

**SOC 3290 Deviance**  
**Overheads Lecture 24: Prostitution 2**

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

- the problem of defining prostitution
- misconceptions about prostitution
- its extent in Canadian society
- a profile of Canadian prostitutes
- entry into prostitution
- theories of prostitution

**Defining Prostitution:**

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

- exchanging sex for other goods/services
- marrying for money
- “marriages of convenience” (i.e. for security)
- arranged marriages / negotiating over dowries
- marrying for immigration status

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

\* Sociological definition: prostitution is:

- (1) Sexual in nature (i.e. exchange of money/goods for sex at time)
- (2) Relationship involves neither love nor affection
- (3) Either a full or part time vocation

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

### **Misconceptions about Prostitution:**

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

- most prostitutes are NOT forced into the life by threats, violence, & drugs (though to some extent for teenage runaways)
- most prostitutes do NOT work for pimps, but are “self-employed”
- there are relatively few links with Canadian organized crime
- most prostitutes are not addicted to drugs
- most have criminal records, but for minor & prostitution offences
- prostitution is NOT prominent in the spread of STD’s & AIDS
- prostitution isn’t necessarily distasteful & unpleasant work, especially for those with little education/job skills when comparing their options
- prostitutes aren’t necessarily guilt ridden with low self-esteem
- prostitutes don’t necessarily despise their customers
- prostitutes are largely heterosexual & have enjoyable sex lives with those they love

### **Extent of Canadian Prostitution:**

\* Official police data is virtually useless:

- number of charges doesn’t = number of prostitutes
- arrests for offences other than prostitution related ones
- high status prostitutes rarely arrested
- “victims” won’t come forward
- “crackdowns” distort official figures

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

- larger cities: 500-600 full time (many more part time)
- medium cities: 100-400
- small municipalities: 20-100

### **A Profile of Canadian Prostitutes:**

- \* Most between 22-25, beginning career in teens
- \* Career lasts about 10 years (women working longer)
- \* Ratio of females to males 4:1. Most single (20% of women married)
- \* About half from “broken homes”
- \* Most from lower- middle or middle class backgrounds
- \* Majority have little formal education (call girls the exception)
- \* Many have suffered physical/sexual abuse at home
- \* We must be *cautious* about *assuming* that humble origins + abuse = a career in prostitution. Many people experience both & don’t become prostitutes, & prostitutes may make such claims to ward off stigma

### **Entry into Prostitution:**

Lutt (1984): three entry points:

- (1) exploitation by pimps (mostly teenage runaways)
- (2) recruitment by a “big sister figure” (youth peer groups)

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

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

(1) *Job skills*: -initiating contact

- negotiating services & fee
- protecting self from hazards
- soliciting discreetly & effectively
- payment up front/ inducing orgasm ASAP
- knowledge of fee structure
- avoiding STD’s /suspicious customers
- protecting oneself
- not using alcohol/drugs while working

(2) *Subcultural values/ideologies*:

- not undercutting competitors/leaking information
- to exploit clients
- acquiring self-protective rationalizations (e.g. performing “vital social functions”/ not hypocrites)

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

\* Incomes vary: Males earn more than females (esp. pimped females)  
Street prostitutes earn less than escorts  
Youth earn less than adults

### **Theories of Prostitution:**

\* Three major theories attempt to explain prostitution:

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

- Sexual morality (“meaningful” vs. “meaningless” sex; “moral” vs. “immoral” acts sex) unintentionally encourages it
- prostitution functions to strengthen the sexual morality of “conventional” women

Problem: functionalist theory is sexist in its definitions of morality

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

- predisposing factors (parents promiscuity, neglect, or abuse)
- attracting factors (money)
- precipitating factors (unemployment, connections or pressure from others)

Sociologists & psychologists emphasize different factors

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

- creating both supply & demand at the same time (socialization, unequal social structure/opportunities)
- selling bodies as commodities reinforces sexist views/reproduces patriarchal structures

### **Conclusion:**

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

\* Next class: drugs and drug abuse 1

