

Explore the concept of 'risk' and 'resilience' within the context of your group, consideration how barriers to full engagement in society affect the likelihood of their integration into community.

This assignment will be identifying the difficulties of reintegrating a hard to reach group back into communities. The group that will be explored in depth throughout this essay will be sex workers, and the possible hardships that they may face when emerging within society once again. The areas that will be discussed will firstly be a brief description of the history of prostitution and exploring sex workers as a group in today's society. Also, this essay will be identifying the possible barriers that are in place that may prevent sex workers from being able to fully integrate in societies, including the risks and resilience of this group, the stigma behind sex workers which may possibly restrain them from being accepted in today's communities, and exploring the ways in which society can improve to make sex workers accepted within communities.

Sex workers, or 'prostitution' as the trade is more commonly known as, is considered to be the oldest profession known to man. The earliest recording of the term prostitution dates all the way back to 2400 BCE. At that time, prostitutes were known as 'Kardid', which is the term Sumerian's used when referring to a prostitute, and during that time was listed as a known profession. It is also believed that the Sumerian women who were in service to the deity Ishtar, who is the goddess of love, fertility and war, would offer their body in exchange for gifts, and money donations to be gifted to their temple (Naked History, 2015). To support the profession, there was a code of law put in place, which happens to be one of the earliest surviving codes of law, known as The Code of Hummarabi, which specifically states and refers to prostitutes, mentioning the rights of the prostitute and that of their children which resulted from their profession, financial support and inheritance. This code of law dates back to around 1780 BCE (Naked History, 2015), and could be considered to support the idea that prostitution as a trade was once highly accepted among society, to the point where prostitutes were respected enough to have laws put in place to support them in the areas previously mentioned. Clearly, this is no longer the case in today's society.

In today's society, prostitution is a topic which is rarely discussed in public, and the profession is undoubtedly frowned upon throughout Britain. A report from the House of Commons within the period of 2016 to 2017 states several statistics, which identifies some data that has been collected in regards to prostitution during this period. The report revealed that there is an estimate of 72,800 sex workers in the United Kingdom and on average they have up to 25 clients each week, earning an average of £78 per client (House of Commons, 2016), this amount may be considered alarming to some individuals as they are rarely seen and heard of, however this figure clearly indicates that sex workers are very much thriving in their profession with the amount of clients they have each week, as well as the income they are receiving. Another statistic states that 11% of men between the ages of 16-74 within Britain have paid for sexual services, which is equivalent to 2.3 million men (House of Commons, 2016). This figure may not seem that substantial, however, considering the use of these services is a subject that tends to not be discussed openly, it is a service that is very much being used. However, sex work is not a simple profession, although the weekly income may be considered attractive to some individuals, it does come with many threats and the risk of some clients abusing the service. Unfortunately, sex workers have been known to be abused by their clients, with some even being murdered. Between 1990 and 2015, an estimate of 152 sex workers have lost their lives to their profession by being murdered by their clients, and 49% of sex workers have stated that they fear for their safety (House of Commons, 2016), this is a clear indication that sex workers need to have more laws put in place to support them, and to have more safety procedures put in place. Clearly, it can no longer go on this way.

Furthermore, prostitution is legal in the UK, although some of the activities associated with the profession are frowned upon and are linked with criminal activities, such as pressuring women into selling their bodies sexually and keeping businesses, for instance a brothel (Telegraph, 2018). This could however be challenged with the fact that there are professions such as webcam performers, who offer services as simple as conversation to performing sexual acts through a webcam. It could be suggested that the latter is a fairly new profession, which has evolved through the continuous development of the internet, and is just a modern version of one's typical sex worker. The way this works is through a website, clearly run by an individual with the power over the webcam performers, much like a 'pimp' and a brothel

would work, however there seem to be no laws preventing this form of sex work. This is very much contradicting the fact that literal brothels are illegal and could be considered as a barrier, which is somewhat preventing sex workers having that safe, legal environment to carry out their work with a supportive and professional system around them (Telegraph, 2018). However, this new form of sex work is potentially making the workers more safe, as they do not have to put themselves at risk physically as physical contact is not a requirement. Therefore, this could in fact reduce the risk of sex workers being physically assaulted or even worse, murdered, if more had the ability and opportunity to change their profession to that of a webcam performer (The Conversation, 2017).

