do not take control over their bodies. They want to control their lives and they refuse being prisoner of their biological structures. They have not enough education to find well paid jobs and when they do not have enough wages they can not afford their children and must get help from another person, who always is a man, for providing the family. When they prevent pregnancy and do not have children they do not need a man's help for providing the family.

Me, I and social reality

And last but not least we can analyze the data from symbolic interactionism's point of view. This theory claims that the reality of social life is equal to social interaction between persons. It is important to notice that this reality exists before the person's birth and she becomes socialized and learns it. Besides, humans' self image develops in interaction with social environment. This self image is decided by the type of social situations which the individual has participated in and how the others have acted in these situations. This theory talks about deviant behaviour and defines it as a behaviour that is stamped as deviant by society or a person. (Månsson in Meeuwisse / Swärd's red., 2002)

I think this is the case for my interviewees. These women have sad life stories and they have been through many terrible moments in their lives. All these moment have influenced their self image and self confidence.

I observed that perceptions and meanings these girls had of their social interactions were full of worthlessness and humiliation. What can a girl who is hurt everyday physically and mentally have as impression of her interactions and herself?

The social reality that Mead mentions is patriarchy which our women are socialized in. These girls have a picture of themselves that is based on other persons' actions and the symbols they get by help of the language. We can claim that these girls take their mothers' roles as victims who are at men's service all the time.

For example low level of education is one of the matters that were common among these women and their mother. We can explain it as a form of tradition. A tradition that is influenced by patriarchy which is a social reality. The daughters followed their mothers and socialized in this tradition. They live in a society that believes women do not need to study. Their mother did not study. Why should they?

Violence can be explained in the same way. The men are convinced that they can use violence against women. And women do not oppose. The interviewees have seen their mothers being the object of violence. They also accept it because they have only seen this kind of scenario. And one more time I will refer to the significant roll of the tradition.

Traditions and social reality give a specific picture of men's and women's rolls in the family. For example the man is the breadwinner and the woman must stay at home and take care of children. A woman who works or opposes violence shows a deviant behavior according to these traditions. These women have learnt what the society wants from them. It wants women who obey men's order.

Society and prostitution

All the women I interviewed agreed that society was responsible and guilty for their problems. As I presented before there is a significant problem and it is lack of good solutions for spreading information about how the girls who have problem at home can get help and be supported. Nahid said: " *I wouldn't do prostitution if I knew that there was a place there I could get help and support*".

Most of these girls have no place to turn to when they face problems and pressure. The problems make it difficult for them to stay and they decide to run away. This matter causes other problems. Most of these women do not have any planning when they run away and no place to stay. They must earn money for being able to provide themselves. What is the easiest way to earn money? Selling sex probably. (Interview with conscious resources)

Besides, there are not enough and appropriate help for these women who do prostitution and really need support and help. There is not exact definition of prostitution in the Islamic law. It makes it difficult to help this group of women when there is not even a definition of this group. Human services try to solve this problem and help these women but they can not do this on their own. The social services in the country need cooperation and support from other authorities. And it is not simple because the Iranian society follows the Islamic laws and traditions and these laws do not accept this phenomenon and besides, there is a sick tendency in the authorities to want to present Iran as a perfect country without any major problems.

Discussion

In the beginning of the study I had some questions and I have got answers to these questions after the fulfillment of the research. It could be better and more verbose if I had chosen more perspectives and had analyzed this phenomenon from other aspects but one more time I refer to the short time I had.

The fulfillment of this thesis and confronting these girls has been both a joyful and unpleasant trip. It was joyful because I saw the women who were trying to get rid of problems and were fighting against patriarchy and on the other hand it was unpleasant because I saw that they couldn't resist the patriarchal system and registered social patterns.

For helping and preventing problems like prostitution we should work on different levels and need the cooperation between many authorities and organizations such as social services and employment service.

First of all we must work on the education of children. It is necessary to teach our children that every child has right to study.

Second of all it is important to teach the women the value of having a job and being independent. I think that having a job can lead to financial independence and it is one of the most important steps in the path to self independence. It is worth to ask ourselves this question all the time: can a woman who is dependent to a man for survival of herself stay against his violence and refuse it?

Changing and working on traditional patterns and new definitions of women and men's roles at home and at the labor market is another thing which is worth to mention. This is significant to learn that a woman is first of all a human being and secondly a mother and wife and it should not be the other way.

When we look at prostitutes' situation in Iranian society we see that the government and authorities don't want to accept it and how can we help these women when we don't even have correct statistics. They run away from their homes which are small societies and then they will be captured by and prisoner of a crueler society that doesn't want these women. Do we know how it is like to be undesirable? To be hated? To be invisible?

We must realize that denying a phenomenon does not make it disappeared and it is better to light up the problem instead of hiding it.

At last I will add that in my opinion the matter of prostitution is related to women's rights and freedom. And it is necessary to show the reality and then compare the state of women in different societies and learn from other women's experiences and believe that if women want they can do anything

Further studies

As I said before prostitution is a multidimensional problem and we can analyze it from different aspects. We can do both quantitative and qualitative studies and we can analyze this phenomenon on the basis of many different perspectives. I can give some examples below: For example communication theory can describe the communication patterns that exist in the families and other groups which the prostitutes are involved in.

Another theory which is useful for describing this social problem is system theory that explains group process and how the different parts of a system/group can affect each other. It can help us to study about how these women have been influenced by other individuals and groups. It is also significant to research about families of the prostitutes, how they can be affected by the fact that a family member is a harlot and how it influences their relationships and interactions.

It is important to mention that most of the studies about prostitution focus on the women who are involved in it. It is interesting and significant to learn about the men who are the consumers of sexual services and find out more about their background, their families and why they are interested of and attracted to these women.

Male prostitution is another subject that is interesting to study about. When we talk about prostitution we focus on the female prostitutes most of the time. There are many men who work as prostitutes and earn money. There are many dangers and problems (rape, violence, etc) related to this job and they are not just associated with female prostitution.

Pimps are another side of the story of prostitution and sometimes we forget them and neglect their role on this act. Why do these men/women do this job? What are their social backgrounds? What are their attitudes toward women? These are some questions which I think are important to know and can be developed.

Another question that is significant is why sex trade and prostitution is so taboo and unacceptable in most of the societies and why it is punished in some law books and acceptable in the others.

It is also considerable to do same study as mine for examining its validity and reliability and see if the results and conclusions I have got are the same and if there are any differences between studies.

Interview guide

Individual aspect:

1. How old are you?
2. How much education do you have?
3. Have you ever worked? If yes, answer question 4 and 5.
4. What was your job?
5. How much was your income?
6. Have you ever been hurt physically or mentally?
7. What is your self-image? What do you think about yourself?
8. Where did you live before the prostitution?

Family and social background

1. How many sisters and brothers do you have?
2. Have your parents been restrictive?
3. What is your father's occupation?
4. How much education does your father have?
5. What is your mother's occupation?
6. How much education does your mother have?
7. How was your relationship with your father?
8. How was your relationship with your mother?
9. How do you feel about your father?
10. How do you feel about your mother?

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