Clearly, sex work is a very dangerous profession, and could be argued to be the most dangerous profession, bringing with it many risks on their lives. More female sex workers are unfortunately being put at risk by having to work alone, with the risk of being raped and assaulted more than likely, and this is due to them not having the ability to work in groups as there is the threat that they will be arrested for brothel-keeping (The Guardian, 2019). The English Collective of Prostitutes has stated that the sex workers are being opened up to violence by being forced to work alone due to the laws preventing them to work together, and have called to have prostitution entirely decriminalised throughout the UK, essentially reducing their vulnerability and exposure to danger (The Guardian, 2019). This could be considered as a risk and a barrier preventing sex workers from being fully able to integrate into society, as their profession is only legal in certain categories, causing sex workers to be more secretive and private about the work that they do, resulting in them possibly isolating themselves from communities. Decriminalisation of prostitution involves the actual removal of all prostitution laws, including sex workers and sex work businesses, such as a brothel (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D). The decriminalisation of prostitution has worked massively for countries such as New Zealand, who decriminalised sex work in 2003, which turned out to be highly beneficial causing 90% of sex workers to have an increase in employment, health, legal and safety rights (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D). It is also highly supported by prestigious organisations, some of which include the World Health Organisation, Royal College of Nursing, UNAIDS and Women Against Rape and internationally by Amnesty International (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D). It has also been suggested that if the decriminalisation of prostitutes was done on a global scale, then

HIV transmissions would be reduced massively by 46% in over a decade. Therefore, the decriminalisation of prostitution, so long as it is consensual between the sex worker and the client, would be beneficial to the human race, increasing sex workers safety and health (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D).

As clearly stated, there are several reasons as to what may be considered as a barrier, preventing sex workers from fully integrating into society. There is the massive issue of sex workers being stigmatised, this in itself creates a massive barrier. There is a stigma that follows and is associated with sex workers, causing them to possibly shy away from communities and has a large impact on them receiving sufficient health care due to being ashamed of what they do, with 62% of street sex workers and 90% of parlour workers not revealing their true profession to their GP's, which undoubtedly results in them not obtaining the right health checks that are essential in this line of work (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D). Due to the stigma surrounding sex workers, it also encourages discrimination and violence, causing female sex workers to have less control and say over their bodies, and to where sex work takes place (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D). The stereotype behind sex workers may have evolved from places such as the red-light district and the way the media represents sex workers (The Conversation, 2017).

There is also the stereotype belief that most prostitutes have been trafficked, although the majority of sex workers are not on drugs and are not trafficked, infact only 6% of migrant sex workers are trafficked. Regardless of this statistic, many individuals still believe that most sex workers are being sex trafficked (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2016). The distinct difference between sex workers and sex trafficking is that sex workers exchange sexual favours for money and it is between two consenting adults, whereas sex trafficking is against someone's will, and can be an adult or even a child. This has had a negative impact on sex workers and their trade, as a higher increase of the population are becoming more aware and concerned by sex trafficking, even wanting to criminalise men who seek and pay for sexual services, which can be considered as a positive, as it is raising awareness for the issue. However this has negatively impacted sex workers as they are being somewhat forced to hide their profession and work more discreetly, subjecting them to more violence than ever before (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2016). Due to this, sex workers are unlikely to want to

integrate within communities, with the fear of the public finding out what their profession is, losing trade and being excluded. The majority of sex workers in the UK are mothers, with a massive 70% of sex workers being mothers. They are often a single parents, leaving them to provide the main income to support their families while facing the risks of benefit cuts, unemployment, low wages and homelessness, henceforth, this typical stereotype surrounding sex workers has a profound impact on these working mothers who are attempting to support their families, while facing the ongoing stigma (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2016).

With the several barriers that sex workers face which more than likely prevent them wanting to integrate into society, there are also other factors that may contribute to them feeling this way. There is the continuous issue of sex workers being labelled, as already stated, and being seen in a specific way. Labelling theory refers to social theory in the form of crime and deviance, and states that although individuals deviant behaviour is sometimes developed due to different causes or circumstances that happen in one's life, it is often that when an individual has been labelled to be deviant or something negative, they then react off those labels and are then attached to that negative and stereotypical behaviour that is considered to be deviant (Bernburg, 2009, pp. 187-207). Sex workers are often labelled and categorised to be something that they are not, as previously seen throughout this essay. They could be considered to be given a hard time, and that their work is deviant, causing them to only see themselves as what they have been labelled as, therefore not supporting and encouraging them to be more than what their profession is. By creating safer working environments for sex workers, it is likely that society would be more accepting of them, with there being less of a stigma surrounding them. Having more safeguarding procedures in place would significantly help with their safety. By decriminalising sex work, making brothels legal, sex work would be more accepted within the UK, giving sex workers more freedom and safety to carry out their work, not having to hide and be alone working, reducing the risk of assault (English Collective of Prostitutes, N.D).

In regards to support for sex workers, it could be suggested that there is not a great deal of support out there for them in regards to policy. However, there are a few Acts within the UK that will support sex workers should they ever need it. With the increase of sexual violence and assaults towards sex workers, there has been a particularly recent Act that has been put

into force, the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 would massively support sex workers in their trade, as its purpose is to prevent and protect the victims of violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). This particular Act is also aimed at the public sectors and the local authorities raising awareness on the issues raised, and there is also statutory guidance in the form of national training framework, which is particularly aimed at increasing awareness of violence against women in regards to public services, ensuring appropriate training is given to all employees in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015). By ensuring all employers in Wales working in public sectors have sufficient training in regards to violence against women, this will be highly beneficial for female sex workers, ensuring that the staff are educated on these matters, and should they need the support in a legal matter, they will have this Act to support them. Another Act that could be considered as encouraging and beneficial to sex workers in their profession would be the Equality Act 2010, as this Act in particular promotes equality among all individuals, protecting them against discrimination within their place of work and within society (GOV.UK, N.D). This Act is especially supportive of sex workers, as it primarily focuses on the backlash they may receive due to their profession, regardless of what it may be or the stigma that is attached to it.

It is evident that sex work is not a simple profession, and once entering into that world they are opening themselves up to many dangers. The stigma surrounding sex work is no doubt a burden and a hindrance on them, causing them to be affected by the labels they have been appointed, and without intention, acting off those labels and becoming them. One of the main issues that has been stated throughout the essay is the fact that sex work is legal, however it is linked with criminal activity, such as the running of brothels, which is illegal. The fact that brothels are still illegal is a major block in preserving the safety of sex workers. If brothels were legal, this would likely reduce the amount of female sex workers getting physically and sexually assaulted, by allowing them to work in either groups of two or more, having that shared support. Also, by making brothels legal, it would possibly encourage sex workers to work more inside, not on the streets, in a safe and legal environment, with rules and regulations giving them protection. Until brothels are made legal, it is highly likely that violence of all kinds against sex workers will unfortunately continue and not decrease. Although there are legislations supporting sex workers such as the Violence against Women,

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 and the Equality Act 2010, which are and will enforce safety and protection for sex workers, also protection from discrimination in their form of work, there is still so much more that needs to be done to ensure sex workers feel comfortable to integrate themselves back into society. Hopefully one day, they will be accepted for who they are and what they do, just as they once were when their profession originally began.

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